



Transforming juvenile behavior through reward and punishment approaches

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ABSTRACT

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Reward and punishment are approaches that have long been used to change an individual's behavior. Juveniles are individuals below predetermined aged involved in behaviors that are contrary to the laws of a country. These juveniles need a lengthy process in transforming their acts in reference to rehabilitation process. Thus, this paper examined the extent to which this rehabilitation process could succeed through reward and punishment in transforming the juveniles' behaviors. This study comprised three case studies of chosen three rehabilitation schools in three different zones (North, central, and south). A total of 8 teachers, 3 counsellors, 3 school administrators, 3 social welfare workers, and 12 juveniles had agreed to be the respondents of this purposive sampling study. Meanwhile, the data was gathered through in-depth interviews and detailed observations on rehabilitation process. The result shows behavioral change among juveniles achievable through rewards and punishments. Indeed, the importance of implementing reward and punishment to assist the juvenile rehabilitation process in these studies' context is undeniable.

Contribution/Originality: This paper's primary contribution is to reveal how reward and punishment could be used to transform juvenile's behavior in rehabilitation schools. It is a pioneer research that focuses on the implementation of the rewards and punishment approach in changing individuals' behavior.

1. INTRODUCTION

Issues of juvenile delinquencies are common issues faced by most nations (Cauffman, Fine, Mahler, & Simmons, 2018; Cilingiri, 2012; Dash, Padhi, & Das, 2021), which is given the utmost attention for its negative impact (Nonthapot & Watchalaanun, 2021). The oft lingering question is why teens are bent towards delinquencies. As stated by Prendi (2012); Rathus (2014); Farnicka (2017); Santrock (2019), teenage is the transition period of children into adult where they are easily influenced by various negative elements in their surroundings. Negative elements include inappropriate values and behavioral learnings from socialization agents around them (Tjalla, Siswantari, & Sudrajat, 2020). In simple terms, when a teenager mingles and interacts with socialization agents, for instance a bad influence peer, they will be pick up bad values (Nyarko, Aikins, Nyarko, & Aboagye, 2019). This teen circle will eventually be showing acts that is termed as deviant and delinquency.

When this group of teenagers commit delinquency and are caught, they will be put in rehabilitation school and will be known as juveniles. There is no denying that there are many current issues going on in society, but juvenile issues are becoming more serious. That is why the issue of juveniles in rehabilitation institutions needs to be studied. Besides, this group is still considered teenagers, and they are the nation's hope. In rehabilitation schools, various approaches are made to change their behavior; hence, this study specifically focuses on the reward and punishment approach. The study aimed to answer such questions: does the reward and punishment approach help juveniles change their behavior? What will the future of a country look like if many of these teenagers are involved in delinquency and get caught? These issues need to be explored, studied, and given full attention.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *Juveniles, Delinquency and Rehabilitation School*

Some scholars view deviant as behaviors that are out of line from local value and norms (Ferrante, 2014; Kendall, 2017). While delinquency is also partly deviant but delinquencies not only are against the norms but are also against the law (Regoli & Hewitt, 2003), hence delinquent teenagers are known as juveniles.

The Malaysian law defines juveniles as teenagers below the age of 18 years. In principle, this group is protected by the *Child Act (2001)* which considers them as immature individuals and are not punishable or prosecutable by the adult act. In this *Child Act*, various aspects are detailed, including the age limit towards all their actions for involvements in delinquency and the protections for them. In this act, there is no prison sentences, as in the case of adults, for any wrongdoings against the law. However, the juveniles are sent to a rehabilitation school for a certain period of time.

Sekolah Tunas Bakti (STB) is one of the rehabilitation schools that caters for underage delinquent girls and boys in Malaysia. The objective of its inception as embodied in Section 65 of The *Child Act (2001)* is not only to detain juveniles, but most importantly to transform them to a better person and to be a someone who can contribute back to the society (*Child Act, 2001*). In order to become a better person, juveniles need to go through a predetermined rehabilitation process at a rehabilitation school (Kendall, 2017).

2.2. *Rehabilitation Process and how to Achieve it?*

According to Kendall (2017) juvenile rehabilitation process is something that is truly complex and toilsome. However, this process is necessary for juveniles. One of the aims of rehabilitation process is to inculcate good values, norms and ultimately good behavior that is reflected in the individuals. Good values are important in the individual as clearly stated by Beaumont and Pernsteiner (2021); Yusoff, Shaharum, and Reza (2021). According to Henslin (2012) rehabilitation process is highly effective on individuals sent into the rehabilitation schools. Within the school various methods are implemented for rehabilitation purposes (Badasa, Gameda, Gaduda, & Wondimu, 2019; Rasskazova et al., 2021) but among commonly practiced methods are rewards and punishment as best practices for improving negative behavior of the juveniles.

Generally, basic concept of reward is to bring enjoyment to individuals, while punishment upsets the person and causes him to abstain from misbehaving again (Altikriti, 2021; Davis, Hennes, & Raymond, 2018). Different types of rewards can be given (Altikriti, 2021; Bolin, Ouellette, & Applegate, 2019; Borek & Abraham, 2018) in the form of gifts, food of choice, certain privileges and praise and appreciation while punishments may include scolding, caning, taking away privileges and so on.

The line of thought of behaviorism believes in using reward and punishment to shape an individual's behavior as rewarding can spur expected behavior and punishment can stop unwanted behavior (Borek & Abraham, 2018; Brauer & Tittle, 2012; Langa, 2014; Zhang & Li, 2021). Thus the reward and punishment approach (Zhang, Song, & Song, 2020) is widely used in improving individuals' behaviors from different age groups. As an example, to shape children's behavior since an early age (Hwang, Waller, Hawes, & Allen, 2020; Syamsudin & Harun, 2018;

Theunissen, Vogels, Sijmen, & Reijneveld, 2015) including schoolchildren (Azwardi, 2021; Sadik, 2018; Umi, Ngabekti, & Lisdiana, 2018). It is also used on psychiatric patients (Harrison, O'Brien, Lopez, & Treasure, 2010; Haynos, Lavender, Nelson, Crow, & Peterson, 2020; Sala, Egbert, Lavender, & Goldschmidt, 2018) and also jailed convicts (Darley, 2005; Durnescu & Poledna, 2020; Jang, Johnson, Hays, Hallett, & Duwe, 2018). Undeniably, rewarding and punishing are usually being practiced to shape one's behavior (Pederson, Fite, Weigand, Myers, & Housman, 2020; Reed, Sharkey, & Wroblewski, 2021; Saddiq, 2020) including juvenile delinquents (Cauffman et al., 2018; Dash et al., 2021).

There are a number of studies on the impact of reward and punishment that can change juveniles' behaviors. For instance, studies by Wing (2005); Sharifah and Zulkifli (2008) found using reward and punishment can shape detained juveniles' behaviors in rehabilitation schools. Findings by Cox (2011) also show rewards in the form of phone calls to families, watching television programs and strolls outside the facilities to stimulate juveniles' continuous good behavior as per schools' expectations. Franzén (2015) examined how what approaches a school implements to successfully rehabilitate juveniles. Findings show that apart from strict adherence to rules, practicing reward and punishment can bring behavioral change. It is seen that the juveniles continuously behave in a positive manner throughout the detained period.

Latif, Uzair-ul-Hassan, and Parveen (2018) found out that the practice of reward include frequent visitation by family and a chance of a shorter detained term and shorter physical punishment, which turns the juveniles towards good behavior, including getting more inclined towards learning. Pederson et al. (2020) states that rewards (encouraging words; praises) and punishment (certain penalty) are interventions that positively impact male juveniles in terms of self-transformation and their behaviors. Altikriti, Nedelec, and Silver (2021) find that rewards and punishments help individuals choose appropriate behaviors and vice versa. Studies also found that with punishment, individuals won't repeat their wrongdoings.

Cauffman et al. (2018) and Ralph (2019) found out that teens are inclined towards positive behavior if rewarded. Most juveniles come from this age group, therefore, it can be said that rewards can positively impact their behavior. Bolin et al. (2019), too, felt that while trying to shape the juveniles' behavior inside rehabilitation school, it needs appropriate methods, such as rewards and punishment. Therefore, it can be said that any form of reward and punishment should be okay, as reward encourages good behavior, while punishment prevents unwanted behavior. Additionally, Ambreen and Asia (2020) also added that the society needs reward and punishment to ensure the community behaves appropriately so that harmonious living is achievable.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The right choice of study framework suitable for a research scope helps precisely to gather the data. In this research context, a case based, qualitative approach was the research design chosen. According to Merriam (1998) a case based study helps the researcher to analyze an individual unit holistically and specifically. Additionally, if a suitable case study is chosen, it involves data collection towards an issue carried out in a natural manner and based on complex descriptive condition (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Therefore, to explore whether juvenile changes happen, a through qualitative approach, with a case study framework is ideally suitable and recommended by previous studies. Additionally, the case study method enables researchers to understand complex situation through un manipulated participants' views, as suggested by Othman (2017).

3.2. Location of Study

This study was carried out in three different schools in 3 different zones sampling both genders. The selection of three schools was made to ensure a clear picture of the rehabilitation process. These three schools were operated

under Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM). Next, to ensure confidentiality, the names of Sekolah Tunas Baktis (STB) were kept confidential, and coded as rehabilitation school A, B and C, as per Table 1.

Table 1. Location of study.

| Institution name | Location (Zone) | Gender |
|-------------------------|-----------------|--------|
| Rehabilitation school A | South | Female |
| Rehabilitation school B | Central | Male |
| Rehabilitation school C | North | Male |

3.3. Selection of Participants

In this qualitative research, a purposive non-random sampling was used (Merriam, 1998) which, according to Creswell (2013), makes a correct respondents' choice, as it identifies individuals that can provide detailed answers to this study. Moreover, purposive sampling helps to identify suitable individuals according to the study scope and explore their behavioral changes through rehabilitation process.

The participants comprised 17 staff members of the rehabilitation schools and 12 juvenile inmates. The school staff included teachers, administrators, counsellors and social welfare workers, who were sampled because of their hands-on involvement in juvenile rehabilitation process. The juveniles were sampled to collect feedback from their own rehabilitation experience and perspective. Such a selection of participants thus helped in finding the extent to which the rehabilitation process changes juvenile's behavior.

3.4. Data Collection

Data was collected through interview which is one of the main qualitative study data gathering methods (Bailey, 2017). In this study, the researcher individually interviewed each rehabilitation staff member, while the interview with juveniles was done in a group. Three juvenile groups (FG1, FG2, FG3,) were formed and focus group interviews were conducted with them. Each group was made up of two to six juveniles. The small number of juveniles in each group gave the opportunity to each juvenile to give their opinion during the interview.

In carrying out individual or group interview, there are three types of interview methods; structured interview, semi-structured interview and unstructured interview (Bailey, 2017). According to interview protocol, semi structured interview method was chosen as data collection method due to its open and flexible structure (Hays & Singh, 2012), as it allowed the researcher to ask more questions in order to have a deeper insight in the issues under study (Bailey, 2017). Observations were also done to strengthen interview data, as proposed by Marshall and Rossman (2016). Lichtman (2013) also suggested observations of the participants' surroundings in order to understand the participants' behavior and the surrounding environment. The observation method helped understand juveniles' behavioral change. During the study, the researcher's role was only that of a passive observer. Being a passive observer is the best approach as it is the least intrusive method to find out about the schools' programs and routine daily activity. Prior to data collection, the researcher explained fully the objectives of the research and requested each participant to sign the 'consent form' as stressed by Bailey (2017), which is also a mandatory requirement of research ethics.

3.5. Data Analyses and Research Validity

The data analysis involves preparing interview transcripts, devising a coding process and finally collect the resultant themes to answer research objectives as suggested by Lichtman (2013); and Creswell (2013). In order to get research validity, data triangulation is performed to verify the data collected from different participants (Teachers, administrators, counsellors, social welfare workers, and juveniles). This process is in line with Hays and Singh (2012), who suggested that different participants give varied opinions which help in understanding the issues under study.

4. FINDINGS

Based on this research findings, juveniles' behavioral changes can be observed as shared by rehabilitation school staff during the interview. Besides, juveniles' behavioral changes can be proven by statements made by juveniles themselves. Findings show that school emphasizes on community based good virtues in juveniles, as explained by the counsellors.

K3: ...finally we want them to be released, as a person who is beneficial to the society.

Pk: Okay.

K3: A person with good community virtues.

(K3, counsellor at Rehabilitation School B: para 572-574).

According to the next participant, a social welfare worker (PKM 1), when good virtues are inculcated in juveniles, they display good behavior. These good virtues are inculcated into juveniles by design and one of the methods is through reward and punishment.

PKM1: Aaa...a person of good virtues will have good behavior. We can inculcate good values in the kids, either by enforcing punishments and giving rewards. So with the good virtues we inculcate ... good behavior inside them.

(PKM1, Social welfare workers at Rehabilitation School A: para 483).

Participants added that punishments were not in physical forms, but more towards chores like cleaning while rewards helped them to nurture good behavior.

K1: Only that the punishments are not really to punish them. We just make them do cleanings.

Pk: Is reward and punishment system a way to make them behave good?

K1: Yes. That is what we practiced here as we cannot give physical punishment. We reward them as an incentive to continue behaving good.

(K1, counsellor at Rehabilitation School B: para 469-471).

Furthermore, G12 participant shared that after a juvenile went through cleaning as a punishment, they will no longer behave negatively nor break any school's rules.

G12: Example of class punishments like tidying up, sweeping.

Pk: So, when the students are punished, they realized their faults, or do they want to repeat their wrongdoings?

G12: They don't repeat the wrongdoings... as they don't want to be punished frequently.

(G12, Teacher at Rehabilitation School C: para 228-230).

The following example give the views of G8 and P1 respondents. Apart of cleaning as punishment, taking away outing privileges is also one of the punishment methods. When outing is taken away, the students are discouraged to repeat their mistakes. Outings include activities like going outside for attending functions, musical concerts like 'gamelan', 'kompang' and live bands outside the schools, usually enjoyed by juveniles.

G8: From troublemakers and wrongdoers, we take away outing privileges.

Pk: So after outing having taken away, are there any changes?

G8: Aaa.. if outing is taken away, they will not repeat their misbehavior.

(G8, Teacher at Rehabilitation School C: para 390-392).

Pk: Can you elaborate on the privileges that are taken away?

P1: ...examples of privileges are invitations for outings, functions, musical plays such as 'kompang', 'gamelan', musical bands, they love it as they can go out....so, when we take away those privileges, they will change, because they want to go outside to join those activities.

(P1, Administrator at Rehabilitation School A: para 39-40).

Group interviews with juveniles revealed that self-isolation as punishment made them realize their mistakes:

Pk: Do you feel that those punishments were enough for your realization of mistakes?

JL5: Aaa..I was put into self-isolation room for more than a month. Aaa..inside there I did a lot of thinking. Aaa.. there were no activities, I could not roam within this school. Aaa.. so, I don't want to do anything wrong again. (FG2, juvenile group at Rehabilitation School B: para 157-158)

Apart from punishment to shape their behaviors, rewards (Kentucky Fried Chicken, KFC) also help behavioral change as observed by a rehabilitation staff.

K3: On our side, we use Kentucky Fried Chicken as a reward system for them.

Pk: Ooo.

K3: For good behavior, no wrongdoings, there is Kentucky Fried Chicken. So, they will be really appreciative for Kentucky Fried Chicken and they will be behaving good, no more misbehaving.

(K3, counsellor at Rehabilitation School B: para 914-916).

Rewards such as treats to eat durians also brings positive impact, like juveniles will display good behavior, as they confessed.

Pk: Do you feel that when the school lets you go on an outing; it motivates you to keep behaving good?

JL9: Yes. We keep asking the officers for the next outing. We really enjoy outing and eating durian at the orchard.

(FG3, juvenile group at Rehabilitation School C: para 115-116).

Field observations also confirmed behavior transformation. It was observed that during the data collection stint at the rehabilitation schools, most juveniles were welcoming and greeted the researchers. No rudeness or unruly greetings or harsh tones were observed. (Daily routine observation at juvenile rehabilitation school A).

Overall the findings of this study revealed the application of reward and punishment and their effects towards juveniles' behavioral change.

5. DISCUSSION

Rehabilitation schools in this research practices a few approaches, for successful juveniles' rehabilitation. But this article only discussed the implementation of reward or punishment to achieve rehabilitation. As discussed in the literature review section, the reward approach is widely implemented to change behavior for various age groups, including juveniles.

Thus, it is not strange that reward and punishment methods are being practiced by these three Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM) rehabilitation schools in order to correct juveniles. While rewards to juveniles are attractive incentives, the punishment for juveniles is also not harsh and limited to only cleaning, taking away outing privileges (outing activities such as attending functions, musical performance such as 'gamelan', 'kompang' and live bands) and being put into solitary isolation for a pre-determined period. While rewards came in the form of juveniles' much appreciated Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) food and durian treats.

Research findings at all three JKM rehabilitation schools also support findings of past researchers that have discussed reward and punishment as a method of transforming juveniles' behavior for instance in [Kivett and Warren \(2002\)](#); [Wing \(2005\)](#); [Aiello \(2007\)](#); [Sharifah and Zulkifli \(2008\)](#); [Schwab \(2008\)](#); [Cox \(2011\)](#); [Franzén and Aronsson \(2013\)](#); [Franzén \(2015\)](#); [Latif et al. \(2018\)](#); [Pederson et al. \(2020\)](#); [Altikriti et al. \(2021\)](#). All studies emphasize on reward and punishment practice, only differentiated by the types of rewards and punishments. Next, our research findings are also in line with the opinions of [Borowski \(2017\)](#) that reward and punishment is a specific method to manage individual's behavior, so that good behavior can be inculcated. So does are the views of [Bolin et al. \(2019\)](#); [Cauffman et al. \(2018\)](#); [Ralph \(2019\)](#), which revealed that reward and punishment practices change juveniles' behavior.

Generally, to rehabilitate juveniles it needs a myriad of approaches towards fruition. One of the approaches that is no less important as elaborated in this research is the practice of giving reward and punishment. In fact, this approach is suitable for all age groups, including teens that is specifically the juveniles in this study.

6. CONCLUSION

Generally, study findings show that the changes in behavior are the focal point of a juvenile rehabilitation school in Malaysia. In order to change juvenile behavior, various methods can be used as long as positive changes can be obtained. In this context of study, one of the methods is reward and punishment. Undeniably, reward and punishment are suitable for all age groups, including the juveniles in this study. However, it was observed that punishments for juveniles sampled in this study were not so harsh as what is imposed on mature offenders, such as cleaning tasks, taking away outing privileges, and being put into solitary isolation for a pre-determined period. Whereas the reward is something that they like, for example, eating Kentucky Fried Chicken and Durians. In conclusion, rewards and punishments are still relevant and effective for rehabilitating juveniles in rehabilitation schools to this day. Based on these findings, therefore, the recommendation that can be made is that this approach should be implemented in other rehabilitation schools since it brings successful results.

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