PEER INFLUENCE ON STUDENT MISCONDUCT

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ABSTRACT

This review paper aims to discuss student misconduct with regards to peer influence and its various types. Adolescence is a period of transition that comes with many challenges for students. Therefore, the researcher focuses on the period of adolescence, since it could lead to more serious disciplinary problems. The failure to provide proper attention and solutions could lead this to a more serious issue in the future. Data collection and analysis conducted through a study of the existing literature help and support the results of this study. At the end of the writing, the researchers hope that there will be more comprehensive proposals and studies that thoroughly address such issues in the future. This includes conducting multiple research works that provide more in-depth implications, carrying out case studies, varying the existing approaches to address misconduct cases, strengthening the existing techniques and varying the practices of overcoming misconduct issues in the country.

Keywords: Peer influence; student misconduct; types of misconduct

1. Introduction

Mingling with peers who have decent attitudes and qualities would influence a student to have a brighter future in academics (Ryan, 2000; You, 2011). This is proven to have a significant relationship in driving students towards success. On the contrary, peers who have negative attitudes would only influence other students towards negativity in all aspects of their lives (UNICEF, 2011). In fact, there are students who are influenced by negative beliefs from their peers that school policies are not important; they would eventually start to establish a certain group (Asmak, 2006). This is due to the fact that peers are seen as the ones who shape the attitudes and behaviors of other students (Willes & Strasburger, 1998). When a student indulges with negative activities with his or her friends, it leads to social problems, including drug addiction (Asmak, 2006).

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2011), teenagers are a majority of the population in most countries in Asia and the Pacific regions. Results from global facts by UNICEF in 2009 reveal that there are a total of 1.2 billion adolescents aged from 10 to 19 years in the world. Approximately 88% live in a developing country, while an estimated 27% (a total of 329 million) adolescents live in East Asia and the Pacific. In addition, based on the evidence (UNICEF, 2011), it is also estimated that about one in every five adolescents suffer from behavioral problems throughout
the world. Therefore, behavior problems is a global issue faced in many countries, including Malaysia. The researchers found that peer influence is one of the strongest factors that shape the attitudes and behaviors of a student. As peers are the closest individuals to students after their parents (Asmak, 2006), students always consider peers as their family members (Warren et al., 2000). Peers are seen as important to a student, as he or she could tell them his or her feelings, problems and secrets (Chiam, 1994). Nonetheless, choosing peers who are involved in negative lifestyles and activities would lead a student to commit misconduct, which eventually causes negative effects. According to a report (UNICEF, 2011), among the activities that lead to negative influence are drinking alcohol, smoking, drug abuse and risky attitudes. Hence, the researchers conduct an in-depth investigation on peer influence, and its relationships to the types of misconducts that are commonly discussed in the past literature. These studies on misconducts, which are identified as serious and critical problems, will be further investigated in order to search for solutions to be implemented in Malaysia.

As the country is moving towards an advanced and developed nation, students are the country’s hope, and they should not commit any form critical misconduct, especially that which is taking place in other countries. Due to the fact that students are prone to negative influence from peers, they should choose quality role models that they can follow. Thus, the researchers have chosen several types of misconducts that are important from the past foreign literature to be discussed in the scope of this study. These individuals are underage, and are involved in cases of violence, aggressiveness, bullying, alcohol intake, and smoking, which can cause negative effects and serious problems. This is crucial in order to provide attention, hence, needs holistic research nationwide. The influence in taking alcoholic drinks and smoking is usually continuous, and could lead to free sex, and eventually, juvenile cases. The researchers also discovered that there is a small amount of past studies on peer influence towards disciplinary misconduct, even though the problem is global in nature. Hence, the researchers conducted this study, which is in the form of a review paper, to discuss the issue.

2. Peer Influence

A peer is defined as an individual that can dominate or influence others to leave an impression on people; for example, a friend who can influence others (Kamus Dewan, 2013). The term ‘friend’ also refers to a companion, close friend or acquaintance. While the term ‘peer’ refers to same age, i.e., young children of the same age in a group. The term ‘teens’ refers to those who grow up together with their peers in school through the process of social development, and establish their own identity. They are also affected, and seeking fun without risking the consequences of their deeds; their peers are a contributing cause of misconduct among them. At this young age, the less stoic instinct and nature of trying new things are within the self. Partners are seen as shaping the attitudes and behaviors of students (Willes & Strasburger, 1998). In this paper, the discussion on the influence of peers will focus on peers as role models that influence students. The types of misconducts highlighted are violence, aggressiveness, bullying, taking alcoholic drinks and smoking.

3. Peers as a Negative Model

Peers are an important factor in influencing the formation of a person’s personality and self-formation. Peers have their own values. If students mingle with friends who are diligent and studious, this character will be indirectly followed by their friends (Ee, 1992). On the contrary, if the
peer group is a group that does not prioritize education and enjoy to break school discipline, it will affect other students (Ryan, 2000; You, 2011). In the Social Cognitive Theory, or Social Learning, proposed by Bandura (1977, 1986), it is mentioned that one of the reasons an individual learns a certain attitude through observations is to be effectively accepted and liked by others in the circle. Hence, most of peer behaviors are taken as a model that is learned through observation, with the intention of imitating the behavior. There are also studies which discovered that peer acceptance would show self appreciation to students, without considering whether it is positive or negative. Therefore, if a student mingles with a group that goes against school rules, the possibility of that student to become involved in committing disciplinary misconduct is high (Mok, 2012).

Generally, teens will imitate anything done by their peers. They will speak, think and dress like their peers. At this point, this what causes teens to often accompany their group (Asmak, 2006). Everything that is proposed by a group of friends will be obeyed blindly, without a member thinking about the implications that follow, which could bring harm. They will experiment with new acts, despite knowing they are wrong and violate school policies. Generally, students tend to idolize their peers’ behaviors as compared to their parents’ behaviors. This scenario is commonly seen in weak classes where students are less disciplined and have no interest towards their studies. In these types of classes, students are mostly prone to commit disciplinary misconduct (Haliza, & Joy, 201). Hence, it is clearly shown here that peer influence could have a negative impact on students.

A study conducted by Asmak (2006) on student disciplinary misconduct shows that peer influence on students involved in misconduct is the highest percentage (63.6%), and they are generally easy to imitate and be influenced by their peers. In addition, there are a number of past researches which discovered that students place great effort to be together with their friends (Asmak, 2006; Black, Devereux & Salvanes, 2013; UNICEF, 2011). In fact, male students are willing to take the risk of their actions and behaviors, as well as to face failure in their studies, as long as they could show the negative self image that can be valued and accepted by their peers (Bullis, Walker & Steiber, 1998; Mok, 2012). Eventually, students would feel comfortable with these kinds of peers, and continuously choose them as friends in order to form a certain group, as they know they are committing the same level of misconduct (Knecht et al., 2010; Sijtsema et al., 2010). This clearly shows that attitudes shown by peers possess an influence for others to follow.

4. The Acts of Violence, Aggressiveness and Bully

Ferguson et al. (2009) conducted a study on a group of 603 male and female Hispanic students in a small town of South Texas. They were aged between 10 to 14 years old, and have answered a survey in the form of multiple behavioral measurements on disciplinary misconduct, such as aggressiveness, disobeying rules, violence and bullying. The aim of their research was to identify various misconducts among students, and their relationship on peer influence. Empirical data findings discovered that the relationship between peer influence and student disciplinary misconduct is very high and significant to influence students to commit misconduct. In fact, they are very exposed to a worse impact. This proves that the influence of peer misconduct has a strong impact on interactions with students.

In addition, peers who commit violence towards others are usually seen as those who are physically and psychologically stronger and more popular among the peers, and are given support to show off their ability and violence towards others (Salmivalli, 2010). Some of them could confidently and intentionally commit violence to fulfill their own objectives. They give attention to gain power and success, as well as to neglect the relationship with the oppressed peers (Menesini, Nocentini &
Camodeca, 2011). They believe that an aggressive attitude is something worthwhile, as the results obtained would increase the feeling of personal value. In addition, they would also feel approved and proud of themselves. They also have strong negative assumptions that lead to rivalry towards others, including friends and teachers around them (Bilic, 2013). When such attitude is followed by other students, it would cause more aggressive behaviors and violence (Salmivalli, 2010).

In a study conducted in China by Pyrooz & Decker (2013) on students who were involved in misconduct problems such as violence and peer groups, it was found that the type of misconduct committed by them is not much different from that of Western and Europe countries. The findings of the relationship of peers’ influence to commit group misconduct, especially violence, are consistent with the findings of past studies conducted in the United States and Europe. Peer influence has a strong relationship in influencing students to commit violence, and takes part in a certain group. Using 2,245 samples of students in China, it was discovered that more than half of the sample committed violence as the highest type of misconduct. The findings also revealed that it is very important to gain social support in changing misconduct influence that involves delinquency and violence among students. This is due to the strong impact posed by the group they have joined.

5. Consumption of Alcoholic Drinks

The consumption of alcoholic drinks among teenagers in Europe is very huge. In 2009-2010, the percentage of alcoholic drinks consumed was about 4% among 11 years old teenagers, and 8% among 13 years old teenagers, at least once a week (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2012). For teenagers between 15 to 16 years old, the consumption of alcoholic drinks was about 87%, and the frequency is five or more times during a certain occassion in 30 days (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2012).

Generally, other than parents’ influence, the consumption of alcoholic drinks among teenagers in the Western and European countries is mostly influenced by peers (Cleveland, Feinberg & Greenberg, 2010). As discovered from a number of experimental studies, the habit of consuming alcoholic drinks among students is mostly influenced by peers, where students would consume alcoholic drinks when they meet their peers according to desire (Collins & Marlatt, 1981; Quigley & Collins, 1999).

A qualitative study conducted by Janssen et al. (2014) on teenagers between 12 to 17 years old in three schools in the Northern-Brabant region, Holland, attracts the researchers’ interest. A 28-items survey was used to collect data from 55 students who were interested to take part to discuss their attitudes towards the consumption of alcoholic drinks among peers. Based on the findings, it was discovered that male and female students were prone to consume alcoholic drinks until they got drunk. It was also found that peer pressure plays an important role. For instance, the students would feel uncomfortable for not drinking alcoholic drinks when their friends were involved in that habit.

According to past foreign studies, students who are involved with negative peer influence will generally bring negative implications towards their well-being and relationship with family members. For instance, African-American teenagers who are involved with negative peers would have low problem-solving skills, weak communication involvement and a weak family relationship, causing parents to give up hope and leave their children without any supervision. Eventually, students may potentially become crime victims, and more distressed symptoms will be experienced compared to teenagers who are not involved with negative groups (Li et al., 2002).
A study by Jones & Magee (2014) on 888 male and female students at the whole metropolitan and rural region of New South Wales, Australia, investigated the relationship between consuming alcoholic drinks and student attitudes. The respondents were aged between 12 to 17 years old, and in Australia, the age limit for consuming alcoholic drinks is lower; the rate is higher as compared to the United States. By using a cross-section research design on students, this study discovered that more than half of the respondents believed that parents, siblings and peers allowed them to consume alcohol, and they had taken alcohol frequently. The findings also proved that peers have more influence to the habit of consuming alcoholic drinks. This is also one of the proofs that shows students in other countries are facing serious problems related to alcohol consumption, and the impact can be uncontrollable among teenagers in Australia.

6. Smoking

Tobacco consumption is one of the main factors that leads to death cases around the globe. The World Health Organization (WHO) stated that an estimated 4 million deaths reported annually are caused by tobacco consumption, and this is predicted to increase to 8.4 deaths yearly towards 2020 (Murray & Lopez, 1997). At the same time, 70% of the deaths will occur in developing countries. Research in developed countries discovered that most people start to consume tobacco before the age of 18 (Secretary of State for Health and Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, 1999). In addition, when students are with their peers without proper supervision, this provides a chance for them to become involved with conversations that lead to the consumption of tobacco, which is through smoking (Dishion et al., 1996). Topics of conversations that involve values and attitude would result in negative or positive reinforcement. Peers could possibly lead towards the positive beliefs and estimation to smoke among students. Spending extra time outside the house without supervision would lead students to witness, read or talk about the act of smoking, which will eventually shape the social expectation towards smoking. Students’ ideas of believing that smoking would make them look cool or popular will directly cause teenagers to smoke (Epstein, Griffin, & Botvin, 2000). This would also lead them towards the habit of consuming smoking materials (Austin, Pinkleton & Fujioka, 2000). Past studies have also shown that teenagers’ assume that smoking would determine their attitude (Austin & Knaus, 2000; Austin et al., 2005). According to past experimental studies which focused on peer influence towards smoking, students would prefer smoking with peers who are heavy smokers as compared to those who do not smoke (Harakeh et al., 2007; Kniskern et al., 1983; Miller et al., 1979).

A cross-section study by Greene & Banerjee (2009) involved 248 male and female students from secondary schools in the north-east United States. The preliminary study was aimed at identifying the relationship between peer influence towards the habit of smoking directly. Based on the study, it is shown that there is a significant relationship between peer influence and student smoking habits. In fact, the discussions were based on their assumptions, and it was not according to the supposed understandings. Hence, all parties should play their roles in overcoming the misconduct, as well as explaining with full of awareness, understanding and acceptance by the students.

Ennett et al. (2008) conducted a study in 13 schools in three districts in North Carolina. The data were collected through a longitudinal method from 2002 until 2004, and was conducted on male and female white, black Hispanic, and other students, between 11 to 17 years old, making up 6579 students altogether. The research showed that influence for peers who smoke with students...
had a very significant relationship. When students are together with their peers, and away from the school compound, they tend to smoke more compared to inside the school compound. This shows that peer influence towards students is one of the contributors to other misconducts, such as truancy or students’ absence from school.

DeLay et al. (2013) conducted a study on the selection of friendship groups among students between 16 to 17 years old from secondary and vocational schools involving 690 male students and 729 female students. The study was conducted for a year, and it was shown that choosing new friends who are also smokers is stronger and higher for those who smoke the same cigarette brand. The implication of choosing the cigarette brand is also high among students who are from high income families. This clearly shows that the influence of choosing peers is also contributed by the brand of cigarettes used.

7. Conclusions and Future Recommendation

According to the discussions on the findings of previous studies, the researchers hope there will be more in-depth studies conducted in the future. Discussions of the research are based on the review paper, which attempts to lead to more serious insights towards the highlighted issue. As today’s students are a valuable asset to the country, they are hoped to be able to control themselves from all the challenges in every aspect of life. All in all, we hope that there will be more studies in the future that could offer solutions in changing peer influence on student misconduct. Hopefully, there will be more a comprehensive proposal with an increasing number instruments or models that will assist the discussion of the study in the near future. The discussion will be based on the underlying theories that act as guidelines, which will be further developed in implementation, and could strengthen and improve the techniques and prevention measures that are suitable. In addition, it is also hoped that in-depth implications of students caused by peer pressure could be conducted, understood and evaluated. It is suggested that future researchers conduct a wider research on the types of misconduct that involves all states of Malaysia, as the matter is global, critical and serious in nature.

References


