

## Perceptions of Youth towards Paedophile Crimes in the Society

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**Abstract:** Understanding youth perceptions of pedophile crime influences the legislative decision-making process and offers a baseline for evaluating variations between the lay and offender populations for clinical purposes. Hence, this study determined the internal and external factors of sexual abuse among children based on youth's perceptions, particularly identifying how far they are concerned about this issue. Methods of observation, interview, and survey questionnaire were deployed to collect primary data. The gathered data were analyzed by using Microsoft Excel and SPSS software using the multiple regression method. The findings revealed that the youth had high-level awareness that social media and parental attitudes contribute to pedophile crimes. However, they did not realize that pedophiles are associated with mental health issues. This study bridges the knowledge and awareness gaps, while concurrently providing a clear understanding of why pedophile is dangerous in society and creating awareness about sexual violence against children amongst youth. The study outcomes offer a better understanding of pedophiles, which can educate society and prevent children from being sexually abused.

**Keywords:** *Youth perceptions, internal and external factors, sexual violence of children, paedophile, society*

### 1. Introduction

A pedophile is a mental disorder that affects adults or adolescents (specifically 16 years and above) and exerts primary or exclusive sexual discomfort on immature children (generally 13 years and below). Pedophiles are not necessarily those who commit sexual crimes against

children. Those who commit sexual misconduct against children are known for their actions, while pedophiles are measured by their desire [1]. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) [2] has classified pedophiles as having a mental disorder. On average, about three percent of the country's citizens are expected to have pedophile issues and commit sexual crimes against children. Most patients with this problem are male; but do not close the possibility for

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women as well. Some pedophiles allow their sexual desire and follow their passion and feelings. Some reckon that such feelings are wrong and they are likely to experience stress, disillusionment, isolation, and loneliness as they attempt to distance themselves as much as possible from children. A pedophile tends to have excessive obsessive properties and shows sexual addiction towards children.

A pedophile can be categorized as a chronic disease. Treatment of sexual disorders is crucial, although rarely are there pedophiles who seek self-medication. Most of them seek treatment due to court orders. The most common form of pedophilia treatment is psychotherapy or medication. Despite the effective treatment, many pedophiles tend to recur [3]. The diagnosis of pedophilia is difficult because many patients do not show emotion even when meeting directly with the doctor. Complete information about the patient is essential for diagnosis. Other information should also be gathered from families, possible casualties, and legal or community organizations. Even experienced doctors may not be able to diagnose the disease in all cases. Pedophiles might be anybody; a commoner or a well-educated person. For instance, in November 2014, a smart mathematician student was sentenced to 5 years in prison after being convicted of 17 offenses of having, making, and distributing over 30,000 pornographic images of children. Another case happened when an English teacher was sentenced to life imprisonment after pleading guilty to 71 sexual abuse charges on children between 6 and 12 years. He violated and made sexual assaults up to 200 children, where most of them were from poor households and homeless.

According to Satar [4] in New Straits Times, most pedophiles will take advantage of children who are less likely to receive parental care and trust strangers. Hence, parents need to encourage, always focus on, and care for their children. In a previous study, undergraduate students had frequently clarified the perceptions and stereotypical characteristics of child sexual offenders, with various opinions that child molesters were often strangers or “dirty old men” who used force, aggression, or threats in committing sex crimes against children [5]. However, child molesters who were involved in grooming behavior often appeared to be kind and polite individuals who enjoy the company of children. Sexual grooming refers to the characteristic that offenders try to gain trust from the family and guardians of the victims. They get into families and institutions in a community, all the while grooming children for sexual abuse [6].

In this era of rapid technology, if society does not proactively educate children about this horrendous crime, people would receive information from internet sources or peers. Children should be exposed to the dangers of sexual crime threats by pedophiles. Apart from mothers, fathers and older siblings also should teach safe and unsafe touches of a stranger to young children. This is a crucial aspect of child

sexual education because failure to educate these children properly would cause such a case to go unreported. In addition, children should also be taught to be sensitive and careful with the environment, prepared with self-protective skills, and mentored on ways to act to prevent bad things. It is vital to maintain good communication with children and encourage them to interact in their daily routines.

Therefore, this study identified how far the youth understood sexual crime toward children and the factors that contribute to this crime. This study should increase the awareness among youth, guardians, and society about the dangers that might be affecting children under their supervision, with constant caution and attentiveness towards behavior beyond normal habits.

## 2. Methodology

This study was conducted in different colleges at a university located in the Northern Region of Malaysia. The population comprised undergraduate students who enrolled in different courses at the university. The research instrument used in this study was an interview and a survey questionnaire. The sample size was 378 respondents, which was calculated using the formula expressed in the following:

$$s = \frac{X^2NP(1-P)}{d^2(N-1) + X^2P(1-P)} \quad (1)$$

where,

$s$  = required sample size

$X$  = Z-value, 1.96 for 95% confidence level

$N$  = population size

$P$  = population proportion

$d$  = degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion

$$s = \frac{(1.96^2)(25,293)(0.5)(1-0.5)}{(0.05^2)(25,293-1) + (1.96^2)(0.5)(1-0.5)}$$

$s$  = 378 respondents

Based on the formula in equation (1), the Z-value of 1.96 denotes a 95% of the confidence level that indicates 95% of the results are accurate. The population proportion,  $P$ , shows that the distribution reflects the skewness of respondents, along with the assumption that 0.5 signifies the maximum sample size. The degree of accuracy expression of proportion,  $d$ , was assumed as 0.05. This study incorporated

two independent variables and a single dependent variable. The independent variables are factors that contribute to pedophile crimes against children, while the dependent variable is the student's perception level of the effect of pedophile crime. To ensure that the data integrity is accurate and to achieve the research objectives, a statistical tool called Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. In SPSS, Cronbach's Alpha is used to measure the reliability of the data. According to Sekaran and Bougie [7], the Cronbach alpha test is used as one of the statistical tests for reliability coefficients. A reliability index value greater than 0.6 ( $\geq 0.6$ ) was applied as a measuring tool for a study. If the alpha value is greater than 0.6, the items reflect high-reliability values and may be used for the actual survey. To achieve the research objectives, the Multiple Regression Test was deployed to identify the significant correlations between dependent and independent variables. The Regression and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were applied to assess the multiple comparisons, as well as the variation of the difference among and between groups of the variables. Table 1 presents the scale used in this study (1 = Strongly Disagree and 4 = Strongly Agree).

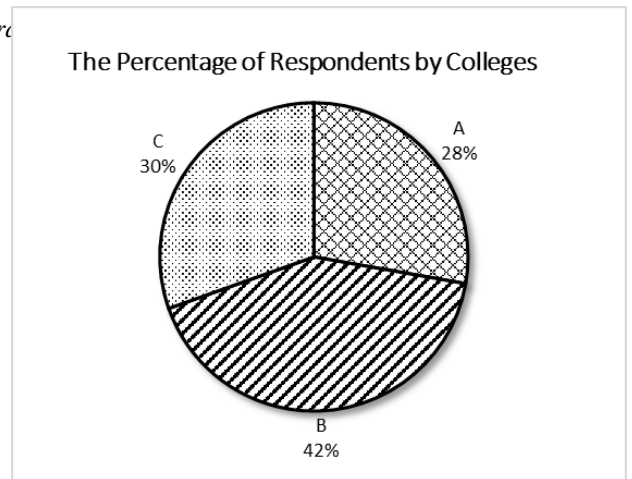
**TABLE 1.** The scale used in the survey

|                   |                |
|-------------------|----------------|
| <b>1</b>          | <b>4</b>       |
| Strongly Disagree | Strongly Agree |

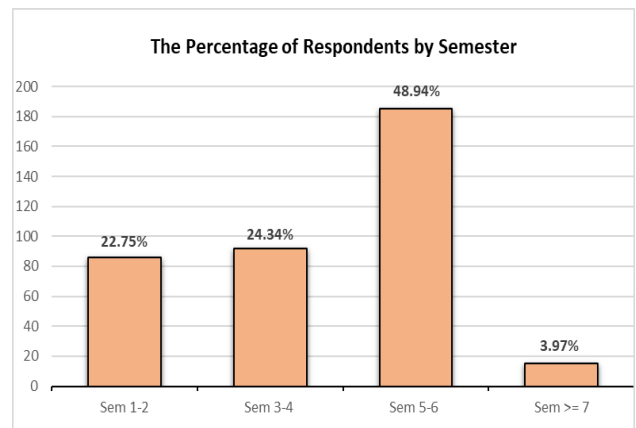
Based on the sample size calculation formula, 378 respondents were deemed suitable for this study. The questionnaire was developed using Google Forms (an online questionnaire tool). The questionnaire was shared with more than 500 respondents via social media, such as Facebook and WhatsApp. The required amount of data was successfully collected through those platforms within two weeks.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Out of the 378 respondents who participated in this study, 105 respondents were from College A, while 158 and 115 respondents were from Colleges B and C, respectively (see Figure 1). Among these respondents, 71 were male and 307 were female. In total, 86 respondents were from semesters 1 and 2, whereas 92 respondents were from semesters 3 and 4. Next, 185 respondents were from semesters 5 and 6, while 15 respondents were from semesters 7 and above (see Figure 2).



**Figure 1** Percentages of Respondents Categorised by College



**Figure 2** Percentages of Respondents Categorised by Semester

The Cronbach Alpha values obtained from both dependent and independent variables exceeded 0.5 (Table 1). This indicates that the items had high-reliability values and were acceptable for further analyses.

**TABLE 1.** Reliability test for each variable

| Variable                   | Cronbach alpha |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| <u>Dependent:</u>          |                |
| Student's perception level | 0.550          |
| <u>Independent:</u>        |                |
| Social Media               | 0.812          |
| Mental Health              | 0.611          |
| Parental Attitude          | 0.741          |

**TABLE 2.** ANOVA

| Model      | Sum of Squares | Df  | Mean Square | F      | Sig.              |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| Regression | 29.390         | 3   | 9.797       | 43.546 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual   | 84.140         | 374 | .225        |        |                   |
| Total      | 113.530        | 377 |             |        |                   |

a. Dependent Variable: Student's perception level

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Media, Mental Health, Parental Attitude

**TABLE 3.** Coefficients

| Model             | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | T     | Sig. |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
|                   | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |       |      |
| (Constant)        | 1.159                       | .198       |                           | 5.844 | .000 |
| Social Media      | .341                        | .052       | .346                      | 6.598 | .000 |
| Mental Health     | -.026                       | .059       | -.023                     | -.434 | .665 |
| Parental Attitude | .283                        | .064       | .252                      | 4.451 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: Student's perception level

The multiple linear regression was conducted to analyze factors that contributed to the pedophile crimes on children based on students' perception levels. The outcomes of this analysis are tabulated in Table 2. The p-value to test the significance of regression was 0.000, which was below the alpha value of 0.05. This value provides strong evidence to Reject  $H_0$ .

$H_1$ : Social media contributes to pedophile crimes against children.

$H_2$ : Mental health contributes to pedophile crimes against children.

$H_3$ : Parental attitudes contribute to pedophile crimes against children

Table 3 present the coefficient value of beta for each dependent and independent variable. The coefficient for beta 1 ( $H_1$ : Social Media) (0.341) and beta 3 ( $H_3$ : Parental Attitude) (0.283) emerged as significant, as the p-value was 0.000 ( $< 0.05$ ). For every increased units in beta 1 and beta 3, 0.341 units and 0.281 unit increased in beta 0 (students' perception level). On the contrary, the p-value for beta 2 ( $H_2$ : Mental Health) exceeded the alpha value of 0.05; signifying that the correlation is not statistically significant. The outcomes revealed that social media and parental attitudes exerted a significant effect on students' perception levels. These two variables displayed that the students had high-level awareness about the effects of pedophile crimes on children. However, the results on mental health disclosed that the

students had low-level awareness about the effect of mental health on pedophile crimes.

#### 4. Conclusion and Future Work

In this study that assessed students' perceptions level towards pedophile crimes, the results clearly showed that the students had high-level awareness of the effects of social media and parental attitude toward pedophile crimes. Nonetheless, the factor of mental health was insignificant and this showed that the students had low-level awareness of this particular cause. They might think that sex offenders were not associated with a mental health issues. Hence, people should be more aware and limit the use of social media since the platform could be a bad influence on children. The students reckoned that parents or guardians should pay more attention to their children's activities. Overall, gaining a better understanding of the risk causes of pedophile crimes should facilitate the early detection of offenders to begin committing crimes. Increasing the awareness among family members of such interactions and providing guidance to students to prevent sexual abuse among children is crucial. Lastly, future studies are recommended to analyze other factors that could contribute to pedophile crimes for the sake of public awareness. This study indirectly creates awareness among students, especially if they have siblings or relatives who could be trapped in these sexual abuse cases. Besides, the study outcomes may prevent students from committing these sexual crime. It educates students to take precautionary measures when connecting with strangers on social sites. Imminently, this study emphasizes the students' understanding of sexual violence towards children.

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