

# The Correlation of Neighbourhood Assets, Personality, and Resistance to Peer Influence among Poor Urban Youth Living in the Metropolitan City of Kuala Lumpur

*Hubungan Terhadap Aset Kejiranan, Personaliti dan Ketahanan Pengaruh Rakan Sebaya dalam Kalangan Belia Miskin Bandar yang Tinggal di Kota Metropolitan Kuala Lumpur*

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This study examines the correlation of neighbourhood assets, personality, and resistance to peer influence among urban poor youth living in the disadvantaged community of Kuala Lumpur. A total of 448 participants living in low-income apartments in Kuala Lumpur, aged between 13 and 24 years old were requested to complete a set of standardised questionnaires to measure neighbourhood assets (Neighbourhood Developmental Assets Questionnaire), personality (Big Five Inventory short version), and resistance to peer influence (Resistance to Peer Influence). The correlation analysis showed that three dimensions of neighbourhood assets and three types of personality were significantly correlated to resistance to peer influence while other dimensions were not significant. These findings are explained in terms of social and psychological context concerning positive youth development to promote social sustainability.

**Keywords:** community, psychology, youth, social sustainability, Malaysia

*Kajian ini meneliti hubungan terhadap aset kejiranan, personaliti dan ketahanan pengaruh rakan sebaya dalam kalangan belia miskin bandar yang tinggal di komuniti kurang mujur Kuala Lumpur. Seramai 448 orang peserta daripada pangaspuri berpendapatan rendah di Kuala Lumpur, berusia 13-24 tahun diminta untuk melengkapkan satu set soal selidik standard untuk mengukur aset kejiranan (Neighbourhood Developmental Assets Questionnaire), personaliti (versi pendek Big Five Inventory) dan ketahanan pengaruh rakan sebaya (Resistance to Peer Influence). Analisis korelasi menunjukkan bahawa tiga dimensi aset kejiranan dan tiga jenis personaliti berkorelasi secara signifikan terhadap ketahanan pengaruh rakan sebaya sementara dimensi lain tidak signifikan. Penemuan ini dijelaskan dari segi konteks sosial dan psikologi yang berkaitan dengan pembangunan belia positif untuk mempromosikan kelestarian sosial.*

**Kata kunci:** komuniti, psikologi, belia, kelestarian sosial, Malaysia

It is widely acknowledged that youth is a critical period for the development of risk behaviours. Over the past 20 years, scholars have shown that developmental assets reduce risk behaviours (Atkins et al., 2002; Fulkerson et al., 2006; Scale, 1999; Toomey et al., 2019) and personality (Cooper et al., 2000; Markey et al., 2003) have a significant relationship on the development, prevention, or intervention of risk behaviour. However, few studies have examined the contribution of neighbourhood asset and personality towards the resistance to peer influence comprehensively. Hence, this study aims to examine the relationship between neighbourhood assets, personality, and resistance to peer influence among youth by examining whether neighbourhood assets and personality correlate with resistance to peer influence or otherwise. Findings of this study are vital to helping youth and community development professionals in designing intervention programmes that coincide with the needs of youth.

## Youth and Related Problems

Studies on risk factors associated with youth who are more at risk in terms of negative behaviours have been reported globally (Atherton et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2017; Pengpid & Peltzer, 2019). For example, several correlational studies in socio-developmental psychology have dealt with at-risk and high-risk behaviours, such as illegal racing, premarital pregnancy, smoking, and drug abuse. These findings on the correlation between negative behaviours and their consequences found that youth with negative behaviours were more likely to experience mental health effects. However, some studies did not show such a relationship. Studies conducted in the United States, for example, examined peer influence on risk-taking behaviours (Lejeue et al., 2007). Using the Balloon Analog Risk Task (BART) to examine whether peers influence risk-taking behaviour, a total of 39 adolescents completed experimental sessions in which standard BARTs and peers were presented in counterbalanced order. The results showed that

BART peers displayed a higher degree of risk-taking behaviour compared to the standard ones. They concluded that risk-taking behaviour was influenced by peers. Interestingly, this study did not show a significant correlation between resistance to peer influence and BART outcomes. These findings indicated that there was no solid evidence of BART outcomes that would be consistent with previous studies on resistance to peer influence. On top of this, recent study found that racial discrimination was another significant factor correlated to behavioural problems (Mendez et al., 2020).

A lot of research on youth in Malaysia focused on socio-economic, psychological, and behavioural problems (Ahmad et al., 2015; Kadri et al., 2019; Manaf et al., 2015; Wan Ismail et al., 2014). One study involving 410 adolescents, comprising 12-year old pupils selected from public schools in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, were examined in respect of the sociodemographic and psychological factors associated with bullying behaviour (Wan Ismail et al., 2014). The participants had to meet the criteria before their selection for that study. The study revealed that the prevalence rates of bullying were 20%, followed by 2.4% for exclusive bullies, and 17.6% for bully-victims. The findings also revealed that most of the bullies were young males with poor academic performance, with lower socio-economic status depending on their parents' educational background. Another research suggested that socially and economically marginalised youth were the most vulnerable to mental health issues (Ahmad et al., 2015). Female adolescents were found to be more likely to develop mental health issues than males. Another study examined the predictors of premarital sex among 1,328 Malaysian youth (Manaf et al., 2015). The studies have indicated that male adolescents have more sexual experience than female adolescents. The study also found that smoking, drinking, operating motorcycles without a licence, truancy, fighting, and vandalism were all significantly associated with premarital sex. This study, therefore, focuses on youth living in disadvantaged communities, based on previous studies.

### Youth and Personality

There were many studies regarding personality types, psychopathology, and community involvement conducted on high-risk youth (Habashi et al., 2016; Milfont & Sibley, 2012; Muris et al., 2013). For instance, study data has demonstrated that personality was closely associated with certain traits like Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, violence, and delinquent behaviour (Muris et al., 2013). The findings found that Machiavellianism and psychopathy were significantly correlated to those with lower levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness, and at the same time, having higher levels of emotional well-being. Interestingly, the study showed that narcissism was positively related to pleasure, conscientiousness, and openness, as well as extraversion. Another representative national survey in New Zealand by Milfont and Sibley (2012) investigated the relationship between Big Five Factors and

environmental engagement involving data from a 2009 study of attitudes and beliefs in that country (NZAVS-2009). From the 2009 New Zealand electoral roll, a series of questionnaires were posted to 40,500 participants, calculated to be 1.36 per cent of all eligible voters in New Zealand. The findings found that higher environmental values were significantly associated with higher agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness, and, unexpectedly, lower extraversion. In addition, one research analysed the association between the Big Five dimensions of personality and prosocial behaviour among 233 Purdue University students (Habashi et al., 2016). The findings found that agreeableness was correlated to prosocial emotions and prosocial behaviour across these emotions. The findings of that research were also in line with previous studies that showed in supporting conditions, neuroticism was directly correlated to a self-focused negative reaction. The best fit and parsimonious explanation of prosocial personality were modelled, as predicted, by agreeableness and neuroticism. Empirical observations related to personality and performance are only partly consistent. Study on the relationship between personality and resistance to peer influence are scarce. To fulfil this gap, this study focuses primarily on the relationship between personality and resistance to peer influence.

Evidence showed that psychopathology consisted of anxiety, fears, and externalizing factors in a large sample of youth (Watts et al., 2019). Distress was significantly correlated with neuroticism while fears were not associated with Big Five dimensions, and externalizing was negatively associated with agreeableness and conscientiousness. In addition, the higher-order psychopathology factors compensated for the associations between lower-order psychopathology dimensions and the Big Five. Statistically, no evidence was found in terms of two-way or three-way interactions within the Big Five dimensions and higher-order psychopathology factors. The findings suggested that personality contributes to psychopathology, at least in young people.

### Youth and Resistance to Peer Influence

Another critical problem relevant to youth psychosocial functioning is peer influence (Brown, 2004; DiGuiseppe et al., 2018; Fortuin et al., 2015; Widman et al., 2016). Peer pressure is widely associated with misconduct and numerous other risk behaviours, such as delinquency, drug abuse, driving without a licence, and premarital sex. Even though young people were the most vulnerable group suffering from peer pressure, they were able to protect themselves from at-risk or high-risk behaviour. For instance, Sternberg and Monahan (2007) analysed age gaps in resistance to peer influence among 3,600 youth between the age of 10 and 30 years old. The findings found that resistance to peer influence increases linearly between the ages of 14 and 18 years old. Reports showed that most youth were able to defend what they believed and resisted peer pressure to do negative activities. In line with previous studies, Sumter et al. (2009), found that resistance to peer influence varied according to

gender where female youth were more resistance to peer influence than males.

Wang et al. (2018), examined the impact of peer influence and selection on mental health problems (i.e. school workflow, school burnout, school value), emotional (i.e. school effort), and behavioural (i.e. truancy) engagement of young people. A social network approach has been used to test post-comprehensive education students in Finland. Students were invited to appoint peers at two points in time to establish peer networks and to recognize their school engagement. The findings of the study found that peers had a significant effect on mental, cognitive, and behavioural engagement, and that behavioural engagement helped young people broaden their social networks.

### **Neighbourhood Assets, Personality, and Resistance to Peer Influence**

Scales and Leffert (1999), proposed a total of 40 development assets that included internal and external ones. From a developmental psychology point of view, youth need assistance to build their potential and talents (Roth et al., 1998), as well as skills to be developed and flourished (Shek et al., 2019). Hence, the PYD with several variables may facilitate healthier development for youth and their family members and communities (Catalano et al., 2004; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Fredricks & Simpkins, 2012; Lerner et al., 2019). However, in the context of neighbourhood assets, there are not many studies examining the relationship between neighbourhood assets and personality on resistance to peer influence.

Neighbourhood assets were commonly associated with involvement in social activities (Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Smith et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2017; Urban et al., 2009; Urban et al., 2010). Youth with a positive perception of neighbourhood ecological assets were found to be more likely to show lower levels of stress and risk activity and experienced healthy development than those who perceived neighbourhood ecological assets negatively. In addition, the report also showed that human and physical resources in society and self-regulation are important factors in contributing to the positive self-development among youth (Urban et al., 2010; Urban et al., 2009). Therefore, further investigation into the role of neighbourhood assets in producing sustainable adolescents in relation to resistance to peer influence so that youths can protect themselves from risk behaviours is relevant.

### **Development Assets Framework**

A variety of human development perspectives, including the bioecological and developmental contextual approaches claim that development takes place as a mutual relationship between the individual and the contexts in which the individual is situated (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Lerner, 1991). Developmental assets were developed by scholars at the Search Institute based on these approaches, as well as empirical studies on childhood and adolescence (Benson et al., 1998; Leffert et al., 1998; Scales et al., 2000). The developmental assets

consisted of two categories: internal or external. Internal assets are those interpersonal strengths (e.g., aspirations, self-esteem, planning, and decision-making) held by the youth themselves that contribute to positive growth and well-being. External assets, on the other hand, are supporting and motivating youth and helping them outshine are the facets of the youth environment (e.g., family, friend, and group strengths). In this study, we are interested to apply one dimension of external assets among Malaysian youth. The more neighbourhood assets youth have, the more resistance they engage in peer influence and less risk behaviours such as violence, alcohol, and other problems with drug use, crime, and so on.

Personality can be explained in terms of the internal assets that focus on positive identity and positive values. Personality characteristics are in line with these assets such as caring, integrity, honesty, responsibility, honesty, self-esteem, and optimistic. Hence, the more personality characteristics youth have, the more resistance to peer influence.

### **The Present Study**

Given that personality might be correlated with neighbourhood assets, having a deeper understanding of variables that may contribute to resistance to peer influence can lead to more successful approaches being created. The goal of the study was, therefore, to explore the degree to which neighbourhood assets and personality styles may correlate to resistance to peer influence. Neighbourhood assets were hypothesized to be associated with resistance to peer influence. Also, personality was hypothesized to be associated with resistance to peer influence.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

Our sample comprised 448 youths residing in Kg Baru Air Panas People's Housing Project (PPR) and Rejang PPR, Gombak, Kuala Lumpur, with the age of between 13 and 24 years old (mean age 16.97 years old; SD 2.92). The sample composed of 54% males, 43.8% females and 2.2% did not state their gender. Most of the participants were Malays (85%), followed by 14% Indians, 1% Chinese, and 0.4% of them did not state their ethnicity. Finally, regarding the samples' parent employment status, most of them explained that their fathers were employed (75.2%, n=337), and most of the mothers were full-time housewives (68.8%, n=308). Further descriptions of this study can be found at Abdul Kadir et al. (2018).

#### **Translation Processes**

The questionnaires assessed the demographic factors, neighbourhood assets, personality, and resistance to peer influence. Standardised questionnaires have been translated into Malay and retranslated into English to ensure the consistency of the meaning; the first author and research psychologists, proficient in both languages, have conducted the translations separately. We addressed the discrepancies, and the language was then revised and retranslated for disputed items until all parties

were satisfied.

## Measures

The Neighbourhood Developmental Assets Questionnaire (Oliva, Antolín, & López, 2012), was used to measure the perceptions that adolescents have about different aspects of the neighbourhood they lived, which may be considered to be assets or resources for the promotion of adolescent development. This questionnaire consisted of 22 items measuring the support and empowerment of youth, attachment to the neighbourhood, security, social control, and availability of youth activities. Examples of the items are “The adults in my neighbourhood are concerned with the well-being of the youth”, “I feel I am part of my neighbourhood”, “In my neighbourhood, there are people who sell drugs”, “People of my age feel valued by adults in the neighbourhood”, and “There are few neighbourhoods, such as my own, where there are as many activities for young people”. Oliva et al. (2012), reported that the internal consistency of the scale was achieved with good reliability for all dimensions (support and empowerment 0.91; attachment to the neighbourhood 0.91; security 0.87; social control 0.85; availability of youth activities 0.80). Cronbach's alpha of the total scale was 0.93. The Cronbach's alpha value of the total scale for this study was 0.83.

The Big Five Inventory short version (BFI-10; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991), can be an extremely short instrument personality test. The BFI-10, which can be answered in about five minutes, was comparable to measure the Big Five Inventory of 44 items. The BFI-10 consisted of 10 statements on extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, stability, agreeableness, and openness. Each type of personality was measured using two statements. Examples of the extraversion items are “I see myself as someone who is reserved”, “I see myself as someone outgoing, sociable”. Examples of conscientiousness items are “I see myself as someone who tends to be lazy”, “I see myself as someone who does a thorough job”. Examples of agreeableness items are “I see myself as someone who is generally trusting”, “I see myself as someone who tends to find fault with others”. Examples of neuroticism items are “I see myself as someone relaxed, handles stress well”, “I see myself as someone who gets nervous easily”. Examples of openness items are “I see myself as someone who has few artistic interests”, “I see myself as someone who has an active imagination”. Test-retest correlations for the BFI-10 scales in the two retest samples showed stability coefficients ranging from 0.72 in the USA, 0.78 in Germany, and 0.75 overall, suggesting that the BFI-10 scales achieved respectable levels of stability over 6-8 weeks in both cultures.

The Resistance to Peer Influence (RPI; Steinberg & Monahan, 2007), was used to measure antisocial peer influence in general. The RPI presents respondents with a series of 10 pairs of statements and asks them to choose the statement that is the best descriptor of themselves. Examples of the items are “Some people say things they don't really believe because they think it will make their friends respect them more” BUT “Other people would not say things they didn't really believe just to get their friends to respect them more”. After indicating the best descriptor, the respondent was asked whether the description was “Really True for Me” or “Sort of True for Me.” Responses were then coded on a 4-point scale, ranging from “Really True for Me” for one descriptor to “Really True for Me” for the other descriptor, and averaged. Higher scores indicate stronger resistance to peer influence. Previous studies showed that psychometric properties of RPI were ranging from 0.55 (Chen et al., 2016) to 0.76 (DiGuiseppi et al., 2018; Steinberg & Monahan, 2007; Sumter et al., 2009). The value of Cronbach's alpha for this study is 0.62.

## Procedures

In line with the Helsinki Declaration guidelines for the ethics of human participants, we had obtained informed consent from parents or guardians for participants below 18 years old before data collection began. We also performed data collection of this study from house to house. Research assistants and enumerators visited the participants at home and briefly explained about the research to the participants and their guardians. Participants completed a self-reporting measure that included neighbourhood assets, personality, and resistance to peer influence.

## Results

Bivariate correlations were performed to examine the correlation between the dimensions of neighbourhood assets and resistance to peer influence. The results showed the significant correlation linking three dimensions of neighbourhood assets to resistance to peer influence; namely, support and empowerment, attachment to the neighbourhood, and security, while two other variables did not achieve a level of significance (refer to Table 1). The results indicated that those who scored high in support and empowerment, as well as attachment to the neighbourhood, also achieved high scores in resistance to peer influence. Meanwhile, those who scored high in security received low scores in resistance to peer influence.

**Table 1**  
*Correlation Analysis of Variables Studied*

The dimension of neighbourhood assets	Resistance to peer influence
Support and empowerment	0.15**
Attachment to neighbourhood	0.13**
Security	-0.10*
Social control	-0.01
Availability of youth activities	-0.01

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

We analysed further to examine the correlation between personality and resistance to peer influence. The results showed a significant correlation linking

three dimensions of personality to resistance to peer influence. Two other variables were not significant (refer to Table 2).

**Table 2**  
*Correlation Analysis between Personality and Resistance to Peer Influence*

Dimension of Personality	Resistance to peer influence
Extraversion	0.08
Agreeableness	-0.06
Conscientiousness	0.16**
Neuroticism	0.23**
Openness	-0.32**

\*\* $p < .01$ .

### Discussion

Our study showed the correlation between neighbourhood assets, personality, and resistance to peer influence among poor urban youth. The results showed that support and empowerment, attachment to the neighbourhood, security, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness were significantly correlated to resistance to peer influence. The results in this study indicated that support and empowerment, attachment to the neighbourhood, and security enhanced prosocial behaviour among poor urban youth. In line with previous studies by Lyons et al. (2001), and Sumter et al. (2009), we suggest that these non-physical factors of social sustainability support and empowerment, security and attachment to the neighbourhood are more responsible for increasing a sense of resistance to peer influence. For poor urban youth, support and empowerment, security and attachment to the neighbourhood may constitute an effective way of enhancing their resistance to peer influence. Lyons et al. (2001), argued that in the process of helping a group to prevent social constraints, social and psychological empowerment is a consequence of engaging in collective actions, and therefore, gaining control is crucial. This can be done by improving the knowledge, living skills, and social skills of the poor urban youth. For instance, most participants in this study were encouraged to actively participate in educational and social programs organised by associations in the community, such as unity and integration carnivals (e.g., Karnival Sayangi Daku dan Sayangi Komuniti PPR). Findings of this study partly support the external assets that suggested neighbourhood assets may help our youth more resistance to peer influence.

Surprisingly, neuroticism is correlated with resistance to peer influence alongside conscientiousness and openness. The results indicated that those who scored high on neuroticism also achieved high scores on resistance to peer influence. The characteristics of neuroticism in this

context suggest that although these poor urban youth more easily become nervous and are unable to handle stress, they can resist peer influence well. This finding recommends that poor urban youth engage less in antisocial behaviour and are more likely to resist peer influence. This result is contradictory to other studies in which neurotic individuals achieved high scores in antisocial behaviour (Habashi et al., 2016).

### Limitations of the Study

The findings of the study, however, are not without limitations. First, the discussion is limited to personality, neighbourhood assets, and resistance to peer influence. Second, the measures of the short version of the personality inventory in this study are not sufficient to reflect the type of personality. We suggest that other researchers use the Big Five Inventory (BFI-44) to explore the type of personality fully. Third, our study is a cross-sectional research design; therefore, the causal relationship is not permissible. Given these limitations, this study presupposes that the reports of youth concerning neighbourhood assets, personality, and resistance to peer influence—essentially, the experiences and perceptions of the young people are significant and should be considered when designing youth intervention programmes.

### Implications of the Study for Future Work

This study has several implications. First, we can use the results of this study to help other social work practitioners to develop and design intervention programs in the face of the social changes present in human development. The focus of social change is to help youth to utilise community resources by providing a specific community program. In turn, the positive outcomes of such development (e.g., support and empowerment, attachment to the neighbourhood, security) will be more probable, and risky and

problem behaviour less likely. Positive youth development and personality, characteristics of the youth, and the social and psychological context are all related to the adaptive community environment. Personality, for instance, reflects either positive or problematic development concerning social relationships with others, which may optimise the probability of positive and healthy development outcomes. These results also raise critical concerns for future study, and further research needs to be carried out to better understand the relative value of neighbourhood assets, personality, and resistance to peer influence in order to deter more beneficial behavioural trends from engaging in risk behaviour.

## Conclusion

In sum, the results of this study revealed a significant factor concerning resistance to peer influence. Therefore, we suggest six indicators of resistance to peer influence on social sustainability. Support and empowerment, attachment to the neighbourhood, and security are significant for strengthening resistance to negative peer influence. The three dimensions of personality type (e.g., conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness) are significant too. They can help youth to resist negative behaviour from peers. Future research that captures positive youth development in terms of neighbourhood assets, personality, and resistance to peer influence will strengthen the literature in this field.

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