What does literature say about student at risk？

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to review the research on at-risk students in order to determine what the literature reveals about the combined influence of school and community type on placing students at risk. Thus, the aim of this paper is to explore the various outcomes for student's risk factor in school and in the community found in literature. We explore whether another factor also plays a role included the school and education system factors, the poverty factors, the surrounding factors, family structure problems, peer factors and the abuse and violence factors. The discussion will included the intensive measure in solving students and community risk factors. We also explore the interventions from school and teachers, family intervention, parental skills, parental support and supervision, family interaction and the communal intervention. In this article, we also discuss the intensive measures in solving student and community risk factors based on intensive programs in Malaysia compare to intervention programs of the west.

Keywords: At Risk Factors, School, Community, Family, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Past researches (Eccles & Gootman 2002; Pittman, et al., 2003;) have found that there are various risk factors imposed on students including problems in schools, academic failures, premature school drop outs, low level of family socio economic situations, continuous poverty, uncomfortable living conditions, single parents, divorce, unsafe surroundings, peer pressure, lack of educational facilities and lack of exposure of services. These are the biggest and complex challenges students are going through in the growing up process. Students are also at the risky stage when the community members are exposed with multiple risks such as crimes, drug abuse and many other negative activities involving neighbors and the other community members. This risk is even more intensified in areas where the crime rates are higher (Macdonald et al., 2009).

Westfall and Pisapia (1994) suggest that three central groups of factors are characteristic of "at-risk" students: (1) social and family background; (2) personal problems; and (3) school and community factors. The Missouri Institute of Mental Health (2002) gives an excellent report on risk factors and which students appear most at-risk. Frazer (1991) writes that research on the dropout issue suggests that the number-one predictive factor for school dropouts is being older than average for the grade. Others have seen the problem in terms of a lack of personal development leading to possible future incarceration and problems with the law and society (Cassel, 2003).

2. Students' Risk Factors in School and in the Community

2.1. School and Education System Factors

According to Robiah (2000), schools are the source of interaction among individuals and the social groups and function as individual and community development processes. Problematic school surroundings has also become the risk factor for students to experience problems such as academic decline (Garland et al., 2005). A study conducted by Andrews et al., (1990) in the USA had found that those students who quit school and lagged behind in the academic achievements are the main cause for them to to have problems and be involved in negative behavior. This is so because they could not make decisions, incline to blame others around them such as their parents, teachers and the community. They also look for the opportunity to try something new while disinterested to be involved in school

activities organize by the school.

Apart of that, the factor of disharmonious school surroundings may discourage them from attending class. This is because school influence is considered the second most important influence as compared to the family influence. According to Omardin (1996), one of the determining factors that leads to the success of the students is the school's climate and culture. A harmonious climate and surroundings could enhance students' spirit thus would reduce their negative behaviors. Among the risks that students face are the school atmosphere, teaching and learning process, administration and the teachers. The organization and the school learning structure which practice competency separate, having assessments, giving rewards and punishments for wrong doings, teachers' attitude and expectations are factors that create risks on students.

2.2. The Poverty Factor

Students who grow up in poor families are often considered as the ones who involve with problematic behavior, crime, less educated, lacking skills and the financial means and so on. They usually reside in areas with improper facilities, small and uncomfortable houses and often become the victim of circumstances (Damon, 2004). They are also linked to insufficient necessities that they need in their life such as limited financial resources from their parents, lack of education and parental supervision, lack of medical attention and nutrition, limited access to employment, unskilled and do not get services opportunity.

According to Moore (2006) poverty is a serious global issue and a large number of students live in absolute poverty in the developing countries. Past studies have indicated that poverty begins when they are still children. This is because the process of poverty itself is a continuous process. Poverty at the early age influences the whole life of the individuals as they become students, teenagers and adults. In many cases, children who are born in poor families are expose to prolonged poverty. This is the case that cause young men to be in the high risk due to the poverty they face since their childhood (Olaleye, 2010).

Poverty during the childhood period influences the overall life as they enter the stages of teenagers, youth and adults. This indicates that the youth of today grow up in a society full of challenges throughout their self development period. Poverty is indeed a complex phenomenon that include the overall aspects such as individual personality, the size of the family, surrounding, government policy, wellbeing and politics. There are numerous methods that have been implemented to eradicate poverty including improving vocational skills, enhance working spirit and productivity, opening up new settlements, education, agricultural subsidy and micro credit system. However, the problem of poverty still persist and it is not easy to be eradicated. According to (Dryfoos, 1990) 25% of the children in the USA are of high risk of becoming productive individuals if their parents and the surroundings encourage positive self development and to help develop their self potential that they possess. According to Thomas, (2004) at this stage, students need to develop values, efficiency and social skills in order to open up potential success as they move on to become adults.

Many past studies have reported that poor families gives higher negative risk to children especially students. A hard core poverty also will give pressure and affect the mental development, physical, emotional and behaviors (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; et al., 2005; Grant et al., 2005; Magaya et al, 2005; Wadsworth & Berger, 2006). In the context of youth, poverty often make them to suffer from stress and also leads to negative behaviors. (Lerner, 2005). This is because in the age range of 15, they ae beginning to develop attitudes and start to look for self identity. Most of them are involve in risky unhealthy behaviors such as drug abuse, nutritional interruptions, violence, , bully, stealing, play truant and arms dealing. This leads to increase of pressure, depression, anxiety, anorexia, drug dependent for short term solutions (Basson, 2008; Busseri, et al., 2007; Gillespie & Akhurst, 2005).

2.3. The Surrounding Factor

Some of the past studies have neglected the biggest factor that is the community factor towards students' behaviors. (Hawkins et al., 1992; Oetting, Donnermeyer & Deffenbacher, 1998). The community in the remote and in the city areas are indeed different where in the former, the community are incline towards having conducive social control, prioritizing on the importance of family solidarity and encourage children's behaviors. In contrary, the city folks are more incline to have individualistic attitude and do not pay much attention on the others (Donnermeyer, 1992; Oetting & Donnermeyer, 1998; Weisheit, Falcone, &Wells, 1999).

The general assumption is that the community in remote areas have less crime cases compared to that in the cities has not been ascertained in reality (Cronk & Sarvela 1997, Donnermeyer & Scheer, 2001; Johnston, O'Malley et al., 2003). This is because in the smaller remote places, the poverty rate is higher and continuous, remote geographical settings, lack of medical facilities and professional services that cause the crime rates to be higher, higher drug and alcohol abuses and accesses of pervert behaviors. Other factors such as geographical location, lack of opportunity and transportation also contribute to the higher risks of increasing negative behaviors among students (Anderson et al., 2005; Anderson, 2003). Apart of that, poverty has a strong influence role in family destabilization and other parents children relationship problems. Poverty also causes the children to develop a feeling of unfortunate of getting economical support from the parents and become drop outs from school.

The cultural factor is also linked to this issue with

employment status, difficult access to both education and services and the existence of conflicts between the generations (Reid, Aitken, Beyer, & Crofts, 2001; Scheier, Botvin, Diaz, & Williams, 1997; Szalay et al., 1998; Warheit & Gil, 1998). Other contributing factors include cultural pressure with links to social class and economy, isolation imposed on students from the remote areas, family problems, prejudice and the stigma which all lead to higher drug abuse among students (Brunswick, 1999).

2.4. Family Structure Problems

Past studies have indicated that there is a strong link between the family and the children development (Howard et al., 2000; Werner & Smith, 1982). They have found out that in students' micro surroundings, the family is the factor towards the risk factor other than the school and the community. An decent family with effective roles helps stimulate children's growth and self development. The past findings have proven that those who were brought up in the high risk family were able to achieve success in both academic and non academic fields. This is due to the resilient traits that they poses which help them to rise from traumatic experiences, physical and psychological pressures (Bushweller, 1995). The parents' personal traits such as being marriage, steady incomes and a well managed family are also having significant link towards students' self concept.

According to Shek (1997), the components that are involved the family surroundings including the parents' behaviors, the functions of the family and in the ways how parents children conflicts are managed. The findings indicate that there is an inter connection between parental behaviors and the family functioning. Fallon (2001) who studied about the link of family functioning and the children development has found out that the children who come from a unified family with adequate communication level and better managed family are having better settling down process. Previous researches have studied the linkage between the husband-wife relationship (quality marriage) and the mother-children (parental behaviors) (Rogers & White, 1998; Dumka & Roosa, 1997; Belsky, 1984).

2.5. The Peer Factor

Peers is also one of the important factors in the lives of the students (Battin, Hill, Abbott, Catalano, & Hawkins, 1998; Beauvais, 1987). Peers refers to students of the same age or similar maturity level. At this stage, peers play an important role in their lives. New forms of relationship such as the friends from different sexes and peers are existing today to replace the family in doing family social and outdoor activities. Students have various relationship with their peers while having different cultural and set values with each other. They get feedback about their ability outside the family knowledge from their peers.

Peers also increase the influence on their behaviors as early as in their childhood until mid teenage period. This is

so because peers are social surroundings that would affect their behaviors (Oetting & Donnermeyer, 1998). Peers is also a rationalization for many other deviant behaviors (Akers, 1998; Conger & Simons, 1997). He explains that the invitation and being coaxed to do immoral social activities have caused students to really get involved in the acts because peers are the next closest individuals after the family.

A study by Dishion et al., (2002) has found out that the youth are the high risk group to be influenced by the peers that would lead to negative behaviors. According to Osgood and Chambers (2000) juvenile problems happen when students choose the wrong company. They are easily influenced by their peers thus involving themselves in deviant activities. Therefore the peers influence factor is greater among the students' circles. There are many self development theories put forward that focus on the students' psychological traits and the surrounding including their friends (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1996; Jessor, 1992; Beauvais, 1987).

2.6. Abuse and Violence Factors

Among the risk factors faced by students are emotional and physical abuses. When they are going through abuses in the family, they are actually widely exposed to the traumatic risks that would become a negative threats to their live and safety. An abused child by the parents would probably lead to emotional trauma because they are in constant fear and repeated violence that they are not prepared for (American Psychological Association, 1997). Being in such situations would make them feel fearful and stressful. The children would suffer from serious anxiety as reported by the past studies that abuse victims would suffer mentally. (Coker & Davis, 2002).

Apart of that, abuses also cause children isolate themselves from the family and the community that led to more behavioral problems which would endanger them. In the study done by Porcerelli et al., (2003) it was found out that abuse victims also suffer from psychosocial problems such as depression (fatigue and tiredness), lonely or depressed, easily becoming angry, frequent crying and attempting suicide. Past studies have found out that there is a relationship between emotional abuse, physical abuse and psychosocial problems. The studies also indicated that various health problems arise due to these abuses such as the nerve illness, heart disease and pain in the stomach areas.

3. Measures Overcoming Students Risk Factor

3.1. School and Teachers

School intervention is important to predict students' success and also be able to foster better children parents relationship, peers and the community members. Croninger

dan Lee (2001) reported that the level of interaction between teachers and students has significant effect in the drop out cases and with much greater impact towards high risk students. While according to Kennelly and Monrad (2007) school authority which provide activities to students would also able to support students to get involved in the activities. Indeed, the school also plays an important role to enhance students' academic achievements and to develop students' self development so that they could pay attention and comment on studies and social activities. The school should provide adequate information to enable problematic students be helped while providing a model so that the problem would be assessed and improvised.

The positive relationship between teachers and students would make teaching as a centre for students to improve the relationship with their teachers and the peers. Such intervention would encourage students to be present in school and foster ties with the community (Botvin et al., 1995; Dishion et al., 1996). Preventive programs on the risk factors should be conducted to deal with the problems such as aggressive behavior, social skills and academic problems so that they realize the bad impacts of their behaviors (Stratton, 2001). This is done to improvise their academic achievements and the social emotions as a mean to handle the risk factors such as academic failures and drop outs problem.

3.2. Parents/Family Intervention

Close family relationship would put a balance for stability in the family institution which also clears high risk students from doing deviational activities (Werner, 1990). The policy makers should also conduct programs that could prevent students from indulging in immoral activities. Early interventions against the risk factors would have greater impact towards positive behaviors. Good parenting programs, children development trainings and implementing family policy would prevent against negative actions, something that parents should take seriously (Ashery et al., 1998).

3.2.1 Parenting Styles

Family based preventive programmes are necessary to enhance family relationship including parenting skills, training for children development all of which would avoid negative reactions (Ashery et al., 1998). The family is also a source of communication about their behaviors just as the parents are the source of support to their children. Nevertheless, the family could also be the main factor that would possibly involve children in deviational behaviors (Labouvie 1990; Oetting & Donnermeyer, 1998).

For students, families are the main source for emotional support and socialization process, encouragement, guidance that allow students to develop family capability and build positive values. Family plays an important role in providing shelters to the children whenever the children get involved in outdoor activities.

3.2.2. Parental Support and Supervision

Parental support would able to reduce the influence of risks and this would also become a protective factor to students. This is because the early risks such as uncontrollable aggressive behaviors could be observed at the early teenage stage. If these behaviors are not properly managed by the positive actions of parents, such behaviors would lead to additional risks when students enter the secondary school level. Apart of that, parental supervision and monitoring aspects are important to prevent children's risky behaviors. These skills would be upgraded with such practices on rules such as monitoring children's activities, complimenting children, consistent disciplinary methods and creating family rules that are adhered by all (Kosterman et al., 2001).

When children are outside of the family surrounding, the most prominent protective factors are with the parental monitoring measures on their children social behaviors, ensuring supervision on their outdoor activities, knowing who their friends are and enact in house rules that are strictly observed. Therefore, parents should conduct supervision measures for their children. These would enable parents to know every activities they are involved in and this would also prevent them from engaging in high risk behaviors. This is indeed important for the parents because parental monitoring has deep influence on the children behavioral outcomes.

3.2.3. Family Interaction

The early interaction in the family between parents and the children possibly be either positive or otherwise. And the outcomes would bring certain degree of effect to the children's early development. When the children are lacking intimacy with their parents, they have a tendency to have negative behaviors. Instability in the house, limited parents children interaction would also become other risk factors towards children. Children need all the healthy surroundings and good family to attain full optimal development but when those features are not achieved, the developmental process would be affected. Strong family bondage could be strengthen through parents' support and skills, adequate two ways parents children communication and with positive parental involvement (Kosterman et al., 1997).

The risk factors that exist in the family have deep impact on students (Gerstein et al., 1993; Kumpfer et al., 1998) that lead to all kinds of negative behaviors such as aggression and loss of self control among those from the poor family background. This would further bring major impact towards the students life. Parents should extend their support to the children so that they have a room where they could share their problem with and receive advices (Hawkins et al., 2000). Therefore, guidance obtained from the elderly would enable them to change their life in positive ways. In general, the family remains as the reliable socialization source during childhood and the teenage periods (Oetting & Donnermeyer, 1998; Scheer, Borden &

Finde, 2000; Simons et al., 2000).

3.3. The Communal Intervention

The communal support is important for students with family and personal problems. Other problems such as poverty, drug abuse, alcoholism and pregnancy could also be great hurdles that hinder their involvements in school. Assistance from the members of the community would enable students to develop skills among themselves. The existence of preventive programs involving the community such as club activities and religious based activities would make them to become effective individuals thus would prevent them from doing unhealthy activities.

Preventive programs are also necessary to handle students' problems with the identification of the risk factors and providing protective means to students. Such programs should be tailored to meet the needs of the students, the risks according to age, gender and ethnic background. To achieve effective communal programs, collaboration with the school authority and the family should be established (Battistich et al., 1997). This includes civic activities with collective efforts, caring and communal based activities. (Christiano, 1996; Wuthnow, 1991).

4. Intensive Measures in Solving Students and the Community Risk Factors

4.1. Intensive Programs in Malaysia

There are various measures that need to be implemented in order to solve this problem. The first measure is being able to look at the high risk students' characteristic context. After identifying the risks that the students face, the school authority should isolate the high risk students away from the rest of the students. The school and the community should take into consideration the suitable programs and procedures to deal with the students' problems. Among the suitable measures are the ones that could help change the risk and would potentially develop them internally. This is because of the fact that the risk factors could be observed from the students' behaviors. Apart of that, supports from the parents, guardians, peers and the community are essential in implementing these programs on the high risk students group.

Secondly, is the intervention process linked to the students' surrounding. Such program must be well linked with their surroundings. For instance, the supports obtained from the family, guardians, school, peers and the community are important to change the risky students' surrounding. Indeed, the school efforts in changing the school climate could enhance students interests. Comfortable classrooms and reasonable class students ratio should be able to transform a dull classroom into a cheerful and better one. Teachers could focus more attention on the students. While the parents efforts in encouraging the children resulting in

them getting strength that is good enough to prevent the risk factors from prolonging. Peers may also play a role an important role within the surrounding.

This group should give a positive influence by helping the affected students to regain their self confidence through positive activities that would prevent them from falling prey to negative activities. Moreover, peers should be able to influence the other friends to do things together such as sport activities, pray, academic discussions and having social activities with the members of the community. At the community level, group activities should be implemented to avoid students from becoming anti social individuals. Among the suitable activities are Social Work Programs that focus on the students problems such as the "Drug Free Youth" with the aim of giving students the knowledge and exposure about the danger of drugs.

There are many other intensive programs organized by the government to help students especially the teenagers and the youth. For instance, programs that provide academic and training to the younger generation which are organized in collaboration with the public and private sectors, youth organizations and the NGOs. The other relevant parties also organize various development and leadership programs to build students inner strength, the family institutions, the schools and the community. This aspect is important to further develop the students' inner potentials such as the mind development, physical, community, family, volunteerism and nation building in order to mould a more responsible young generation that would contribute productively to the nation development.

The next aspect is the education system. The high risk students are assessed on their academic achievements and other aspects such as the cognitive development, language and the social skills. This is due to the fact that the physical, emotional and social developments and their learning abilities are different from one person to the others. Slavin (1997) tied the individual differences in the learning process. He said that students diversity exist in the level of competency, learning speed, cognitive style, language, gender and interest. For instance, in school, there are mediocre male students and there are also hard working female students who are more successful than the others. Therefore, the teaching method should be accommodated to fit the needs of particular students. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) have said that the female communicative ability is better than their male counterparts while the males are superior in the field of minds. Moreover, students also have different ability in term of cognitive ability (analyzing, logical thinking, languages, outing and imagination) Alfred Binet & Theodore Simon have produced an intelligent test called the Stanford- Binet Intelligece Test. Lewis Terman (1916) renovated the Binet test set and introduced the IQ (Intelligence Quotient) test. Phychologists disagree that the intelligence is equivalent with creativity.

Next, intervention is aimed at helping the students going through transition process to become successful young man. Students are said to be of risk and unable to take over the

adults' roles based on their behaviors at school. Most high risk category students are more often to play truant , skipping class, disturbing other students, involve in juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, running around freely and pre-marital pregnancy. This is so because they try to emulate what the adults are doing. The program chosen is the students' preventive program preventing students from entangling in immoral activities.

4.2. Intervention Programs of the West

In the West, there are many guidelines that are being provided to many parties in organizing any intervention programs for students with problems at school and in the community. For instance, the program guidelines produced by the At-Risk Student Committee (ARSC) consisting of three stages, the first, the Strategic and Risk Factors (MRFS), second stage, Evidence Based Programs (MEPAP) and the third stage, Effective Programs (EPD). All three stages are expected to help all parties including school, parents, peers and the community in order to solve the risk factors faced by the students.

The first stage, MRFS, is aimed at helping the school administrative team to identify students risk factors by assessing the data obtained from students, by studying the emerging themes and patterns that cause the risk factors on students. The MRFS program begins with analyzing of data obtained in specific district. Later on, it helps to identify the right strategy and the suitable programs that would able to handle the risk factors. The second stage, MEPAP, is hoped to help the school authority to figure out the right strategy for prevention based on the evidence gathered. Moreover, other information regarding costs, and the suitable strategy that will be used are stored here.

The second stage program gathers mostly evidence that are obtained through investigation. Every program carried out will be studied again to ensure it has solid foundation for effectiveness. Other than that, the second stage also contains process for assessment and effective preventive development plan based on the risk already identified. While the Assessment Research Programs (PAR) is a process that is developed by the NDPC and has been used in the state of Carolina to help school reduce students at risks. The third stage, the EPD, is aimed at providing additional information the programs that are available in schools and at the community level.

Next, the therapy program is also important to reduce the risk of students at school and in the community. This program focuses on related issues on the psychological and the social aspects. For instance, the Multisystem Therapy (MST) a short term intensive program using the treatment approach to reduce the anti social behaviors among problematic students by identifying the t students, family, school, peers and the local community factors that cause the anti social behaviors in students. The MST model uses the treatment programs with the ecological or the human development approaches. It is based on the Ecological

System Theory founded by Bronfenbrenner. It deals with identifying the causes that spark the anti social behaviors from many views that contribute to the students negative behaviors.

It also maintains the view that the anti social behaviors exist as a result of interaction between the students and the valuable social system around them such as the family, peers, school and the community. This system hopes to support or block the possibility that anti social behaviors would emerge on the risk factors and the other protective factors among the students. For instance, the lack of parental supervision would cause in increment of mischievous and juvenile problems whereas a concerned parent of their children would in turn reduce the chances of getting the possible anti social behaviors.

Likewise, a supportive teacher with good students relationship would help reduce the problem. In contrary, a poor school surroundings would increase the rate of academic failures or having a mediocre performance. The MST program is aimed at reducing the risks while increasing the protective factors among students. The MST model stresses the source of the problems and giving resource protective benefits to the students. Among the programs found in this model include the Family Therapy, The Cognitive Behavior Therapy and the other activities that focus the psychological and social factor of students. A comprehensive therapeutic approach would be able to develop students while taking them away from negative activities.

The lack of funding has become a major constraint to reduce the risk on students. A large funding is required to offer welfare assistance to the needy students, victims of abuses and family violence, drug dependant and proper facilities at schools. The students' poverty imposes problems to school in ensuring that the students would overcome the constraints mentioned earlier.

Secondly, the attitude problem poses as one of the risk factors that cause a prolonged problem among students. According to reports, some uneducated parents are of the opinion that premature school dropout does not affect the children's development process. In some cases, parents become the culprits in disallowing their children from attending school or become left behind in their studies. As a matter of fact, it is the role of the parents to allow improvement of potentials among the children. Furthermore, they should give support to their children even if they are in difficult conditions.

Students' geographical situation has also becoming a main constraint in the process of overcoming the risk problems among students. It is conspicuous that students in the remote areas and in the outskirts of towns are facing difficulties especially with transportation and facilities. Therefore, a comprehensive strategy is needed that could reduce the school dropout problems in school while improving and providing better facilities so that students would have the interest to continue studying and having the potential to reduce the risks that they are facing.

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