

Constructing juvenile delinquency: an analysis of news media coverage and government response to youth crime in Malaysia

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Title

**Constructing juvenile delinquency: An analysis of news media
coverage and government response to youth crime in Malaysia**

By

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M.A (Hons), B.A (Sociology)

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Social Sciences, University of

New South Wales

March 2012

ORIGINALITY STATEMENT

'I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at UNSW or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom I have worked at UNSW or elsewhere, is explicitly acknowledged in the thesis. I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design and conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.'

Signed

Date

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the topic of the social construction of juvenile crime in Malaysia. The research project seeks to establish the extent to which youth crime is contextualised and socially constructed as part of perceived ‘social problems’ in Malaysia by various claims makers in society, namely government agencies, the media and the public. The thesis will analyse in particular the construction of claims made in the area of youth crime and the evolution of perceptions of it as becoming a serious and problematic societal issue. Claims made in the newspapers and government documents will form the basis for the examination of the issues.

The research endeavour is situated within the existing research literature on youth crime and justice and media coverage of crime. A sample of 695 news articles from two Malaysian daily newspapers (*The Berita Harian* and *The News Straits Times*) is examined using qualitative data analysis techniques, from a perspective that draws on social constructionism and framing theory.

The data from newspapers in this study is analysed using frame analysis. This type of analysis, which is concerned with particular forms of presentations or modes of discourse, is of particular relevance to this thesis, where it is argued that frames strongly influence perceptions of juvenile crime issues and events in Malaysia today. This research confirms existing research literature in several aspects, whilst also offering new insights about the social construction of youth crime in the Malaysian print media.

From an analysis of relevant print media items, the findings from this study show that the frames proposed by Sasson (1995) are consistently present in the manner in which youth crime has been constructed by newspapers in Malaysia. Specifically the faulty system frame, the blocked opportunity frame, the social defect/breakdown frame, the media violence frame and the inter-group conflict frame (called the racist frame by Sasson) were found to be consistent with Malaysian newspaper accounts of youth crime. An additional sixth frame, the individual defect frame, emerged in the analysis and was used widely to suggest that youth crime may be framed in accordance with individual behaviour and choices.

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CHAPTER 1: POINT OF DEPARTURE

Introduction

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today adolescents' problems in Malaysia should be dealt with speedily and not allowed to continue to spread. (Utusan Malaysia Online, 30/10/2001)

Juvenile problems are very difficult to deal with. Juvenile problems have existed in this country since the 1940s and now it has become a global issue. In Malaysia the earliest intervention in youth problems was with the establishment of the Juvenile Court Act 1947. (Utusan Malaysia Online, 03/01/2004)

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said members raised concern during the cabinet meeting on the increase in the number of social problems among adolescents in the country and demanded urgent intervention. (Utusan Malaysia Online, 25/06/2004)

Juvenile crime increased by 415 cases in a year. (Berita Harian (BH), 15/11/2006)

The rise in the crime index was worrisome for the government. (The Star, 31/01/2007)

Crime rate up 15 per cent - Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Musa Hassan is not perturbed. He has laid his battle plans. He is not waiting for results. He said, "we simply have to be more aggressive in seeing the measures through". Since he took over the top cop's position in September, Musa has announced several radical changes, the latest being the rehiring of retired officers on a contract basis. (New Straits Times (NST), 31/01/2007)

The above quotations from newspaper clippings in the Malaysian press show the common perceptions of youth crime are that it is rising, is difficult to contain, and represents a 'social problem'. Fears about stirrings of youthful rebellion and the development of youth crime have received considerable publicity in the Malaysian media. Even though the media is only one of the means through which people construct their perceptions of the world, it is a significant source of information for many when it comes to ideas about crime (Roach Anleu, 2006).

According to Best (1989), there are two types of 'claims-makers': the primary and secondary claims-makers. Primary claims-makers are experts with direct knowledge about a social issue; these experts make claims or counter-claims. Meanwhile secondary claims-makers are the media that transform and translate claims made by the primary claims-makers. Malaysian youths have been subjected to intense scrutiny, from various claims-makers such as government agencies, the news media, politicians and the

public. This scrutiny has focused not just on the number of crimes committed, but the type of crime committed, focusing in on the moral quality of young people where morality is judged in relation to the norms and values of society. The Malaysian public has come to perceive ‘youth deviancy and criminal activity’¹ as a serious and a widespread problem. Being minors, young people are perceived to be the ones likely to break dominant and restrictive standards of morality (Yahya and Yow: 2002; NST, 11/03/2007; NST, 14/03/ 2007), they are treated (beyond the usual sanctions) as outsiders, outside of the society - its networks, institutions, communities, mores, values and ways of life, and - thus subject to both informal and formal labelling. From media accounts it would seem that young people who deviate are regarded as more of a serious threat to the society than adult offenders with the government seeming to want to exert not just the right to control criminal behaviour but also their morality.

Section 67 (1a) of the Child Act 2001² states that young people can be treated as *delinquent* subjects, when their acts or omissions are prohibited and punishable by law under the Malaysian legal system and that they can also be legalised as a ‘status’ offender, that is, whose offences would not be criminal if committed by an adult. Following the United Nations Standards and Norms in Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice 1998, status offences refer to offences related to truancy, school and family disobedience,

¹ The distinction between concepts of crime and deviance is important in this study. What are considered crime and deviance in Malaysia? These are questions that have caused much complication which there is very little consensus. While ‘crime’ is that behaviour which is classified to be against the criminal code (legal or religious), ‘deviance’ is a broader more subjective term which encompasses behaviour that, whilst not always ‘criminal’ are perceived (by the public and media) to be acts of wrong-doing. For the purposes of this research, I focused primarily on the offence-oriented definitions used by the media. In order to get at what may be defined as ‘crime’ or ‘deviance’ in the media, focusing on offences is easiest. This media definition refers to mostly to street crime with a particular emphasis on youth culture and their visibility in public places. Most elder members in the society and even media believe their visibilities have potential to cause trouble thus endanger society and the country. In the media, the concept of crime and deviant is focused on both individual and group acts and in particular the more gruesome forms of interpersonal crime such as murder, assault, rape and armed robbery. However, these definitions may not include all that describes deviant youth. For example running away from home, living on the street, loitering (*lepak*) and sexual promiscuity (*bohsia/bohjan*) are still being part of what the media portray as ‘deviant youth’. Also drug-related offences, school violence and vandalism may not fit with the violence orientation of media depictions of crime; however, they are forms of crime which may receive coverage, particular if they are believed to be linked to gang activity. Thus I adopted an inclusive approach in order to capture the full spectrum of what may be termed ‘youth’ crime. When dealing with criminal behaviour there are two systems of law at play in Malaysia: the Malaysian criminal law and the Islamic Syariah law. The criminal law or known as the Criminal Procedure Code governs all Malaysian who committing crime while the Islamic Syariah law or Syariah Criminal Procedure regulates the Muslim population only. For example when the case of ‘*lepak*’ and ‘*bohsia/bohjan*’ lifestyle caused young people to be involved in a pre-marital, extra-marital or multiple sexual relationships, this form of sexual promiscuity among male and female youths are judged under these laws particularly those of Muslim youths.

² The Child Act 2001, which came into force on 1 August 2002 is an Act consolidating three former Acts, namely, the Juvenile Courts Act 1947 (Act to establish the Juvenile Court and deal with child offenders); the Child Protection Act 1991 (Act to provide care and protection to children) and the Women and Girls’ Protection Act 1973 (Act to protect women and children exposed and involved in immoral vices).

public drunkenness and idle³ behaviour; the range of potential deviant behaviour is more broadly defined for juveniles than for adults. While in the majority of Western countries status offences have been abolished, in Malaysia, they persist. This suggests that attitudes to crime are still tied to attitudes to morality for particular groups of offenders more so than other groups. Young people are one such group.

Fear about youth crime and deviance rates growing and getting out of control has been a persistent argument not only among community, and for the government but also in the mass media. There seems to be a link between this reaction and demands for the implementation of policy and legislative reforms to deal with troubled/troubling youngsters; this is the cycle of deviancy amplification coined by Cohen in 1972, in his book, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. It represents a cycle of increasing numbers of media reports on a category of antisocial behaviour or undesirable events, leading to a moral panic⁴. As a result of the frequent media reports, small problems start to seem threatening and rare events become frequent. The frequent reports then instigate public concerns about the danger of the threatening problems, hence demanding something to be done about it. The typical reactions from the police and the law enforcement system are to engage as many resources as possible to deal with this perceived threat. The law enforcement system (i.e. judges and magistrates) comes under public pressure to deal out harsher sentences which then influences the State politicians to amend or pass new laws by giving the impression that they are dealing efficiently and effectively with the perceived threat in order to guarantee public safety. The responses by those in authority tend to reinforce the public's fear, while the media continue to report police and other law enforcement activity and thus amplify the threat. However, the perceived increase in delinquency and the call for stronger enforcement/punishment to deal with it in the Malaysia has to be questioned in light of their current rate regardless of any evidence to validate them. Since the 1970's much research has been conducted on the existence and nature of moral panics. In the Malaysian context, a contemporary question is whether youth crime is in fact out of control and then perhaps whether tougher measures are needed, or whether this is part of a news-media cycle that serves, other, for example, political purposes.

In Malaysia, the government claims that young people like to be involved in activities that are against the norms in society, thus they are classified as a deviant group (Ali, 2006). In fact the words from prominent politicians and senior police officers identify juveniles as 'violent', 'mindless gangsters', views widely

³ This behaviour is similar to the 'lepak' (loitering) activity of the young people in Malaysia.

⁴ A moral panic may be defined as a generalised fear and outrage which is out of proportion with actual events, where a group (such as youth) is singled out for the danger they ostensibly represent to the rest of the society (Cohen, 2002).

reproduced in print and broadcast media (Utusan Malaysia Online, 30/10/2001; Utusan Malaysia Online, 05/11/2001; Utusan Malaysia Online, 01/03/2004; NST, 11/03/2007). The reasons for, and results of, the construction of youth crime are varied but I will argue in this thesis that primary amongst these is the ability to put down and label juveniles through a rejection of their behaviour as simply destructive and dangerous in order to use this negative labelling to construct youth crime as among the social problems in Malaysia. This label is reinforced by the perception that youth crime in Malaysia is a serious problem. However, is this really the case or is public perception being moulded by a relatively few but highly publicised incidents? Despite the perception that youth crime is out of control, little attempt has been made to examine whether fears about escalating youth crime are realistic.

Most public knowledge concerning crime does not come from direct experience of victimisation, detection of offending by authorities, nor from academic studies or policy documents (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1980; Roberts & Doob, 1990; Surette, 1998). Rather, this knowledge is commented upon and constructed through stories circulated in mass media (Roberts & Doob, 1990; Surette, 1998). According to White (1990, p. 107) there are four broad categories in contemporary representations of young people: the “ideal” young person; the young person as a “threat”; young people as “victim”; and young people as “parasites”. White’s work is based on Australian conditions, however even a cursory examination of Malaysian media suggests these categories may have merit in the Malaysian context. In particular, the category of young person as a ‘threat’ would seem to resonate. This thesis will investigate the media produced images of young people.

In Malaysia, newspaper coverage of youths is mostly based on their criminal pursuits (Ali, 1998). For instance, when the former Prime Minister, Tun Mahathir Muhammad (NST: 05/03/1997, p. 7) mentioned the many social ills affecting the young, there were almost immediate ripple effects felt throughout many levels of society, ostensibly leading to moral panic concerning Malaysian youths as evidenced by the establishment of the Child Act 2001 and the introduction of major youth programs such as *Rakan Muda* and the National Service Program; the aftermath of this suggestion is still valid today. For example, there was an increase in *lepak*⁵, *bohsia* and *bohjan*⁶ being reported in news media in the 1990s with representations focusing heavily on negative images of young people (The Star Online: 06/04/1997, p. 2).

⁵ This is part of the culture among youths in Malaysia where they engage in ‘loafing’, hanging out or loitering in amusement arcades and commercial outlets (i.e. shopping malls, fast-food eating outlets, public parks and recreational centres). It is a form of deviant activity associated with young people in Malaysia which perceived by adults can influence young people to be involved in criminal activity particularly when mixing with wrong peers that like to create trouble.

Today these representations are still consistently displayed in the media. A typical example is one where young people were reported in news media as having a wild party that involved drugs and casual sex (Utusan Malaysia Online: 15/04/2008). Other examples come from State officials such as the Malaysian Inspector-General of Police, Tan Sri Musa Hassan, who stated that among the crimes added into the index are indecent behaviour⁷, causing hurt and criminal intimidation, rioting, cheating, extortion, criminal breach of trust, computer crime, and trafficking and possession of dangerous drugs (The Star 31/1/2007).

Media images of youth crime can have both positive and negative impacts on public policy depending upon how politicians use and/or misuse the portrayals. From the point of view of social control, media portrayals of certain types of youth subculture can produce “deviancy amplification” (Cohen: 1980), that is, public labelling of particular groups of young people which then generates further deviant behaviour in the groups so labelled.

In Malaysia, the high rates of youth crime reported by official statistics and the media shape the public’s perceptions of young people. Media coverage of apparent crime waves and deviant activity involving young people create a particular kind of social awareness, not only of the alleged offences, but of the kinds of young people most likely to commit these offences. Invariably the focus of such media stories is on activities such as casual sexual experimentation (*bohsia* and *bohjan*) and loitering (*lepak*), street fights, illegal motor racing and motor vehicle theft. The main message conveyed is of danger and the vulnerability of young people or the general public to this kind of crime.

The print media coverage on deviant youth (culture and subculture or lifestyle i.e. *lepak*, *bohsia/bohjan*, punk, hip hop or black-metal subculture) and crime (i.e. drug crime, school/youth gangs, violent and criminal behaviour) provides for the continuous series of sensational media stories that persistently maintain a hysterical tone. There has been considerable research and writing about why media pays such attention to crime and youth crime. Analyses of media stories on violent crime in relation to more common forms of crime have been carried out in particular by Bell (2003); Chesney-Lind, (1999); Schissels, (1997a, 2006); and on the inadequately/inaccurate knowledge about crime, justice and punishment that is prevalent among the public (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1991; Hall, S., Jefferson, T.,

⁶ *Bohsia* or *Bohjan* are colloquial *Bahasa Malaysia* terms used to label those engaging in pre-marital, extra-marital or multiple sexual relationships. It is a form of sexual promiscuity among male and female youths. *Bohsia* refers to females, while *Bohjan* refers to males.

⁷ Alternative local term is outraging modesty.

Critcher, C. and Robert, B., 1978; Surette, 1998a). My reading of works by Hall, Jefferson, Critcher, & Robert (1978), Goode, E. & Ben-Yehuda, N. (1994) and Benard Schissel (1997a) initiated my interest in this research on the social construction of crime. In this thesis I take the matter further by analyzing whether the typical reasons for media sensationalism described in the literature fit with the Malaysian coverage of youth crime.

The problem of media sensationalism is further compounded by the fact that media accounts (accurate or not) are many people's main source of information on crime. Research also shows that the media is an important source of socially constructed knowledge about crime (Perrone and Chesney-Lind, 1997; Schissel, 1996, 1997a; Jewkes, 2004; Pollak and Kubrin, 2007). As such, media depictions of crime can certainly contribute to shaping perceptions of crime-related issues. It is important to attempt to understand the basis for these perceptions because the research literature also tells us that there are policy implications which flow from how people perceive crime and punishment and what they feel should be done about youth crime (Bernard, 1992; Best, 1999; Garland, 2001; Perrone and Chesney-Lind, 1997, Surette, 1998a). Of particular concern are law-and-order political platforms which seem to indulge in stories of crime committed by youth. The government calls for tougher laws and stricter law enforcement are justified on the basis of claims that juvenile crime is out of control.

Moreover, media portrayals of youth crime seem to be one particularly interesting site of investigation. The media is one of the means through which people construct their perceptions of the world and it is still a significant source of information for many people when it comes to ideas about crime. Thus, my thesis is about establishing the extent to which youth crime is contextualised and socially constructed by various claim makers in Malaysian society, namely government agencies, the media and the public. Exploring how juvenile delinquency has been socially constructed as part of the broader social problems in Malaysia is of particular interest in my research. In particular the thesis aims to analyse the construction of claims of youth related crime and the perception of its occurrences as becoming serious and problematic. This examination will be carried out based on claims made in the newspapers, as well as by analysing government documents and publications.

The media images tend to present youth in Malaysia as the purveyors of trouble or as a threat to society because of their obsession with the pursuit of "fun" (NST: 5/3/1997, p. 19; The Star Online: 6/4/97). In fact the media have identified the phenomenon of *lepak*, *bohsia* and *bohjan*, which together capture the lifestyle of the young, presenting them as sexually and morally deviant. The question at hand concerns

whether constructing young people in such images contributes to the creation of a moral panic⁸ (Cohen: 1973, p. 69) and how this construction might influence the public and the government views on youth issues.

Government and media can generate public fear with their claims that youth crime is increasing, thereby raising panic amongst the public. Newspapers have become a means for discussing solutions and searching for a consensus on the perceived problems associated with the young people in Malaysia. Newspapers thus have become the medium for the public and the government to raise their opinions on issues affecting young people. Indeed it is a practice in most newspapers in Malaysia to invite the public to debate issues related to problems regarding youth and possible solutions. Occasionally, young people themselves are involved in these debates. For example, in letters to the editor columns, individuals are encouraged to write about their opinions on youth issues and sometimes the editor will set certain topics for the public to debate.

Young people in Malaysia

The social and daily activities of young people in Malaysia fall under the label of youth culture. Even though most social activities among youths have existed for a long time, it was not until the mid 1990s that many of these activities became more explicitly known and subsequently became one of the focuses in socio-political debates in the country. This change in youth culture is in part due to the increased willingness of young people to experiment in a care-free manner. Also, it is due to the visibility of these activities because they are occurring in public places. Even though the appearance of young people in public places started in the early 1980s, most young people's lives are still confined to the privacy of home under the control of adult members of the family. This transformation in youth culture would seem to have taken place in most major cities in the country. Both young males and females are alike in what is considered to be courageous lifestyles with a focus on discovery. Industrialisation, that took over as the lead sector in the economy from the 1980s on, saw Malaysia become one of the fastest growing industrialised countries in South East Asia (Jomo: 1992; Bowie: 1994), a process accompanied by many social and cultural changes that were sometimes challenging. Rapid industrialization in a country means lifestyle changes which naturally have an effect on young people as well (NST: 05/03/1997, p. 7). Mardzuki argues that "young people are exposed to greater social expectations from school and job

⁸ This term will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

markets. Some changes in social and peer relationships are reflected in the increase in pre- and extra-marital relationships and social groupings that do not conform to traditional family patterns (*Sarawak Tribune*: 25/07/1996).

Some scholars (Mohd Amin, R., Abdullah Yusof, S., & Mohamed Haneef, M. A., 2006; Stiven, 2002) argue that with economic development, adolescence is prolonged due to the increased need for long-term education in a more complex society so that a uniform passage into adulthood is blurred. In addition, the economic marginality of youth is increased since labour laws limit work for children who are no longer needed in a developed work force. At the same time, due to the development of consumerism, mass education and media messages encourage young people to consume. Meanwhile, parents become more involved in work and thus have less time and opportunity to directly care for or supervise their children. Compared to earlier eras, therefore, modern youth have less opportunity to take part in particular economic activities, and because parents are working more, have less immediate supervision after schooling. This means that this generation of youth has more time on their hands, and more freedom in what they do with that time. As such they have both the time and opportunity to pursue more hedonistic interests than their earlier peers. This change in youth culture sits uneasily with past culture and as such does lead to an increase in role conflicts where both young people and adults readjust their understandings of what is to be a young person. Their life experiences are full of conflicts and challenges that come from a range of variables that exist in their surroundings.

In relation to the above argument concerning economic development, some have argued for instance, that the *bohsia/bohjan* and *lepak* cultures among youths exist as a consequence of rapid industrialisation of the country (Ali, 1998; Stiven, 2002). Since the 1980s, when large numbers of youth from rural areas flocked to larger cities in search of employment in factories, this type of cultural phenomenon has spread. Associated with this lifestyle are young females who come in large numbers to be employed mostly in electronic factories. The attraction of a care-free life in the city with the many shopping complexes, supermarkets and avenues for entertainment attract these youths who generally spend their leisure hours after work indulging in ‘window shopping’ or merely loitering in groups in such places. Perhaps money is uppermost in their minds – some extra cash with which they could enjoy a better quality of fashionable life in the city will be excellent. A common perception is that these youths will not hesitate to find way to get fast money even if the way to earn it is not legal. Their concerns with earning extra money with which to lead a more fashionable lifestyle may lead to the common perception that they will turn to illegal means to attain these new found goals. Their pursuit of luxury living and pleasure seeking generate the

concerns of older members of society and of authorities because such enthusiasm would seem to mean exposing these young people, especially young females, to the risk of criminal activities.

This lifestyle among youths gives rise to the popular use of the terms *bohsia/bohjan* and *lepak*. The word *bohsia* originates from the Chinese Hokkien dialect meaning ‘voiceless’. It is frequently used to describe under-aged young girls who are ‘easy pick-ups’ – girls who do not make a fuss when approached mostly by males either of the same age or by younger or older adults. The term is associated with the term *lepak* because both *bohsia/bohjan* started with youngsters loitering in groups in major shopping complexes. With a large proportion of these young people being away from the social controls and monitoring of family members, they indulge in various activities, becoming involved in a way of life which would not be normally be tolerated by adults in their hometown (Mohd Amin, et al., 2006; Stiven, 2002). For some writers (Ali, 1998; Stiven, 2002; Mohd Amin, et al., 2006) this perceived decline in moral values is associated with the absence of the traditional sanctions from parents and the collective social group from which they originate.

The peak of this ‘free’ culture is seen by commentators to be the point where female youths in small groups would place themselves as ‘pick-ups’ at strategic locations in shopping complexes, public buildings or street corners, for the service of local male youths and adults. This activity of acting as ‘pick-ups’ by female youths represents deliberate flirtatious behaviour with anonymous male youths and adults, such as a willingness to accept an invitation for a ride and a simple meal, which in turn signifies a willingness for any consensual, non-committal, casual sexual activity that might follow. This cultural behaviour is understood by both males and females involved (Stevens, 2002), and is usually in the form of a single sexual encounter. This representation of girls shows them as naive and easy prey to roving males on glossy motorcycles or in cars. Consequently girls are seen to be in grave moral danger from engaging not only in loafing but also in ‘casual sex’ as *bohsia* - the so-called ‘easy-pick-ups’ (Stevens, 2002). Later, the term *bohjan* entered the discourse to refer to teenage boys engaged in the same activities as those of *bohsia*. This lifestyle practice of both female and male youths has been closely tied to social problems such as the ‘dumping’ of newborn babies by young single women. It has also been linked to perceptions of greater exposure of females’ bodies in beauty contests and magazines and to the taking of alcohol and illegal drugs in entertainment outlets such as nightclubs, discotheques and karaoke lounges (Sen & Stevens, 1998).

Responding to this new youth culture became a focus in most Malaysian newspaper coverage in the mid 1990s. The young were upbraided for wasting time and failing to exhibit the personal characteristics

required of the new Malaysian order in particular those visualized for youths in the ‘Malaysian Vision 2020’⁹. The new Malaysian order presents an aspirational vision for all Malaysians, as illustrated in Vision 2020, calling for the nation to achieve a self-sufficient industrialized nation by the year 2020, and encompassing all aspects of life, from economic prosperity, social well-being, educational world class, political stability, as well as psychological balance. The issues of *bohsia/bohjan* and *lepak* were closely linked in stories, but the former took on a more negative nature. The story broke in the Lifestyle section of the New Straits Times on 15 September 1994. Captioned “When ‘*bohsia*’ Means Trouble”, the story suggested that when night falls, droves of teenagers – some as young as 12 – would converge on the road behind the Sultan Abdul Samad building in Kuala Lumpur, a spot which had gained notoriety as a hang-out for easy pickups. These youngsters were seeking excitement in dangerous liaisons (Hisham Harun, 1994a). Even though this activity was prevalent among all ethnic groups (Samsuddin and Herman, 1993) the perception was that it was more widespread among Malay Youths who are Muslim (Samsuddin et al., 1993).

Contemporary Malaysian youth culture can be further ‘spiced up’ with different experimentations of subculture lifestyles. During the early 1960s, for example, the ‘hippie’ subculture swept the Western world making a deep impact on human civilisation. A typical ‘hippie’ was seen as a young untidy person wearing gaudy coloured casual clothes and long hair, advocating freedom of thought and expression, and rejecting many of the conservative standards and values of society. Smoking cannabis (*ganja* in colloquial Malay language) was a favoured pastime. Malaysian youths copied this lifestyle to a certain extent (Ali, 2001). Malaysian youths also embraced other subculture lifestyles which resemble those of the hippies such as the punk, rocker or skinhead/Mohawk lifestyles. Very recently Malaysian youths have been associated with hip hop culture (Ali, 2006). These youth subculture lifestyles are viewed by older members of society as promoting violence, promiscuity, alcohol and drug use and disrespect of values and norms in Malaysian society. At the same time these pejorative images of youth have also been sensationalized by the news media, portraying them as models of offensive behaviour or as deviating from normal accepted values and culture.

Global consumer culture has also contributed to the shifting of youth culture in Malaysia. A vast array of global consumer products has penetrated Malaysian markets, from overseas ready-made products to

⁹ Vision 2020 is a policy whereby the government aims to industrialize by the year 2020. This requires a young generation that can lead the country by becoming skilled workers, and participants in commerce and other sectors of the economy. The young generation is also expected to become more equipped with positive values and a spirit that will fulfill this goal (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1994, p. 3).

multinational groups such as banks, entertainment outlets and fast-food outlets as well as an international spectrum of franchised commercial outlets. The rise of this consumerist culture grows with the high demand of various products by Malaysian youths, for it is they who are both the consumers and targets of this youth-oriented consumerism. The ever-increasing numbers of urban and suburban youths who gather at these commercial centres show the changes that have taken place in the Malaysian youth culture which is completely open to global influence and demand. Malaysian youths are among the primary consumers of this global youth culture either in the form of its lifestyle, entertainment or culture (Stivens, 2002).

It is therefore not surprising that youths seem to prefer hanging out in the amusement arcades of the various shopping centres, entertainment or fast-food outlets because they are the targeted consumers even though they are still young and financially not secure. However, linking this lifestyle to negative images of their behaviour when at those places is not a solid explanation for the rise of crime related to youth in general. For the young, the increasingly abundant shopping centres, especially video arcades with their globalised patterns of entertainment, have become the social centres of many of their lives, where they *lepak*, chatting, and consuming according to, and probably beyond, their means, whilst at the same time incurring the anger of their elders for their idleness and ‘abundant leisure time’.

Even though some studies (Ministry of Youth and Sport, 1994) on *lepak* showed there is no concrete relationship between the practising of *lepak* by young people and their involvement in criminal activities, a negative view of youth culture has been overtly acted out by the state by means of interventionist policies or direct intervention in the lives of young people, such as in media reports that promote the view that many young people lack the motivation and drive to be a part of Malaysia's success story. Such reports highlight views that many are falling victim to the many social ills in the country. The first response to the perceived youth problem in 1994 saw the introduction of the Rakan Muda program in that year. The second youth program, National Service Training Program (*Program Latihan Khidmat Negara* – PLKN) was implemented in 2003. Both of these youth programs ¹⁰ aim to provide an intervention strategy in the lives of younger generations in Malaysia.

Even though the ideal of these two programs of providing guidelines for young people with the objectives of creating strong bonds for youth and creating a Malaysian nation, these programs can be viewed as consistently providing punitive measures. A youth culture centred on having fun gets little sympathy from state agencies, religious authorities, and the mass media and, perhaps surprisingly, even parents

¹⁰ Both will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

because such culture is considered a form of hedonism and is cited as a central feature of a youth lifestyle which is to be avoided.

Youth issues

The description of youth culture and the definition of the word 'youth' above are linked to other important youth issues in Malaysia. Firstly Malaysia has made substantial investments in health, education and sports to nurture the energy, creativity and talents of its youth to contribute to nation-building. Secondly, overall attendance numbers for secondary school in 2007 are 2,253,383 students as compared to enrolments for primary school of 3,167,775. Out of these enrolments, there were 59,000 cases of misconduct by students in 2007 accounting for nearly 1.1% of the total enrolment (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Thirdly, annually the government of Malaysia has also demonstrated a commitment to children's right to education and welfare, spending roughly 20% of the national budget on education (Ministry of Education, 2007). The government provides free compulsory education for children up to the age of 15 in lower secondary school continuing up to 19 years of age for middle and upper secondary school. Fourthly, in relation to employment, children under 14 are prohibited from working by the Children and Young Person (Employment) Act of 1966. The Act permits some exceptions such as light work in a family enterprise, work in public entertainment, work performed for the government in school or in training institutions or work as an approved apprentice.

Fifth, there is a number of perceived social problems associated with youth, ranging from addiction to tobacco smoking, illegal drug use, alcohol drinking, *lepak*, *bohsia/bohjan*, gangsterism, vandalism, rape, prostitution, illegal abortion and many others deviant activities. Some of these are listed under the Penal Code Law such as drug related offences, sexual offences, crime against private property and status offences. Sixth, the authorities are also concerned about the number of youths who have been confirmed as HIV carriers. Government research showed that some of these youth are not drug addicts but have had been involved in drug use in the past (Ministry of Youth and Sport, 1994).

These youth issues are among the many issues that will be considered in this study on how the government, the media and the public are involved in the process of constructing youth crime in Malaysia.

Aims and objectives of the study

The main aim of this study is to explore perceptions of youth crime and how official meaning and identities are constructed in practice. With this intention, this study will examine the relationships between the public's fear of and concern for youth crime as reported in newspapers, reporting on youth crime in newspapers, and government responses to youth crime. This study will examine the public's fear of and concern with youth crime as depicted in newspapers, the print media's reporting of crime, and the government response to this crime which influences the construction of youth crime itself.

Aims: This study will investigate:

- The nature of newspaper reporting of youth crime
- The perceptions of the public from newspaper articles
- The government reactions to youth crime.

Research questions

This study is guided by the following research questions which will be discussed in detail in the methodology chapter later on.

1. How are young offenders represented in Malaysian newspapers?
2. What are the main 'frames' used to understand youth crime? Are these frames similar to or different from those proposed in the literature, such as by Sasson (1995a)?
3. Has there been any change in the framing of youth crime in Malaysian newspapers within the period 1995-2004? If so, what might explain this?
4. To what extent have these frames influenced government policy on youth crime?

Organisation of the thesis

This thesis will be organised into eight chapters. Chapter one consists of the introductory discussion on youth culture and associated issues in Malaysia, the aims and objectives of the study, the research questions, and an outline of the thesis.

The second and the third chapters will review relevant literature for this research. Chapter Two is the setting for my research with discussion on general legal context that will review the development of the legal and judicial system in Malaysia and the basic constitutional framework of current day Malaysia. The discussion will continue on the current policy governing youth crime and the official accounts of delinquent youth behaviour and will include definitions, statistics and trends on juvenile crime as well as academic findings/research literature on youth crime. The third chapter will focus on the analytic conceptual framework of the thesis. This chapter will discuss the social construction, frame analysis and media. This discussion on media will look at the general production of news, defining crime news, media contents and dominant ideologies and news media in Malaysia.

Chapter four looks at the research methodology, such as the research design, the research process, the methods of data analysis and the strengths and limitations for the study.

Chapter five is a discussion of frames emerging from the data concerning juvenile law, justice and policing of youth crime. It is called the faulty system/inadequate laws and law enforcement frame. This chapter highlights why and how these frames are constantly referred to in each component of this study – newspapers (including public comments), government statistics and policy reports.

Chapter six discusses the construction of youth crime based on four frames: the social defect/social breakdown frame, the blocked opportunity frame, the media violence frame and the inter-group conflict frame. These frames are consistently used by the media in their representations of youth crime.

Chapter seven argues that there is one other important frame used by the media in Malaysia in their portrayal of youth crime: the individual defect frame. Many of the explanations provided in media coverage focus on some kind of individual defect. This includes pathologies or conditions that render individuals either temporary or permanently irrational, as well as situations in which individuals make rational decisions to infringe against societal norms in some manner.

Chapter eight summarises findings from the study and discusses the potential implications of the research. In this final chapter, the thesis revisits the research questions and the key thesis arguments. This chapter also offers concluding comments and discusses the future directions in research related to youth crime in Malaysia.

CHAPTER TWO: SETTING THE SCENE

This chapter provides an introduction to the topic of youth crime and juvenile legislative relations in Malaysia. It presents the legal structure framing youth justice, highlighting key legislative shifts during the period of study 1995-2004. It describes what is currently known about youth offending, using available statistics. The chapter concludes by describing the key pieces of research literature in this field. This chapter sets the scene for this thesis by providing some contextual information that will form the backdrop to the original empirical data presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

THE MALAYSIAN LEGAL CONTEXT

The following discussion describes the Malaysian legal context particularly related to juvenile justice in the country. In examining the past it is clear that earlier practice has had a significant impact on current sensibilities concerning the so called the perceived youth crime ‘problem’ in Malaysia.

Development of the Malaysian legal system

The records relating to the administration of justice and the legal system of Malaysia prior to British colonial rule in Malaya are generally inadequate. However, it is clear that in the realm of civil law, more particularly personal laws, the customary laws (also known as *Adat* law) of particular areas, together with Islamic law were applicable. There was, during this period, no established legal system applicable and as such, the Sultans or the chiefs invariably resolved all disputes. Records of legal or judicial proceedings during this period were not maintained and there is no evidence to suggest the applicability of the doctrine of precedent (Hickling, 1991).

In considering the evolution of the legal system in Malaysia, some reference ought to be made to the development of the Malacca Sultanate (as early as 1400 A.D). This period was an early landmark in the development of the legal system and the administration of justice. Historians have recorded that during this period, Malacca embraced Islam introduced by Muslim merchants from the Middle East and as a result Islamic rules and principles were introduced into the state. As Islam became the state religion, Islamic law together with customary Malay law was administered in the Sultanate. The fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century marked the early history of the introduction of codified law and

the establishment of Islamic laws in the country (Malaysian Law Journal, 2002; Ibrahim and Joned, 1985; Wu Min Aun, 1981).

In traditional Malay society, there was no distinct separation of powers as is practiced today between the judges and the executive. The Rulers and their chiefs were responsible for maintaining social unity, law and order. The political hierarchy usually comprised the village headman, the district chiefs, and above them, the Sultan or Rajah who was the Supreme Ruler. The law that was applied was Islamic law, which was modified by the Malay customary practises. There are two Malay customary practices namely the matriarchal *Adat Perpatih* and the patriarchal *Adat Temenggong*. Some elements of *Adat*¹¹ still remain a living tradition regulating the lives of most Malays in the country. When the Chinese and Indian immigrants arrived, they were left very much to themselves to exercise their own laws. The disputes among them were settled by the headman in their own community. As a result, Malaysia has a rich, unique and infinitely varied blend of practices affecting all members of the population whether they are indigenous to the county or the descendants of immigrant settlers.

The constitutional framework of current day Malaysia

The Malaysian Federation Constitution is a written document and represents the supreme law of the land. The approach adopted by the framers of the constitution was to incorporate some Basic English Constitutional Principles in this written document and infuse these with a Malaysian flavour (Omar, 2005). The fundamental features of the constitution are the creation of the nation as a Federation with the *Yang DiPertuan Agong*¹² as the Supreme Head functioning as a constitutional monarch. The constitution established a system of parliamentary democracy and establishes Islam as the religion of the Federation.

¹¹ *Adat* is a colloquial Malay word that refers to the customary laws, the unwritten traditional code regulating social, political and economical as well maritime laws in Malaysia. There are two kinds of Malay *adat* laws found in Malaysia. The first is known as the *Adat Perpatih* which was developed based on a matrilineal kinship structure from early time by the *Minangkabau* people in Negeri Sembilan. The second *adat* is *Adat Temenggong* which is based on a patrilineal kinship structure. *Adat Temenggong* is widely practiced by other Malays from other states in Malaysia. There is *Undang-undang Adat* or customary law which is unique only to the various native groups in Sarawak and Sabah and is known as the customary laws. The customary law is a system of land tenure based on *adat*. Native customary rights to land consisted of rights to cultivate the land, rights to the produce of the jungle, hunting and fishing rights, rights to use the land for burial and ceremonial purposes, and rights of inheritance and transfer. According to native ideas, the clearing and cultivation of virgin land confers permanent rights on the original clearer (Geddes 1954; Freeman 1955; Richards 1961).

¹² The *Yang DiPertuan Agong* is the highest ranking office created by the constitution of the federation of Malaysia. The position is de facto rotated every five years between the nine sultans of the Malay States. The English translation for the *Yang DiPertuan Agong* is word 'King' since from the Western perspective Malaysia is a

For the context of this thesis it is crucial to understand the Malaysian legal system especially its relation to youth crime and justice. The legal system in Malaysia is based on a set of written and unwritten laws. Among the written are: the Federal Constitution together with the constitutions of the 13 states comprising the Federation, legislations enacted by the Parliament and State Assemblies, and delegated or subsidiary legislation made by bodies under powers conferred on them by Acts of Parliament or State Assemblies. The Unwritten laws are comprised of the principles of English Common law adapted to local circumstances, case law and local customary law. Muslim law or *Syariah* Law is also an important source of law applicable only to the Muslim population and administered by a separate system of courts.

THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK GUIDING JUVENILE JUSTICE

The developments of children's law in Malaysia

Children in Malaysia have been protected by either general or specific legislations from as early as 1889. The development of child protection laws in Malaysia can be seen in several stages up to the latest statute that was passed in 2002, the *Child Act 2001*. At the same time, there have been major developments in the international arena on issues of children's rights especially with the introduction of the *Convention on the Rights of Child* (CRC) which includes among other things the right of the children to be protected from harm and suffering.

Child Protection Laws

The Malaysian legal system is heavily influenced by English law. The British occupation via Penang in 1786 caused English law to be introduced into what was then called the Malay Peninsula. As a result, several Charters were introduced in Penang, Singapore and Malacca. After the incorporation of the Straits Settlements (which comprises Penang, Malacca and Singapore) statutes related to children were introduced. These include the introduction of the *Apprentice Ordinance* and later the *Children Ordinance*, to assist the government to address child abuse and cases of neglect. *The Children Ordinance*

constitutional monarchy with a monarch as head of state. The *Yang DiPertuan Agong* is one of the few elected monarchs in the world.

1922 was a specific statute and later replaced by *the Children Ordinance 1937*, *the Children Ordinance 1939* and *the Children Ordinance 1946*.

In 1947, the *Children and Young person Act* was introduced¹³. This Act was passed with the objective of protecting the two groups of people mentioned specifically in the Act, i.e. ‘children’¹⁴ and ‘young persons’.¹⁵ The response of government in terms of child protection acts is discussed in Chapter 5.

Court for children¹⁶

Previously known as the Juvenile Court, a Court for Children was established under the *Child Act 2001*. The Court consists of a magistrate who, as the case may require, is assisted by two advisors. The Court for Children is not open to the public. Although newspaper reporters may attend they cannot reveal particulars that may identify the offender. If found guilty, the court does not use terms such as ‘convict’ or ‘sentence’ in relation to the child offender and any reference in any written law to a person convicted, a conviction and a sentence will, in the case of a child, be construed as a child found guilty, a finding of guilt and an order made upon a finding of guilt respectively. These terms cannot be used to refer to a child offender as both terms imply negative connotations.

The Court is presided over by a senior magistrate who decides on guilt. He sits with two assessors, one of whom should be a woman if possible, to assist him in deciding the ‘sentence’. The woman assessor will be necessary particularly if the offender is female in order to best represent the interests of the female offender and to assure her protection. Before deciding how to deal with a juvenile, the court considers the offender’s general conduct, home environment, school record and medical history. The court may admonish and discharge an offender; it may grant a discharge upon the offender entering a good behaviour bond to comply with such orders as may be imposed or a committal to the care of a relative or other fit person; it may order his parents or guardian to execute a bond to exercise proper care and

¹³ This Act was introduced via Government Gazette 3525/47. Based on section 1(2), this Act only applies in West Malaysia and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan. This Act was repealed when the Child Protection Act 1991 was enforced.

¹⁴ ‘Child’ is defined as those under the age of 14 years old (see section 2(1) of Act 232).

¹⁵ ‘Young Person’ is defined as those who have attained the age of 14 but are below the age of 18 years old (see section 2(1) of Act 232).

¹⁶ The discussion is based on document published on the Child Act 2001 (Act 611)

guardianship; it may endorse an approbation order or an order of committal to an approved school such as *Asrama Akhlak*¹⁷, Sekolah Tunas Bakti¹⁸, Taman Seri Puteri¹⁹ or the Henry Gurney School, for ‘corrective’ education; or it may give an order to pay a fine, compensation or costs. Imprisonment may only be ordered if the offender is aged between ages 14 to 18 years old. It is the last resort used only in cases where the delinquent cannot be suitably dealt with in any other manner.

Criminal Procedure Code (Act 593)²⁰

The Criminal Procedure Code (Act 593, Section 293)²¹ is an Act relating to criminal procedures, within which reference is made to criminal procedures for ‘youthful offenders’. Youthful offenders include any child convicted of an offence punishable by fine or imprisonment who, in the absence of legal proof to the contrary, is above the age of ten and under the age of sixteen years in the opinion of the Court before which the child is convicted.

Syariah Criminal Procedure²² (Federal Territories) Act 560, 1997

The Syariah Criminal Procedure (Federal Territories) Act 1997 is an Act which makes provisions relating to Syariah Criminal Procedure for Syariah Courts.²³ Generally speaking, under Syariah Law, the ability

¹⁷ *Asrama Akhlak* is a probation centre for young people who according to the Malaysian Child Acts 2001 are in danger of delinquent activities. *Asrama Akhlak* is a temporary place for children who are under remand and rehabilitation. The children can either have been involved in criminal activities or are being classified as “beyond control” cases. There are two reasons why children are placed at *Asrama Akhlak*: Children may be in transit until they are moved to *Tunas Bakti* School or the children are subject to a probation order.

¹⁸ *Tunas Bakti* School is an approved school for the placement of juveniles who are charged with juvenile crime or status offences under the 2001 Child Acts. It is also a place of care for young people who are classified as “beyond control.” Entry to the school is usually based on a court order. Other cases in which a child can be placed in this school concern parents who apply in writing to the magistrate to place their child who they deem “beyond control” into an institution for care. However this latter case is not desirable because if the child is only classified as “beyond control” and if he or she is placed in this school, the environment may not in fact be conducive for the child as most of the children placed in this school have generally been exposed to criminal events of some kind.

¹⁹ *Taman Seri Puteri* is an institution for young women below the age of 18. It is an institution to rehabilitate and provide refuge for young girls who may be exposed to moral danger and involvement in prostitution and who are placed here either by court order or by voluntarily application.

²⁰ Incorporating all amendments up to 1 January 2006

²¹ Details of this Act 593 is attached as Appendix B: Law of Malaysia, Act 593, Criminal Procedure Code – Youthful Offenders (Section 293)

²² Incorporating all amendments up to 1 January 2006

to commit criminal acts is only attributed to a person of sound and free will. Consequently, a Muslim child is not held responsible for any crime act until he/she reaches the age of puberty. The definition of the age of puberty, however, varies according to the views of Muslim scholars, further complicating the definition itself. Despite the discrepancies, under the Syariah Criminal Procedure (Federal Territory Act) of 1997 “youthful offender” is interpreted in Section 2(1) of the Act to mean an offender above the age of ten and below the age of sixteen years.²⁴ Children offenders will not be subjected to Syariah law unless the offence in question is recognized within the Syariah states enactments (Nisrine & Farkhanda, 2010).

Summary

From the above discussion the age of a person is significant when considering the liability, procedure and punishment to be imposed on a child. It is concluded that the age of criminal responsibility as provided for in Malaysian law begins at the age of ten years. It depends however upon the level of understanding as to the nature and consequences of the act at the time of commission of the crime. Whilst in the Syariah Court, the criminal responsibility of a person is determined upon attaining the age of puberty, according to Islamic Law. The Syariah Criminal Procedure (Federal Territories) Act 1984 interprets ‘youthful offender as an offender above the age of ten and below the age of sixteen years’. Even though there are various criminal acts and procedures that have governed young people in Malaysia, since 2001, the care, protection and rights of young people are administered under the Child Act 2001.

TREND OF JUVENILE CRIME 2002-2007

In Malaysia for the period 2001-2007, juvenile crime cases increased slightly particularly for female juveniles. The data for male juvenile crime cases on the other hand, show a rather fluctuating trend in the same period. However what is obvious in the latest trend in juvenile crime statistics indicates the increased involvement of children between seven and nine years of age (Statistic Department of Social Welfare, 2007). The rise in crime among young people can be viewed from various aspects. Table 2a below represents a collation of data on young people found guilty of crime according to gender.

²³ This Act shall apply only to the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan and shall come into force on a date to be appointed by Yang di-Pertuan Agong by notification in the Gazette.

²⁴ See Syariah Court Prosecutor of Perak v Jaffary and Hasliza (1991) 8 JH 99.

Table 2a: Children found guilty according to gender

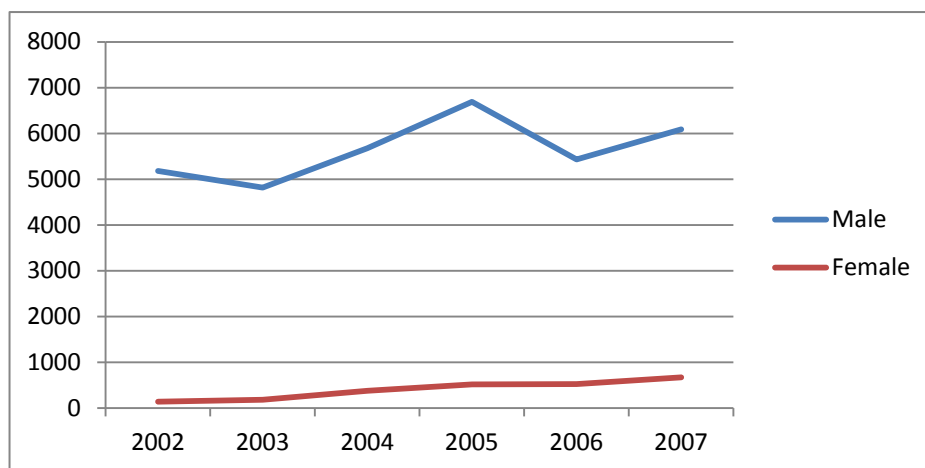
Year	Total population in age group 10-19 years	Male offenders	Female offenders	Total	% of total male and female offending population in age group 10-19 years
2002	5010600	5181	138	5319	0.10615
2003	5067900	4819	179	4998	0.09862
2004	5119600	5676	380	6056	0.11829
2005	5169900	6687	514	7201	0.13928
2006	5232000	5432	523	5955	0.11382
2007	5292800	6090	673	6763	0.12777

(Source: Statistic, Social Welfare Department, 2007)

Gender

Although juvenile crimes are still predominantly a male phenomenon, statistics showed the involvement of female juveniles in crime has suffered a slight increase throughout 2002-2007 (Table 2b). When considering the total female age group from 10-19 years, female children who were found guilty of crime were only 0.01% in 2002 (138 cases), 0.01% in 2003 (179 cases), 0.02% in 2004 (380 cases), 0.02% in 2005 (514 cases), 0.02% in 2006 (523 cases) and 0.03% in 2007 (673 cases). Even though these data did show a slight increase, it accounted for only about 0.01% between 2003-2004 and 2006-2007 considering the overall population growth of these age groups.

Figure 2a: Children found guilty according to gender, 2007



(Source: Statistic, Social Welfare Department, 2007)

There is still a substantial gap in the rate of crime committed by male offenders compared to female offenders. Figure 2a illustrates the involvement of both young male and female offenders in crime from

2002 to 2007. In the six year period, young females accounted for 6.68% (2425 cases) while young males accounted for 93.32% (33,885 cases).

Offence type

Table 2b and Figure 2b show the number of children found guilty according to the type of offence listed under the Penal Code. From Figure 2b it is clear that crimes against property were the most common offences by children in Malaysia, between 1997 and 2007. There was an overall increase in property crime over this period. Drug crime remained the second highest form of criminal involvement for juveniles with an increase in number since 2004. Crime against persons was the third highest category of juvenile crimes; there has been a decrease in this type of crime since 2003 but the numbers rose again in 2007. Subsequent offences were traffic offences, gambling, possession of weaponry or firearms, gender offences and others crime (including children beyond control, offences under the Fishery Act, trespassing, possession of pornographic materials, offences under the Transportation Act, offences under the Bribery Act, offences under the Telecommunications Act and offences under the Poisons Act). There has been an increase since 2003 in traffic offences. Figure 2b shows the disparity between rates of crime against property compared to other types of crimes.

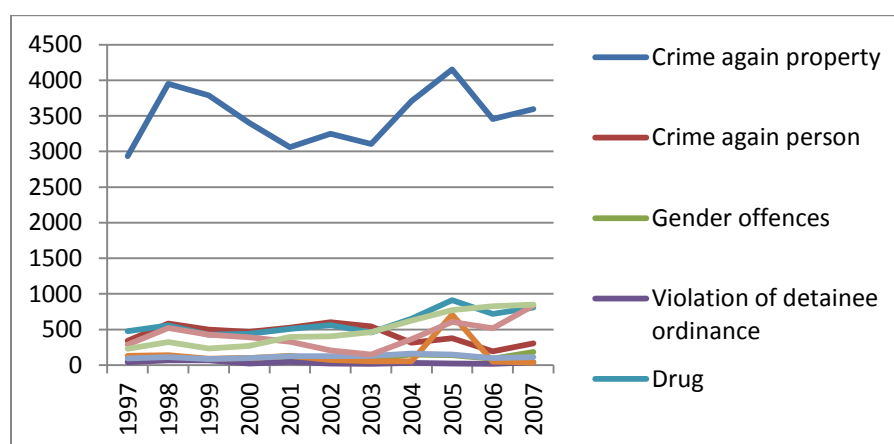
Table 2b: Children found guilty according to type of offences, 2007

Type of offences	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Crime against property	2932	3950	3790	3401	3060	3250	3103	3707	4154	3454	3593
Crime against person	341	586	497	467	524	602	542	314	375	193	304
Gender offences*	53	84	84	98	70	79	86	150	141	89	184
Violation of detainee ordinance	38	65	68	22	43	22	16	30	23	16	41
Drug	476	559	428	442	506	562	458	650	914	718	810
Gambling	132	139	88	98	131	72	55	55	711	47	34
Weaponry/firearm	94	111	86	97	124	124	128	162	147	98	112
Traffic offence	287	522	427	389	327	205	146	363	605	515	834
Others	227	322	232	270	397	403	464	625	774	825	851
Total	4570	6338	5700	5284	5182	5319	4998	6056	7201	5955	6763

Note: *Gender offences are related to prostitution, sodomy.

(Source: Statistic, Social Welfare Department, 2007)

Figure 2b: Children found guilty according to type of offences, 2007



(Source: Statistic, Social Welfare Department, 2007)

Ethnic group

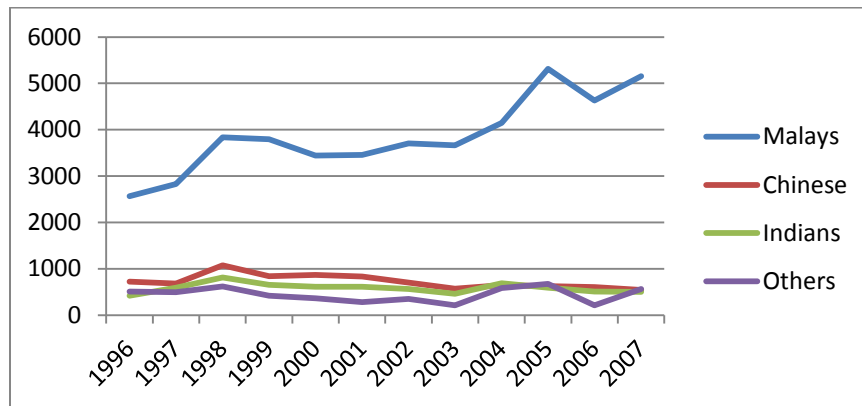
There is no one ethnicity associated with crime in Malaysia. Crime is not linked to a particular ethnic group for all ethnic groups are involved in juvenile criminal misconduct. However, according to the Social Welfare Department Statistic, Malay juveniles comprise the largest number of young people involved in criminal activities, for example in 2007 there were 5156 cases (76.2%); followed by Chinese, 542 cases (8%); Indian, 504 cases (7.5%); and others (including the indigenous people in Sabah and Sarawak), 561 cases (8.3%). It is evident from the data that Malay youths are offending in far greater proportion than other ethnic groups.

Table 2c: Children found guilty according to ethnic group, 2007

Year	Malays	Chinese	Indian	Others	Total
1996	2564	723	419	505	4211
1997	2825	679	593	493	4590
1998	3836	1072	814	616	6338
1999	3792	837	654	417	5700
2000	3442	869	613	360	5284
2001	3459	831	614	278	5182
2002	3705	698	566	350	5319
2003	3665	571	460	214	4910
2004	4143	645	685	583	6056
2005	5312	627	589	673	7201
2006	4627	606	509	213	5955
2007	5156	542	504	561	6763

(Source: Statistic, Social Welfare Department, 2007)

Figure 2c: Children found guilty according to ethnic group



(Source: Statistic, Social Welfare Department, 2007)

Summary

To summarise, it seems that in the time frame looked at in this study, there have been some changes in youth crime rates in Malaysia, as well as some evidence of stability. The rate of male youth crime has remained relatively stable, however there has been an increase in the number of young females appearing before the courts, and there has been an overall increase in the rate of Malay youth found guilty in the children's court. Young people are committing a range of offences with the majority related to crimes against property. The use of official statistics by the media may bolster the media's claims that youth crime is a problem, and that it is on the rise. Following the implementation of the Child Act 2001 there was a spike in official crime rates for youth (Sidhu, 2005). At first glance, one might assume that after 2001 young people were committing more crime. Looking more carefully at the numbers, however, it appears that changes in the reporting of certain crimes to authorities contributed to the increased rates in official statistics (Sidhu, 2005). The media may have a greater interest in simply reporting the rise in crime in its contribution to building the moral panic around crime, rather than explaining actual reasons for the rise in crime statistics.

STUDY OF DELINQUENCY IN MALAYSIA

There are few specific studies of youth crime in Malaysia. In order to gain some perspective on what is available the following section will examine a sample of the existing studies in order to situate this

current research and to provide an insight into the relative newness of the idea of social constructionism in Malaysian research on juvenile crime. It will be evident that this concept is an exploratory one at this point in time in the field in Malaysia.

Looking at the Malaysian studies on youth crime, most of these studies take an objectivist approach. That is the greatest proportion of this literature concerns itself with understanding the reason for criminal and deviant behaviour among youth. In Malaysia the perception on youth problem is it is becoming out of control. Even since the early 1990s it has been viewed that the problem related to youth has becoming worst and worsening by the days. However there is no clear empirical evidence that seems to support the idea of ever-escalating youth problem. However from the various studies done on youth crime in Malaysia, the problem of youth is stated to be caused by either a problem of modernisation and urbanisation, family, poverty, indiscipline, effect of the media, and type of offences. Most of these causes envision crime as the product of family and community breakdown that related to divorce, urban boredom, absence of discipline and responsibility.

Modernization and increasing urbanization contributed to an escalating fear among Malaysian that their youth would be marked by a lack of morals and discipline. Baginda for example suggests that in Malaysia, delinquency is generally an urban phenomenon brought about by the process of modernization and urbanization (Baginda, 1984). More cases were found in the urban setting than in rural areas. There have been an increasing number of juvenile offenders brought before the courts in Malaysia from 1960 to 1980. For example in 1960, there were 1,098 arrested for property offences, increasing to 2,474 cases in 1980, an overall rise of 39.3% (Baginda, 1984). At the beginning of the 1960s, research found that juvenile offenders were more likely to come from slum and squatter areas (Baginda, 1984). At present juvenile crime also involves juveniles from urban areas (Nasir, R., Zamani, Z. A., Khairudin, R., and Wan Shahrazad, W. S., 2011). In the study done by Nasir and colleagues (2011), a majority (62.2%) of young offenders were found to come from urban areas, as compared to 31.6% from rural areas (p. 158). The understanding of youth problem is often related on how we construct the problem which in this case is said to be related to modernization and urbanization.

Another studies qualitative research conducted by Suppiah (1984) on 12 male inmates at Kuala Kubu Bharu Drug Rehabilitation Center indicated both differences and similarities between three ethnic groups in terms of factors contributing to drug misdemeanours. The 15 to 25 year old inmates were from the Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic groups. His study relates the problem to be caused by the problem of the family. His study found out the absence of a father role model was one common factor across all

ethnic groups that contributed to the addiction. All respondents pointed to the lack of supervision, discipline, and control, and the lack of a father role model as important contributing factors in their drug addiction. The mother's role was found to be less important. However, findings from the interviews with the inmates also stated that the lack of mother's love and care was one of the reasons they became involved in drug use. The majority of the addicts came from a family that lacked love and closeness as well as receiving less moral and emotional support including support from siblings. As a result they felt neglected and unwanted which deepened their emotional crisis. Supiah's study that constructs family as the factor for youth crime is also supported by a study by Hadi (1990). This second study also found a lack of family cohesion is a consistent risk factor in adolescent delinquency. This found low quality²⁵ of parent-child relationships in 125 girls who were placed in residential treatment for involvement in vice activities. The majority of the girls, 68.7% (n=86), did not enjoy harmonious relationships with their parents. Of these, 50 girls were reported to have parents who were neglectful, 33 reported having parents who were permissive²⁶ and 3 had parents who were reported to be sexually or physically abusive. Another study by Hadi (2004) that looked at the relationship between juvenile delinquency and the family institution, found that the trend had changed. Some of the adolescents involved in delinquency were found to come from not only two parent families with stable incomes but also from single parent families. In the past, most adolescents who were involved in delinquency came from single parent families (Fong, 1982; Taib, 1973) and lower income families, but today the problem of delinquency involves adolescents from higher income families as well. Some adolescents who committed potentially socially harmful actions such as drinking, gambling and watching pornography came from harmonious families and from upper income families. In his study, Hadi noted a sizeable number of adolescents from single income families who had not involvement in delinquency at all (Hadi, 2004).

Later studies in 2004 also look at relationship of youth crime and family. Jin (2004) examined the interpersonal experiences and coping strategies of Malaysian students with adults also found out that youth problem is related to problem of family. This study reported that parents used harsher disciplinary methods with the primary school children such as shouting, spanking and caning whereas the secondary school children reported that their parents used less harsh discipline on them; however, they received less social support from their parents and teachers. Parents appear to have difficulty in getting support from family and friends when having problems with adolescents compared to problems they face with primary

²⁵ In this study, a low quality relationship refers to poor interactions between parents and daughters, often accompanied by disagreements, yelling at one another and sometimes physical or sexual abuse. For the parents' part, this translates as poor parental skills whilst for the children it takes the form of resistance and rebellion.

²⁶ In this study the term refers to parents who are too lenient and will not criticise anything regarding their children's behaviour. In other words, children can do as they like.

school children. Taha, Ridzwan, & Ahmad (2004) conducted a survey on 274 males and 225 females, mostly Malay adolescent secondary students with conduct problems, without conduct problems, and juveniles in residential institutions in Malaysia. Using the Family Assessment Device (FAD), their study examined the differences between family functioning and internalized and externalized problems among these adolescents. The study found that the secondary students with conduct problems perceived their family functioning more negatively than the secondary students without conduct problems. This group with conduct problems also scored higher averages on all the FAD dimensions suggesting a more negative aspect of family functioning than the other two groups. Interestingly, juveniles in residential institutions who score higher for internalizing and externalizing problems perceived their family functioning less negatively than the group with conduct problems.

The above studies that look at youth crime and the problem family often lead to blaming the dysfunction of family. Normative sociological approach to studying youth crime is also popular. The loitering (*lepak*) in 1994, for example, apply both control and strain theories to examine and explain the causes of youth crime. Even though loitering is more a form of youth deviancy than criminal behaviour it is perceived by government authorities and older adults in Malaysia as one of the contributors for youth crime. Thus in February 1994 researchers from seven Malaysian universities conducted a study of young people found loitering in public places in major cities throughout Malaysia. The report, entitled “Loitering Behaviour among Teenagers” (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1994) was based on a survey in Peninsular Malaysia of 6,110 young people between 12 and 25 years of age. One of the main findings in this report was that on average, young people spend approximately 16.3 hours per week hanging out in public places, or about 847.6 hours per year. Loitering is perceived to be ‘loafing’ and loafing is prevalent among all ethnic groups but is more widespread among Malay youths, who loaf 16.8 hours a week compared to 14.7 hours by Chinese and 12.8 hours by Indians. Loafing is a problem in almost all major urban areas in the Peninsula. With increases in age, the unstructured free time increased from 14.4 hours to 18.8 hours. The study also found out respondents who had low performance in school or work had the highest free time (26.3 hours per week). This problem is related to the pathological environment and the influence of significant others that caused youth to be involved in criminal activities. In other words, youth who have too much free time (*lepak*) and mixed with the wrong crowd will be easy to be influenced to commit crime. The findings of this study seems to blame young people who *lepak* and target them as a potential criminal. This study then concludes that in order to save youth from involving in criminal activities, controlling their behaviour is critical.

There are few studies that relate youth crime in accordance to a specific type of offence. For example Spencer and Navaratnam's (1980) study looked at drug use among youths in secondary school in Malaysia. The study focused on youthful views on drug use. Their findings indicate that a new pattern of drug use by youth has transcended older cultural differences between the Malaysian states and is in turn explained by a more universally familiar set of characteristics in adolescent development. Abdul Rahman's (2004) study looked at types of crime associated with juveniles in Malaysia. He stated that during the past three years, there were 15,797 cases registered involving juveniles. Of these, 61.4% (n=8,448) involved property, including stealing and possessing stolen goods. The second highest category of offence involved fighting, bodily harm and murder²⁷. The third most prevalent category involved drug abuse and addiction and the fourth included adolescents involved in traffic violations such as dangerous driving. Finally the least prevalent category was for carrying dangerous weapons. Even though this type of study looks at a specific type of offence of youth crime it does have merit in order to understand how y

There are few studies that suggest a direct link between youth crime and the media. The studies employ an analysis of media coverage that argues there is a linkage of what had been consumed by youth through media can lead them to imitate and thus commit crime. Youth crime is said as a result of the influence of media particularly of those of violence. Even though the study of violence in the media and its impact on aggressive behaviour among students in Malaysia is still under study, a study conducted by Samsudin & Pawanteh (2001) found that violent behavioural problems among aggressive students caused by watching violence in the media were already present in Malaysia. His research found that teenagers were the biggest users of media, that is between 21.3 to 22 hours per week and were very attracted to films that centred on such things as violence, erotica, thriller, terror, war, murder, supernatural and extreme sport. He claims that the effect of prolonged exposure to media will cause students to become the most active group to imitate and act out aggressive scenes as witnessed in the media (Samsudin et. al., 2001). Violence in the media has also created negative problems among adolescents; it has been shown that this behaviour has spurred young people on to commit juvenile offences (Samsudin, 2002). A front-page report in a newspaper entitled '*Kerana VCD lucah, adik dirogol abang ke penjara*' (*As a result of watching a pornographic VCD sister is raped and brothers jailed*) claimed that watching a pornographic video caused two teenage males to rape their own biological sister, aged 17, twelve times (BH,

²⁷ This categorization is listed in the Malaysian crime index and also used in official crime statistics. It is acknowledged that this category does not make any distinction between a playground fight, assault, and murder. However for the purpose of this research the author will retain this category as such.

08/03/2006). The teen males in a statement admitted that watching the pornographic video prompted them to act out their sexual aggression towards their own sister.

Samsudin's study is also supported by Dawi (2002) where he said films, newspapers, magazines, novels, books, internet, interactive media and television that draw attention to western cultural practices have created problems of physical, verbal, nonverbal, anti-social and criminal behaviour among students. He reported that violent and sexual scenes viewed in the media will make adolescent minds become "ruthless and mean." He also stated that this matter is undeniable because on average they are young people aged between 12 and 20, who are still considered immature. At this young age, students are easily stimulated because they are in the process of transition towards puberty. He claimed that they will exploit hostile information they have adopted from the media as a routine in their daily behaviour.

The later study by Sivamurugan (2004) also links youth crime with media violence. In his study on the effect of watching violent media has raised concerns over the increase in juvenile cases among students from 4,931 cases in 1994 to 5,562 in 2003, an increase of 13%. According to Sivamurugan, recently the involvement of artists in what he calls "inappropriate culture" is significant, for example Black Metal music and drugs. Many teenagers make these artists their idols, which he claims will cause teenagers to copy the negative behaviour of their idol. Another study done by a group of undergraduate students of Moral Education, International Islamic University in 2004 on Patterns of Sexual Misconduct Among Students from 1996 - 2004 (Cosmos, 15 March, 2007) found that the effect of watching sexual violence in the media has resulted in 15 to 88.2 percent of students of primary and secondary schools admitting to writing obscene words, using obscene gestures and uttering obscene words. The findings of this study also revealed that watching violence in the media has also caused violent behaviour among adolescents. Constructing youth crime as a result of media consumption starts to take its effect in the start of 2000. I argue that a critical analysis of media coverage is important to examine the issue whether the representation of youth crime in the media is based upon an empirical reality or rather a deliberately constructed version of youth crime that serves a certain interest.

The construction of youth crime to serve certain interests fails to acknowledge the voice of youth people themselves. A study (Ali & Abdul Kadir, 2005), "*Offending Boys: Manufacturing of Juvenile Delinquency*", which involves the life of young offenders in the rehabilitation centre looks at this issue. Their study is on young offenders and their life experience in one of the rehabilitation schools in Malaysia. The study is based on informal focus group discussion. This study looks at the voices of young people who have had experience in criminal activities. The findings showed that the reality of life in

rehabilitation school provided little care and protection rather a place where young offenders recounted that life was no different compared to their daily experience before they were admitted to the school. Few respondents admitted life there was worse compared to daily experience outside the school. The reality they experienced did not guarantee them a life free from violence since some experienced the aggressive nature of other inmates of the institution as a threat and found it impossible to secure their own safe territory. This was especially critical for those who were very new to the system, of a very young age and admitted to the school due to status offences such as being “beyond control.” This group of young offenders reported a lot of difficulty surviving in the school because they did not know how to safeguard themselves compared to those who had already been there for more than two months, in older age groups and had been admitted due to criminal cases. In fact the latter group in the study admitted they bullied the former group especially if they were new, young, defenceless, sensitive, docile, and exhibited more feminine attributes. Acknowledging the reality of life in rehabilitation centre for these young offenders can construct a different understanding on whether rehabilitation is the solution to help young offenders or do they deserve alternative to this system.

Summary

The review of Malaysian studies on juvenile delinquency attributes youth crime to issues with family (parents, father and mother), more relaxation time available and the effect of media violence. The above studies were cited as examples of the types of research which is informing government agencies, the media and the public in Malaysia. They present a useful context for understanding Malaysian youth crime. However in this thesis I am examining the topic of youth crime in a critical manner in order to see how information can be used to construct a biased image of reality using the media in order to excite fear over the youth crime. This present research is slightly different from the above discussed studies because it focuses on how youth problems are constructed in the print media. Even though there is discussion on trends in youth crime in Malaysia, the statistics cannot be regarded as self-evident, rather they need to be considered as part of the mechanisms which exercise power, and how they form a part of media imagery in general and to what purpose. This study will also focus on public writings and government responses to youth crime particularly on those presented in the print media. Since no similar study in Malaysia has been written specifically on this research topic, this thesis is largely exploratory.

CONCLUSION

The next chapter will present discussion of literature on media and the analytic conceptual framework of the thesis. The conceptual framework is drawn from the theoretical perspective of social constructionism and frame analysis.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUAL ISSUES IN UNDERSTANDING YOUTH, MEDIA, AND CRIME IN MALAYSIA

Introduction

This thesis examines youth crime and justice via the portrayal of youth crime in the newspapers in Malaysia. Since this thesis aims to examine the portrayals of youth crime and justice in news media, it is important to describe the current state of play of media in Malaysia, and then review some literature on media. Thus the first section of this chapter addresses some key issues including the processes through which crime news is defined and shaped, the ideological nature of media content, and the effect of the media. A number of theoretical perspectives on media, crime and society will be examined. Given the scope and inter-disciplinary nature of this research, a combination of approaches seems appropriate for developing an analytical framework. This thesis will argue that the most pertinent concepts for explaining youth, media and crime in Malaysia, come from the social constructionist framework, and from framing theory. The central tenets of both these approaches will be presented, highlighting their utility for youth crime and justice research.

NEWS MEDIA IN MALAYSIA

The previous chapter gave a general overview of studies on youth crime statistics, research on juvenile delinquency in Malaysia and the Malaysian Legal framework. Since this thesis aims to examine the portrayals of youth crime and justice in news media in Malaysia, it is important to briefly discuss the structure of the media in Malaysia.

There are 35 daily newspapers in Malaysia, 20 of which are published in Mandarin, eight in English, three in Malay, three in *Tamil* and one in *Malayalam*. In terms of sales, the combined circulation of the *Utusan Malaysia* and the *Berita Harian* (the two biggest Malay language dailies) is about equal to the total circulation of all the Chinese newspapers, and they surpass the combined circulation of the eight English language dailies (Idid: 1989, p. 45).

The four daily papers distributed nation-wide are the *Berita Harian* (BH), the *Utusan Malaysia*, the *New Straits Times* (NST) and *The Star*. For the purpose of my research, I will concentrate on two of these major national newspapers: the *New Straits Times* and the *Utusan Malaysia*. The *New Straits Times* is subjected to more control than the *Utusan Malaysia*. As an English language daily, it serves a wider

readership, especially in the business community. The readership is made up of all ethnic groups: Malays, Chinese, Indians, Native groups from Sarawak and Sabah and others (Idid: 1989, p. 42). Even though both newspapers are owned by UMNO, they sometimes take different stands on particular issues, especially at times of factional conflict within the party (Crouch: 1996, p. 87). Thus, it is useful to evaluate how these Malay-controlled newspapers represent and cover youth issues.

Mainstream newspapers in Malaysia come in a variety of vernacular languages, namely Malay (the national language), English, Chinese, and Tamil. In addition to newspapers, Malaysians wishing to keep up with the news have several television channels to choose from. Government run Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) hosts two channels: TV 1 and TV 2; while Malaysia's giant media group *Media Prima Berhad* owns all four of the country's free-to-air television channels (namely TV 3, NTV7, 8TV and TV9). Two pay-television operators – ASTRO and newcomer MiTV offer broadcasts of mainly foreign television contents.

Malaysian news sources and news organisations

Newspapers in Malaysia are owned by different organizations thus each will have different agendas on the shaping of news contents. Mainstream Malaysian newspapers and television broadcasters also have an ongoing history of extremely close links with the governing parties. For example the Malay Mail and the New Straits Times are both owned by the New Straits Times Press but cover different types of stories with the Malay Mail running more human interest and sensationalistic stories. Utusan Malaysia is closely linked to the Malay political party UMNO, while The Star is closely affiliated to the Chinese political party MCA. Although both are members of the ruling coalition Barisan Nasional, it is an accepted fact that each party is in the business of looking after their ethnic interests. Even a cursory look at the different newspapers betrays different agendas which are then conveyed to their readers.

It is also possible to identify a number of media groups in Malaysia that control most of this mainstream media. These groups include Media Prima Berhad, Star Publications (Malaysia) Berhad, Utusan Group (Malaysia) Berhad, Nanyang Press Holdings Berhad, Sin Chew Media Corporation Berhad, KTS Groups, Penerbitan Sahabat (M) SDN Bhd, and Tamil Nesan. While there are numerous media organizations in Malaysia, once their controlling interests are identified, it becomes evident that media ownership is highly concentrated, with government being a major stakeholder. Indeed, Malaysian news media are largely owned or indirectly controlled by the 14 political parties which constitute the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN

– National Front), which has been elected to office in every election since independence (Bolongaita, 2004; Means, 1996).

In Malaysia, even though newspapers are in private hands, their ownership is closely affiliated with major political parties (Idid: 1989, p. 50). The fact that “the press was largely owned by groups associated with the government meant that news and the commentary unfavourable to the government were rare and the activities of opposition parties and government critics were normally presented in an unfavourable light. But this did not mean that only a single point of view was expressed: although uniformly pro-government, newspapers often represented different factions and interests” (Crouch: 1996, pp. 86-7). The government and government-affiliated businesses control almost all the media in Malaysia. The government owns two television channels (TV1 and TV2) and 32 radio stations, of which eight are national and 24 broadcast in specific states. There are also four other free-to-air television stations, two subscription television operators and 16 private radio stations. The country also boasts some 34 mainstream newspapers.

The government of Malaysia regards the mass media as a tool for nation building, development and national unity (Heng, 2002). To that end, the broadcasting media which are government owned and controlled have been instructed since the early 1970s to help oppose ‘anti-national elements’. As a tool for nation building, development and national unity, a law was passed on Dec. 7, 1987, allowing the Information Minister to monitor all programmes to ensure that they are consistent with government policy. The Minister has the power to revoke the license of any station judged to be in violation of the law.

In Malaysia, government continues to exert significant forms of control within the media market, including around media ownership, production and content. Key actors in the media market organizational field include media, government and political organizations. In Malaysia, the government-media relations that constitute the foundations of media markets have traditionally centred on issues of media responsibility, social cohesion and nation-building, for example, under ‘development’ and ‘Asian values’ models of the media (Heng, 2002). While social, political and economic transformations are occurring in Malaysia, government-media relations remain closely connected, and in many instances are challenging for media independence and for public debate.

Beyond issues of ownership, the government has sought other ways to engage with the media. A range of legal measures have stifled media in Malaysia, linked back to the history of British colonialism, in which the British colonial administration used legal measures such as licensing and censorship to contain media

(Anuar, 2000; Khattab, 2004). These legal measures include the Official Secrets Act 1972 which ‘prevents journalists from accessing information in any official document labelled as secret’, the Internal Security Act (ISA) 1960 which allows detention without trial, and the Broadcasting Act 1988 that gives the Minister of Information significant control over television programming and broadcasting licences (Brown, 2005; Khattab, 2004).

The Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1984 regulates the use of printing presses, printing production, reproduction and distribution of publications, and the importation of publications from abroad. The PPPA imposes a number of restraints in relation to these activities, and prescribes strong penalties for their breach, including jail sentences. The PPPA gives “the Home Minister ‘absolute discretion’ in awarding and revoking permits, and to disallow any judicial review of the process” (Brown, 2005: p. 41). According to Anuar (2000: p. 186), such use of law has long-term effects on journalistic practice in Malaysia. In the years post-independence, ‘the importance of mass media, particularly radio and newspapers, gained prominence given the government’s preference that they should be useful tools of national development’ (Anuar, 2000: p. 183). Anuar argues, however, that mainstream journalism in Malaysia has gradually been transformed. While a model of ‘developing journalism’, defined as journalism contributing to national development by reporting both government successes and failures, was adopted in post-independence Malaysia, mainstream media now focuses primarily on positive stories to the benefit of the political elite (Anuar, 2000: p. 184). This outcome appears to be related, in part, to newsroom culture in Malaysia, where close links between political leaders, editors and publishers make it difficult for journalists to investigate political leaders (Anuar, 2005; George, 2006).

Summary

The media in Malaysia is either owned by government or private organisations. Even though there are a growing number of privately owned media organisations, they are still directly or indirectly affiliated with government. The media is also regulated by the PPPA, a government tool to control the publication and production of media in the country. Directly or indirectly the government has influence over what can be published by the media in the country and what cannot. This government close affiliation with the media seems to define the terms and conditions within which youth crime and other youthful transgression are ‘constructed’, understood and acted upon.

Defining crime news: media formats and structures

What is news?

Roshier (1973) conducted a study where he found that people estimated the proportion of news space devoted to crime in their newspaper at four times the actual percentage. He speculates that 'there is one obvious explanation for this: people perceive more crime in their newspapers than there actually is because they are more likely to read it' (Roshier, 1973: p. 31). From his findings, he concluded that crime is newsworthy because people are interested in it and read the stories. In this section, the specific criteria of newsworthiness identified in the research literature are examined with particular note to its connection to youth crime.

Hall et al. (1978) argue that the news media operate on the assumption of a consensus view of society. Crime and violent crime especially interrupt that consensus, thus making it newsworthy. Violence therefore occupies a privileged place in news coverage. As Hall et. al. (1978: pp. 67-68) mention,

One special point about crime as news... is the special status of violence as a news value. Any crime can be lifted into news visibility if violence becomes associated with it, since violence is perhaps the supreme example of the news value 'negative consequences'.

Acts of violence seem to be covered in an aura of newsworthiness, and perhaps more so when we speak of acts committed by young people. The definitional difficulties of a term such as violence also appear to contribute to this seeking out of stories about violence. Certain acts that can be encompassed under a broad definition of violence (for example a common assault by a school bully or become member of gangs) do not receive the same coverage as individualised acts of violence with immediate and visible effects. As Chibnall (1977: p. 79) points out,

...the relevance of various moments in the process of violence is identifying the most significant moments as the act and its effects rather than its causal context of motivation. Undoubtedly, this relevancy hierarchy is closely related to the pragmatics of news presentation. A violent act is more amenable to dramatisation than are the conditions and processes which shape its development. Its effects can be vividly portrayed by photographing victims; its meaning captured in a single, simple graphic and immediate

message. The causes of violence are more complex and intractable, less open to instant emphatic understanding.

The above quote suggests that stories on violence are a news commodity under some specific conditions. Chibnall (1977: p. 77) offers five rules for judging the relevancy of a story involving violence: first, that the acts reported be visible and spectacular; second that the story have sexual and political connotations; third, that the acts can be presented graphically (Sacco, 1995); fourth, that we can focus on the individual pathology; and fifth, that the story have implications for deterrence and repression. These selection criteria favour interpersonal violence by individuals, with the consequence that we are left with a contrived set of stories that have little to do with what is actually going on the world.

As Hall et al. (1978: p. 53 – italics in original) suggest,

The media do not simply and transparently report events which are ‘naturally’ newsworthy *in themselves*. ‘News’ is the end-product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories [...] At the most general level this involves an orientation to items which are ‘out of the ordinary’ which in some way breach our ‘normal’ expectations about social life, the sudden earthquake or the moon-landing, for example. We might call this the *primary or cardinal news value*.

They further add that other important elements in determining the ‘newsworthiness’ of a story are that it is unexpected, dramatic, and has negative elements needed for the media to consider an item ‘newsworthy’ such as ‘periodicity’ and ‘consonance’. The timing of an event needs to be favourable to its being incorporated into the schedule of news production and the event must be related to common news themes and be explained in concordance with accepted views on the topic. Consonance also refers to what others have described as the newsworthiness of stories that have a link to current news theme(s) or a recurrent theme or motif or recursivity (Best & Huchinson, 1996; Ericson, Baranek & Chan. 1987; Hall et. al., 1978; Luhmann, 2000). Stories with a recurrent theme or motif come with their own vocabulary that evokes for the audience the stories that have come before.

Sacco and Fair (1992: p. 195) have demonstrated “the extent to which press attention is focused upon violent, relatively infrequently occurring crimes such homicide, while more frequently occurring non-violent offences such as break and enter tend to be under-reported.” In the light of the previous

discussion of the influence of media on public perceptions, it is worth asking whether this distortion in reporting practices produces the impression that violent crime is occurring more frequently than it actually is.

Violent crime is quite low and stable in Malaysia however it is still the most reported type of crime. The focus of this thesis is on all types of youth crime in Malaysia but it was also noted that when young people committed violent crime the coverage in news media was often automatically amplified²⁸, thus providing an illustration of news worthiness. How this kind of news is framed by newspapers will be examined in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 when looking at the findings of the research for this thesis.

Various authors (Cohen, 1973; Ericson et al., 1987, Hall et. al., 1978; Luhmann, 2000; Shoemaker & Reese, 1991; Surette, 1998a) have enumerated some of the following criteria as news value: involvement of elite persons or nations, conflict or controversy, human interest (personalisation), civic significance, political relevance, cultural or geographic proximity to readers (local relevance), large number of people affected, surprise (unexpected), moral judgements or difference (good vs. bad), attributing to actors (persons involved in the conflict i.e. youth offenders) rather than background circumstances (simplification), expression of opinions, and routines of news organisations (time and space available). Chibnall (1977) concluded that the key element in the construction of compelling crime narrative is the attribution of responsibility or blame. Chibnall (1977) suggests that violence is most likely to receive media attention because it involves sudden injury to 'innocent others', especially in public places.

The competition brought on by electronic media since the 1950s has also forced the press to change the types of stories it covers and how it does so. For example, prior to the 1950s, it would have been considered in poor taste for the press to cover private matters or 'backstage'²⁹ behaviour, such as crime (see Surette, 1998a: p. 19). However, the electronic media blur the line between news and entertainment and the press have to follow suit, to a certain degree, in order to remain competitive (Surette, 1998a, 1998b).

²⁸ It represents a cycle of increasing numbers of media reports on a category of antisocial behaviour or undesirable events, leading to a moral panic (Cohen, 1973).

²⁹ The term 'backstage' is a concept introduced by Erving Goffman in 1959 in his text "*The presentation of self in everyday life*". Backstage behavior is behavior performed in relative privacy; it is a behavior closer to the real self, less varnished and less an act. In the case of crime news reporting, it refers to a behavior which is informal and is often not such a socially acceptable way of behaving. In other words, any behaviour that violates mores or is considered taboo represents a backstage behaviour.

According to Jewkes (2004) there are 12 news structures and news values for the new millennium: threshold (importance), predictability (expectedness or how common or uncommon the crime is), simplification (removing shades of grey), individualism (individual focus or causality), risk (the sense that individuals may be at risk of being victimised and whether the risk poses a lasting danger), sex (whether the crime has a sexual aspect to it), celebrity or high-status persons (whether the offender or victim is a notable individual), proximity (whether the crime happened locally and has cultural relevance), violence (the level of violence involved), the presence of spectacle and graphic imagery, children (whether young children are involved), and conservative ideology and political diversion (deterrence, distraction from wider problems); however, the six most prominent are risk, sex, proximity, violence, spectacle and graphic imagery, and children. Jewkes also stresses that “a story does not have to conform to all the criteria in order to make the news – although events that score highly on the newsworthiness scale (that is, conform to several of the news values) are more likely to be reported” (Jewkes 2004: 40). These news values shape the newsworthiness of crime news and it can change over time.

As discussed above, the ‘newsworthiness’ criteria help to understand why some stories are covered by news agencies while others are not.

Shaping crime news

While criteria of newsworthiness arguably have a profound influence on the content of media, there are nonetheless a number of other factors to be considered when assessing the forces that shape media content.

Shoemaker & Reese (1991) have indicated that much of the research on media content has examined the effects of this content on audiences in particular. They propose that instead of looking at how the media exert influence, it would be equally valid to scrutinize how the media are influenced. They suggest that no one source of influence can account for media content and they offer several theories. These explanations can be found in journalistic routines, journalists’ socialisation; organisational constraints; extra-media factors such as the economic environment, revenue sources, advertisers, and culture; and ideological forces from the powerful or more specifically, media financiers (Shoemaker & Reese 1991: p. 49)

According to Shoemaker & Reese (1991: p. 221) “events are more likely to be covered than issues”. When crime is represented as an ongoing issue it is less likely to be considered as newsworthy. Contrary individualised representations of criminal events can fit easily into newsworthiness criteria. Another example of factors influencing the media is the view that: “The more deviant people or events are, the more likely they are to be included in media content and the more likely they are to be stereotyped” (Shoemaker & Reese 1991: p. 225). This assertion begs the question of who is defined as ‘deviant’. Deviant refers to actions which transgress commonly held norms. What is defined as deviant differs across time and place. The concept of deviance is broader than that of crime, which is restricted to law breaking (Giddens, 2009).

Studies of juvenile crime in Malaysia as discussed in Chapter 2 for instance, stated that the kind of deviant behaviour commonly associated with young people includes skipping school, getting into fights, running away from home, persistently lying, using illegal drugs or alcohol, stealing, vandalizing property, engaging in aggressive or violent behaviour towards other individuals, and violating school rules, home rules or local criminal laws. Journalists do not tend to look for a fresh perspective; they attempt to frame the discussion around established understandings of an issue (Hall et. al., 1978). Children raised by single mothers as well as minority and/or disadvantaged youth are examples of stereotypes of young people used by journalists to suggest they might be more prone to delinquency and violence (Ali, 1998). Perloff (2000), Schissel (1997a, 2006) and Van Dijk (1991) have indicated that the offenders’ race is generally mentioned only when they originate from a visible minority and conversely, racial identity may be omitted when the victim is racialised. In the context of Malaysia, children from economic and socially deprived families are often stereotyped as being at risk of involvement in delinquency and antisocial behaviour (Ali, 1998). Even though there is no definitive stereotype of youth crime associated with one particular ethnic group, journalists do indirectly provide quotations from prominent voices such as government representatives or the police who place stress on the fact that Malay youth are a prominent group at risk of involvement in crime compared to other ethnic groups.

Kappeler, Blumberg & Potter (1993) also describe several media techniques which decontextualise crime. They refer to the selection of certain unusual incidents and their transformation into social issues, the overemphasis on violent crime and the misuse of statistics. They view the role of media, police and politicians as that of ‘mythmakers’ about crime and justice.

Lastly, another influence on media content is indicated by Hackett & Zhao’s (1997: p.67) assertion that in order to reach broader audiences, papers have tended to depoliticise the news. Stories about street crime

have emerged a safe area to report on not so much because they are apolitical, but more because of their reliance on 'implicit and hegemonic' political values (Ericson et. al., 1991; Hall et. al., 1978).

These influences and others have resulted in news coverage of violence that is totally detached from reality (Gerbner, 1988; Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). Shoemaker & Reese (1991: p. 14) aptly point out that 'the answers we find depend on the questions we ask'. Indeed crime reports on violent youth could offer an entirely different picture, but the questions that need to be asked for that to happen are not being asked or cannot be asked within the current economic and socio-political context of media. According to Webster (1995), Schiller (1983a and 1983b) draws our attention to social inequalities and to the fact that information and technology are not being used to alleviate these inequalities. Unfortunately, we are left with a situation where:

Violence and crime are the staple diet of commercial news reporting. Even though [...] their frequency in reporting bears no relationship to that of actual incidence, their legitimacy is so well established that their social and political functions are rarely noted and policies guiding their publication are seldom debated (Gerbner, 1988: p. 11).

The ways in which crime and violence are shaped and sold as news are exemplary of the media's role in the production and reproduction of ideology. As Hackett & Zhao (1997) have noted, reporting tends to be rather homogenous. This is particularly evident when we consider crime news.

In sum, there are a number of ways in which crime news content is selected and shaped. The construction of images which conform to dominant ideologies thus serves to reproduce a certain world view as discussed in the following section.

Media contents and dominant ideologies

It is clear that the media does not represent all issues and all points of view on the issues with equal frequency or space. Certain views are obviously favoured and the relevance of this preference can be drawn from the following discussion of the influence of the media on public perceptions.

Dominant ideologies

Dominant or hegemonic ideas, though they may be harshly criticized by some groups who are not well served by them, have a strong level of adherence not because they are inherently ‘true’ but rather because these ideas seem like common sense and are therefore unquestioned. These are views that are strongly held by a majority in liberal democratic states and which, though they may be challenged, are difficult to overcome. Individuals or groups who attack these ideologies are often marginalised. Extraneous knowledge tends to be associated with these established ways of knowing the world, such as the fact that dominant conceptualisations are not replaced by new ones, rather they absorb the new concepts. Hall (1980: p. 134) explains that:-

The different areas of social life appear to be mapped out into discursive domains, hierarchically organised into dominant or preferred meanings. New, problematic or troubling events, which our expectancies and run counter to our ‘common sense constructs’ to our ‘taken-for-granted’ knowledge of social structure, must be assigned to their discursive domains before they can be said to ‘make sense’. The most common way of ‘mapping’ them is to assign the new to some domain of other of the existing ‘maps of problematic social reality’.

This conceptualisation is strongly reminiscent of Berger & Luckmann’s (1966, 1967) portrayal of the social construction of reality. They have referred to these established ways of knowing whereby any ‘new’ element tends to be understood in relation to what is already accepted. In some of the moral panic³⁰ literature, it has been observed that the issue must be framed within the terms that are already viewed as ‘problematic’ (Cohen: 1973, 2002). For example, if a claim against an individual or group fits into the current context of ‘known reality’, it will be more easily accepted than a claim that is completely different, foreign or new (Jenkins, 1992), regardless of the relative veracity of the claim.

Tuchman (1991) sees media as being strongly tied to ideology, yet able to exert some influence on it and, ultimately, modify it. ‘Theoretically the most interesting questions about news and news organisations concern either process, such as the general relationship between news and ideology, or the specific processes by which news reproduces or alters ideology’ (Tuchman, 1991: p 79). This adherence to ideology by no means guarantees the underlying assumption of consensus:

³⁰ Moral panic will be discussed further in “The Effect of Media in Society” section of this chapter.

Discourse analysis of content, participant observation within news organisations, and interviews with sources thus all confirm that official views are embedded in news accounts. In this specific sense, news is ideological. However, although the news media may unconsciously embed a 'preferred reading' in their stories even that 'preferred reading' may constitute a 'contested terrain' (Hall, 1979). That is, groups of readers or viewers (or individuals) may reject the preferred reading or argue about its validity (Tuchman, 1991: pp. 88-89).

Both media personnel and media sources are not completely in control but both are engaged in a process that produces both media content as well as its ideological aspects (Ericson et al., 1989). The continuation of dominant ideas about crime and justice seems to be especially connected to three dialectical relationships. The first dialectical link whereby dominant ideas are perpetuated mediates between the media and political preoccupations on the one hand, and public concern on the other. According to Schissel (1996: p.40), 'the sociological question that remains then is whether public sentiment precedes the activities of discursive agents like politicians and media specialists, or whether these typical moral entrepreneurs direct public passions for political and economic benefits. McCormic (1995: p. 155) has also addressed this relationship:

News reports fit into a textually constructed reality, where public perception and official policy are part of a loop. The more stories people read about crime, especially of events they can't control, the more likely they are to think crime is out of control, which will produce more stories and generate more interest in legal reform, a condition promoting the production of crime news in the first place.

The notion that both media and political interests shape public concerns or public concerns shape media and political preoccupations seem somewhat limited (McCormic, 1995). Conceptualising a mutually constitutive and reinforcing relationship between them seems more compelling, although perhaps the influence of one side is greater than that of the other under certain condition (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1989).

The second mutually reinforcing pattern observed is that hegemonic ideas tend to be legitimatised by media accounts and this legitimisation in turn lends further credibility to these ideas. In Hall et al.'s examination of the parallels between media representations and dominant ideologies, they note (1978: p.57)

In this section, we want to begin to account for the ‘fit’ between dominant ideas and professional media ideologies and practices. This cannot be simply attributed – as it sometimes is in simple conspiracy theories – to the fact that the media are in large part capitalist-owned (though that structure of ownership is widespread), since this would be to ignore the day-to-day ‘relative autonomy’ of the journalist and news producers from direct economic control. Instead we want to draw attention to the more routine structures of news production to see how the media come in fact, in the ‘last instance’, to reproduce the definitions of the powerful, without being, in a simple sense, in their play.

These ‘structures of news production’ such as limited resources and the pressures of deadlines are also combined with the professional ideology of journalistic ‘objectivity’. This view of the news as a ‘mirror of reality’ masks the fact that journalists must use their individual judgment (Leff, 1997); what is considered objective in journalism is not neutral but merely conventional.

The fact that governments are often a key information source for reporters raises serious questions about the information presented in media reports. For example, Noakes and Wilkins (2002) explain that the media tends to rely upon the government and government agencies for information about protest groups and their causes. This can of course cause problems, particularly when the protest groups are mobilizing against government or a government policy. Journalists tend to depend upon this information because it purports to add prestige to stories and in order to add a level of objectivity to the reporting of the research. Media stories are always time sensitive, due to the nature of news production, leading to a reliance on government data as a key information source (Noakes and Wilkins, 2002). The media also tend to rely on government data for stories about national groups since governments are a primary data collection agency for this type of information.

In many ways, the media and the government have a symbiotic relationship when it comes to information. The relationship between the media and the government is highly complex and inter-dependent, and this relationship has definite effects on how people understand and interpret the news. This over-reliance on authoritative sources, though perhaps justified in many ways, is in fact a choice made by journalists which results in other voices (i.e. less authoritative ones) not being heard. By choosing certain sources, journalists give legitimacy to the authority these sources purport to hold, whether justified or not (Ericson et al., 1989).

The third dialectical relationship which serves to perpetuate dominant ideology is that between press reports and police reports (Fishman, 1981). Fishman (1981) has observed that news stories on crime are primarily based on police reports, but one of the criteria for police in selecting crimes to report to the media is the perceived 'newsworthiness' of the story. Reporters rely on police criteria and police rely on media criteria. 'This circularity of the reporting system keeps the same sorts of crime in the news' (Fishman, 1981: p. 382; Ericson et al., 1989; Welch, Fenwick & Roberts, 1998).

The police play an important role in the production of crime news as they are the primary contact providing information about crime to the media. Consequently, it may be the case that the media adopt the police view of crime. Sacco (1998: p. 40) points out that the role of the police as the dominant gatekeeper means that "crime news is often police news and ... the advancement of a police perspective on crime and its solution is facilitated." Furthermore, the police interpretation of crime may be uncritically accepted by the media. As Johnson (1989: P.13) claims, many local news reporters are "seduced by the bureaucratic reporting of a horrific story and rush to news judgment without realizing how the dissemination of these unrepresentative stories promotes vested bureaucratic, agency, or political interests".

In addition to the role the police play in assisting the media in defining social problems, the media's role as a money-making enterprise needs to be considered. Henshel (1990: P. 59) argues that because of the nature of commercialized mass culture:

...social problems tend to become fads when portrayed by the media. They are 'sold' to the public, packaged in attractive, sensationalist wrappings... Because the mass media are money-making ventures, if one topic becomes 'obsolete' by no longer attracting as many viewers or readers, it is reasonable to expect a shift to another, more lucrative fad.

One of the media's aims is to make money, and in order to do that they need to, for example, sell newspapers. Without catchy headlines of 'important' issues, this would be less possible. The self-perpetuating nature of these ideologies about crime and justice leads us to consider the implications of policies generated within these confines.

The effect³¹ of media in society

Media images are not reality but rather represent a *constructed reality* (Goffman, 1974; Berger & Luckman, 1966, 1967; Fuller & Myers, 1941; Becker, 1966; Spector & Kitsuse, 1977; Surette, 2007). Media images, however, are powerful and influential and ultimately, they do have an impact on so-called reality (Tuchman, 1978; Surette, 2007, 2011).

Complete agreement about the role played by media accounts of crime and violence does not exist. While some may view media depictions as accurate and fair representations of reality, others would argue that these portraits of youth are anything but neutral representations, as crime is always given a greater focus over and above other more prevalent forms of offending. Media accounts may provide people with information and so-called knowledge about youth crime, but what seems more important is the influence exerted by these renditions on people's perceptions, opinions and even behaviours.

While the media cannot tell us what to think, it does largely tell us what to think about (Cohen, 1973). The media plays an important role in the life of the public and has a strong influence on our understanding of what are significant and important issues (McCombs and Reynolds, 2002). Chermak (1995) also asserts that the media plays a role in shaping and moulding public opinion.

Young (2007) suggests that the media helps to provide the narratives that allow the public to distinguish between different values and behaviours and their moral consequences. Its role in society aids in identifying and setting the tone of public debate on issues. Media coverage can influence the public through at least two processes: agenda-setting and framing³² (Gollust & Lantz, 2009). Gollust et al. (2009) describe agenda-setting as the news media's selection of which issue to cover. Whether or not a problem appears in the news influences which problems the public considers important (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) giving the media an important role in setting the agenda for the newsworthiness of issues. The second process whereby the news media have influence over the news is framing. Here the media can select particular aspects of social problems to emphasise (Entman, 1993) in constructing their issue.

According to Gamson & Modigliani (1987: p. 143) a frame can be further viewed as a "central organising idea or story line that provides meaning" to the events related to a story or issue. Those looking for such

³¹ Media effects or media influence refers to social scientific research on the way the mass media affect how media consumers think or act.

³² Agenda-setting and framing will be discussed in detail later in this Chapter.

frames can identify them through the use of five common devices: catchphrases, depiction, metaphor, exemplars and visual images (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). By its agenda-setting activities, the mass media can shape the considerations that people take into account when making judgements about issues (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987).

Cohen (2002) believes that moral panics have been generated in the past by media coverage which is too simplistic and over applied to a particular social issue. This continues to be the case today according to several commentators in the field. (Schissel, 1996, 2006; Jewkes, 2004; Beckett, 1997; Hogeveen & Smandych, 2001; Hartnagel, 2004; see also works compiled by Greer, 2003, Poynting & Morgan, 2009). A moral panic may be defined as a generalised fear and outrage which is out of proportion to actual events, where a group (such as youth) is singled out for the danger they ostensibly represent to the rest of the society (Cohen, 2002). This danger relates to the ascribed moral inferiority of the 'dangerous group'. As Schissel (1996: p. 39) points out "in essence, the moral panic draws on existing ideological beliefs about crime and criminality and reinforces this ideology by fomenting fear about the unpredictable and expanding dangerous nature of youth activity". This is of great importance when looking at the construction of youth crime and justice in the media.

The classic work of Stanley Cohen of the 1960s, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: the Creation of Mods and Rockers*, investigated the ways in which the media contributed to a widespread moral panic based on what were considered by some to be the deviant actions of a small group of people. His study of the Mods and Rockers phenomenon in Britain exemplified the way in which media response to deviance can shape the ways in which groups are classified and consequently treated. According to Cohen, a moral panic is defined as society's misperception and overreaction to the actual seriousness of an event or events. Overtime, moral panics have taken on fairly prescriptive qualities. By some action or event, a condition, episode, person or group becomes defined as a threat to societal values and interests (Cohen, 2002). His label 'folk devils' encapsulates the so-called 'threatening' aspect of the group, the Mods and Rockers.

Cohen's study examined how a few small incidents involving the Mods and Rockers at beach resorts in England escalated into a societal moral panic in a relatively short period of time. He studied those institutions that played a role in the expansion of the moral panic focusing on social control institutions such as the police, the courts and the media. According to Cohen, the media is a system of control which initiates panic by employing key tactics. These tactics include the use of headlines that create negative images, such as the linking of 'folk devils' to other social trends, the use of popular stereotypes and the

application of value-laden labels and overexposure. All caused a negative societal reaction to the Mods and Rockers, and consequently, young people as a whole. Cohen discussed how over-reporting of the initial incidents led the public to be sensitised to crime, increasing its vigilance and lowering the threshold for deviance by young people. Such sensitizations lead law enforcement to respond to any slight misstep by a young person in an overly authoritative manner. Naturally, police encounters with young people increased arrests, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Cohen however stated that “the importance of the media lies not in their role as transmitters of moral panics nor as campaigners but in the way they reproduce and sustain the dominant ideology” (2002: p. xxix).

The considerable effect of producing versions of the news in accordance with the accepted ideologies can be explained by the limited access to different views available in the media. Furthermore, the lack of alternative views further impedes the already incomplete understanding of the public with regard to crime and violence. The next section of this chapter describes two theories that inform this thesis: the social constructionist theory and framing theory.

Social Constructionism

This thesis contends that the most useful unifying theoretical framework for this study is social constructionism. It is assumed that the media play a key role in constructing social reality. What are examined are the images that are produced in the media’s construction of youth crime and justice. Therefore, the focus is on content rather than on the process of social construction or how the constructions are received by the audience. The process of construction of the news has been explored to some extent by Ericson et al. (1987, 1989, 1991) in order to understand how the audience decodes messages. It is imperative to first understand what the content of those messages is. As Jiwani (1993: p. 20) points out,

Semiotically-informed textual or local semantic analysis can help deconstruct the meanings that are privileged in media texts. However, the end result is not necessarily one that all audience viewers would arrive at were they to watch the same news story. For one thing, audiences do not have time to analyse systematically the news they watch in the context of their homes.

The theory of social constructionism is chosen with a postulate that for a majority of the population it is rare to experience a firsthand encounter with young people involved in any sort of crime or deviant behaviour (Bennet, 2003: p. 255). Rather, our knowledge of youth behaviour on the whole comes from various forms of media constructed news coverage. The media becomes the main source of most people's understanding of juvenile crime because news supplied can usually be considered to be information that is timely, relevant to the concerns of its audience and presented in a form that is easy to grasp (Bennet, 2003: p. 10, 225). Our lasting impression of crime (such as youth crime) that we have never seen derives from media-supplied stories (Bennet, 2003: pp. 225-226) that aim to arouse feelings in us about our grasp of the event. This form the knowledge that we have gathered, discovered and learnt from the media-supplied stories is more likely, in fact, to be socially constructed knowledge. It represents a form of reality made available to us through the deployment of mass media (Bennet, 2003).

Social constructionism is a well-established sociological perspective that is rooted in the premise that while certain objective conditions exist (such as youth crime), the way we understand the condition is not fixed, but rather is constructed, negotiated, formulated and organized by social actors in an attempt to make sense of the world (Sarbin & Kitsuse, 1994: p. 3). Berger & Luckmann's work, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966, 1967), has been very influential in framing understandings of social constructionism. Although traditionally the sociology of knowledge was linked to the study of ideas or of intellectual history (Ritzer, 1988: p. 346), Berger and Luckmann (1966) expanded this focus on intellectual ideas by proposing that the sociology of knowledge should focus on the everyday reality in which all humans engage. For them, this reality is the reality 'par excellence', the reality that we cannot avoid because it is shared with others. Berger and Luckmann argue that because only an elite few in any given society actually create intellectual history, the sociology of knowledge should concern itself with the study of everyday knowledge production, in which all members of a society participate and share:

The theoretical formulations of reality, whether they be scientific or philosophical or even mythological, do not exhaust what is 'real' for the members of a society. Since this is so, the sociology of knowledge must first of all concern itself with what people 'know' as 'reality' in their everyday, non- or pre-theoretical lives. In other words, commonsense 'knowledge' rather than 'ideas' must be the central focus for the sociology of knowledge. It is precisely this 'knowledge' that constitutes the fabric of meanings without which no society could exist. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: p. 14)

Within social constructionism, there are two major streams of thought that view social problems as social constructs: 'strict constructionism' and 'contextual constructionism'. Although both streams agree that social problems are socially constructed, they differ on how social constructionist research should be conducted.

The strict constructionists (Blumer, 1971; Spector & Kitsuse, 1977; Woolgar & Pawluch, 1985; Sarbin & Kitsuse, 1994) view constructionism as a form of phenomenological sociology which maintains that all knowledge is socially constructed and oriented towards practical problems. Understood in this way, facts are never neutral. Thus, the sociologist should focus on the claims-making process and how claims (e.g. statements about a said condition) about a specific problem are received, while refraining from passing judgment about the validity or the content of the claims themselves. The sociologist is merely another claims-maker who is not privileged to make assertions about which claims may be valid or invalid.

In contrast, contextual constructionism allows the researcher greater flexibility. Contextual constructionists (Gusfield, 1981; Schneider, 1984; Hazelrigg, 1985; Best, 1987, 1989, 1990 and 1995; Jenkins, 1992 and 1995) agree that one should study the social organisation of social problems and how the claims around a problem are made, and that one should also examine the claims themselves, including their validity. The style and content of claims are just as significant as the claims-making process in the construction of social problems (Best, 1990; Gusfield, 1981). Contextual constructionists argue that the researcher can be critical about claims made about objective reality and that these claims can be refuted through the use of research and/or the application of social science methods that have been agreed to through consensus and debate as being sound. For the contextualists, some 'facts' are more valid than others. Determining which are valid is largely dependent upon which receive consensus and success.

Being concerned with the larger issue of youth crime, and sociologically committed to a critical discussion of claims about youth crime, this thesis argues that youth crime as a social problem should be analyzed contextually rather than from a strict constructionist perspective. Because the media can be seen as conduits through which people construct reality and ultimately formulate values (Ravelli, 1997: p. 3), this thesis draws on a sample of print media to understand how youth crime has been constructed in Malaysia. Some of the claims made about youth crime will be reviewed critically in light of academic research, literature, and statistical reports on youth crime as a means of highlighting the competing realities or claims about youth crime and related issues (e.g. attitudes about youth crime and violence). Discussion of representations put forward by the media on these issues will allow for a constructive dialogue regarding the social construction of reality.

The construction of knowledge

The constructionist approach to social issues aims to understand “how people assign meaning to their worlds” (Best, 1989: p. 252). Constructionists observe and analyse how meaning is created (Hall, 1997) using the social character of shared language. A central tenet of this approach is that “things don’t mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems – concepts and signs” (Hall, 1997: p. 25). Since meaning is constructed *in* and *through* language, it play an active role in creating social issues and events, including the identification of social problems. This is to say social problems are in fact a matter of perception (Fuller & Myers, 1941; Becker, 1966; Spector & Kitsuse, 1977). Therefore a social issue or event is considered a social problem only if and when there are people who perceive it as such.

A constructionist view acknowledges that newspapers do not simply report the events of the day. They act however as main players in selecting, assembling and producing the news (Fleras, 2001). Constructionists “do not deny the existence of the material world” (Hall, 1997: p. 25); instead, they argue that it is the meaning transmitted by material objects that is significant in understanding social issues. In terms of youth crime, then, a constructionist approach is interested in what beliefs and understandings are produced surrounding these crimes, as opposed to the incidence of the crimes. In the course of understanding the production of discourse, what is noteworthy about media such as newspapers, television, radio, internet, and magazines is not only their content but the symbolic function that this content has in knowledge construction. Referring to Hall (1997: p. 6), discourse is defined here as “a way of referring to or constructing of knowledge about a particular topic or practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, image and practices, which provide ways of talking about forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic”. Moreover, these constructions have implications for how people react to social issues. For example, research on news reports of sexual assault has shown a tendency to imply that female victims were to be blamed for the attacks (Voumvakis & Ericson, 1984; Los & Chamard, 1997; Caringella-MacDonald, 1998; Gavey & Gow, 2001; Korn & Efrat, 2004). The acceptance of this rape myth has destructive consequences for female rape victims who may be stigmatised as opposed to perpetrators who may be dealt with more leniently based on the reality constructed in news reports.

Constructionism has roots in the sociology of knowledge, an area of inquiry focusing on the relationship between human thought and the social context where this thought arises (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, 1967). When considering the “inevitably subjective” (Best 1989: p. xvi) nature of social problems from a constructionist position, it is important to ask what we mean by knowledge and reality. Berger and Luckmann (1966: p 1) define knowledge as “the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics”. They explain reality as “a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognise

as having a being independent of our own volition (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: p. 1). For constructionists, however, the distinction between knowledge and reality is blurred. Knowledge acts as the raw material for our reality: we create and respond to our social world based on how we believe the world to be. There is no direct relationship between the lifespan of a constructed reality and its “objective, empirical, validity” (Surette, 2007: p. 32). From a constructionist perspective, cultural forces and social tendencies are the greatest influence on a constructed reality. As Surette (2007: p. 32) states, “the world may be in one state, but people can believe it is in another state and act accordingly”. In other words, to the constructionists, the best way to understand social phenomena is not to ask “What is reality?” instead, “What do people believe reality to be?” This understanding coincides with Spector and Kitsuse’s (1977) notion that social problems are what people define them to be. Before looking particularly at news reporting of youth crime as a constructed issue, then, it is important to ask, “What is a person’s constructed reality composed of, and what role do news media play in the construction of this reality?”

Surette (2007, 2011) states that our socially constructed reality is influenced by the blend of our experienced and symbolic reality. Experienced reality is simply our personal and direct experiences. On the other hand, symbolic reality is created socially - a reality made up of “all events you did not witness but believe occurred, all the facts about the world you did not personally collect but believe to be true, all the things you believe to be true, all the things you believe to exist but have not seen” (Surette, 2007: p. 31-32). Surette notes that the social knowledge that makes up one’s symbolic reality may be absorbed from significant others (such as family and friends), social institutions (such as school, government, and church), and the media (p.30). This symbolic reality, in combination with personal experiences, determines an individual’s socially constructed reality. Changes in an individual’s social knowledge will alter this constructed reality.

Each individual’s constructed reality will be different because personal experiences and what people assimilate from their social world differ. Still individuals who have access to the same knowledge will have similarly constructed realities (Surette, 2007: p.32). Thus, trends in media coverage have great potential power in the knowledge construction process because most newspapers are distributed consistently and widely, allowing for simultaneous knowledge construction among a large population. Moreover, the words in one newspaper do not just reach one person; the results of media representations are synergetic as each individual will further reinforce this social knowledge through communication with friends, family and colleagues. In this way, media representations do not simply reflect, but also influence, cultural trends and social norms (Hall, 1997).

Numerous authors have used a constructionist framework in their analyses of media content and offer broad definitions of what this approach involves (Loseke & Best, 2003). Sacco (2005) presents social constructionism as an opposing paradigm to objectivist approaches in the identification of social problems. According to Sacco (2005: p. 7), objectivist approaches “assume that we know what the problematic conditions in society are” and that, to address the issues, an investigation of the objective elements of these conditions is all that is required. In other words, objectivist approaches claim that we can know a situation and study the true features of it. However this for Sacco is not sufficient to understanding crime; he contends that a more suitable question is: “what are the social processes through which we come to understand what our social problems are?” (2005: p. 7). In short, social constructionism questions the notion that we can objectively recognise what the problematic conditions in society are and insists that subjective interpretations must be analysed in order to better understand social perceptions of crime.

Fleras (2003: p. 113) expands on the subjective nature of the media by pointing out that most of what is identified and taken for granted as “normal, necessary or common sense” is actually social and constructed rather than anything “real, inherent, or inevitable”. She argues that the news media imposes frames on social issues through bias by the attention brought to certain aspects of social reality over others (2003: p. 119). This bias derives from deciding how to ‘spin’ the story: what context to include; what framework to display it in; and how to interpret the facts available (Straubhaar & La rose, 2000: p. 44). The result of these decisions is a news story which will favour certain elements of information at the expense of others.

The discussion of main concepts of social construction stresses the process that constructs the final news product. Constructionist theory suggests that the subjective character of the news media can result in a significant gap between constructed and empirical knowledge of social issues. In fact, research concentrating on the social construction of crime proposes that the media does not accurately portray crime. For example, Sacco (2005, p. 85) observes that media coverage of crime “tends to strip complex social realities to their least complicated forms”. Thus the analytical framework for this study is geared toward understanding the socially constructed images of youth crime and justice in the print media. The data is analysed through this lens in an attempt to identify elements involved in the construction of the news and routines of selecting and shaping news related to youth crime and justice.

Constructing childhood

It is important to briefly discuss the construction of childhood as it will be part of this research on the social construction of juvenile delinquency. Childhood is socially constructed (Jewke, 2004). That is, the concept of childhood has emerged and changed over time through the production of knowledge from discourse. Childhood is socially constructed according to social conditions of time, rather than such notions being plausible universal states of childhood (Brown, 2005). These constructions are used by adults across all social classes (Hendrick, 1997). According to James and Prout, “childhood is understood as a social construction. As such it provides an interpretive frame for contextualizing the early years of human life. Childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies” (1990: p. 8).

At any historical moment childhood has been constructed around a complex interplay of competing social, economic and political priorities (Goldson, 1997: p. 4). For example, the impact of the industrial revolution had created an immense demand for labour that pushed adult and child relations in the opposite direction from more romanticised notions of child; the climate of the nineteenth century and the aggressiveness of new capitalism saw optimistic notions of childhood challenged (Hendrick, 1997). Rapid modernization and urbanization caused further concerns, as the population increased there were increasingly smaller distances between the houses of the poor and the houses of the wealthy; it initiated fears of the ‘dangerous and criminal classes’ producing children who would grow up to be the same, and schooling of such children was deemed to be their salvation (Brown, 2005). Critics linked these discourses of deprivation, depravation and social disorder with children of working class families, and this provided for the deeply imbedded notion that such children were in need of discipline, training and regulation in the guise of education (Brown, 2005). Therefore we can see that children have been depicted as both vulnerable victims in need of care and protection, but also that they have been perceived as potential threats in need of discipline and regulation, this dualistic conception structured the ways in which children have been perceived from the beginning of the nineteenth century (Goldson, 2002: p. 120).

Childhood and youth are socially constructed categories that have been used by adults to explain their fears. For example, Jewkes (2004) argues that in 1993 children became regarded as evil monsters capable of committing the most depraved acts, this she argues was due to mass media reporting on the murder of two year old James Bulger by two ten year old boys, the media presented the two children as rational and adult like who were fully capable of making informed decisions. For Jewkes (2004) they were used to

portray an example of a perceived moral decline of children and young people, which indeed instigated a moral panic (Cohen, 2002). Media portrayals of children's involvement of crime, is thus, central in creating and reinforcing public perceptions of childhood, while this undoubtedly has consequences for children, individually and collectively, its source lies within a broad context of media and political concern over a perceived break down in law and order. Jewkes (2004: p. 89) argues that this case initiates the perception that children could be adult like 'evil monsters' capable of committing the most depraved acts.

Childhood became redefined in almost exclusively negative terms (Jewkes, 2004: p. 91). In relation to media discourses, it often sustains simplistic notions of 'child criminals', often referring to them as 'evil', 'rational', and 'disrespectful'. Thus it is not a surprise that they are subjected to a process of 'othering' (Matthews, 2009:82). Research has revealed that if the public receive detailed facts about a given case they are not always likely to have punitive responses, in fact when greater detail is provided people are less likely to favour custodial sentences (Hough & Roberts, 2004: pp. x-xi). This is crucial since the majority of children who are defined as 'problematic' are often those who suffered difficult social conditions and several disadvantages. Therefore the government should place a greater emphasis on informing public opinion by revealing the complex problems faced by many young offenders (Goldson & Muncie, 2006: p. 211).

Framing theory

The theoretical concept of framing is fundamental to social constructionist approaches and particularly relevant when analysing the media (Dowler, 2006; Berns, 2004; Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Fleras 2003). Frame analysis refers to the symbolic point of reference from which individuals attempt to understand sociological phenomena and construct their realities. The concept of framing has been incorporated into a number of sociological approaches particularly studies of the mass media. Altheide (1997) for example, discusses the 'problem frame' in media presentations of social issues, and how this framework can be manipulated to construct how the audience interprets a phenomenon to be a social problem.

Goffman (1974) differentiates between primary frames and social frames that contribute to subjective reality. Primary frames are those frameworks that refer to natural phenomena that are not open to interpretation. Goffman uses the example of the state of the weather in a weather report. Social frames, on the other hand, are dependent on interpretation based upon biases, predispositions and lived

experience. Goffman's perspective emphasizes the importance of interpretation for social reality. Social problems such as crime are often framed by the media as a public safety issue, which raises the level of fear in the public (Altheide, 2002) and often results in a more punitive criminal justice response. News stories involving crime and punishment often take prominent places in newspaper reporting because of their continued element of entertainment and the level of fear that this type of story provokes.

Because of the role of media, and especially news media, in shaping and being shaped by culture, the study of media content and discourse is significant for penetrating and getting to the core of ideological discourse on specific issues. In this study the manner in which youth crime has been constructed in Malaysia is examined from a framing point of view. Altheide's (1996: p. 31) definition of frames aids in our understanding of how meaning is derived in certain vital ways:

Frames are the focus, a parameter or boundary for discussing a particular event. Frames focus on what will be discussed, how it will be discussed and above all, how it will not be discussed.

He provides the example of illegal drugs. Framing this as a public health issue or a criminal justice issue will lead to quite different ways of discussing the problem. The same thing applies to youth crime. If youth crime is framed as a threat to the safety of the nation compared to a frame which emphasises the importance of helping the youths involved, the government will be justified in responding to youth crime by using a tougher or more punitive approach over a gentler more concerned approach in its means of providing justice for these youths.

Other scholars (Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992; Gamson, 1988 & 1992; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, 1989; Beckett, 1994; Sasson, 1995a) have adopted this methodology in exploring how particular social problems are constructed. According to Sasson (1995a: pp. 9-10), frame analysis is predicated on three fundamental premises:

- a. That people are seen as active assemblers of meaning, and that in their constructions of social issues or problems, 'they draw upon the resources as their disposal including popular wisdom, their personal experiences...' and that 'they select from the range of interpretative frameworks available in the culture for making meaning of the issue at hand'. This premise also supposes that the construction of a social problem typically involves 'a diagnostic component that identifies a condition as intolerable and attributes blame or causality, and a prognostic component that prescribes one or more courses of ameliorative action' (Sasson, 1995a: p. 10).

- b. The second premise of this methodology is that ‘the creation of meaning through the work of framing occurs in various forums, including academic journals, the mass media, and everyday conversation’ (Sasson, 1995a: p. 10; Ibarra & Kitsuse, 1993).
- c. The third premise of the frame analysis identified by Sasson (1995a) is that ‘conflicts on particular issues are fought out as symbolic contests between contesting frames’. In other words, he assumes that different claims makers are always in competition ‘with one another to get their preferred frames before the public and to rebut those of their rivals’ (Sasson, 1995a: p. 10). He further suggests that these competing claims makers measure their own success in defining the problem ‘by the degree of visibility they win for their preferred frames’ (Sasson, 1995a; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes & Sasson 1992).

Using the frame analytic method, Sasson (1995a) examines the contested frames of the media and popular discourses on street crime in the United States. He situates the frames identified within known sociological paradigms. For instance, he links the frame that blames discrimination, unemployment, poverty and unequal opportunities to ‘social disorganisation’ (the blocked opportunities frame) and argues that those who apply this perspective believe that for the government to effectively deal with the problem of street crime, they should address its ‘root causes’ by creating jobs and reducing poverty (p.18).

Media frames are central organising ideas that allow readers to ‘locate, perceive, identify, and label’ relevant events that they either have or have not experienced first-hand (Snow, Rochford, Worden & Benford, 1986: p. 464 as cited in Binder, 1993: p. 754). ‘Largely unspoken and unacknowledged,’ media frames organise the world for members of the media and the public (Gitlin, 1980: p. 7 as cited in Gamson & Modigliani, 1989: p. 3). For example, in their study of the social construction of nuclear power, Gamson & Modigliani (1989) found that nuclear power was framed as progressive and as a positive form of energy so that there was little scepticism about its application.

Frames chosen and represented by the media can also become the dominant discourse of public opinion (Binder, 1993). The discourse produced by members of the media creates meaning that appears firsthand to be ‘commonsensical’, yet at the same time reveals something about the assumptions, values, myths and stereotypes of society (Myers, 1990: p. 13). In the case of print media, frames assist readers to ‘organise’ events or issues so that they ‘comprehend’ and ‘know how to react’ to an issue.

Surette (2007: p. 39) identifies a frame as:

...a fully developed social construction template that allows its users to categorize, label, and deal with a wide range of world events. Frames simplify one’s dealing with the

world by organising experiences and events into groups and guiding what are seen as the appropriate policies and actions.

The process by which the media ‘filter the infinity of events into manageable bite-sized frames’ is not arbitrary: language, appearance, and tone are purposely chosen to frame the story in a certain manner throughout the selection, presentation, and evaluation of the news (Fleras, 2003: pp. 122-123). Furthermore, the selection of frames reflects the ‘preferred interpretation’ of those who control the news process (Fleras, 2003: p. 119) yet its design is also ‘fully responsive to our demands’ (Goffman, 1974: p. 14). The two notions are not mutually exclusive. As a profit driven organization, a newspaper will have to consider the demands of the public, as well as its advertisers, when constructing its preferred interpretation of social issues.

A primary aspect of the framing process is that it is about leaving out some details and highlighting others Reese (2007: p. 149). The role of frames is to simplify and organise information, the selection of frames in these cases signifies what explanations are seen as the most manageable and easily digested, but can still attract readership. Even though both roles of information may be factually accurate, the choice of what to include reflects what is considered an appropriate and acceptable explanation for the crime. It will also determine the central message transmitted to the readership.

Key individuals to the framing process are claim makers: the promoters, activists, professional experts, government representatives of spokespersons, and media organisations involved in forwarding specific claims about social conditions, not the conditions themselves (Best, 1989; Spector & Kitsuse, 1977). These claims makers are major players in the construction competition; they use factual and interpretive claims to influence our knowledge of the issue at hand. Factual claims are statements about ‘what happened’ and allege to objectively describe the world (Surette, 2007: p. 37). Interpretive claims focus on the meaning of events and perform one of two roles: they will either present an explanation for the factual claims or will offer a course of action to remedy the issues presented (Surette, 2007: p. 37).

Nature and the content of frames

Goffman’s (1974) work, ‘Frame Analysis’ analysed how frames assist us to construct daily events or phenomena. Frames according to Goffman ‘recognise’ strips³³ of the everyday world, a strip being ‘an

³³ A strip according to Goffman is used to refer to any raw batch of occurrences that draw one’s attention as a starting point of analysis (1974: p.10).

arbitrary slice or cut from a stream of ongoing activity' (p. 10). To study a frame is to research the 'terms of the organisation of experience' (p. 10 - 11). Goffman also claimed that frames are subjected to changes through a process called 'keying':

“a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by participants to be something quite else. The process of transcription can be called ‘keying’” (pp. 43-44)

While Goffman recognized that individuals use specific resources to organise experiences for them, he however did not identify these resources (Tuchman, 1978: p. 195). Among these resources, are the news media. Several scholars have studied the news media framing of events and experiences Goffman discussed. For instance, Tuchman (1978) examined the news making process, including the press's role in framing. Like Goffman, Tuchman noted that frames help organise daily phenomena: 'Frames turn non-recognisable happenings and amorphous talk into a discernible event. Without the frame, they would be mere happenings of... talk, incomprehensible sounds' (p. 192). But, compared to Goffman, Tuchman stated that frames are the product of 'negotiation' about the character of an occurrence (p. 193). And because frames influence our understanding of events, these negotiations are ultimately around the meaning of events: was the flood deep or shallow? Was the politician corrupt or trustworthy? Does a story on a rape and murder case go on the front page, the subsequent page or the last page?

The players in these negotiations include the news media and other institutions, organisations and professions (p. 216). Tuchman has extensively studied the news making process and argued that frames are part of this process. However, she did not study the link between these two areas extensively or on how frames work in news content.

Gitlin (1980) presented a more detailed conception of how frames function in the news. He defined news frames as 'principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters' (p. 6). According to Gitlin, frames are also defined by what they exclude. In his study of how the news media portrayed Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), he found that news organisation frames focused on individuals, rather than the group as a whole, and on news events engineered by SDS rather than the underlying conditions the group was attempting to address (p. 28).

To clarify understanding of frames, Entman (1993) recapped Gitlin's conception of how frames function in the news. However, he extended the concept to include the fact that frames also 'define problems', 'make moral judgements', 'diagnose cause' and 'suggest remedies' (p. 52).

Meanwhile, Iyengar & Kinder (1987) have suggested that frames are topic-based. According to them, news makes up our understanding of the world by focusing on certain topics – e.g. inflation, national defence, or unemployment. Iyengar (1991) reported that news frames are either episodic or thematic. Episodic frames focus on individuals and view news as a series of single events. Thematic frames, on the other hand, examine larger social dynamics that may produce apparently secluded events. These two frames may result in very different stories on, for instance, rising unemployment and youth crime. An episodic story may focus on how a single youth, for example, lost his job which led to his involvement in crime, while a thematic story may look at economic data and government policies that explain this trend on a national scale and how the government can try to create more jobs for youth and thus avoid criminal involvement.

In 1987, Gamson & Modigliani studied the content of frames. They observed a greater variety of frames than did Iyengar and Kinder, as they saw frames as philosophical premises that translate into different forms of arguments. For example, they analysed the alternative frames in the media's coverage of affirmative action. The 'Remedial action' frames argue that affirmative action programs are necessary to redress the continuing effects of a history of racial discrimination while 'reverse discrimination' frames contend that these programmes advance the well-being of certain racial groups at the expense of individual rights (pp. 148 – 149). According to Gamson & Modigliani, frames are rhetorical devices that explicitly advance arguments.

Developing on Entman (1993) and Gitlin (1980), Pan & Kosicki (1993) examined the tools used by journalists in constructing frames. They divide these tools into four organising structures of news discourse: syntactical, thematic, script and rhetorical. Syntactical structures refer to the building blocks of news stories – headline, lead, episode, background, closure, inverted pyramid, and source attributions. Thematic structures offer a thesis about a problem or issue, such as describing affirmative action programs as tools of reverse discrimination rather than as practices needed to correct past wrongs. Scripts are story lines that form a news narrative. In part, these are the five Ws and one H in reporting: who, what, when, where, why and how. Rhetorical structures are news techniques that encourage the acceptance of news content and specifically news frames. These may contain pictures of flattened

buildings to demonstrate the power of an earthquake or the covering of an event using the third person to highlight the journalist's objectivity and implicitly, the reality of the event.

While Gitlin, Entman, Pan and Kosicki generally portray how frames function in the news, others have studied the characteristics of certain frames and how they describe institutions, politicians, interest groups and other news subjects. In reporting on political institutions, national news frames have focused on conflict rather than consensus between public officials (Graber, 1989; Kerbel, 1997; Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992). Other research has suggested that these frames are reporter-driven rather than source-driven and that the reporter frame has tended to over-report candidates' criticisms of each other, thereby artificially inflating the level of conflict (Kerbel, 1997). Althaus, Entman & Phalen (1996) also found the over-reporting of conflict in coverage of congressional debate. Conversely, reporters have tended to under report office holders' policy successes (Patterson 1993, 1996).

Related to the conflict frame is the strategy frame, in which journalists describe candidates' or public officials' acts as self-serving or as attempts to manipulate the public. The strategy frame also promotes the 'horse race' aspects of politics: who is winning, who is losing and why (Jamieson, 1992; Patterson, 1993). Since 1980 the majority of presidential campaign coverage for both print and broadcast news has focused on strategy. Neuman et al (1992) wrote that both conflict and strategy frames show politicians as competitors which exaggerates the differences in their views (p. 64).

Both Capella & Jamieson (1996, 1997) and Patterson (1993) also considered another type of structure: the issue frame. Rather than painting politics as a game or competition, issue frames focus on matters related to governance – for instance, the social or welfare or foreign policy – independent of their strategic implications. Hence, issue frames show politics as a basket of public policy problems and solutions, rather than as a competition between opposing forces. Even though Cappella and Jamieson's experimental work was able to show that strategy framing activates scepticism and depresses learning, their work discovered no statistically significant results of the issue frame. Patterson (1993) added that strategy frames have some power to control political coverage while whilst noting that the use of frames has gradually receded.

In general, by concentrating on strategy and over-reporting conflict, journalists have become increasingly interpretive in their coverage. In offering strategic analysis, reporters have provided their own perceptions of the events and individuals they cover rather than allowing the words and perspectives of news subjects to dominate news stories (Patterson, 1993). By over-reporting conflict, they are suggesting

campaigns are more combative than is actually the case. An emphasis on both strategy and conflict add up to journalistic interpretations that do not correspond with the reality of political campaigns.

Overall, while researchers have examined the content of frames there appears to be little agreement on the nature of this content. What's more, past research does not make clear the source of frames. Are they for example arguments advanced by sources or a set of journalistic assumptions influencing the structure of the news stories? Part of the confusion over content occurs because there is little research on how or why frames are adopted. Are frames the result of source activities, journalistic norms, source-reporter interactions, organisational priorities, or something else? Understanding 'how' frames make it into news discourse may shed light on their nature.

Gamson & Modigliani (1987) began to deal with this question. They argue that news frames may be the products of 'sponsor activities' – actions taken by news sources to put forward their particular frame in news print. Sponsors, whom the researchers define as organisations or advocacy networks (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987: p. 144) construct packages to promote their views on issues such as affirmative action and attempt to get news outlets to adopt their packages when covering these issues (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; 1989). They showed how certain 'sponsors' (such as the Supreme Court, and the Justice Department) each advanced frames on affirmative action and which ones dominated news discourse. They also attributed the rise of some frames and the failure of others to media practices, such as the need for both drama and objectivity. In short Gamson (1989) concluded that any entity that sends messages in news – journalists or sources – is a frame sponsor.

All the same, they did not study these processes in detail and generally derived their conclusions from their analysis of content – news content and that of the sponsors' frames. Left unstudied is the nature of the interactions that favour the adoption of some frames and the rejection of others. For instance, 'why' did the reverse discrimination frame dominate in the news? These questions are explored below.

Rather than clarifying the nature of frames, studies exploring the origin of frames have possibly further confused our understanding of them. Gamson & Modigliani (1987) suggested that frames are source-driven. Sources are the sponsors of frames and these frames are either accepted or rejected by the news media. Gamson & Lasch (1983) and Gamson & Modigliani (1987; 1989) saw frames as tools used to organise news stories and other forms of discourse; the function they posit for frames is different from that foreseen by others. To them, frames are arguments such as the 'reverse discrimination' frames that appear in the news. Frames are not devices that influence the construction of entire news stories but

elements that appear within news stories. Because frames work as arguments, stories can comprise a variety of conflicting frames without upsetting the overall structure of a news story. However Gamson (1989) admitted that journalists may also be promoters of frames because they determine a news account's story line, lead, and closing. Much like Gitlin (1980), Gamson & Modigliani (1989) wrote that news organisations adopt certain packages through 'negotiation' with package sponsors: journalists 'straddle the boundary between producers and consumers of meaning' in adopting certain packages (p. 9).

This is in contrast to Iyengar (1991), Jamieson (1992) and Patterson (1993) who suggested that frames are primarily reporter-driven. This contrasting view remarkably changes the nature of news frames. According to this research, journalistic assumptions and practices construct stories focusing on strategies or issues, themes, or individuals. These and other studies also insist that frames are embedded in the overall structure of news stories. Frames are not an argument situated in the headline of a news story, rather, they define or influence, the nature of an entire news story. These variations are important because they present different conceptions of how news is constructed. If frames function as arguments - several frames or perspectives – can appear with a single news story. However, if they serve to structure a given news story, frames are singular in nature, therefore overpowering alternative views of reality.

The topics of news framing studies span a wide range of social problem, disputes, and protests; including crime and delinquency, child abuse, welfare, ethnic minorities, women's issues, terrorist attacks, to name a few. Because of its wide use, critical researchers consider media framing as a tool of power that can be used in the struggle to define whose view of the world will predominate (Hallahan, 1999). Ashley & Olson (1998) claim that, social groups who challenge the norms have been shown to be deviant (abnormal), unimportant, and illegitimate; whereas groups whose beliefs are consistent with society's norms are made to look important, legitimate, and not deviant.

Those conceptual definitions suggest that journalists actively create frames to help package information for efficient delivery to their audiences. Therefore, the framing or presentation of events in the mass media can affect how recipients of the news come to understand those events. Establishing the definition of framing allows an insightful look at the true power the news media have over public expression and opinion. In addition to knowing the function of a frame, it is equally important to note what aspects of a story the media look at when framing a particular event (Scheufele, 1999).

According to Miller & Riechert (2001), journalists use a variety of tactics to analyse a story: text analyses, review of informed writings or discussion, depth or focus group-interviews and ethnography.

The media use particular elements of these tactics to establish frames. Frames can be detected by establishing the presence or absence of certain key words. Those key words do not represent the frames, rather the words are indicative of perspectives by which issues and events can be discussed and interpreted. In addition, Tankard (2001) offers a list of framing mechanisms, or focal points for identifying frames: headlines and kickers, subheads, photographs, photo captions, leads, selection of sources or affiliations, selection of quotes, pull quotes, logos, info graphics, and the concluding statements or paragraphs of articles. All of those things may work to bring together to present an ideological perspective of the article.

Determining which type of framing to use by the reporter also depends on the different types of news stories or events that are being portrayed. There are several different types of framing used by the media. According to Watkins (2001), three distinct frames situate most news reporting practices: legitimate controversy, consensus and deviance. Each frame has its own distinct style of news reporting. In the frame of legitimate controversy, journalists strive to achieve objectivity and balance. Legitimate controversy is how most television news reporting is framed. Examples include coverage of issues that are easily framed in point/counterpoint terms such as elections and abortion.

However, in the consensus frame, journalists stray away from objectivity. Within this area, journalists do not feel compelled to present opposing views or to remain distant observers. In contrast to legitimate controversy, the journalist's role is to serve as an advocate or celebrant of consensus values. This type of framing tends to occur during moments of national celebration, national crisis, or national mourning. In addition to the sphere of legitimate controversy and consensus is the deviance frame covering persons and events viewed by journalists as outside the boundaries of normative behaviour. In cases like these individuals or events become newsworthy precisely because they can be portrayed as violating the taken-for-granted values and beliefs of society in some important way. In this instance, the news becomes a boundary-maintaining mechanism. When operating from this frame, journalists play the role of exposing, condemning, or excluding from the public agenda those who violate or challenge the consensus. Journalists mark out and defend the line of acceptable conflict (Watkins, 2001).

Consequences and effects of news frames

Many have studied how framing affects the portrayal of the status of certain groups and our understanding thereof. Goshorn & Gandy (1995) analysed how frames shape our conception of risks by highlighting some aspects of reality while de-emphasising others. The authors studied news coverage of the Federal

Reserve Board report, which concluded that Whites were more likely than Blacks to obtain loans. They found that the overwhelming majority of story headlines noted how blacks were more likely to be denied mortgages; in contrast, only a handful of headlines reported that whites were more likely to obtain them. By emphasizing black loss rather than white success, the author contended, news headlines frame the mortgage market as a risky endeavour for blacks rather than as a successful one for whites.

Guerrero (1993) studied the portrayal of blacks in film and concluded that Hollywood ‘constructs black people as ‘other’ and subordinate, while it naturalises white privilege as the invisible but sovereign ‘norm’ (p. 5). He based his conclusion, in part, on entertainers, athletes, and criminals while diminishing “dramatic roles depicting the emotional and intellectual complexity of black life” (p. 7). In these studies, frames may be understood in terms of over-representation and under-representation of certain aspects of reality, which alter our understanding of a group and their shared roles. This research has focused on the construction and content of news frames and its implications for certain groups. The impact of framing extends beyond these spheres. These findings demonstrate that framing in the news has consequences for news consumers.

Kahneman & Tversky (1984) have found that frames can have a variety of effects on audiences. They concluded that word changes can influence the choices people make. The different types of frames conceived by researchers are associated with similar effects. Iyengar (1991) found that episodic and thematic frames influence attributions of responsibility for public problems differently. When certain news items emphasized the widespread nature of problems (thematic frames) subjects attributed responsibility to society. He also explored how more overt frames influence attributions of responsibility. These frames point to either ‘causal responsibility’, which focuses on the origin of a problem (p. 8). For certain issues, respondents were judgmental of national leaders when the news emphasized their responsibility for certain problems and controversies (i.e. causal responsibility) but less so when the news focused on leaders’ steps to address matters (i.e. treatment responsibility).

Gamson and his colleagues noted the effects of frames. Gamson (1992) ascertained that certain frames influence how people talk about the topics of these frames, referring in his study to the affirmative action frame. Kinder & Sanders (1996) also studied the effects of Gamson’s affirmative action frames. They employed two of these frames in testing public opinion: the ‘reverse discrimination frame’ and the ‘unfair advantage frame’. Their study of affirmative action programs portrayed black people as receiving benefits they have not earned. They found that while the reverse discrimination frame did not influence other related opinions, the unfair advantage frame correlated with the subjects’ “partisanship, their

ideological identity, their intolerance for change and diversity in society, their views on social issues, and the threats they saw to the United States around the world” (1996: p. 86). They concluded that inducing citizens to think about affirmative action in different ways by using different frames affects their understanding of the issue and opinions on related matters (p. 90).

CONCLUSION

There is much literature both empirical and conceptual from which to draw to understand youth, media and crime. Social constructionism is chosen with an assumption that for a majority of the population it is rare to experience firsthand encounters with young people who involved in any sort of crime or deviant behaviour. Meanwhile, framing theory provides a useful adjunct to this perspective because past research has demonstrated that frames have some effect on news consumers but that the extent of these effects varies. News frames may influence public opinion or may be reshaped to fit one’s understanding of national and world events. The studies described in this chapter provide evidence that the frames in the news influenced the way audiences understand crime news in the media. This study represents an attempt to understand how the mass media in Malaysia, in particular the print newspapers, construct and frame youth crime in Malaysia. For this study, Sasson’s work on frame analysis is adapted as it has a particular resonance with the Malaysian context. It is interesting to examine whether the construction and framing of youth crime in Malaysian newspapers will generate the same findings as those from research in other countries, in particular western countries, or whether the results will vary due to the different socio-demographical backgrounds of the country. This is yet to be discovered. The next chapter will discuss the methodology used in this thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This thesis examines the images and narratives that are produced in the media's construction of the reality of youth crime and justice. It is assumed that the media play a key role in constructing social reality. As Burns notes:

“News as a written or spoken form of communication is always constructed in the sense that journalists never reveal all the information they have on a topic” (2002: p. 121)

This thesis will analyse the way in which two Malaysian national newspapers construct youth crime and present empirical data examining the framing of youth crime. It will also examine the relationship between these frames and public opinion as expressed in these newspapers, and Malaysian youth crime policy.

Research questions

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. How are young offenders represented in Malaysian newspapers?
2. What are the main ‘frames’ used to understand youth crime? Are these frames similar to or different from those proposed in the literature, such as by Sasson (1995a)?
3. Has there been any change in the framing of youth crime in Malaysian newspapers within the period 1995-2004? If so, what might explain this?
4. To what extent have these frames influenced government policy on youth crime?

Research design

In order to examine how and why a social problem is constructed, one needs to focus on the claims, the claims-makers, and/or the claims-making process of a particular social problem. Ideally, one would trace

the movement of all claims-makers³⁴ within a particular vicinity as far back as records are kept, collect data on all claims made, and search the legislative records and policy and procedure manuals on issues related to youth crime. This type of project would be time consuming and costly. Alternatively, one could turn to secondary claims-makers, which may be more effective than studying primary claims-makers because while policy makers directly interact with claims-making groups, the public's sense of social problems may be more directly influenced by secondary claims-makers such as members of the media (Best, 1990: p. 19). Secondary claims are efforts to persuade and, as such, they try to convince audiences about the existence of a particular problem. These claims merit examination because most people learn about social problems from media reports, not through direct contact with interest groups. According to Best (1987), members of the media not only transmit claims, they also transform them:

They [the media] are, on the one hand, part of the process by which issue cultures are produced. Because their role is believed to be so central in framing issues for the attentive public, they are also, to quote Gurevitch and Levy (1985: p. 19), 'a site on which various social groups, institutions, and ideologies struggle over the definition and construction of social reality'. (Best as cited in Gamson & Modigliani, 1989: p. 3)

Consequently, media content can be used as an important indicator of how an issue or a social problem becomes constructed within a culture. In addition to being effective, most media records are relatively easy to access and are a practical resource for collecting data on claims-makers, claims, and the claims-making process. It is hoped that this research will help to enrich the knowledge paucity currently associated with the portrayal of juvenile crime within the news media in Malaysia.

Selection of the medium

The methodological approach is a content analysis of the *Berita Harian* and the *New Straits Times* over a ten year period, between 1st January 1995 to 31st December 2004. The purpose of concentrating on data

³⁴ Primary claims-makers are experts with direct knowledge about a social issue. These experts make claims or counter-claims. Meanwhile secondary claims-makers are the media that transform and translate claims made by the primary claims-makers. In his study of mass media accounts of threatened children, Best (1989) distinguishes between primary and secondary claims-makers. Primary claims-makers are activist experts, or victims who seek greater public awareness of some condition and often advocate changes in changed or new social policies. Claims-makers compete in a social problems marker place and typically attempt to attract media attention. He also identified news media as well as a variety of entertainment media as secondary claims-makers. Rather than merely transmitting claims made by primary claims-makers, the media translate and transform claims.

from 1995-2005 is to gauge over the most recent decade, the reactions of various groups to the issues of youth crime. More specifically, the study examines any potentially interconnected responses to youth crime within this period as seen in changes to Government legislation and policy concerning youth and crime. As well, this period was chosen because it covers six years before and four years after the introduction of the *Child Act 2001* – and this legislation is seen as a critical turning point in the Malaysian juvenile justice system. During this period of study Malaysia experienced the impact of the Asian Currency Crisis of 1997-1998. Even though there is no study done specifically on the impact of this crisis on youth crime in the country, the crisis does affect the economic performance in the country with increased unemployment and inflation.

To supplement data from public writing in the newspaper, survey data published by the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research will also be examined. The Merdeka Center is a social research organization based in Selangor, Malaysia that is geared towards conducting research in the area of social, economic and political attitudes in Malaysia with a view toward promoting democratic values and deepening the quality and nature of public discourse in the country. The third source of data will be government documents (primarily policies). The details of these sources are discussed below.

(i) Content analysis of newspapers

Newspaper coverage

The first data set is made up of a focused content/discourse analysis of two national newspapers in Malaysia, focusing on the coverage and representation of youth and youth crimes. The two newspapers are the *Berita Harian* (BH) and the New Straits Times (NST). BH is the most popular Malay daily whilst the NST is the most popular English daily.

Newspaper articles were selected for analysis as they are generally more assessable and indexed than other news sources (i.e. television, internet, radio) and because a large portion of newspaper content is dedicated to the reporting of crime related topics (Surrette, 1992; Cohen, 2002). The newspaper articles of these two newspapers are available online through subscription from e-Media (<http://www.emedia.com.my/>). All sample articles collected for this study are gathered from this site. These two newspapers were selected because of their large circulation numbers, geographic diversity and circulation beyond their local region of publication (Kuala Lumpur).

Although this research restricts itself to sources originating in print media, the data will be based only on online newspaper archives between the years 1995 and 2004. While critics may argue that the newspaper is a dying medium (Shafer, 2006), a 1991 study by the Ministry of Information reports that 56% of Malaysians read daily papers. The most popular are the Malay Berita Harian with a readership of 1.5 million and the English-language New Straits Times at 596,000 readers. Thus, both newspapers have the potential for influencing a substantial number of people in the country. Even though both newspapers are owned by UMNO, they sometimes take different stands on particular issues, especially at times of factional conflict within the party (Crouch: 1996, p. 87). Each newspaper also relies primarily on verbal narratives as opposed to numerical figures to communicate information. For this reason, it is useful to evaluate the different ways these Malay-controlled newspapers represent and cover youth issues.

The NST and the BH are useful for an overall picture of the origins, planning and implementation of youth policy Malaysia-wide. The analysis of newspaper coverage will be confined to the period after 1994. However, some stories presented in this period require linkage to press stories previous to 1995, and occasionally reference is made to issues from 1990 to 1994. As stated above, the purpose of concentrating on the newspaper coverage from 1995-2004 is to analyse the reactions of various groups to the issues of youth crime six years before and four years after the implementation of the Malaysian Child Acts 2001.

It is clear that newspapers have become an important arena for discussing the perceived social and cultural problems of the young generation. It is equally clear that newspapers have become a means for discussing solutions and searching for a consensus on the perceived problems associated with the young generation in Malaysia. Newspapers have thus become the mediators for public discussion. Indeed it is now a practice in most newspapers in Malaysia to invite the public to debate issues related to youth problems and their solutions. Occasionally, young people themselves are involved in these debates. For example, in letters-to-the-editor columns, individuals are encouraged to write about their opinions on youth issues and sometimes the editor will set certain topics for the public to debate.

Newspaper articles are readily obtained from library archives and are now available as online documents, and many publishers also make available a hard copy which can be removed from the archive for analysis. Moreover, newspapers are commonly textually and theoretically dense, allowing a researcher to gather more extensive information on any given issue. For example, a news story about youth crime might be given a mere twenty second spot on the evening news, while the same story in a newspaper may

take up several columns or even pages, providing more in-depth information regarding what the problem is and who the stakeholders are.

Method of data collection

Even though there are various types of mass media in Malaysia, my research will only utilise the news archives of the print media compiled online by e-Media. To examine the different ways the news media in Malaysia constructed youth crime, this study uses ‘frame analysis’ to analyse a selection of feature articles, editorials and news stories from two daily national newspapers in Malaysia. E-media has an up-to-date virtual index covering the period from 1991 to the present. Due to the time consuming nature of searching for hardcopy publications, this study will only utilize news articles compiled and made available online by E-media through individual subscription.

The technique used to collect the data for this research will be purposive sampling of daily coverage of youth crime. This technique was intended to provide a complete picture of the distribution and coverage of stories on youth crime throughout this period. This sampling type was chosen to collect all possible items that would relate to the research. Only articles directly concerned with ‘youth crime and deviancy’³⁵ were used. All articles concerning youth and crime were included regardless of length, and regardless of author/type of article (e.g. investigative piece versus opinion piece). Because the main purpose of doing this study was to concentrate only on youths above 10 years and below 18 years of age who were involved in crime, some stories that were retrieved and that did not fit this parameter were omitted. All retrieved stories were copied and saved as text in Microsoft Word documents.

All the pertinent articles were collected throughout the 10 year period from each of the newspapers studied. The ‘pertinence’ of an article was judged on the basis of its content. During the sampling process, I read as much of each article as needed in order to determine whether they related to youth crime/juvenile delinquency, laws pertaining to young people, and/or certain areas of youth deviancy and

³⁵ For the definition of ‘youth crime and deviancy’ and ‘youth/juvenile/age’ refer to Chapter One on the definition of key concepts. For the purpose of this study I discarded news items on the basis of age determinations. For instance, I eliminated articles involving young children under the age of 10 years old and over 18 years of age. When age was not specified and youth was not sufficiently emphasized I did not keep the articles in the sample. I also excluded articles that were primarily focused on an adult offender (co-accused with a youth) and articles about adults accused of crimes against minors who were also engaging in the offences (prostitution, runaways, drug) except when focus was on the young person.

marginalisation that are potentially connected to criminalisation. For example, I included in the sample articles reporting on crimes committed by young people or crimes for which young people were charged or suspected. I also retained articles about drug use and abuse in school, school discipline and safety, bullying, runaways and youth prostitution.

I searched the newspapers using terms or keywords/key phrases that identified and linked to stories on youth and crime with national news coverage or with local/state news coverage. By using keyword searches particularly words such as ‘youth crime’ and ‘juvenile delinquency, all reported stories, in full text were identified. While there is no guarantee that every story of relevance was retrieved, the risk of omitting data was reduced by using multiple keyword searches.

The common words used besides youth(s) were:

- adolescents
- young people
- young man/woman
- young generation
- youngsters
- juvenile
- kids
- delinquent
- child
- children
- teenager

Similar keyword searches in the Malay language were used in order to search for articles in the Malay *Berita Harian*³⁶. The other keyword/key phrase searches were based on the types of offences and/or cultures and sub-cultures associated with youths in Malaysia. These keywords were:

- punk
- skin-head
- black metal

³⁶ The Malay terms are *remaja, orang/anak muda, lelaki/perempuan muda, generasi muda, budak, juvana, delinkuen, kanak-kanak, anak (lelaki/gadis/perempuan)* and *gadis*.

- hip-hop culture
- youth culture
- school bullies
- gangsters
- pusher
- drifter
- street kids
- vandal/thug
- young gay or lesbian

Among common words in colloquial Malay that refer specifically to youth cultures and sub-cultures are words such as:

- '*lepak*',
- '*bohsia* and *bohjan*',
- '*mat/minah rempit*',
- '*mat motor*'

The coding Manual for the newspaper is attached in Appendix A.

To identify articles potentially relevant to my research, I typed the following keywords/key phrases into both newspapers' e-Media indices:

- youth and crime
- youth and violent
- youth and immoral behaviour
- youth and crime statistic
- youth and criminal offences
- youth crime and public reactions
- youth crime and government reactions
- youth crime and policy
- youth crime and justice
- youth and school problems

All of the listed keywords are important to search for reported incidents and coverage of youth crime in newspapers, or for commentaries, features, and editorials on the subjects. These are keywords/key phrases I assumed would commonly be used in reporting or commenting on crime involving youth in Malaysia.

Once all articles were identified, they were sorted out using:

- the published date
- newspaper type (the BH or NST)
- locality of coverage (local or national section in the newspaper)
- active voice (primary claims-makers involved) in the report
- type of article/source – (investigative journalist/opinion piece/short descriptive)

Youth crimes reported in just a single coverage were identified and coded as ‘1’ while ones receiving multiple reports were given the value ‘2’. At the end there were two data files created – a single coverage one and a multiple coverage one with follow-up stories. If a particular case was reported in both BH and NST, it was entered only once in the total data. In other words, a youth crime article that was printed in both newspapers on the same day or if there was a follow-up story the next day was not classified as a multiple report story rather it was referred to as the same story. Multiple report stories referred to coverage that was reported two or more times by the same newspaper.

After the content analysis began it was found that all the originally identified keywords were redundant because the findings from a search using the keywords ‘juvenile crime and delinquency’ keywords resulted in the same list of findings. In addition to these keywords the word ‘*Bohsia/Bohjan*’ was included as this search gave me mixed lists of the same and new article lists. Only those articles that were not related to the keywords juvenile crime and delinquency were retrieved to avoid redundancy of articles from the search keywords. At the end of the online search, I managed to retrieve approximately 695 related articles from an original list of 3046 articles. The other 2351 news articles were omitted because they did not fit the parameters designed for the main purpose of the study with its concentration on youth crime by youths from 10 years to 18 years of age. The total numbers of each newspaper sample are stated in the following table.

Table 4a: Total and percentage of news articles as shown by keywords search

Name of newspaper	Total articles published	Keywords Juvenile crime and juvenile delinquency	Keywords <i>Bohsia / Bohjan</i>	Total samples	Percentage out of total of both newspapers
The Berita Harian	969	335	14	349	11.46%
The New Straits Times	2077	313	33	346	11.36%
Total news articles	3046	648	47	695	22.82%

Data on public writings

This thesis also utilises data from public writings published in the two newspapers; the public writings are in the form of published letters, emails, and comments to the editor. Within the ten year period, the total contributions of public writing obtained using the search keyword of ‘juvenile crime and delinquency’ and ‘Bohsia/Bohjan’ were 70 items (Table 6a). 30 (42.86%) were gathered from Berita Harian and 40 (57.14%) from the New Straits Times. There are 7 newspaper columns (Table 3b) and 6 newspaper columns (Table 3c) identified in BH and NST respectively that specifically related to youth crime. However there are 42 public writings not listed under any of the specified columns which were published elsewhere in the two newspapers.

Table 4b: BH Column and number of youth crime articles

BH COLUMN NAME	No of articles
SURAT & EMEL	5
SUARA ISLAM	1
DIALOG	7
WADAH WANITA ISLAM	3
KOMENTAR Hujung Minggu	1
MASALAH ORANG MUDA	1
BERSAMA REJAL ARBEE	1
NOT CLASSIFIED	11
TOTAL	30
Percentage	42.86

BH has five contributions listed as *Surat & Emel*, seven for *Dialog*, three for *Wadah Wanita Islam*, and one each for *Suara Islam*, *Komentari Hujung Minggu*, *Masalah Orang Muda* and *Bersama Rejal Arbee*. For BH, there were 11 contributions not listed under any of the seven columns. *Surat & Emel* were letters and emails sent to the editor of the newspapers. They included the name and address of the sender. *Wadah Wanita Islam* and *Suara Islam* were personal views from Muslims individuals; the first represented opinions of Muslim women only while the other published opinions from both genders. *Masalah Orang Muda* was a column for the public to write about their perceived problems and issues regarding young people while column *Bersama Rejal Arbee* was a personal column of Rejal Arbee.

Table 4c: NST Column and number of youth crime articles

NST COLUMN NAME	No of articles
OUTLOOK	2
TIES THAT BIND	1
THE BENCH MARK	1
OTHER THOTS	1
ON THE RECORD	1
COMMENT	3
NOT CLASSIFIED	31
TOTAL	40
Percentage	57.14

Meanwhile, NST has two articles listed as *Outlook*, one article each for *Ties That Bind*, *The Bench Mark*, *Other Thots* and *On the Record*, and three articles listed as *Comment*. There are 31 contributions not listed under any of the six columns. All columns are columns for the public to write about their remarks on problems and issues related to youth crime in Malaysia.

(ii) Document analysis – Government reports

The second source of data comes from a review of government produced legislation and policy published within the period 1995 through 2004. To investigate the Malaysian government's reaction to youth crime an analysis of these official government documents was undertaken. The government data was divided into three types:

- official statistics,
- legislation and
- parliament Hansards and departmental annual reports

These data include Royal Malaysia Police Department (PDRM) Statistics, the Malaysian Public Safety Index, the Malaysia Child Act 2001, Criminal Procedure Code/The Penal Code, Syariah Criminal Procedure, and selected Annual Reports from government ministries that look after the wellbeing of Malaysian youths.

a. The government official statistics cover statistics produce by the Royal Malaysia Police Department (RMPD) and Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD);

Juvenile crime statistics in Malaysia are drawn from the official data of formal reports of criminal incidents made to the Royal Malaysia Police Department (RMPD). Statistics regarding juvenile offenders are also recorded by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD). Adolescents who have an arrest record are known as ‘official delinquents’; their proceedings are recorded as official delinquency and become part of the official statistics. Normally the criminal incidents are collected and disseminated on an annual basis by these two agencies. In Malaysia, this is recorded as the total number of crimes reported to the police for major offence categories either as index or non-index crime and as the total number of arrests made for any crime that is cleared or solved (RMPD, 2008). Official data can be used to learn about the trends and patterns in delinquency rates. However, these statistics are best read as an *indication* of youth crime rather than as actual rates. There are many well known problems associated with crime statistics stemming from errors in detecting, reporting and recording crime (Cicourel, 1968: pp. 58-69; Roach Anleu, 2006: p. 22).

The analysis of statistics from the RMPD and the MWFCD covers statistics regarding the involvement of youth in criminal cases. The aim was to look at descriptions and trends in youth crime. Besides new crime categories, types of offences were identified in particular within the 1995-2005 time-frame. The statistical data from the MWFCD also provided data on the number of young offenders placed in

approved rehabilitation institutions³⁷ in Malaysia. The MWFCF provided further facts and descriptions on young offenders in addition to those from the RMPD. Thus the MWFCF can act as a checks and balance database for youth crime, and complement the data that is available by the RMPD.

b. The government legislation refers to Malaysia Child Act 2001³⁸

This study reviewed and analysed the *Malaysia Child Act 2001* as part of a national response to youth crime, by performing a content analysis on existing documentation. The principle Act governing the protection of children is the *Child Act 2001* which came into force on 1 August 2002. This Act consolidates three former Acts, namely, the *Juvenile Court Act 1947* (Act to establish Juvenile Court and deal with child offenders); the *Child Protection Act 1991* (Act to provide care and protection to children); and the *Women and Girls' Protection Act 1973* (Act to protect women and children exposed and involved in immoral vices). Regardless of whether they are victims or offenders, children are all governed by this single Act.

c. The government ministry annual reports include selected reports from Ministry of Youth and Sport, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF). Other relevant data are the selected Penyata Rasmi or the Parliament of Malaysia Hansards.

All the relevant annual reports from these government ministries, the MCPF and Hansard were reviewed to see what kind of reports or discourse were debated and published on youth, specifically youth crime and justice. Only data that was relevant to youth crime and offending was analysed.

Approach

All the government data (official statistics, legislation and annual reports) were in the form of reviews of the relevant data on youth crime and offending. For the purpose of analysis, only data pertaining to youth

³⁷ The approved rehabilitation institutions refer to rehabilitation centres or schools for young people who according to the Malaysia Child Act 2001 have been involved in crime or are in danger of delinquent activities.

³⁸ Refer to Chapter One on the explanation of Malaysia Child Act 2001

crime and offending was extracted. The Royal Malaysian Police Department (PDRM) statistics covering the same period were examined to gather useful statistical data. If there was not enough detail in the statistical data, the study was designed to look for complementary information from the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) which is put out by Department of Social Welfare Statistics. These statistical data concentrated only on data related to youth crime and offenders. Thus it was a review of all annual statistics within the timeframe chosen. The content analysis of these documents used the same search keywords that were used to search newspaper articles as mentioned above.

(iii) Survey data published by the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research

The Merdeka Center is a social research organisation based in Selangor, Malaysia that is geared towards conducting research in the area of social, economic and political attitudes in Malaysia with a view toward promoting democratic values and deepening the quality and nature of public discourse in the country. For the purpose of extracting supporting data on public writings the four surveys of this Center were examined.

- 2003's survey: 'the national issues, economic optimism, crime and public safety' in October, and 'Islam and political participation' in December 2003.
- 2004's survey: 'Voter viewpoints towards national and local issues, crime, social problems and corruption, perceptions of the elections and media reporting' in July 2004.
- 2006's survey: 'the National Youth Survey' in May-June 2006.
- 2007's survey: 'the Nation-wide telephone survey' in August-September 2007.

Even though all four surveys were analysed only relevant data from each survey was used for the discussion.

Method of data analysis

Content / Frame analysis of newspaper articles, public and government documents and publications

Supported as an employable method of analysis in the study of discourse construction (Burr, 2003) and media studies (Davis and Morsdell, 2006), qualitative or quantitative content analysis can be understood as “a social survey of a sample of images that use a tightly structured and closed questionnaire” (Slater, 1998: p. 235). Content analysis concerns itself with “meaning only in the sense of what is explicit in the words used ... and what is implied by their use from the range of alternatives that could have been employed” (Miller and Brewer, 2003: p43). In this study, using the above definition, a close ended coding scheme was developed as a means to assess primary ‘records’ and ‘documents of analysis,’ that is, the printed article.

In *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Lincoln and Guba (1985: p. 277) define ‘records’, “to mean any written or recorded statement prepared by or for an individual ... for the purposes of assessing to an event or providing an accounting.” Meanwhile ‘document’ is a term denoting “any written or recorded material other than a record ... such as ... diaries, speeches, newspaper editorials” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: p. 277). To study the construction of crime’s image, the manner in which print media blend the evidence of factual events and articles of lifestyle and opinion is important (Bennet, 1982; Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1987; Silverman and Wilson, 2002; Greer, 2003).

The sample articles from newspapers³⁹ (695 articles: 349 from BH and 346 from NST) were content analysed using a frame analysis. Frame analysis ‘is best regarded as a methodology for conducting research in the constructionist paradigm’ (Sasson, 1995a: p. 9), and is used by Sasson (1995a) in exploring how the media help to construct public awareness of street crime in the United States. In this thesis I have drawn from Sasson’s frame analytic method to investigate the phenomenon of youth crime in Malaysia and to consider the construction of youth offending by the news media, the government and the public.

³⁹ The total number of newspaper articles (695 articles) should not be confused with frames or sub-frames. Frames and sub-frames are abstracted from these news articles so the numbers of frames (7 main frames) and sub-frames (30 sub-frames) can be more than the number of newspaper articles. For example, in one newspaper article there can be more than one frame and the frame can then be further examined for total number of sub-frames. Details of frames and sub-frames are described in Table 4d and 4e respectively.

This study is using Sasson's work not only because of its advanced methodology for framing popular discourse but also because of its theoretical perspective on how ordinary citizens use media to make sense of social problems. Sasson's approach is similar to my work in examining how the mass media constructs the dominant stories about crime through the method of frame analysis. Sasson's framework is a mirror for my approach in examining the framework within which particular accounts of crime are covered in the media as it has examined a wide variety of newspaper stories to uncover the dominant narratives told about crime.

Sasson (1995a) identified five competing frames in which the problem of street crime has been constructed in media discourse in the United States. These frames are: the faulty system frame, the blocked opportunities frame, the social breakdown frame, the media violence frame and the racist frame. According to Sasson, the faulty system frame suggests that offenders engage in crimes because they know that they can get away with it. The problem of street crime can also be framed as a consequence of blocked opportunities where for example unemployment, poverty and lack of education opportunities lead to strain and frustration and on to crime. The social breakdown frame suggests that crime is a result of breakdown within families and communities (Sasson, 1995a). Other frames include those that blame the problem on violence in the media such as television, movies and popular music; and those that attribute the problem of youth crime to racism in the criminal justice system (Sasson, 1995a: p. 16).

In this thesis, 'six categories'⁴⁰ or frames were used as a guideline for data collection. Five frames were drawn from Sasson's work and one new frame was included as it emerged early in the newspaper analysis. This sixth frame relates to the representation of youth crime as a consequence of their individuality, primarily their psychological/biological make-up. In this study four of the Sasson's frames were maintained using their original titles: the faulty system frame, the blocked opportunity frame, the social defect / breakdown frame and the media violence frame. The fifth frame of Sasson's, the racist frame, is termed 'inter-group conflict' in this study to cover not only race relations but also class and inter-generational relationships. Table 3b further summarises the frames examined in this study.

⁴⁰ Refer to the Coding Manual (no. 6 – no. 10) in the appendix section.

Table 4d: Explanation of crime frames⁴¹

Crime frames	View	Example of potential interventions
1. Individual defect	Crime stems from individual flaws and choices.	Government agencies and all segments in the society work together to help young people who are at risk or have potential to be at risk of involvement in crime.
2. Social defect/social breakdown	Crime stems from family and/or community breakdown.	Citizens work together to recreate supportive communities that work for the good of all.
3. Inter-group conflict	Crime stems from group tensions.	Individuals work to overcome or identify potential inequality, racism, inter-generational gap and issues among individuals of same age group.
4. The faulty system/inadequate laws and law enforcement	Crime stems from problems associated with the structure of the criminal justice system, i.e. leniency and inefficiency.	The criminal justice system 'gets tough on crime'.
5. The blocked opportunity	Crime stems from frustrations as a consequence of blocked opportunities due to e.g. poverty and inequality.	The government addresses the 'root causes' of crime by creating jobs, offering training, opportunities in education and reducing poverty.
6. The media	Crimes stems from the influences posed in the mass media.	The government regulates contents and imagery in the media.

In terms of framing the news stories by the respective daily newspaper, I have further divided these six frames into sub-frames. The rationale for this division is to make the collection of data and analysis easier and more systematic. The table below shows sub-frames of each of the major frames.

⁴¹ Frames 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 are adapted from Sasson's (1995) Crime Talk: How Citizens Construct a Social Problem. For frame 3, Sasson lists the frame as 'Racist System' however in this study I called it rather as the 'Inter-group Conflict' because to used the term 'Racist System' will not cover the other inter-group conflict such as conflict between classes, inter-generational gap and general individual conflict. The first frame 'Individual Defect' is a frame to cover explanation of crime originated from individual behaviour and self choices.

Table 4e: Major frame and sub-frames

Major frame	Sub-frames
1. Individual defect	<p>Mental disorder</p> <p>Characteristics of individuals related to morality: character flaws, youthfulness itself, and having sexual relationship outside marriage (such as moral indecency: related to pre-marital sex, unwed pregnancy, prostitution, 'bohsia/bohjan')</p> <p>Easy money (criminal activities that guarantee quick earning of money such as illegal drug dealing, petty theft (mugger, pickpocket, shoplifter, extortion)</p> <p>Hedonism (pleasure seeking associated with youthfulness)</p> <p>Use of alcohol, drugs, gambling and ammunitions</p> <p>Curiosity</p> <p>Rebellion/retaliation against parental neglect</p>
2. Social defect / social breakdown	<p>The family (poor parental control; materialism; lacking family bond, abuse and neglect)</p> <p>Pathological environment and social conditions (rapid industrialisation and development)</p> <p>The influence of significant others: peers and adults</p> <p>Inadequate public facilities (includes space)</p> <p>Religiosity (lack of faith and social values)</p> <p>Lack of community support (includes social responsibility)</p> <p>School functioning (includes coping with school pressure and gang threats, school discipline)</p> <p>Cultural gap (conventional practice versus avant-garde)</p>
3. Inter-group conflict	<p>Youth fight, gang fight and bullying</p> <p>Racially motivated and the denial of racism</p> <p>Racial/ethnic/class motivated discrimination and prejudice</p> <p>Inter-generational conflict</p> <p>Provocation and victim precipitation</p>
4. The faulty system/inadequate laws and law enforcement	<p>Inadequate laws</p> <p>Inadequate law enforcement (questioning police procedure, discretion in handling juvenile cases, lacking knowledge of certain crimes, confusion over definition of 'a child', 'juvenile' and 'young person')</p> <p>Conflict court decision (such as whether certain court cases should be tried before the Syariah, Civil, Criminal, Adult or Children's Court)</p>
5. The blocked opportunity	<p>Poverty</p> <p>Lacking opportunity in education</p> <p>Unemployment</p> <p>Lacking opportunity in training</p>
6. The media	<p>Media's influence on youth involvement in black-metal culture, pre-marital sex ('bohsia/bohjan'), sexual offences (rape, assault, pornography and homosexuality), running away from home</p>

All of the above sub-frame analyses are discussed in the findings chapters.

CONCLUSION

The data examined in this thesis has allowed an understanding of the broad processes which have shaped debates on youth problems, and how those debates have influenced the construction of youth crime in Malaysia. It was anticipated that an exploration of the data would highlight the relationships between the formal politico-legal institutions of the state, the reporting of the media and the public reaction to young people (via public writing in newspapers and Survey data published by the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research) in the context of present day Malaysia. These relationships and their fields of influence have a profound impact on the social construction of youth crimes.

Through the employment of these sets of data, the goal of this thesis has been to articulate the dynamics of debate around the construction of the youth problem, with a particular focus on youth crime, and how this has occurred in Malaysia. There are certain limitations in this present study. First there is clearly a need for more comprehensive research on how youth crime is represented in the media, particularly to widen the scope to include comparative materials from a variety of media that is not only limited to print media. A fuller analysis would also cover more than two newspapers in order to survey differences. It is also imperative to study the content analysis of the representation of youth crime in the media according to themes such as social demographic background (i.e. ethnic groups, social class, locality, gender) and social legal background (i.e. offence type, sentence category.) My thesis is an exploratory study in this area, a beginning for research in media and crime where far too little has been done so far. I now turn to discuss the findings chapters of the thesis.

CHAPTER 5: FRAMING YOUTH CRIME: FAILING LAW, COURTS AND POLICING

The most dominant frames emerging from the data analysis concern what Sasson termed the faulty system frame. This relates to portraying youth crime in a way that focuses on the faulty aspects of the criminal justice system, especially the juvenile law and policing. This chapter highlights why and how this frame is consistently seen across each component of this study: newspapers, government statistics and policy reports. The presence of these themes suggests that Sasson's (1995) work is relevant to the Malaysian context. However by itself the 'faulty system' frame covers only some portions of media representations of youth crime in Malaysia.

Overview of the findings

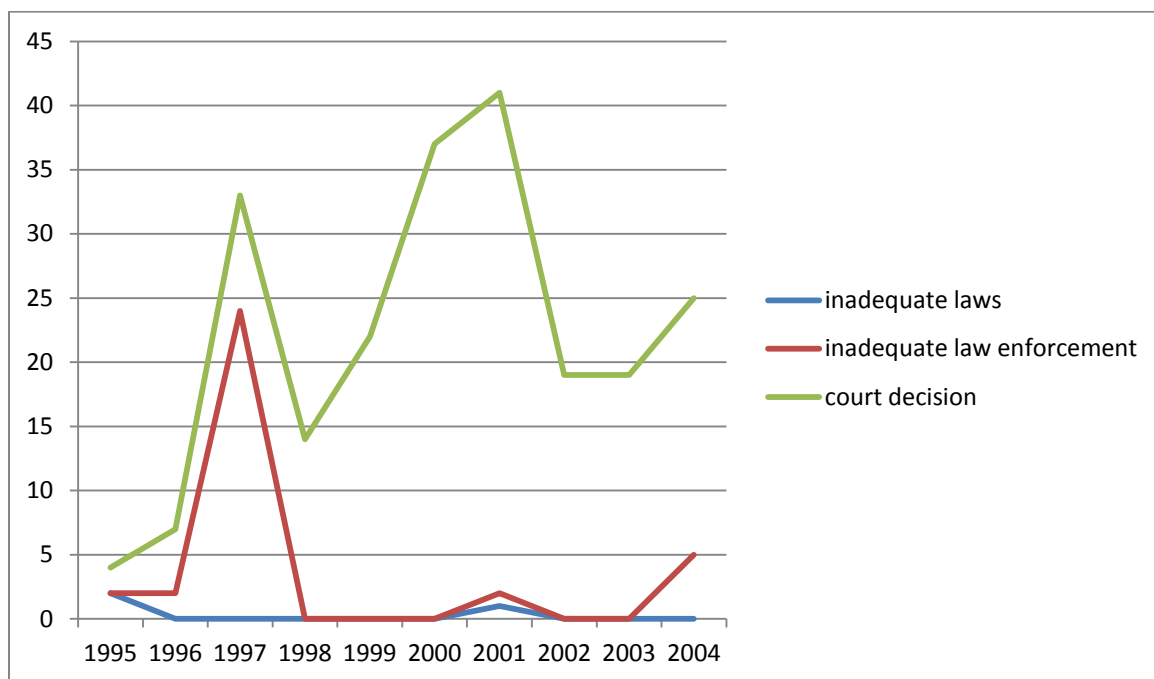
According to Sasson (1995) one of the most common frames seen in media representations of crime concerns what he calls the 'Faulty System and Inadequate laws and law enforcement frame'. In this frame youth crime is explained via reference to poorly functioning components of the criminal justice system. In this present research this frame is broken down into three sub-frames: inadequate laws (A), inadequate law enforcement (B) and inadequate court decisions (C). Table 5a presents the findings of this study on the number of media representations found in each category.

Table 5a: Total number of news articles relating to the faulty system frame by newspaper, sub-frames and year

Year / sub-frame	Inadequate laws (A)		Inadequate law enforcement (B)		Inadequate court systems (C)		TOTAL	
	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST
1995	2	0	2	0	0	4	4	4
1996	0	0	0	2	1	6	1	8
1997	0	0	0	24	13	20	13	44
1998	0	0	0	0	4	10	4	10
1999	0	0	0	0	13	9	13	9
2000	0	0	0	0	21	16	21	16
2001	1	0	1	1	23	16	25	17
2002	0	0	0	0	9	10	9	10
2003	0	0	0	0	6	13	6	13
2004	0	0	5	0	9	11	14	11
Total each sub-frame by each NP	3	0	8	27	99	115	110	142
TOTAL Sub-frame in both Newspapers	3		35		214		252	

Figure 5a graphs the data over time. Table 5a and Figure 5a, show that the most common sub frame is C (inadequate court systems) (n=214), and this is consistent over the period of study. The other notable trend in Figure C is a peak around 1997, and 2001. The other two sub-frames score less than 50 with A scoring only 3 and B scoring 35. There is only a small difference in the coverage of the highest score by both newspapers with 214 scores in BH and 252 scores in the NST.

Figure 5a: Total number of news articles relating to the sub-frames of the the faulty system / inadequate laws and law enforcement by year for both newspapers



This finding suggests that when reporting on juvenile crime in Malaysia, reporters commonly frame the issue by reference to problems within the criminal justice system. Most often, the framing specifically relates to perceived problems with the court system, that is, to the type and nature of judgements made. This finding fits with Jewkes (2004) work suggesting that there exists a valuable investigative tradition in the media that plays an important role in the spheres of crime control and crime prevention in uncovering corruption and miscarriages of justice (Jewkes, 2004). The following are the detailed discussions of each of the sub-frames.

Faulty system: sub-frame inadequate law (A)

Sub frame A represents the idea that juvenile crime relates to inadequate laws, that is that the laws have failed to protect society, including young people. The confusion over the definition of ‘a child’, ‘a juvenile’ and ‘a young person’ initiated an overhaul review in 1997⁴² of the three acts that look after the wellbeing of young people: the *Juvenile Act 1947*, the *Young Woman and Girl Protection Act 1973*, and the *Child Protection Act 1991*. The review has resulted in the introduction and adoption of the *Child Act 2001*. The issue of age also involves examining the age of criminal responsibility according to both the Syariah Court and the Civil Court. In Syariah law, the age of criminal responsibility starts at 7 years while in Civil law, it starts at the age of 10. Because of this discrepancy, very few juvenile criminal cases have been handled by the Syariah Court. Thus, under the *Child Act 2001*, all criminal cases that involve young people have to be trialled according to civil law operating under the Children’s Court or in some cases under the High Court.

The following are some examples of how the frame of faulty system was used in newspaper headlines describing youth crime in Malaysia over the period of study.

Keputusan kes budak masuk lokap Februari (Decision on a case of a child placed in lockup in February), BH: 08/11/1996

Undang-undang babitkan remaja wajar dipinda (Laws involving adolescents need to be amended), BH: 24/11/1997

Pegam bantah umur jenayah juvana (Lawyers opposed to the age of criminality of juveniles), BH: 23/11/1997

Kes Juvana gagal capai matlamat (Juvenile cases failed to reach goals), BH: 14/11/1997

Kanak-kanak masuk lokap dapat ganti rugi (A child placed in lockup receives compensation), BH: 15/03/1997

⁴² The Social Law Committee, under the National Unity and Social Development Ministry, was formed with the objective of reviewing social and related legislation (July 25 1997). It was set up to carry out a comprehensive review of all laws relating to social issues with the aim of making legislation more stringent.

Polis gari pelajar bukan isu utama [HL] (Police handcuffing students is not the main issue), BH: 26/02/1997

Sindiket dadah guna remaja elak hukuman mati (Drug syndicate uses adolescents to avoid death penalty, BH: 23/02/1997

Remaja lelaki kabur definisi rogol (Male adolescents are not cleared of rape definition), BH: 22/06/2004

Peruntukan halang dakwa remaja 14 tahun merogol perlu dipinda (Provisions which stop 14 year olds being charged with rape need to be amended), BH: 12/02/2004

Disiplin: Arahan Khalid bercanggah (Discipline: Khalid's directive conflicted), BH: 06/07/1999

Ramai tidak tahu akta lindung hak kanak-kanak (Many do not know of the Acts which protect children), BH: 21/06/2001

Girl, 11, in lock-up case: Decision Feb 27, NST: 08/11/1996

Drug rings targeting the younger group, NST: 23/02/1997

Detention of girl, 11, in lock-up 'unlawful', NST: 15/03/1997

Handcuffing of pupils unwarranted, say groups, NST: 26/02/1997

Police criticised for raids on schools in Muar, NST: 23/02/1997

Handcuffs unnecessary (HL), NST: 23/02/1997

Ambiguities in the Child Act, NST: 13/04/2003

Juveniles treated differently, NST: 14/09/1997

Proposal to set standard legal age for juveniles, NST: 09/09/1997

Juvenile Court unaware of rules governing the role of advisers, NST: 12/12/2000

Redefine 'juvenile' term to fit the crimes, NST: 08/12/2003

The above headlines show the conflict of definitions that exists in various social laws relating to juveniles in Malaysia. Social laws governing subjects, such as the age of juveniles, require revision because the existing contradictions mean that most laws could not be adequately applied. The headlines suggest that some juveniles committed or were influenced to commit serious / violent / 'grave' crimes such as Drug Offence crimes (Section 12 (2) Dangerous Drugs Act 1952), murder (Section 302, Penal Code Act) and armed robbery because they thought that their status as juveniles meant that they could get away without severe punishment or in some cases without being given the death penalty. According to JCA 1947, the crimes listed under the serious / violent / grave crime (section 16 of the JCA) note that a juvenile convicted of these types of capital offences will only be detained at the pleasure of the Ruler. The statistical data does not indicate young people in Malaysia are increasingly committing violent crime (see Chapter 2), rather most young offenders are involved in property crime; however it is likely that what catches the attention of the reader will be crime listed as serious/violent or grave crime. These stories will sell and will be likely to receive media attention particularly when it involves harming innocent others such as children, young girls and old people (Chibnall, 1977; Sacco et al., 1992, Jewkes, 2004).

In constructing compelling crime narratives Surette (1998a) suggests that conflict and controversy either in the crime committed, the law and justice, or its enforcement procedures are important to news value (Surette, 1998a, Luhmann, 2000). In Malaysia there is a conflict regarding the age of criminal responsibility and the age group of young people classified as juvenile offenders by the Juvenile Court Act (JCA) 1947, the Child Protection Act (CPA) 1991 and the Young Women's and Girls' Protection Act (YWGPA) 1973. Under JCA 1947 and CPA 1991 juvenile offenders are those young people aged over 10 years of age and below 18 years of age. However under YWGPA 1973, juvenile offenders are those young people aged over 10 and below 21 years of age. With this inconsistency in defining who can be classified as a juvenile offenders, there was also a proposal to lower the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 7 years because some claim-makers believed the original age of criminal responsibility before its amendment in 1972 was 7 years of age. When the Child Bill was being drafted there was a suggestion by the Drafting Consultants to lower the age of criminal responsibility to 7. As this proposition was made

without explicit nationwide studies but rather due to perceived public pressure owing to the ‘perceived’ increase of child offenders, it was vehemently rejected in one consultation workshop (Majid, 2001). This dispute was settled with the passing of the Child Act 2001 which maintains the age of criminal responsibility at the age of 10 years and standardises the definition of juvenile offenders to be young children over 10 years of age and below 18 years of age. The introduction of the Child Act 2001 automatically repealed the JCA, CPA AND YWGPA.

A juvenile is a person who has attained the age of criminal responsibility prescribed in Section 82 of the Penal Code and is under the age of 18, in defining the age of criminal responsibility, states that ‘nothing is an offence if done by a child aged below 10.

Adding to the confusion is the conflicting definition of the word “child” under section 2(1) Child Protection Act 1991 and section 2 Adoption Act 1952. The former defines “Child” as someone under the age of 18 while, the latter, under the age of 21.

The age limit in the definition of who is a young offender has also been subject to criticism over several years. This criticism was more apparent prior to the introduction of the Child Act 2001. Condemnation of the failure to criminalise young offenders under 18 came from a great many commentators, including within the criminal justice system due to the assumption of the increase in the crime rate for offences committed by young people below the age of 18. The following excerpt is an example of the conflicting comments shared in newspapers.

The review is to determine which of the laws were still applicable. Those no longer suitable would be recommended for repeal. Mimi Kamariah told those present that a standard legal age for juveniles should be adopted, thus resolving the conflict of definition that existed in the present social laws. She also suggested that the age of criminal responsibility be reduced to seven years, compared to the present 10. “Prior to the amendments to Sections 82 and 83 of the Penal Code, seven was deemed to be appropriate for the age of criminal responsibility.” However, she added, after January 1976, it was raised to 10 with no explanation. (NST 18/11/1997)

The Government is concerned with the new trend in juvenile delinquency cases in the country. There is a marked decline in the age of offenders over the past five years.

National Unity and Social Development Minister Datin Zaleha Ismail said there were now cases being reported of seven to nine year-olds committing crimes such as stealing and vandalism. She added most of these very young offenders had turned to crime to get money to feed their fancies to visit places like video game arcades and other places that were out-of-bounds to them. She said emergency measures should be implemented by all concerned to curtail this worrying trend. (NST 15/06/1999)

There was also a dissatisfaction regarding the maximum age at which a person was regarded as a juvenile which at present is set at 18 years of age. The arguments were well stated in the following excerpts regarding the age ceiling of juveniles:

Teenage murderers, rapists and robbers are no longer that uncommon, although not common either by any stretch of imagination. What is certain is that juvenile delinquency is no longer confined to stealing or vandalism. Last year's statistics on juvenile crime, involving students aged between 13 and 18, included a number of murders, attempted murders, armed robberies, rapes, kidnap and assault. It is very difficult to imagine that youngsters who have just left childhood could possibly kill in cold blood, and a High Court judge had in fact recently suggested that they should no longer be treated as children when facing the consequences. In delivering his judgment, Justice Fook Yen called for a review of the Juvenile Courts Act, 1947 to keep up with the changing times. "The ceiling age of juveniles should be reduced to perhaps 15 or 16 years," he was reported to have said when passing sentence last month. He had said the present age of 18 was inappropriate and youths of today tended to mature faster than before. The law stipulates that the age of criminal responsibility begins at 10, but the Juvenile Courts Act provides that those under 18 be given special protection, including anonymity and lighter punishments. But lawyers with experience of juvenile offenders and a social worker were less enthusiastic. Lowering the age would mean subjecting 15 or 16 year old youths to full range of punishments, including the death penalty, and removing a whole set of protection accorded to them. (NST, 28/09/1997)

The issue of conflicting definitions of juvenile age was highlighted recently when police and Welfare Department officers detained a 19-year-old girl for patronising a cafe in Nilai, Negri Sembilan. The girl was detained under section 8 (1) of the Young Women's and Girls' Protection Act 1973 which provides that a girl under the age of 21 can be

detained by the courts if it is believed that she is exposed to any moral danger and requires protection. This contradicts the Juvenile Court Act 1947 which defines juveniles as those under the age of 18. (NST, 09/09/1997)

As discussed previously, the coverage repeatedly suggested that more experienced offenders were likely to seek out young people to perform certain acts for them as the youths would not be as easily detected or would not be subjected to the same level of legal sanctions if caught. The obvious case is drug trafficking where pushers choose to use teenagers to do their work instead. The following excerpt explains this type of situation.

It is small wonder then that dadah (drug) traffickers are targeting teenagers as young as 13 as new addicts and pushers. On Jan 6, Kuala Lumpur police busted a heroin syndicate which made use of seven teenagers to supply the dadah to regular buyers in the Jalan San Peng area. The teenagers, including two sisters aged 14 and 15, were arrested in a flat in Jalan San Peng. Kuala Lumpur police Narcotics Department chief Assistant Commissioner Zuber Shariff, who arrested the seven, said although they were in their teens, they conducted the operations like professionals. The seven were obviously under the guidance of the traffickers. "We believe they have been in operation for several months." Teenagers are favoured for their obvious advantage over adult pushers. Dadah traffickers know that minors would not be charged under the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952, which carries a death penalty for trafficking and life imprisonment for possession. This loophole is obvious to top police officials, but is one which they are powerless to rectify. (NSUNT 23/02/1997)

Dadah syndicates can make use of juveniles to smuggle or distribute dadah because if they are caught, they would be treated leniently because of their age. By offering them money and other inducements, juveniles knowing that they will get off lightly even if they are caught can be tempted to join dadah syndicates as couriers or distributors. (NST 08/08/2001)

In fact, those pushing to toughen the laws governing youths and to lower the age at which a young person becomes criminally responsible often cited this very reason.

Contradictions are found in some laws and some are outdated, with penalties that are no longer a deterrent like small fines. (NST, 13/07/1997)

Most of the country's social legislation had been drawn up against the simpler truths of an earlier time. The realization that these laws are no longer adequate has been one of the most welcome consequences of the social ills debate. (NST 14/07/1997)

From the above it seems that many claim-makers (the parents, academics, police, politicians, welfare workers, lawyers and judges) argued that inadequate laws and law enforcement caused, promoted or intensified youthful involvement in crime, thus constructing crime as a legal problem. Severity, certainty and celerity of punishment are seen as key factors; however it is severity (or lack thereof) which received coverage in the sample. The notion of deterrence underlies many of these explanations; however, the term itself is not used very often, and is usually only used by criminal officials. One theme that is often reported in current-day news about young offenders is that the law is not harsh enough (too 'soft'), fails to make youth accountable for their actions and allows them to 'get away with crime', figuratively and in some cases literally (Schissel, 2006; Smandych, 2001b: p.xv). It is in fact this type of critique that the drafters of the Child Act 2001 tried in part to address.

It was held to review and draft new legislation on social affairs and to exchange views on the proposed legislation which would be submitted to the Cabinet for endorsement to replace three existing Acts: JCA 1947, CPA 1991 AND WYGPA 1973. The review is to determine which of the laws were still applicable. Those no longer suitable would be recommended for repeal. In presenting her recommendations, Mimi Kamariah told those present that a standard legal age for juveniles should be adopted, thus resolving the conflict of definition that existed in the present social laws. She also suggested that the age of criminal responsibility to reduced to seven years, compared to the present 10. Prior to the amendments to Sections 82 and 83 of the Penal Code, seven was deemed to be appropriate for the age of criminal responsibility. However, she added, after January 1976, it was raised to 10 with no explanation. (NST 18/11/1997)

Some of the existing social laws are more than 50 years old and are no longer practical, Zaleha said. (NST, 09/09/1997)

The purported leniency of the law governing youth criminal behaviour is not only a contemporary critique. This type of discourse has previously existed and is seen in critiques of the Juvenile Act, 1947; Child Protection Act, 1991; Young Women and Girl Protection Act, 1973; and even the Child Act 2001.

Last year's statistics on juvenile crime, involving students aged between 13 and 18, included a number of murders, attempted murders, armed robberies, rapes, kidnap and assault. It is very difficult to imagine that youngsters who have just left childhood could possibly kill in cold blood, and a High Court judge had in fact recently suggested that they should no longer be treated as children when facing the consequences. (NST 28/09/1997)

A statement made by the Ipoh High Court judge Chin Fook Yen on Friday that youths aged 15 and above should be tried as adults. Chin had said the present definition of juveniles was outdated because young people today were not the same as when the Juvenile Courts Act 1947 came into effect. (NST 18/08/1997)

Both newspapers raised discussion of the issues relating to the use of entertainment outlets such as karaoke lounges where youths gather to socialise. The coverage addressed the perceived problems relating to these lounges and young people. Some articles made clear points about the misuse of entertainment licenses by owners of these kinds of outlets. A particular focus of the discussion was the legalisation/decriminalisation debate. Some expressed the view that the leniency of giving a licence to these outlets would lead to increased misuse whereby underage youths come to these outlets which are only concerned with profit rather than checking the age of its patrons. When this kind of situation is allowed to happen there could be a possibility of enforcing strict rules for the consumption of alcohol or drugs but there are various other associated problems that take place on the premises.

National Unity and Social Development Minister Datin Paduka Zaleha Ismail told the Dewan Rakyat yesterday that the problem only arises when they are used for immoral activities. They should abide by the conditions stipulated in operating licences which,

among others, state the operating hours and the minimum age of patrons. (NST, 17/07/1997)

According to Zaleha, the (Social) committee was formed with the objective of reviewing social and related legislation. Zaleha said several laws needed to be amended or abrogated to avoid contradictions which could cause difficulties for enforcement officers. Related laws to be re-evaluated include the Entertainment Premises Act which contradicts the Women and Girls' Protection Act on the minimum age requirement for female patrons of entertainment outlets. Under the Women and Girls' Protection Act, the court can send a girl who is under 21-years-old to an institution if it believes that she has been ill-treated, neglected or exposed to any moral danger and needs protection. Contradictions are found in some laws and some are outdated, with penalties that are no longer a deterrent like small fines. (NST, 13/07/1997)

The perceived inadequacies of the law also extended to portrayals of the justice system. News writers and some criminal justice personnel emphasised the negative impact on young people of going through the criminal justice system instead of being 'given a chance'. They drew attention to the idea that youths would be burdened with a criminal record 'for the rest of their lives'. These ideas are associated with labelling theory, a criminological perspective which had begun to develop by the middle of the 20th century. Examples of the negative impact of labelling included a report in both newspapers.

Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the Juvenile Act 1972 did not allow the media to identify juveniles arrested by police. He added that the publicity surrounding the arrests and the handcuffs could emotionally scar the students. (NST 26/02/1997)

Najib feared displaying photographs of students in handcuffs and identifying them could leave psychological and emotional scars. (NST 25/02/1997)

Judges would occasionally make mention of their concerns about leaving young offenders with criminal records, but criminal records tended to be used more often as justification for severe sentences imposed on repeat offenders. The latter is more in keeping with classical perspectives in criminology with a focus on accountability and aggravating factors.

Another explanation revolving around an inadequacy in the law which provided greater opportunity for crimes to occur, involved descriptions of violence and the use of weapons, mostly relating to sharp objects such as a knife, machete or samurai sword or blunt objects such as a hammer, wood planks or steel or iron rods. The use of sharp or blunt objects is more evident in crime than the use of firearms in Malaysia due to the fact that firearms are illegal and very difficult to obtain. Access to deadly weapons was one of the more recent explanations in newspaper coverage to explain juvenile offending behaviour, most notably knife-related deaths. Writers usually mentioned the accessibility of deadly weapons in conjunction with other causes, such as gangs, drug and alcohol, lack of supervision and situations with triggers and escalation of tension or frustration. Various news items mentioned examples of accidents or mishandling of deadly weapons by young people. The following excerpt portrayed how two young people used weapons in a desperate bid to rob 20 cents from a seven year old girl. When both the victims and offenders are children and a deadly weapon has been used, the news value of the story increases due to its traumatic and shocking nature. This is in keeping with Jewkes' criteria for newsworthiness of crime stories (2004: pp. 61-62) where any type of crime can be lifted into newsworthiness if children are associated with it, whether they be victims or offenders. In 1992, Philip Jenkins also made this point, indicating that any offences that deviated from moral consensus are made notably more newsworthy if children are involved.

The boys, both aged 13, have pleaded not guilty to voluntarily causing hurt to the seven-year-old girl with a penknife while robbing her of 20 sen. (NST 30/11/2000)

Normally the media prefers to represent victims who can be viewed as 'ideal' victims. The 'ideal victim' (Christie, 1986: p. 18) is as 'a person or category of individuals ... who are perceived as vulnerable, defenceless, innocent and worthy of sympathy and compassion. Elderly women and young children are typical examples of 'ideal victims'.

Another newspaper excerpt showed the use of a sharp object in a murder case.

The accused was charged with murdering Liew Mei Fong by stabbing her in the back with a sharp weapon, thus causing her death. (NST 08/06/2002)

In addition to portrayals of inadequate laws as criminogenic, the news report also raised questions about the sufficiency of law enforcement. By calling into question the manner in which the law is enforced, newspapers can draw attention to abuses of power by those who are vested with state authority in the

exercise of their duties. This practice again might have allowed us to draw certain parallels with a critical paradigm within criminology, where attention is paid to the role of perceived agents of social control.

Faulty system: sub-frame inadequate law enforcement (B)

The existence of the faulty system frame is seen also in the public outcry over the effectiveness of the police on issue of youth crime and justice. SUHAKAM, for example has made an inquiry over the age of young people in contact with the police. The example of the confusion is reflected in the following excerpt discussed in NST (09/09/1997).

The issue of conflicting definitions of juvenile age was highlighted recently when police and Welfare Department officers detained a 19-year- old girl for patronising a cafe in Nilai, Negri Sembilan. The girl was detained under section 8(1) of the Young Women's and Girls' Protection Act 1973 which provides that a girl under the age of 21 can be detained by the courts if it is believed that she is exposed to any moral danger and requires protection. This contradicts the Juvenile Court Act 1947 which defines juveniles as those under the age of 18. Adding to the confusion is the conflicting definition of the word "child" under section 2 (1) Child Protection Act 1991 and section 2 Adoption Act 1952. The former defines "child" as someone under the age of 18 while the latter, under the age of 21.

The sub frame of inadequate law enforcement represents questions about certain police procedures or discretion in handling juvenile cases such as when they are arrested. An example of this is the police handcuffing of school students in a school area for suspected drug offences, and the detention of young girls together with adult detainees in police lockups. This frame is also about the lack of knowledge around certain crimes or confusion over the definition of 'child', 'juvenile' and 'young person'.

When there are claims that concern a perceived inadequacy in the law, it is not a surprise to find that even the enforcement officers are confused when dealing with young people who have committed offences. Over the period of study, the coverage in newspapers portrayed this confusion within the police regarding the definition of the age of a juvenile, as with "Detention of girl, 11, in lock-up unlawful" (NST, 15/03/1997) and "Proposal to set standard legal age for juveniles" (NST, 09/09/1997).

The High Court today declared the detention of an 11 year-old girl in a police lock-up four years ago as illegal and awarded her RM10,000 in damages plus costs. Justice Datuk Faiza Tamby Chik said her detention in the same lock-up with adults at the Petaling Jaya police station contravened the Juvenile Courts Act 1947. Faiza said the detention of the girl by the police was not made under any lawful provision. The “I would like to remind police officers that when taking action in cases where children are involved, they must always be mindful of the provisions under sections 82 and 83 of the Penal Code. They (police officers) must always exercise greater restraint when carrying out their duties in cases involving children and young persons,” he said. (NST, 15/03/1997)

The issue of conflicting definitions of juvenile age was highlighted recently when police and Welfare Department officers detained a 19-year-old girl for patronising a cafe in Nilai, Negri Sembilan. The girl was detained under section 8(1) of the Young Women's and Girls' Protection Act 1973 which provides that a girl under the age of 21 can be detained by the courts if it is believed that she is exposed to any moral danger and requires protection. This contradicts the Juvenile Court Act 1947 which defines juveniles as those under the age of 18. (NST, 09/09/1997)

There are several articles which highlighted the deleterious effects of misconduct by personnel dealing with crime. Discourse with respect to harassment by police in certain places and misuse of power or lack of knowledge of related laws when dealing with suspects either in custody facilities or during the arrest can be seen in the following newspaper reports:

... Juveniles are in remand at the Sungai Buloh Prison for offences ranging from petty thefts to violations under the Penal Code and Dangerous Drugs Act reflects badly on the country. According to the Prisons Department, more than 200 young people aged between 14 and 21 years are put behind bars while waiting for their cases to be heard. But, as reported by the media, children as young as 10 years are held in the prison. Whatever the age, the fact remains that these youngsters thrown in the scrap heap of a prison are living evidence of the authorities' failure to provide basic necessities for the healthy mental and physical life of wayward children. Worse it suggests lapses in ensuring the children's rights to the due process of the law and in upholding the spirit of the juvenile delinquency laws. (NST 20/09/2000)

In other articles, there was evidence of a backlash against police when they handcuffed school students who were suspected of drug dealing. It was given wide coverage throughout the country. Below are two excerpts from responses to the police mishandling of the drug suspects:

Photographs of the pupils, some handcuffed, were carried in a segment of the print and electronic media. The New Straits Times had on Saturday quoted several lawyers as saying that the sensational coverage was completely against the spirit of the Juvenile Courts Act of 1947 which was enacted to protect minors. He said, however, that police should not have used handcuffs on the students arrested for suspected dadah involvement. "As the Prime Minister has said, the police should have handled that differently. This is not the first time they have used handcuffs unnecessarily," Nazri said. (NST 26/02/1997)

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today described as unnecessary the handcuffing of schoolchildren suspected to be involved in dadah, adding that the police should use their discretion when dealing with juveniles. Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, hoped that such action by the police would not recur as it would put the children under tremendous pressure. "They should not have handcuffed the schoolchildren. Perhaps, the police were following normal practice, but I think when it involved matters like these, the police should have used their discretion." "It could be because there was no instruction on this. However, this does not mean that action will not be taken against the students involved." "I feel action should be taken against these children (students involved in crime) but there is no need to handcuff them. Just bring them in said. (NSUNT 23/02/1997)

Through these and other examples, it became evident that in the media context not all instances where abuse of power was revealed were seen to relate to systematic causes of misconduct among social control agents. Rather, in media representations the typical approach was to focus on individual law enforcers as 'bad apples' that are seen as unrepresentative of their profession.

Faulty system: sub-frame the conflicting court decision (C)

Sub-frame C relates to court decisions on trials, sentences or rehabilitation that involves young people. These court decisions also include cases between the 'Syariah' and 'Civil' courts. An example of court

decisions on youth sentences is '*Tahanan Limpah Sultan*' where young people who are found guilty are detained in prison '*at the pleasure of the ruler*' because of their involvement in grave crime such as offences involving dangerous drugs (Section 502) or murder (Section 302). The punishment for the grave crimes under Sections 502 and 302 is mandatory death. However no death sentence is possible for young offenders under the age of 18. As a result they have to be detained as '*Tahanan Limpah Sultan*'.

Aside from the content of the law, reports also hinted that weak enforcement of the law was likely to promote criminal behaviour among youths. The terms '*bohsia/bohjan*' and '*mat/minah rempit*', were a recurrent favourite in both newspapers. Various sources ranging from individuals without affiliation to community organisations to law enforcement and criminal justice personnel frequently complained about the so-called leniency of youth justice decisions, painting a picture of youth detention as enjoyable, therefore ineffective, and even counter-productive. For instance:

The National Unity and Social Development Ministry will set up a committee to review the existing laws on social issues to ensure that law-breakers were more accountable for their actions. It is about time we reviewed these laws and study their relevance as some of them have been around for the past 50 year. For example, offenders now do not feel the pinch if they are fined RM200. (NST, 18/05/1997)

More recently a reporter quoted various claim makers who were pushing to bring back caning to school, for example in this report with the headline, "Caning pupils will yield good results" (NST 31/05/1996) arguing that:

Under intolerable circumstances, hitting the palm or the buttocks will definitely yield good results, albeit temporarily. It is this "no nonsense approach" that will curb delinquency in schools.

Another with the headline "Caning can help curb indiscipline in schools" (NST 22/02/1997), argued in the following quotation:

We can longer allow a handful of protesting parents to force the disuse of a proven method in ensuring that our young toe the line. ... We are convinced that the previous education system had not only provided knowledge but also moral values to pupils. We don't want to end up churning out brilliant but flawed personalities, Shahidan said.

Another article had a similar headline to the above: “Bring back the cane to check indiscipline in school” (NST 24/10/1995). In other cases, the law was criticised for being too harsh and equally ineffective in prohibiting unwanted behaviour. This was the case in particular with respect to the suggestion for strict enforcement of disciplinary punishment in schools regarding the disobeying of school rules. The following were excerpts on the subjects.

It is gathered that students who smoke will face compulsory caning and if they are caught a fourth time, they will be expelled under the latest anti-smoking rules of the Education Ministry. It is felt absolutely necessary that just consideration should be given to juveniles who take up smoking as there is the danger they may later take dadah and commit crimes and other unhealthy acts. (NST, 21/05/1997)

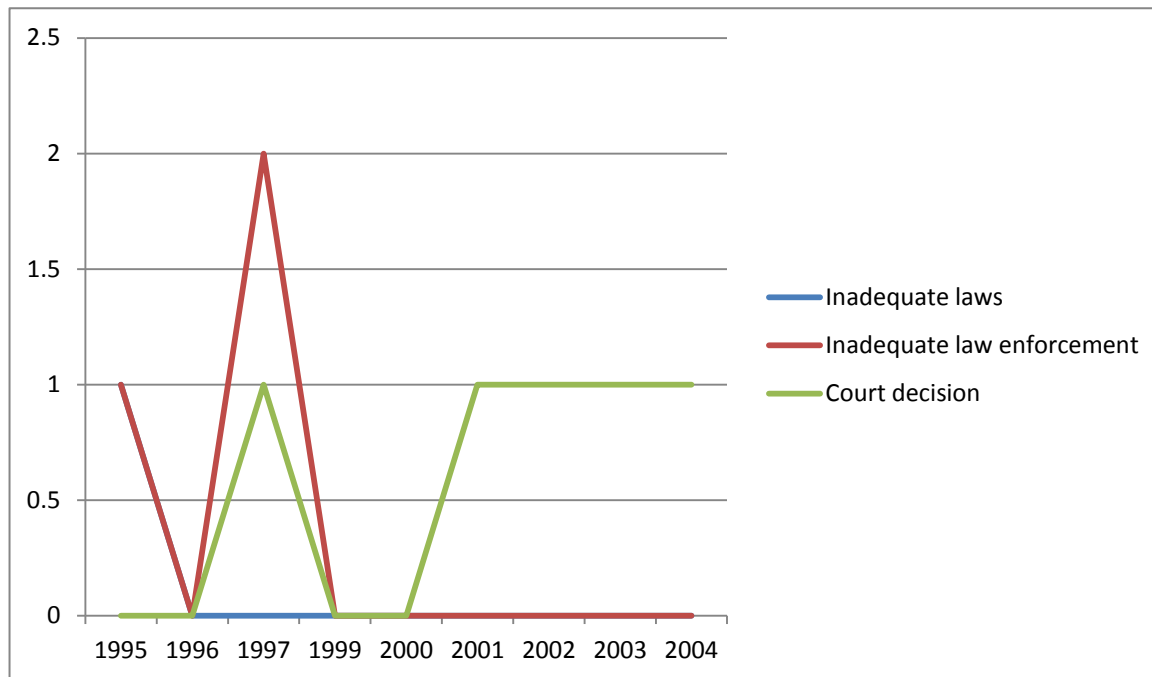
Public attitudes to youth crime – letters to the editor

One means of reporting dissatisfaction with court decisions is through the direct communication of readers via letters to the editor. Table 5b and Figure 5b show the total number of public writings (letters to the editor) relating to the sub-frames within the faulty system theme, according to year for both newspapers.

Table 5b: Total number of public writings relating to the sub-frames of the faulty system theme by year and newspaper type

	Inadequate laws A		Inadequate law enforcement B		Inadequate court systems C		TOTAL	
Year / sub-frame	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST
1995	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0
1996	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1997	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	3
1998	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1999	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2000	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
2001	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
2002	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
2003	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
2004	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total each sub-frame by each Newspaper	1	0	1	2	0	5	2	7
TOTAL Sub-frame in both NP	1		3		5		9	

Figure 5b: Total number public writing relating to the sub-frames of the faulty system theme by year and newspaper type



Over the ten year period of interest, public writing (as represented in letters to newspaper editors) concerning youth crime most often focused on perceived problems with court decisions rather than problems with laws or law enforcement. Meanwhile the highest score according to year was in 1997 and that was pertaining to the ‘inadequate law’ category. Even though the rest of the sub-frames lost coverage after 1999, the ‘inadequate court decision’ frame continued from 2001-2004. So it seems that public sentiment concerning youth crime matches media representations of youth crime, with both framing the issue most frequently as some kind of ‘fault’ within the court decision process.

In an examination of the letters to the editor it was clear that public concern related to a view that the Juvenile Court may have been unaware of the rules governing the role of court advisers and whether they had to be present during the hearing or after the juvenile had been found guilty of the offence. The confusion resulted in the postponing of the hearing. Other letters to the editor raised the issue of court sentencing and juvenile offenders. The *Child Act 2001* [Section 91(g)] provides for a child to be caned when found guilty. One writer commented that this sentence was too harsh. The other writer raised issues relating to the definition of the term ‘juvenile’. This writer questioned whether the present definition of ‘juvenile’ was still suitable for use particularly when juveniles commit heinous crimes such

as murder, robbery or rape. When grave crimes had been committed, these writers questioned: “Should we still allow the law to take into account the age of the criminal rather than the crimes committed?”

A great many of the concerns raised by the public revolve around an understanding of law and law enforcement. Inadequate laws and law enforcement can cause, promote or exacerbate youthful involvement in crime. Thus the law and the functioning of the criminal justice system is another concern for the public. The notion of deterrence underlies many of the public calls to toughen juvenile law. For example, the idea of setting the age of criminal responsibility at ten years has been debated ever since the age of children involved in crime started decreasing. It is this type of critique that the drafters of the Child Act 2001 tried in part to address:

In presenting her recommendations, Mimi Kamariah suggested that the age of criminal responsibility be reduced to seven years, compared to the present 10. “Prior to the amendments to Sections 82 and 83 of the Penal Code, seven was deemed to be appropriate for the age of criminal responsibility.” However, she added, after January 1976, it was raised to 10 with no explanation. (NST 18/11/1997)

Some of the existing social laws are more than 50 years old and are no longer practical, Zaleha said. (NST, 09/09/1997)

A statement was made by the Ipoh High Court judge Chin Fook Yen on Friday that youths aged 15 and above should be tried as adults. Chin had said the present definition of juveniles was outdated because young people today were not the same as when the Juvenile Courts Act 1947 came into effect. (NST 18/08/1997)

Apart from the perceived leniency of the law governing young offenders, the age limit placed on the definition of who qualifies as a young offender has also been subjected to criticism for several years. This criticism was more apparent prior to the introduction of the Child Act 2001. This condemnation of the failure to criminalise young people under 18 year olds came not only from those within the criminal justice system but also from the public, due in part to the increase in the crime rate among young people below the age of 18 years. The following excerpts provide examples.

I wish he could be tried according to Shariah Law, so that he can be charged with murder and can be sentenced to death, the same way that he has taken the life of the poor young girl. (BH, 29/09/1999)

Many young offenders involved in grave crimes are safe simply because they are underage. When they murder someone they are still untouchable by the law and are given TLC instead of being hanged to death. (NST, 18/08/2001)

The apparent concerns raised in the above examples centred on the idea that underage young people were able to get away with serious crimes. The argument made by the public on this matter was that justice does not prevail, or is not fair to victims of crime.

In the above discussion, various points of view suggest that the current age limit was poorly enforced, so changing the law would not have the intended effect. Young people did not receive sufficient information on their responsibilities with respect to alcohol or drug consumption; they also lacked information on what constituted rape offences and why they should be cautioned not to be involved in any type of sexual relations. Nor were there clear guidelines on the legal age limit for the use of entertainment outlets. It was particularly difficult for young people to understand social and legal rules that governed their life when there were few adults or even parents who took the initiative to explain the matters to them. To some extent young people were left to learn by making their own mistakes.

The public writings raised issues related to the Criminal Procedure Code and the Juvenile Court Act which makes no statement on the use of handcuffs on juvenile or adult suspects. The action of the police to handcuff suspects, particularly juveniles, then triggered responses from the public. Under the sub-frame B, the issues raised by the writers were related to the procedures taken by police when dealing with juvenile suspects. These three writings were related to the police action to handcuff the juvenile suspects. The negative judgment became amplified when the images of school students being handcuffed were published on TV and in the newspapers.

Findings from the survey data from the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research ⁴³ showed that public perception of the police's ability to curb crime was moderate (11% saw the police as highly effective, 57% answered average, 29% answered low while 3% answered 'don't know'). Those who perceived that the police was not in control of the crime situation outnumbered those who felt they were fully on top of

⁴³ The information is based on data published by the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research on August 2004

the situation by nearly 3:1. More than half of the respondents who participated in this survey were satisfied with the efforts of the government in addressing the issue of crime and social problems in the country' (5% answered 'very satisfied' and 55% answered 'somewhat satisfied') while about 36% were unsatisfied (29% 'somewhat satisfied' and 7% 'very unsatisfied').

Government response

Even though from the data the 'faulty system' frame covers only some portions (252 sub-frames) of media representations of youth crime in Malaysia, the discussion of the shortcomings and weaknesses of law, courts and police framed in the media would seem to influence a response from the Malaysian government to make appropriate changes in respect to its juvenile crime legislation and policy that feature both rehabilitative and punitive components. For example the government under its Department of Social Welfare has implemented the Community Service Order for young people who are involved in minor offences so that they are sent to the approved rehabilitation institutions rather than sentenced. The rehabilitation institutions are approved centres or schools established by the government with the goal of reforming, guiding, educating and protecting child offenders from the danger of delinquent activities and crime.

Since there are issues related to the faulty system sub-frame which are linked to the treatment of young offenders mentioned in the discussion above, the most obvious response would be the revision of juvenile crime legislation itself, specifically the amendment and revision of laws related to the children's criminal act.

Between 1995 and 2000, the legislative law that governed juvenile crime and justice in Malaysia was still based on the three acts, namely the Juvenile Court Act 1947, the Young Women and Girls Act 1973 and the Child Protection Act 1991. Following increased youth crime since the early 1990s, the government saw the need to revise these three acts so that it could cater to the changes that had taken place in relation to youth crime and the life of young people in Malaysia. In July 1997, the Social Law Committee was set up to look at this matter. The aim of the review was to develop the existing laws to ensure that law-breakers were made more accountable for their actions and enable the Government to tackle the problem of youth crime more effectively. As stated before, the result from the review of these three acts was the

Child Act 2001. This Act was also a response to Malaysia's commitment and compliance to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Child Act 2001

This Act seeks to regulate not only the children involved in conflict with the law but also to implement protective actions against children in the following categories:

- Children who are in need of protection and care;
- Children who are in need of protection and rehabilitation;
- Children who are beyond parental and custodian control; and
- Children who are abducted

The main discrepancy in Malaysian juvenile law is related to the initial age of juvenile criminal responsibility. It is an issue with juveniles involved in serious or grave crimes whereby they are not allowed to be punished with imprisonment or heavier punishment because of their age as they are protected under the law. In Malaysia for the purpose of criminal liability, there are three categories applied to children involved: complete immunity when a child is below 10⁴⁴; there is partial immunity when the child is between ten and twelve years old⁴⁵; and children above 12 years old⁴⁶ are treated as adults for the purposes of criminal liability but they might not be subjected to equal mode of punishment.

Although children can be treated the same as adults, they cannot be sentenced as adults. For example, a child who is accused and then punished with a mandatory death sentence cannot be put to death. Instead, the child will be detained 'at the pleasure of the Ruler', depending on which state the crime was committed in⁴⁷. Such was the case in *Koh Wah v. PP*⁴⁸ where despite having been convicted with the murder of his tutor's 9 year old daughter, the boy, aged 11 at the time of the crime, was ordered to be detained at the Kajang Prison at the pleasure of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong as the crime took place in Wangsa Maju, Wilayah Persekutuan.⁴⁹ A similar decision was meted out upon the eight students of a

⁴⁴ Refer to Section 82, Penal Code

⁴⁵ Refer to Section 83, Penal Code

⁴⁶ Refer Child Act 2001, particularly Part X and XIII on criminal procedure for children

⁴⁷ Refer to Section 97, Child Act 2001

⁴⁸ Refer to (2004) 5 MJL 193.

⁴⁹ Although it was disputed that sending the boy to prison was not the best available option, the Judge was bound by the terms, "detained in prison" in Section 97, Child Act 2001 as opposed to just "detained" by the previously

religious school in Seremban, all aged 17 years old at the time of their crime, upon their conviction of murder of fellow student, Muhammad Farid.⁵⁰ An exception however, took place in *Lim Hang Seoh v PP*⁵¹ where a 14 year old boy was sentenced to death by the High Court for possession of firearms, an offence under section 57, Internal Security Act 1960 which is also a security offence by virtue of Regulation 2, Essential (Security Cases) regulation 1975 (ESCAR). Regulation 3(3) expressly excluded the Juvenile Court Act of 1947 to be applied to juveniles charged with security offences. Due to the explicit wordings of Regulation 3, his appeal to the Federal Court subsequently failed. Fortunately on his final appeal to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong his death sentence was commuted to detention at the Henry Gurney School until the age of 21. It would be interesting to see how a similar case would fare with the current Child Act 2001, which although it provides for an alternative to a death sentence with that of an indeterminate period of detention, it does not expressly excludes the application of Regulation 3(3) of ESCAR. To set the appropriate minimum age of criminal responsibility is crucial. Thus only those young people who are old enough to understand the significance of their behaviour can be brought before a juvenile court.

According to international standards (United Nation CRC), deprivation of liberty means placement in any kind of establishment – penal, correctional, educational or protective – from which a child cannot leave at will. It affects not only children who have been sentenced after being convicted but also children in need of protection. In Malaysia, it is used in pre-trial detention (including in police lock-ups or children detained under remand), which may last many months (SUHAKAM, 2000). It is used as a welfare or re-educational measure on the decision of an administrative body without a judicial decision or review.

According to the SUHAKAM report (2000), of all phases of the juvenile justice process, it is on arrest and immediately thereafter while in police custody that an accused juvenile is most likely to become the victim of abuse and other forms of harsh treatment. It is also at this stage that the juvenile is likely to be denied the presence of parents/guardians, social worker, or legal representative who might be in a position to provide protection against such acts. Even though there is no official report in Malaysia about any incidents of police torture or cruelty during custody of young juveniles, there exist some concerns in respect of treatment of children during these stages.⁵² For instance, there is one case reported in the media involving the detention by police of an 11 years old girl in lock-up with adult offenders (NST:

repealed Juvenile Court Act 1947. The boy was however isolated from the older inmates and was given regular education to prepare him for his impending government examination (PMR) the following year.

⁵⁰ This case was highly-publicised by the media in late December 2003.

⁵¹ Refer to (1978) 1 MJL 68.

⁵² There have been allegations made in the mainstream newspapers but until now there have not been any confirmations of their authenticity.

15/03/1997). The High Court declared the detention of an 11 year-old girl in a police lock-up four years ago as illegal and awarded her RM10,000 in damages plus costs. The detention of the girl in the same lock-up with adults at the Petaling Jaya Police Station contravened the Juvenile Courts Act 1947. In fact the detention of the girl by the police was not made under any lawful provision. Another case was on 17 February 1997, where police arrested and handcuffed 40 students in a school drug raid. In his elaboration of the case, the judge reminded “police officers that when taking action in cases where children are involved, they must always be mindful of the provisions under sections 82 and 83 of the Penal Code. They (police officers) must always exercise greater restraint when carrying out their duties in cases involving children and young persons.” Even though the media, police and politicians act as ‘mythmakers’ when it comes to crime and justice (Kappeler et al., 1993), the opinions of the Malaysian police and government personnel regarding crime and how to solve it are highly viewed; in fact it is one of government’s responsibilities (through policing) to guarantee public safety. This finding is consistent with Noakes and Wilkins (2002) who argued that the media tend to rely upon the government and government agencies for information particularly when it adds prestige to stories and easy access to available data.

The law for purposes of regulating the procedures within these stages is laid down in the Child Act 2001 albeit in absence of certain details. A glaring absence lies within the first 24 hours upon a child being apprehended by the police. Apart from one provision, Section 87 that states that upon arrest, the police officer is duty bound to inform first, the parents or guardian and secondly, the probation officer of the arrest of such child, the Act is silent on other specific procedures in respect to mode of arrest and investigation in the first 24 hours. In practice, due to practical difficulties in locating the probation officer, only the parents or guardian would be informed by the police. Thus the protective element which section 87 seeks to secure is not achieved. Though the police have some guidelines by way of Administrative Orders in view of respecting the position of children,⁵³ these orders are merely administrative in effect and may not be observed strictly. Specific statutory provisions outlining special procedures applicable to children ought to be clearly spelt out in the Child Act 2001 itself. This would prevent the court from having to justify the police’s actions when they resort to the procedures in the general Criminal Procedure Code. Though not perfect, the Child Act 2001 is a very significant turning point in Malaysian juvenile justice as it provides standardised and improved measures to deal with young offenders.

⁵³ For example in 17 February 1997, police has arrested 40 students in school drug raid.

Children beyond control

The words coined by media that refer to young people who misbehave such as *bohsia/bohjan* or '*mat rempit*' have gained attention in the revision of juvenile law in Malaysia. Unlike previous categories mentioned earlier, there is no definition accorded in the Act, or the previous repealed Acts for this particular category of crime. Section 46(1) however provides that in the event any parent or guardian is unable to exercise proper control over the child then application may be made to the Court for Children for the State to assume control over the child. Such application would entail either committing the child to a custodial institution (an approved school, place of refuge, probation hostel or centre) or to place the child under the supervision of a probation officer. Experience from the implementation of similar provisions of previously repealed Acts indicate that being 'beyond control' can be manifested by acts such as running away from home, involvement with drugs and/or being habitually disobedient and incorrigible. 'Misbehaviours' falling within the category of beyond control are those of *bohsia/bohjan*, drifters (who wander the street at night, use drugs or alcohol, and may also gamble or become involved in affrays with other groups), and those who engage in illegal motorbike racing, locally known as '*Mat Rempit*'. Anecdotal evidence indicates that this form of 'beyond control' behaviour, committed usually by teenagers, is becoming a common ground for parents/guardians seeking a court order for alternative care for their children. The question is whether it is right for parents or guardians to send these children to custodial institutions and whether this course of action will cause more harm than good in the lives of their children. It could simply mean that another faulty system is created providing an easy way out for adults with unmanageable children. Perhaps better alternatives for rehabilitation could be provided to help these children regain meaningful lives.

In cases that fall under the category of the 'beyond control child', it is the parents or guardian who seek the court order against the child, whereupon the Court considers the application, inquiring into the circumstances of the child's case including probation reports if needed. Similarly, as in the other categories discussed above there is no provision for separate representation of the child before the Court. The child's view may be heard and duly considered by the Court but again, this does not provide a separate representation by an independent advocate promoting the child's best interests.

Representation of children in criminal proceedings is similar to that of adults, namely, it is highly dependent on the financial competency of the parent/guardian in providing such service. Where the child comes from a higher income bracket family, then the likelihood of representation is greater. In reality, as juvenile delinquency is more frequent in lower income families (Dato' Meme Zainal Rashid, 2008)

chances of being legally represented are slim. However, the Government's Legal Aid Bureau may be sought by those under 21 but they would only qualify for legal aid if their guardians or nearest kin have an annual income of less than RM25, 000. People in this category need to pay a minimal registration fee of only RM2. But again, this service is limited to minor criminal offences such as theft, dishonestly obtaining stolen property or as in one relatively recent high-profile case of a child dodging the call for National Service who was punished with imprisonment as he was too poor to pay the fine. In addition to this Government funded service, the Bar Council does offer free legal aid but application is limited due to scarcity in manpower.

CONCLUSION

The faulty system frame perceives crime as a result of the inadequacies of the criminal justice system. The explanations of juvenile crime here are linked to liberal judges, overcrowded rehabilitative institutions, and legal technicalities which undermine the ability of the criminal justice system to deliver swift, consistent penalties. The major response of the government, made during the period of interest to this study, was the revision of the earlier three acts relating to children namely the Juvenile Court Act 1947, the Young Women and Girls Act 1973 and the Child Protection Act 1991. The introduction and enforcement of the Child Act 2001 aims to improve the law and juvenile justice system and above all the rights of young people in Malaysia.

In sum the media reports portrayed inadequacies of the law and its enforcement as potential explanations for youthful misconduct, though they rarely adopted a position that would suggest systemic problems. Rather the focus was on individual cases, and bad decisions, that is, the 'bad apple' idea. The faulty system frame treats crime as a consequence of the failures of the criminal justice system: crime is related to legal technicalities, liberal judges, and permissive laws. One response to this frame, in order to lower the crime rate, might be the imposition of more certain and more severe punishments meaning the incapacitation of offenders for longer periods of time.

There is evidence that the dominance of this way of framing crime-related issues has much to do with the media's tendency to define government and law enforcement officials as "authoritative" and "objective" sources. One analysis of news media representations of the drug issue, for example, found that stories featuring state officials as news sources were far more likely to depict the drug problem in ways that

imply the need to get tough on drugs and drugs users, and that the predominance of these sources accounts for the overwhelming depiction of drug use as a law-and-order issue during 1995-2004.

Even though the focus was on 'faulty systems' the tendency in the media coverage in this study was to ascribe blame to individuals and specific circumstances rather than examining the broader socio-political context. The explanations were also in keeping with the tendency of newspapers to simplify and de-contextualise crime news by narrowly focusing on individuals and incidents, rather than on societal forces and context. In many, if not most instances, the explanations provided in the coverage stemmed from the language choices of news writers themselves and from any sources they chose to quote in their reports. Writers frequently merely inferred explanations without elaborating their discussion. Authoritative sources within the criminal justice system, particularly police and judges, provided some of the explanations found in the coverage. Writers quoted professionals or experts frequently and they tended to portray such sources as highly credible and quoted them extensively when they used them. Individuals without affiliation also had their opinions about the causes of crime expressed in the newspapers, particularly through the avenue of letters to the editors. It was rare for offenders to be given a voice in order to explain their own wrong doing, although this practice did occur at times.

According to the public (as expressed in their letters to the editor of newspapers), the Malaysian juvenile justice system is riddled with loopholes and technicalities that render punishment neither swift nor certain. For example in some public writings, the newly implemented Malaysian Child Act 2001 made it almost impossible to convict a child offender of any grave crime (i.e. murder, kidnap, rape). The public writings canvassed in this study suggest that to take control of the weaknesses and inadequacies of law, courts and policing in order to enhance public safety there must be an increase in the swiftness, certainty and severity of punishment. The public writings also suggested that loopholes and technicalities in the present system that delay the apprehension and imprisonment of offenders must be eliminated. In the public's view, government funding for police, courts and prisons must be made available. The next chapter will discuss the social defect/social breakdown frame, the blocked opportunity frame, the media violence frame and the inter-group conflict frame.

CHAPTER 6: FRAMING YOUTH CRIME: THE PATHOLOGICAL SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

The previous chapter argued that the faulty system frame has been consistently used by the Malaysian media in understanding youth crime. This chapter discusses the construction of youth crime in Malaysia based on four other frames: the social defect/social breakdown frame, the blocked opportunity frame, the media violence frame and the inter-group conflict frame. These frames are consistently used by the media in their representations of youth crime building a narrative of a pathological society and environment. Thus the findings from this thesis suggest that Sasson's frames are highly relevant to the Malaysian context. Each of these frames will be discussed in detail below.

THE SOCIAL DEFECT / SOCIAL BREAKDOWN FRAME

The print media tendency to focus on framing youth crime with reference to a 'faulty system' is one explanatory component of the construction of crime. However, by itself it does not account for many 'versions' of youth crime. Claims makers also use other narratives when discussing youth crime and deviance. It is the framing of those possibilities which reveals even further the narrow scope of the explanations found in the news coverage. News reports represented 'pathological' social and environmental factors mostly in terms of how they can negatively influence individuals to engage in crime. This frame envisions crime as the product of family and community breakdown, high divorce rates, urban boredom, and the absence of discipline and responsibility of work. This frame concerns perceptions about disintegrated family and communities where there are both parents working full time. As women have entered the workforce full time there have been changes to the traditional structure of the family with one implication being that children are left more often with other family members such as grandparents or aunts or are sent to organised child care or in some cases left alone at home unsupervised.

Where both parents are working full time, there is less supervised quality time spent with children. Studies in Malaysia (Supiah: 1984; Hadi: 1990, 2004; Taha et al.: 2004) have indicated that a prolonged absence of parental supervision can put young children at more risk of experimental behaviour that violates the norms and values of the society.

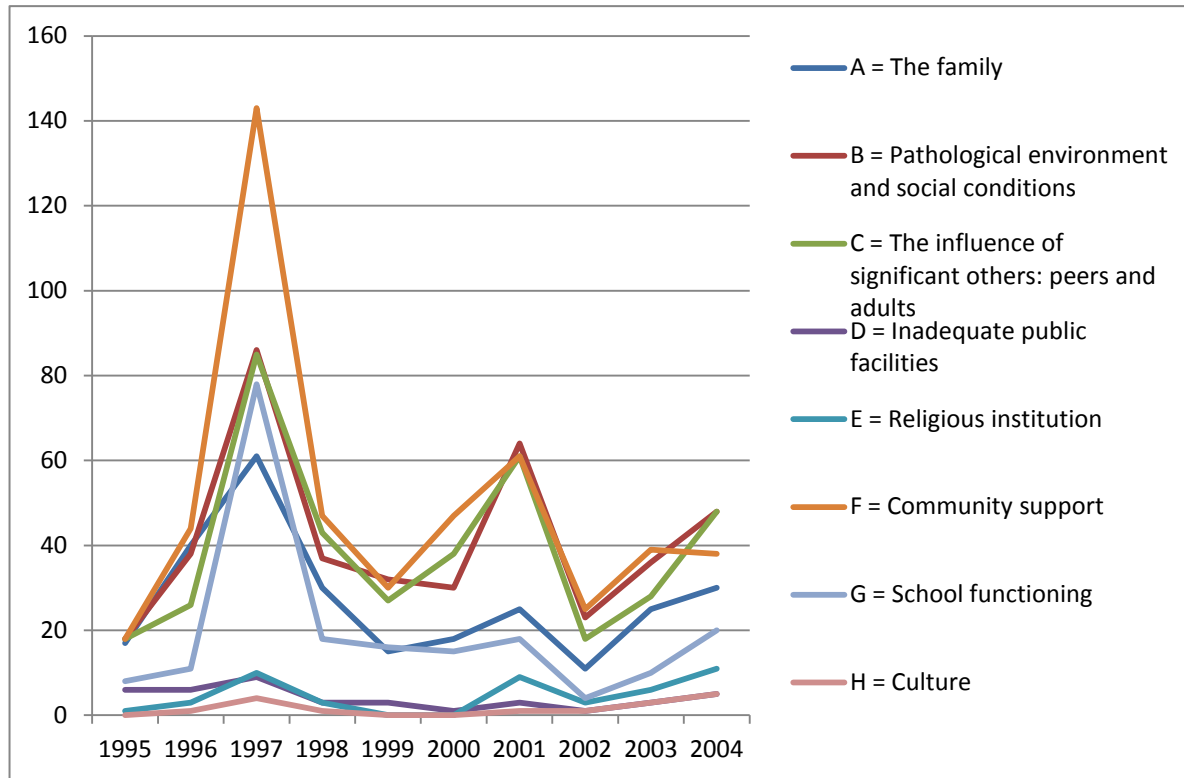
This chapter concentrates on the frame of a pathological society. Within this, eight sub-frames were identified. These were: A = the family (poor parental control; materialism; lacking family bond, abusive and negligent); B = pathological environment and social conditions (rapid industrialisation and development); C = the negative influence of significant others: peers and adults; D = inadequate public facilities (including space); E = the weakening of the role of religious institutions (religious and social values); F = the lack of community support (including social responsibility); G = the weakening of school functioning (including coping with school pressure and the threat of gangs and school discipline); and H = the weakening of the role of cultural practices.

From Table 6a and Figure 6a below, it can be seen that, within the frame of a pathological society, the most common way claims makers frame youth crime relates to perceptions around a lack of community support. This is followed by frames relating to the pathological environment and social conditions, the influence of significant others, the family and the school function. It is interesting to note that religious institutions and culture score less than 50 scores. The presence of this kind of frame suggests that religion, social values and culture are still important components of growing up and socialisation. However the low score on these sub-frames may relate to the potential sensitivity of claims makers on issues related to religious belief, social values and culture of each ethnic group in Malaysia. The overall scores for this frame is 1879 with BH contributing 920 scores and NST adding 959 scores. Another explanation is that the media chose not to cover this due to a perception of a lower newsworthiness factor.

Table 6a: Total news articles relating to a pathological society by sub-frame and year

Year / sub-frame	A		B		C		D		E		F		G		H		TOTAL	
	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST
1995	8	9	5	13	7	11	3	3	0	1	8	10	2	6	0	0	33	53
1996	18	22	12	26	13	23	2	4	0	3	21	23	2	9	0	1	68	111
1997	22	39	36	50	32	53	0	9	0	10	65	78	36	42	0	4	191	285
1998	12	18	15	22	19	24	3	0	0	3	21	26	10	8	0	1	80	102
1999	8	7	17	15	18	9	2	1	0	0	19	11	8	8	0	0	72	51
2000	8	10	14	16	25	13	1	0	0	0	30	17	11	4	0	0	89	60
2001	17	8	39	25	38	23	2	1	5	4	37	24	9	9	0	1	147	95
2002	7	4	10	13	8	10	1	0	2	1	14	11	2	2	0	1	44	42
2003	14	11	16	20	12	16	2	1	4	2	15	24	2	8	2	1	67	83
2004	19	11	28	20	31	17	2	3	10	1	21	17	12	8	4	1	129	77
Total each sub-frame by each NP	135	138	192	220	203	199	18	22	21	25	251	241	94	104	6	10	920	959
TOTAL Sub-frame in both NP	273		412		402		40		46		492		198		16		1879	

Figure 6a: Total news articles relating to a pathological society by sub-frame and year

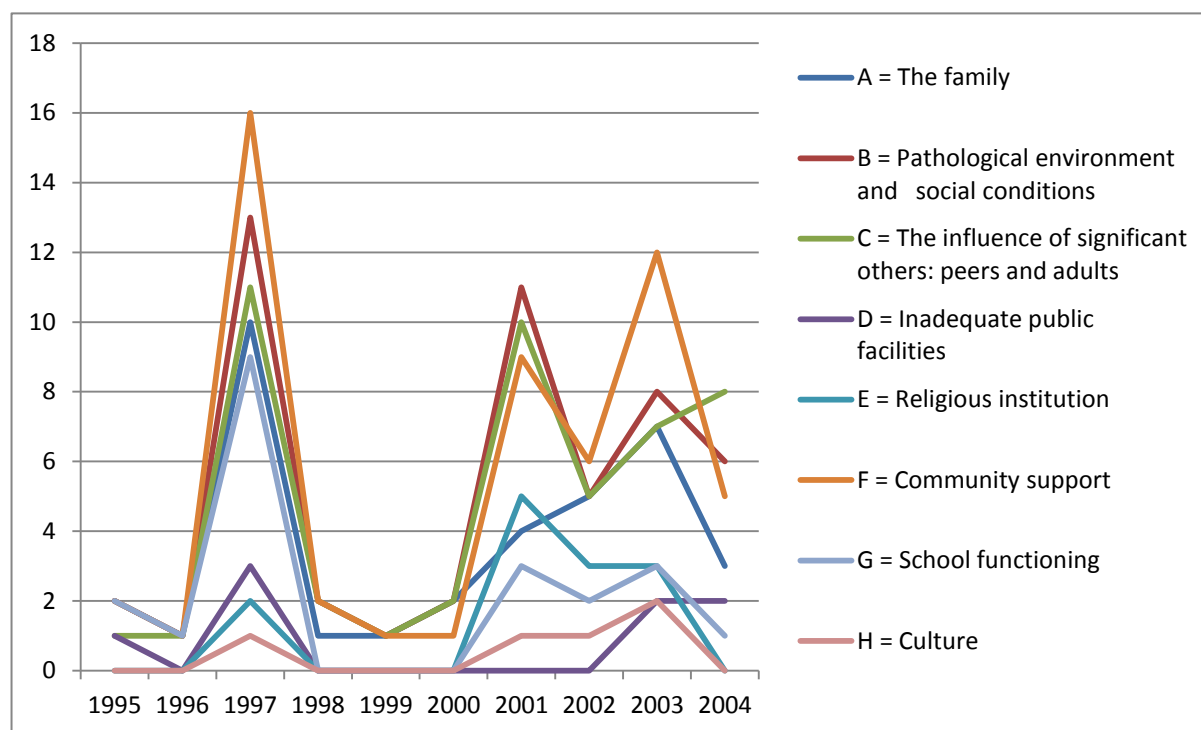


Data from public writings (Table 6b and Figure 6b below) also share the same pattern as the overall newspapers findings above. The five highest scores are F=55, B=51, C=48, A=36, and G=21. The other three frames scores under 20 are: E=13, D=8 and H=5. Similar to the overall sub-frames data of the above, the public writings also focus less on religious institutions and culture thus having a score of less than 20. From both of the patterns of findings, it can be assumed that the low presence of these sub-frames may indicate that reasons for youth's wrongdoings and criminal activities are hardly associated with religious beliefs, social values or the culture of each ethnic group in Malaysia.

Table 6b: Total public writings relating to a pathological society by sub-frame and year

	A		B		C		D		E		F		G		H		TOTAL	
Year / sub-frame	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST
1995	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	2	8
1996	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	5
1997	2	8	3	10	3	8	0	3	0	2	3	13	1	8	0	1	12	53
1998	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	7	0
1999	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	0
2000	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	3
2001	2	2	6	5	5	5	0	0	3	2	4	5	1	2	0	1	21	22
2002	2	3	2	3	2	3	0	0	2	1	3	3	1	1	0	1	12	15
2003	4	3	3	5	3	4	1	1	2	1	5	7	1	2	2	0	21	23
2004	2	1	4	2	6	2	1	1	0	0	3	2	1	0	0	0	17	8
Total each sub-frame by each NP	16	20	23	28	23	25	2	6	7	6	22	33	5	16	2	3	100	137
Total Sub-frame in both NP	36		51		48		8		13		55		21		5		237	

Figure 6b: Total public writings relating to a pathological society by sub-frame and year



The above data suggests that a common media representation of youth crime relates to a lack of support and social responsibility in the community particularly in those communities in the major cities where there can be a tendency of young people to be involved in wrongdoings and criminal activities. The lack and even the loss of a sense of collectivism in society specifically in urban industrial society was a topic frequently raised in the news articles. The public concerns may represent panic over this loss, for example in a situation where neighbours hardly know one another and most prefer to live their own life than participate in communal activity. The representation relates to regret raised over the decline in and absence of collective living where each member in society used to have a sense of responsibility to others particularly in regard to the wellbeing of young children and adolescents. The cultural and social practices of mutual support began to decline along with rapid industrialisation and development where individuals in society became more individualistic and materialistic as opposed to collective and supportive of each other. In this study there are many mentions of breakdowns in the functioning of family connected with poor parental control, lack of family bonding, and abuse and neglect in the family.

It seems that the effect of changes in Malaysian society has prompted questioning over the social functions of school, religious institutions, the family and even the government in moulding the life of young people and providing security for its members in the community.

Some examples of the newspaper headlines using the social defect frame in the construction of youth crime are the following:-

Ibu bapa lalai punca kes juvana (Neglectful parents are reason for juvenile cases), BH-WAN: 10/10/1995

Gadis dilatih jadi pelacur (Girls trained to be prostitutes), BH: 30/12/1996

Ibu bapa punca masalah sosial remaja (Parents stir social problems among adolescents), BH: 29/07/1996

Usah salah kerajaan jika keluarga pincang (Don't blame government for family dysfunction), BH: 25/05/1996

Penyakit masyarakat membangun (Disease of a developed society), BH: 19/07/1996

Juvana bunuh budak perempuan mangsa keluarga kucar-kacir (Juvenile who killed young girl is victim of troublesome family), BH: 22/06/2001

Making parents responsible for actions of their children, NST: 25/02/1997

Juvenile crime cases: Making parents liable, NST: 04/12/1998

Parents largely to blame for ills, NST: 27/07/2001

Gangs seek recruits from two KL schools, NST: 21/12/2004

Have more fields for youths to play on, NST: 18/03/1997

Breakdown of the family unit, NST: 01/10/1996

Relocate some schools in cities to suitable areas, NST: 12/10/1996

Revise Juvenile Act to penalise parents too, NST: 04/04/1997

Lack of parental care, pursuit of wealth among the main causes, NST: 28/02/1997

A caring society no more, NST: 20/09/2000

Focus on moral development now, NST: 26/05/2004

In addition to portrayals of family, reporters looked for explanations about delinquency in other areas such as young people's environments with a focus on community, social conditions, media, peers and adults. Examples listed in newspapers were crimes such as illegal motor racing, moral indecency (pre-marital sex, unwed pregnancy, prostitution, *Bohsia/Bohjan*), drug abuse/addiction and running away from home. Young people who committed these types of crimes were explained as having poor judgement and inexperience because of bad influences. Newspapers often relate these types of juvenile crimes to the deficiency of family, religious, community and school institutions in their roles in moulding young people to be better citizens.

Among the proposals discussed in the media to overcome these problems were punishments for parents; setting curfew time for young people; and sending young people of 18 years of age to attend mandatory nation building courses or training (i.e. National Social Service - RM500 million a year). There was also a push in 1997 by Malaysian police departments to empower disciplinary teachers with auxiliary police power to deal with disciplinary cases in schools. Below are the few examples:-

The family and juvenile laws will be amended to make parents punishable for offences committed by their young children (NST 25/02/1997)

The appointments of police officers as foster parents in schools have helped diffuse many problems.

There is a move to empowering disciplinary teachers with auxiliary police powers to curb social problems among school students. These teachers will be student-friendly. Although they are empowered to make citizen's arrests, a great part of their role will be to counsel students. (NST 25/02/1997)

Police hope to implement next month the proposal to make parents responsible for their children's actions by making them post bonds. He added this move would compel parents to be more responsible for the actions of their children. "Parents should not blame the presence of entertainment outlets and video arcade centres as the cause of social ills, but blame themselves for not exercising control over their children's movements," said Syed Abdul Rahman (NST 04/12/1998)

The family

The spectrum of causes revolving around the family is the most developed explanation in the entire sample. Despite the wide array of different considerations available, family seems to be one area that is inevitably considered. Even when other causes were perhaps more obvious, speculation on whether the family situation had somehow contributed to the young person's behaviour was often present as well.

One distinction clearly drawn in the articles examined here was that between good and bad families, as though there were no shades of grey between the two polar opposites. The first representation considered here was that of the so-called good family. Explaining this concept might allow for a better subsequent comparison with the construction of the so-called 'bad' family. In the coverage, 'good families' are composed of 'respected citizens, 'well known residents', people in military service, people in esteemed professions, and stereotypical nuclear families. 'Good families' typically conform to the traditional patriarchal familial ideology (Eichler, 1997) and parents within those families are representatives of hegemonic masculinity and femininity.

The image of a good family is fairly clear and fits well with the prevalent stereotypes of gender and family. A 'bad' family acquires meaning only through implicit or explicit comparison with a 'good family'. Families who fail to teach proper values, who fail to set a proper example and provide more guidance for their children, who fail to adequately supervise and discipline their children, and who fail to provide an acceptable home environment (due to poverty, alcoholism, marital breakdown or other reasons) are strongly criticised. These indicators of 'pathology' within the family are commonly found in

theoretical formulations within the positivist perspective. Nevertheless, these indicators are incorporated into news coverage as common sense (with moralistic undertones). Reporters will generally make seemingly neutral comments about families which leave room for interpretation as to the (un)fitness of the parents. But in other cases, such as reports containing direct quotes by judges or attorneys and letters to the editors, the comments about 'bad' families can be overtly condemnatory. Blaming parents was also a popular explanation in the media found by Klein and Chancer (2000) and McManus and Dorfman (2002).

So-called broken homes, where parents are separated or divorced, were frequently targeted. For example in coverage of one rehabilitation school for boys, the journalist highlighted the statement made by the Welfare Department Rehabilitation Division Assistant director that said:

The saddest cases are children who turn to crime due to poverty, parents who are drug addicts or due to sexual abuse. The emotional stress leads the children to exhibit behavioural problems. ... This leads to truancy, staying out late, running away from home, and getting out of control. (NST-LTIMES 25/07/2000)

In another article it was claimed that "the breakdown of the family unit is one of the factors contributing to the rise in social ills among youths" (NST-LTIMES 05/06/1997). Yet another stated: "another contributing factor was poor parenting, which would cause children to resent their parents and lead them into delinquency" (NSUNT 22/10/1995). The journalist did not contextualise the information, however, in terms of the overall proportion such families represent in society. The discussion of the failings of the family brings us back to the notion of responsibility. The idea that individuals are responsible and accountable for their behaviour is a fundamental tenet of the classical school. The critiques brought by the neo-classical school are particularly relevant here in terms of seeing the age of youth as a mitigating factor. Given that youth have not been considered fully criminally responsible for their acts, blame may be (justifiably or not) placed elsewhere. Furthermore, parents were often a favoured scapegoat, particularly when they are seen as less than adequate in fulfilling their parental duties. Parents were in fact liable to prosecution under the Child Act 2001 for contributing to delinquency.

The media's attribution of blame toward families for the juvenile delinquency of their own children as well as delinquency in general was often headline-generating news as seen in the following headlines:

Ibu bapa lalai punca kes juvana (Neglectful parents cause juvenile cases), (BH-WAN 10/10/1995)

Gadis dilatih jadi pelacur (Girls trained to be prostitute), (BH 30/12/1996)

Ibu bapa punca masalah sosial remaja (Parents cause social problems among adolescents) (BH 29/07/1996)

Usah salah kerajaan jika keluarga pincang (Don't blame government for family dysfunction), (BH 25/05/1996)

Making parents responsible for actions of their children (NST 25/02/1997)

Juvenile crime cases: Making parents liable (NST 04/12/1998)

Reporters vilified 'irresponsible' families and inept parents in much the same way as the broken homes discussed above with respect to social pathology. If the law diminished a youth's responsibility, reporters still individualised the blame in that they attributed it to the individual family unit.

Perceptions of permissiveness in parenting is one of the more recent favourites in terms of framing bad parenting, emerging in the second half of the twentieth century. Distant, preoccupied parents who do not pay enough attention to their children represent another more contemporary image of parenting that leads to delinquency. This representation replaced the earlier focus on non-existent or inadequate supervision. In some of the data in this thesis, parents 'disrespect for the law' was seen as one cause of juvenile delinquency, as was poor parenting in general, although reporters did not clearly define what constituted bad parenting, as can be seen in the excerpts below:

Assistant Welfare and Counselling Officer of STB Cheras Raymund Jagan, when met at his office recently, told Bernama that the counsellors spend about 45 minutes daily with the trainees and on most occasions they would be unresponsive. He said, 34 of the 111 STB Cheras inmates were ordered to the centre for motorbike theft offences, three for sexual offences and the rest for petty crimes. All of them were dropouts before they reached 15 years of age, six per cent were illiterate, while 80 per cent had no knowledge on the subject of sex. And all of them came from broken families. (NST 18/08/2001)

Counsel Mohd Azhar Yeop Ismail told the judge the girl committed the offence because she needed money to buy food and for her school pocket money. He said she was involved in such crime because of lack of care and attention from her mother since her father's death early last year. (NST 28/03/2000)

In the above excerpts we see the nature versus nurture debate playing out in the explanations that newspapers favour in accounting for youth crime. If there is nothing inherently wrong with the law, courts and policing, the family must be to blame somehow. The newspapers mentioned other environmental influences though to a lesser extent than that of the family.

Pathological environment and social conditions

News accounts occasionally framed the failings of the family within a wider perspective that included the role of other elements in a young person's environment such as the weakening roles of the school, the community and the religious institution.

Schools, shopping malls, the media, money and affluence, urbanisation, have had a fair share of the blame for the increasing alienation and decadence of our youth. This blame-mongering has been followed by a clamour to come down even harder on the hangouts of youthful vice - such as video parlours and discos - and to put restrictions on young people's freedom. (NST, 24/02/1997 - Headline: Taking the blame)

Other accounts also mentioned inadequate social services, inadequate foster care, slum housing and housing projects as having a strong bearing on young people's involvement in crime.

Chief Justice Tun Mohamed Eusoff Chin said: suggestions for us to change this procedure is good, but not practical at the moment as we do not have special detention centres for juveniles in every place. Eusoff was speaking to newsmen after officiating at the North Zone Sports Carnival for court officials at Universiti Teknologi Mara here today. He was asked to comment on a statement by Kuala Lumpur Bar Council's Legal Aid Centre chairman Ragunath Kesavan, who claimed on Thursday that juveniles were still being detained in lock-ups while waiting for their trials. National Unity and Social

Development Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman had, in September, given an assurance that such practice would be stopped to prevent juveniles from being traumatised by the experience. He said that criticism of the procedure might have its merits, but the critics must also consider the limitations of the current detention system. We cannot send a child facing charges in Alor Star to, for example, the Sungai Lereh Juvenile Centre in Malacca. (NSUNT 19/11/2000)

This type of attention to the youth's environment represents a somewhat more complex and contextualised understanding of social problems such as youth crime. However, simplified explanations were much more dominant. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that explanations incorporating the broader environment of an individual were not frequently found. The more immediate environment of the youth was considered in terms of how it might affect the individual's behaviour and cause delinquency. For instance, when environmental factors were used, reporters typically portrayed the school as failing in its educational or disciplinary capacity. Other commentators such as politicians and religious leaders blamed schools and communities more generally for the lack of appropriately supervised activities for the young people's leisure time. In Malaysia, particularly in the earlier 1990s and perhaps up to 1999, community leaders suggested (Ali, 1998) that youth who were not kept busy in healthful pursuits would get into trouble; this is one of the reasons why youth programs such as *Rakan Muda* was introduced in 1994.

Also in the mid to late 1990s, it seems that claims makers became more concerned about the role of religious institutions in young people's environments. Religious leaders and individuals whose opinions were printed in the newspapers reported on the diminishing influence of the religious institution in the lives of young people, directly linking this to immorality and crime.

Although rare some commentators did make strong cases to demonstrate the effects of specific social conditions upon youth. This was especially the case during and following the rapid economic change in Malaysia from the early 80s when reporters represented upward trends in crime statistics as attributable to the economic booms (Baginda, 1984; Nasir and colleagues, 2011). Reports specifically linked youth problems to such factors as the absence of fathers and mothers for paid labour and the instability brought about by rapid change. Despite the empathetic reference to social conditions which had led families to fail in the control of their children, editors and news writers did not call into question underlying assumptions about 'normal' and 'deviant' families. They continued to portray deviant families as 'causes' of delinquency, describing families' shortcomings as the result of individual failure or failure due to social factors beyond their control.

Social conditions relating to poverty were another causal factor associated with youth crime. High unemployment rates in general, and among youth in particular, insufficient welfare payments, economic recession, lack of legitimate job opportunities and lack of job training for youth in a society that was sometimes described as becoming increasingly materialistic were understood to be problematic. In the article NSUNT (22/10/1995) a claims maker stated that:

...sub-cultures in societies like those found in the slum areas where the hardcore poor have to fight to survive and where there is “societal deprivation” will also more often than not cause behavioural problems.

In another example, when asked by judges why they had committed theft or robbery, young people would answer that they were unemployed, that they needed the money to buy food or clothes. Sources from various backgrounds, including judges, police, social workers and politicians also acknowledge this link between economic hardship and crime (NST, 24/02/1997). It is particularly interesting to see how explanations around strain produced by rapid economic changes are redeployed at different moments in history when ‘anomic’ conditions exist.

In sum, the press coverage over the period of study of this thesis presented ‘pathological’ social conditions as factors leading to delinquency portraying crime as a rational response to those social conditions. This representation is in keeping with explanations which assume that the offender is not fundamentally different from the non-offender, but that his or her social environment is ‘pathological’.

The influence of significant others, peers and adults

The other area of concern around the perceived malleability of young people was that they would more easily be led into crime by other people (including their peers, adults who would take advantage of them or a crowd scenario getting out of hand). The influence of peers, in particular, is well documented in the research literature, especially within the context of youth sub-culture (Bell, 2003; Bibby, 2001; Cohen, 1955; Flannery, Williams & Vazsonyi, 1999; Miller, 1958; Wooden & Blazak, 2001).

The imitation of others whether they are peers or individuals, whose crimes have garnered attention in the news, was one area of concern. This apprehension was occasionally raised as an objection to the incarceration of juvenile offenders, as the formation of criminal associations was seen as particularly

threatening to their rehabilitation. News reports portrayed the co-housing of young offenders with adults, perhaps more experienced criminals as apt to lead to further criminal involvement, as suggested by the idea that prisons are a school for crime.

Salimah Abdul Hamid, the Welfare Department rehabilitation division assistant director, urges parents not to send their child to the approved schools as a matter of recourse. Please tell parents not to place such high hopes that putting their child in an institution will solve all their problems. Juveniles are sent here after committing all sorts of crimes. ... The danger is when the child comes in after committing a minor crime, he might pick up tips from others and become worse off once he leaves the school. There is no guarantee their child will improve in an institution. (NST-LTIMES 25/07/2000)

In some cases, reporters quoted sources citing the group dynamic as a factor for particular groups of youths who had committed crimes together; individually they were just fine but as a group they tended to get into trouble. This was the case for example, when reporters quoted young people who knew the youths accused of killing a step father of their friend's girlfriend – "The accused told me he had beaten up the girl's father" (NST 29/10/2004) and "Sisters, friends planned murder, court told" (NST 20/08/2004). This case also drew on the 'bad apple' metaphor, explained above, where sources described one 'bad' youth as causing other 'good' youths around him or her to behave badly.

A case of bad apples: ...Bujang (not his real name), 17, an inmate of STB Kuala Lumpur in Cheras for the past two years. Bujang was only 15-years old when he was sentenced to three years in Sekolah Tunas Bakti (STB) in Kuala Lumpur for statutory rape two years ago. Over that period, his mother had only visited him ten times and his father's parting words to him on the day he was arrested were: "Stay there and don't ever come back, you are not my son." Bujang does not have a good relationship with his family and being a dropout by the time he was 12 years old, he would spend his days watching porno, illegal motorbike racing or just hanging out aimlessly. After two years in STB, he was allowed to leave for good behaviour. However, said Bujang, "My father doesn't want me to be released." Frail and undersized for a 17 year old, Bujang is still withdrawn and unresponsive. Hence, who is to be blamed when a child ends up like Bujang unwanted by his family? Is he now in the care of society? Will he be more dangerous if let out of STB or will he become more hardened if he is left in STB longer? (NSUNT 14/10/2001)

In general, accounts depicted youths as being easily lead into crime by their peers because they would strive to fit in, they might succumb to peer pressure, they were keeping bad company, they were part of a ‘gang’ or they were showing off. The following excerpts are examples indicating how young people can easily become the victims of bad company thus involving themselves in unlawful activities.

Mah Weng Kwai, chairman of the Bar Council's Criminal Law Committee, could help very much in dealing with juvenile delinquency. Those who are involved in dadah or unlawful activities, or have fallen into bad company could seek help from him. Today, children can easily become the victims of negative influences when they associate themselves with bad company and resort to smoking. This can lead to involvement in dadah and other unlawful activities. (NST 21/05/1997)

Reports also suggested that young people could be led into crime more easily by those who were older than them, due to influence, coercion, recruitment and training. The following headline and excerpts exemplified this idea that youth are susceptible to being led into crime by adults.

Gangs seek recruits from two KL schools (NST 21/12/2004)

Dadah traffickers know that minors would not be charged under the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952, which carries a death penalty for trafficking and life imprisonment for possession. This loophole is obvious to top police officials, but is one which they are powerless to rectify. (NSUNT 23/02/1997)

Dadah syndicates can make use of juveniles to smuggle or distribute dadah because if they are caught, they would be treated leniently because of their age. By offering them money and other inducements, juveniles knowing that they will get off lightly even if they are caught can be tempted to join dadah syndicates as couriers or distributors. (NST 08/08/2001)

One gender-specific version of the explanation that ‘bad’ adults lure youth into vice and crime revolved around the recruitment of young women and girls into the sex trade. For example one headline “*Gadis dilatih jadi pelacur* – Girls are trained to be prostitutes, (BH 30/12/1996) heads a story that parents trained their girls to become prostitutes as an easy way to earn money. Portrayals of men (and adult

women) involved with young women and girls in the sex trade (generally referred to as ‘child prostitutes’) were especially dangerous. Reports depicted the young women and girls as particularly vulnerable, exploited, threatened, and intimidated, while portraying the men as villainous, exploitive, threatening, intimidating, manipulative, selfish, lazy and perverted. Accounts of the various methods used in convincing girls to partake in prostitution and related activities were typically very clear with strong emphasis on the coercion used on them (i.e. physical force, sexual assault, blackmail, extortion, drug abuse). For example one headline reported particular terms used by reporters especially verbs such as “push, prey, force and coerce”, in constructing stories of the coercive acts used by pimps, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

The latest news reported a man in Kota Kinabalu has been arrested for allegedly raping his own 16 year old daughter until she finally gave birth to his child. He then prostituted her (BH, 19/10/2000).

According to the police investigation, the 38 year old man has been prostituting his daughter at various medium class hotels since January. According to the report, the victim was brought to Kota Kinabalu from their village in Membakut, Sabah for the purpose of sending her to school at Kota Kinabalu. He brought the victim to stay at a hotel in Kampung Air and on the first night there, she became the victim of her abusive father. Once she managed to escape but was found again by her father. Another case has been reported in which a girl was sold to a pimp by her own father for money. This first case happened in Sarawak where a girl aged between 9-10 years was admitted to hospital because of vaginal infection. After investigation, the girl was seen to have a tattoo on her private parts as a result of being sold by her family to a pimp and being ordered to entertain clients. The second case involved a child aged 9 years. She became the victim of a custody dispute between her parents who were in the process of getting a divorce. Her mother won custody but her father, a lecturer in a higher education institution kidnapped her and both are now staying in Chow Kit. Her father, an alcoholic, was always drunk and was fired from his position. To get money, he rented his daughter out for a few days to his friend before she was sent back to him.⁵⁴ (BH 04/11/2000)

⁵⁴ Paraphrase from original Malay, “*Terbaru akhbar melaporkan seorang lelaki di Kota Kinabalu ditahan kerana disyaki merogol anak kandungnya berusia 16 tahun sehingga melahirkan anak sebelum melacurkan gadis itu (Berita Harian, 19 Oktober). Mengikut siasatan polis, lelaki 38 tahun itu melacurkan anaknya di beberapa hotel*

Constructions concerning the sex trade are not central to the point discussed here. However what is obvious from the examples above in such portrayals of those in positions of power taking advantage of young women and girls is that young sex trade workers can be seen to be particularly susceptible to exploitation. So, as was the case with the depictions of negative media influences, the image of young offenders in the coverage suggested that they were also uniquely vulnerable to the disruptive influences of individuals around them, whether family members, friends or foes.

Public's fear of and concern with juvenile crime

The objective in this section is to discuss how claims makers frame the public's fear of juvenile crime within the context of the social defect frame. It is assumed that one of the means in which people become more fearful of crime and more committed supporters of government measures for dealing with youth crime is when the news media frame the issue so that causal responsibility falls on societal conditions (e.g., economic and social inequality).

From the optimistic views expressed in the public writings, the problems associated with young people are considered less likely in affluent areas than in more deprived areas. From letters to the editor, the apparent reason given was the lack of basic facilities for young people in deprived areas. There are several explanations relating youth crime to the social defect frame. For instance one public writing associates youth crime with a lack of fields to play football; secondly, in more affluent areas young people can pay to use private gyms or social clubs because they have means to do so. Thirdly, urban areas are considered more likely to see problems such as 'young people hanging around the streets', while small towns and rural areas are more likely to focus on 'lack of opportunities' for children and young people. Finally, and perhaps not surprisingly, positive views of young people are associated with seeing

sederhana sejak Januari lalu. Mengikut laporan, mangsa dibawa bapanya dari kampung mereka di Membakut, Sabah dengan alasan untuk menyekolahkanya di Kota Kinabalu. Mangsa dibawa menginap di sebuah hotel di Kampung Air dan pada malam pertama menginap, dia menjadi mangsa buas ayahnya. Pada suatu masa, dia dapat melarikan diri tetapi dapat dikesan dan ditangkap semula bapanya. Shahida pernah berhadapan dengan kes anak perempuan dijual kepada bapa ayam oleh bapa sendiri untuk mendapatkan wang. Kes pertama berlaku di Sarawak yang mana seorang budak perempuan berusia antara 9 dan 10 tahun dimasukkan ke hospital kerana jangkitan pada farajnya. Apabila diselidiki, budak ini ada tatu pada bahagian berkenaan kerana dia dijual oleh keluarga kepada bapa ayam dan ditugaskan melayani pelanggan. Kes kedua pula membabitkan kanak-kanak berusia 9 tahun. Dia menjadi rebutan ibu bapanya yang dalam proses perceraian. Si ibu mendapat hak jagaan tetapi si ayah, tenaga pengajar di sebuah institusi pengajian tinggi, mencoleknya dan kedua-duanya duduk di Chow Kit. Si ayah, ketagihan alkohol dan kerap mabuk hingga dibuang kerja. Untuk mendapatkan wang, anaknya itu 'dipinjamkan' kepada 'kawan' jika dia kesempitan wang untuk beberapa hari sebelum dikembalikan."

juvenile crime in terms of ‘lack of opportunities’, while the least positive views of young people tend to focus on young people ‘hanging around’ shopping complexes, parks, streets with nothing to do with their free time.

What is immediately obvious from the analysis is that, in general, perceptions of young people are characterised by both contradictions and ambivalence. For example, the behaviour of young people today is described as worse than in the past, yet there is also a general belief that young people today are not listened to enough, either because most parents are too busy working to make ends meet, or because they are spending more time making money than spending quality time with their children. The letters to the editor suggest concern that children are either left in the care of relatives or maids or, worse still, left at home to look after one another. Similarly there are statements mentioning that young people have little or no respect for older people but also contradictory statements that describe young people as responsible, helpful and friendly. From the analysis, it appears that the public also believe that today girls are catching up with boys in terms of bad behaviour. Evidence from the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM, 2007) continues to point to a gender gap in overall offending, especially in serious offending by young people. The official statistics still continue to show greater evidence of offending by young males, though the gap narrows for particular age groups and the pattern reverses entirely for some specific forms of delinquency. For example, young females are more likely to be exposed to moral danger including prostitution, and are more likely to run away from home than young males. It seems likely that, in a period of sustained concern for young people in general, the behaviour of girls – which is traditionally seen as less unruly and problematic than that of boys – becomes a focus for more generalised concerns about social order.

One specific issue of youth crime often mentioned is an issue that has been the focus of considerable political, media and policy attention in Malaysia in recent years (for example, recent developments in relation to child curfews and parenting orders). From the newspaper analysis, most statements relate that youth crime has increased. In fact, statements mentioning youth crime in major cities, and even in rural areas, are higher in number than ever before (NST: 13/07/1996, 02/04/2001, 08/08/2001; NSUNT-FOCUS, 23/05/2004; BH-TEN: 18/12/1997; BH, 05/04/1997). Young people who live in remote rural communities were once said to be less likely to commit crimes but the view, at least in newspapers mentioning this issue, has changed. Crime associated with young people in remote rural communities such as Federal Land and Development Authority (FELDA) has shown an increase. Other comments indicate perceptions of youth crime and crime in general as ‘spiralling out of control’. It is worth noting here that, at least as measured by police-recorded crime statistics, the perception of increasing youth crime appears to fluctuate along with real crime rates. Of course, it is extremely difficult to estimate the

actual level of youth crime since not all youth crimes are recorded, especially when there are many cases of unreported incidents. Other statements found in the media pertained to the relationship between youth crime and the areas in which people reside.

The problems commonly associated with young people in particular areas, as mentioned in the newspapers are: groups of young people hanging around the street or public spaces; vandalism, graffiti or other deliberate damage to property; problems caused by young people who have been drinking alcohol and; problems caused by young people who have been using drugs.

Concrete statistics regarding the problems common in a particular area cannot be tested, as the information gathered from the newspaper analysis only indicated what problems were commonly mentioned by the public. The extent to which the public are directly affected by youth crime can only be gauged from statements claiming that the public have been 'greatly affected' by these crimes. This does not necessarily indicate first-hand experience of victimisation, but could relate to becoming aware of victimisation through friends, family, neighbours or others living in the same area. A famous quote states that 'if it can happen to others it can also happen to me'. The fact that young people hanging around in the street or public spaces are frequently mentioned in relation to youth crime is due more to the perception that 'nothing good' will arise from the congregation of young people in public places, rather than from any specific forms of criminal behaviour.

Youth crime in general is widely thought to be rising, and specific problems associated with youth crime that are frequently mentioned in the news media are seen as common. It is the indirect consequences of such phenomena, specifically the extent to which the public worry about becoming victims of crime, and the extent to which they alter their behaviour as a result of anxieties about young people in public places and these are commonly mentioned in the public writings. From the newspaper analysis it appears that people are likely to report worrying about having their home broken into, or that someone they live with will be the victim of crime. The analysis also found that the presence of young people in public places makes some people feel both uncomfortable and worried. Women were more likely than men to feel this way, and older people were similarly more likely than younger people to be worried. One of the key features of an effective community is its ability to regulate itself and to deal with minor conflicts without recourse to external agencies. For the sub-frame concerning social responsibility, there were statements which indicated a willingness to either intervene directly at the time or contact parents or police to help regulate youth crime but these patterns of responsibility argued the public to have lost it function.

Parental responsibility laws are largely a product of the Child Act 2001, which holds parents criminally and civilly liable for the delinquent acts of their children. This is a result of increasing juvenile crime since the 1980s. Even though the crime rate over the period of study fluctuated rather than increasing consistently, the present juvenile crime rate is still well above those of the mid-1990s and the overall rate is still particularly high among young males, especially among Malays. Offences related to dangerous drugs have not seen a decline either (Statistic, Social Welfare Department, 2007). Of particular concern is the fact that juvenile crime has become increasingly fatal, illustrated by the many cases of murder, rape, and offences related to dangerous drugs and weaponry (Statistic, Social Welfare Department, 2007). Importantly, public attitudes and fears around juvenile crime have never ceased. Concerns for juvenile crime continue to reflect the rise in juvenile crime since the early 1990s. If the public relied on media representations to understand youth crime, they may have reason to be concerned. Reports published in the news media describe: a higher number of juveniles charged with serious crimes (NST, 07/04/1995); juvenile offenders getting younger (BH, 15/06/1999), more juvenile offenders below nine years of age (NST, 15/06/1999); 300 to 600 juvenile offenders being registered each year (BH, 20/02/2004); and young females catching up with young males in their involvement in crime (Statistic Social Welfare Department, 2007). Although juvenile crimes are still predominantly a male phenomenon, statistics show that the involvement of female juveniles in crime has also increased from 138 cases in 2002 to 673 cases in 2007. The perception that young girls (Bohsia) are reportedly more likely to spread HIV/AIDs (NST: 24/08/1997) also concerns the public, particularly parents of young people.

Another area that raises public concerns is the role of parents in juvenile crime rates. There are no statistics on parents' employment status and the number of young offenders. However most parents, who work, leave the care of their children in the hands of relatives, a maid, schools or child care centres. This condition might be fine for pre-teens but representations suggest that to adolescents it might pose a challenge. Lots of discussion and debates on this issue have been raised in newspaper coverage. Those who support close monitoring and more quality time spent with children at home argue that parents have to be made liable if their children commit a crime. The general argument is that parents should be responsible for looking after their children and that there is no excuse for parents neglecting their children.

Permissiveness of parents is one of the more recent favourites in terms of bad parenting, emerging in the second half of the twentieth century. Distant, preoccupied parents who do not pay enough attention to their children represent another more contemporary image of parenting as a cause of delinquency. This representation replaced the earlier focus on non-existent or inadequate supervision. In the earlier part of

the sample, parents' 'disrespect for the law' was seen as one cause of juvenile delinquency, as was bad parenting in general, although reporters did not clearly define what constituted bad parenting. The excerpts below provide some idea of the public's views on parenting:

Dr Chan said the message that some parents or guardians gave indirectly to their children is that violence is acceptable from the beginning, by instilling fear and threats, and inflicting physical punishment. (NST 18/08/2001)

Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Abdul Samad said the main reason why youngsters resorted to offences like theft was because their parents could not provide them the money to allow them to enjoy themselves, while children of rich parents involved in crime did so because they had been pampered by the parents and had little parental supervision. (NST 18/08/1999)

National Unity and Social Development Minister Datin Zaleha Ismail said "Parents should bear the biggest responsibility in preventing this negative development as it is sheer neglect and indiscipline that turns young children into criminals." In fact the new trend can be seen in tandem with the decrease in parental care of children these days, with working parents sparing very little time for their offspring. (NST 15/06/1999)

In summary, the public writings analysed in newspaper articles tended to blame the causes of youth crime and disorder on their parents or teachers, and on broader social or structural factors such as the poor family environment; rapid industrialisation and development, the lack of community and social responsibility, and the lack of school functioning.

Similarly, survey data from the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research⁵⁵, listed parents and family as most to blame for the rise of social problems, followed by authorities such as the police and other enforcement agencies, external influences/foreign culture⁵⁶, lack of religious teachings, economic conditions, and social institutions such as schools. The findings reflected the perceptions that the family institution is under pressure and unable to cope with emerging social problems. This finding is supported by the

⁵⁵ The information is based on data published by the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research on August 2004

⁵⁶ To Malaysian the overseas cultural practices in particular western cultural practice is termed as yellow culture which is considered to potentially influence young people to deviate from the local norms, values and practices.

Center's other research which indicates that while some families continue to spend significant amounts of time with their children the time spent is lower in quality.

In the survey results there were five types of crime listed to be the most common criminal activities in the neighbourhood, with theft and robbery coming first, followed by drug abuse, fights, sexual crimes and murder. The findings suggest that contrary to the most common media reports which focus on more serious crimes, the most common crimes consisted of theft and robberies. This suggests that the recent spate of reporting on snatch thieves can be seen to have a high traction with the public. The survey also finds that economic conditions may be the prime reason for the increase in crime rather than a general deterioration of morality.

As has been mentioned throughout the thesis, government responses to youth crime can take many forms and range from minor to major intervention and prevention strategies. Among the strategies used in Malaysia to overcome youth crime are: teaching and exposing students to the risks and dangers of crime; helping students learn the social skills to resist criminal activities; working with parents to improve parenting skills and communication; training parents and teachers to deal with troubled kids; introducing and implementing various youth policies, programs and trainings, revising and amending juvenile justice laws.

Government response

Every day, various crimes, wrong doings, attitudes against morality, and actions that are conflicting with values, ethics, norms, law, regulation and religion are committed by adolescents including school students in Malaysia. News by mass media on adolescents (students or not) committing various crimes stir up fear in all sections of society (Samsuddin A. Rahim & Iran Herman, 1993; Harian Metro, 26 April 2000). Hence the persistent rise of concern relating to the development and changes of negative attitudes among adolescents, particularly among those who have completed the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education, SPM), and who seem to have lost direction in life and become involved in criminal activities. From the findings, blame is placed on parents, educational institutions and authorities, with the resulting proposal to make it compulsory for Form Five school leavers to participate in National Training Service Program (PLKN) surface. This awareness emerges because of concerns about the nation's future generations who have no clear vision and direction in life. This can be seen from various angles. According to the claims makers in this study, this generation of youth prioritise their peers or peer

groups (Azizan Bahari, 2003). Youth involvement in social ills such as Black Metal, Punk culture, loitering ('*lepak*'), drifting, illegal motor racing and other useless activities will ruin their future (Arena Che Kasim & Hadhirah Ahmad, 2002; Rafidah Md. Khamin, 2003). Either from the growing perception that individuals may be at risk or that children are involved or that levels of violence are high, youth crime persistently increases in news value (Jewkes, 2004: p40). Similarly, any youth activities that deviate from the norms and values of society become a threat and are seen to need intervention from the government.

Government commentary suggests that even though Malaysia is a country which values purity and religious belief highly, religiosity does not seem to be deterring young from involvement in criminal and wrong-doing activities. Rafidah Md Khamin (2003) found that adolescents acted badly because of parental control, too much freedom in life and inadequate exposure to any positive values either at school or at home. Parents can no longer be relied on to be responsible and act as a social control or to mould their children's personality; the family is either too busy or there is inadequate love and care. Due to this, research by the Educational Ministry (1992) quoted in Rafidah (2003) found that adolescents who violated school discipline were a result of school and educational systems that are not persuasive and where school subjects are too burdensome and compacted. Without more attention being given to these students, serious implications arise for society and the future of the country. As a result a form of silent rebellion occurs, such as truancy and spending time at shopping complexes, entertainment outlets or even at bus terminals during school hours.

If this unhealthy development fails to be systematically prevented and contained, it will have major implications on the belief systems, society and the country as a whole. According to the claims makers in this study almost all adolescents, regardless of race, seem to lose their identity, especially as Malaysians, as a result of a variety of outside influences and values that are frequently negative in nature. The young seem to have no ideal role models who form and influence them towards a healthy development, and guide them in making changes that will help them become the generation who will lead the country some day. In addition, they can be seen to admire western values and cultures which are at many times contradictory to traditional Malaysian social values, norms and aspirations. The perception is that involvement in unhealthy activities seems to be a form of satisfaction and pride among young people. Societal values and norms such as cooperation, doing good deeds and cultivating unity are slowly diminishing. Even behaviour that indicates a lack of respect and responsibility towards public and national infrastructures is very common (Saad, 1980).

Current development and socio-economic changes in the country have somehow influenced paradigm changes and attitudes of most people in Malaysian society, including adolescents. Improvement in quality of life and dreams for wealth, hedonism and materialistic culture seem to have influenced self values and attitudes of almost all young people, family, society and even the country (Abdul Rahman Aziz, 1997). Realising this, the Malaysia government (Vision 2020; Social Policy) has made an effort to look for means to form more dynamic, meaningful and competent goals for all aspects of adolescent development. The government is also planning appropriate ways to build a younger generation which is patriotic and devoted to the country (National Service Document). Moreover the aim is to produce a generation which is active, intelligent, self confident with positive attitudes.

The expansion of urbanisation in Malaysia contributes to the social defect/breakdown frame. One consequence of urban planning is the loss of communal spirit with an ensuing spirit which only looks after personal interests among Malaysians, especially the younger generation. Urbanisation is of course unavoidable but it also provides a source for development and improvement of the quality of human life. However as a nation that wants to develop its populations and country according to its own model, the government believes the National Service Program is essential to act as an agent of unity among various races and at the same time provides unity for any race. Through the National Service Program, the individualistic lifestyle which is characteristic of urbanisation can be transformed into communal spirit, since those young people who participate in this program show increases in their concern for living together and serving the local community through the spirit of volunteerism. Since rapid urbanisation means a decrease in communal spirit, communal living can provide a means of learning to cooperate and control negative influences from outside (National Service Document).

The increase in crime and behaviour problems at school has prompted the Education Ministry to intervene as a form of juvenile crime prevention. The interventions are aimed at keeping the school or classroom environment free from any kind of misbehaviours or crime. For example there is the foster school program (*Anak Angkat* Program) whereby a State Education Department officer takes charge of a particular school, helping to monitor the school and keep it free from crime. Programs aimed at building the capacity of schools to initiate and sustain innovation have reduced delinquent behaviour, drug use, and suspensions (The Education Ministry, 2000). The Education Ministry is also bringing back the stringent rules of compulsory caning and expulsion from school to curb indiscipline and social ills among students though caning would be contrary to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to which

Malaysia is a signatory⁵⁷ (UNICEF, 2008). This in particular referred to the anti-smoking rules of the Education Ministry. The police have worked closely with Education Ministry. Police not only regularly patrols schools in the district in an effort to reduce juvenile crime but the appointment of police officers as foster parents in schools has helped diffuse many problems at schools. The government also decided that disciplinary teachers would be given the powers of auxiliary police to deal with disciplinary cases in school areas. Anti-crime clubs were also to be set up in all schools to enhance security and prevent students getting involved in crime or becoming the victims of crime (The Education Ministry, 2000). The police also offered to help monitor students outside school areas as a social obligation; this was particularly to detain students found loitering, smoking or misbehaving when they should be at school during school hours. In a collaborative effort between the Education Ministry and the police, the police cadet movement was introduced into schools as a co-curricular activity to raise awareness among students of the role of the police. The ministry believes the police cadets program in school is able to play an important role in helping to curb juvenile crime (The Education Ministry, 2000).

Under the Department of Social Welfare, the District Juvenile Welfare Committee was set up as a committee to monitor delinquency at a district level. The prevention work it does includes counselling juveniles with behavioural problems, meeting their discipline teachers and education departments, holding gatherings with children under their parents' supervision, organising public forums on juvenile problems and setting up drop-in centres in 'high risk' areas. Another form of prevention is done through juvenile welfare and neighbourhood watch committees to monitor juvenile crime and to clean up the drug problem.

Under the Youth and Sports Ministry (1994, 1995, 1996 & 1997), youth leaders and their organisations have been urged to work with government to find solutions to problems affecting the younger generation. Youth organisations are encouraged to address issues such as drug addiction and juvenile delinquency.

Summary

Among the eight sub-frames relating to society as pathological, the overall newspaper frames and the public writing tend to blame youth crime and disorder on broader social or structural factors: community support, pathological environment and social conditions, the influence of significant others, the

⁵⁷ This is one of the eighth reservations to the provisions of the CRC: Article 37 pertaining to torture and deprivation of liberty towards children. 'Reservation' means the ability for a State Party to a treaty to express its disagreement with some provisions of the latter by making an exception to the overall approval.

functioning of the family and the school. In response to this, the government has increasingly (via the Nation Building project) called for everyone to work together with the government to create better and supportive social conditions that sustain the development of young people without any potential criminal involvement. The following section discusses another common representation of youth crime: youth crime related to blocked opportunities.

THE BLOCK OPPORTUNITIES FRAME

The frame of *blocked opportunities* according to Sasson (1995) depicts crime as a consequence of inequality and discrimination, especially as they manifest themselves in unemployment, poverty, and inadequate educational opportunities. People commit crimes when they discover that the legitimate means for attaining material success are blocked. This concept of blocked opportunity can be linked back to what Merton (1938) referred to as ‘anomie’ which referred to a situation in which there is a noticeable lack of balance between the culture’s norms about what constitutes success in life (goals) and the culture’s norms about the legitimate ways to achieve those goals (means). In other words, when society places a greater emphasis on achieving the culturally preferred goals but does not equally emphasize the accepted norms regulating the means to achieve those goals, individual in the society is in a state of anomie. When one is blocked from achieving his or her goal, he or she may turn to crime as an alternative. Consistent with the positivist explanations available which might account for young people’s greater ‘propensity to crime’ are those which were evident in the newspaper sample in this study. In this study it was clear that some claims makers framed youth crime as a result of unemployment, ignorance, disease, poor housing, urban congestion and discrimination.

Table 6c: Total news articles relating to the sub-frame of blocked opportunity (structural disorder) according to year

Year / sub-frame	Poverty (A)		Lacking opportunity in education (B)		Unemployment (C)		Lacking opportunity in training (D)		TOTAL	
	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST
1995	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1
1996	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	2	4
1997	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	5
1998	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1
1999	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
2000	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
2001	3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	6	0
2002	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2003	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	4	1
2004	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	4	1
Total each sub-frame by each NP	14	10	3	3	3	1	3	1	24	15
TOTAL Sub-frame in both NP	24		6		4		4		38	

The notion of blocked opportunity includes reference to general structural disorder. From the data there appeared to be four sub-frames (see Table 6c and Figure 6c): poverty (A), lacking opportunity in education (B), unemployment (C), and lacking opportunity in training (D). The highest mentioned sub-frame is A with BH scores of 14 and NST scores of 10. The other three sub-frames score 3 each for BH; and three, one and one for NST. The total number of all sub-frames are 38, rather low scores compared to other frames identified in this study.

Figure 6c: Total news articles relating to the sub-frame of blocked opportunity (structural disorder) according to year

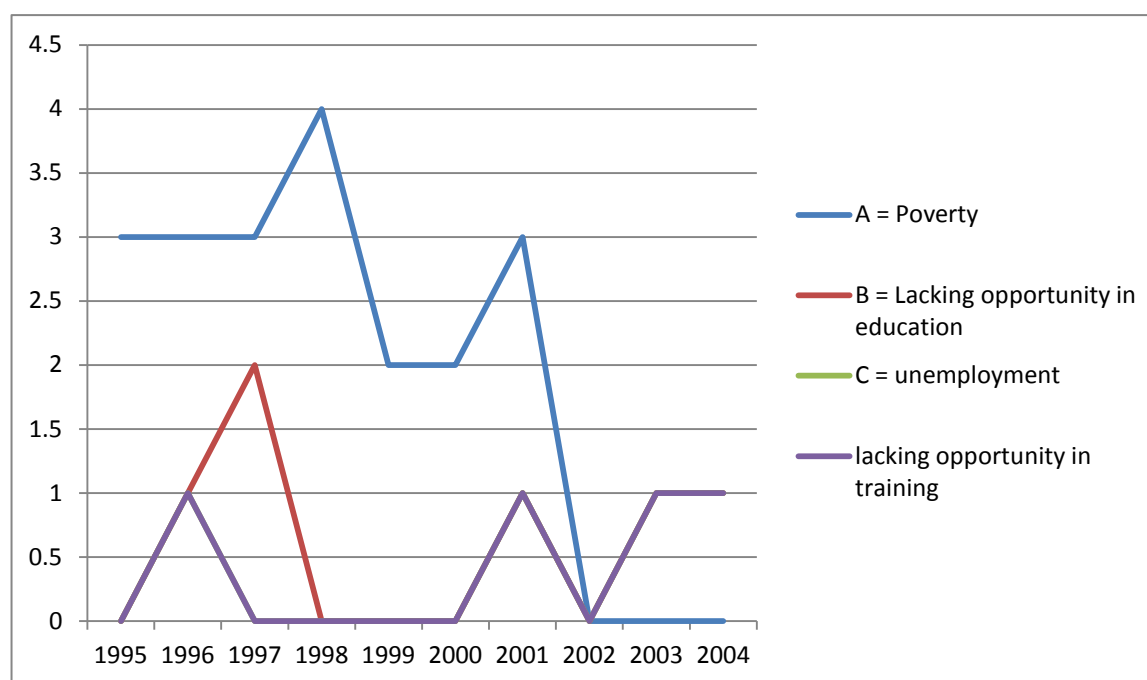


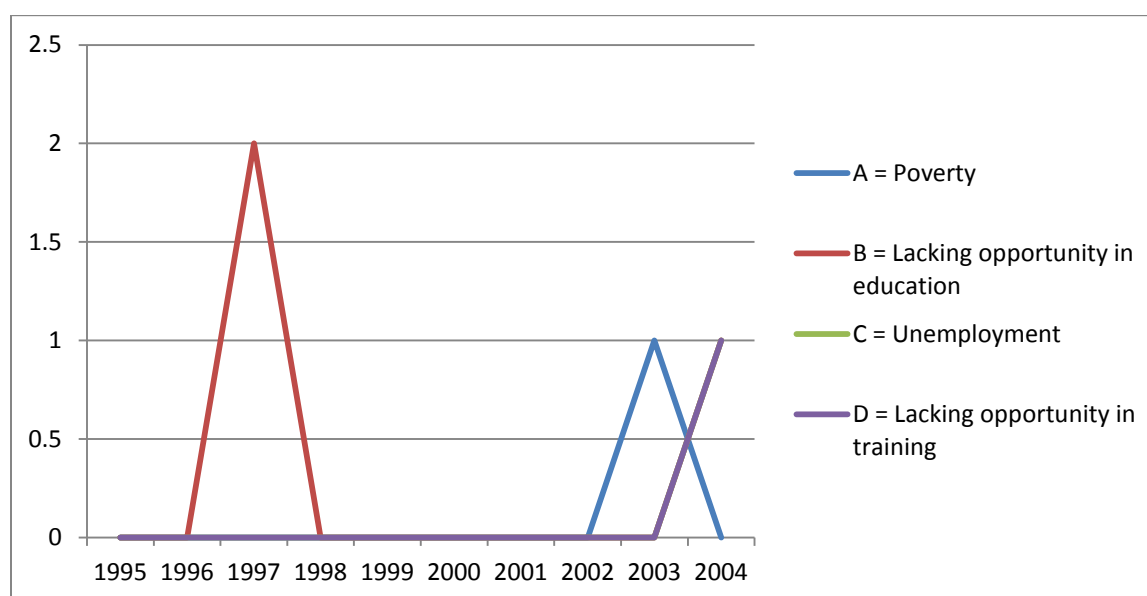
Figure 6c: it is clear that poverty is perceived and/or represented by some claims makers to be the reason why young people are involved in criminal activities. Poverty limits the opportunity to get a good education, particularly a higher education. When there is limited participation in education, there is also limited opportunity in training, particularly job skill training. Surprisingly there is not as much mention of unemployment as the reason for youth crime. This indicates that when there is limited opportunity in either education or training, directly or indirectly there will be unemployment; if this group of young people do enter the job market, they are also likely to have lower wages due to their lack of qualification and training.

Similar to the analysis of newspaper framing above, the public writings (Table 6d and Figure 6d, below) also mentioned blocked opportunities as one of the contributing factors of youth crime. Similarly, public writings in this category were less than for other sub-frames. The highest mentioned sub-frame is B with a score of 3. The other three sub-frames score 1 each. The total number of all sub-frames is only 6.

Table 6d: Total public writings relating to the sub-frame of blocked opportunity (structural disorder) according to year

Year / sub-frame	Poverty (A)		Lacking opportunity in education (B)		Unemployment (C)		Lacking opportunity in training (D)		TOTAL	
	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST
1995	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1996	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1997	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
1998	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1999	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2001	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2002	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2003	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
2004	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	3	0
Total each sub-frame by each NP	1	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	4	2
TOTAL Sub-frame in both NP	1		3		1		1		6	

Figure 6d: Total public writings relating to the sub-frame of blocked opportunity (structural disorder) according to year



It is clear from the public writings (Figure 6d) that where this was commented upon, the tendency was to link the lack of opportunity in education for young people to involvement in crime. Poverty is covered as a link to youth crime only very occasionally, and after 2002.

Intense industrialisation since the 1980s in Malaysia, particularly in major cities attracted many young people to migrate in search of job opportunities. Being young and unskilled the job security was very low with income inequality and weakness. At the same time, alone in new cities their social safety net was also low. As time went on, these young migrants took up residence in the cities and started their own family life. When successful after working hard and saving, many found they had moved up the economic ladder, creating better lifestyles. The first generation of migrants⁵⁸ worked hard to make sure their children received a good education and gained entry to high paying jobs. However, not all these migrants ended up with a better future and some are still struggling in life. While some are successful, others are still working hard in lower paying blue-collar jobs with an end result of steadily worsening prospects for the urban poor. Growing desperation in these circumstances promotes crime as well as violence. The response to crime related to these issues is the demand that government do something about it.

The related headlines under this frame are:-

Peluang kerja terhad antara punca masalah sosial di Felda (Limited job opportunities among the causes of social problems in Felda), BH: 09/11/2004

Social ills - poverty of mind and spirit, NST: 25/04/1997

The 'Malay Dilemma' revisited, NST: 05/03/1997

The few headlines cited above indicate that poverty is seen to be a reason for young people's involvement in criminal activities. According to this frame the government must ameliorate the social conditions that cause it. So to reduce crime, the government has to provide an educational plan that serves the poor, a welfare system that attends to the needs of the less fortunate and job programs that offer hope to the citizens. The government must address the "root causes" of crime by creating jobs and reducing poverty.

⁵⁸ Migrants here referred to young people from rural areas who move to cities in search of job opportunities, education and better living environment.

The rise in the number of child offenders represents the failure of society that includes parents who fail to develop meaningful relationships with their children and schools that fail to address the needs of every single child, says Dr Peng. There is also the lack of facilities for teenagers in the housing estates, another factor that could lead children astray (NSUNT-FOCUS 13/04/2003).

Issues raised by the public are related to what happens in the school environment. According to the public writings, school should complement what students may lack at home so they can feel a sense of belonging. This kind of support should be made available to all students. There should be no discrimination in this kind of attention between good students and ‘not so good’ students. In fact ‘not so good’ students need more support in order to perform not only in school but in other areas of their lives. If the support is missing it is not a surprise to find these students getting involved in wrongdoings or criminal activities.

The survey data published by the Merdeka Center in August 2004⁵⁹ stated that crime, social problems and the economy remain the top concerns of respondents. Economic conditions are listed among the reasons for the rise in social problems. The perception is that poor families are under pressure and unable to cope with emerging social problems particularly if the family has to face economic hardship that requires the parents to spend extra time at work. Little or no prospect is open to poor families in terms of widening their economic opportunities. The children of poor families can also be affected by this lack of economic opportunity. There are cases where children have to drop out of school to help support the family. A study done by Ali and Abdul Kadir (2005) acknowledged this issue where there were many school dropouts as early as 8 years old, the reason being the need to help out in the family either to look after younger siblings or to work for extra cash particularly in single parent/single mother families.

Government response

The Malaysian government has subscribed strongly to the idea that economic development must involve and benefit all citizens. The development thrusts in this agenda were centred on the philosophy of ‘growth with equity’. With regards to poverty eradication, Malaysia has adopted long-term policies since the early 1970’s. In providing for the vulnerable groups, the thrust of the Government has always been to enhance

⁵⁹ The information is based on data published by the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research on August 2004. The survey covered the period of 15-21 July 2004 and involved 1,017 randomised selections of respondents of both gender with various ethnic background and state of residence.

income-earning opportunities. The programs listed to overcome poverty are the New Economic Policy (NEP) 1971-1990, National Development Policy (NDP) 1991-2000, and National Vision Policy (NVP) 2001-2010⁶⁰.

The components of government programs are: employment creation, provision of housing and social amenities and development of growth centres.

Employment creation: Job opportunities in urban areas are generated in many ways, though they are not necessarily directed at the poor. Most of the employment may be found in the industrial and service sectors. The government has encouraged the growth of these sectors by providing infrastructural facilities and fiscal incentives. Although this effort has resulted in creation of new jobs, the extent to which they benefited the poor is questionable, since most of the urban poor have a very low level of education and skills. Other programmes for creating urban job opportunities include the development of small-scale industries or business and industrial villages. These programmes have the potential to succeed but their implementation is confined to certain large urban areas and target groups and this does not necessarily benefit the poor (Kasim, 1991).

Provision of housing and social amenities: In order to raise the standard of living and the quality of life of the lower income groups in urban areas the government implemented various projects including the provision of low-cost housing units and social amenities (under National Development Policy (NDP), 1991-2000). Although the Government has controlled the price of low-cost housing, most of the urban poor cannot afford to buy a house owing to their low income. They cannot obtain loans and could not service the loan if they had one. On the supply side, most of the problems are related to finance, management and business profit motives. These problems limit the achievement of the private developer in developing even a target of 30 per cent low-cost houses. The short supply of low-cost housing has resulted in high house rents and the establishments of squatter settlements. On social amenities, however, there has been a lot of improvement. The provision of social amenities forms an important component in upgrading programmes within squatter settlements (Kasim, 1991).

Development of growth centres: The main aim of this programme is to meet the objective of the New Economic Policy (1971-1990), namely poverty eradication and restructuring of society. This programme has been implemented in three different places. The first is in centres within centres. In Kuala Lumpur for example four growth centres have been developed, namely Wangsa Maju, Bandar Tun Razak,

⁶⁰ Economic Planning Unit, 2002

Damansara and Bukit Jalil. This programme could create job opportunities in secondary as well as tertiary sectors and provide low-cost and medium-cost housing. Secondly, it involves centres in new regions. A number of urban centres/new townships have been planned by regional development authorities such as DARA, KEJORA and KETENGAH. However, their achievements have been unsatisfactory (Kasim, 1988). The third programme area is in rural urbanization. The main activities included in this programme are village regrouping and the establishment of small-scale industries. While the former aims at improving the quality of life the latter provides job opportunities as well as income generating activities.

The government's National Mission 2006-2010 and the 9th Malaysia Plan gives attention to human capital development and poverty eradication. The government and community programs such as Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) and Program Pembangunan Rakyat Termiskin⁶¹ (PPRT) are among the ongoing programs in the country. In the context of developing 'young human capital' in line with the National Mission and the 9th Malaysia Plan, the response is to provide enough protective factors particularly for young people from poor family backgrounds. The development of young people's needs according to this response is assessed in accordance with the development and progress that is ongoing and the challenges faced by poor families.

During the National Development Program period, PPRT was introduced to assist the hardcore poor. The programme established a register on the profile of hardcore poor households and contained a package of projects tailored to meet their specific needs, such as increasing their employability and income, better housing, food supplements for children and educational assistance. Direct assistance was given to the hardcore poor who were disabled and aged. In addition, they were also provided with interest-free loans to purchase shares in a unit trust scheme (ASB-PPRT) so that the dividends could supplement their income.

The Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the private sector complemented government efforts in the poverty alleviation programmes. Working in close cooperation with one another, they provided small business loans, industrial training, job opportunities, and educational support for children as well as better housing. Since 1987, Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM), an NGO, provided micro-credit financing to about 69,000 poor families with interest-free loans of RM300 million provided by the Government (Economic Planning Unit, 2002). The private sector and the various state-based poverty eradication foundations also intensified their efforts in providing skills training as well as in-kind and financial contributions to the poor.

⁶¹ The Development Programme for the Hardcore Poor

During the NVP period, to effectively implement anti-poverty measures, all the relevant programmes and projects were consolidated under the Skim *Pembangunan Kesejahteraan Rakyat* (SPKR). The SPKR included the Program *Pembangunan Rakyat Termiskin* (PPRT) and other related anti-poverty programmes to address issues of general and hardcore poverty, irrespective of ethnicity in both rural and urban areas as well as economic sectors. The *Program Sepadu Pembangunan Desa Terpencil* was strengthened under the SPKR to address pockets of poverty, particularly in remote areas and among the *Orang Asli*⁶² and other *Bumiputera*⁶³ minorities in Sabah and Sarawak. SPKR programs were aimed at further improving the well-being and quality of life of the poor and low-income households.

The government response through its structural development program to strengthen human welfare continues to motivate and build self-esteem and self-reliance among the households and communities involved. Under PPRT/AIM, the poor in squatter areas benefited from the provision of electricity, water stand-pipes and health care, while some who own land were built houses whose cost was fully covered by the government. Furthermore, income generating projects such as small businesses for housewives to supplement household income were also implemented.

Summary

The frame of blocked opportunities concerns inequality and discrimination, especially as they manifest themselves in poverty and inadequate educational and training opportunities. This frame was present in the newspaper articles, public writings and survey data in this study. It is also clear that the Malaysian government has responded to this issue and see the need to specifically address problems of the poor. There are many programs designed to help the poor, programs which continue to form major government policy in Malaysia since the 1970s particularly with the introduction of continuous government poverty eradication programs, such as discussed above. The findings suggest that Sasson's frame of blocked opportunities is highly relevant to the Malaysian context.

Even though poverty and unemployment have been mentioned in the newspapers frames as a cause of blocked opportunities, these two factors are not emphasised as being primary contributors for young people being involved in criminal activities. The low score for this frame (38 scores) indicated this

⁶² Indigenous and native people in Peninsular Malaysia

⁶³ Indigenous and native people in Sabah and Sarawak

situation. In this study there were no direct links found in newspaper articles to the effect of the Asian financial crisis and youth crime. There is also no mention of Asian financial crisis in the newspapers discussion that linked its impact on the increase of youth crime in the country.

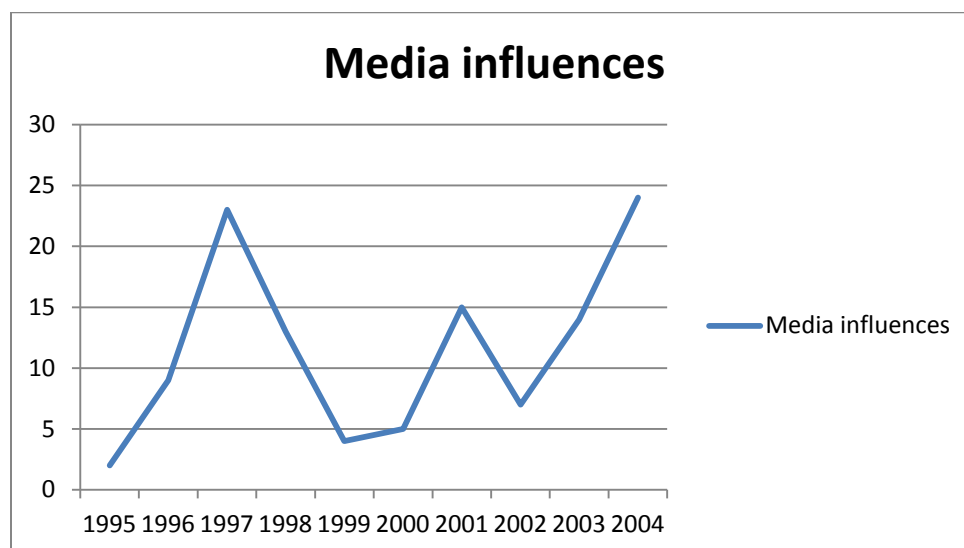
THE MEDIA VIOLENCE FRAME

Claims makers using this frame construct youth crime as a result of the influence of violence in the media such as television, films, the internet and popular music especially from those programmes imported from outside Malaysia. For example, in the reports the headline “Social ills as part of growing pains” stated that one of the problems faced by young people was indulging in "*mindless Western-inspired activities*". However the reporter did not explain to what these activities referred. This sub-theme was highly prevalent in the news coverage studied in this thesis and parallels some criminological literature concerning young people’s susceptibility to media influence (Aker, 1985; Bell, 2003; Flannery et al, 1999; Tanner, 1996; Wooden & Blazak, 2001).

Table 6e: Total news articles relating to the frame of the media according to year

Year / sub-frame	Media influences (A)		TOTAL	
	BH	NST	BH	NST
1995	2	0	2	0
1996	2	7	2	7
1997	10	13	10	13
1998	1	12	1	12
1999	3	1	3	1
2000	3	2	3	2
2001	8	7	8	7
2002	2	5	2	5
2003	10	4	10	4
2004	18	6	18	6
Total each sub-frame by each NP	59	57	59	57
TOTAL Sub-frame in both NP	116		116	

Figure 6e: Total news articles relating to the frame of the media according to year



Within the sub-frame concerning the influence of the media there was only one theme and that related to the media influences associated with young people's involvement in wrongdoings and criminal activities that related to the issues of black metal, pre-marital sex ('*bohsia/bohjan*'), sexual offences (rape, assault, pornography and homosexuality), and running away from home. There are 116 articles (Table 6e and Figure 6e) that were found to be associated with youth crime and media influences. The majority of these focused on the influence of particularly violent and sexual images. Figure 6c suggests there have been some obvious fluctuations in trends, in 1997, 2001, and since 2004 reporting on this matter has been on the way up. The peak in 1997 can be linked to the attention given by the government on issues of young people particularly those involved in crime as 1997 and 1998 were the two years before the introduction of the Children Protection Act, 1999. It is also possible that the second peak in 2001 relates to a similar reason, in that youth crime was particularly topical because of the introduction of the Child Act 2001.

The peak in 2004 may be a consequence of more attention being given to young people particularly with many youth programs and youth policy being introduced such as the: the National Service Program (PLKN), the Children Policy, and the Children Protection Policy.

The media focuses on the effect of a range of factors including those mentioned above, black metal music, pre-marital sex (*bohsia/bohjan*), sexual offences (prompted by rape, sexual assault, pornography, homosexuality images) and running away from home. In this frame it is suggested these are learnt

through print media, TV programs, films and the internet. The idea is that the media has produced a life without borders; people learn new things simply by a click of a mouse. Young people are perceived to be a prime target as their youth means they can easily catch up with new technologies and are said to be ‘techno savvy’. For example young people are more likely to use social media on the internet, and thus be potentially susceptible to the abuses of online technology. Comments made in the news articles concerned the issue of parental and governmental control particularly in term of censorship or restriction. Parents are said to play a role in controlling access of young people to materials published in media, either in the form of TV programs, films or internet sources.

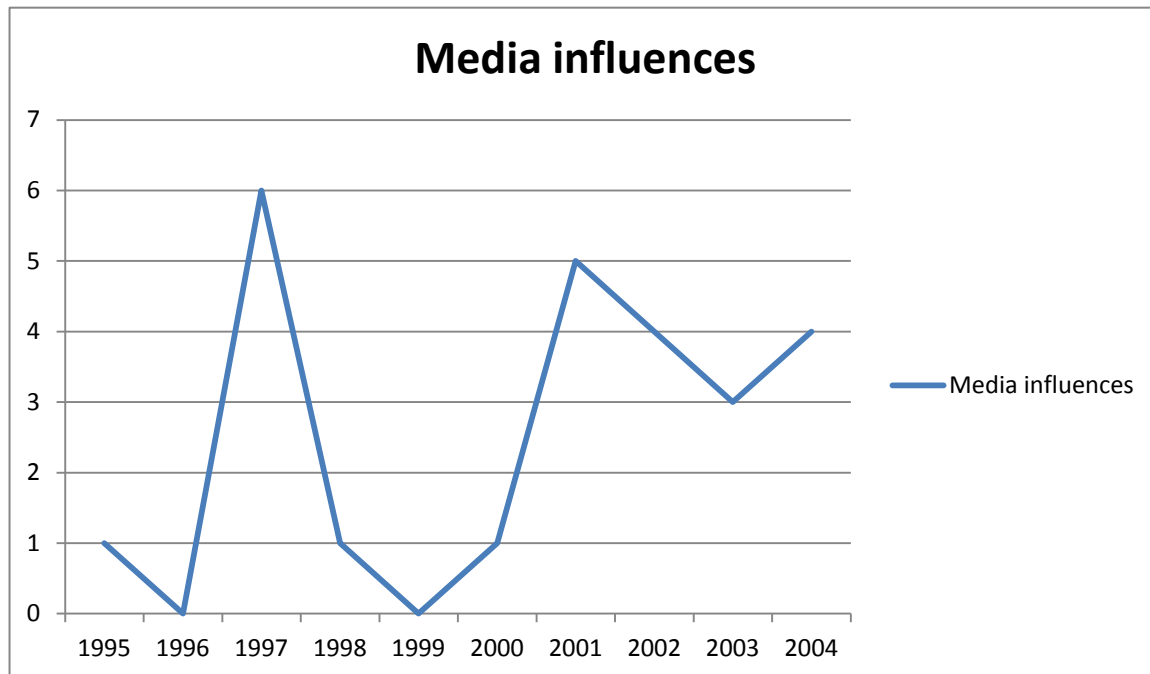
Responses from the public: public writings (letters to the editor)

The analysis of public writing suggests that the media is seen as a component shaping youth crime in Malaysia. The total scores for this sub-frame (as seen in Table 6f) are 24: 13 scores for BH and 11 scores for NST. The public writings suggested that media has both positive and negative influences.

Table 6f: Total public writings relating to the frame of the media according to year

Year / sub-frame	Media influences (A)		TOTAL	
	BH	NST	BH	NST
1995	1	0	1	0
1996	0	0	0	0
1997	2	4	2	4
1998	1	0	1	0
1999	0	0	0	0
2000	0	0	0	0
2001	2	3	2	3
2002	2	2	2	2
2003	2	1	2	1
2004	3	1	3	1
Total each sub-frame by each Newspaper	13	11	13	11
TOTAL Sub-frame in both NP	24		24	

Figure 6f: Total public writings relating to the frame of the media according to year



Analysis of the public writings shows that there are perceptions around the consumption of media. The internet, as a new form of media hype is seen to be important to young users. The internet provides not only information for their school projects but has also become a form of entertainment for most young users. A particular issue raised concerned the monitoring of materials made available on the internet by parents and government. However, according to the public writings, rather than assuming all forms of media entertainment are negative for young people, adults should find a way to educate youth on the good and bad effects the media could have on them. The contributors believe in the education of young people and that highlighting the effect of the media is healthier than censoring or banning media entertainment.

Excessive violence in the media was also found to be a popular media explanation for youth crime by Klien & Chancer (2000) and McManus & Dorfman (2002). The following are the example of headlines emphasising youth crime and the effects of the media:

Bahan lucah punca penyakit sosial (Pornographic causes social ills), BH: 28/03/1998

Pengaruh media tidak mampu dibendung (Media influence cannot be contained), BH: 29/09/1999

Televisyen mampu mempengaruhi minda (Television can affect the mind), BH: 28/02/2001

Kajian dedahkan televisyen pengaruhi remaja ganas (Research reveals television influences teen violence), BH: 08/09/2003

Cerita ganas pengaruhi remaja (Violent stories influence teens), BH: 01/09/2003

Filem lucah, pornografi cetus keinginan seks (Pornographic movies, pornography triggers sexual desire), BH: 23/06/2004

Media massa pemangkin seks bebas (Mass media catalyst for casual sex), BH: 06/10/2004

Call to address negative ICT influences, NST: 17/12/2004

Bullying goes online, NST: 30/09/2004

Media-blaming campaigns

One of the media-blaming campaigns detected in this sample was in relation to young people and concert attendance. Sources repeatedly made causal links between youths, entertainment and crime. There was considerable fear surrounding the influence of the medium of the internet and the effect its usage on young people (BH: 01/09/2003; BH: 08/09/2003; NST: 17/12/2004; NST: 30/09/2004). Nowadays as the internet is easily accessible in most homes, young people are said to consume too much time online without being monitored by any adults. Even though the internet offers many positive benefits, it can also impose negative influences on young people. This media-blaming campaign relates to the purported link between internet and youth crime. For example one parent stated that “Students nowadays are exposed to a wider range of experiences - television, movies, the Internet,” (NST-LTIMES 14/01/1998). Due to the concern over the influence of the internet on young people’s behaviour, there was a demand to include “access to pornography over the internet as an offence” to be listed in the Act 2001 (NSUNT-FOCUS 13/04/2003). There was also a call to monitor entertainment outlets such as cybercafés,

...many entertainment outlets such as cybercafés are being patronised by youths and there is a need for greater supervision to ensure they are not misused. We are not against cybercafés but its facilities should not be abused like letting youths participate in illegal online gambling activities. (NSUNT 05/12/2004)

So over time, the negative influence of the media has been a recurring theme in various forms. In any case, from the early concerns about concert attendance, television and radio programs and video CDs to the more contemporary focus on internet usage, different forms of media have been given ample consideration when it comes to explaining crime among young people.

Responses from the Merdeka survey

Consistent with the public writings, the survey data from the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research⁶⁴ also regards external factors such as the media and popular culture as a central threat to the erosion of traditional values amongst Malaysian young people.

The government of Malaysia regards the mass media as a tool for nation building, development and national unity (Heng, 2002). To that end, the broadcasting media which are government owned and controlled have been instructed since the early 1970s to help oppose 'anti-national elements'. As a tool for nation building, development and national unity, a law was passed on December 7, 1987, allowing the Information Minister to monitor all programmes to ensure that they are consistent with government policy. The Minister has the power to revoke the license of any station judged to be in violation of the law.

Key actors in the media market organizational field include media, government and political organizations. In Malaysia, the government-media relations that constitute the foundations of media markets have traditionally centered on issues of media responsibility, social cohesion and nation-building, for example, under 'development' and 'Asian values' models of the media (Heng, 2002). While social, political and economic transformations are occurring in Malaysia, government-media relations remain closely connected, and in many instances are challenging for media independence and for public debate.

Government response

As Malaysia has become part of the global economy the opening of 'borders' has also affected the personal development of adolescents. The perception exists that young people quickly accept changes and will be exposed to outside development resulting from rapid spread of information technology.

⁶⁴ The information is based on data published by the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research on August 2004

“Inappropriate outside cultures” have been adapted and accepted by most in society (Ohmae, 1990). As a response to the concern about the negative influence of the media on young people, the government reviewed the *National Broadcasting Policy* (1988). The revision was made to ensure that government bodies that worked in the media could keep up with developments in information technology and to check the influx of negative elements and thus tackle social ills affecting society. This kind of response is crucial as the television stations and print media are influential in shaping the views of youth. Thus under the *Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA)* the government has the power to regulate the use of printing presses, printing production, reproduction and distribution of publications, and the importation of publications from abroad. The media is required to comply with the policy requirement and to be more sensitive to materials which contain ‘unhealthy’ elements. The government under its censorship authority is expected to be more selective and impose stringent screening of programs and films.

The *PPPA 1984* is a piece of legislation that requires all print media in Malaysia to obtain a license and abide by its strict regulations. This power extends to banning and prohibiting the importation of publications. For example, in 1987, three newspapers were given suspension orders, leading to a serious problem of self-censorship in newsrooms which has had a negative impact on the overall quality of journalism throughout the country. Most newspapers and magazines prefer to ‘toe the line’ rather than risk losing their licenses.

This piece of legislation is enforced by the Malaysian Ministry of Home Affairs. The powers are vested in the Home Affairs Minister who can grant or deny any permit. The minister can also restrict or ban outright publications that are likely to endanger national security interest or create social unrest. The Constitution of Malaysia does allow freedom of speech, for the press as well. However, there is a very crucial limitation. The Constitution provides that freedom of speech may be restricted by legislation “in the interest of security (or) public order.” Hence this means the government can enact legislation to determine the way information is disseminated by the mass media industry if the government feels that the national interest has been threatened.

Summary

Overall in this study, news articles and public writings consistently portrayed young people as more likely to imitate others and to emulate what they see in various forms of media, specifically through images on television, film, VCD and the internet. The imitation of real or imaginary criminal individuals or actions repeatedly served as a panic button about the younger generation. The representation of young people as

vulnerable and can be influenced easily suggest they were highly competent in imitating vile, destructive, immoral images they encountered in the various forms of media. The influence of the media was one particularly potent target for moral panic. Pressures from the public on the issue related to offensive content in the media urging the government to continue to exert significant forms of control within the media market, including around media ownership, production and content. This finding supports the existence of Sasson's frame within the Malaysian context.

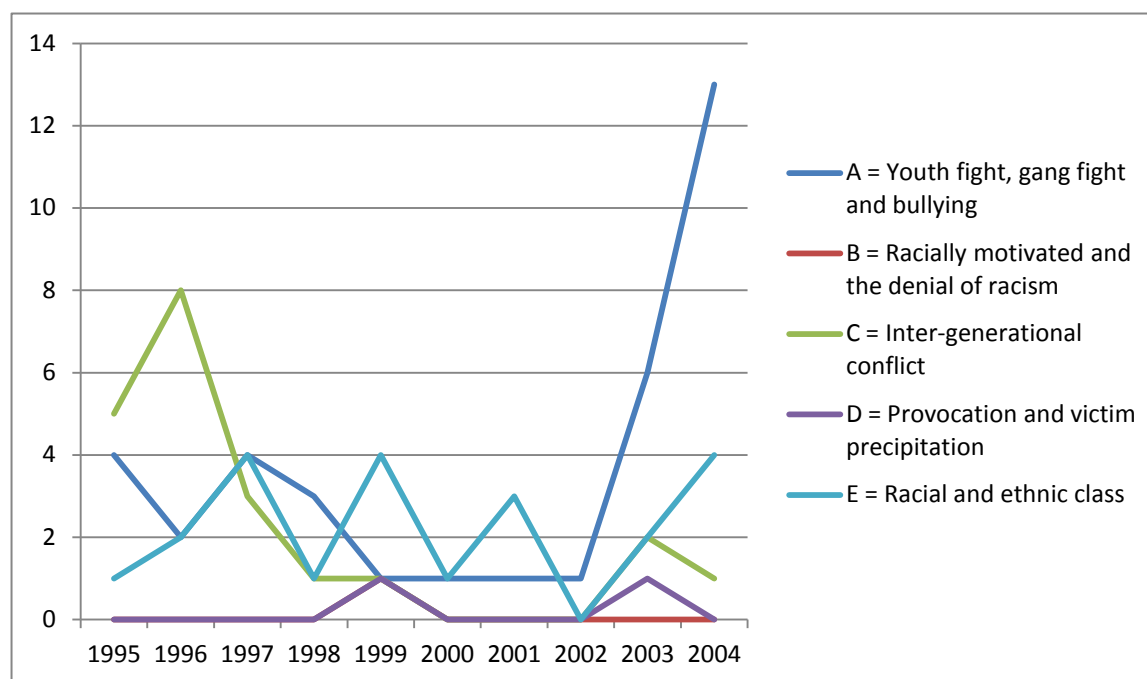
THE INTER-GROUP CONFLICT FRAME

A considerable amount of coverage in the sample was concerned with youth crime as relating to conflict between groups or at times, 'gangs'. This is consistent with Sasson's frame of 'inter-group conflict', where the root cause of juvenile crime is seen to be conflict within peer groups. However, relatively little attention was given in the coverage to the cause of the conflicts when compared to the other explanations detailed for other frames. Table 6c and Figure 6c highlight these findings.

Table 6g: Total news articles relating to the frame of inter-group conflict, by sub-frame and year

	Youth fight, gang fight and bullying (A)		Racially motivated and the denial of racism (B)		Inter-generational conflict (C)		Provocation and victim precipitation (D)		Racial and ethnic class (E)		TOTAL	
Year / sub-frame	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST
1995	3	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	1	7	3
1996	1	1	0	0	8	0	0	0	1	1	10	2
1997	3	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	3	6	5
1998	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	5	0
1999	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	3	1	7	1
2000	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
2001	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	3	2
2002	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
2003	0	5	0	0	0	2	1	0	2	0	3	7
2004	7	6	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	0	12	6
Total each sub-frame by each NP	21	15	1	0	17	4	2	0	15	7	56	26
TOTAL Sub-frame in both NP	36		1		21		2		22		82	

Figure 6g: Total news articles relating to the frame of inter-group conflict, by sub-frame and year



The inter-group conflict frame (Table 6g and Figure 6g) contributes relatively low overall scores to the framing of Malaysian youth crime (n= 85). This frame was divided into 5 sub-frames: youth, gang fights and bullying (A); racially motivated and the denial of racism (B); inter-generational conflict (C); provocation and victim precipitation (D); and racial and ethnic class (E).

The most common sub-frame was related to gang fights and bullying in school areas (A) (36 counts). The next most common sub-frames were E with 22 counts (where the largest ethnic group mentioned is of Malay background) and intergenerational conflict (C=21 scores) where the cases linked to inter-generational relations are mostly concerned with young people and their own parents and grandparents. The gap relates to the lack of understanding of the older generation towards the needs of today's young people, as a result of which, young people rebel and conflict occurs leading possibly to young people running away from home. There are only 2 scores for the sub-frames relating to D (provocation and victim precipitation) and 1 score for B (racially motivated crime and the denial of racism).

One explanation for the small number of D in the coverage is because claims makers usually focus more on offenders than victims. This may be because of differences in perceived news worthiness. The low

count for sub-frame B can be linked to the tendency not to report any conflict that relates to racial tension or confrontation because it is such a sensitive issue to report upon in Malaysia. It is perhaps an issue newspapers choose to avoid rather than to potentially create further conflict. Below is a detailed discussion of each the sub-frames of the inter-group conflict.

Youth fights, gang conflict and bullying

Various conflicts between individuals or groups of youth represented one such type of intergroup conflict. Reports tended to describe these conflicts as situations triggered by an incident, argument or fight. In some cases, reporters portrayed the problems as being of an escalating nature, for example tension between ‘gangs’ from different schools leading up to a series of street fights. They often explained some of the behaviour as acts of revenge, retaliation for some perceived slight. This was the case for example, in reports on acts of aggression linked to gang rivalry; such was the implication of the following headlines, “Cases of bashing students has escalated”, (paraphrased from original Malay, “*Kes belasan pelajar semakin berleluasa*” (BM 25/01/2004) and “Students fighting in bus are prosecuted today”, (paraphrased from original Malay, “*Pelajar gaduh dalam bas didakwa hari ini*” (BH 01/11/2001). Coverage in one article mentioned how a student suffered from serious injuries after he had been attacked by schoolmates at his school because he was found talking to a female student without permission from his seniors (NST 23/08/2003).

Reporters typically did not acknowledge these fights as race or class based rather in more general terms such as ‘being in the wrong place at the wrong time’ or because of revenge for an earlier fight. Accounts emphasized the threatening nature of the fights, by employing terms such as death, seriously injured, in coma and etc., in the following excerpt:

Issues such as students bashing another student, gangsterism and thuggery are not new. Reported in newspapers, this year’s case started with the incident of Form Five student, Nazirul Amran who died after being bashed by adolescent thugs who had extorted him on the New Year’s Eve. In the incidents around 2 am in the morning, Nazirul and his two friends were said to have been bashed and stomped on by 10 other adolescents who were drunk. Nazirul was in a coma due to the serious injury in his neck. He was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit at Kuala Lumpur Hospital for two days before he passed away. The second case involved Mohd Jabaar Mohd Aslam, 14 years old, who claimed he been beaten and extorted in front of two discipline teachers after he gave up

a mobile phone which contained lewd photos belonging to another student. Anjay Kumar Dhiagarajan, 13 years old, was injured after been bashed by a group of senior students in one incident at secondary school at Stampin Road, Kuching, Sarawak. Sanjay was said to have been bashed with a chair, an iron chain and was also injured from cigarette burns because he failed to pay RM30 for payment to settle a fighting case involving himself and one of the members' brother earlier. (BM 25/01/2004)

While a critical analysis of news coverage might indicate that class and race power differentials were at play in how reporters portrayed the groups of youths, it was clearly not the focus of the explanation offered in the news coverage. The reporters' explanations were much more in line with either the youths freely choosing to engage in the fights (e.g. retaliation), or relating to the low self-control and poor-judgement that are perceived to be characteristic of youth. This type of explanation involving escalation of tension between groups or individuals leading up to a fight also took the form of a lengthy experience with bullying leading up to the attacks, such as the crimes took place in the school yard, involved bullying, gangsterism or jokes that ended up in a fight.

Such explanations clearly drew from the focus on the psychological effects of bullying on an individual and a virtual silence regarding the broader context in which bullying can occur (Morrison, 2007). The concept of 'bullying' itself covers a multitude of behaviours however this is not the focus of this thesis.

Intergenerational conflict / Provocation and victim precipitation

Another example of group conflict occasionally found in the coverage was what was characterised as intolerance towards youth in general, for instance if parents were seen as neglectful, children might end up as the 'invisible killer', (*'Invisible killer' in neglect by parents*, NST-LTIMES - 13/11/1995). Another is a letter to the editor written by someone from the public with the headline, "*Handle the bad boys in schools*" (NST, 15/08/2003) suggesting there should be action taken to deal with students in school as to create a safer place to study. He admitted the action might be harsh but something had to be done about 'bad boys' in school.

Police should be mobilised to monitor troubled schools. Their presence at the schools will be a clear deterrent to would-be bad boys from within and outside the school. The school administrators should weed out all the bad hats and send them to boys' homes or

juvenile centres for rehabilitation. This might seem harsh but something has to be done to stop this menace.

However another claims maker mentioned too much stereotyping from older people being applied to their young children. For instance the following excerpt raised this concern.

There is so much talk about "bohsia" and "bohjan", youth hanging out in shopping complexes, being unproductive and so on. At parent-teacher association meetings, parents criticise "youth nowadays" as being uncontrollable and irresponsible, comparing their "free and easy" life in the old days with that of the youth of today. And the first time I saw the Petronas advertisement on the info-screen in the Express Rail Link (ERL) on my way home to Kota Kinabalu from KL, I was more saddened than happy to reminisce about my kampung upbringing. I was saddened by the negative perceptions insinuated by the older folk in the advertisement about the adolescents, their own children living in present day Malaysia not having and not knowing the true meaning and value of friendship like they used to have in their days. My questions are: what is the objective of stereotyping or labelling the adolescents or youth? Is it fair to compare and criticise the lives of today's youth with how we were and what we used to have and blame them for it? The environment and situations that children are brought up nowadays are so different. Life in a "concrete jungle" like KL, for instance, is not the same as life in a "real" kampung of old or even now. When I was travelling on the ERL to the KL International Airport, I looked at the blocks of flats where families actually live, and wondered how it feels for the adolescents and the effect it would have on them living in such conditions. There's hardly any room for the family to even dry their clothes. It seems convenient to point fingers at the young people for their irresponsible behaviour, their seeming lack of appreciation of their surroundings and their ingratitude and lack of understanding of what has been achieved since independence. But would the constant labelling or sweeping statements about them through the media by community leaders or society in general, of late and in the past, solve the problems faced by youth or posed by youth? When children or youth are ignored, they would eventually lose the "spark" in them. How could they show how much they care when parents and adults in authority do not pay attention nor care to show how much they care? Instead, some of these adults would eventually deem the youth as listless and useless. (NSUNT-FOCUS 07/09/2003)

Another claims maker also voiced a similar concern asking in the headline of his article, "The young people of today: Are we really talking to them enough?" (NSUNT-FOCUS 19/05/2002). He argued that the older generation was just intolerant of the younger generation.

There are many misconceptions about the young of today. Mainstream media has the same herd mentality - when there is anything wrong within society, blame it on the young. There are all kinds of debates among policy makers of today on how "to handle" them. Many of these young people are perplexed as to the fuss surrounding them. Occasionally there are debates on "social problems" - drugs, lepak, bohsia, incest, you name it. But listen to them carefully - these problems are created not by them... The young of today are not the young of yesteryears. They are the product of the successes and perhaps even, excesses of nation building. They are the produce of countless years of social engineering. They are the Generation Y and perhaps Z of this country. As the nation progresses, so too the challenges of managing the young population. Many of us misconstrue the exact roles of parenting the children of today. The moral custodians are certainly alarmed at the innocuous nature of today's relationship among the young. Many parents - perhaps inheriting the guilt of their own upbringing - would like to posit a "holier-than-thou" attitude. Parenting gurus coached them to be strict and just - in the world where strict is perceived as authoritarian and being just is considered a parental excuse to control them. Parenting today is not without challenges. Even motivational and parental facilitators acknowledge that. Life is not simple any more. Children are becoming more complex. And parents who fail to understand their own children will do so at their own peril. Politicians tend to simplify. Sadly, to many of them the young are merely numbers and thus potential candidates in their constituencies, nothing more. So, imagine their horror when the young people carry the banners and flags of opposition parties in general elections and by-elections. These people to them are merely instruments of the opposition... How wrong he can be. Young people are by nature rebellious... and independent-minded.

Another claimed that it was "Unjustified to label all youth as unmanageable" (NST-LTIMES 29/10/1997). In this article the writer argued there were too many misconceptions made about youth.

WE are tired. We are tired of being labelled as a useless, unmanageable group. We have had so many names and accusations thrown at us, so many from those who wouldn't see things as they are. We don't deserve to be treated this way. I am speaking for the young people of our country today. Ah... the youth, they might say, immoral behaviour; everything good in them on the decline; weak and pampered; no sense of responsibility; don't think of the future. And the list goes on. Do realise that not all of us are what the media and so-called "concerned citizens" portray us to be. There are a lot of us out there who are studying for our future, getting good grades, planning ahead. There are a large number of us who work honestly and diligently for a living, and don't fool around for kicks or for some extra money. We don't do drugs, nor have we ever joined in anything illegal. We have fun, we do - but in our own clean, good ways. Those *bohsia* and *bohjan* lifestyles aren't ours. I've seen many childhood friends who seemed so bad and unmanageable when they were in their teens turn into respectable citizens, pillars of society. Youth is the time when we learn what life is all about, trying to find our own way and our own direction. There's so much to think about as it is; we don't need any more pressure than what we are having. We are not stupid. We have minds of our own. We need guidance from adults - but not suppression and constraints.

Media coverage also portrayed rebellion and resistance to authority, the stamp of youth, as a source of their misconduct. The papers reported on youth political protests such as protests against political parties or demonstrations against significant issues, for instance in this headline, "Unlawful assemblies: Seven students charged" (NST, 04/09/1999).

Certain types of youth namely *bohsia/bohjan*, *mat/minah rempit*, punks and *kuturayau* were more likely than others to be portrayed as acting out of rebellion. The variations in this respect may have depended on the socio-political climate of the times or on who the writer of a particular item was, as different writers could sometimes describe rebellion as a somewhat endearing characteristic of normal youths that would pass (with testing of boundaries) or as more troublesome (pushing of boundaries). For examples, one article claimed that what progresses during adolescence was 'part and parcel' of growing up and over time, youths can and usually do mend their ways.

Yes, I admit, we don't have as much experience as adults do, so that's why we should be given the chance to make our own mistakes. Nobody can learn without making mistakes. It's all part and parcel of the journey through life. So please, don't label all of

us across the board based on just those who are unwholesome. Let it be known that there exists Malaysian youths with vision, young virtuous Malaysians who are quietly working to excel (NST-LTIMES 29/10/1997).

In addition the following article heading “Stop shielding us; we'd rather learn from our mistakes” (NST-LTIMES 02/07/1997) also shared the same matter.

It's tough being a teenager these days. Everyone seems to acknowledge us as future leaders of the country but they also see fit to dictate our actions as if they do not trust our judgment... Give us teenagers a break! We are not about to start smoking, drinking or fighting or having illicit sex after watching a concert! Though I am a teenager, I have learned about ownership and taking responsibility for my actions. Once we stop making excuses for ourselves by blaming others, we can start correcting our faults. Trying to create a problem-free environment by banning this and blaming that will not help us grow as leaders. Do not shield us from reality. I'd rather learn from my mistakes than not being even able to recognise them.

Other articles, however, reported offensive comments made by adults about youths. For example, the following excerpts from newspapers showed comments made about certain young people who were considered to be deviating from rules at school.

...my school has had the misfortune of getting a new headmistress who rules the school like an academy for juvenile delinquents. Her ideas are so bizarre that she even made a new rule that girls could not wear hoop earrings because “only gangsters wear hoop earrings”. (NST-LTIMES 13/12/1995)

When giving his verdict, Judge K C Vohrah said it was a pity for the victim who had just finished sitting her Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination who was not able to live to adulthood because of being violently murdered by a person whose behaviour was that of an ‘animal’. “You should have been hanged to death for the offence that you have committed but you are lucky because at the time of the incident you were still underage, less a day from 18 years”, he said.⁶⁵ (BM 31/08/1997)

⁶⁵ In original Malay, “Ketika membuat keputusan, Hakim Datuk K C Vohrah berkata, adalah malang bagi mangsa yang baru sahaja selesai menduduki peperiksaan Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) tidak sempat merasai hidup

The generation gap was not a major explanatory theme for youth misconduct. It was more of a cliché, occasionally drawn upon to account for differences of opinion where youthful behaviour was pushing, if not crossing, the boundaries of law.

Responses from the public: letters to the editor

This study found eight public writings in the form of letters to the editor that related to this frame (Table 6g and Figure 6g below). In contrast to the claims makers (journalists) the most common frame seen in the public writing related to race, ethnicity and class.

Young people from a Malay working class background are the most commonly mentioned young people involved in wrongdoings or criminal activities compared to other groups (E). Not surprisingly given that the major population group in Malaysia is Malay, the majority of young people are Malay in terms of arrest, conviction and those in rehabilitation schools. This finding is supported by the police crime statistics⁶⁶ where Malay juveniles comprise the largest number of young people involved in criminal activities since 1996 (Statistic, Social Welfare Department, 2007). However, the conflict reported upon is not between different racial or ethnic groups rather the conflict is within group itself.

Sub-frame A scores 2 counts and both writings mention that young people like to get into fights and bullying particularly with their schoolmates. Sub-frame C has only one score; there is only one piece of writing on this and the remark states a conflict of inter-generational relations between the young person and his or her family or guardian. Even though sub-frame B and D did emerge in the general coverage of both newspapers (referred to Table 6g above), there is no coverage in the public writings.

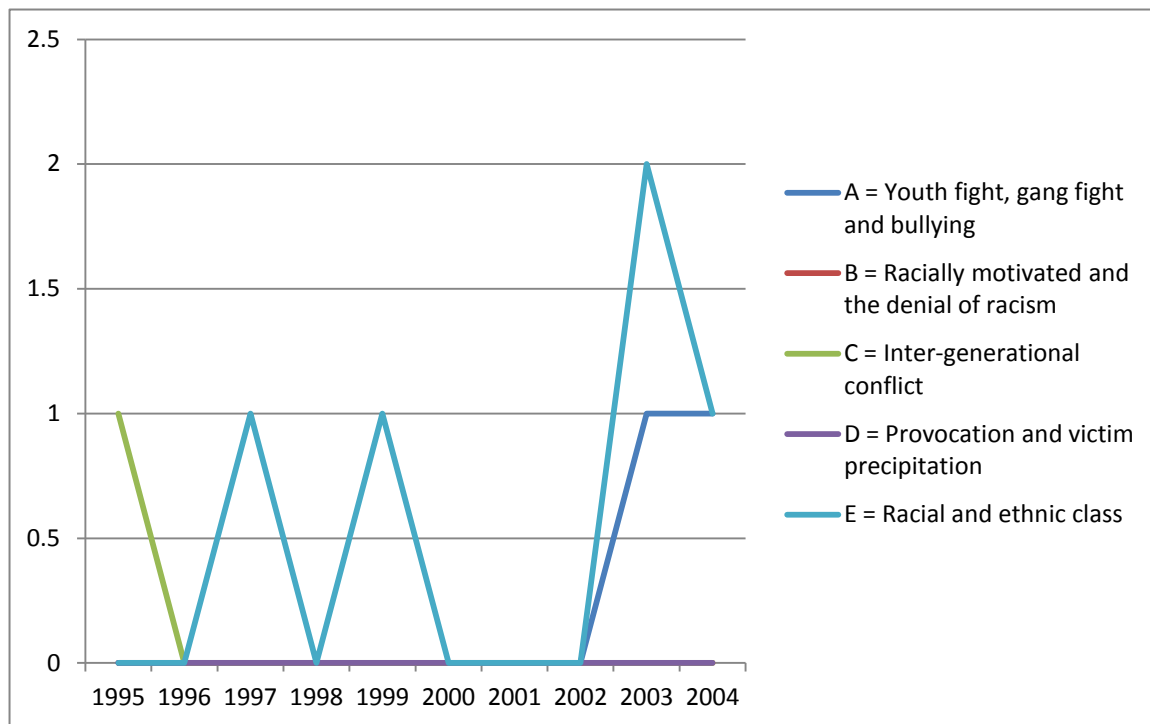
dewasa kerana dibunuh dengan kejam di tangan seorang yang bersifat 'binatang'. "Kamu sepatutnya dihukum gantung atas kesalahan ini tetapi kamu bernasib baik kerana ketika kejadian itu kamu berusia di bawah umur iaitu kurang sehari daripada 18 tahun," katanya.

⁶⁶ Refer to Table 2c and Figure 2c, Chapter 2 of the thesis.

Table 6h: Total public writings concerning inter-group conflict by sub-frame and year

	Youth fight, gang fight and bullying (A)		Racially motivated and the denial of racism (B)		Inter-generational conflict (C)		Provocation and victim precipitation (D)		Racial and ethnic class (E)		TOTAL	
Year / sub-frame	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST	BH	NST
1995	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
1996	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1997	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
1998	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1999	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
2000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2001	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2002	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2003	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	1
2004	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
Total each sub-frame by each NP	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	1	6	2
TOTAL Sub-frame in both NP	2		0		1		0		5		8	

Figure 6h: Total public writings concerning inter-group conflict by sub-frame and year



Statements gathered from newspapers suggest that there is some inter-group conflict with the public more or less likely to view media portrayals of young people as fair or unfair depending on their age. The younger generation tends to say that the picture the media presents is unfair, while the older generation is more likely to feel that the media portrayal of young people is fair. Some examples of newspaper headlines that pressed on this frame are:

Dua beradik dituduh bunuh datuk, cucu ke mahkamah (Two brothers charged with murder of grandfather and his grandson in court), BH: 07/12/2000

Pelajar didakwa sebabkan kematian rakan (Student charged for causing death of a friend), BH: 21/02/1998

Pelajar gaduh dalam bas didakwa hari ini (Students fighting on the bus were charged today), BH: 01/11/2001

Let the elderly tend the young, NST: 16/06/1999

Bridging the generation gap, NST: 09/07/2003

How adults and the youth can bridge gap, NST: 05/03/1997

Boy, 16, charged with murder of his mother, NST: 21/12/2004

Sisters, friends planned murder, court told, NST: 20/08/2004

Responses from the Merdeka Survey

The survey data from the Merdeka Center⁶⁷ showed both genders viewed crime and safety, and social and moral problem as among the most important issues in the country in 2004. Crime and safety came second while social and moral problems were the fourth issue, among the 16 issues listed. Juvenile/social problems and crime were also listed as important issues in local neighbourhoods. Malay respondents voted juvenile/social problems as the most important issue in their neighbourhood and listed crime as the third most important issue. Meanwhile the Chinese and the Indian respondents voted crime as the most important issue in their neighbourhood and listed juvenile/social problems as the second issue.

All races (Malays, Chinese, Indian and Others) listed crime and social problems as local concerns in their community and this finding was consistent with the national issues. The finding suggests that the concern over crime and social problems is not only media driven but also has resonance with the actual conditions on the ground.

The finding also highlights a concern over social problems especially those involving young people. Of the respondents, 70% said that social problems had increased a lot. This heightened concern over social problems reflects a sense of powerlessness in tackling problems affecting the young. This may be derived from the actual increases in reporting on crime by the media and the mismatch between societal expectations and society's ability to nurture the young. Findings indicate that this perception is pervasive within the Malay and Indian communities but less so in the Chinese community.

⁶⁷ The information is based on data published by the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research on 24 February 2004.

Responses from the government

The frame of inter-group conflict also plays out in government responses during the period of study. For example, one government response attempted to form better relations among racial and ethnic groups particularly among the younger generation through the PLKN program. Through this youth program, it is hoped that the formation of citizens occurs according to the philosophy of Rukun Negara (Principles of Nationhood) which was introduced in 1970 and then streamlined by Vision 2020 which was introduced in 1991. Rukun Negara and Vision 2020 have become guidelines for national policy and underline the philosophy for nation building and development. The government perspective is that since Malaysia is a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural country, it is necessary to have strong unity among young Malaysians especially regarding their love and devotion to the country. This is crucial because young people will not only participate in the development of the country but will also inherit the leadership in the future.

According to government documentation, this program is needed because of three main factors. First is the change in thinking among young people in terms of ideas of ethnic-nation and the concept of citizenship. As a result of globalisation, there is a sense that the younger generation has little if no interest in issues related to citizenship. The decline in this issue is the result of an unstable country, the easy movement of individual from one country to the next and life opportunities that are widely open for exploration; this is compared to the older generation who had to fight against colonisation in order to gain the sovereignty of an independent nation. Consequently, efforts to form identity and foster a spirit of nationalism among the younger generation are deemed necessary.

Secondly, there is a perception that comes through government policy over the period of study that modernity brought by rapid development in the country since Independence in 1957, has made the younger generation comfortable with more self-centred attitudes. As a result of modernity the younger generation is more comfortable desiring satisfaction in life as individuals rather than to sacrifice for society and the country. The perception is that the younger generation firmly hold materialistic and consumerist attitudes because these lead to fulfilment of their lifestyle goals. Furthermore what they desire can be seen, held and enjoyed. This is unlike the nationhood ideology which is a utopia and difficult to achieve, except for those who really aspire to protect it.

Third is the expansion of urban development in Malaysia. The impact of urban planning has been the loss of community spirit and a move to a more materialistic spirit among individuals in Malaysia, especially among the younger generation. Urbanisation is a necessity. Urbanisation also accelerates development and improvement in the quality of human life. However as a country that desires to build its citizens and nation based on its own model, it seems that the government feels PLKN is a requirement as a tool to achieve unity within and among races and ethnicity in Malaysia. Through PLKN, individualistic lifestyles, a characteristic of urbanisation, can be transformed to community spirit, because the younger people who participate in PLKN have been trained to live together as one and to serve local community through the spirit of volunteerism.

The PLKN policy was created and debated by various individuals and organisations before it was launched; thus the perception is that this policy genuinely reflects Malaysian aspirations. The uniqueness of PLKN, a Malaysian model, is based on characteristics such as the involvement of all races either males or females and with Rukun Negara as its foundation. It has multi-disciplinary curricula, does not focus on military conscription and has its own images in terms of uniforms, theme logo and songs.

The introduction of this program is a pioneer for a national agenda to train adolescents so they can become a successful generation who strive for excellence in comparison to today's generation. PLKN is centred on Rukun Negara, the philosophical statements on life principles, a basis for a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural mix of Malaysian citizens. In reference to PLKN, its philosophical statements are:

Malaysia is a beautiful country, liberated and loaded with its community and cultural diversities. Malaysians love their country, willing to serve and participate actively in confronting environmental and global changes and challenges.⁶⁸

The government's implementation of PLKN aims to instil intelligence, to improve nationhood understanding and to strengthen loyalty to the country thus reducing or eradicating problems associated with inter-group conflict.

⁶⁸ Paraphrase from original Malay, "*Malaysia adalah sebuah negara yang indah, bebas dan kaya dengan kepelbagaian masyarakat dan budaya. Rakyat Malaysia mencintai negaranya, sedia menyumbang dan turut serta secara aktif menghadapi perubahan dan cabaran persekitaran dan dunia.*"

Summary

The findings from this study suggest that the inter-group conflict frame has been used by claims makers in Malaysia, over the whole period of the study. This supports the relevance of Sasson's work in this context. The findings suggest that conflicts tended to be represented as relating to class and age but not so much race. Media explanations tended to shade and depoliticise the conflict by attributing them to other causes such as bullying, personal insults, and gang or group protection. The public writing on this topic in the form of letters to the editor also tended to not discuss openly issues relating to race, focusing more on age and class conflicts. If there is any mention of race conflict, only individuals from the same race will talk on behalf of their own race. The issue of race continues to be a sensitive issue in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

In sum this chapter argued that Sasson's frames, the social defect/social breakdown frame, the blocked opportunity frame, the media violence frame and the inter-group conflict frame are evident in Malaysian media representations of youth crime. The print media has portrayed the family, the environment and social conditions, peers and adults, and the media all as contributing factors influencing the choices of young people and their involvement in crime. Each of these influences, while explaining the behaviour of young people, also served to construct the image of youths as easily influenced, lacking judgement and vulnerable to exploitation. The next chapter will discuss the individual defect frame.

CHAPTER 7: FRAMING YOUTH CRIME: PATHOLOGICAL INDIVIDUAL

The common conceptions of troubled youth often focus on the nature of youth violence or crime. As stated by Bernard Schissel, "although habitual and potentially dangerous offenders are the small minority, only their activities and characteristics seem to inform the moral panic debates" (Schissel 2006: p. 11). A lot of what is known about youth is driven by the media; the form of knowledge can influence the public discourse about youths (Tanner, 2001; Schissel, 1997). This chapter considers the way in which the category of 'youth' has been constructed through moral panics which frame youth as the pathological individual or as 'evil people' and blaming them for the social problems and fear in the society. The moral panics create social consequences for youth because the panic can influence how we understand youth and their problem. The panic surrounding youth as the representations of crime influenced both the way trouble youth were understood either as crime or pre-criminal and what was understood to be the appropriate response to their problem.

The term such as "juvenile delinquent" for example indicates that there is something different about the misconduct of youth or juvenile that needs special consideration. This also indicates and that the problem lies in the individual youth who is understood as delinquent or to be problematic and dysfunction within any functional community. Youth, through the construction of this frame, become "Other" or something separate from "us" and packed with associations of danger and problem. Media that disseminate simplistic information that packed with inconsistencies and misinformation regarding children who transgress the law facilitated the process of 'othering' which then caused 'child criminals' to be distanced, objectified and consequently receive little sympathy, empathy and tolerance (Matthews, 2009: p. 82). While this othering process is not the exclusive domain of the media, the media can play an important role in shaping and furthering such perceptions of youth (Glassner, 1999; Kappeler and Potter, 2005; Schissel, 1997a, 2006). These dysfunctions of youth are strengthened through statistics, images, corporate power, and individualism, the discourse of delinquency becomes "indistinguishable from forms of representations of youth" (Visano, 1996: p. 72).

Following the above this chapter argues that there is one other important frame used by claims-makers in Malaysia in their portrayal of youth crime: the individual defect frame. Many of the explanations provided in the coverage focused on some kind of individual defect. This includes pathologies or conditions that render individuals either temporarily or permanently irrational, as well as situations in which individuals make rational decisions to engage in criminal behaviour. In Sasson's study of street crime this frame did not emerge. However, in this study it was a clear theme.

This study found that a considerable number of claims-makers constructed youth crime in relation to individual flaws. Within this construction a number of sub-frames were identified. The most common sub-frame related to character flaws and the nature of youthfulness with 591 and 581 counts respectively. Examples of character flaws were moral indecency that includes pre-marital sex, unwed pregnancy, prostitution, '*bohsia/bohjan*', and illegal motor racing. The sub-frame relating to the nature of youthfulness is concerned with pleasure seeking behaviour. These two sub-frames overlap in practice because pleasure seeking behaviour may involve supposedly morally indecent behaviour including pre-marital sex, unwed pregnancy, prostitution, *bohsia/bohjan* and illegal motor racing. However these sub-frames have been separated because some pleasure seeking behaviour is not a character flaw per se such as smoking, '*lepak*' and partying.

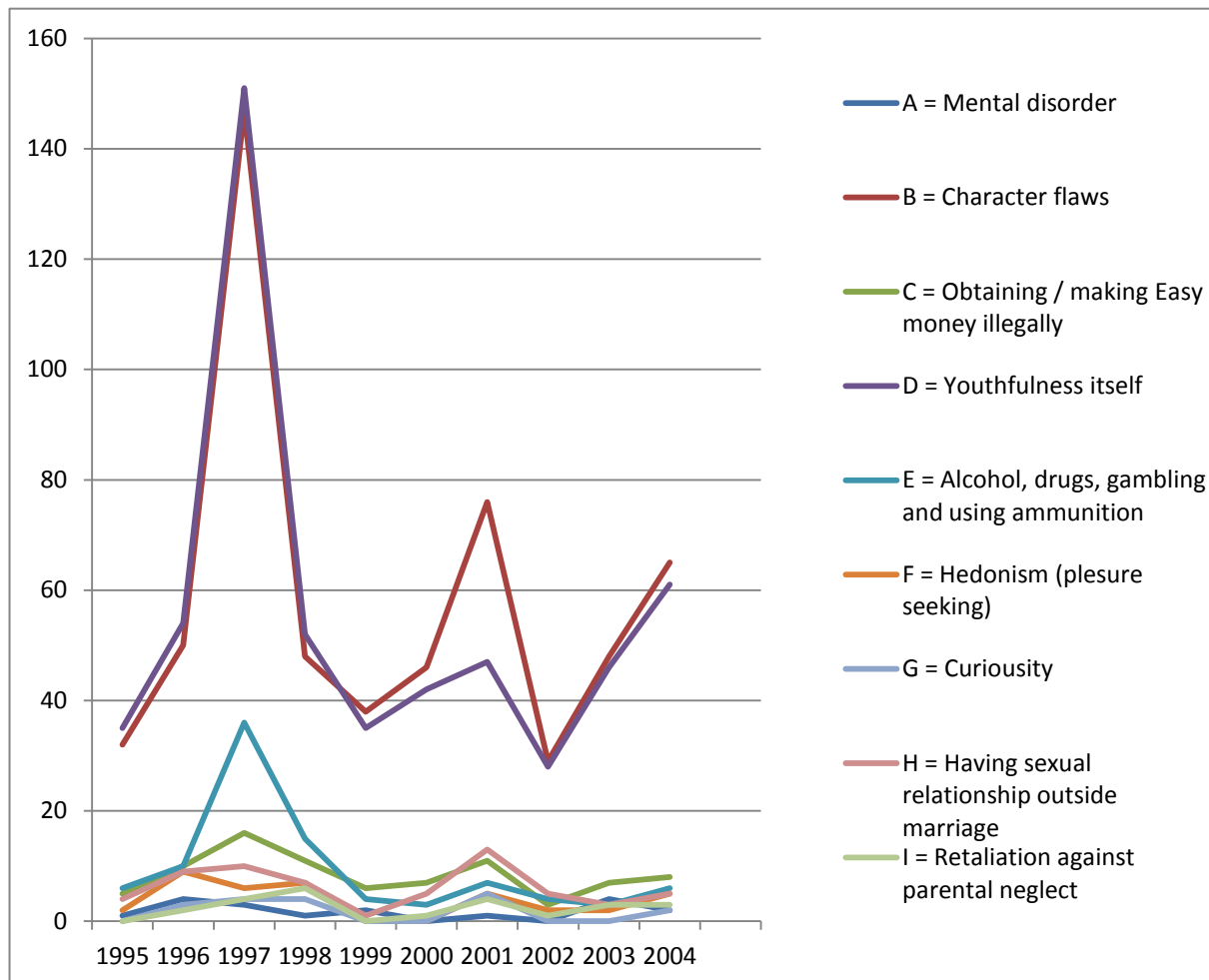
In this study the other sub-frames were less prominent; each had a count of less than 100 (A=18; C=84; E=91; F=38; G=18; H=62; and I=24). The total score for all the sub-frames is 1507; BH contributes 698 scores and NST contributes 809 scores.

From Tables 7a and Figures 7a it is clear that the most common representation of youth crime within the individual defect frame concerns character flaws and the defects of youthfulness. The peak coverage is in 1997 and 2001 paralleling findings regarding other frames. Across the study there was more coverage of youth crime stories during these two peaks periods; with 1997 being the pre-proposal stage of the Children Protection Act which was heavily discussed and evaluated in 1999-2001 relating to the introduction of the Child Act 2001.

Table 7a: The individual defect frame by sub-frame and year

Year / sub-frame BH	Mental disorder (A)	Character flaws (B)	Obtain/making easy money illegally (C)	Youthfulness itself (D)	Alcohol, drugs, gambling and holding ammunitions (E)	Hedonism (F)	Curiosity (G)	Having sexual relationships outside marriage (H)	Retaliation against parental neglect (I)	Total
1995	1	15	3	16	5	0	0	0	0	40
1996	2	22	3	22	6	0	0	0	0	55
1997	3	72	5	70	13	0	0	0	0	163
1998	0	23	0	24	6	0	0	0	0	53
1999	1	22	2	21	4	0	0	0	0	50
2000	0	29	3	27	1	0	0	0	0	60
2001	0	46	7	47	4	1	1	0	0	106
2002	0	15	2	15	2	0	0	1	0	35
2003	1	19	5	17	2	0	0	0	0	44
2004	2	39	3	38	2	5	1	1	1	92
Total BH	10	302	33	297	45	6	2	2	1	698
Year/sub-frame NST	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	Total
1995	0	17	2	19	1	2	0	4	0	47
1996	2	28	7	32	4	9	3	9	2	97
1997	0	75	11	81	23	6	4	10	4	223
1998	1	25	11	28	9	7	4	7	6	98
1999	1	16	4	14	0	0	0	1	0	36
2000	0	17	4	15	2	0	0	5	1	44
2001	1	30	4	30	3	4	4	13	4	93
2002	0	14	1	13	2	2	0	4	1	37
2003	3	29	2	29	1	2	0	3	3	72
2004	0	26	5	23	1	0	1	4	2	62
Total NST	8	289	51	284	46	32	16	60	23	809
Total JCD and BB in both BH and NST	18	591	84	581	91	38	18	62	24	1507

Figure 7a: Total number of articles relating to individual pathology by sub-frame and year



Some examples of the headlines that emphasised individual defects in their construction of youth crime are the following:-

Budak kontroversi lahirkan anak (Controversial child giving birth), BH: 06/05/1995

Kelahiran luar nikah meningkat (Out of wedlock babies increased), BH: 07/05/1997

The changing face of juvenile delinquency, NSUNT: 21/07/1996

Teen shoplifters find it thrilling, NST-LTIMES: 12/08/2003

School fire: Six pupils remanded, NST: 07/06/2000

Boy pleads guilty to killing emu, ostriches, NST: 15/11/2002

Rich children also among delinquents, NST: 05/12/2004

Many explanations that occur on the individual defect frame centre on mental defects (mental disorder, low intelligence, psychological trauma), flawed personalities (bad character, greed, laziness), youthfulness (poor judgment, inexperience, pursuit of independence) and intoxication.

Mental disorder

Mental disorder is one of the prevalent examples of explanations for youth crime that focuses on an individual defect. Mental illness constitutes a form of individual pathology. It is considered a factor in diminishing individual responsibility for criminal behaviour. Inferences about mental disorder virtually always focused on the individual, although some explanations involving mental disorder did examine the social conditions which led to or intensified such problems. In this frame, the defect of the individual served as a reference point for understanding the specific youth criminal incident.

That mental disorder as an explanation was highly prevalent in the sample is a good example of the simplification of crime phenomenon. Even the hint of a mental disorder seems to offer newspaper reporters a 'cop out'. That is, the rationale allows them to stop looking for any other reasons for youth offending. In contexts where news reporting resources are limited, easy answers may be ones which are favoured (Hall et. al., 1978). Mental disorder, it seems, explains the unexplainable to a certain extent. The reliance on mental disorder in such a way is in keeping with the media representations of mental illness found by Wahl (1995) which tended to be stereotyped, offensive, and inaccurate. Several articles made brief or even single word reference to some sort of mental disorder to explain the acts of a young person for which no other explanation was elaborated.

According to Wahl (1995), rarely did the newspaper coverage come up with any attempt at explaining or contextualising mental disorder. Findings from this present study are consistent with Wahl's finding. For example, mental illness was assumed to be something beyond control, thus removing blame from the usual sources (the individual and/or his or her family). In very few cases the writers of news items did demonstrate an effort at understanding why a young person was or became mentally disordered. The sources of mental illness when they were discussed were frequently sensationalistic – for example sexual or physical abuse, post trauma, brain functioning or heredity problems. As Henshel (1990: p. 59) noted, the kinds of issues that can make the problem seem traumatic sell the newspapers. The following newspaper quotations mention this link.

The saddest cases are children who turn to crime due to poverty, parents who are drug addicts or due to sexual abuse. The emotional stress leads the children to exhibit behavioural problems. This leads to truancy, staying out late, running away from home, and getting out of control. (NST-LTIMES 25/07/2000)

Many young offenders commit crimes to fulfil psychological needs caused by poverty, broken homes, frustration, desperation as well as the lack of love, attention, opportunity and guidance. (NSUNT-FOCUS 13/04/2003)

In one case involving an 11 year old boy who murdered a five year old girl, the reporter did mention that the parents of the boy were divorced when the boy was an infant (NST, 02/02/2001). Later in coverage of the same case, an explanation of mental capacity was linked to family background and peer involvement.

His lawyer, Arunan Selvaraj said that the boy came from a broken home, had never known parental love and had dropped out of school after Standard Two. Earlier Gombak district Social Welfare Department officer Asiah Mohamed Salleh, when tendering the probation report on the boy, said he had run wild and mixed with bad hats in Selayang Baru. This, she said, could be due to the fact that his parents were divorced when he was five years old and he was constantly shunted between his stepfather's house in Selayang Baru and his grandmother's house in Ijok, Perak. She said the boy had also related to her an incident in which he witnessed his friend, a Form One pupil, having sex with a Form Two schoolgirl. (NST 22/06/2001)

When mental illness was suggested as an explanation, it was usually mere speculation on the part of the reporter, or what one might expect the reader to infer. This speculation usually took the form of a mention that an accused offender would undergo a psychiatric evaluation or that a defence strategy would hinge on proving that the accused was not fit to stand trial or not guilty by reason of insanity. Clearly, being examined by a psychiatrist or using an insanity defence is very different from being mentally ill; however, the inference is that the explanation resides within the purview of mental disorder. In that sense, the inclusion of this type of information constitutes an element in the explanatory framework employed by newspapers for understanding certain youth crimes. Many cases reported that those who offended in high profile cases would be assigned to undergo psychiatric examination.

A schoolgirl who was charged in the magistrate's court with killing a 58-year-old grandmother was ordered to be sent to Hospital Bahagia (mental hospital) for one month of psychiatric observation (NST, 24/08/1999).

Aside from mentions of psychiatric examinations, the more substantial explanations focusing on an offender's mental health worldwide tended to be concentrated during the height of the positivist psychiatric influence (Menzies, 1989; Scull, 1977) in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s with a slight resurgence in the late 1990s surrounding a few high profile murders committed by young offenders, where reporters mentioned psychiatric examinations and quoted various types of experts, including psychiatrists and youth workers. Similar cases in Malaysia shared the same nature of arguments where statements from experts were widely covered and prominent. Their statements were not only good for the trial progress of the cases but also attracted readers to follow the cases covered. For example the following excerpt highlights the opinion of a principal psychologist on a killing after a rape case.

Dr Edward Chan, Principal Psychologist of Malaysian Psychologist Centre, said in psychopathology, raping and killing belonged to the same line and what usually prompted the killing after rape is the fear of being discovered. The offender is usually "desensitized" vis-a-vis his crimes, a process that does not necessarily begin from the city or the advent of modernisation, like the influx of smut VCDs. He said children or juveniles when committing a horrific crime did not see the distinction between reality and fantasy because they were usually exposed to cruelty when they were young. Therefore they become desensitised ... they can become very cruel, he added. (NST 18/08/2001)

Mental disorder, as discourse of disease or as a legal defence, was one of the key explanations used in accounting for behaviour by focusing strictly on the defect of the individual. As far as news coverage is concerned, mental disorder appears to be a neat and tidy explanation which is unchallenging and thus perhaps tempting to report on.

Character flaws

Another area where the focus on an individual's flaws become an explanation for crime take the shape of statements made about individuals' personal attributes, their personality, their values or morals. Common

representations of young people have provided characterisations such as being vicious, dishonest, heartless, predisposed to crime, disrespectful of others, immature, irresponsible, self-indulgent, self-centred and rebellious. Such ‘character’ flaws were not seen as mitigating their behaviour as was the case with mental illness but were rather offered as explanations. In fact such portrayals are consistent with the government push for an increase in making youth responsible for their behaviour.

The increase in responsibilisation of youth for their behaviour presents throughout the sample. This type of characterisation has become increasingly marked by the focus on choice and individual responsibility. At the same time it also focused more and more on risk assessment. Throughout the sample there were many mentions of ‘risk’ and associated words, as well as notions associated with risk factors which were quite apparent; however, these risks were not discussed in terms of treating those ‘affected’ individuals, instead they were assessed in terms of how best to protect society from them. Overwhelmingly reporters discussed the protection of society through discourse that focused on individualisation and responsibility such that repressive responses seemed a logical solution (Beck, 1992; Holloway & Jefferson, 1997). This explanation links to what Goshorn and Gandy (1995) stressed regarding how frames shape our conception of risks by highlighting some aspects of reality while de-emphasising others.

In the article heading “The changing face of juvenile delinquency” (NSUNT, 21/07/1996) the discussion focused on how juvenile delinquency is in a new phase as the result of modernisation, calling the juveniles who offended as “the new breed of juvenile offenders”.

Juvenile crime is breaking out of its old hunting grounds of poverty-stricken homes and is spreading its curse to higher-income families. We are seeing more juveniles from a wealthier class of society than before. Since these children are not driven by economic hardship, they commit crimes more for kicks than out of necessity.

The words used in the description of youth crime in the above quotation give an indication of the tone of the entire article. The language conveys that the situation is alarming and worrisome, a claim which is bolstered through references to statistics and the quoting of experts. The theme of fear is dominant from the start to end of the article with a number of anxieties articulated, including claims that youth crime and violence are increasing in frequency, and terms like severity or younger offenders who have no respect for human life and kill for any reason. The alarmist tone of the article is backed up by law enforcement and academic experts lending their credibility to the concept of ‘super-predator’ youths.

Lawyer Chandran Ramanadan, who has been handling juvenile cases at the magistrate's court in Ampang for the past three years, calls them "the new breed of juvenile offenders". A Universiti Malaya sociologist, however, cautions that the trend should not be seen in absolute terms especially when the country's rapid economic development has boosted the income levels of all strata of society. Income levels for most people have risen in recent years so a family that used to be lower class before may now be middle class, says Associate Professor Abdul Hadi Zakaria. This means the increasing number of juveniles from wealthy families could be a natural progression of economic success, says Abdul Hadi.

In addition to the use of experts to lend credibility to the concept of youths as 'super-predators', the article provides statistical evidence of the 'problem' of youth violence. The metaphor of the 'bad apple' is also presented within this construction of deeply disturbed and disturbing individual youth. Bad apples are rotten and it is feared that their decay will affect the good apple. The bad apple metaphor is further used in individualising pathology and blame.

The move away from the psychiatrically and legally defined labels of mental disorder toward depictions of flawed character tends to extend the field of those considered 'defective'. Although experts certainly lend greater credence to the notions of character flaws, the number of sources who can attest to 'individual defect' is also broader. In sum the focus on character flaws is, above all, a further means of limiting the explanatory frameworks to individuals rather than to the society and culture around them.

Self interest/Easy money

The concept of hedonism and rational choice are central to understanding the money motive used often in the news coverage of youth crime in Malaysia. For example, to survive we need money for food, clothes, shelter or we simply have a desire for a variety of material possessions. Most people may obtain money to fulfil their livelihood legally but some may do this illegally particularly if they have limited or no alternative to do so legally or if they need an easy way to obtain fast money. Young people who are unemployed or underemployed often have access to very little money while at the same time being targeted within consumerist society. Corporations expend considerable effort and resources in order to transform children and youth into consumers. Yet the news reports do not portray this monetary motive as a consequence of the young offenders' position within the social order, but merely as an effect of their

individual circumstances. Furthermore character flaws such as greed or laziness are implicit in portrayals that suggest crime is an 'easy' way to acquire money or goods. Therefore, while the need or desire for money is easily understood by most, it is not generally portrayed as a valid motive for crime. The lure of easy money was periodically shown in the findings from this study to be just a trap, leading to the downfall of those who fell for it. An example is an article about a woman who had engaged in prostitution not only to support her drug habit but also to pay for her daily living. In other news coverage, a young person admitted to assaulting a little girl with a penknife for 20 cents. In another article, a youth admitted she "committed the offence because she needed money to buy food and for her school pocket money" (NST, 28/03/2000).

the increasing number of youths selling drugs to make money. Before, they were only keen on experimenting with drug but now they see money in it. (NST 29/08/1996)

In another article it was reported that the 15-year-old girl accepted as little as RM10 daily for sexual favours (NST 23/08/1997) for the sake of obtaining quick money.

Occasionally, a specific need or desire was given as a motive for theft or robbery such as in the headline, "Teen shoplifters find it thrilling" (NST-LTIMES 12/08/2003). According to some claims makers youth committed crimes to fulfil psychological needs while others suggested youth were doing it because of wanting attention they were otherwise lacking.

They get the thrill from making others scared of them. Their crimes are an indication of their ability and bravery and they want to flaunt this to the rest. The same goes for other sorts of crimes. For example, many of them steal motorcycles not because they need them but because of the thrill they get in stealing. This new-found power and respect would increase their self-esteem and self-worth. (NSUNT-FOCUS 13/04/2003)

All they may want is attention and a little excitement, Dr. Peng said. (NSUNT-FOCUS 13/04/2003)

In other cases rather than stealing money or objects to sell, young people were reported to steal objects they wanted to have for themselves such as clothing, motorcycles, hand-phones or computers. For example this was portrayed in the excerpt below where two 17 years old girls were jointly charged with two adult counterparts for shoplifting of personal goods while another case of a robbery/murder reported

a school girl had been charged with murder of a grandmother because of RM40 and other personal belongings.

A day's jail and a RM600 fine was what two girls, aged 20 and 22, received for shoplifting six pairs of underwear, three brassieres, a blouse and a pair of shoes worth RM162.60 from a hypermarket in Subang Jaya. Another two girls, both 17, who were jointly charged, were each fined RM600 under the Juvenile Courts Act 1947 which does not provide jail sentence for juvenile offenders. (NST 28/05/1997)

Police arrested the girl at a house in Kampung Ara Payung three days after the incident and recovered a mini compo, a dictionary, RM40 and a kitchen knife. (NST 24/08/1999)

Aside from stealing, prostitution was also a behaviour that claims makers commented upon, noting that some youths especially young females engaged in this for the promise of money. One girl shared her experience of why she prostituted herself in order to sustain her drug addicted behaviour.

Fascinated with affluent life in city, Kartika (not her real name) 18 years old, together with her village friend from the eastern part of Malaysia decided to migrate to the city looking for a job. However, once arrived she was more disappointed than ever. She realised that life in the city was not easy at all. Work was very hard to find at that time. Then she met a guy and they fell in love. She thought he was the only man that could protect her but because she loved him too much she got involved with a group who was always high on pills (drug). One night her boyfriend persuaded her to sample a pill. After agreeing to take the pill she felt her head spinning and thought she would never use it again. However the effect of the pill was such that she did fancy it again. It was not easy to get the pills as the cost was too expensive. So she did not have any choice but to prostitute herself. Her boyfriend arranged all the appointments with clients and every night she had to have sex with two men. She was paid only between RM 200 – 300 per day.⁶⁹ (BH 17/12/2001)

⁶⁹ In original Malay: “Kartika terjebak dalam kumpulan kaki khayal - Terpengaruh dengan kehidupan di kota yang penuh dengan kemewahan, Kartika (bukan nama sebenar) 18 tahun, bersama rakan sekampungnya dari pantai timur nekad berhijrah ke kota untuk mencari pekerjaan. Namun setiba di sana, apa yang diimpikan hampa belaka. Barulah Kartika sedar bahawa kehidupan di kota tidak semudah disangka. Pekerjaan sukar diperolehi ketika itu, sehinggalah beliau berkenalan seorang jejaka yang akhirnya mereka jatuh cinta. "Saya sangkakan dialah satu-satunya lelaki yang dapat melindungi saya. Tetapi kerana kasihkannya, saya terjebak dalam kumpulan kaki khayal. Pada malam itu, saya dipujuk mencuba ubat khayal. Pada mulanya terasa pening kepala teramat sangat dan

Factors other than money were clearly at play in the dynamics of this situation; however, it was the monetary aspect that the reporter emphasised, detailing how much money they had earned and how the ‘pimp’ had taken it from the girls. The case of a young girl reported in the newspapers presents the desperation of a mother who prostituted her own daughter for easy money.

A case of a girl who was allegedly prostituted by her own mother with payment between RM 10 and RM 40 was revealed by this newspaper last month following information given by the public. The girl also reported that she had been having sex with men chosen by her mother either at their house or at other places in the area since three years ago.⁷⁰ (BH 15/03/1995)

While the ‘money motive’ may not be the most sensational, it was quite prevalent. The depictions of young people who are either willing or coerced by adults to break the law to acquire what they need or desire, is consistent with the other types of ‘individual defects’. By placing the focus on the individual and their actions, we can ignore the broader social context which induces consumerism from a very young age.

The defect of youthfulness itself

Age is the issue at the heart of the debates about whether youth should be treated separately from adults or not. As the news articles examined all aspects of criminality and deviance in youth, it is appropriate to consider the particular ‘defect’ that is youth. As in previous discussion, youth was considered as a factor which diminished the individual’s capacity to produce a rational choice. Youth are seen as particularly problematic due to their underdeveloped morality, intelligence and/or self-control. Youthful

ingatkan saya serik untuk mencuba lagi. "Tetapi kesan daripada ubat khayal itu, membuat saya mahu mendapatkannya lagi. Bukan saja sukar mendapatkan bahan itu, malah harganya mahal. Jadi, saya tiada pilihan melainkan melacurkan diri. "Kekasih sayalah yang menguruskan temu janji dengan pelanggan. Hampir setiap malam saya terpaksa melayan dua lelaki. Saya hanya diberi imbuhan dua hingga RM300 sehari."

⁷⁰ In original Malay: “Selain itu, gadis terbabit juga dilaporkan membuat pengakuan kepada pegawai JKM bahawa dia pernah mengadakan hubungan seks dengan beberapa lelaki yang dipilih oleh ibunya di rumah mereka serta beberapa tempat lain di daerah ini sejak tiga tahun lalu. Kes budak perempuan itu terbongkar ekoran pendedahan yang dibuat oleh akhbar ini sebulan lalu berikutan maklumat orang ramai bahawa dia dilacur oleh ibunya dengan bayaran di antara RM10 dan RM40.” (BH 15/03/1995)

characteristics are portrayed as explaining crime such as having poor judgement, being inexperienced and misguided, and the typical youthful pursuits of independence, freedom or thrills.

Often situations which started out “all in good fun” could lead to unfortunate and even disastrous consequences. This outcome would then be explained as an effect of young people’s poor judgment or inexperience at handling difficult situations. This reasoning was apparent in cases where people were shot or stabbed ‘by accident’, where situations escalated and got out of hand, where the individuals panicked, and where behaviour led to unintended consequences.

In such cases, the youths involved were often referred to as foolish, stupid, macho, ignorant, having weak minds or being impulsive. Some examples of these images included news coverage of the case of boys who had placed homemade bombs in the schoolyard. In another story reported by NST (Two 13-year-olds claim trial to arson, 26/08/1999) a group of boys set the school on fire causing RM 300,000 worth of damages, as an act of retaliation against disciplinary action. A similar case occurred in 2000, where “six pupils were remanded by the magistrate's court to facilitate police investigation into the fire at a disciplinary teacher's room at the school.” (School fire: Six pupils remanded, 07/06/2000).

Other examples of poor judgement and inexperience given as explanations involved young women who concealed a pregnancy or birth, who tried to obtain an illegal abortion, who committed infanticide or who abandoned their baby. Reports showed such women as desperate and vulnerable of handling their situation, for example, how to tell parents about their pregnancy. This is difficult not only for the young women but also for their parents.

With frightening regularity, stories of teenage pregnancies, teenage runaways, abandoned babies and abortions are grabbing the headlines. The reasons are varied and inter-related but social discomfort about sexual activity among young unmarried people and their lack of information and access to relevant services such as contraceptives and proper counselling are major factors (NST-LTIMES 11/07/1997).

Also in keeping with the factor of poor judgement, the news coverage tended to portray youth as misguided. This image closely parallels the official discourse on juvenile delinquency under Section 82 of Penal Code which states that “nothing is an offence if done by a child aged below 10”. Young persons are said to be vulnerable and easily cowered when confronted by the might of the law.

A young person, who has his first brush with the law, needs to be dealt with carefully and considerately, as between the ages of 10 and 18 they are at the most crucial stage of development of their lives (NSUNT 14/09/1997).

Beyond the mistakes and errors in judgement, news accounts explained the behaviour of young people as ‘a call for help’, attention seeking and motivated by personal problems that they might be facing. For instance in the following excerpt the Minister said:

Sometimes children who commit petty crimes have underlying reasons, such as family problems, and getting to the root of the problem is more important than punishing the child. (National Unity and Social Development Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman - NSUNT 12/10/2003)

Examples included one article with the headline “Lack of parental care, pursuit of wealth among the main causes” (NST 28/02/1997) and one article on “Giving child offenders a chance to put it all behind” (NSUNT 16/08/1998) where parents sent troubled and delinquent youths to a shelter or rehabilitation home. One of the excerpts from the articles stated:

Some of the parents who enrol such children in our centre believe that their responsibility ends there. Even after discovering that their child's behaviour is the result of neglect, these children are still left alone when they return home for the holidays (NST 28/02/1997).

In others, officials were quoted as saying:

Please tell parents not to place such high hopes that putting their child in an institution will solve all their problems. Juveniles are sent here after committing all sorts of crimes. ... The danger is when the child comes in after committing a minor crime, he might pick up tips from others and become worse off once he leaves the school. Although we try to provide for their basic needs and have skills training after they are released they might have trouble finding jobs as society places a stigma on them. ... This is one reason for them to give up trying and fall back into crime. It is better for parents to seek counselling and avoid having their child being detained (Salimah Abdul Hamid, the

Welfare Department rehabilitation division assistant director - NST-LTIMES
25/07/2000)

Although section 46 of the Act allows parents to 'hand over' children beyond their control to the authorities, parents should be made to pay a fee as taxpayers' money is used to run these schools. Imagine, sometimes you get cases where the mother will simply say, "Gomen saja jaga sama dia. Dia tak dengar sama saya ...dia bapak pun sudah lari"⁷¹ (Bulbir Singh, Juvenile Court adviser - NSUNT-FOCUS 13/04/2003)

Another factor associated with young people's choices to engage in critical or deviant behaviour is the quest for freedom and independence. Often news reports describing young runaways focus on a seeking of freedom and independence rather than as running away from a bad home life. Typically, reporters implied that the worst thing runaways were trying to escape was parental control. This was the case of the young woman as stated in the study by the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development survey of runaways: "most Malay girls, showed that a high percentage did so because they could not stand being nagged by their mothers, who were mostly full-time housewives" (NSUNT 23/02/1997). Accounts of some cases in the coverage portrayed young people as running away to just to be with their boyfriends and this also caused concern. Article in BH-TEN (18/12/1997) for instance reported:-

Lately, there was concern in newspapers reports regarding girls who run away from home because they followed their boyfriends. Young adolescent girls were easily convinced by friends; they were not mature enough to make decisions. Small house, parents' arguments, poor religious teaching, inadequate attention and lack of affection from parents are central factors that caused children to tense up and then they will take an easy way out such as running away from home to ease pressure⁷², said members of Dewan Undangan Negeri Morib, Datuk Abdul Samad Maharuddin.

⁷¹ Paraphrase as "Let government looks after him, he never listens to me... his father has also fled."

⁷² Paraphrase from original Malays "*Sejak kebelakangan ini, kes gadis lari dari rumah kerana mengikut teman lelaki sangat membimbangkan seperti yang tersiar dalam akhbar,*" katanya. *Gadis remaja mudah terpedaya dengan pujuk rayu rakan dan tidak matang dalam membuat keputusan. "Rumah yang sempit, pertengkaran ibu bapa, kurang pendidikan agama, kurang perhatian dan kasih sayang adalah faktor asas yang menyebabkan anak-anak tertekan dan mengambil jalan mudah seperti lari dari rumah untuk mengurangkan tekanan," katanya. Ahli Dewan Undangan Negeri (Adun) Morib, Datuk Abdul Samad Maharuddin.*

Reporters repeatedly relied on clichés about the generation gap and inter-generational misunderstandings. In the earlier years of the sample, reports suggested that runaways were not seeking freedom so much as they were going off to look for work; however, portrayals of parents' anxieties were the same regardless of their children's motivation for running away. Since the 1980s, the image of runaways has rested much more on this idea that they were seeking freedom from the various constraints under which they live, mostly their parents and sometimes also village life. For example in an article with the headline "*Kelahiran luar nikah meningkat*" ("Number of out of wedlock babies increased") the implication is that both young males and females always rush into things. The coverage quoted Datin Fauziah Mohd Ramly (Deputy Secretary to Ministry of National Unity and Community Development), who stated:-

...nowadays a very obvious social problem associated with female and male adolescents is pre-marital sexual relations. Investigations by Welfare Office (JKM) said there existed among adolescents those who refused to be corrected if they made mistakes and hardly accepted any advice from parents. Both female and male adolescents preferred to be bold and would take an easy way out such as running away from home and living with their partner. This living arrangement will expose them eventually to a liberal sex life⁷³. (BH 07/05/1997)

Other articles emphasised parents' lack of understanding as the reasons for their children choosing to run away from home as well as the children's lack of understanding about their parents' good intentions. They also highlighted the tension created by parental rules and the children's need for independence. The explanation of the defect of youthfulness that links the reasons for delinquency to poor family relationships is consistent with findings by Suppiah (1984). Here it was mentioned that young people who became drug addicts came from a family that lacked love and closeness as well as receiving less moral and emotional support including support from siblings.

Thrill seeking was another factor which was described as motivation for misbehaviour when youths pursued fun and excitement for relief from boredom (Cohen, 1955; Miller 1958). The following excerpts from newspapers are some examples:

⁷³ Paraphrase from the original Malay: "*Masalah sosial yang agak ketara masa kini di kalangan remaja perempuan ada kaitannya dengan hubungan bebas di antara mereka dan lelaki. Siasatan Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM) mendapati wujud sikap remaja yang tidak suka ditegur dan sukar menerima nasihat ibu bapa. "Remaja ini gemar bertindak berani dengan mengambil jalan mudah melarikan diri dan hidup bersama rakan, tanpa mengira lelaki atau perempuan yang akhirnya mendedahkan mereka kepada seks bebas"* Timbalan Ketua Setiausaha Kementerian Perpaduan Negara dan Pembangunan Masyarakat, Datin Fauziah Mohd Ramly".

The agency found that teenage addicts became hooked after trying out dadah due to thrill-seeking, peer influence and curiosity. It's also the time when they are a little bit curious and rebellious. (NSUNT 23/02/1997)

Three teenage girls, all top students from first-rate schools, strolled into a cosmetic and health-care products store one morning and started plonking stuff into their bags. They took only the most expensive products. After their shoplifting spree, they went to the home of one of the girls to enjoy their spoils. Lying on the bed, they noted that shoplifting was 'easy' and 'thrilling'. (NST-LTIMES 12/08/2003)

Joining a gang would give these juveniles a sense of power and control that is lacking in other parts of their lives. They get the thrill from making others scared of them. Their crimes are an indication of their ability and bravery and they want to flaunt this to the rest. The same goes for other sorts of crimes. For example, many of them steal motorcycles not because they need them but because of the thrill they get in stealing. (NSUNT-FOCUS 13/04/2003)

As discussed below, a lack of proper recreational activities was a factor that purportedly contributed to some youth crime; reports described youths with too much free time on their hands as more likely to get into trouble. Also the temptation of the prohibited was mentioned as one reason for certain types of crimes. Several of the acts reported in the sample were defined as mischief and pranks and the reporters suggested such motives as curiosity, a dare, boredom or the context of a celebration such as on New Year's Eve. The following excerpt depicted this situation:

Lately we are shocked by how adolescents have made illegal motor racing a way to amuse themselves. They were only in their teen years, as in the old saying '*umur baru setahun jagung dan darah baru setampuk pinang*'. They made the capital city into a place to fulfil their foolishness. The event always took place on the night of Hari Raya, New Year or on any other major celebrations⁷⁴. (BH, 03/03/1999)

⁷⁴ Paraphrased from the original Malay: "*Baru-baru ini kita dikejutkan dengan penampilan remaja yang menjadikan lumba motosikal haram sebagai kegiatan menghiburkan hati. Mereka ini dalam lingkungan belasan tahun seperti kata orang tua-tua umur baru setahun jagung dan darah baru setampuk pinang. Mereka menjadikan ibu kota*

This type of explanation was used for a wide variety of offences ranging from petty theft, vandalism and minor assaults to rape, arson and homicide. For example in the following two headlines, young people committed offences because of their uncontrolled urge for fun: Boy pleads guilty to killing emu, ostriches (NST, 15/11/2002) and another article with the headline “Teen shoplifters find it thrilling” (NST-LTIMES 12/08/2003).

Characteristics associated with youthfulness were therefore a further way in which crime was explained by concentrating on one individual ‘defect’. The focus on the individual challenges the need to examine the broader social context of young people’s lives.

Intoxication (alcohol and drugs)

Claims makers use intoxication so often to explain criminal behaviour that it warranted its own category in this analysis. Claims makers began to make use of this frame with much more frequency since 1990s. In the two newspapers there were many acknowledgements of problems caused by illegal drugs. This time frame coincided with a period of counter-culture, with drugs being part of that picture. Media coverage concerning illicit drugs was widespread in the 1990s and the influence of alcohol and drugs was frequently used as an explanatory frame for youth crime. Other methods of intoxication revealed during the same time period including ‘sniffing’ product such as petrol, paint thinner, solvent and glue as well as consuming cough syrups or flu prescriptions.

In this study media reports did not portray being under the influence of alcohol or drugs as justifying or excusing criminal behaviour, but they did present it as a reasonable explanation of behaviour, especially when it came to young people who were unaccustomed to the effects of alcohol or drugs. Although the formulations changed slightly over time, the influence of intoxicating substances was a recurring theme throughout the sample period.

In as much as most of the references to intoxication indicated diminished capacity due to the influence of substances, they could be related to the classical view that rational choices might be affected by intoxication. Given that individuals chose to consume such substances, they were generally held accountable for their behaviour, that is, intoxication was seen only to help to account for the behaviour.

sebagai tapak untuk memenuhi keinginan ‘gila’ itu. Yang kerap terjadi ialah pada malam menyambut Hari Raya, Tahun Baru dan juga jika ada pesta keramaian.

However, in the few cases where intoxication was seen as part of a broader pattern of behaviour and was linked to addiction, the positivist paradigm became the stronger explanatory framework with its notions of individual pathology and disease and the need for therapeutic treatment.

Aside from intoxication as an explanation for behaviour, claims makers brought up other factors, especially relating to drugs. Reports suggested that the ease of access to illegal drugs in high schools, for example, was a reason for the increase in drug use and abuse among young people. For example an article in 2004 with the headline, “rise in student drug pushers causing concern” reported the number of student drug pushers and addicts was increasing annually (NSUNT 05/09/2004). In the report too, it was stated that:

It was most likely that many juvenile drug dealers were getting their supply from local syndicates and pushers, while the rest were already addicts trying to sustain their addiction. Another unsettling discovery was that from the statistics gathered, there is a higher ratio of female students getting involved in drug addiction and distribution.

The notion of a gateway drug i.e. that the use of ‘soft’ drugs leads to experimentation with ‘hard’ drugs was also mentioned in several articles, by experts on addiction, former addicts and young people themselves.

Smoking may be considered as just a passing fad among the young. But the danger is that if students start with cigarettes, they may not stop there and could later get them hooked to dadah (drugs) (NST 06/08/2001).

While in another article, a social psychologist Dr Chiam Heng Keng cited work that found truancy among female students is on the rise. Young females are also drinking and smoking more than before:

Eventually, their habits may lead them to drug abuse. The young are also into branded stuff these days. They play truant, go shopping and the goods on display fan their desire, leading them to steal (NSUNT-FOCUS 23/05/2004)

Additionally, the coverage emphasised the idea that drug addicts will commit other crimes for utilitarian purposes, either in order to obtain money to ‘feed their drug habit’ or in the cause of drug trafficking. One addict recalled his addiction led him to become a small-time drugs pusher.

I got fed up of stealing from my parents and decided that being a pusher was the best way to sustain my habit. (NSUNT 23/02/1997)

Therefore, alcohol and drugs were another negative influence upon young people which newspapers used as an explanation for involvement in crime. The portrayal of the negative impact of alcohol and drugs was not limited to the effects of intoxication on behaviour, but also included the ease of access to illegal drugs and the other crimes committed in relation to the drug trade.

Responses from public writings

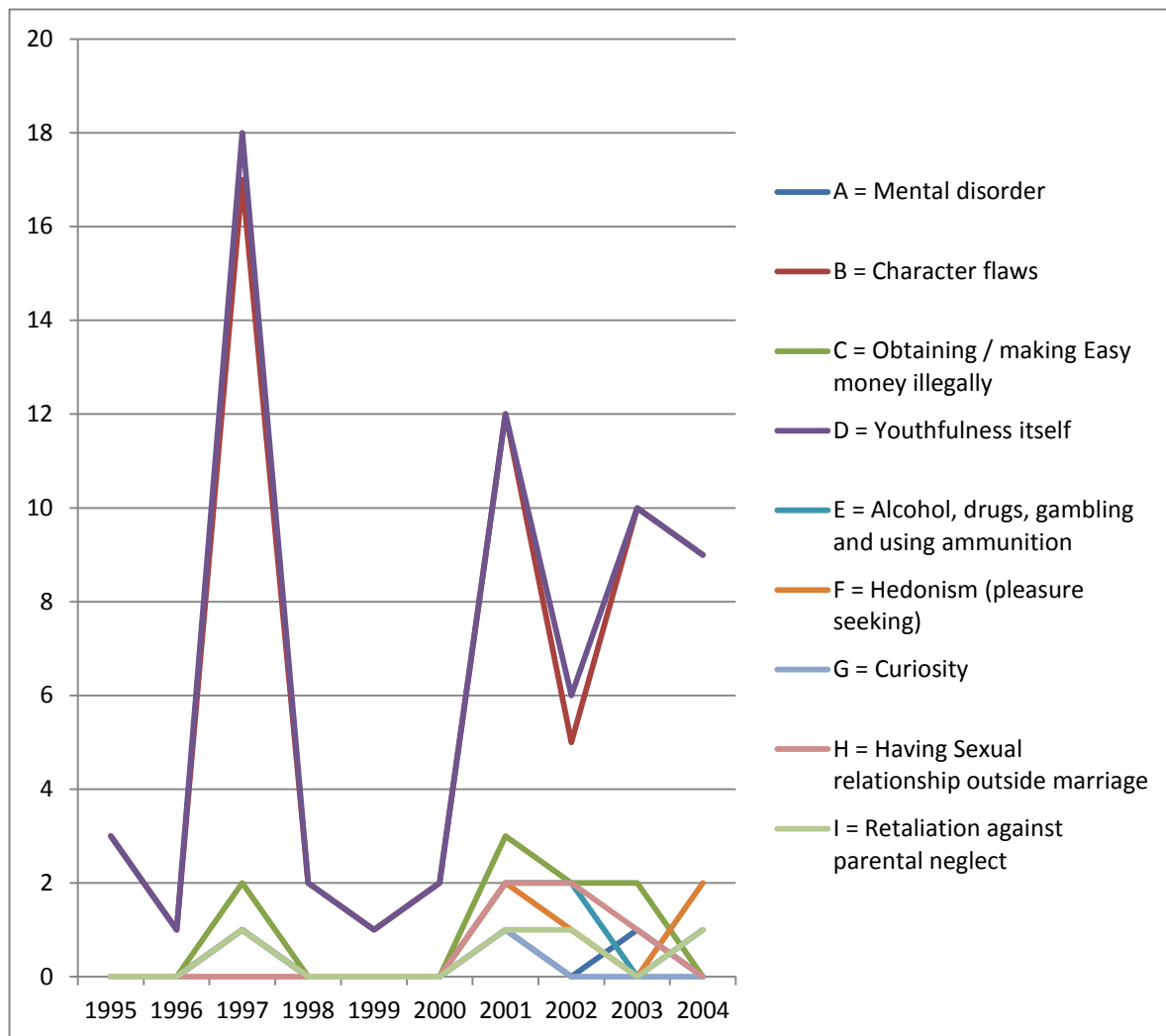
Based on the analysis of public writings the findings from this study reiterated the findings below (Table 7b); that is, the most common sub-frames used to construct youth crime related to character flaws and the nature of youthfulness with 62 and 64 counts respectively.

The other sub-frames have scores under 10 (A=3; C=9; E=6; F=6; G=2; H=5; and I=4). The total scores for all the sub-frames are 161; BH contributes 73 scores and NST contributes 88 scores.

Table 7b: Public writings: the individual defect frame by sub-frame and year

Year / sub-frame BH	Mental disorder (A)	Character flaws (B)	Obtain / making easy money illegally (C)	Youthfulness itself (D)	Alcohol, drugs, gambling and using ammunition (E)	Hedonism (F)	Curiosity (G)	Having sexual relationships outside marriage (H)	Retaliation against parental neglect (I)	Total
1995	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
1996	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1997	1	3	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	9
1998	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
1999	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
2000	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
2001	0	7	2	7	0	1	1	0	0	18
2002	0	2	2	3	1	0	0	1	0	9
2003	1	3	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	9
2004	0	7	0	7	1	2	0	0	1	18
Total BH	2	27	7	28	3	3	1	1	1	73
Year/sub-frame NST	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	Total
1995	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
1996	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
1997	0	14	1	15	0	1	1	0	1	33
1998	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1999	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2000	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
2001	1	5	1	5	2	1	0	2	1	18
2002	0	3	0	3	1	1	0	1	1	10
2003	0	7	0	7	0	0	0	1	0	15
2004	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
Total NST	1	35	2	36	3	3	1	4	3	88
Total JCD and BB in both BH and NST	3	62	9	64	6	6	2	5	4	161

Figure 7b: Public writings: the individual defect frame by sub-frame and year



In terms of public writing concerning the frame of individual defect (Figures 7b) the peak coverage was in 1997 and 2001. This highest coverage is also on the sub-frames of character flaws and the defect of youthfulness. Across newspaper articles and public writings there was a tendency to stress these two sub-frames.

Public concerns on the lost generation, the ‘leaders of future Malaysia’

As has been mentioned in the literature review, community perceptions and attitudes to youth crime are shaped to a large degree by media presentations of youthful lawlessness. Aside from the media’s inflammatory portrayal of juvenile offences as a ‘juvenile crime trend’, there is also the unjust accusation that most unsolved crimes are committed by juveniles and young people. Juvenile crime is also portrayed by the media as being ‘predatory’, ‘drug crazed’, ‘hedonistic’ and directed towards certain groups such as the elderly, women and young children – groups that are considered fragile and defenceless. It is almost always portrayed as being characterised by extreme, irresponsible, thoughtless and careless violence.

“We are afraid of our young generation - how can they lead and develop the country if they do not even have the character of a good citizen?” (BH, 05/04/1997), this is one example of frustration on the part of the public regarding young people, who they see as lacking responsibility. Common representations of young people characterise them as vicious, dishonest, heartless, pre-disposed to crime, disrespectful of others’ property and of laws, immature, irresponsible, self-indulgent, self-centred, and rebellious. The portrayals are consistent with an increased desire to make youth responsible for their behaviour. This type of characterisation is present throughout the public discussions and debates in newspaper articles, and has become increasingly marked by a focus on choice and individual responsibility. In an article headed “The changing faces of juvenile delinquency” (NSUNT, 21/07/1996), the discussion revolved around how juvenile delinquency has entered a new historic phase as a result of modernisation, calling the juveniles who offended “the new breed of juvenile offenders”.

Juvenile crime is breaking out of its old hunting grounds of poverty-stricken homes and is spreading its curse to higher-income families. We are seeing more juveniles from a wealthier class of society than before. Since these children are not driven by economic hardship, they commit crimes more for kicks than out of necessity.

The concerns this article conveys are alarming and worrisome, claims which are supported through references to statistics and by quoting experts. The theme of fear remains dominant throughout the article, touching on a number of anxieties including claims that youth crime and violence are increasing in frequency and severity and involving younger offenders who have no respect for human life. This alarmist tone is backed up by statements from law enforcement officials and academic experts.

James Nayagam, chairman of Shelter Home, one of several non-profit organisations looking after juveniles, says he has seen the latest socio-economic trend emerge in the last five years. Since then, we have been seeing an increasing number of children from middle-to-upper class backgrounds getting involved in crimes. Their parents, especially if both are working, simply can't control them.

In addition to the use of experts to lend credibility to the concept of the super-predator, the article provides statistical evidence of the 'problem' of youth violence.

In sum, the various concerns grouped under the theme of public concerns around the so-called lost generation, 'the leaders of future Malaysia' are intended to show how these concerns have influenced the ways in which youth crime has been constructed in Malaysia. It is common for these concerns to focus on individuals – if not directly blaming them, at least attributing the situation to their individual characteristics rather than to any social factors or suggesting that something can be done to help this young generation specifically.

Government response

Media coverage or public writings on youth crime contributed to a push for government intervention in the development of young people in Malaysia. One example of a link between the government and the individual defect frame is in the example of prevention targeted to help individual young people. The government considers social issues related to young people as serious because young people are considered to be valuable assets to the country; the young will determine the continuity of leadership and the prosperous quality of life of the country. The seriousness of the government in dealing with young people and the crime problem is seen in the considerable funds (RM160 millions) allocated for example to the *Rakan Muda* Project. This amount is however a fraction of the total RM2.7 billion allocated for the development of young people under the Seventh Malaysia Plan.

The Youth Development Policy of 1997⁷⁵ is a revised version of The National Youth Development Policy of Malaysia which was first issued in 1985. This policy serves as a framework for the planning and implementation of youth programs in the country (ESCAP, 2002). The revised policy was officially launched on 8 December 1997. Its main objective is to establish a holistic and harmonious Malaysian youth force imbued with strong spiritual and moral values, who are responsible, independent and patriotic; thus, serving as a stimulus to the development and prosperity of the nation in consonance with Vision 2020. This youth development policy was targeted to reduce the individual defects associated with young people in Malaysia who are expected and encouraged to widen their knowledge; to acquire positive values; to increase their vocational and technical skills; to improve social interaction; to promote the importance of a healthy lifestyle; and to coordinate with Government agencies, the private sector and NGOs.

Programmes that target young people incorporate these aims and cover such areas as leadership training, vocational skills, entrepreneurial development, healthy lifestyle, sports and arts and culture. These programmes are implemented by the Government, usually through the Ministry of Youth and Sports, in cooperation with youth organizations, NGOs and the private sector.

In addition, there are specific programmes designed for problem youths. These include the rehabilitation of young people who have been involved in substance abuse and criminal activities. Programmes are implemented in collaboration with the National Association for the Prevention of Illegal Drug and the Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation. Federal Government development expenditure for the Ministry of Youth and Sports amounted to approximately M\$ 1.4 billion for the period 1996-2000. This amount represents 1.4 per cent of the total development expenditure for that period.

In his seminal work, *Visions of Social Control*, Stanley Cohen wrote of a benevolent creeping process, based on incremental eligibility, that expands the property of the criminal justice system and welfare and treatment agencies. He argued that:

The ideology of early intervention and treatment and the use of psychological or social work selection criteria, allows diversion to be incorporated into wider preventive strategies. Legal definitions and due process give way to low visibility, “discretionary

⁷⁵ This section is largely derived from Government of Malaysia, “Youth in development”, Chapter 20, Government of Malaysia, *Eighth Malaysia Plan, 2001-2005* (Kuala Lumpur, Percetakan Nasional Malaysia Berhad, 2001), pp. 573-581.

decision-making” by administrative or professional agencies. The drift is to work with parts of the population not previously reached, variously defined as young people “in trouble”, “at risk” or in “legal jeopardy”, “pre-delinquents” or “potential delinquents”. (Cohen: 1985, p. 33)

Cohen’s argument can be applied to the proliferation of crime prevention policies and programmes in Malaysia (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1994, 1995 and 1996). For example *Rakan Muda* programmes are an example of the government response to public pressure that required government to intervene in the life of young people to prevent their involvement in criminal activity.

Looking at the government data and policies on this issue, it is clear that Malaysia adopted the social prevention perspective especially when dealing with young people. The intention is to provide young people with as many activities as possible so that they have less time for leisure pursuits. The *Rakan Muda* programme offers activities focused on knowledge and skills in employment, education, vocational training, cultural and recreational activities.

Rakan Muda can clearly be seen as part of Cohen’s “creeping process”. Young people who are considered to be “at risk” by government are encouraged to participate in *Rakan Muda* programmes. Participants are in turn generally perceived by Ministry and programme supervisors as people in need of treatment or early intervention. The spread of this form of community correction is so significant as to make most young people a potential target of intervention and treatment.

Rakan Muda had two component programmes, the *Rakan Muda* Lifestyle (RML) and the *Rakan Muda* Brigade (RMB). The key feature of these changes is the resurgence of the “emphasis on individual responsibility over governmental action” (Weir: 1993, p. 93) and greater involvement of community agencies and groups (NGOs, social services, academics, and business leaders) in programme implementation. The operation of the programmes contains some features which are innovative, perhaps worthwhile, and which can be considered complementary to other services currently on offer for young people in Malaysia.

Rakan Muda was established largely at the urging of the Ministry of Youth and Sport, which was responding to the alarming rate of youth crimes reported in police statistics and the media. Its study of young people in 1995 led to a belief that many young people were experiencing emotional problems and that drug use and drug dealing was a particular problem among the young. For example, the statistics for

new drug addicts in the Malaysia showed an increase every year and the same applies to repeat offenders despite severe penalties (Anti Drug Unit: 1993). Committee representatives from every state in Malaysia were brought together to discuss ways of addressing these issues, and a programme developed in consultation with the Ministry of Youth and Sport. *Rakan Muda* aimed to address the perceived related issues of drug abuse, family breakdown, sexual assault and “at risk” lifestyles. Since then, the organisation has expanded and developed into a national enterprise involving dozens of staff and thousands of youth participants. Over the past three years, an estimated 1,207,352 young people have taken part in the programmes across Malaysia (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1997).

Rakan Muda had the specific aim of bringing older people and youths together in the belief that this would have a positive impact on reducing youth crime. Furthermore, by involving not only Ministry representatives but society in general, the programme is seen to meet wider demands for community crime prevention, where the community must work in concert with the government and law and order agencies to control and prevent crime, working “together against crime” (NST: 27/2/1997, p. 1).

The participation of agencies outside government in crime prevention characterises of the broader shift in social policy in which young people are subject to ever increasing intervention and control. As part of the dual concern for economic efficiency and enhanced co-ordinated responses, the multi-agency approach has been signalled as the means towards new and improved service delivery. The government seeks to coordinate differential participation by various groups in society into an integral network. For example, the police and youth leaders played an increasingly important role in schools by attempting to educate students about the meaning and merits of good citizenship.

The Ministry for its part organised *Rakan Muda* councils and regional committees. Representatives come from both state branches of the Ministry of Youth and Sport and panels appointed by the Prime Minister. All committees meet periodically to identify ways in which the local community can play a part in crime prevention, with a focus on keeping young people out of crime. This new type of broad intervention seeks to enlist every community resource in a proactive and co-ordinated effort to contain and prevent crime, giving particular attention to improving the relationship between older people and youth.

The government has also introduced the National Service Training Program (*Program Latihan Khidmat Negara* – PLKN), an alternative effort to develop and produce young Malaysians who can be protectors and leaders in the future. Besides targeting racial harmony as has been discussed in Chapter 6, through its individual skill development programmes young people are given opportunities and advantages to

undergo character building throughout their life. This youth training program was first proposed in late 2001, brought to committee in 2002 and was finally brought to action in 2003. Initially it was thought that all youth of a certain age would be drafted but later the numbers were restricted due to lack of resources. The issue of conscription has always been a sensitive political issue in Malaysia because of the ethnic divisions of the country. The rationale for National Service was to bond the youth of Malaysia together and create a Malaysian nation, as the problem of racial polarisation was found to pervade educational institutions in Malaysia. This program is a compulsory program that is aimed to help mould a young generation who are patriotic. The national service program has several main objectives: to inculcate patriotism among the youth; to promote inter-ethnic unity and national integration; to instil a spirit of caring and volunteerism among society; to produce an active, intelligent and confident young generation; and to build character by emphasizing noble values. Some criticisms were that the program was a tacit admission of the failure of the education system to deal with restlessness and alienation, social problems and the lack of inter-ethnic mingling among the country's youth.

Aiming to foster young people's individual development, this program stressed self endurance, teamwork, personal development, nationhood and patriotism towards the country. Those who have attended this training are expected to have self-discipline, high spirits, confidence, loyalty to the government and country, to always be prepared to take challenges and face obstacles, and be able to foster collaboration and unity among various races in the country.

As a response to social pressure to improve personality and behaviour of adolescents, the government views the PLKN as a Malaysian model as crucial. The PLKN aims to generate adolescents who are well disciplined, have positive thinking and are competent and can say no to negative values existing in society. By completing the PLKN adolescents are trained not only to become good citizens who will benefit from their own individual development but will also be valuable to society and the nation. National Service that was introduced in 2004 was for reason of national resilience. National resilience has wider aspects; it covered political, economic, social, cultural, foreign countries and all type of ideologies that can interfere with the sovereignty of the country. National resilience also concerns with generation of young successors of the country. These generations of successors are those who are in their adolescent years. Adolescents are perceived to have become too individualistic and materialistic and these attitudes are often viewed to have lessened their spirit of patriotism, volunteerism, collectivity and self-control (Ahmad Fawzi Mohd. Basri, Utusan Malaysia, 16/02/2004).

CONCLUSION

In sum, the various explanations under the frame of ‘individual defect’ have in common their focus on the individual, if not directly blaming him or her, at least attributing the situation to their individual characteristics rather than to any social factors. Such explanations do not violate the ideological boundaries of questioning the social order and serve to maintain the image of the criminal as other, different and/or responsible to some degree. It is not surprising that the public also associated individual defects as a reason for youth offending. The government is keen to correct and prevent youth crime by designing and implementing youth policy and programs targeting individual youth. Government intervention through youth policy and programs describe young people as a problem rather than as victims, in turn justifying the authorities intervening and controlling their actions when they are perceived to be outside adult supervision. The argument for intervention and control is that young people in Malaysia are in need of protection from themselves, peer groups, devious adults and various temptations of modern social and urban life (Ariffin: 1995). The following chapter summarises the findings from the study and discusses the potential implications of the thesis.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

From the analysis of findings in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, certain themes and patterns of significance in understanding constructions of youth crime in Malaysia become apparent. This chapter summarises the findings from the study and discusses the potential implications of some of the narratives used by claims-makers. In the first part of this final chapter, the thesis revisits the research questions and the key thesis arguments. The second part offers concluding comments and future directions for research of youth crime in Malaysia.

Discussion of findings

The first research question examines how young offenders are represented in Malaysian newspapers. It is clear from the media, the public and the government discussions, that young people may act contrary to the expectation of morals and norms in the society. This trend is increasing and thus posing a threat to Malaysian society where young people are highly valued and considered the ‘treasure of the nation’. As more and more behaviours of this nature are reported and observed among young people, it is not a surprise that the government has responded with youth programs (i.e. *Rakan Muda* and National Service Programs) aimed at helping young people avoid this path. This study has found that, in Malaysia, representations of youth crime relate not just to the law and criminal offences but also to illegalised acts which are mostly defined in relation to immoral behaviour and judged to be against the accepted morals and norms of Malaysian society.

The discussion of news frames regarding young people in Chapter 5 indicates that claims makers focus on changes in young people’s leisure pursuits. The interplay of individual factors and the social environment directs young people towards particular pursuits in their leisure, the nature of which is important to understand. Major social changes involve a whole range of personal and social factors – from individual character formation to the role of adults and peers in the formation of cultural and social values, and the effects of the wider society’s norms and expectations, including those of government and mass media.

Media findings indicate that during the process of growing up most young people in Malaysia are exposed to a large number of varieties of role models, both at home and outside the home. As society becomes more diverse the range of social roles and choices available to most of these young people

increases dramatically. Yet the ways in which they select roles is hard to predict. According to older adults, greater freedom for young people carries more risks for errors in judgement and the consequences thereof. Dropping out of school, being out of work, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, drug addiction and crime are powerful examples of the consequences of extended freedom. The lifestyle trends of young people are also widely discussed in parliamentary debates, both in the *Dewan Rakyat* (Lower House or House of Representatives) and the *Dewan Negara* (Upper House or House of Senate).

From the media coverage, the public writings and the governmental debates, it has been identified that social changes have created new constraints, experiences and opportunities for young Malaysians, in a context where even well-established social institutions are subjected to change. The family unit is one example of how a social institution has been transformed, from the extended family to an increase in nuclear families and single-parent homes. Changes in social attitudes towards young people, as well as expectations of them, have occurred in many spheres of life. The problems associated with young people are no longer urban centred, rather spread to all areas. Young people in remote land development areas such as FELDA are also exposed to crime. The problem is not only aggravated by the tendency of young people from rural areas to move to major cities but also as a consequence of rapid changes in overall development itself. The process of adaptation to new changes surrounding them creates dilemmas. In all of these situations, young people are more likely to be blamed for their deviant and criminal behaviour because they had little power to voice their needs and issues.

This study has found that a significant media construction of youth crime relates to the contribution of voices of those in authority in the reporting of youth crime by the media. Media images tend to portray young people as purveyors of trouble or as a threat to the society. The media plays the role of amplifying negative images of sexuality and morally deviant young people. The terms '*bohsia*' and '*bohjan*' are the results of a media construction where, typically, the use of dismissive labelling was common, such as, 'criminal', 'social ills', 'wasteful youths', 'trouble students'. Such labelling had the effect of removing the necessity for any sort of sociological explanation of young people's activities. According to Hall (1978b) the media's approach to forms of behaviour such as hooliganism has sat comfortably with the political authoritarianism that has demanded a 'toughening attitude' towards all forms of social permissiveness:

... the temptation grows to deal with any problem, first by simplifying its causes, second by stigmatising those involved, third by whipping up public feeling into a panic about it and forth by stomping down hard on it from above (1978b: p. 34).

In Malaysia, phenomena such as *lepak*, *bohsia* and *bohjan* not only caused the stirrings of fear but also incited authorities to put forward a night curfew for teenagers. It has also been suggested that entertainment outlets such as nightspots, bars, karaoke lounges and other places of that nature be limited and discouraged. The stereotyping of deviant and criminal youths in the media deepens the fears of the Malaysian public around losing the future citizens of the country. It is evident from the media that claims makers in the country are more concerned with the future than the current welfare of youths. The claims makers often express their frustrations with young people who are said to lack responsibility, discipline, knowledge and self-control. They also argue that these deficiencies in young people limit their involvement in the development of the country.

Crime news appears to occupy a key place in newspapers. As Roshier (1973) argues, crime news is news because people are more likely to read crime news than other types of reports. Evidence of the importance of crime news stories can be seen in the relationship between news media and the police, the main source of crime news stories. The importance that both the media and the police attribute to their mutual relationship attests to the significance of crime news (Ericson et. al., 1991; Fishman 1981). Also, as Bell (2003: p. 30) aptly points out ‘both the police and the media have a vested interest in crime – it ensures their jobs’.

It is undeniable that crime news is news. For instance interpersonal crime fits many, if not most, of the newsworthiness criteria discussed in the literature. As Hall et al. (1978: pp 67-68) point out, “any crime can be lifted into news visibility if violence becomes associated with it, since violence is perhaps the supreme example of news value’s ‘negative’ consequences.”

Confirming previous research in this area, representations of youth were simplistic and de-contextualised. Simplification and individualisation appear to be key themes in the coverage of youth crime news. These themes were observed in a number of ways. First, certain features of the stories themselves revealed a minimal approach style in reporting on youth crime. Second, the tendency to dichotomise portrayals and point out the good and bad, the offenders and victims, further indicates the tendency to simplify. Third, despite the large number of explanations and solutions offered for youth crime, we see that the vast majority of the themes relating to crime causation or appropriate solutions fell into relatively narrow explanation and response frameworks.

The analysis of news articles also exposed the inclination of the reports to provide a strict minimum of information in reporting on youth crime, for example, most stories were very brief, and few articles were followed up with subsequent reports. The predominance of local crime news and the focus on incidents as opposed to issues were also evidence of this micro-level treatment of youth crime news.

The focus on crime, motives and method are fairly easy to understand. Commonsense representations of youth crime relating to love or money were also prevalent among those found in the sample, as were explanations focusing on the family. The different means of paring down stories to provide minimal information, background and context, serve to convey an image that crime is a simple problem and, by implication, warrants simple solutions. Suggestions that tougher measures are needed were commonplace.

Sources who would offer a counter-perspective were typically not included in the coverage. This observation brings to mind the question raised by others (i.e. Barak, 1988; Chesney-Lind, 2003) about the dynamics that exist between academics and the news media. It would appear that reporters solicit the input of certain academics more often than others. Chomsky (1992) and Chunn and Menzies (2006) also make this argument. They suggest that sources who offer non-mainstream views cannot meet the journalistic criterion to support what they are saying. Sources who offer commonsense' views do not have to contextualise nor do they have to provide evidence of what they assert. Is the reason for the over-accessing of certain academics that they are sought out because they are known to provide quotes that are consistent with the simple version of the story being written? Are academics who provide more complex views not as useful to reporters operating within the constraints of news production routines? Do the academics who offer more complex perspectives avoid media context because they know from experience that their views will not be accurately portrayed in the news media? Is it a combination of these reasons and others? This research does not answer these questions; it only highlights them and their significance in considering the implications of this research. Doyle and Lacombe (2003) have shown that experts can play a role, in collaboration with the media and the criminal justice system, in scapegoating certain individuals through the creation of an institutionally legitimated discourse surrounding 'deviant' individuals as 'different'. As such, there is a paradox that experts can either serve to deconstruct crime myths or perpetuate and extend them further.

One of the clearest reflections of the tendency to simplify crime news is the dichotomisation of young people and their parents as good or bad, and of victims as deserving or undeserving of sympathy. The coverage tends to make these categorisations premised on dominant ideologies about family, age, gender,

race and class. At the same time, the coverage omits much about the social background of young offenders which might have helped the reader acquire a more balanced perspective. The coverage also tells us very little about the victims of crime, despite the fact that the experience of victimisation tends to get dramatic.

As Kappeler and Potter (2005: p. 23) point out, the four elements that make up a good story (a distinct deviant, an innocent victim, a virtuous hero and a threat to traditional norms and values) also form the basis for the perfect crime myth. It would appear that crime stories that combine these elements will be more likely to find their way into the news than stories that do not. The great proportion of stories involving interpersonal crimes is evidence of this distinction. Incidentally, such stories tend to receive more lengthy coverage than those concerning business or public property victims. They also feature larger headlines and are more likely to be accompanied by photographs. The privileged place occupied by police in the coverage also supports the creation of crime myths because police typically feature in the 'virtuous hero' role.

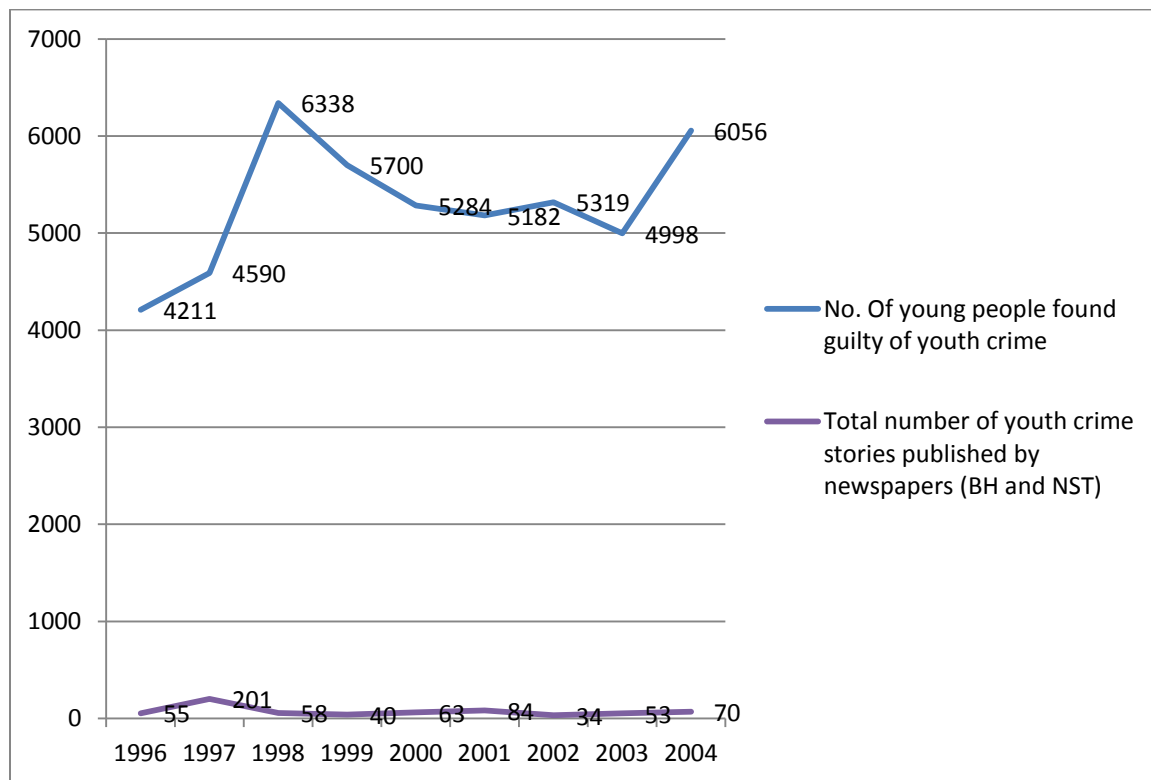
Confirming previous work in this area (Burlow et al., 1995 cited in Welch et. al., 1998; Ericson et al., 1991) the coverage canvassed in this research primarily contained explanations about youth crime and actual or proposed responses that fit within the dominant paradigms. Reports tended to place a large focus on individual explanations, either blaming individuals for their wrongdoings or portraying them as somehow 'defective' or as 'bad apples'. When journalists examined social explanations, it was usually in terms of their effect on the individual, not on society. They paid very little attention to the broader social structure and its impact. Clearly, structural explanations are more complex and difficult to explore.

Overwhelmingly, the coverage framed portrayals of responses to youth crime with the parameters of responsibility (i.e. accountability and deterrence) or pathology (i.e. treatment and prevention). Within the very narrow range of solutions envisaged, the typical direction was to be more repressive, particularly in the latter half of the study period. There are many explorations of social responsibility. The coverage mentioned the idea that the way we operate as a society has an impact on all people but especially vulnerable people such as young people.

The variations in the amount of coverage on youth crime over time, as seen in Chapter 5, could be explained by parallels with levels of societal concern but this is not supported by official crime rates; throughout the study periods there are variations in official youth crime rates. Official statistics (Table 8a) indicate rather fluctuating youth crime rates. The periods where there are high levels of youth crime,

news coverage does not mirror the periods of intense concern over youth issues. Although a relationship between societal concerns, the reporting of news by the news media and the statistical reports about youth undoubtedly exists, their connections do not appear to be proportional; an increase in one does not necessarily correlate to an increase in the other.

Figure 8a: Number of young people found guilty of youth crime and the total number of youth crime stories published by newspapers



The level of news coverage (Figure 8a⁷⁶) does appear to be a reflection of the official crime rate of 1997 but the coverage started to decrease in 1998 while the crime statistics show a drastic increase. The ten years of the study period indicates a rather fluctuating rate of youths brought to the attention of the police and the courts and found guilty of youth crime. The intensity of news coverage is also rather scattered.

The coverage of youth crime in the print media is neither a reflection of the reality of the types and nature of offences known to the police nor a manifestation of societal concerns about youth and youth crime in particular. The amount of news coverage was at a peak in 1997 but then started to decrease in 1998 and

⁷⁶ Youth crime news coverage for 1995 is not included in the graph so as to be consistent with statistics covering data from 1996-2004

1999. The number of newspaper articles covering youth crime increased slightly in 2000 to 2001 but dropped in the following two years. In 2004 the coverage increased again. The drastic increase in coverage in 1997 was a result of increased youth crime rates and the attention given by the public and government to the issue of youth crime. In 1997 too there was also a revision of the three former child Acts. Subsequently there was another peak period of news coverage in 2000 and 2001. This increase was consistent with the print media's increasing focus of attention upon moral behaviour of young people, coupled with a 'coincidental' increase of discussion of violence in the press, the increased use of alarmist discourse, the emphasis placed on 'vulnerable' victims and increasingly unsympathetic portrayals of young people who were breaking the law.

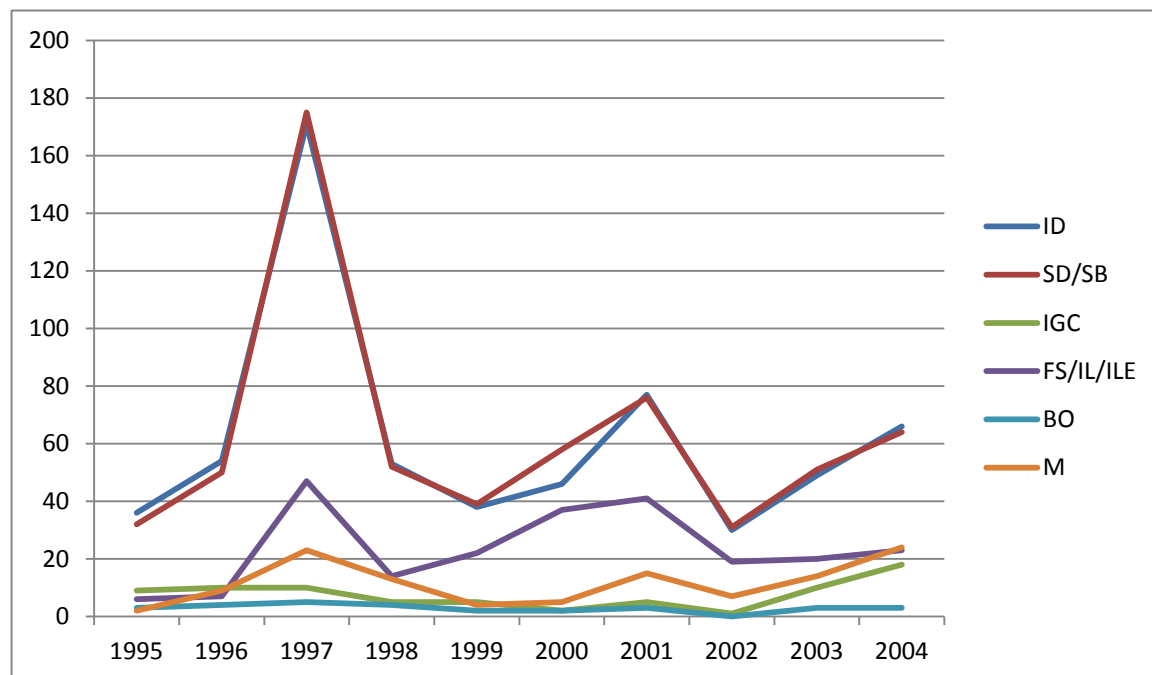
The second research question concerned the main 'frames' used to understand newspaper descriptions of youth crime from 1995-2004. Are these frames similar or different to those proposed in the literature, such as by Sasson (1995a)? There are six frames utilised in this thesis: The faulty system frame, the blocked opportunity frame, the social defect/breakdown frame, the inter-group conflict frame, the media violence frame and the individual defect frame. The first five frames were drawn from Sasson's work and do appear, after the analysis, to be similar to those he proposed. The one new frame which is different to Sasson's is the individual defect frame. This sixth frame is important to understanding the framing of youth crime as a consequence of their individuality, primarily their psychological/biological make-up.

Among these six frames, three frames are the most prominently used by newspapers to describe youth crime from 1995-2004 (refer to Table 8a and Figure 8b below). Those are social defect/social breakdown frame, individual defect and the faulty system/inadequate laws and laws enforcement.

Table 8a: Total major frame combined (BH and NST: Keyword search ‘Juvenile crime and delinquency’ and ‘Bohsia/Bohjan’)

Year	Total sample BH and NST (JCD and B/B)	Individual defect	Social defect / social breakdown	The inter-group conflict	The faulty system / inadequate laws and law enforcement	The block opportunity (structural disorder)	The media
1995	37	36	32	9	6	3	2
1996	55	54	50	10	7	4	9
1997	201	171	175	10	47	5	23
1998	58	53	52	5	14	4	13
1999	40	38	39	5	22	2	4
2000	63	46	58	2	37	2	5
2001	84	77	76	5	41	3	15
2002	34	30	31	1	19	0	7
2003	53	49	51	10	20	3	14
2004	70	66	64	18	23	3	24
Total frame	695	620	628	75	236	29	116

Figure 8b: Total major frame combined (BH and NST: Keyword search ‘Juvenile crime and delinquency’ and ‘Bohsia/Bohjan’)



The third question looks at whether there has been any change in the framing of youth crime in Malaysian newspapers within the period 1995-2004? If so, what might explain this? The negative construction and framing of youth crime and behaviour in the Malaysian newspapers have prompted me to engage in this research. Given the alarming nature of reporting on youth crime that I observed in the late 1990s (i.e. coverage of many murder cases involving young offenders), I wondered whether such construction and framing was characteristic of news reporting on youth crime in general or whether the coverage was uncharacteristically alarmist and fear-mongering.

Throughout the study period, fear is the dominant theme in the reports on youth offences throughout the sample. Perhaps this is what Poynting et al., (2009) refer to as a continuous moral panic. In this situation framing the seriousness of the youth problem is not a one off event but rather an ongoing one since fear mongering on the subject of youth crime has become a constant agenda in newspaper coverage in Malaysia. This narrative of fear (discussed in the findings chapter 5, 6 and 7) has been fostered by several factors: news of the increasing frequency of youth crime, the spread of the problem (i.e. sub-urban, rural – remote villages or FELDA areas), the increasing level of violence observed (i.e. more lethal use of force, increasing use of lethal weapons such as knives), the involvement of younger offenders, recurring referrals to the problem as an epidemic or crime wave and emphasis on random and predatory acts. Such portrayals of youth crime are consistent with the moral panic literature.

Even though this thesis does not aim to evaluate the moral panic aspect of the news articles, the media techniques used to highlight the fear issues resulting from youth crime is consistently in agreement with the moral panic literature which indicates an increasing prevalence over the course of the late twentieth century. This trend would suggest that there were in fact circumstances particular to the end of the twentieth century which fostered a particularly alarmist discourse on youth in the media.

Some might suggest that it is normal for newspapers to target fears, since a normal reaction to fear is to seek more information on how to protect ourselves, as frightened people will read more newspapers. On the other hand, an equally plausible reaction to fear is avoidance, which would not necessarily serve the interests of newspapers. However, many of those elements of stories which are used to construct a narrative of fear around youth crime are the very elements which make the story newsworthy in the first place: the prominence of violence, the focus on the rarest and most spectacular acts, the focus on the dramatic, the emphasis on negative consequences and the fit within a recurrent theme (i.e. epidemic or crime wave).

Within the framework of media production, the most newsworthy stories are those which are most likely to provoke a fear reaction in the viewers, to provide a misleading and distorted image of youth crime and to be most destructive to the image of young people in the society. Youth crime remains to be continuously framed as one of the more serious social problems in Malaysia. The only change is the result of the framing of youth crime. Within the ten year study period many policies and programs have been proposed and implemented to prevent the perceived risks of youth problems particularly to the younger generation in Malaysia.

This study has found that youth crime is framed and constructed as one of the important issues in the country. In fact throughout the ten year study period youth crime has consistently been one of the items on the government agenda. Hence, there are continuous allocations in government budgets every year to fund youth programs such as the *Rakan Muda* and the National Service Programs. Youth problems have also become regular topics for parliamentary debates.

The findings have shown that the construction of youth crime has been continually pessimistic. The negative representations seek attention not only from the government but also from the public to react quickly and effectively to solve the youth crime. Every group in the society are asked to work together to help save young people from risking involving themselves in criminal activities. The construction of youth crime has successfully pushed for more protectionist policy around children particularly to stop them from involving in criminal activities. This push led to the establishment of the Children Protection Act 1999 and the Child Act 2001. By constructing youth crime as a stand-alone problem that needs interference from authority, the construction implicitly maintains trust in the government to formulate policy or legislation that will then help 'save' young people in Malaysia.

It is significant to mention that the construction of youth crime in Malaysia is not solely based on the rate of official youth crime statistics but also on perceptions of illegal deviant behaviour associated with young people; these mostly question morality. The construction sees young people as a threat to the country, whether by committing crimes or exposing themselves or others to the risk of moral danger. Prevention and intervention in the life of young people are seen as critical. This kind of construction is found in media coverage, public writings and government documents. Even though some people might perceive this kind of construction as not in fact

being helpful to young people, there are some advantages to the rationale of the necessity to intervene in the lives of young people. This kind of sentiment is utilitarian in that it is about doing the greatest good for the greatest number of young people. However one concern remains in that limited chances are provided for young people to participate in having input into and making the decisions on their own life choices. Thus it is apparent that more involvement of young people is necessary to make fair and supportive changes that will benefit not only them but society as a whole. It will be fruitful to examine young peoples' voices regarding this construction of youth crime in Malaysia but due to time constraint the intention to include them directly as part of this study was not possible. The inclusion of young people in the future work is necessary particularly to share their views on the issue that affect their life directly and personally. Future research can solely focus on young people views on what has been constructed as youth problems (i.e. delinquent behavior or criminal activity).

The fourth research question examines to what extent these frames have influenced government policy on youth crime? To answer this question, media images and public confidence in youth justice are considered. Given the previous discussion about the simplification of youth crime news, it would be problematic to argue that the media offer a realistic portrait of youth crime. Not only is youth crime simplified, it is de-contextualised, with the media focussing predominantly on the rarest and most spectacular of events and framing them within the conventional paradigms of explanation and response to crime.

The interpretation of youth crime is crucial here: if the individual understands media accounts as representations of the rarest and most spectacular events, then the coverage does reflect that reality to a certain degree. However, if the individual understands the news as a depiction or sampling of reality, though perhaps somewhat distorted and sensationalised, then the media do not reflect reality and instead foster a misleading image of crime in society.

The media in Malaysia fuelled the discontent around the issue of youth and crime which led to the revision of the three acts that governed the life of young people. The introduction and implementation of the Child Act 2001 repealed and replaced the previous three acts relating to youth and crime. If there is a crisis in confidence in the youth justice system, when the public's main source of information about the

youth justice system is the media, it seems futile to argue that the media have not played a role in the construction of youth crime in the country.

The construction of youthful offending and its causes frequently resulted in discussions on how such offending was being or should be addressed. Depictions of reactions to youth crime typically portray how the government responds to this issue. In addition the representations of claims makers involved in the responses (mostly government representatives, law and justice enforcement personnel, parents, academics and the general public) were quite prominent in the news coverage analysis. The various reactions form the basis for what are considered to be representations of justice at more abstract level.

There are ongoing debates in the media about what is being done and what ought to be done about youth crime, such as treatment and rehabilitation ideals that target the ‘defective’ individual (discussed in Chapter 7). There are also portrayals which are more reflective of the ‘punitive’ model, emphasizing deterrence and individual responsibility, and the responses that are linked to the inadequate laws and enforcements frame in the coverage on the administration of youth justice and protection. However responses can also take the form of a ‘rehabilitative’ model. The depictions of justice being analysed are in terms of policing, sentencing and law reform.

The typical responses to youth crime tended to fall within the dominant paradigms of punitive criminology explanations. They were depicted as either responsibility or pathology. Even though the legal framework underpinning many responses was inspired by punitive ideas, the legalistic discourse in the coverage took a variety of shapes with particular emphasis on the rule of law, legal rights, deterrence through punishment, criminal responsibility and severity of punishment.

The coverage showed a certain degree of tension between the two models. While the two perspectives were interconnected throughout the study period, there were definite shifts with respect to which model was favoured over time. Between the introduction of the Juvenile Court Act 1947 and the late 1980s, the punitive model was dominant in terms of government responses. The tone in the coverage was unquestioning of government and legal responses to youth crime were portrayed as fair. The 1990s saw a movement towards a ‘child-saving’ approach particularly reflected in the welfare model when dealing with youth justice and protection. The introduction of CPA 1991 signalled a turn towards a more rehabilitative approach (discussed in Chapter 3).

The period leading up to the eventual enactment of the Child Act 2001 in early 2002 included reports about certain concerns regarding the ability of the earlier three Acts (JCA, YWGPA and CPA) to achieve their rehabilitative ideals and to respect the legal rights of young people. Such concerns were reflected in the replacement of the three acts with the revised justice model of the Child Act 2001. Even though the focus was on a rehabilitative model, the punitive influences were common and still dominant. They called for tougher and more punitive laws to better control youth, thus remaining consistent with the traditional and basic social values in the country. The more traditional and basic approach focuses on the protection of society through harsher crime control measures. There were direct and indirect criticisms levelled at the Child Act where some claims makers (segments of the public, the law and justice personnel, academics and experts) perceived it as too lenient. They described some punishment and treatment programs as too lenient when compared to the crimes some young people committed (grave crimes such as rape and murder).

Narratives relating to ideals of rehabilitation were present throughout the sample. The ideals refer to treatment in the form of counselling, prevention, education, training, youth programs (either leisure or skill) and probation. These principles were integral to the work of the child protection and welfare officers in the country (as stressed in the National Children Policy, the Children Protection Policy and the Child Act 2001). These individuals along with many others were often quoted as advocating prevention, rehabilitation and a 'fairer' approach to youth justice.

Politicians, judges and trained professionals were the most prominent sources quoted in the elaboration of the narrative around specialized classification and treatment of delinquents. This reliance on authorities is in contrast with the trend which saw these types of sources comment infrequently in terms of the explanations for youth crime. Politicians and judges did attempt to discuss why youths committed crimes though this was rather limited. They rather discussed what should be done about youthful offending and how best to help young people to live free of crime. From the thesis findings, professionals, especially academics in the sociology, medical, psychology and law fields, are often sought to offer explanations of youth crime. There are various news coverage items, where police, prosecutors, judges and politicians put forth the idea that the treatment could and should be mandated by courts and where treatment advocates argued for institutionalization in order to effect treatment and rehabilitation. Only limited numbers argued that the imposition of institutionalization would run counter to the whole issue of justice and protection of young people. These few reflected a firm belief in the rehabilitative model. Their influence shows a fair-minded way of dealing with young offenders, not only at the trial and sentencing phase of the judicial process but also in the rehabilitative treatment of young offenders. The government

under its Welfare Department has introduced community based rehabilitative programs such as the Social Service Order (*Perintah Khidmat Masyarakat*) for those who are involved in minor criminal offences.

While many rehabilitative programs formulated and implemented by the government targeted individuals perceived to be 'defective' or needing help, other programs were more general in scope and were geared towards providing better environments in which youth could develop. Some of the main types of prevention programs included education, structure leisure activities, job training and youth programs, poverty elimination program, housing and better funding for families.

Some commentators also recognized that in some instances rehabilitation would not be possible particularly to those chronic and violent offenders. In those cases, coverage depicted society as having a right to protect itself and holding a higher priority than the best interests of young people. This discourse of 'rights' is very much supportive of a justice focused model. The rationale for this justice approach is that certain offenders would be better off and that punishment would produce deterrence through certainty, celerity and severity. The notions of individual rights and responsibilities took on great importance within the justice model. The emphasis is clearly more on deterrence through more stringent law enforcement and tougher sentences. This view accentuates the individualization of responsibility and accountability, whether the target of blame is the young person or parents. Parents are made responsible and accountable for their children's wrongdoings – if not legally, then at least morally. The shift in the juvenile justice law since the introduction and implementation of the Child Act 2001 saw parents made legally responsible for their children's criminal offences. Parents are not only required to participate in their children's rehabilitation process (either in the form of family counselling or meetings) but are also required to pay fines or compensation.

Even though the Malaysian juvenile justice has experienced changes as a result of the international juvenile justice trends (i.e. the Convention on the Right of the Child, after 1995), the media framing of youth crime as one of the serious problems in Malaysia does on its own weight influence government policy on youth either through its legal intervention or youth policy as a whole. The government response resulted from the youth crime issues constructed and framed in the media, such as through the introduction and implementation of the many policies (i.e. national social policy, children policy, children protection policy), youth development programmes (i.e. the *Rakan Muda* and PLKN) and the amendment of the child act (i.e. Child Act 2001), and all are in favour of the welfare of youth and the positive development of young people in Malaysia.

Implications and conclusion

This research offers an analysis of the representations of print media of juvenile offenders in Malaysia over a ten year period, situating these representations within their social context. It also provides a ten year period of analysis of print media coverage of youthful crime in Malaysia which were not available in the research literature in the country.

In this research, it is important to acknowledge important contradictions found within the findings with the existing research literature on crime in the media, the most significant of which is the relatively frequent inclusion of explanations – albeit simplistic, conventional and decontextualised explanations – for youth crime. The data points out the existence of classical and positivist explanations in the media coverage throughout the ten year study period, and in particular the fact that classical ideas were more prevalent than might be assumed in the media coverage of youth crime and deviance.

It is also important to acknowledge the potential effects of the coverage on youth crime and violence. However, this is rather speculative as I have not assessed media impact on this research, nor can media impact be assumed from studies of media content (Doyle, 2006). Nevertheless, the research suggests areas for further investigation based on knowledge of the contents of news coverage.

This research also highlights the importance of studying discourse because of its potential impact on policy. When fear and anxiety fuel policy reform, these being feelings which are largely unfounded because they are based on misinformation, the situation holds cause for concern (Doyle and Lacombe, 2003).

Ironically while the news media may foster reform, the role of the media lies also in perpetuating the status quo through everyday reinforcement of ideological discourse around gender, race, age, class, sexuality, morality and family.

In addition, groups who work to improve the lot of young people, especially youths who come into contact with the law, may find in this research empirical evidence to support their position. This research helps further the aims of those who seek to restrict media coverage on young offenders by pointing out how contemporary portrayals of youth, in particular, tend to criticize them and cast them in the role of ‘other’. It also provides support to those who wish to reform the law and approaches to dealing with

young offenders. By showing how a fear of youth is constructed, this study makes it easier to find ways to address those fears in a manner more constructive than the repression of young offenders. This promotes a more realistic image of young people who break the law by providing a socio-historical context against which to analyse existing images.

Implication for future research

Since the sample only covered the years 1995 to 2004, it does not represent the current coverage of youth crime in the print media. Hence, one possible direction of future research might be to update this project to include the coverage from 2005 to the present. This could presumably be undertaken with far greater ease than was the case with key term searches employed in this research. Computerised databases can be utilised for greater speed and efficiency. The caveats associated with those databases must nonetheless be acknowledged: the researcher must rely on the decisions of those charged with indexing the material in terms of what is included and excluded; such decisions may change over time and from one index to another, and search terms must be carefully chosen in order to exclude irrelevant material (see Best, 1999: pp. 189-195).

At the same time as legislators put forth amendments to toughen the child justice law, sensational media coverage surrounding a number of crimes committed by young people also marked the mid 1990s and the first half of the 2000s. There was excessive coverage surrounding visible youth homicides and gangs, aggressive girls and school arson, bullying and fights. Throughout this period, there was increasing concentration of media ownership, with a limited number of media perspectives from which to draw daily news information on crime as well as other topics. In spite of this limitation, the media retained a basic pedagogical role in informing and shaping public views on crime and justice – a role which is strongly evidenced in the research literature (Altheide and Snow, 1979; Ericson et. al., 1991; Schissel, 2006). For this reason alone, it is very pertinent to study media representations and consider their potential influences.

Another potentially rewarding subject for future research would involve a discussion with crime reporters from all the major newspapers. The research could be conducted through semi-structured interviews which would examine challenges faced by reporters in the daily reporting of crime, and youth crime in particular, which may impact the quality of coverage that is produced (Chibnall, 1977; Ericson et. al., 1987; Fishman, 1981; Hall et. al., 1978; Shoemaker and Reese, 1991). This research might reveal variations in the amount of freedom and autonomy individual reporters exercise in their coverage of a

story, as well as in the level of reliance on stories taken from wire services. It is hoped that such a discussion might lead to a greater involvement of the academic community in enjoining print media to offer more contextualized and extensive news stories. By better understanding the needs and pressures of journalists, academics may then be better prepared to assist the information gathering process in ways that are meaningful to both professions. Some of the public concerns about youth crime may in fact be alleviated by a better quality of information. This, in turn, may encourage a move away from the reactionary responses to youth crime which have been dominant in recent years.

As my research did not examine user reaction to the news messages, this topic could also be examined in future research. Media effect studies necessarily begin with a consideration of media content. This study could provide the background against which to consider public images of youth, youth crime and justice, and an analysis of how viewers construct those images. As pointed out by others (i.e. Graber, 1980; Shoemaker and Reese, 1991; Surette, 1990), media impact is cumulative, so it would seem to be much more relevant to examine knowledge, opinions and attitudes built up over time rather than immediate reactions to a specific piece of coverage. On the other hand, Doyle (2006) has argued that interpretive studies of specific segments of viewers might better inform us on the influence of crime stories.

Policy and youth crime study

It is fair to acknowledge that newspapers are a business and that the pursuit of profit is their primary goal, but this objective does not justify discounting their public service obligation to inform the public. In fact, in the pursuit of their business objectives, the law affords the media certain rights and freedoms which serve them particularly well. This refers to the freedom of the press. Such protections are premised on the fact that the media have a public duty in a democratic society. As such, civic responsibility should at least hold equal priority to making money.

Finally, I have been fascinated by the news-making criminology literature. I have also read and heard about the challenges faced by those academics who attempt to engage with the media in order to put forth more accurate information about crime and justice, only to find themselves disappointed when they see their words and ideas distorted or wholly excluded in favour of snappier catchy materials. Despite these difficulties, it nevertheless behoves academics to share their research with the public, as academics also benefit from certain protections in carrying out their duties. Regulations protect their intellectual freedom. Income taxes normally fund much academic research. Researchers also have a responsibility to their research participations. Universities should serve as resources for their communities.

Criminology is an inter-disciplinary field of study that involves such diverse areas as biology, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, law, philosophy, women's studies, history, and political science. The very objects of criminology – crime, criminals, violence, and the variety of other phenomena studied by criminology, such as crime rates, crime patterns, policing, victimization, legal processes and corrections, are socially constructed. How those phenomena are formulated is at the heart of criminology; if we do not understand how they are constructed, what meaning can any study of these phenomena have? What matters is not the reality of the criminal event, but rather how that reality is built and represented. I would like to use a quote from the introduction to the book *Cultural Criminology Unleashed* where Ferrell, Hayward, Morrison & Presdee (2004: p. 7) argue that “in a world where power is increasingly exercised through mediated representation and symbolic construction, struggles over power and control become cultural in nature.” The media therefore plays a very powerful role in the construction and representation of young people in conflict with the law. How youth crime has been constructed does influence public perception; these perceptions can create fear and panic thus demanding intervention from government. The government as the ruling authorities is also influenced by how youth crime is constructed. But at the same time, the government is pressured by the public to find solutions to youth problems, either legally or socially. Understanding those processes is central to criminology's ability to truly comprehend youth crime and justice in general and specifically to the context of Malaysia.

EPILOGUE

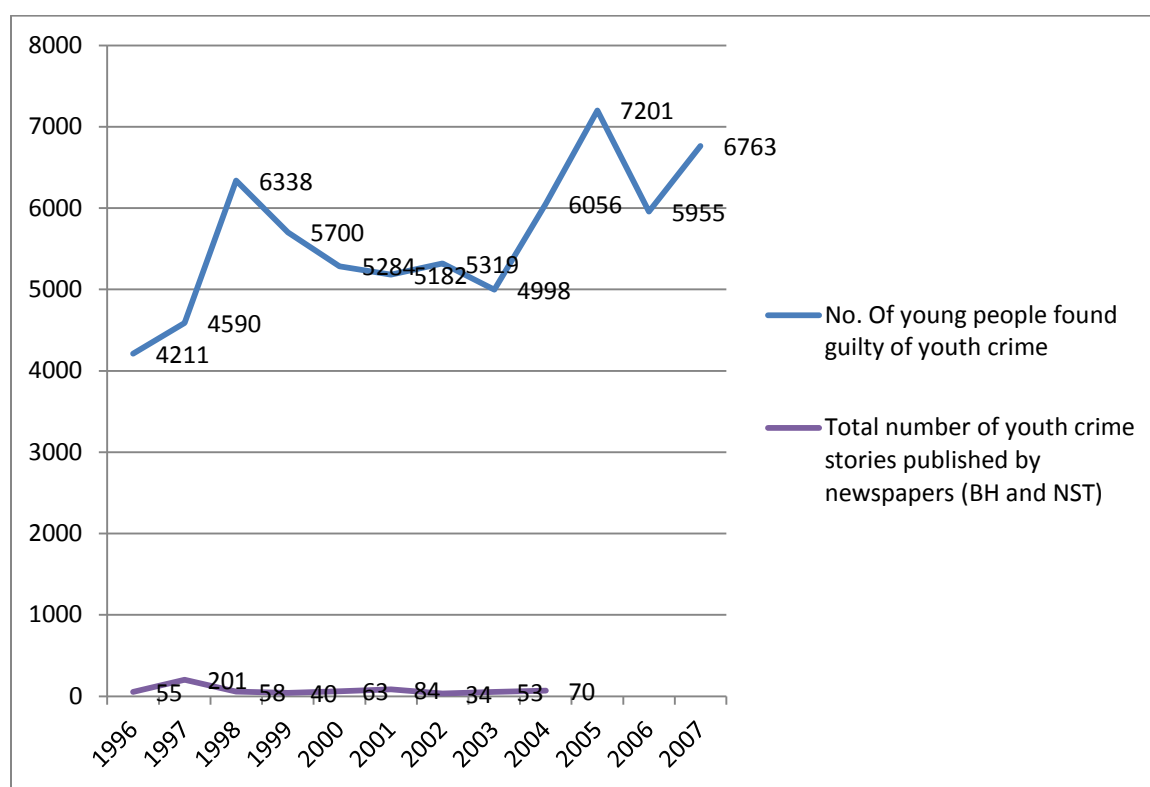
This thesis is examining the social construction of youth crime in the print media in Malaysia and how it has impacted on the society in which they take place. As outlined in the findings chapters (Chapter 5, 6 and 7) the framings of youth used in this thesis were based on Sasson's five frames namely the faulty system frame, the blocked opportunity frame, the social defect/breakdown frame, the media violence frame and the inter-group conflict frame (called the racist frame by Sasson). The faulty system frame sees crime stemmed from problems associated with the structure of the criminal justice system, for example the leniency and inefficiency of the law and justice system. The blocked opportunity frame is associated with crime stems from frustrations as a consequence of blocked opportunities due to poverty and inequality that existed in the society. Meanwhile, the social defect/breakdown frame sees crime happened because of family and/or community breakdown. The media violence frame sees crime stems from the influences (mostly violence) posed in the mass media. The last frame of Sasson's, the inter-group conflict frame argues crime stems from group tensions, as a result he said individuals have to work to overcome or identify potential inequality, racism, inter-generational gap and issues among individuals of same age group. All these frames were found to be consistent with Malaysian newspaper accounts of youth crime. The additional sixth frame, the individual defect frame, emerged in the analysis and was used widely to suggest that youth crime may be framed in accordance with individual behaviour and choices. As a result, the government agencies and all segments in the society has to work together to help young people who are at risk or have potential to be at risk of involvement in crime.

This epilogue proposes to reflect on the social construction of juvenile crime after 2004 until at present. It also will shed light on the changing structure of media representations of youth crime and the extent to which this reflects (if at all) a new sense of openness that may exist in the society within the study period or of the post period.

Within the period of 1995-2004, Malaysia experienced the impact of the Asian Currency Crisis (1997-1998). Whether this crisis has an impact on juvenile crime is difficult to answer even though there has been an increase in juvenile crime rate within those two years. It is perhaps due to possibly distorted public perceptions on what become the causes of the increase in the juvenile crime rate particularly when media have amplified and sensationalized the problem of youth crime in the country. The increase on the youth crime rate and its print media coverage can be due to the greater attention on young people specifically after the government proposed the *Children Protection Act 1999*. The increase in crime rates and news coverage was also repeated when the government proposed the *Child Act 2001*. The years

following 2004 have also indicated the rise and fall in the rate of juvenile crime in Malaysia (see Figure E1 below). Since the analysis of newsprint youth crime reporting only covered those until year 2004, a follow-up analysis of the reporting of youth crime post 2004 would be worthwhile if we wanted to properly investigate whether there is more openness in reporting of youth crime and if there is more openness in reporting youth crime is this due to government openness in sharing information on youth crime as a whole.

E1: Number of young people found guilty of youth crime and the total number of youth crime stories published by newspapers



To my understanding the 1997-1998 financial crisis has rather a partial indirect impact on juvenile crime in Malaysia. The following discussion briefly outlines what happened in the country during the crisis and how the economy started to recover toward the end of 1998. Within the period of 1995-2004, Malaysia experienced the impact of Asian economic crisis of 1997-1998. Prior to the onset of the crisis in July 1997, Malaysia had been enjoying rapid and sustained economic growth (Ministry of Finance, 1998) which saw a reduction in unemployment. The economy was at full employment level until the crisis. During this crisis there is an increase in unemployment and inflation which had a downward effect on real wages that consequently recorded a rise in the incidence of poverty. The result of the crisis forced the

Bank Negara Malaysia to respond immediately by intervening in the foreign exchange market which to uphold the value of ringgit. The Malaysian economy began to feel the negative effects of the crisis. The crisis has resulted in the slowdown in economic growth had an inevitable impact on Malaysia's social sphere. The employment rate rose from around 2.6 per cent before the crisis to about 3.9 per cent by the end of 1998. Inflation also climbed steadily from 2.7 per cent before the crises to 5.3 per cent at year end 1998 (Bank Negara Malaysia, 1999a, 1999b). Unavoidable effects included the erosion of household income and welfare. In addition to the existing poor, a new group of poor emerged from whom there were no social safety nets available to cushion the effects of a sudden loss of income. Urban families experienced the worst of impact due to an increase in the cost of living for food, household necessities, health care, tertiary education and transformation. For Malaysia, the social issues that assumed primary importance in the post crisis scenario were increasing unemployment, inflation and poverty levels, as well as reduced access to and quality of, education and health. Crime has been associated with poverty. The experience of block opportunities to the poor is felt not only in economic opportunities due to high rate of unemployment but also to other social sectors such as in education, health and welfare services. By the end of 1998 the economy was still feeling the effects of the crisis, but from this point on it slowly started to recover.

The intention of this study is not to examine the impact of economic and political influences on youth crime reporting in Malaysia. However, given the implicit links between economic, political and social policy this may be a useful area of future research.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

CODING MANUAL ADDITION

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Name of Newspaper 2. Date of article 3. Year 4. Title/Headline 5. General Frame <ol style="list-style-type: none"> b. Victims' rights and justice c. Fear/public safety/moral panic d. Youth crime as a threat to the country e. Government concern (what should/should not be done to deal with youth offenders) f. Police reaction k. Gender r. Offender's rights and justice v. Voices of young people y. Age of first offence is becoming younger z. Age of criminal responsibility 6. Frame: Individual defect <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Mental disorder b. Character flaws (moral indecency: pre-marital sex; unwed pregnancy; prostitution, 'bohsia/bohjan'; illegal motor racing) c. Easy money d. The defect of youthfulness (pleasure seeking) e. Alcohol, drugs, gambling and in possession of ammunitions (illegal weapon) f. Hedonism g. Curiosity Sexual relationship (include wellbeing such as health issue – HIV, AIDS, STDs and security issues) i. Retaliation against parental neglect 7. Frame: Social defect <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The family (poor parental control; materialism; lacking family bond; abuse and negligent) b. Pathological environment and social conditions (rapid industrialising and development) c. The influence of significant others: peers and adults d. Inadequate public facilities (include space) e. Religion institution (religious and social values) f. Community support (include social responsibility) g. School functioning (include coping school pressure and gang's threat, school discipline) h. culture 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Frame: Inter-group conflict <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Youth fight, gang fight and bullying b. Racially motivated and the denial of racism c. Inter-generational conflict d. Provocation and victim precipitation e. Racial and ethnic class 9. Frame: the faulty system / Inadequate laws and law <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Inadequate laws b. Inadequate law enforcement (questioning police procedure / discretion in handling juvenile cases / lacking knowledge of certain crime – confusion over definition of 'a child', 'juvenile', and 'young person') c. Court decision (include Syariah vs. Civil) 10. Frame: the block opportunities (structural disorder) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Poverty b. Lacking opportunity in education c. Unemployment d. Lacking opportunity in training 11. Frame: the media <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Media influences (black metal, pre-marital sex ('bohsia / bohjan'), sexual offences (rape, assault, pornography, homosexuality), running away from home) 12. Theme/subject matter <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Crime / youth crime / youth deviancy b. Cost of youth crime c. Fear/public safety/moral panic d. Child Act/legislation challenges e. Public confidence on the police, the juvenile justice, the government f. Policy shift g. Claims-makers voice h. Blaming family especially woman (mother) i. Pressure of growing up j. Lack of parental supervision (extended vs. nuclear family) k. Custody at the pleasure of the ruler – TAHANAN LIMPAH SULTAN – detained as young or juvenile offender in prison l. Media coverage m. Challenging data on youth crime (validity and reliability of sources)
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<p>13. Reaction to youth crime and representation of justice</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Paradigmatic responses to youth crime <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Treatment and rehabilitation of the defective individual Deterrence, just-deserts and individual responsibility Assessments of administration of justice <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Police and the press Assessing justice in sentencing The push for law reform The role of parents in reactions to youth crime and representations of justice <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Good fathers and hegemonic masculinity Mother love and hegemonic femininity <p>14. Persons referenced/mentioned</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Personal (victims, victims' family members, offenders, offenders' family members) Government official/Politician (pro. Vs. opp.) Criminal justice official (police officer, judge, prosecutor, magistrate, warden, probation officer) Advocacy groups Experts (academic, analysts, researcher, evaluators) Other (activists, the public, commentator, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs), young people Witness Reporter <p>15. Organisations referenced/mentioned</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Government Criminal justice Advocacy groups Experts (university research group, analysts, evaluators) Other (activists, the public, commentator, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs), young People <p>16. Persons indirectly cited</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Personal (victims, victims' family members, offenders, offenders' family members) Government official/Politician (pro. Vs. opp.) Criminal justice official (police officer, judge, prosecutor, magistrate, warden, probation officer) Advocacy groups Experts (academic, analysts, researcher, evaluators) Other (activists, the public, commentator, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs)) <p>17. Organisations indirectly cited</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Government Criminal justice Advocacy groups Experts (university research group, analysts, evaluators) Other (activists, the public, commentator, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs)) 	<p>18. Persons directly quoted</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Personal (victims, victims' family members, offenders, offenders' family members) Government official/Politician (pro. Vs. opp.) Criminal justice official (police officer, judge, prosecutor, magistrate, warden, probation officer) Advocacy groups Experts (academic, analysts, researcher, evaluators) Other (activists, the public, commentator, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs)) <p>19. Organisations directly quoted</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Government Criminal justice Advocacy groups Experts (university research group, analysts, evaluators) Other (activists, the public, commentator, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs)) <p>20. Item Source</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Reporter Citizen Government representative Organisation, specify Police Courts Activists NGOs Offender + offenders' family members Prison & rehabilitation centre Witness <p>21. Geographical focus: identify the geographical focus of the article</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> National Regional Local <p>22. Focus of the report</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Specific incident Multiple incidents Incident(s) linked to larger, ongoing issue General crime issue General criminal law issue General social issue Other, (health and security of detainee, voices of young people, teaching of religion, school discipline, teachers' attitude, Information-Communication-Technology (ICT)) Juvenile justice – implementation/enforcement (contradictory definition of age of juvenile offender in regard to AMJ 1947, APK 1991 and APWG 1973) Contradictory statistical data on drug among students Function and roles of media in portraying and protecting the rights and justice of juvenile offender
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<p>23. Follow-up: identify if the article is linked to other article/s</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. No follow-up (totally new story) b. Follow-up-certain (item is following up previous story in sample) <p>24. Coverage in other newspapers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. NST only b. BH only c. Both NST and BH <p>25. Types of offences referred in the report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Crime listed under Juvenile crime Statistics, specify b. Crime listed under Status offence, specify c. Crime listed under 'in need for welfare and protection', specify <p>26. Age of offender (if applicable)</p> <p>27. Race/ethnicity of offender (if applicable)</p> <p>28. Types of sources mentioned in the report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Journalist of organisation b. Other journalist c. Police d. Lawyer/judge e. Courts f. Correction g. Offender + family members h. Victim + family members i. Witness j. Public administrator k. Government sources l. Private corporation m. Community organisation/NGOs n. Professional (community worker, social worker, youth worker, psychologist, coroner, doctor, school teacher, principal) o. Academic expert (criminologist, researcher) p. Other (the public, commentator) <p>29. Category of the type of article</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. News (include all types of news, hard and soft) b. Analysis, features, special report, series c. Column (other than police and court) d. Police or court column e. Editorial f. Cartoon/comic g. Photo/graphic h. Other, specify 	<p>30. Vocabulary portraying youth crime</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td></tr> </table> <p>31. Legal terminology designating individuals</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td></tr> </table> <p>32. Shifting characterisations of young people who break the law</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th style="width: 50%;">1990s</th> <th style="width: 50%;">2000s</th> </tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </table> <p>33. Offence-related designations of youths</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th style="width: 50%;">Mostly commonly used terms</th> <th style="width: 50%;">Other terms used</th> </tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </table> <p>34. Describing reactions to criminal victimisation</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th style="width: 33%;">Immediate reactions</th> <th style="width: 33%;">Short-term reactions</th> <th style="width: 33%;">Long-term or lasting effects</th> </tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </table> <p>35. Describing program, legislation and policy as a respond to youth crime</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th style="width: 33%;">Program</th> <th style="width: 33%;">Legislation</th> <th style="width: 33%;">Policy</th> </tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </table> <p>36. Describing publics proposal as a respond to youth crime</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td></tr> </table> <p>Notes:</p>									1990s	2000s					Mostly commonly used terms	Other terms used							Immediate reactions	Short-term reactions	Long-term or lasting effects										Program	Legislation	Policy									
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Appendix B

LAWS OF MALAYSIA

REPRINT

Act 593

CRIMINAL PROCEDURE CODE

Incorporating all amendments up to 1 January 2006

PUBLISHED BY

THE COMMISSIONER OF LAW REVISION, MALAYSIA

UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE REVISION OF LAWS ACT 1968

IN COLLABORATION WITH

PERCETAKAN NASIONAL MALAYSIA BHD

Youthful offenders

293. (1) When any youthful offender is convicted before any Criminal Court of any offence punishable by fine or imprisonment, the Court may, instead of awarding any term of imprisonment in default of payment of the fine or passing a sentence of imprisonment— (a) order the offender to be discharged after due admonition if the Court shall think fit; (b) order the offender to be delivered to his parent or to his guardian or nearest adult relative or to such other person as the Court shall designate on such parent, guardian, relative or other person executing a bond with or without surety or sureties, as the Court may require, that he will be responsible for the good behaviour of the offender for any period not exceeding twelve months or without requiring any person to enter into any bond make an order in respect of the offender ordering him to be of good behaviour for any period not exceeding two years and containing any directions to that offender in the nature of the conditions referred to in paragraphs 294A(a), (b) and (c) which the Court shall think fit to give; (c) order the offender, if a male, to be whipped with not more than ten strokes of a light cane or rattan within the Court premises and in the presence, if he desires to be present, of the parent or guardian of that offender; or *Criminal Procedure Code* 127 (d) deal with the offender in the manner provided by the Juvenile Courts Act 1947 [*Act 90*].

(2) The Court before which a youthful offender is convicted may, in addition to or instead of punishing the offender in the manner provided in this section, inflict on his parent or guardian a fine not exceeding twenty ringgit in any case in which the Court, after summary enquiry, is satisfied that such parent or guardian has, by neglecting to take proper care or otherwise, conducted to the misconduct of that offender: Provided that no parent or guardian shall be fine without his having had an opportunity of being heard and (if he desires it) of adducing evidence in his defence.

(3) When any order has been made under paragraph (1)(b) and the Court has reason to believe that the behaviour of the offender during the period specified in the order is not good or that the offender has not complied with any direction included in the order the Court may issue a notice addressed to the offender and to the parent, guardian, relative or other person to whom the offender has been delivered or under whose supervision

the offender has been ordered to remain to show cause why that offender should not be dealt with under paragraph (1)(d) and if cause is not shown to the satisfaction of the Court, the Court may cancel the order made under the said paragraph (1)(b) and substitute for it as from the date of the cancellation an order under the Juvenile Courts Act 1947, and may if necessary issue a warrant for the apprehension.