

THE SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED
AND REPRODUCED YOUTH
DELINQUENCY IN SOUTHEAST
ASIA

DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES ON CREATING A FAIRER SOCIETY

A fair society is one that is just, inclusive and embracing of all without any barriers to participation based on sex, sexual orientation, religion or belief, ethnicity, age, class, ability or any other social difference. One where there is access to healthcare and education, technology, justice, strong institutions, peace and security, social protection, decent work and housing. But how can research truly contribute to creating global equity and diversity without showcasing diverse voices that are underrepresented in academia or paying specific attention to the Global South?

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THE SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED AND REPRODUCED YOUTH DELINQUENCY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Advancing Positive Youth
Involvement in Sustainable Futures

BY

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United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India
Malaysia – China

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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INTRODUCTION

ABSTRACT

Existing literature argues that the expression of delinquency is common during childhood and especially adolescence. Here, the practice of delinquent behaviours increases the risk of disrupting one's trajectories of educational and labour market attainment. Delinquent youths, particularly those behaving delinquently severely, are prone to be undereducated, under- or unemployed, earning less, enjoying fewer employment welfare benefits and entitled to fewer job promotion opportunities. Given their sociological background, the author is interested in understanding how juvenile delinquency is socially constructed and reproduced. There are a variety of major key risk factors of the social construction of juvenile delinquency, including familial, or parental in particular, issues, the experience of any form of violence, the act of imitation, and psychological and emotional distress. In this book, the author will examine the socioeconomic, sociocultural and psychosocial factors that lead to the entrenched problems of youth delinquency. Per the United Nations, youth is defined as individuals aged from 15 to 24 years old. There are ample practical problems in adopting a legal definition to understand delinquency, because, for example, what is regarded as legal or not is often poorly defined and rather subjective. Also, legal definitions vary over time, barring a clear, standardised understanding of the word 'delinquency'. In scholarly discourse, juvenile delinquency covers a multitude of sins, such as robbery, vandalism, violence, drug or alternative psychoactive

substance use and the performance of some kinds of heterosexual or homosexual acts. While youth is widely interpreted as comprising individuals aged 24 years or below, the upper age limit for juvenile delinquency adopted by the English and American laws is much lower – under the age of 18 years. Given such contexts, in this book, the author primarily addresses youth/juvenile delinquent behaviours as relevant acts performed by individuals aged below 18 years. However, occasionally, the author presents survey data indicating youths' expression of delinquency among respondents aged 24 years or below.

In this book, the author will provide reasoning on how Southeast Asian (SEA) governments, individually and collectively, have not taken an adequately aggressive, strict approach to regulating their policies against youth delinquency, prompting adolescents' involvement in delinquent behaviours to be growing rampantly. The lack of appropriate legislative and law enforcement efforts results in significant individual and societal costs, jeopardising SEA's pursuit of sustainable futures. Therefore, it is necessary to develop this book in order to analyse the causes and consequences of a variety of youth delinquent behaviours and its associated unequal power of relations, alongside expanding the insights of sociological inquiry into a current, ongoing phenomenon of inequalities. Policy recommendations are presented at the end of Chapters 3–5, allowing local policy-makers to evaluate the current policy development and seek possible policy amendments to efficiently and effectively cope with the notable, entrenched and multifaceted problems of youth delinquency. Outputs of this book, additionally, enable (under-)graduate students and relevant scholars and specialists focusing on SEA studies to understand the causes, effects, costs, and policy development and gaps with respect to the youth smoking epidemic, the youth drinking epidemic and youth delinquency of sexual misconduct.

One of the key highlights of this book is that the outputs suggest ways to attain more sustainable, equitable, liveable and inclusive futures in SEA other than the assessments of youth delinquency per se. In doing so, the author hopes to contribute scholarly to the understanding of how regional economic competitiveness, social cohesion and habitability can be sharpened when youth delinquency is addressed thoroughly and aptly. Moreover, when the

author addresses youth delinquency, they identify how digitalisation and informationisation diversify the means for the SEA youths to gain access to tobacco products, alcohol goods, commercial sex clients and casual sex partners. Recommended policies in response to youth delinquency regionally, in part, target tightening the imposition of e-regulations by SEA governments to narrow any regulatory loopholes that relevant parties can instrumentalise on to earn lucrative profits at the expense of raising the rates of youth delinquency. In-depth analyses of both conventional and digitalised youth delinquency add further value to this book to readers' understanding of the corresponding timely issues and recommended policy-making.

The author will, therefore, primarily explores the contexts of Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. Here Thailand and Malaysia are, currently, the only two regional upper-middle-income countries that share the same prospect of becoming high-income countries in the future. Indonesia, alternatively, has overtaken the Philippines as the biggest economic market and political powerhouse within the region. Therefore, compared to their less or least developed neighbouring counterparts, these countries are more prepared to develop sustainable, habitable and equitable futures while maintaining their Asian and global standings by raising economic and social competitiveness. Indonesia and Malaysia are among the two largest Muslim-majority countries in the globe. In the next chapters, the author will theorise how religious conformity deters local youths from expressing delinquency. Per Islamic laws, smoking, drinking and premature sex are prohibited. It will be interesting to explore whether religious deterrence helps prevent Indonesian and Malaysian youths from expressing delinquency. If not, the author will investigate what factors prompt local youths to behave delinquently, despite religious deterrence. Although these three countries are prioritised in the sociological discussion, the author will present some arguments and data with respect to the contexts of other SEA countries, such as the Philippines and Vietnam, to support their evaluation of youth delinquency regionwide.

Keywords: Juvenile delinquency; youth; Southeast Asia; public policy; sociology; sustainability

OVERVIEW

Existing literature argues that the expression of delinquency is common during childhood, especially adolescence. The practice of delinquent behaviours increases the risk of disrupting one's trajectories of educational and labour market attainment. Delinquent youths, particularly those with severe delinquent behaviours, are prone to be undereducated, entitled to few job promotion opportunities, and under- or unemployed. In addition, they may earn less and enjoy fewer employment welfare benefits (Carter, 2019).

Given their sociological background, the author is interested in understanding how juvenile delinquency is socially constructed and reproduced. There are several key risk factors related to the social construction of juvenile delinquency, including familial (particularly parental) issues, the experience of any form of violence, the act of imitation, and psychological and emotional distress (Gogua, 2020). In this book, the author will examine the socioeconomic, sociocultural, and psychosocial factors that lead to the entrenched problems of youth delinquency. Per the United Nations, youth is defined as individuals aged 15–24 years old (United Nations Youth, n.d.).

There are ample practical problems in adopting a legal definition to understand delinquency. For example, what is regarded as 'legal' is often poorly defined and subjective. Legal definitions vary over time, barring a clear, standardised understanding of the term 'delinquency'. In scholarly discourse, juvenile delinquency covers a multitude of sins, such as robbery, vandalism, violence, drugs or alternative psychoactive substance use, and the performance of some kinds of heterosexual or homosexual acts. While youth is widely interpreted as individuals aged 24 years or below, the upper age limit for juvenile delinquency adopted by English and American law is much lower, under the age of 18 years (Farrington, 1993). Given such contexts, in this book, the author primarily addresses youth/juvenile delinquent behaviours as relevant acts performed by individuals under the age of 18 years. Occasionally, the author presents survey data that indicates youths' expression of delinquency among respondents aged 24 years or below.

There are significant numbers of detected juvenile delinquencies in SEA, which jeopardises the region's social stability and order. Youths expressing delinquency in SEA contexts have propelled the lack of regional labour productivity, juvenile disciplinary problems in school and military settings, and the shortage of parental or community control (Xenos, 2004).

According to the United Nations, more than 60% of the youth population worldwide reside in Asia, accounting for more than 750 million individuals (United Nations Youth, n.d.). Asia houses a total of 59.76% of the world's

total population; SEA alone hosts some 8.58% of the global population (Worldmeter, 2022a, 2022b). Chapters 3–5 engage in a sociological discourse, citing relevant statistical data on how youth delinquency (in the forms of the youth smoking epidemic, youth drinking epidemic, and youth sexual misconduct, respectively) has been prevailing and growing in SEA. Despite the growing, significant rates of youth delinquency in the region, there is a lack of relevant up-to-date, extensively investigated scholarly assets that address problems surrounding juvenile delinquency.

For example, *The Future is Asian: Global Order in the Twenty-First Century* (Khanna, 2019) discusses the socioeconomic, political, and technological growth in Asia, exploring how such an advancement prompts the increasing focus on Asia, including SEA. However, the book does not assess youth delinquency and has, therefore, an absence of policy recommendations in response to such a form of a juvenile problem. *Sex, Money and Morality: Prostitution and Tourism in Southeast Asia* (Truong, 1990) details and analyses sex tourism in SEA. The book, however, does not exclusively or primarily focus on youths' non-commercial sexual engagement. Also, the provision of recommended policy-making to tackle the problem of regional sex tourism is absent. Moreover, the book was published more than 30 years ago. Therefore, the arguments and findings, despite still being indicative to some degree, may be unlikely to reflect the concrete situations of delinquency on sexual misconduct in today's SEA. *Youth, Poverty and Conflicts in Southeast Asian Cities* (Hanley et al., 2004) explores tensions among youths living in poverty in SEA. Such an examination shares a raft of similarities with the development of the current book, where the author theorises and problematises how poverty is a major socioeconomic risk factor for youths' smoking, drinking, and sexual misconduct behaviours in SEA. However, Hanley et al.'s (2004) work was published nearly 20 years ago; therefore, the scholarly contribution could be dated. Also, Hanley et al. (2004), in part, investigated the relationships between poverty and youths' sexual engagement. Their work failed to look at the broader understanding of youth delinquency. As such, any discussion on juvenile smoking and drinking behaviours was absent. Thus, there are significant scholarly values and urgencies to develop the current book as problems of youths' smoking, drinking, and premature sexual activities in SEA, despite their long-time existence, have been substantially underexplored.

In this book, the author will provide reasoning on why SEA governments, individually and collectively, have not taken an adequately aggressive, strict approach to regulating their policies against youth delinquency, prompting adolescent involvement in delinquent behaviours to increase. The lack of appropriate legislative and law enforcement efforts results in significant individual and

societal costs, jeopardising SEA's pursuit of sustainable futures. Therefore, it is necessary to develop this book to analyse the causes and consequences of a variety of youth delinquent behaviours, as well as the associated unequal power of relations, alongside expanding the insights of sociological inquiry into an ongoing phenomenon of inequalities.

Policy recommendations are presented at the end of chapters 3–5, allowing local policy-makers to evaluate current policy development and seek policy amendments to efficiently and effectively cope with the notable, entrenched, and multifaceted problems of youth delinquency. Outputs of this book enable (under-)graduate students and relevant scholars and specialists focusing on SEA studies to understand the causes, effects, costs, and policy development and gaps with respect to the youth smoking epidemic, drinking epidemic, and sexual misconduct.

A key highlight of this book is that the outputs suggest ways to attain more sustainable, equitable, liveable, and inclusive futures in SEA other than the assessments of youth delinquency *per se*. In doing so, the author hopes to contribute to the understanding of how regional economic competitiveness, social cohesion, and habitability can be sharpened when youth delinquency is addressed thoroughly and aptly. Moreover, when the author addresses youth delinquency, they identify how digitalisation and informationisation diversify the means for SEA youths to gain access to tobacco products, alcohol and underage or casual sex partners. Recommended policies in response to regional youth delinquency, in part, target the imposition of e-regulations by SEA governments, aiming to narrow regulatory loopholes that relevant parties can instrumentalise to earn lucrative profits at the expense of raising the rates of youth delinquency. In-depth analyses of both conventional and digitalised youth delinquency add further value so that readers understand the timely issues and recommended policy-making initiatives.

In the following chapter, the author will apply self-control and social-control theories, general strain theory, and cultural deviance and social learning theories to explain and problematise the social construction and reproduction of youth delinquency in SEA. The author will explore what environmental factors, socioeconomic disadvantages, demographic traits, and cultural deviance engender such social construction and reproduction *per se*. Given the relevance and importance, the author will justify why these theories are exclusively employed to support the sociological analysis presented throughout this book. Supported by the theoretical framework, the author will demonstrate how the juvenile problems of smoking, drinking, and premature sexual activities are all closely related within and beyond the SEA contexts. Therefore, these three types of youth delinquent behaviours are primarily addressed.

The author will also expose the policy limitations or gaps for SEA governments to tackle youth delinquency. They will suggest what specific, despite multifaceted restrictions, policies are recommended for policy-makers to design, arrange, and deliver to break the vicious cycle of social construction and reproduction of youth delinquency. To present and investigate the entrenched, complex problems of youth delinquency, the author primarily engages in sociological and theoretical discussion and analysis.

Secondarily, the author delivers statistical data and comparisons to support the sociological arguments and theoretical framework. Given that each SEA country holds and prioritises different historical, cultural, social, economic, and political values and weaknesses, it is unrealistic to thoroughly discuss all regional countries within a book. The author will, therefore, primarily explore the contexts of Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. Here, Thailand and Malaysia are, currently, the only two regional upper-middle-income countries that share the same prospect of becoming high-income countries. Indonesia, alternatively, has overtaken the Philippines as the biggest economic market and political powerhouse in the region. Therefore, compared to their less or least developed neighbouring counterparts, these countries are more prepared to develop sustainable, habitable, and equitable futures while maintaining their Asian and global standings by raising economic and social competitiveness.

Indonesia and Malaysia are among the two largest Muslim-majority countries in the world. In the next chapters, the author will theorise how religious conformity deters local youths from expressing delinquency. Per Islamic laws, smoking, drinking, and premature sex are prohibited. It will be interesting to explore whether religious deterrence helps prevent Indonesian and Malaysian youths from expressing delinquency. If not, the author will investigate what factors prompt local youths to behave delinquently despite religious deterrence.

Although these three countries are prioritised in the sociological discussion, the author will present some arguments and data with respect to the contexts of other SEA countries, such as the Philippines and Vietnam, to support their evaluation of youth delinquency regionwide.

In Chapter 2, the author will develop the theoretical framework of the sociological analysis of youth delinquency in SEA. The author will introduce the control theory (both self-control and social control) to understand under what circumstances youths are more or less likely to behave in a deviant manner. The author will mention the general strain theory to draw relationships between the encounters of negative life events, the development of strain, and the disposition to perform delinquency. The author will also address the cultural deviance and social learning theories that help justify the expression of

juvenile delinquency from a sociocultural perspective, alongside paving the way to explaining how social costs of youth delinquency can be raised by policy amendments to mitigate adolescent smoking, drinking, and sexual misconduct behaviours. In this chapter, the author will highlight how poverty, the availability of delinquent opportunities, peer influence and pressure, a lack of parental and school socialisation, and deviant social and cultural norms are all risk factors for youth delinquency.

In Chapter 3, the author will problematise the youth smoking epidemic within SEA to justify the worrisome regional impacts of tobacco trade on youth. The author will present major youth smoking trends in SEA, illustrating how the presence of tobacco products has adversely affected regional youths. Next, the author will highlight the causes of the youth smoking epidemic, namely susceptibility and positive advertising. The author follows by emphasising the national and regional costs of youth smoking, arguing how such a lifestyle results in negative consequences in relation to the delinquency. Lastly, the author will recommend policies for tobacco control that SEA governments should consider to contain the epidemic of youth smoking.

It is noteworthy that all SEA governments have some degree of tobacco control policies in place. However, many lack the implementation of comprehensive national tobacco control strategic plans and tightened law enforcement endeavours to target the problem of youth smoking. Therefore, the outputs of this chapter should contain scholarly values that are conducive to the betterment of policy-making.

In Chapter 4, the author will discuss the youth drinking epidemic region-wide to demonstrate why the impact of alcohol products on youths is concerning. The author will present major youth drinking trends within SEA to further study how the rampant regional alcohol trade has adversely affected local youths. The author will point out the causes (susceptibility and toxic culture) of the youth drinking epidemic. Next, the author will evaluate the national and regional costs of youth drinking, discussing how such a lifestyle results in consequences in relation to delinquency. The author will recommend policies for alcohol control that SEA governments should consider when amending or forming their policies to contain the epidemic of youth drinking. The outputs of Chapter 4 will draw a close association between youth smoking, youth drinking, and youth sexual misconduct. Therefore, the author indicates that these delinquency problems should be addressed simultaneously to eradicate the issues of long-term holistic youth misbehaviours.

In Chapter 5, the author will explore a range of juvenile sexual misconduct, including underage sex, premature marital commitment, teen pregnancy and extramarital sex. The author will problematise each of these forms of sexual