

**Fifth Family Research Network (FRN) Forum:
“Child/Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention”**

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Auditorium Level 1, Civil Service College**

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The fifth FRN Forum on “Child/Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention” highlighted issues practitioners faced in dealing with youths. The key topics this edition of the FRN focused on were deviance and possible methods of intervention, which could be used to prevent delinquency. Participants at the Forum noted the importance of being aware of prevailing youth culture and issues faced by youths before attempting to tackle any problem. This was important as it would allow for more appropriate forms of guidance to be utilised, and would also prevent youths from committing repeat offences.

The Forum was moderated by Dr Vivien Huan, Associate Professor and Sub-Dean, Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme, National Institute of Education. Speakers who spoke at the Forum included:

- Ms Jennifer Teoh, Assistant Director, Clinical and Forensic Psychology Branch, Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports
- Dr Patrick Williams, Assistant Professor, Division of Sociology, Nanyang Technological University
- Dr Ganapathy Narayanan, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore
- Ms Esther Ng, Chief Executive Officer, Coalition Against Bullying for Children and Youth



Ms Teoh provided an overview of the management of juvenile delinquency and youth offenders in Singapore. She highlighted the Theft Intervention Programme and the Violence Prevention Programme as two examples of evidence-based interventions available. To ensure the success and effectiveness of such interventions, Ms Teoh added that follow up sessions to monitor the youths who had undergone the various programmes was essential.

Subsequent presentations by Dr Williams and Dr Ganapathy addressed theories and methodologies used in understanding and studying delinquency. Dr Williams noted that there were different notions of deviance. Certain personality traits or appearances (e.g. dressing) of some youths might be inaccurately associated with deviance. For example, our society associates tattoos with the undesirable and casts negative stereotypes on youths who have tattoos; however a youth with tattoos might not necessarily be a delinquent.

Dr Ganapathy suggested that structural forces such as socio-economic status and family backgrounds had strong influences on youth criminality, deviant youth subcultures and youth gangs. For instance, the lack of parental guidance could lead to weak familial relations and negative attitudes towards authority. Families with a lower socio-economic status were also less likely to equip their children with the means to fare well in a school environment. Children from such families had a higher likelihood of dropping out of the education system. Dr Ganapathy noted that these youths, having failed in the eyes of mainstream society, could view gangs as an avenue to regain recognition and self-esteem. By joining such gangs, they would then come to adopt values such as masculinity where toughness, aggression and collective responsibility are commonly emphasised.

The third speaker, Ms Ng spoke about art therapy as an alternative intervention programme. She explained that art therapy could be a more suitable and effective method of therapy for those who were not able to articulate themselves verbally as art therapy encouraged the expression of emotions and thoughts, vis-à-vis cognitive behaviour therapy. Focussing on children, Ms Ng shared that art therapy has proven to be helpful in allowing children the ability to come to terms with trauma and thereafter help them move on with life.

The Forum also highlighted the need for more inter-disciplinary research to be carried out in the following areas:

- the determinants of juvenile delinquency among those with middle socio-economic status;
- the factors contributing to resiliency among those with lower socio-economic status;

- the importance of recognising socio-economic and class differences of children in schools; and
- the need to assess youth offenders for appropriate rehabilitative programmes.



Given recent incidences of youth violence reported in the media, the Forum was timely as it provided a valuable opportunity for practitioners and experts engaged in the field to discuss issues related to deviance as well as to highlight current research and programmes available for use to try and prevent delinquency in youths. The Forum drew attention to the progress made in this area, but stressed that more could be done. The involvement of family, schools and the government was necessary so as to meet the challenges presented by youth delinquency. This was especially so for schools as these were places where youths spent a substantial amount of their time at. Participants at the Forum also agreed that more programmes providing support and guidance for youths should be initiated in schools.

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