Measuring Self-esteem, Resilience, Aggressive Behavior and Religious Knowledge among Women Drug Inmates in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Drug abuse remains a significant challenge that is preventing further progress and excellence of women in many ways. Therefore, the Malaysian government has made serious efforts at addressing the problem. Such action is intended to re-empower women whose lives are affected by drugs to live healthier, more prosperous lives and make a meaningful contribution to the economic development of the country and the world at large. This study was conducted to measure the level of identity (self-esteem, resilience, aggressive behavior and religious knowledge) among women drug inmates who undergo drug treatment and rehabilitation programs at rehabilitation centres in Malaysia. This study was conducted using a quantitative method which included a cross-sectional survey design. A total sample of 120 women inmates from rehabilitation centres located in Bachok, Kelantan were selected as respondents. The study found that most women inmates who were undergoing drug rehabilitation programs during the study showed a moderate level of self-esteem (67.2 percent), resilience (77.3 percent), aggressive behavior (80.7 percent) and religious knowledge (69.7 percent). The implication of the research findings is that current rehabilitation centres in Malaysia face a huge responsibility to rebuild the identity of women inmates following their release. Besides the need for social support and policy, concern over strengthening women inmates’ self confidence and character are also crucial.

Keywords: Self-esteem, resilience, aggressive behavior, religious knowledge, women drug inmates

INTRODUCTION

The world has long recognised the importance of women’s role in the society. In many countries, women play a major role...
in the national and economic development through their social and economic activities. For example, their domestic role as mothers made immense contributions in shaping future generations. Meanwhile, women in developing countries generate significant economic growth through their engagement in income generating activities such as food crop production, food processing distribution, and small scale businesses. In Malaysia, women have achieved significant progress since independence in 1957. Women in Malaysia have achieved great progress in education, health, economics and politics although more improvement is needed in certain areas such as in power sharing and decision making. The Malaysian government proved its commitment towards empowering women when the development planning for the advancement of women in Malaysia was introduced in the Sixth Malaysian Plan. However, this effort is under threat and has become a national concern when more women in Malaysia have been reported to be involved with drug abuse. The fact is more frightening when current studies have shown that women are more sensitive to the consumption and long time effects of drugs than men. These effects include cognitive and neurological effects, organ damage, breast cancer and reproductive consequences (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Study conducted by Lyons et. al., (2008) and Grella et. al. (2005) found that a high rate of depression has been found among drug users who are at greater risk of suicide than those who do not misuse drugs. Despite recognition of the issue, women are continuously experiencing barriers to receive better support and treatment within the society. Reports have also shown that women substance abusers experience a number of barriers such as receiving treatment, child care responsibilities, stigmatization and inability to pay for treatment (Brady & Ashley, 2005; Razani, 2007). These unique issues suggest that more specific studies to examine drug addicts among women should be specifically considered. Efforts curbing the spread of drug abuse among women should be seriously addressed by implementing prompt action to overcome the problem and finding the best solution.

Malaysia is one of the countries that is committed towards achieving a drug-free country status by 2015 (Fauziah et. al., 2012a). The government, on February 19, 1983, declared drug abuse as a national disaster and endeavor using stringent law enforcement together with rehabilitation programs for addicts (Fauziah & Naresh, 2009). Despite continuously facing various challenges and obstacles in achieving the goal, Malaysia has never given up the fight against drug problems by using various approaches which include prevention, enforcement, arrests and drug rehabilitation for drug addicts. Women’s involvement in drug abuse not only has negative impacts on themselves, it also leads to other social problems such as moral decadence, prostitution and household destruction (Wilson & Kelling, 1982; Jamaludin et. al., 2009). Drug abuse among women can cause a variety of health problems such as HIV/
AIDS (Gauya, 2005; Razzaghi et al., 2006; Wells et al., 2006). For example, Ministry of Health Malaysia in their report has found that cases of HIV/AIDS among women increased from 737 in 2005 to 975 in 2006 (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2007). There are also studies which found that women’s involvement in drug abuse may affect the well-being of their children (Lukman et al., 2011) and may leave her more vulnerable to violence/attacks by others (Poole & Dell, 2005; EMCDDA, 2008; Institute of Alcohol Studies, 2008). Furthermore, a study conducted by Keen et al. (2000) also found that the children of mothers with substance abuse problems are less likely to remain with their birth mother, more likely to show developmental delay and are significantly more at risk to abuse and neglect than the general population. As a group, the children of drug misusing parents normally perform less well academically and socially (Keen & Alison, 2001).

As a whole, the problems associated with drug abuse are handled by the National Anti-Drugs Agency under the Ministry of Home Affairs. This agency is responsible for leading the formulation of policies relating to drugs including implementing prevention programmes, medical care treatments and rehabilitation programmes, upgrading the drug information system and evaluating the effectiveness of the country’s antidrug programmes in order to increase the regional and international cooperation in the effort of eradicating the threat of drugs and lastly to provide secretariat service to the National Drug Council (AADK, 2013). The statistics released by the National Anti-Drugs Agency revealed that in January to November 2012, a total number of 8,468 addicts were detected compared to the same period in 2011 which is a total of 10,383 people. Based on that number, 4,948 people (or 58.45 percent) were new addicts in the year 2012. Meanwhile, statistics released by the National Anti-Drugs Agency of Malaysia showed that the number of repeated offenders being registered is 2,156 people (34.33 percent). Based on the type of drugs in January-November 2012, statistics showed that heroin had the highest number of users compared to other type of drugs with a total number of 4,080 followed by morphine (2,657) users (AADK, 2013). On average, a total number of 15 new addicts and 11 relapse offenders were detected every day between January-November 2012 (AADK, 2013).

As for gender, statistics from January-November 2012 showed that a total number of 158 drug cases involving women were recorded in Malaysia. Of these cases, three states recorded the high number of women drug addicts which are Sarawak and Perak (24 cases for each state), Johor (20 cases) and Kuala Lumpur (19 cases). Although the number of women cases have dropped slightly, this does not mean that the issue can be taken lightly. There are several factors that have been identified to cause women involvement in drugs and these include self-weakness and family factors (Jamaluddin et al., 2009) and the lack of resilience (Sapora, 2008). There are also a number of researchers who stated...
that there is a relationship between poor self-esteem with a tendency to engage in social problems, deviant and delinquent behavior (Harter, 1993; Chen et. al., 1998; Byrne, 2000). Some researchers also found that women’s involvement with drugs addiction poses a threat to the future of the nation (Chawarski & Schottenfeld, 2006; Chawarski & Schottenfeld, 2007; Habil, 2001).

Taylor and Husizer (1998) in their study found that an individual who was identified using a variety of drugs was more prone to aggressive behavior. The findings were also supported by other studies in which the uses of various types of drugs, especially cocaine and amphetamines have negative effects in increasing aggressive behavior among its users (Boles & Miotto, 2003; Davis, 1996; Moore & Stuart, 2003; Chermack & Blow, 2002; MacDonald et. al., 2008). Similarly, a study conducted in Malaysia by Fauziah (2012b) found that adolescents who used heroin and morphine were more likely to show aggressive behaviors. Due to the negative impact of drugs on human behavior, it is crucial to resolve this problem immediately.

In preventing drug abuse, identifying protective factors is crucial. Previous studies have identified several protective factors against drug abuse and those factors include strong family bonds, parental involvement and monitoring, success in school performance, pro-social institutions (e.g. such as family, school, and religious organizations) and conventional norms concerning drug use. For example, several studies have shown that people with spiritual or religious involvement are less likely to be involved in drugs. In other words, religious involvement acts as a protective factor against negative behavior such as involvement in drug misuse (Donahue & Benson, 1995; Francis, 1997; Steinman, 2004). The findings are consistent with studies by Poulson et. al., (1988), Greenwald (2000) and Stylianou (2004) who found that individuals who were practicing their religion were less likely to engage in risky behaviors.

Apart from religious knowledge, a number of studies have identified that several risk factors were associated with women’s drug abuse and criminal activities. These factors include parental issues, childhood abuse and neglect, mental illness, social support and association with other drug users (Willis & Rushforth, 2003). Apart from these, a special focus on women’s offender characteristics is also vital in helping to formulate drug rehabilitation programs as it provides information and knowledge about internal resources (e.g. resilience, self-esteem, religious knowledge) that can be used in their recovering process. The results of the current study will not only provide the latest input related to the level of women’s identity of drug abuse, but also be able to assist the National Anti-Drug Agency to make improvements to the existing module of drug rehabilitation programs. This study is also beneficial to help the country to mobilize the role of women in a holistic manner and to help counselors, social workers and psychologist
who work in related issues or settings. In general, the objective of this research is to measure the level of identity of self-esteem, resilience, aggressive behavior and religious knowledge among women who are undergoing drug rehabilitation programs at drug rehabilitation centers.

METHODS

This research was conducted using cross-sectional survey and analyzed using descriptive analysis. The primary data were obtained through a survey using self-administered questionnaires. The level of self-esteem, resilience, aggressive behavior and religious knowledge score among women drug inmates involved in drug abuse activities were measured based on the minimum score interpretation as shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean score</th>
<th>Interpretation of the mean score</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;.20</td>
<td>low level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.01-3.00</td>
<td>moderate level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.01-4.00</td>
<td>high level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four standardized questionnaires were used to collect the data and they were:

Self-esteem scale: This 10-item scale assesses respondents’ self-esteem using a 4 Likert scale that ranged from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree and (4) strongly agree. The scale showed moderate high reliability with Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.63.

Resilience scale: This 10-item scale measures levels of resilience and was specifically developed by the researchers for women drug inmates. This self-report questionnaire using a 4 Likert scale ranged from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree and (4) strongly agree. The Cronbach alpha for the scale was 0.82, indicating a high reliability.

Aggressive behavior scale: This scale was also developed by the researchers to measure aggressive behaviors among women drug inmates. The scale consisted of 11-items (both positive and negative items combined). This self-report questionnaire using a 4 Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree and (4) strongly agree. Cronbach alpha coefficient of this scale was 0.74, indicating a moderately high reliability.

Religious knowledge scale: This 7-item scale measures religious knowledge among women drug inmates. Responses were measured using a 4 Likert format scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree and (4) strongly agree. Cronbach alpha for the scale was .614, indicating a moderately high reliability.

Population

In this study, the population referred to the women who were positively identified as
involved with drug abuse cases and they came from different ethnic backgrounds. A total number of 120 women drug inmates who are undergoing the National Anti-Narcotic Agency of Malaysia drug rehabilitation program at the time of study were specifically chosen to participate.

Data Collection

A pilot study and pre-test analysis were completed before the data collection process began. Prior to the data collection process, written permission from the Director General of the National Anti Narcotics Agency was sought by the researcher. In the permission letter, the research objectives, purposes and procedures were thoroughly explained. Once the permission was granted, questionnaires were then distributed randomly to women inmates. Researchers were assisted by drug rehabilitation officers in distributing the questionnaires and collecting the data. All rehabilitation officers involved in the study were briefed about the research objectives and procedures. As a response to the illiteracy problem traced among inmates and to conduct a smooth data collection process, respondents were divided into two categories: (1) respondents who could read/write and (2) respondents who could not read/write. The latter group was assisted by rehabilitation officers to answer the questionnaires. However, both groups were carefully monitored during the process. All the data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 15.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Self-esteem refers to the assessment of the behavior of women inmates, their characters and inner potentials. According to Bee and Boyd (2002), self-esteem refers to a comprehensive evaluation or assessment of an individual against value and their self-esteem. The findings show that the majority of women drug inmates involved in this study exhibited a moderate level (67.2 percent) to low level of self-esteem (26.1 percent). Only 6.7 percent of 120 respondents demonstrated a high level of self-esteem as shown in Table 2.

The results of this study indicated that the majority of women inmates who underwent the rehabilitation program have a moderate level of self-esteem and this reflects the need to strengthen the female inmates’ self-esteem in order to assist them in the recovering process. Meanwhile, a study conducted by Harter (1993) and Chen et al. (1998) found that individuals with low self-esteem had a high tendency to engage in social problems. In contrast, Gruinstein and Nutbeam (2007), Newman (2002), and Hughes and David (1989) found that individuals with high self-esteem were more likely to build their resilience well. These studies were consistent with Byrne et al. (1981) who suggested that individuals involved with deviant and delinquent behavior are usually those who have low self-esteem. Specific effort in improving women inmates’ self-esteem therefore is needed to restore these women’s capacity to rebound following their drug addict episode. The application of strong self-esteem in
the process of drug treatment, will also help to expose women inmates on how to evaluate themselves and be able to build positive values. Therefore, the aspect of self-esteem should be addressed to ensure that women inmates are able to continue to be independent and able to live healthy lives without drugs.

Resilience refers to the coping ability among women drug inmates in managing/handling negative influences. A study conducted by Meichenbaum (2005) found that individuals with strong resilience are those who have a positive personality. Findings of this study show that the majority (77.3 percent) of drug inmates exhibited a moderate level to a high level of resilience (22.7 percent) (Table 3). No respondents in the study showed a low level of resilience and this might indicate the success of the Malaysia rehabilitation program in strengthening personal resilience among women inmates who underwent drug treatment and rehabilitation programs at rehabilitation centres in Malaysia. Indeed, individual resilience is an important

### TABLE 2
Level of self-esteem among women drug users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-esteem</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>67.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>26.1</td>
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### TABLE 3
Level of resiliency among women drug users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resiliency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>77.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
aspect in determining treatment success as resilience is widely accepted as one of protective factors against anti-social behaviors. According to Sapora (2008), a lack of resilience in facing the challenges of life is caused by individual involvement in negative and high risk activities such as engaging in drug abuse. Therefore, to strengthen the resilience among women inmates, strategies to defend themselves against negative influences need to be taught to them when they undergo treatment and rehabilitation in an institution.

Aggressive behavior refers to the act of aggression, attacking behavior and attitude towards the hostility inherent among drug women inmates involved in this study. The findings show that the majority (95 percent) of respondents have a moderate level of aggressive behavior (74 percent) to high levels (21 percent). Only 6.7 percent of them showed a low level of aggressive behavior as shown in Table 4.

A high percentage rate of aggressive behavior among women inmates showed that the majority of them needed immediate intervention in dealing with their aggressive behavior. Positive behavior change among women inmates is much needed to build a strong identity and get respect from the society. A study conducted by Fauziah et. al. (2012b) found that drug addicts who show aggressive behavior are comprised of those who use heroin and morphine. While a study conducted by Azizi et. al. (2008) found that aggressive behavior was influenced by the conditions of social environment such as interaction with family members, interaction with peers and mass media exposure. Since the results of this study showed that the majority of women drug inmates still showed negative behavior, serious steps are needed to address the problem immediately. The results of this study suggest that women inmates who demonstrated high levels of aggressive behavior can be offered evaluation and psychotherapy by counselors to help them control their aggressive behaviors. The intervention and follow up can be continued even after they are released from the rehabilitation centers to ensure that they do not relapse.

### Table 4
Level of aggressive behavior among women drug users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aggressive Behavior</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>80.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Religious knowledge refers to knowledge of basic religious education, beliefs and religious practices by women respondents in the study. Research findings demonstrated that the majority of women drug users (69.7 percent) have a moderate level of religious knowledge to a high level (28.6 percent). Only 1.7 percent of the inmates still showed a low level of religious knowledge (Table 5). Although most of the women inmates have a good knowledge of religion, an effort to provide guidance and strengthen their religious knowledge should be enhanced. This is due to the exposure of the religious aspect is part of the element in efforts to strengthen inmates from being further drawn into drug addiction. Several western studies found that religion is able to act as a protective factor against negative behaviors including drug abuse among young people (Donahue & Benson, 1995; Francis, 1997; Steinman, 2004). Individuals with higher religious knowledge and practices are usually more able to organize their lives in a peaceful manner (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). Conversely, several other studies have found that low levels of religious knowledge among the youth expose them to risky activities that could damage their character and identity (Kogan et. al., 2005; Stylianou, 2004; Greenwald, 2000; Sharifah et. al., 2010). Meanwhile, a local study found that moderate religious knowledge contributed to drug abuse activities among 200 young people involved with drugs (Fauziah et al., 2012c). Therefore, the emphasis of religiosity among women inmates is needed to help them to build strong characters and later be able to contribute something useful to the religion, race and nation.

It is widely known that most religions in the world have strong emphasis on abstinence from alcohol and drugs. Studies worldwide have proven that teaching on drug/alcohol abstinence can delay or prevent people from taking alcohol or drugs although the amount of alcohol or drugs intake is no different from other groups without exposure to teaching on drug/alcohol abstinence. Table 5: Level of religious knowledge among women drug users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious knowledge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
alcohol abstinence (e.g. Hawks & Bahr, 1999). The religious and spirituality aspects in preventing drug abuse have long been established. It is assumed that moral teaching or orders in spirituality or religious teaching may influence the decrease of substance use among its people. It is also believed that spirituality and religious teaching provide opportunities to acquire learned competency and organizational ties between its people. Thus, teaching on drug-abstinence may be useful in prevention and treatment efforts and therefore should be included and intensified in every rehabilitation program.

CONCLUSION

Overall, findings suggest that strengthening women drug offenders’ characters with specific focus on self-esteem, resilience and religious knowledge deserves special attention. More research is needed to explore these issues with the intention that future knowledge can be used to formulate a more holistic rehabilitation program that can address group needs uniquely. This study highlights that the existing general rehabilitation program maybe too basic and unable to reach its target due to its inability to identify the special needs of various inmates (e.g. women and men). It is hoped that these findings would provide more understanding of women’s drug use in Malaysia and their special needs and concerns. These findings also hopefully will provide a clearer picture of women’s drug use that later can be used to strengthen drug prevention and rehabilitation programs in Malaysia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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