

**SITUATION OF GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN MALAYSIA**  
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The open sky concept of information and media liberalization has resulted exposure to the outside world. Series of studies have been conducted to analyze the epidemics that require major attention. For example, the National Population and Family Development Board found out, in a study in 1994, that more than two-thirds of youth aged 13-19 years have had some exposure to sexual oriented materials. Apart from that, dating, cohabitation and abortions seemed to have been accepted norms among teenagers. Census 2000 disclosed that the percentage of marrying at a later age among young women aged 20-34 is increasing. There was an increase about 48.1 % in year 2000 as compared to 43.2% in year 1991. This is also happening to females aged 20-24 years where an increase of 68.5% was indicated in year 2000 as compared to 60.2% in 1991.

**Introduction**

The term *at risk* has been viewed through several lenses. It has evolved from the medical field adopting the term from the insurance industry that determines liabilities and insurance premium cost (Baizerman, 1991), i.e. in which the former measures a probabilistic outcomes like the risk of contracting a specific disease and providing implications for treatment or prevention (Richardson et al., 1989). The educators borrowed the term in the early 80s to refer to school dropouts for variety of reasons and providing the bases for school policy betterment aimed at improving educational services. Pallas (1992) equates the seriousness of untreated education problems to untreated medical problems. The term *at risk* implies urgency because dropouts may lead to unemployment which in turn may lead to other social crisis. Subsequently, the term has been employed to give the sense of urgency concerning the youth risky behaviours that contribute to unhealthy lifestyles and damaging thinking pattern. This transitional youth at risk perspective triggers more at risk situations like at risk of having low self esteem, at risk of becoming alcoholic, of becoming infected by HIV/AIDS, of substance abuse, and of falling deep into illicit sexual problems.

The common understanding cutting across the numerous studies associated with being *at risk* is that it is basically a symptom to certain predisposing factors in the life of the young people. Youth do not exist in a vacuum; they are exposed to practices, culture, and the surroundings within the context of the family, school; peers, media and the communities both local and globally (Azimi, 2003). This entity shapes the young persons whether they will be *at risk* or *empowered promise*. In other words the surroundings, depending on their capabilities, may churn the youth either way. The predisposing factors may contribute to two sets of assets to unleash the potentials of the young people. Specifically, the first set may be referred to as external asset and the other as internal asset. The different levels of the assets associated with the young people may contribute to whether they are *at risk* or *empowered promise*. If the external asset (e.g. parents, school and community) provides the environment for the young people to unleash their potentials positively, they will have the *empowered promise* to avoid being at risk. The internal asset (e.g. internal drive, positive values, and social competencies) if positively developed will provide additional booster for the youth to stay on the desirable path.

In this context, the term at risk is viewed as all encompassing to include unpromising behaviors in school, substance abuse, indulging in illicit sexual activities, delinquencies and the like, and at risk of loggerhead with parents, siblings and peers. These at risk behaviors categories will also be scrutinized in relation to both the external asset and internal asset. The major focus of the paper is on girls and young women at risk.

It is a worldwide phenomenon that researches on young females are limited and data are not easily available. Obviously they are not exactly identical to the boys. For example they attain puberty much earlier but they are deprived in several ways as compared to their counterpart. In fact it is well reported there is an increase spurt of cases where girls and young women engaging in critical at risk situations than the rate the boys are experiencing. It is unfortunate that in many parts of the world violence continues to perpetrate against girls and young women. The United Nation's World Youth Survey (2003, 2005) report several incidences of gender inequality, discrimination, and stereotyping in many continents across the globe. The above scenarios warrant.

## **Background**

Malaysia's population is young and growing fast. In the year 2000, according to the last Malaysian census, there were 10.1 million youth aged 15 to 40 years in Malaysia, an increase of 2.7 million since 1991. The proportion of youth in the population aged 15 to 24 years increased from 18.8 per cent to approximately 19.9 per cent from 1991 to 2000. The proportion of the 25 to 40 year age group grew slightly from 23.4 per cent to approximately 23.6 per cent of the total population in those years (Malaysia Department of Statistics, 2003).

In 2000, 16.5 million people out of nearly 22 million were under 40. Those under 40 will represent two-thirds of the population in 2020, since the total population is projected to jump from 22 million in 2000 to 31 million in 2020, nearly a 50% increase. It is estimated that young Malaysians of 15-24 years will be 10 million strong at that time. The young population will also drive rapid household growth as total households are projected to increase from 4.7 million in 2000 to 6.2 million in 2010 and 6.9 million in 2015 (Malaysia Department of Statistics, 2003).

## **General Scenarios of Malaysian Youth in Transition up to 2003**

Malaysian youth demonstrated a dramatic change in their lifestyles and thinking patterns beginning in the late 80s. This generation is the first in Malaysia to grow up with computers, music downloads, instant messaging and cellular phones. The 'open sky' concept of information and media liberalization provides the means for young people to be more tolerant towards internationalism. Without adult guidance and insight, youth risk confusion in their identity resulting in being connected and yet disconnected.

In a study by the National Population and Family Development Board in 1994 on reproductive health among Malaysian youth, 2,366 adolescents aged 10 to 19 years from every state and all ethnic groups were surveyed over a two-year period. The findings included the following:

1. Over two-thirds of youth aged 13 to 19 years have had at least some exposure to materials such as magazines, films and videos containing explicit or implied sexual connotations.
2. Dating is an accepted norm among teenagers.
3. More urban than rural adolescents approve of cohabiting and of having sexual relationships, especially among older youth and those intending to subsequently marry.
4. Several adolescents interviewed knew or had known someone who had either been pregnant or had had an abortion. Many of the adolescents knew clinics that performed abortions as well as of the traditional means used to abort a foetus.

Census 2000 revealed that young adults are marrying at a later age. The proportion of never married (single) persons aged 20-34 years continued to increase between 1991 and 2000 from 43.2% to 48.1 %. Among females 20-24 years of age, 68.5% were single in 2000 compared to only 60.2% in 1991. Similar patterns were also observed for females in the 25-34 age groups, as well as among males. Young male adults are tending to marry at a later age, as indicated by data on mean age at first marriage, which showed an increase from 28.2 years in

1991 to 28.6 years in 2000, while for females the increase was from 24.7 years to 25.1 years over the same period (Malaysia Department of Statistics, 2005).

Research on youth values and culture in Malaysia has also shown that cultural patterns and values among youth are ~hanging. The common perception that Malaysian youth are more individualistic than ever before has been supported by research findings, which indicate that although collectivist values still predominate among youth, individualistic values are emerging (Ezhar & Azimi, 1997). Most believe this to be the result of a variety of factors, including the

primary role of global culture that is inundating youth through a variety of forms of mass media. How else can one explain the emulation by young Malaysians of the appearances and behaviors of their western counterparts, despite never having come in to contact with them? Such direct evidence can only be attributed to the pervasive role of mass media in all its forms. Behavior is a reflection of values, which implies that the rising involvement by youth in social problems can be due to a lack of positive values or the result of an increase in negative values.

Research conducted in Malaysia on values and culture (Family Development Foundation, 2002) has indicated that social problems are more common among teenagers with a high desire for external goods such as wealth, influence and respect. These teenagers were more involved in drinking, "bohsia", gambling, cohabitation, running away from home, loafing, illegal racing, truancy and gangsterism. On the other hand, teenagers who put priority on strong faith, wisdom, and good moral conduct were less involved in all the social problems mentioned above, and also less into drugs and pornographic videos.

In terms of the thinking patterns and lifestyles of youth, research has shown that they generally have a positive self-concept, which is relevant to the development process, including energy, desire for change, desire to learn and many others. They are sensitive to the needs of the society and are willing to provide the energy to meet them. By and large, they are responsive to national appeals for service. With these and other abilities, traits and energies, young people are an asset to any nation in its striving toward development (Azimi, Turiman, & Ezhar, 2003). However, some disturbing trends indicate the possibility that many Malaysian youth are at risk of discontinuity, which can lead to the trap of more serious social ills such as drug and alcohol addiction, HIV-AIDS, mental illness and others.

Research conducted to observe the differences in the thinking patterns and lifestyles of youth 15-19 and 20-25 revealed the following (see Table 1):

When asked whether they had had sexual intercourse, 5.1 % of 15-19 year olds said they had as compared to 10% of 20-25 year olds.

1. In terms of smoking, 31.7% of 15-19 year olds said they smoked as compared to 38.5% of 20-25 year olds.
2. When asked whether they drank alcohol, 13.6% of 15-19 year olds said they had as compared to 25.1 % of 20-25 year olds.
4. In relation to gambling, 20.8% of 15-19 year olds said they gambled as compared to 29.2% of 20-25 year olds.
5. In terms of illegal drug use, 7.7% of 15-19 year olds said they took pills as compared to 12.9% of 20-25 year olds.
6. When asked as to whether religion was important in their lives, 25.2% of 15-19 year olds indicated that it was not important, as compared to 26.8% of 20-25 year olds.

Table 1: Lifestyles and Thinking Patterns of Youth

<b>Lifestyle Items</b>	<b>15-19 year olds (%)</b>	<b>20-25 year olds (%)</b>
Sexual intercourse	5.1	10.0
Frequented discos	14.8	32.4
Smoking	31.7	38.5
Alcohol	13.6	25.1
Gambling	20.8	29.2
Illegal drugs	7.7	12.9
Importance of religion	74.8	73.2

As indicated by the above scenarios, there are critical social trends developing among Malaysian youth in key lifestyle areas. The research findings indicate that there is an increase in the percentages of youth engaging in risky behaviours as they leave adolescence and enter into early adulthood (Azimi, Turiman, & Ezhar, 2003).

### **Focusing on Girls and Young Women at Risk**

From 2004 onward several studies have been conducted to reveal the trend and status of youth in selected areas including girls and young women at risk. The first in the series of researches by UPM's team was a study to look into youth religiosity and personality indexing of young people and the implications for nation building. In addition to the Islamic Religiosity dimensions scales, a risk behaviour instrument was also included. The instrument, among others, comprised of seven risk activities aiming at assessing the frequency of engagement in the different at risk activities. The activities are grouped into two categories: Alcohol and Substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, and smoking) and Sexual related risks (exposure to phonographic materials, sexual intercourse, and lesbianism). The respondents of the study were randomly sampled from six groups of youth, namely: secondary students, undergraduates, inmates of rehabilitation centres, members of youth associations, and young professionals. They were asked to indicate whether they have or have not engaged in the given at risk behaviours. Figure 1 depicts the percentage of females respondents engaged in at risk behaviours.

Come 2005, a study entitled "Youth as a foundation of unity: A study of inter-ethnic tolerance" was conducted by the youth research team in UPM. A good portion of the data from the national study looks into the patterns of involvement of young girls and women ranging in age from 15 to 40 years indulging in negative behaviour. The study employed a survey design involving 1688 respondents selected randomly. The measure of involvement in negative behaviour involved asking respondents to self-report their involvement. Figure 1 shows the percentage of the females' respondent involved in at risk behaviours.

In 2006 a study on youth culture became the focus of the research team in UPM. As being the practice in the previous researches, the instrument also comprise of scales to understand the at risk behaviours of the young people. Specifically, the at risk instrument looks at the engagement of the youth in the three at risk behaviour categories namely substance abuse, sexual related, and law breaking. The respondents, aged 15-40 years, were randomly selected from secondary schools, public and private universities, and professional and unemployed youth. The number of girls and young women participated in the study was 846 and 37.8 percent of them were found engaged in at risk behaviours (see Figure 1).

The most recent study to reveal at risk situation of young people is centred on late adolescence or early youth. The respondents for the 2007 study were randomly selected from upper secondary pupils in West Malaysia. As the focus of the is very much on at risk behaviours, the instrument is more encompassing with additional two additional at risk categories (school and social bonding related) plus scales to unveil the young people external and internal assets. The data enable the researcher to understand the extent to which these assets contribute to at risk behaviours and the implications on how to facilitate and empower the young people to be effective partner in development in a fully developed nation come 2020. A specific subtopic is devoted to give a closer scrutiny to the correlations between youth assets and at risk behaviours. The comparative data are shown in Figure 1, Tables 2 and 3.

Engagement in At Risk Behaviours Among Girls and Young Women

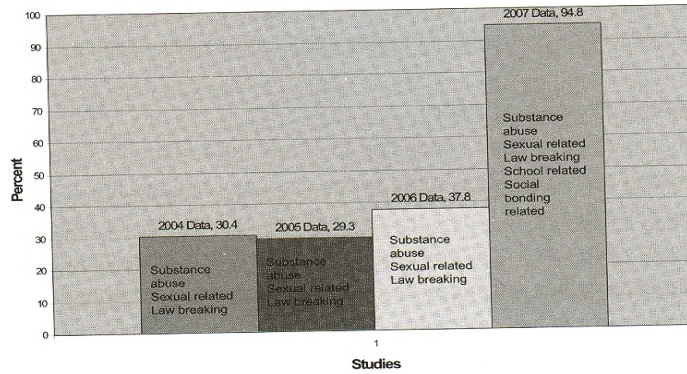


Figure 1 shows that, across the series of researches, the percentage of engagement of girls and young women in (risk behaviors (substance abuse, sexual related, and law breaking) does not indicate dramatic increase. This observation based on the three at risk categories is also true with the 2007 study (the jump in percentage is due to the two additional categories - school and social bonding related). From the data it is reasonable to conclude that one in three of the girls and young women are involved in at risk behaviours. However this statement can be misconstrued. The following table will give a better perspective of the respondents' engagement in the different categories of at risk behaviours (see Table 2)

Table 2: Comparative Study of Girls and Young Women Engagement in At Risk Behaviours by Categories

At Risk Behaviours Categories	2004 n=905	2005 n=1663	2006 n=84	2007 n=61
<b>Substance Abuse</b>				
Alcohol	12.6	12.5	11.9	9.6
Drugs	9.0	0.5	1.5	0.8
Smoking	8.6	-	6.7	6.2
Gum Sniffing	-	1.1	0.4	1.1
<b>Sexual Related</b>				
Pornography	25.1	7.6	15.4	11.8
Sex out of wedlock	7.1	1.8	0.9	1.3
Lesbian	4.3	-	1.4	1.5
<b>Law Breaking</b>				
Vandalism	-	12.0	13.2	7.2
Theft	-	7.4	6.6	7.8
Gambling	-	10.7	1.2	6.2
<b>School Related</b>				
Cheating in Exam	-	-	-	59.3
Truancy	-	-	-	24.3
Disciplinary Action	-	-	-	22.4
<b>Social Bonding Related</b>				
Quarrelling with parents	-	-	-	69.8
Quarrelling with siblings	-	-	-	81.5
Quarrelling with others	-	-	-	89.4

Table 2 provides a vivid picture of the at risk behaviour of the Malaysian girls and young women. The first at risk category, substance abuse, is a major concern because the negative behaviours are addictive and eventually could lead to dire consequences. Cutting across the series of studies alcohol is getting its grip on the female population. The data shows that one in ten of the female respondents are entangled in the alcohol net. At risk with drugs is skewed in 2004 study because the respondents include inmates from the drug rehabilitation centres. Smoking is crawling into the centre stage with the female population. However small the percentage of engagement in at risk behaviour portrayed by the present studies, there is the need to plan appropriate intervention to curb the progress and position it as an important agenda in the nation's youth development programme.

With regard to sexual related at risk behaviour, the studies show that it is here to stay. It may begin with pornography where on the average one in ten of the female respondents is enjoying it. Based on the global trend, sex out of wedlock and lesbianism are become a subculture especially so if the girls fall into the wrong group where the negative behaviour is an accepted lifestyles - the inclination is indicated from the data of the 2004 study. Law breaking at risk behaviour is no more synonymous to the boys. Vandalism, stealing, and gambling are catching up with the fairer sex. Almost one in ten girls and young women are identified with law breaking at risk behaviour.

The last two at risk categories, especially school related at risks, may be considered as antecedents factors contributing to the other at risk behaviours. For example failure in school or dropouts may lead to unemployment which in turn may lead to other social crisis. Similarly a person having problem with social bonding triggers more specific at risk situation like at risk of having low self-esteem, alienated, and societal misfit - and these in turn may contribute to unhealthy lifestyles and damaging thinking pattern. The finding from the recent study is quite revealing considering the girls are notably more successful academically than the boys. Majority of the girls are involved in cheating and about one-fourth of them play truant and being given disciplinary action for misconduct in school. As for social bonding related at risk behaviour, almost all of the girls are prone to be at loggerhead with other people. This is certainly an alarming behaviour and if not given the appropriate treatment this may develop into a major obstacle to the achievement of vision 2020.

Based on the preceding discussion, several questions may be posed to further elucidate the status of at risk between the girls and young women: Are the findings on at risk behaviour of the female respondents typical of the girls only? Are the at risk behaviours group specific? Can at risk behaviours be considered as mere *fad* that they will outgrow them? Table 3 is put together to provide direction in answering these questions.

Table 3: Comparative Engagement of Girls and Young Women in At Risk Behaviours

At Risk Behaviours	2004( n=905)		2005(n=1663)		2006(n=846)		2007
	G 36	YW669	G 75	YW888	G565	YW276	G 612
<b>Substance Abuse</b>							
Alcohol	8.0	14.4	9.6	16.0	11.2	13.8	9.6
Drugs	5.0	10.5	0.2	0.8	1.9	0.7	0.8
Smoking	5.2	10.0	-	-	8.5	3.3	6.2
Gum SniffinQ		-	1.1	1.2	0.4	0.1	1.1
<b>Sexual Related</b>							
Pornography	15.5	28.6	7.0	8.6	16.8	13.0	11.8
Sex out of wedlock	3.5	8.4	1.1	2.7	0.9	1.1	1.3
Lesbian	2.6	4.9	-	-	1.8	1.7	1.5
<b>Law Breaking</b>							
Vandalism	-		17.8	6.5	17.3	5.1	7.2
Theft	-		9.4	5.3	8.5	2.9	7.8
Gambling	-		9.3	20.9	1.2	1.1	6.2
<b>At Risk at School</b>							
Cheating in Exam	-		-		-		59.3
Truancy	-		-		-		24.3
Disciplinary Action	-		-		-		22.4
<b>At Risk Relationship</b>							
Quarrelling with parents	-		-		-		69.8
Quarrelling with siblings	-		-		-		81.5
Quarrelling with others	-		-		-		89.4

The findings show that the young women demonstrate a more at risk pattern than the girls in substance abuse and sexual related at risk categories. The pattern may also be construed that there is a tendency for the girls to deteriorate in both the two at risk categories as they climb the age ladder. However, the findings also suggest that the young women outgrown vandalism and stealing as they enter adult status. The incremental trend of at risk behaviors among the female respondents may continue drastically if the evolution is allowed to go unchecked. The trend supported the findings the 2003 study on lifestyles and thinking pattern of contemporary youth of both sexes (Azimi, Turiman, & Ezhar, 2003). The question is how does one go about planning to counter this undesirable development among the girls and young women? The next subtopic attempts to response to this pertinent question.

### Correlates of At Risk Behavior among Girls and Young Women

Being *at risk* is basically a symptom to certain predisposing factors in the life of the young people which may include family, school; peers, media and the communities both local and globally (Azimi, 2003). These predisposing factors form the external assets of the young people. These external assets may in turn contribute to the development of the youth internal asset (positive values, and social competencies). In other words the interplay of both the assets will form the basis for unleashing the potentials within them to lead a healthy lifestyles coupled with having positive mindset toward life. The positive juxtaposing of the assets with the young people developmental needs (both sociological and psychological) is critical in ensuring that they are on the desirable path. The questions remain to be answered are: In the context of the Malaysian girls and young women, which components and elements of the external and internal assets should be given utmost emphasis to help them undergo their developmental growth without at risk behaviours interference? Which of this group of assets is having very significant correlation with different categories of at risk behaviors identified

3.

The study aims at prioritizing the group of youth assets that should be given immediate attention in curbing the girls and young women involvement in at risk behaviour. Initially there is a need to determine whether the girls and young women are more in need of the external on internal assets to be strengthened in the process of providing professional guidance. Table 4 shows the correlations between external and internal assets and the five categories of at risk behaviors. The findings show that the external assets demonstrate a stronger relationship with all the five categories

Of at risk behaviors as compared to internal assets.

Categories of At –Risk Behaviors	Positive Youth Development Assets p (r)	
	External Assets	Internal Assets
At – Risk School	0.0005** (-0.144)	0.0005** (-0.191)
Substance Abuse	0.0005** (-0.225)	0.053NS (-0.078)
Sexual Related Risk Behavior	0.001** (-0.134)	0.02* (-0.094)
Law Breaking Behavior	0.0005** (-0.149)	0.001** (-0.128)
Social Bonding Related	0.001** (-0.138)	0.316NS (-0.041)

Note: \*\* Correlation Test is very significant at level of significant,  $\alpha = 0.001$

Correlation Test is very significant at level of significant,  $\alpha = 0.05$

NS Correlation Test is not significant at level of significant,  $\alpha = 0.05$

Correlation Strength based on Guilford's Rule of Thumb (Guilford, 1956)

$r < 0.20$  : Very Weak Correlation ;  $0.20 < r < 0.40$  : Weak Correlation ;  $0.40 < r < 0.70$  : Moderate Correlation

$0.70 < r < 0.90$  : Strong Correlation;  $0.90 < r$  : Very Strong Correlation

The internal assets on the other hand show very significant relationship with only school related at risk behavior and law breaking behaviors. The following paragraphs go into detail to identify the components and elements of the external assets that act as the major predisposing factors for the girls and young women to be entangled in different

Categories of at risk behaviors

Categories of At –Risk Behaviors	Positive Youth Development Assets p (r)			
	Support	Empowerment	Boundaries & Expectation	Constructive Use of Time
At – Risk School	0.0005** (-0.159)	0.556NS (-0.024)	0.0005** (-0.158)	0.544NS (-0.025)
Substance Abuse	0.0005** (-0.222)	0.0005** (-0.143)	0.0005** (-0.228)	0.316NS (-0.041)
Sexual Related Risk Behavior	0.0005** (-0.148)	0.423NS (-0.182)	0.0005** (-0.181)	0.909NS (-0.005)
Law Breaking Behavior	0.0005** (-0.165)	0.423NS (-0.182)	0.0005** (-0.181)	0.133NS (0.061)
Social Bonding Related	0.0005** (-0.142)	0.014* (-0.099)	0.002* (-0.122)	0.921NS (-0.004)

Note: \*\* Correlation Test is very significant at level of significant,  $\alpha = 0.001$

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$0.70 < r < 0.90$  : Strong Correlation;  $0.90 < r$  : Very Strong Correlation



Table 6 reveals that the components of the external assets that correlate very significantly with almost all the categories of at risk behaviours are *support* and *boundaries and expectations*. The *empowerment* component of the external assets associated very significantly with substance abuse at risk behaviours only. Further understanding of the relevant elements within the components of *support* and *boundaries and expectations* will enable the researcher to suggest action to be taken to check the advancement of the at risk behaviours among the girls and young women. The result is shown in Table 7 and 8.

Table 7: Girls and Young Women Engagement in At Risk Behaviors Correlations by Support Elements of External Assets (N=612)

At Risk Behavior P (r)	At Risk In School	Substance Abuse	Sexual Related Risk Behavior	Law Breaking behavior	Social Bonding Related
Family Support	0.0005** (-0.146)	0.0005** (-0.161)	0.0005** (-0.156)	0.0005** (-0.186)	0.0005** (-0.169)
Positive Family Communication	0.0005** (-0.166)	0.0005** (-0.187)	0.0005** (-0.142)	0.0005** (-0.207)	0.0005** (-0.182)
Other Adult Relationship	0.882NS (-0.006)	0.745NS (-0.013)	0.480NS (-0.029)	0.239NS (-0.048)	0.334NS (-0.039)
Caring Neighborhood	0.023* (-0.092)	0.0005** (-0.217)	0.007*] (-0.108)	0.058NS (-0.077)	0.286NS (-0.043)
Caring School Climate	0.008* (-0.107)	0.0005** (-0.191)	0.006* (-0.111)	0.027* (-0.090)	0.062NS (-0.075)
Parents Involvement in School	0.0005** (-0.113)	0.001** (-0.410)	0.128NS (-0.062)	0.004* (-0.116)	0.005** (-0.113)

Note: \*\* Correlation Test is very significant at level of significant,  $\alpha = 0.001$

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$0.70 < r < 0.90$  : Strong Correlation;  $0.90 < r$  : Very Strong Correlation

The findings show family and parental factors are critical in helping the girls and young women combat the negative invitations. *Family support* and *positive family communication* are found to correlate very significantly with all the five categories of at risk behaviours. While *parents involvement in school* demonstrates highly significant relationship with three categories vis-a-vis school related, substance abuse and social bonding. It is also important to note that *caring community* and *caring school climate* may also contribute to the reduction of the possibility of substance abuse at risk behaviour among the girls and young women.

Table 8: Girls and Young Women Engagement in At Risk Behaviors Correlations by Boundaries and Expectations Elements of External Assets (N=612)

At Risk Behavior P (r)	At Risk In School	Substance Abuse	Sexual Related Risk Behavior	Law Breaking behavior	Social Bonding Related
Family Boundaries	0.001** (-0.131)	0.0005** (-0.150)	0.106NS (-0.065)	0.0005** (-0.167)	0.441NS( 0.031)
School Boundaries	0.002* (-0.124)	0.0005** (-0.203)	0.0005** (-0.144)	0.001** (-0.131)	0.013* (-0.100)
Neighborhood Boundaries	0.070NS (-0.073)	0.0005** (-0.147)	0.012* (-0.102)	0.078NS (-0.071)	0.013* (-0.100)
Adult Role Models	0.0005** (-0.141)	0.0005** (-0.198)	0.001** (-0.135)	0.0005 (0.187)	0.001** (-0.130)
Positive Peer Influence	0.027* (-0.089)	0.001** (-0.129)	0.020* (-0.094)	0.026* (-0.090)	0.134NS (-0.061)
High Expectation	0.053NS (-0.078)	0.001** (-0.128)	0.044* (-0.082)	0.081NS (-0.070)	0.008* (-0.107)

Note: \*\* Correlation Test is very significant at level of significant,  $\alpha = 0.001$

Correlation Test is very significant at level of significant,  $\alpha = 0.05$

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$0.70 < r < 0.90$  : Strong Correlation;  $0.90 < r$  : Very Strong Correlation

Table 8 presents the results of product moment correlation analysis of the elements within the *boundaries and expectations* component with the five categories of at risk behaviours. It is found that only *adult role models* element correlated very significantly with all the five at risk behaviour categories. *School boundaries* and *family boundaries* are found to have very significant relationship with four and three at risk behaviours respectively. Another important observation is that all the six elements of the *boundaries and expectations* components correlated very significantly with one categories of at risk behaviour i.e. substance abuse. Girls and women engaged in substance abuse need guidance from individuals surrounding them including parent, school, community and peer.

### Conclusions

The studies shed the needed light to understand the status of at risk behaviour among Malaysian girls and young women. In addition, the research conducted in 2007 is instrumental in suggesting some intervention strategies for curbing the phenomena now and in the future. Even though the findings show a relatively small portion of the girls and young women engaged in the damaging behaviours as compared to the males, the trend is quite similar in which substance abuse and sex related at risk behaviours plus gambling show marked incremental involvement as they climb the age ladder.

Serendipitous revelations from the recent study show an unwelcoming observation regarding the girls and the young women. Even though the fairer sex is generally accepted as more successful than the boys academically, the study found that a high percentage of them are involved in school related at risk behaviours. Secondly, almost all of the the girls and young women participated in the study are entangled with social bonding at risk behaviours. As the females form a major portion of the population, the latter finding may slow down the achievement of the goals of a fully developed nation, as it is inconsistent with the nine challenges of 2020.

At risk behaviours of the girls and young women, if allowed to go unchecked, will contribute to form a major threat to society. Any attempts to resolve the menace should not only focus on the present cohort rather begin investing on the young people from child through adulthood. The interventions programmes should shun away from negative stereotyping but rather working on building smart partnership with the parents, schools, and community in providing a supporting and caring environment to unleash the potentials of the girls and young women. It has to be a concerted effort focusing on empowering them to be an asset to the nation.

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