

## **Gender Effects on Self-Esteem, Family Functioning and Resilience among Juvenile Delinquents in Malaysia**

**A. S. Arokiaraj\*, R. Nasir and W. S. Wan Shahrazad**

*School of Psychology and Human Development, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia*

*\*E-mail: sham\_86@yahoo.com*

### **ABSTRACT**

Resilience is a very important aspect of each individual's life. Individual characteristics such as self-esteem and family characteristics such as family adaptability and family cohesion pose both risk and protective factors in an individual's environment. The objective of this research is to determine the relationships that exist between resilience, self-esteem, family adaptability and family cohesion of juvenile delinquents while considering the effect of gender. Respondents were 134 juvenile delinquents (44 males and 90 females) from two juvenile delinquent schools in Malaysia who took part in this exploratory cross-sectional survey research design by responding to The Resilience Scale, The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scales II. Results showed that self-esteem, family cohesion and family adaptability together with gender did not produce a significant interaction effect with resilience.

**Keywords:** Self-esteem, family functioning, resilience, juvenile delinquents

### **INTRODUCTION**

Living in a continuously evolving and advancing world improves persons' quality of life. However, they also become more prone to negative forces, resulting in their participation in a vast range of social problems, which arise due to the challenging environments they face every day (Laird, 2004; Laursen, 2005). In Malaysia, the rates of juvenile crime had increased steadily from 2002 to 2009 where the number of violent crimes by juvenile offenders such as rape, molest, and armed robbery had almost doubled from 1105 cases to 2394 cases. Based on police records, the number of violent crimes committed by juvenile offenders up to August 2010 was 860 (Hariati, 2010). Out of 2899 drug addicts identified in the year 2009, 43.29% were relapse cases. On an average, five new addicts and four relapse addicts were discovered everyday

throughout the period of January to November 2009 (National Anti Drug Agency, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2009).

Generally, an environment consists of the individual, his/her family, school and community. All these environments are connected and hence, the presence of possible risk and protective factors influence each other by the social relationships formed and its qualities. Adolescents faced with more risk factors are vulnerable to participate in risky behaviors (Ahern *et al.*, 2008). As an example, Mayzer (2004) stated that participants with lower self-esteem were associated with an escalating pattern of aggressive behavior. Adolescent's aggression were associated with more social problems, family expressiveness, physical discipline, and negative control but less family cohesion. Some predictors of delinquent

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\*Corresponding Author

behaviors and aggression involved more maternal psychopathology, social problems, and family conflict with an addition of having lower global self-esteem in predicting aggression but not delinquent behavior.

The presence of protective factors within an individual's environment help them achieve equilibrium to get back on the right track and protect them from succumbing to their vulnerability in making decisions and in their actions (Brooks, 2006; Knight, 2007; Anthony *et al.*, 2009; Ungar *et al.*, 2007; Kumpfer, 1999). Resilience is a personal resource and is defined as the ability to positively adapt and cope successfully, during or after experiencing stressful or risky situations, and in the face of adversity, enabling them to recover to the baseline they originally begin from (Reker, 2008; Rew *et al.*, 2001; Holmes, 2006; Masten *et al.*, 2008; Hauser and Allen, 2006; Ahern *et al.*, 2008). It is developed through interactions of an individual with its social environments, brought about by one's life changing circumstances and may not be possessed or be able to be developed if a person solely relies on his/her will power alone (Knight, 2007; Reker, 2008; Brooks, 2006). One researcher reported that women have lower levels of resilience compared to men (Sills *et al.*, 2009). Another researcher also has similar findings proving that gender differs significantly in the variable of resilience (Fisher, 2003).

These behaviors could have stemmed from various roots. Firstly, the issue of self-esteem is of significant importance as the identity formation of an individual reaches its peak during adolescence. Self-esteem describes the discrepancies in an individual's evaluation of his/her self image (who he/she actually is) and his/her ideal self (who he/she wants to be) (Kavas, 2009; Altinyelken, 2009). A study conducted by Bauman (2000) found that lower self-esteem is associated with higher physical abuse. Results showed that there were significant correlations between sexual abuse and stress where girls with more serious sexual abuse experienced more stress. In considering the effect of gender on the variable, Fisher (2003) suggested that there were no gender differences in self-esteem.

Other researchers reported that males have, significantly, slightly higher scores than that of females and vice versa (Craddock, 2009; Ullman and Tatar, 2001).

The family is the primary socializing group in which children develop their personalities through discovering values and attitudes that guide their actions in larger cultures and throughout their lives (Siegel *et al.*, 2003; Cavan and Ferdinand, 1975). The circumstances that occur and situations that arise within a family would relate to and affect all its members. Most juvenile offenders have larger family sizes, come from low to moderate social economic status, broken homes or dysfunctional families such as those with family violence, interfamilial conflicts, erratic disciplining styles, or inconsistent family supervisions (Siegel *et al.*, 2003; Shoemaker, 2010; Nye, 1958; Quay, 1987; Bynum and Thompson, 2002; Glueck and Glueck, 1968; Cavan and Ferdinand, 1975). Family adaptability refers to the amount of flexibility that exists or is displayed in a family (Olson and Gorall, 2003). It refers to the capability of the family system to change when the situation arises for such an occasion to take place. Family cohesion is defined as 'the emotional bonding that couples and family members have towards one another'. It assesses the degree to which family members are connected to or separated from their family. In considering the effects of gender, Scabini and Galimberti (1995) discovered that gender yields no significant results with family adaptability as a dependant variable. Similar to this, Vincent and McCabe (2000) report no significant differences among both boys and girls on the family adaptability variable. Vincent (2007) states that males have higher mean in measuring family cohesion compared to females. Johnson *et al.* (2001) reports contrasting results that females have higher levels of family cohesion compared to males.

Besides the gender differences that exists in the variables of resilience, self-esteem family adaptability and family cohesion, many researchers have successfully found links between self-esteem, family cohesion, family adaptability, and resilience. Craddock

(2009) discovered that both traits and outcome resilience were correlated significantly with self-esteem. Derner (2005) also discovered that a significant positive correlation did exist between resilience and self-esteem. Some other researchers in support of this link include Lee *et al.* (2008), Veselska *et al.* (2009), Sewell (2008), Parvizian (2004) and Madrigal (2008). Fisher (2003) reports the existence of a significant positive correlation between resiliency and family adaptability as well as resiliency and family cohesion. Similar to the above, Kim and Yoo (2010) report that the relationship between total resilience and family adaptability is one that is statistically significant.

The objective of this research is to determine the relationships that exist between resilience, self-esteem, family adaptability and family cohesion of juvenile delinquents while considering the effect of gender.

## METHODS

The research design is an exploratory cross-sectional survey. It was carried out in two schools for juvenile delinquents; one of which is a boy's only juvenile delinquent school whereas, the other is a girl's only juvenile delinquent school. Using a purposive sampling, a total of 134 adolescents between ages 13 to 20 studying in these juvenile delinquent schools (44 males and 90 females; 84.3% Malay, 6.0% Chinese, 9.0 % Indian, and 0.7% others) participated in this study. Three standardized questionnaires were used to collect the data and they were:

1. The Resilience Scale - The Resilience Scale developed by Wagnild and Young (1993) was used in this research. It is a 25-item questionnaire with scores ranging from 25 to 175. Scores above 145 indicate moderately high to high resilience, whereas scores within 125-145 indicate moderately low to moderate levels of resilience, and scores of 120 and below indicate low resilience. The five characteristics that form the conceptual foundation of The Resilience Scale are perseverance,

equanimity, meaningfulness, self-reliant and existential aloneness (Wagnild, 2009). Based on Wagnild (2009), an article was published reviewing 12 studies that have used the Resilience Scale as part of their research. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of these studies ranges from .73 to .91, which indicated an acceptable and moderately high reliability. The Resilience Scale showed to have significant associations with variables such as morale, self-esteem, life satisfaction, depression and perceived stress (Wagnild, 2009). These studies indicated the support on the construct validity of the Resilience Scale (Wagnild, 2009).

2. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale – The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10-item scale that is answered using a four point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree to test an individuals' global level of self esteem through statements of self-worth and self-acceptance. The scores obtained from this instrument can range from 0-30. A score of more than 25 indicates high self-esteem, while a score of below 15 indicates low self-esteem. Scores within 15-25 show that participants' self-esteem is within the normal range or they have moderate self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965).

The instrument has Cronbach alpha values in the range of 0.77 to 0.88 (Shamshunnisah and Hasanah, 2009). The test-retest correlations were within the range of 0.82 to 0.88. The scale also showed an internal consistency value of 0.670. Schmitt and Allik (2005) reported that the convergent validity of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was significantly positively related to extraversion at  $r = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ , significantly negatively related to neuroticism at  $r = -.43$ ,  $p < .001$  and significantly positively related to model of self at  $r = .25$ ,  $p < .01$ . In measuring the discriminant validity of the measure, it was not significantly positively related to openness at  $r = .12$  and not significantly negatively related to model of other at  $r = -.05$ .

3. The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale II - The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale II is a 30-item scale with 16 items measuring cohesion and 14 items measuring adaptability. Participants would respond to a Likert scale which ranges from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always) to describe how often a particular behavior takes place in their family. The description of the scores is given in Table 1. For the cohesion scale, the authors have reported a good internal validity of  $r = .87$  and a high reliability value of  $r = .83$ . Similarly, for the adaptability scale, the authors also reported a good internal validity of  $r = .78$  and a high reliability value of  $.80$  (Olson and Tiesel, 1991; Saedah, 2004).

TABLE 1  
Scoring of the family adaptability and cohesion scale

Cohesion			Adaptability		
8	80	Very	8	70	Very
	74			65	
7	73	Connected	7	64	Flexible
	71			55	
6	70	Connected	6	54	Flexible
	65			50	
5	64		5	49	
	60			46	
4	59	Separated	4	45	Structured
	55			43	
3	54	Separated	3	42	
	51			40	
2	50	Disengaged	2	39	Rigid
	35			30	
1	34		1	29	
	15			15	

The first step involves identifying and selecting the participating juvenile delinquent schools, one in Selangor and one in Malacca. Following approval letters from Malaysian Welfare Department, the researcher gathered participants' details from the respective locations. The students were gathered at a convenient location and time in their schools

and they were briefed on confidentiality issues. Participants then answered the questionnaires. After all the data have been collected, they were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Hypothesis 1: There are significant interactions between self-esteem and gender on resilience among juvenile delinquents.

A two-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of gender and self-esteem on resilience and the results are shown in Table 2. Subjects were divided into two groups according to their level of self-esteem (Group 1: low self-esteem; Group 2: moderate self-esteem). There was a statistically significant main effect for self-esteem,  $F(1, 130)=6.87$ ,  $p<0.01$ ; however, the effect size was large (partial eta squared=0.05). The main effect for gender,  $F(1,130)=2.25$ ,  $p>.05$  and the interaction effect  $F(1, 130) = 0.054$ ,  $p>.05$  did not reach statistical significance.

### Hypothesis 2: There are significant interactions between family cohesion and gender on resilience among juvenile delinquents.

Results in Table 3 show the two-way between-groups analysis of variance to explore the impact of gender and family cohesion on resilience. There was a statistically significant main effect for family cohesion,  $F(6, 121)=2.65$ ,  $p<0.05$ ; however, the effect size was large (partial eta squared=0.14). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Group 1 (Disengaged) was 100.13 (SD=26.37) was significantly different from Group 4 (Separated) ( $M=127.08$ ,  $SD= 17.24$ ), Group 5 (Connected) ( $M=129.50$ ,  $SD=24.78$ ) and Group 7 (Very Connected) ( $M=154.00$ ,  $SD=12.73$ ). There were no significant mean differences between Group 2 (Disengaged) ( $M=119.08$ ,  $SD=19.56$ ), Group 3 (Separated) ( $M=124.94$ ,  $SD=14.26$ ) and Group 6 (Connected) ( $M=121.33$ ,  $SD=15.92$ ). The main effect for gender was  $F(1,121)=0.17$ ,  $p>.05$  and the interaction effect was not significant,  $F(6, 121)=1.36$ ,  $p>.05$ .

TABLE 2  
Results of two-way ANOVA on the differences of resilience by gender and self-esteem

Sources of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
Gender	886.226	1	886.226	2.247
Self-esteem	2707.672	1	2707.672	6.865*
Gender*Self-esteem	21.206	1	21.206	.054

\* p < .01

TABLE 3  
Results of two-way ANOVA on the differences of resilience by gender and family cohesion

Sources of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
Gender	65.889	1	65.889	.172
Family cohesion	6102.018	6	1017.003	2.652*
Gender*Family cohesion	3118.659	6	519.776	1.355

\* p < .05

TABLE 4  
Results of two-way ANOVA on the differences of resilience by gender and family adaptability

Sources of variance	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F
Gender	306.443	1	306.443	.816
Family adaptability	7269.936	6	1211.656	3.228*
Gender*Family adaptability	2286.128	5	457.226	1.218

\* p < .001

**Hypothesis 3: There are no significant interactions between family adaptability and gender on resilience among juvenile delinquents.**

A two-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of gender and family adaptability on resilience and results are shown in Table 4. There was a statistically significant main effect for family adaptability,  $F(6, 120)=3.23$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; however, the effect size was large (partial eta squared=0.12). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Group 1 (Rigid) was  $M=106.14$ ,  $SD=29.81$  and Group 2 (Rigid) was  $M=117.74$ ,  $SD=18.63$  and were significantly different from Group 5 (Flexible) ( $M=133.27$ ,  $SD=19.36$ ). Group 3 (Structured) with mean 119.35 ( $SD=20.64$ ), Group 4 (Structured) with mean 121.68 ( $SD=18.31$ ), Group 6 (Flexible)

with mean 123.00 ( $SD=16.20$ ) and Group 7 (Very Flexible) with mean 116.40 ( $SD=28.54$ ) did not significantly differ from the other groups. The main effect for gender was  $F(1,120)=0.82$ ,  $p>.05$  and the interaction effect was not significant,  $F(5, 120)=1.22$ ,  $p>.05$ .

Results of this study indicated that self-esteem had a main effect on resilience as supported by Parvizia (2004), however, gender did not. Self-esteem and gender also did not have a significant interaction effect on resilience. Both family cohesion and family adaptability had a main effect on resilience, as supported by previous studies such as Fisher (2003) and Kim and Yoo (2010) respectively. Similar to the above, gender did not have a significant main effect on resilience as suggested by Scabini and Galimberti (1995) and Vincent and McCabe (2000). Both family cohesion and family



adaptability, respectively, with gender, did not yield a significant interaction effect on resilience.

It was clearly identified that there were significant differences across participants who have disengaged family cohesion levels compared to participants with separated, connected and very connected family cohesion levels. As for family adaptability, there were significant differences across participants who have rigid levels of family adaptability levels when compared to participants with flexible family adaptability levels. This shows that participants have various ranges of family cohesion and family adaptability levels which can be at either extreme of the spectrum or somewhere in the middle. Therefore, the influence of family on the resilience level of an individual is clearly not the sole factor that influences adolescents. As an example, despite the various family backgrounds they come from, all the participants in this study were juvenile delinquents. Therefore, the internal characteristics of an individual play a very important contributing role in the resilience development process.

There were no main effects where gender was concerned as gender initially did not have a main effect on resilience. As the addition of self-esteem, family cohesion, and family adaptability together with gender also did not have a significant interaction effect with resilience, it can be concluded that these variables are stronger when they individually influence resilience more than when they are combined. Another reason could be due to the fact that global gender inequality has declined over the past several decades leading to a lack of gender differences across a vast range of characteristics and fields (Dorius and Firebaugh, 2010).

### CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, it can be determined that self-esteem, family adaptability, and family cohesion have stronger and significant main effects with resilience as opposed to gender's main effect on resilience or the interaction effect between

gender and the other variables on resilience. In-depth interviews should be conducted with participants, their families as well as their guardians at the juvenile delinquent schools to better understand the existence or the actual impact of self-esteem, family adaptability, family cohesion and gender on resilience.

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