

ENGAGING 'MAT REMPLIT' WITH INTERACTIVE CAMP INTERVENTION TO PROMOTE SELF EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Involvement of young teenager as "Mat Rempit" terminology used in Malaysia for those engaging in reckless as well as illegal racing is alarming. Previous research found that teenagers are easily involved as Mat Rempit because of many factors such as peers influence, curiosity, lack of family attention, poverty and mass media influence. Besides illegal racing, there has also been an occurrence of Mat Rempit portraying aggressive behaviours and engrossing with drug or alcohol misuse. Due to their attitudes, the number of accident and teens committing a crime is increasing every day. This situation could be worse if there is no action order to reduce the number of teenagers who involved as Mat Rempit. Many of them have been arrested by a police department after they were allegedly racing illegally on the street. Many rehabilitation programmes in curbing the issue have been conducted, but most of them have found a dead end. Therefore, this paper discusses the effectiveness of interactive camp intervention approach as a way to engage with Mat Rempit. There are four psychological instruments used to explore self-empowerment levels before and after camp intervention which include components of self-esteem, assertive, resilience and leadership. A total of 30 participants were identified through purposive sampling to participate in the camp intervention program for a month. Local bikers club assisted the sampling process of using a snowballing technique to ensure that all recruited participants are Mat Rempit. The key findings are almost 60.0 percent of the participants aged between 16-18 years old, 65.0 percent finished their secondary schools, 66.7 percent involved in motorcycle accidents a few time and 76.7percent lived in rural areas. The mean score of post-test for all sub-modules was higher than the pre-test score. Only the self-esteem score has shown a significant difference between pre-test and post-test. There are significant relationships between resilience, assertive and leadership component for the self-empowerment module. This study has proven that camp interventions have a positive impact on self-esteem and the behavioural changes as Mat Rempit. These findings can help counsellors, social workers, psychologists or youth workers emphasise the aspects of resilience, assertive and leadership in making psychosocial camp-based interventions for Mat Rempit.

Key words: Mat Rempit, At-risk youth, Camp intervention, Self-Empowerment, Group work

INTRODUCTION

Teenagers are the state's human capital that will determine the country's future progress. The development of teenager's well-being is vital to the nation in various ways because healthy teenagers are a crucial indicator towards the nation's prosperity. On the contrary, if a teenager is involved with many social problems, it can make them immature that continually challenges community development. Although teenagers are considered significant in the community development, there are times when they are marginalised and excluded from society.

According to the World Youth Report (United Nation, 2005), it is estimated that 25 percent of teenagers are said to be at-risk youth because they engaged in misconduct behaviours due to poor living conditions, low socioeconomic status, lack of the opportunity to achieve real potential and lack of resources in their community. At present, many teenagers are involved in illegal street racing or Malaysian term they are known as "Mat Rempit". This term is unique to the Malaysian perspectives only. In other countries, it can relate to illegal racing or street racing culture among youth (Ismail & Ibrahim, 2008). Most of the Mat Rempit use small capacity motorcycles to race and without proper safety measures (Wong, 2011). They regularly travel in large groups and race on public roads endangering other road users. Fergusson et al. (2003) reported that teenagers involved with illegal racing are associated with externalising behaviours such as attention issues, deviant behaviour, influenced by peers, drug abuse, alcohol misuse and criminal activity. Rozmi (2012) highlighted that Mat Rempit is also associated with anti-social behaviour, substance abuse, smoking and hanging out to spend time with peers without any purpose. Most of the illegal street racers are male aged between the ages of 15 to 24 years old and more likely to involve in illegal racing because of their interest in motorsports (Warn et al., 2004).

There are many reasons why teenagers could be influenced into involving with Mat Rempit activities. One reason is their inexperience and youth (Rozmi, 2012), thus being young and having lack of experience can lead teenagers into dangerous and illegal street racing. Besides, teenagers' thinking, attitude and action are influenced by their friend. Most of them tend to follow their friends' advice rather than their parents and teacher. As the youth, teenagers feel curious where they desire to try something new and to challenge in their life (Fergusson et al., 2003). That is why they get easily attracted into illegal racing because they want to feel admired and outstanding by showing off their racing skills and winning. They even feel amused when breaking the law or get away from the police roadblocks when riding at high speed. A family problem could also be the cause of illegal racing

among teenagers. This situation happened when they feel that no family members care about them. Some of them joined illegal racing to overcome their family financial problems because they live in poverty, thus by winning the race they are entitled to the prize money (Rozmi, 2012). At the same time, many of them also need the money to support their expenses especially to upgrade their motorbike to make it fit for the races because their family surely cannot afford it. Subsequently, mass media through films and dramas portraying actions of illegal racing could also be a possible contributing factor in cultivating the issue of Mat Rempit.

In developmental psychology, a teenager is an essential stage of development in an individual life. This stage is a period of transition and preparation from childhood to adulthood (Erickson, 1995) which happens in a fast and vibrant time shift compared to the other stages of development. Although the transition into a teenager is inevitable, the speed and extent of these changes burden the ability of most teenagers (Gouws, 2017; Hudley, 2016). Consequently, the stressful life among teenagers is a focus of many studies especially in developing countries like Malaysia (Wahab et al., 2013). In Malaysia, studies on illegal racing are very limited despite its renowned negative consequences and long existence (Ismail & Borhanuddin, 2009; Rozmi, 2012; Wong 2011). While there is increasing recognition that teenagers' problematic behaviours are associated with psychosocial factors, research examining youth development and empowerment programme among Mat Rempit remains limited.

According to Fikri et al. (2012), the Mat Rempit race is not only racing on the road using 'kapcai' or 'scooter' but also involves abusive behaviour such as stealing motorcycles and cars, vandalism, drug abuse, snatch rape and rape. However, not all Mat Rempit are committed with illegal racing, some of them just ride motorcycles dangerously and irregularly to get entertain (Rozmi, 2012). The behaviour of Mat Rempit is said to be aggressive and can easily engage with violent activities due to low levels of emotional and spiritual intelligence (Fikri et al., 2012). For example, there is a report in the mass media linking Mat Rempit with aggressive behaviour in which the Mat Rempit is reported to attack an ambulance driver for reprimanding the action of those who are racing (Shamsul Kamal Amarudin, 2017). Goleman (2001), emotional intelligence is essential for adolescents to control their feelings to others and to use those feelings to guide their thoughts and actions positively. Meanwhile, spiritual knowledge enables one to think creatively and with the foresight to create or alter negative behaviour towards positive behaviour (Zohar & Marshal, 2001).

Empowering at-risk youth is essential. Failure to empower them could lead to this group being lured and trapped by deviant behaviour. Several major studies have found that psychosocial intervention is crucial to develop psychological and social well-being among teenagers involved in illegal racing (Ismail & Borhanuddin, 2009; Ismail & Ibrahim, 2008; Rozmi, 2012; Wahab et al., 2013). Wan Shahrazad et al. (2012) stated that psychological components such as self-esteem, resilient, assertive and leadership could cause adolescents to be involved with the obsessive habits. Based on these factors, there is a need to empower teenager using the practice of group work. The concept of self-empowerment in this paper refers to teenagers' ability to control their behaviour and set their goals in making positive choices (Rappaport, 1981). The concept of self-esteem is an assessment made by one's self on self-esteem, behaviour and personality (Woolfolk et al., 2002). It formed through the feelings learned and positive thinking reflecting a positive attitude about "I can do it" (Palladino, 1990). Meanwhile, the concept of resilient looks at the dynamic process which includes favourable adjustments in the context of difficulty (Resnick, 2000). In the context of this study, resilience refers to the ability of adolescents to rise again after suffering distress. Whereas assertive is also referred to as the interaction pattern between individuals to express the intentions of the heart, the will and the practical opinion undervalues and norms in society (Pozatek, 2010). The assertive will produce the appropriate behaviour by respecting the will of the individual and others. In the context of the Mat Rempit, they are said to be less assertive as they are easily influenced by peers and simultaneously willing to take on the reckless action when challenged. That is why self-leadership is crucial to ensuring that the decisions made are not self-destructive. Leadership concept in this study is related to setting and not just a response to an issue, but also identifying problems and sparking positive changes that bring significant improvements. Effective leadership is the ability to integrate and maximise resources within the environment to achieve common goals (Bhugra, Ruiz & Gupta, 2014).

The scope of this paper involved Mat Rempit. Mat Rempit were chosen in this study because they were said to have severe social problems. Previous studies found that Mat Rempit want to have experience, prestige, pleasure to fulfil their self-esteem with much influenced by their peers (Rozmi, 2012). Studies also showed that family socioeconomic status, family structure and mass media might affect teenager risk-taking behaviours (Wong, 2011). They underestimate the risks of their actions and have no intention of getting help due to their lack of insight and resources. Therefore, this study was conducted to understand that illegal racing can be harmful to oneself and others. They also need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of themselves and make sure they have faith and believe in themselves to change their risky and problematic behaviours. No empirical study found to explore the effectiveness of group work using camp-based intervention programme in modifying the problem behaviours of illegal street racers or known as Mat Rempit in Malaysia. The self-empowerment module used in the camp-based programme to investigate the relationship of self-esteem, resilience, assertiveness and leadership among Mat Rempit. It is hoped that the findings from this study may provide valuable knowledge that will guide the intervention of behaviour modification to reduce at-risk youth associated with illegal racing.

Camp Intervention as Group Work for Adolescent

According to Mishna, Michalski and Cummings (2001), therapeutic camp programs provide a unique intervention through which vulnerable children and youth can make gains in their emotional and social functioning while having fun with peers. The camp approach can provide a practical context for social group work intervention because it gives opportunities for individuals through group activities that are encouraged to grow and develop socially and emotionally as well as to participate responsibly in society. Also, the planned activities in the camp are to optimally challenge the participants, to improve their self-esteem and enhance their social abilities and skills (Kelk, 1994). Participants grow and develop through the processes involved in meeting these challenges. The camp-based intervention program discussed in this article is organised by Centre for Youth Empowerment

(PERKASA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in collaboration with PERMATA Division. The camp is a four-week residential therapeutic program, with four modules such as Self-Exploration Module, Self-Management Module, Self-Empowerment Module and Spirituality Module. All these modules are implemented through interactive and fun activities to ensure that Mat Rempit can learn and play with their peers outside of the classroom. This camp also utilised online learning that embedded in the modules. The participant used audio and visual skills in watching a psycho-educational video online about their goodwill, but people perceived negatively based on their physical appearance.

This paper only discusses the effectiveness of the Self-Empowerment Modules which include four sub-modules such as self-esteem, resilience, assertiveness and leadership among Mat Rempit in Malaysia.

METHODS

This study used a quantitative approach that employed a snowball sampling techniques, a traditional method to sample hard-to-reach populations because of moral, legal, social sensitivities surrounding the behaviour under investigation (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997). Since it is difficult in gaining access to the population of Mat Rempit, all participants were recruited by the Biker's United Club, a local motorcycle club in an attempt to facilitate access to target groups and settings. This study had inclusion criteria such as (1) self-identified as Mat Rempit and (2) engaged in illegal motorcycle street racing or reckless motorcycle riding. The number of participants of this study is 30 people which predetermined based on the figure which is expected to produce a significant impact of the PERKASA camp-based programme. All the participants were informed of the study's objectives and signed an informed consent form. They were guaranteed that their responses would be confidential and reminded that their participation in the study was voluntary.

All voluntary participants were requested to stay for 21 days at the PULAPOT Camp in Wangsa Maju, Kuala Lumpur. They were asked to answer a set of the questionnaire before the camp and after the camp. The set of the questionnaire contained demographic characteristics, self-esteem scale, resilience scale, assertiveness scale for adolescents and leadership scale.

Data were analysed using SPSS 21.0 for Windows. The score distributions were checked for underlying assumptions of normality using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test; as all the score distributions were not normally distributed non-parametric tests were used. The Mann-Whitney U test and the Kruskal-Wallis test were used for comparison of medians. Spearman's correlation coefficient was used for correlation analyses. The chi-square test was used to test the significance of differences in percentages. Analyses resulting in values of $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.001$ were considered significant.

RESULT

A total of 30 Mat Rempit were successfully recruited as participants of the study. All the participants involved in this study have met the inclusion criteria. Table 1 shows that all participants participated in the camp intervention were male and Malay. Regarding age, 56.7 percent of participants were aged 18 years and below. On the other hand, based on education level, 56.7 percent of participants had high school education level, followed by 26.7 percent lower secondary school and only 6.6 percent had Malaysian Skills Certificate and 10 percent of participants with only primary education. Concerning employment, almost 47 percent of participants in this study have entered the workforce and had form of jobs. The majority of participants were from rural areas and only 23.3 percent of participants living in the city. Approximately two-thirds of participants in this study admitted they had experienced a motorcycle accident.

Table 1: Socio-demographics of the participant

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
GENDER		
- Male	30	100.0
RACE		
- Malay	30	100.0
AGE (YEAR)		
- 16 to 18	17	56.7
- 19 to 21	11	36.7
- 22 to 25	2	6.6
EDUCATION LEVEL		
- Primary	3	10.0
- Lower Secondary	8	26.7
- Upper Secondary	17	56.7
- Skills Certificate	2	6.6
JOB STATUS		
- Employed	14	46.7
- Unemployed	16	53.3
LIVING AREA		
- Urban	7	23.3
- Rural	23	76.7

HAVE INVOLVED IN MOTORCYCLE ACCIDENT		
-	Yes	20
-	No	10
		66.7
		33.3

Mean Score Differences between Pre-Test and Post-Test among Variables

Table 2 shows the mean score of the self-esteem in post-test (M = 2.76, SD = 0.18, n = 30) is higher than the pre-test (M = 2.56, SD = 0.32, n = 30). The t-test results showed that the difference between pre and post-test was significantly different (t (29) = 3.16, p <0.05) with a mean difference of 0.20. This result indicates that the level of self-esteem of the participants increased during the camp intervention. Also, the mean score of the post-test for resilience and assertive scales are also lower than the pre-test, but the t-test results do not show any significant differences. The mean score of the post-test for leadership (M = 2.85, SD = 0.44, n = 30) is also higher than the pre-test (M = 2.72, SD = 0.43, n = 30). However, there are no significant differences between pre and post test for leadership as well as for resilient and assertive. All these results indicate that there are no changes in the level of resilience, level of assertive and level of leadership during the camp intervention.

Table 2: Independent samples T-test between self-esteem, resilience, assertive and leadership of participants

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Difference	t	df	p
SELF-ESTEEM						
Pre-test	2.563	0.323	0.059	3.16	29	0.004*
Post-test	2.760	0.183	0.033			
RESILIENCE						
Pre-test	4.693	0.953	0.174	0.98	29	0.923
Post-test	4.711	1.031	0.188			
ASSERTIVE						
Pre-test	2.758	0.361	0.066	1.16	29	0.255
Post-test	2.825	0.311	0.057			
LEADERSHIP						
Pre-test	2.721	0.434	0.079	-1.74	29	0.093
Post-test	2.845	0.435	0.079			

*p < 0.05

Correlation between Variables

When the Pearson's Correlation test was conducted on all four variables of the study, it was found that only resilience factor had a moderate positive relationship (r = 0.714, p <0.001) with leadership factor (Table 3). While there is a weak positive relationship (r = 0.292, p <0.05) between resilience factor and assertive factor. However, the self-esteem factor was not significantly related to other variables in this study.

Table 3: Correlation between self-esteem, resilience, assertive and leadership of participants

	Self-Esteem	Resilient	Assertive	Leadership
SELF-ESTEEM	1.000	0.295	-0.191	0.292
RESILIENT		1.000	0.259*	0.714**
ASSERTIVE			1.000	0.135
LEADERSHIP				1.000

*p < 0.05 **p < 0.001

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

The findings of this study cannot be easily generalised to all illegal racers because they required multidimensional approach in empowering Mat Rempit. This study is purposely done to explore the effectiveness of self-empowerment module through camp-based programme only and not aim to other types of intervention to transform Mat Rempit's negative behaviours. Most of the participants in this study are from rural areas, around Kuala Selangor and only one-fourth of those who live in the city. The findings show that most adolescents who are Mat Rempit are those who live in the rural areas, do not work or hold any permanent jobs. If we look closely at age, nearly 60 percent of them are underage adolescents involved in Mat Rempit activities, but when explicitly viewed there are four participants aged 16 years old who have become Mat Rempit. According to the Road Transport Department (JPJ), the legal of acquiring motorcycle driving licence in Malaysia is 16 years. Nevertheless, all participants in this study were found to have no motorcycle driving license and ride their motorcycle dangerously. In fact, almost two-thirds of these adolescents have involved in road accidents due to reckless behaviour in motorcycle riding. This situation may cause trouble to their parents as they are still underage. Therefore, some of the Mat Rempit who had been arrested by the

police were sent to the Social Welfare Department for community service as ordered by the court. Most of the parents have high expectation of boys than girls because they want their male children to be future family leaders (Ismail & Ibrahim 2008, Rozmi, 2012).

According to Erikson (1995), adolescents undergo the transition in their psychosocial development stage can create the potential conflict between identity and industry. In other words, the Mat Rempit in this study are having a dilemma to find their identities and are easily influenced by their peers (Rozmi 2012). It is no surprise that many of the Mat Rempit are not interested in going to school and decided to work either temporary or part-time jobs as long as they get the financial resources to meet their personal needs mainly to upgrade their motorcycles (Wong, 2011). In this study, almost 48 percent of the participants are employed. During the camp, the researcher managed to interview some of the unemployed participants, and they admitted to being involved in drug addiction or criminal activities (such as stealing, robbing, breaking other people's house) just to get some pocket money. This finding is consistent with other studies on Mat Rempit conducted in Malaysia (Ismail & Borhanuddin, 2009; Ismail & Ibrahim, 2008; Rozmi, 2012; Wahab et al. 2013; Wan Shahrzad et al., 2012; Wong, 2011). Additionally, most of the participants explained that they joined Mat Rempit activities because they are bored and they found no activities that attracted them to get involved especially in rural areas. This finding seems to be contradicting with the previous study conducted by Rozmi (2012) where most of Mat Rempit activities happened in the urban area and not rural area. When they became Mat Rempit, they felt joy, fun and a sense of belonging to a gang. According to them, these activities were able to release their stress due to internal self-conflict in searching for their true identity.

Based on the results of this study, it shows that the mean score of self-esteem among Mat Rempit has increased by joining the camp intervention. What factors contribute to these positive changes? All of the participants involved in this study have voluntarily participated in following the camp activities. One of the possible causes is during the recruitment process of the participants, and there are a few rewards promised by the biker's club to attract them to join the PERKASA camp-based intervention. The PERMATA Division entrusted the biker's club to help in recruiting the participants because the club is one of the famous motorcyclist clubs in Selangor. So, when the participants enrolled in the three weeks intervention camp their level of self-esteem became higher as they engaged in fun activities together with their peers based on the social learning modules. Self-empowerment module is a fun learning through a small group work when participants were asked to watch video clips online and try to do a short review. Closing activities on that sub-module are through media approaches using another video that is shown to adolescents and make them feel sorry for what has happened or what will happen if their negative behaviours continue without change. Some of the participants even cried despite their tough looks. According to Woolfolk et al. (2012), an assessment made by an individual on his own depends on the action highlighted either positive or negative that is affecting their level of self-esteem.

Nevertheless, the results of the study also found that the adolescents' resilience is closely related to the assertive and self-leadership of the adolescents themselves. It shows that Mat Rempit who has high levels of self-esteem will be more confident and assertive. They have a high tendency to be a leader in a peer group. Thus, in the context of this study, gang leadership among Mat Rempit is significant in determining the level of youth resilience, and it is the basic structure of the formation of the Mat Rempit group (Ismail & Borhanuddin, 2009; Ismail & Ibrahim, 2008; Rozmi, 2012). Due to this, the snowballing method used in obtaining the survey participants also proved that there was a high level of leadership in the participants when they managed to persuade their peers to participate in the camp-based intervention for three weeks. In fact, the camp-based program is considered interactive group work activities that can reinforce the relationship of group members and thus make them more assertive and resilient.

For that reason, PERKASA's camp intervention program to engage the Mat Rempit has the significant impact on empowering their inner strengths such as self-esteem, resilience, assertiveness and leadership. The policy maker should take note that Mat Rempit like to be helped in a group work rather than the individual basis for self-empowerment. They want to have their peers around and do interactive learning activities. The programme for Mat Rempit cannot be rigid; it should be fun and flexible with real contents to invite them to change their negative behaviours. The contents of Self-Empowerment Module are targeted to boost their self-esteem, resilience, assertive skills and leadership to be a useful teenager as well as letting them see how important to plan for their futures. They also need to be encouraged to channel their riding skills to participate in sports premier motorcycles such as Cub Prix, GP and tattoo. Furthermore, they could also be exposed to the vocational education system to enable them to pursue formal knowledge of the interest they have in the motorcycle.

The government's plan through this PERKASA camp-intervention approach has succeeded in making behavioural modifications in at-risk youth and making them more positive and productive. After the participation of intervention camps, teens are still given the guidance to continue their career interests. Based on the participants' feedback on this study, they become more motivated to change their lives when returning to their families and communities. So the government's efforts through the Centre for Youth Empowerment (PERKASA) have achieved the objective of its establishment. However, the cost of organising intervention camps is certainly not cheap. In future, we need to find a better way that can attract the Mat Rempit to join the camp-based intervention program voluntarily. We are concerned that their willingness to engage in this program is not genuine because they may enter this intervention program due to the promised rewards.

CONCLUSION

Self-Empowerment Modules for camp-based intervention are designed for at-risk youth, especially for Mat Rempit to create awareness and confidence for them to change. The content of the interactive modules like self-empowerment module is seen to be attractive to engage with Mat Rempit. Thus, it becomes a platform for them to get together with their peers and to learn how

to change the negative behaviours in a fun and interactive environment. This self-empowerment module seems to have a positive impact on Mat Rempit who wants to build a more meaningful life for him and his family. The camp intervention program is the best approach so far to engage with Mat Rempit. The effectiveness of the camp intervention can be achieved if the program utilises therapeutic approach in group work intervention within the appropriate timeframe and filling in the fun and interactive activities. Self-esteem, resiliency, assertive and leadership elements should be taken into account when conducting behaviour modification to a Mat Rempit. The Self-Empowerment Module represents a different intervention for at-risk youth that may give positive impacts on their emotional and social functioning while having fun with their peers.

However, the needs of at-risk youth should be given priority to ensure that they are not left behind in a community development plan. The social inclusion approach is essential in social group work interventions such as a camp-based programme for at-risk youth. A bottom-up policy approach should be considered if we want to empower at-risk youth holistically. The collaboration between government agencies and non-government agencies should be established. They should approach and engage at-risk youth like Mat Rempit with a positive mindset and not judge them based on their negative behaviours. It is proposed that the recruitment process for camp-based intervention programme in the future will involve a partnership with the Road Transport Department (JPJ), Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM), Road Safety Department (JKJR), Road Safety Research Institute (MIROS) and Social Welfare Department (JKM) as well as Ministry of Youth and Sports (KBS).

Overall, interactive camp-based intervention approach is required to engage with Mat Rempit. The self-empowerment module should be implemented to address the issue of Mat Rempit in Malaysia. Specific activities to Mat Rempit based on a group work can attract them to change and reduce their negative activities. Our at-risk youth is not a problem but requires the guidance of all members of society to build a healthy and competitive nation jointly. This effort is not something that is impossible to implement, but it requires systematic planning and is characterised by love affection and concern from all parties..

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