

SEX/GENDER AND ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AMONG PARENTS IN KUALA LUMPUR

Yarina Ahmad

Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Selangor
40450, Shah Alam, Selangor
Email: yarina@salam.uitm.edu.my

Denise Cuthbert

School Graduate Research, RMIT
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.
Email: denise.cuthbert@rmit.edu.au

Dharma Arunachalam

Centre for Population and Urban Research
School of Social Sciences
Monash University
Clayton, Victoria, Australia
Email: Dharma.Arunachalam@monash.edu.au

Sara Niner

Faculty of Arts and Education
Melbourne Burwood Campus
Deakin University
Victoria, Australia
Email: sara.niner@deakin.edu.au

ABSTRACT

While the recognition and acknowledgment of physical child abuse were observed and recognised in Malaysia around the 1970s; child sexual abuse (CSA) was not acknowledged until years later, in the 1990s. Since then, Malaysia evidenced the rising number of CSA cases yearly, as well as a serious type of CSA including the paedophile cases recently. This paper focuses on understanding the social and cultural attitudes towards CSA among parents in Kuala Lumpur. This paper presents the results of a general survey involving 900 participants representing fathers and mothers live in Kuala Lumpur. Samples were selected based on the probability proportionate to size (PPS) sampling technique, with emphasis given to two important sociological aspects (sex/gender and ethnicity) in understanding the social and cultural attitudes towards CSA in Malaysia. The findings of this study revealed that a strong significant difference between participants' ethnicity and knowledge of the definition of CSA. Further, the findings of this study discovered that there exists a strong significant relationship between participants' gender and perception of all four types of CSA enquired in this study (molestation, incest, rape by boyfriend and rape by uncle). The findings uncovered that female participants, representing the mothers who live in Kuala Lumpur, have indicated higher perception towards all types of sexual abuse against children. While mothers have a greater perception of CSA, this does not guarantee that they will take further action to lodge a report to the authorities. Instead, the male participants, all of whom are fathers, showed greater readiness to lodge a report to the authorities for cases of CSA. The findings of this study provide a sociological understanding of CSA that is useful for the relevant agencies to address CSA issue in Malaysia. CSA is a form of a serious child abuse that has severe implications for the victims as well as their parents. Hence, the government and all parties should play proactive roles in addressing this issue effectively through education and increased awareness among children as well as parents and all adults.

Keywords: Child sexual abuse (CSA), sex/gender, ethnicity, parents

Introduction

While the recognition and acknowledgment of physical child abuse was observed and recognised in Malaysia around the 1970s (Hwang, Chin and Leng 1974; Nathan and Hwang 1981; Kasim, Mohd. Shafie and Cheah 1994; Kasim, Cheah and Mohd. Shafie 1995), CSA was not acknowledged until years later, in the 1990s. Singh, Yiing and Nurani (1996) claimed that awareness of CSA began to increase in Malaysia after the 3rd Asian Conference on Child Abuse in 1993. Subsequently, the first paper about the subject of CSA in Malaysia was published in the international journal *Child Abuse & Neglect*, authored by Kassim and Kasim (1995). In their paper, Kassim and Kasim (1995) discussed 101 confirmed cases of CSA recorded by the Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) Team between June 1985 and December 1990. From these 101 cases, six girls aged between 12 and

16 years old were found to be pregnant (p.795). Malay victims recorded the highest number of cases (50%), followed by Indians (24.7%) and Chinese (24.7%), and the remaining (1.9%) were another ethnicity. A large majority of the cases involved girls as the victim (93.9%), with boys comprising eight of the CSA victims (Kassim and Kasim 1995).

Subsequently, the number of reported CSA cases in 1993 increased to 75, more than double the number of CSA cases in 1992 (31 cases). It was suggested that this significant increase was due to the increasing number of people willing to report CSA, particularly doctors and medical officers, as well as teachers and welfare officers (Johari 1994). The rising number of reported cases could also be suggested as due to the implementation of the Child Protection Act 1991, which obligated doctors and medical officers to report child abuse incidents referred to their hospitals. Despite that, the doctors working with the SCAN Team at that time claimed that there were difficulties in making a diagnosis of CSA, especially if the victim was below five years old and if there was a lack of physical evidence. Furthermore, it was also suggested that sexual abuse is a very difficult and uncomfortable issue to discuss, thus leading to a greater reluctance of disclosure among a majority of the victims (Johari 1994).

Since then, the number of reported CSA cases continues to increase annually, and a dramatic increase recently occurred. The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) recorded a total of 767 cases in 2009, which increased to 866 cases in 2010 (Department of Social Welfare 2010). Meanwhile, the Royal Malaysian Police recorded 3,631 CSA cases in 2007, and this increased to 4,063 cases in 2010. Out of the total number of reported CSA cases in 2010, a majority were rape cases (65.4%), 23.5% involved cases of molestation, 8% were incest, and the remaining cases were classified as unnatural intercourse, which includes cases of sodomy (Royal Malaysian Police, 2010). The number of reported CSA continues to increase until recently. The recent statistics reported by the DSW revealed a total number of 978 cases of CSA (424 cases reported under the Section 17(1)(a); and 554 cases reported under the Section 17(1)(b) of Child Act 2001) (Department of Social Welfare, 2015).¹

Most recently, Malaysia was sparked with a paedophile case involving a British citizen, Richard Huckle, 30 years old, who admitted to committing a series of sex attacks on 23 Malaysian children (The Star, 2 June 2016). The 23 victims came from mainly poor Christian families, where Huckle gained access to these children when he was posing as a Christian English teacher doing good deeds (Payton, 2016). Huckle was arrested upon his arrival at Gatwick Airport on 19 December 2014, when he came home for Christmas. More than 20,000 pictures and videos took of himself abusing the children were found on his computer. Huckle also wrote a paedophile manual entitled: "Paedophile and poverty: Child-lover Guide" and "Pedopoints ledger" in which he detailed rapes and various sex acts—a private record of the children he had abused, and made it a game of different types of indecent activities (Payton, 2016). In reacting to Huckle's sentencing in London, the Association of Women Lawyers (ASW) stated that the existing Malaysian laws were suggested as severely inadequate to deal with wide range of sexual offenses against children (The Star, 7 June 2016). Britain has very specific laws to protect children—Sexual Offences Act 2003, also deals with notification requirement (sex offenders registry); and the Protection of Children Act 1978 which deals with indecent photos of children. A criminal law practitioner, Kitson Foong suggested that it is high time for Malaysia to have a specific Sexual Offences Act that governs and capture all forms of sexual crime against all victims (The Star, 7 June 2016).

This issue among others show that CSA cases in Malaysia is a serious issue, yet not being acknowledged by many Malaysian, and therefore many CSA issues in Malaysia went unreported (Choo, 2001; Bernama 2010). Public awareness was suggested as one of the factors contributing to low reporting of CSA (Bernama 2010). The Kuala Lumpur Police Chief, Datuk Mohamad Salleh said that those who know any CSA incidents happening in their neighbourhood and not taking any action to report the incident were either do not aware or do not feel that protecting a child's right is also their responsibility (Bernama 2010). Hence, it is believed that the CSA cases and its severity are more than the actual number of cases reported.

While there is a number of research that have been undertaken to explore the knowledge of child abuse among professional groups (for example doctors, nurses, police and welfare officers), due to the importance of understanding forms of abuse and the different roles that must be integrated in the prevention of child abuse (Abrahams et al. 1992; Marshall Jr and Locke 1997; Kraus and Jandl-Jager 2011). By contrast, very little research has been carried out regarding public attitudes or perceptions of child abuse. Dhooper et al. (1991) remarked that regardless of the existing child protection services dealing with child abuse and neglect issues, prevention and early detection of abusive situations are needed. This is dependent on the awareness and concern of the general public: they must be able to take appropriate action by reporting any child abuse incidents they witness.

Despite the importance of public awareness and involvement in dealing with this issue, there is limited research focusing on public knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of child abuse, in particular CSA in Malaysia. Previous studies undertaken in Malaysia cover samples from CPA being reported at the hospital (Kasim and Kassim, 1995); the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse among Malaysian paramedical students (Singh, Yiing and Nurani 1996), retrospective measurement of child maltreatment among young adults (aged 18 to 26 years old) in seven countries including Malaysia (Dunne et al. 2008); none represent the general public, and in particular mothers and fathers in Kuala Lumpur. This is the gap that this paper attempts to fill, with the discussion surrounding sex/gender and ethnic differences in understanding the social and cultural attitudes towards child sexual abuse (CSA) among parents. This covers the knowledge of the legal definition of 'sexual abuse'; perception of different types of sexual abuse against children; and attitudes towards reporting CPA cases.

¹ The rising number of reported CSA is consistent in most of the countries in the world. However, as reported in the National Center for Victims of Crime, the statistics of reported CSA vary in different countries. The real prevalence of CSA is difficult to determine due to many CSA cases went unreported and thus, most of the experts agree that the real prevalence of CSA is more serious than the reported cases to the relevant authorities (The National Center for Victims of Crime official website, 2016).

Child sexual abuse (CSA)

Child sexual abuse means the sexual exploitation of children through actions such as incest, molestation and rape (Kempe and Kempe 1978). Since the early work of Kempe, the evidence shows that the reported cases until the 1970s represent only a fraction of the total, and sexual abuse in particular is unreported. Incest and other forms of sexual abuse of children are likely to bring forth strong feelings of revulsion or disbelief among people. Kempe and Kempe (1978) suggest that these are the same feelings that have caused professionals to shy away from the problem of sexual abuse and to underestimate its severity and extent. However, in order to better highlight and understand sexual abuse, the problem should be dealt with as openly as physical abuse, which at one time seemed just as abhorrent.

WHO and ISPCAN (2006) defined the sexual abuse of a child as: 'The involvement of a child in an activity that he or she does not fully comprehend and is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Children can be sexually abused by both adults and other children who are—by virtue of their age or stage of development—in a position of responsibility, trust or power over the victim.' According to Corby (2006), the issue of defining sexual abuse in practice is both complex and problematic. There is much more agreement between child health and welfare professionals about the seriousness of child sexual abuse and about the importance of intervening to protect children from such abuse.

According to Kassim and Kasim (1995), the definition of child sexual abuse varies from one place to another, depending on the culture, values, and beliefs of the individuals in a community or society at large. In Malaysia, the law against sexual child abuse is enacted under Section 17 (2) (c) of the Child Act (2001) (Act 611), which states:

A child is sexually abused if he has taken part, whether as a participant or an observer, in any activity which is sexual in nature for the purpose of –

- (i) any pornographic, obscene or indecent material, photograph, recording, film, videotape or performance; or
- (ii) sexual exploitation by any person for that person's or another person's sexual gratification. (p.30)

In addition, the classification of different types of sexual abuse towards a child is further referred to in the Penal Code (Act 574) of Malaysia, which is divided into three separate sections that cover rape (Section 375), incest (Section 376A), and unnatural intercourse (Section 377). A man is said to commit rape if he has sexual intercourse with a woman: (a) against her will; (b) without her consent; (c) with her consent, when her consent has been obtained by putting her in fear of death or hurt to herself or any other person; (d) with her consent, when the man knows that he is not her husband, and her consent is given because she believes herself to be lawfully married; (e) with her consent, when she is unable to understand the nature and consequences of that to which she gives consent; and (f) with or without consent, when she is under 16 years of age (Section 375, Penal Code (Act 574), pp. 145-146).

Section 375 (f) is applicable to a rape case involving a minor as a victim; in addition, consensual sex involving underage couples (16 years and below) is considered rape according to this act. The female victim can lodge a report against her partner for raping her, even if they have had consensual sexual intercourse more than once, as long as she is aged 16 years or younger. The victim's parent or guardian may also lodge a report for a rape case between the underage couple if the girl refuses to do so; in this situation, it is still considered a rape case. The punishment for the rape cases listed above is imprisonment for a term of not less than five years and not more than twenty years, and the perpetrator shall also be liable to whipping (Section 376, Penal Code (Act 574), p.146).

'Incest' refers to a sexual act between people whose relationship is such that they are not permitted, under the law, religion, custom or usage applicable to marry (Section 376A, Penal Code (Act 574), p.147). The punishment for incest as stated in Section 376B is imprisonment for a term not less than six years and not more than twenty years, and the perpetrator shall be liable to whipping (p.147). This act is applicable if the victim is under sixteen years of age, if female, or less than thirteen years of age, if male, and deemed incapable of giving consent (p.147). 'Unnatural intercourse' refers to any person who incites a child under the age of fourteen years to any act of gross indecency with him or another person as stated in Section 377E, and the punishment is imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years, and shall also be liable to whipping (p.149).

Methods

This paper forms part of the doctoral research of one of the authors which adopted mixed-method approach². This paper concentrates only on the results of the quantitative findings in relation to knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of CSA among 900 representative residents of Kuala Lumpur.³ Data for the quantitative approach was gathered through a general survey by using a structured questionnaire; it was *personally administered* to the participants from 27th August to 16th November 2010.

² An explanatory design using a mix-method approach was adopted for the purpose of the study, which began with quantitative data collection (a general survey involving 900 participants); this was then supported by qualitative research (seven in-depth interviews among the general public, and three in-depth interviews with the representatives from each of three government agencies dealing with child abuse cases in Malaysia).

³ The total number of population in Kuala Lumpur is 1,306,112 (Department of Statistics, 2000). According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), for a population of more than 100,000 people, the total number of samples is 384. However, this study decided to enlarge the sample size to represent different gender and ethnic groups in Malaysia. Further, as this study applied probability proportionate to size (PPS) sampling technique, a larger sample size is needed (Babbie, 2007). This is to ensure enough samples for each sub-sample applied in this study (gender and ethnic groups). In the process of reaching 900 samples, a total number of 1,005 questionnaires were collected. 105 questionnaires were excluded from the analysis due to incomplete responses, or the fact

The *probability proportionate to size (PPS)* sampling was applied in this study by clustering the samples from three out of 11 districts in Kuala Lumpur (Lembah Pantai, Wangsa Maju and Bukit Bintang), and further divided into two strata: ethnic groups and sex/gender. Emphasis was given to the sociological aspects, in particular socio-demographic (sex/gender—representing fathers and mothers), socio-cultural (ethnicity—three main ethnic groups: Malay, Chinese and Indian), and socio-economic (educational level—school level [primary and secondary] and below, diploma/certificate, and University and higher [bachelor degree, masters and above]) in understanding the social and cultural attitudes towards CPA in Malaysia.

The data was analysed using the software program Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS). A *chi-square* analysis was undertaken to measure the relationship between two variables—sex/gender and ethnicity; and knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of CSA.

Results

Based on disaggregated data, it was established that both participants' sex/gender and ethnicity were significant indicators in their knowledge of the definition of a child, and knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of CPA in Malaysia.

Knowledge of the definition of child sexual abuse (CSA)

Using the official definition of CSA in Malaysia (see Note 1, Table 1), this study examines the knowledge of participants about their acceptance of this definition. Notably, only 76.3 % of the surveyed participants indicated 'mostly acceptable' for these actions to be defined as CSA. Most surprisingly, 11.6% of 900 Kuala Lumpur residents surveyed do not accept the listed actions were classified and defined as CSA. Although the actions stated in the Child Act 2001 are the legal definition of CSA, which clearly show a form of sexual abuse against children, the number of Malaysians who do not accept the definition as CSA reveals a distressing scenario. In addition, *chi-square* analysis revealed a *strong significant* difference between participants' ethnicity and knowledge of the definition of CSA. While those with Malay and Indian ethnic backgrounds have shown slightly *better knowledge* of the definition of CSA, Chinese participants instead indicated 'moderately acceptable' and 'unacceptable' in relation to the listed actions as forms of CSA. This is another worrying result involving Malaysian parents in Kuala Lumpur.

Table 1: Relationship between participants' sex/gender and ethnicity on their knowledge of the definition of child sexual abuse in Malaysia (%)

Knowledge	Sex/Gender (%)		Ethnicity (%)			Total (N=900)
	Male (N=450)	Female (N=450)	Malay (N=300)	Chinese (N=300)	Indian (N=300)	
Definition of child sexual abuse (Note 1)	#		***			
Mostly acceptable	74.2	78.4	82.6	67.0	79.3	76.3
Moderately acceptable	14.0	10.2	10.7	16.7	9.0	12.1
Unacceptable	11.8	11.3	6.7	16.3	11.7	11.6

Note: Chi-square value: very significant ($p < .01$)***; significance ($p < .05$)**; some/weak relationship ($p < .10$)*; and not significant ($p > .10$)#

(Note 1) 2 Items – Sexual child abuse is defined as whether as a participant or an observer, in any activity which is sexual in nature for the purposes of—(i) *any pornographic, obscene or indecent material, photograph, recording, film, videotape or performance*; or (ii) *sexual exploitation by any person for that person's or another person's sexual gratification* (Child Act 2001:30).

Perception of different types of sexual abuse against children

There are several forms of sexual abuse against children, with different classifications depending on the age of the victim and type of CSA case; this study took the initiative to explore the public's perception about different types of CSA in Malaysia. It also attempted to explore patterns of perception of CSA across different genders and ethnic groups in Malaysia. Four scenarios of different types of CSA were given to the participants during the survey: (1) child molestation; (2) rape by a boyfriend; (3) rape by an uncle; and (4) an incident of incest. The surveyed participants were asked how they would deal with each of the incidents. Four actions were listed for the participants to select: listen to the victim; request more information from the victim; directly confront the perpetrator with the allegation; report to a neighbourhood committee; and report to NGOs. Subsequently, these actions were grouped into three levels: 'mostly acceptable'; 'moderately acceptable' and 'unacceptable' actions. The surveyed participants were also asked whether they would take action to report any of the four incidents to the authorities (police, Department of Social Welfare etc.). (Please see Note 1, Note 2, Note 3 and Note 4 in Table 2).

The overall patterns of perception of CSA among surveyed participants were found to be almost similar, despite the different scenarios. Approximately 41% to 45% of the participants indicated that the actions listed to deal with the each of the situations were 'mostly acceptable'. Another 43% to 46% indicated the actions were 'moderately acceptable'—they are willing to listen

that the participants themselves chose to discontinue responding to the questions. Further, the participants were informed that they can withdraw themselves from answering the questions whenever they feel inconvenience and traumatized (for the participants who have personal experience related to CSA – they were among the victims, experienced witnessed CSA and others). Notably, around 10% of the individuals approached during the survey refused to participate in the survey.

and request more information from the victims; yet, not many were willing to confront the father of the victim with the allegation and report it to a neighbourhood committee or NGOs. Meanwhile, 11% to 14 % indicated the listed actions to deal with the situations were ‘unacceptable’. This was found across the four types of CSA examined in the survey.

Table 2: Relationship between participants’ sex/gender and ethnicity on their perception of different types of child sexual abuse in Malaysia (%)

Perceptions	Sex/Gender (%)		Ethnicity (%)			Total (N=900)
	Male (N=450)	Female (N=450)	Malay (N=300)	Chinese (N=300)	Indian (N=300)	
<i>Child molest</i> ^(Note 1)						
Appropriate actions:						
<i>Mostly acceptable</i>						
<i>Moderately acceptable</i>						
<i>Unacceptable</i>						
Lodge a report to authorities:						
<i>Yes</i>						
<i>No</i>						
<i>Rape by boyfriend</i> ^(Note 2)						
Appropriate actions:						
<i>Mostly acceptable</i>						
<i>Moderately acceptable</i>						
<i>Unacceptable</i>						
Lodge a report to authorities:						
<i>Yes</i>						
<i>No</i>						
<i>Rape by uncle</i> ^(Note 3)						
Appropriate actions:						
<i>Mostly acceptable</i>						
<i>Moderately acceptable</i>						
<i>Unacceptable</i>						
Lodge a report to authorities:						
<i>Yes</i>						
<i>No</i>						
<i>Incest</i> ^(Note 4)						
Appropriate actions:						
<i>Mostly acceptable</i>						
<i>Moderately acceptable</i>						
<i>Unacceptable</i>						
Lodge a report to authorities:						
<i>Yes</i>						
<i>No</i>						

Note: Chi-square value: very significant (p<.01)^{***}; significance (p<.05)^{**}; some/weak relationship (p<.10)^{*}; and not significant (p>.10)[#]

(Note 1) An adult is in a situation where a seven-year-old neighbourhood girl tells the adult that she has been sexually molested by her father – **Appropriate actions:** (1) Listen to a 7-year-old girl; (2) Request the girl to provide more information; (2) Directly confront the father of the girl with the allegation; (3) Report to neighbourhood committee; (4) Report to non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

(Note 2) An adult is told by a 16-year-old girl that she has been raped by her boyfriend – **Appropriate actions:** Listen to the 16-year-old girl; (2) Request the girl to provide more information; (2) Directly confront the girl’s boyfriend with the allegation; (3) Report to neighbourhood committee; (4) Report to non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

(Note 3) An adult is told by an 18-year-old girl that she has been raped by her uncle – **Appropriate actions:** Listen to the 18-year-old girl; (2) Request the girl to provide more information; (2) Directly confront the uncle with the allegation; (3) Report to neighbourhood committee; (4) Report to non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

(Note 4) An adult woman is in a situation in which her daughter, aged 14 years old, reports that she has been raped by her father or step-father (i.e. the husband of the woman) – **Appropriate actions:** (1) Listen to the 14-year-old girl; (2) Request the girl to provide more information; (2) Directly confront he father or step-father of the allegation; (3) Report to neighbourhood committee; (4) Report to non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

In addition, the *chi-square* analysis uncovered that there was *no significant* relationship between participants' socio-cultural background and their perception of rape by uncle and incest cases. However, a *significant* relationship exists between participants' ethnicity and perception of rape by boyfriend involving a minor as a victim. While those with Indian and Malay ethnic backgrounds have demonstrated more 'mostly acceptable' answers to the listed actions to deal with rape by boyfriend incident, Chinese participants instead responded with a greater amount of 'unacceptable' answers.

Notably, there exists a *strong significant* relationship between participants' gender and perception of all four types of CSA enquired in this study. The findings uncovered that female participants, representing the mothers who live in Kuala Lumpur, have indicated higher perception towards all types of sexual abuse against children. While mothers have a greater perception of CSA, this does not guarantee that they will take further action to lodge a report to the authorities. Instead, the male participants, all of whom are fathers, showed greater readiness to lodge a report to the authorities for cases of CSA. Hence, this shows that men involved in this survey believe that CSA cases require the authorities, compared to just listening and requesting for more information themselves, or reporting to the neighbourhood committee or NGOs. In relation to lodging a report to the authorities for CSA incidents, those from a Chinese ethnic background continue to show a slightly lower willingness compared to Malays and Indian-Malaysians. Consequently, this finding could be due to their attitude of not being willing to take more responsibility by getting involved with the case and reporting it to authorities.

Awareness of any child sexual abuse (CSA) incidents

Additionally, this study examines the awareness of surveyed participants who were familiar with CSA or had witnessed CSA incidents. As presented in Table 3, 1.4 % of the total 900 participants indicated awareness that their friends, relatives, colleagues or neighbours had sexually abused their children. Moreover, 1.3 % of the surveyed participants indicated that they were aware of relatives and/or neighbours who sexually abused children, abuse that occurred when the participants themselves were children. Among the 300 Chinese participants involved in this survey, no one reported awareness of any of their friends/relatives/colleagues/neighbours who had sexually abused their children. Only two Chinese participants indicated awareness that their relatives or neighbours sexually abused their children when the participants themselves were still children.

Table 3: Relationship between participants' sex/gender and ethnicity on their awareness of child sexual abuse in Malaysia (%)

Awareness	Sex/Gender (%)		Ethnicity (%)			Total (N=900)
	Male (N=450)	Female (N=450)	Malay (N=300)	Chinese (N=300)	Indian (N=300)	
Aware of friends/relatives/ colleagues/neighbours etc. who have sexually abused their children:						
Yes	1.3	1.6	2.0	0.0	2.3	1.4
No	98.7	98.4	98.0	100.0	97.7	98.6
Aware of relatives/ neighbours etc. who have sexually abused their children; when participants were a child						
Yes	1.3	1.3	2.0	0.7	1.3	1.3
No	98.7	98.7	98.0	99.3	98.7	98.7

Note: Chi-square value: very significant ($p < .01$)^{***}; significance ($p < .05$)^{**}; some/weak relationship ($p < .10$)^{*}; and not significant ($p > .10$)[#]

Discussion and conclusion

Knowledge of the definition of CSA is very important as it revealed the understanding of what actions can be considered as sexual abuse against children. The findings of 11.6% of 900 Kuala Lumpur residents surveyed do not accept the legal definition of CSA revealed a frightening outlook involving Malaysian parents who live in Kuala Lumpur. If many Malaysians continue to believe that these actions were not adequate to define CSA, their degree of acceptance of CSA could possibly lead to more cruel actions of CSA, or lead to the death of a child. One of the worst cases of CSA in Malaysia, the rape and murder of eight-year-old Nurin Jazlin Jazimin, illustrates the extent of the cruelty of CSA incidents that occur in Malaysia.⁴

⁴ Nurin was abducted for one week and her body was found dumped in a sport bag at a business premises in Petaling Jaya, Selangor (Hamid 2007). Nurin is believed to have been killed 24 hours before her nude body was found. The post-mortem on the body revealed that the victim was raped, and the murderer had inserted an eggplant and cucumber in her genitals, forcing the rapture of her rectum which was infected with bacteria, resulting in her tragic death (*Bernama.com* 20 September 2007). Nurin's case still remains unsolved and police says they will never close the file on her (*The Star Online* 19 January 2009).

A study by Singh, Yiing and Nurani (1996)⁵ on the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse among Malaysian paramedical students can be considered one of the benchmarks of this type of study. However, while the respondents of their study were victims of childhood abuse (Singh, Yiing and Nurani 1996), this study aimed at adults, and it is possible that perpetrators of abuse were present. The Chinese victims indicated the high prevalence of CSA (Singh, Yiing and Nurani 1996), yet the Chinese parents who involved in this study revealed a slightly limited knowledge of CSA and indicated they are less aware of the CSA incidents in their community. Despite the high number of reported cases among the Malays and Indians, the study by Singh, Yiing and Nurani (1996) indicated a slightly lower prevalence of CSA among these communities. However, the Malay and Indian parents in this study report witnessing more CSA incidents, in line with the reports.

While there are many forms of CSA, this study uncovered the different pattern of perception for different forms of CSA, and it varies across participants' sex/gender and ethnicity. The findings uncovered that female participants, representing the mothers who live in Kuala Lumpur, have indicated higher perception towards all types of sexual abuse against children. While mothers have a greater perception of CSA, this does not guarantee that they will take further action to lodge a report to the authorities. Instead, the male participants, all of whom are fathers, showed greater readiness to lodge a report to the authorities for cases of CSA.

The findings of this study also discovered that there is a *significant* relationship exists between participants' ethnicity and perception of rape by boyfriend involving a minor as a victim. While those with Indian and Malay ethnic backgrounds have demonstrated more 'mostly acceptable' answers to the listed actions to deal with rape by boyfriend incident, Chinese participants instead responded with a greater amount of 'unacceptable' answers. This is the very tricky situation. Notably, there is no legal acceptance for consensual sex among teenagers aged 16 years and below in Malaysia. Although the teenage couple may already have had consensual sex multiple times, the girl or her parents may still be able to lodge a report for rape, as long as the girl is aged 16 years or younger. This is stipulated in the (Penal Code Act 574) (Section 375), and it is applied to all Malaysians. Therefore, the finding of a higher number of Chinese participants who indicated their unacceptability towards the actions to deal with rape involving a minor is probably due to a number of factors: unsure that the victim had really been raped or she may just want to 'get back' at the boyfriend, or maybe the girl wants to let the boyfriend face the legal punishment because he broke up with her—in other words, revenge. Or perhaps the Chinese community may have a slightly higher tolerance about consensual sex between minors, compared to Malays and Indian-Malaysians.

The earlier finding of a higher proportion of Chinese participants who indicate lower acceptance of the definition of CSA (Table 1) reflects the finding regarding awareness of whether anyone they knew had sexually abused their children (Table 2). Among the 300 Chinese participants involved in this survey, no one reported awareness of any of their friends/relatives/colleagues/neighbours who had sexually abused their children. Only two Chinese participants indicated awareness that their relatives or neighbours sexually abused their children, when the participants themselves were still children. With the result of a lower degree of acceptance of the definition of CSA among Chinese participants, this is presumed to have influenced their awareness of CSA. They may have witnessed a CSA-related incident, yet with their limited knowledge of CSA, they did not believe the incident reached the level of CSA. Another possible explanation for these findings is probably due to the fewer reported cases of CSA among the Chinese community compared to Malay and Indian communities. Once again, the lower reported cases of CSA among the Chinese community were presumably due to their limited knowledge and understanding of CSA. As the actual number of reported CSA cases in Malaysia is increasing yearly, it is assumed that there are probably more participants who have witnessed a CSA incident, yet they chose not to disclose the incident during the survey. This reflects the Malaysian culture which regards sexual abuse, and more specifically CSA, as a taboo subject, and thus it is not acknowledged or discussed openly.

Similarly, an international study conducted by Fontes and Plummer (2010) discovered that cultural values, ethnicity and religion were found to have influenced the disclosure and reporting of CSA. The authors highlighted several cultural values impacting disclosure of CSA, including: feelings of shame; taboo and modesty; sexual scripts that make the disclosure more difficult; feeling of shame on the loss of their daughter's virginity; status of being a female; obligatory violence; and also values of honour, respect and patriarchy. In addition, the authors have also suggested that a wide variety of religious norms and expectations may make disclosure of sexual abuse difficult. Furthermore, reporting CSA to the authorities was also found to be influenced by cultural differences (Fontes and Plummer 2010). The findings of this study in relation to the cultural values, ethnicities and religions that influence the disclosure and reporting CSA could also be applied in a multi-ethnic country like Malaysia.

While there are many factors contributing to the rising number and seriousness of CSA in Malaysia such as: many cases went unreported (Choo, 2001; Bernama 2010); the existing Malaysian laws were suggested as severely inadequate to deal with wide range of sexual offences against children (The Star, 7 June 2016); and low awareness among the public about CSA (Bernama, 2010). This study filled one of the gaps in terms of providing the sociological understanding of CSA among parents that is useful for the relevant agencies to address CSA issue in Malaysia. CSA is a form of a serious child abuse that has severe implications

⁵ Singh, Yiing and Nurani (1996, p.487) surveyed 616 student nurses and trainee medical assistants at the Ipoh School of Nursing and Hospital Bahagia Medical Assistant Training School, as a community population to determine the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse. Their study also uncovered that the prevalence of CSA was found to be significantly different across ethnicity: Malays (5.8%); Indian-Malaysians (5.4%); and Chinese-Malaysians (25.0%). Although the authors have argued that the data of reported CSA in Malaysia during that time was high among Malays and Indian-Malaysians, compared to Chinese, yet their study uncovered something different—Chinese females appeared to have an increased risk of being sexual abuse victims.

for the victims as well as their parents. As the number of CSA cases is keep rising; the severity of the incidents is worsening that could lead to death; and low awareness of many parties about CSA leads to paedophile case recently; thus, Malaysia should take prompt actions to deal with CSA issue holistically. As remarked by Dhooper et al. (1991), regardless the existing child protection services in dealing with child abuse and neglect issues, prevention and early detection of abusive situations are needed—this refers to the awareness and concern of the general public to take appropriate action by reporting any incidents they witness. Hence, the government and all parties should play proactive roles in addressing this issue effectively through education and increase awareness among children as well as parents and all adults.

As Malaysia has recently gazetted the Child Act (Amendment) 2016, which focuses on four main aspects: child registry, community service order (CSO) and a family-based care and heavier penalty (*Berta Harian* Online, 25 July 2016; Bernama, 26 July 2016)—this will ensure more protection, safety and development of children will be enhanced. However, awareness of public on all children issues should be continuously emphasised. Similarly, the Women, Family and Community Development Minister, Datuk Seri Rohani Abdul Karim stated that in order to effectively implement this new act, the ministry will conduct an awareness campaign for the public and relevant agencies to ensure that all parties involved are ready before the act is fully implemented (*Berta Harian* Online, 25 July 2016; Bernama, 26 July 2016). It is hoped that all issues pertaining to children, including CSA and other forms of abuse, neglect and abandonment will be taken seriously by all parties in Malaysia, in ensuring our children's rights, protection, safety and development.

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