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GENDER IDENTITY CRISIS OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION IN MALAYSIA: SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE ISSUE OF *Pengkid*

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ABSTRACT

Gender identity crisis among Malaysian youth nowadays is becoming a matter of grave concern. This article is based on a study conducted to explore and understand the perception of the public towards *Pengkid*, a term used to refer to a female, whose physical and behavioural appearance resembles that of a male. The sexual orientation is also towards other females, i.e., showing a preference for same-sex partners. *Pengkid* is becoming more visible in society and lately, the term has been associated with social concerns, like, drug and sexually-related problems. This study also aims to develop possible indicators for identifying a *Pengkid*. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods is used. A survey was conducted involving a total of 1,298 samples, representing people in three main districts in Negeri Sembilan, i.e., Seremban, Port Dickson and Rembau. Structured interviews were also conducted with several target groups or subject matter experts, such as religious leaders, academicians, lawyers, medical doctors and social workers as well as a number of *Pengkid*. The main finding from the research indicates that the level of awareness of the public of the *Pengkid* problem is high. The research also developed some physical and behavioural indicators for the purpose of identifying *Pengkid*.

Contribution/ Originality: The study is one of very few studies which have investigated on pengkid, who represent Malaysian youth facing crisis in looking for their gender identity. The findings of this research contribute to spark the awareness among society on the importance of tackling and curbing the problem.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is no doubt that the rapid development of the millennium is posing many challenges to people in different walks of life, and globalisation is one of those challenges. While globalisation has been instrumental in enhancing a country's economic growth and political stability and has brought about great advancements in information and communications technology, it has also led to a decline in moral awareness among Malaysian youth. Truancy in schools, runaways, pornography, drug abuse, premarital sex, baby dumping and issues involving homosexuality are among the problems commonly associated with the declining morality among Malaysian youth (Anthony, 2010; Nor Hafizah *et al.*, 2012; Mofrad *et al.*, 2013).

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the word, 'youth', refers to individuals between the age of 15 to 24 years. Those in this age category are in the process of leaving childhood and entering adulthood. Commonly, youth in this transitional period undergo many physical and psychological changes that can have an impact on their independence and self-identity. Gender and sexual identity have generally become two of the major concerns of youth. In the process of looking for the identity that fits them best, many youths are experimenting with various ways to portray themselves publicly.

Malaysian youth, especially Malay Muslim adolescents, are not the exception to this gender and sexual identity crisis. Many are increasingly expressing their non-conformance to gender identity and sexuality, even though such acts may obviously be against their religious tenets.

In this article, the same-sex sexuality problem is discussed by relating it to LGBT, an acronym that refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual. Understanding the LGBT acronym requires an understanding of non-heterosexual sexuality or homosexuality. The word, 'homosexual', refers to someone whose sexual preferences and activities are primarily to people of the same sex. In order to understand homosexuality, three elements of sexual identity need to be differentiated (Moses and Hawkins, 1982). The first is gender identity which refers to one's perception of him or herself as male or female. The second element is gender role which refers to a set of behavioural roles that are expected of males and females. The third element is sexual orientation which refers to an individual's preference for partners of the same or opposite sex or both. Thus, LGBT is marked by the abnormality in gender identity, gender role and sexual orientation which contradicts to socially accepted norms. 'Lesbian' refers to a female, who is physically, emotionally and sexually attracted to a member of the same sex. 'Gay' refers to a male who is physically, emotionally and sexually attracted to a member of the same sex. 'Bisexual' is an individual who may be attracted physically, emotionally and sexually to the member sex (men and women) or can be both. 'Transgender' or transsexual is relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond with their birth sex (Holmes, 2003).

The transgender or transsexual group includes those who are called *pengkid*, a localised synonym for a masculine-looking Malay-Muslim lesbian (Yuenmei, 2012). *Pengkid* is a term used to refer to a female, usually young, who dresses, appears and acts like a male. Her behaviour, attitude and actions are manly; even the sexual interest of a *pengkid* is toward another woman. A *pengkid* develops love and even sexual relationship with other females and will play the role of a male. In short, a *pengkid* expresses the gender identity that is opposite to her biological norm, moral and social development. However, it is to be noted that not all females who show a male appearance are *pengkid*; there are females who feel comfortable to dress like a male, but their sexual orientation is towards males, and they are generally referred to as 'tomboys'.

According to Islamic teachings, this problem of gender identity crisis and sexual disorientation should be curbed because it is clearly contrary to the nature of human beings (*fitrah*). In fact, the Rukun Negara (Five National Pillars) has made this very clear with regards to personality development and behaviour of people. Its fifth tenet is on good behaviour and morality (Kesopanan dan Kesusilaan) which is in relation to the importance of developing individuals who are well-mannered and who can foster a harmonious society with high moral values. Therefore, the elements of decency and morality are important in the context of relations amongst people in a multi-racial country, like Malaysia. This tenet also implicitly condemns any conduct or act which is contrary to the nature of an individual. In this sense, Malaysians should turn to these five pillars as they provide the guidelines to society to maintain its communal values. The *pengkid* phenomenon is worrying in the sense that people who interact with *pengkid* may be at a higher risk of being influenced by them. Problems can ensue in family institutions if a married woman is attracted to another woman (*pengkid*). Similarly, social and psychological development of a young girl can be affected if her social circle is contrary to her own *fitrah*.

The gender identity crisis, such as *pengkid*, requires a clear identification mechanism. If the *maknyah* or transvestites can be identified by their dress and behaviour, how can we identify the *pengkid*? What mechanism can

be used to identify and recognize a *pengkid*? It is to answer these questions that this research was undertaken to specifically suggest and develop indicators that can be used to determine whether or not a female is a *pengkid*. In this research, the proposed indicators can be divided into two: physical indicators and behavioural indicators. The physical indicators refer mainly to the physical appearance of a *pengkid*; while the behavioural indicators relate to the behaviour and actions of a *pengkid*. It has to be noted that the research intentionally focuses on developing the physical and behavioural indicators because these are the overt indicators and are considered as basic conditions to identify whether or not a person is a *pengkid*. Many other conditions can be studied and adopted as identification mechanisms. At the very least, the research hopes to suggest ways on how a *pengkid* can be identified.

A historical overview of *pengkid* in Malaysia has been provided by a study conducted by Yuenmei (2012). According to her, the word *pengkid* originated from the term, 'Punk kids'. The term, 'Punk kids' was highly associated with young male teenagers who embraced the punk culture in the late 1970s. The label also applied to masculine-looking female teenagers who are sexually attracted to same-sex individuals. It is believed that the *pengkid* identity and community have been around in Malaysia, especially in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur starting from the late 1970s.

The National Council of *Fatwa* (*Majlis Fatwa Kebangsaan*) has ruled that *pengkid* lifestyle is illegal and strictly prohibited. This *fatwa* states: "*pengkid*, that is, women who have the appearance, mannerisms and sexual orientation similar to men is *haram* in Islam. Ironically, *pengkid* is becoming more apparent in society, indicating the spread of the mannerisms associated with *pengkid*. More and more cases relating to *pengkid* have been reported in print and electronic media nationwide. In fact, a Google search of the word *pengkid* results in 435,000 hits in just 0.25 seconds. This is an indication that *pengkid* is no longer an isolated issue in the society.

There are still very limited written and empirical sources on issues involving *pengkid* in Malaysian literature. One of the recent studies conducted on *pengkid* is by Zhooriyati and Hashim (2014) which focuses on understanding the relationship between problems faced by *pengkid* and their level of stress. The study has found that the stress levels of *pengkids* are manageable and of a similar level with control subjects. Many other studies have focused on LGBT in general and not exclusively on *pengkid*. Similarly, in the Western literature, numerous studies have been conducted to understand the various issues of homosexuality and LGBT. In general, those studies have found that these LGBT individuals are at a high risk of medical, mental and psychological problems. For example, Savin-Williams (2001) reveal that the gay male, lesbian and bisexual youth have significantly more psychosocial adjustment problems than heterosexual youth. Similarly, Williams *et al.* (2005) indicate that sexual minority youth in the community report more emotional and behavioural difficulties than heterosexual adolescents. Hegna and Wichstrøm (2007) report that homosexuals are prone to suicidal attempts compared to heterosexuals. In addition, Vadevelu and Jamir Singh (2015) show evidence on the involvement of transgender youth with drugs to overcome their emotional distress. Furthermore, homosexuals have been found to be the high-risk group to suffer from mental disorder, such as conduct disorder (Mustanski *et al.*, 2010) major depression and neurotic disorders (Mustanski *et al.*, 2010; Chakraborty *et al.*, 2011; Wang *et al.*, 2014) anxiety disorder (King *et al.*, 2008) and obsessive-compulsive and phobic disorders (Chakraborty *et al.*, 2011).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research adopted both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative method was conducted through a survey questionnaire, while the qualitative method involved a series of structured interviews with a few target groups and people, such as religious leaders, academicians, medical doctors, lawyers and social workers as well as several *pengkid*. The survey was conducted using a self-developed questionnaire. Random purposive sampling was used whereby people that met the research criteria in terms of vicinity or place of residence were chosen to participate in the survey. The questionnaire had 109 items divided into several sections representing the respondents' profile and respondents' knowledge about *pengkid*, respondents' agreement on the physical factors

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of *pengkid*, respondents' agreement on the behavioural factors of *pengkid*, respondents' perception of the culture (budaya) of *pengkid*, respondents' perception of the factors that contribute to the *pengkid* problem and respondents' understanding and practice of Islam. Respondents were asked to respond to each statement to evaluate their perception of and agreement on *pengkid* issues as indicated earlier by using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 'highly agree' to 'highly disagree'.

A total of 1,298 residents of Seremban (520), Port Dickson (442) and Rembau (336) participated in the survey. These three districts were chosen on the basis of the uniqueness of each district. For example, Seremban is the capital city of Negeri Sembilan, and the people of Seremban are multiracial. Port Dickson was chosen due to its popularity as a tourist attraction, while the people of Rembau were selected due to the unique *Adat Perpatih*, whereby the respondents represented both traditional and modern ideologies (*Refer to Table 1 for demographic details*).

In addition to the survey, the structured interviews adopted the snowballing technique. A total of 19 people were interviewed. Six of them are *pengkid*, three are the female companions to *pengkid* (*wanita pendamping*) and one is a friend of a *pengkid*. Another six persons who were interviewed are experts with various specialised knowledge, including medicine, law, psychology and sociology and *Fiqh* knowledge. There were also three representatives from non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The responses of respondents were analysed using descriptive statistical analysis. Each response indicated in the questionnaire was measured individually. Frequency and percentage for each response were calculated. Since one of the main objectives of this research is to develop indicators to identify *pengkid*, evaluation of the frequency and the percentage was sufficient because it can give an indication of the frequency and structured agreement on a particular aspect of a *pengkid*.

Qualitative analysis was used to analyse the data collected through the structured interviews. The analysis started with the transcription process whereby all interviews were transcribed verbatim. It is to be noted here that the transcription process was done as it was spoken. This means that in most cases, the researchers did not translate the language and dialects used by interviewees to ensure data authenticity. Three key stages of qualitative analysis were used. The first stage was open coding. This stage involved an analysis of each line of the interview transcript to provide a particular theme to these lines. The second stage was axial coding. All the themes were then grouped into specific categories to get a better understanding of the issue. The final stage was selective coding whereby the researchers chose the themes or categories relevant to the research.

Table 2 presents the findings on knowledge and awareness of *pengkid* among respondents. A total of 997 (77.81%) out of the 1,290 respondents know and are aware of the existence of *pengkid*, while 293 (22.57%) of the respondents stated that they do not know about *pengkid*. These findings indicate that the percentage of respondents who know about *pengkid* is high. Thus, it can be interpreted that *pengkid* has become very noticeable and obvious to the extent that the community of Negeri Sembilan is aware of their existence.

Table 3 refers to the findings on the ways by which respondents know about *pengkid*. As stated, 41.60% of the respondents indicated that they know about *pengkid* through observation, while the rest know about *pengkid* through reading and socialisation (27.89% and 28.89%, respectively). This can further support the above statement that *pengkid* have made themselves noticeable to the extent that the people of Negeri Sembilan know *pengkid* mainly through observation. This means the *pengkid* are now more easily discernible and can easily be recognised.

Table 4 describes the percentages of respondents who agree with each of the statements that describes the physical indicators of a *pengkid*. The percentages were compiled and placed according to a ranking order. This means that the statement with the highest percentage indicates that it is agreed to by most respondents and can be used as the main physical indicator of a *pengkid*.

Qualitative findings on the physical indicators of a *pengkid* also support the quantitative findings described earlier. The people who were interviewed are highly agreeable on the physical indicators of a *pengkid*. According to them, these physical attributes can be clearly seen and thus can be used or adopted as indicators to identify *pengkid*.

The following is an example of an excerpt from a *pengkid* on the physical aspects of a *pengkid*. This point is supported by other *pengkid* who were also interviewed:

> "[*Pengkid*] has a very short haircut but they do not prefer bald. [They normally have] straight hair style and spike, upright, using hair gel. [Their physical] body [is] flat chested, wear curved or cloth wrapper, highlights straight body shape, stays away from feminine look, does not show feminine body shape. [While] the face is masculine, some are good looking" (*Pengkid*-1)

With regards to the internal physical aspects of a *pengkid*, it can only be known by those who are close to the *pengkid*, for example, the *pengkid's* girlfriends. According to them, a *pengkid* does not have an Adam's apple, does not have a male sexual organ, wears male accessories, does not wear make-up, does not wear a bra and likes to wear a waist girdle. The following is an excerpt from a *pengkid's* girlfriend:

> "One day I saw with my [own] eyes something that a woman should not do *(*Respondents did not elaborate what the pengkid did*)*. [My friend] Nurul is proud to be called a man, smart and so on. Nurul had gambling habits, drinking wine and involving with the gang .... she admitted herself to me .... Nurul smokes [cigarattes], walks like a man's style, has a short hair, wears big shirts and loose pants, uses a rough voice, and wears chest girdle. She takes a long time to get ready and take a bath" (*Pengkid's* girlfriend)

The findings from this research suggest some physical indicators that can be used to identify a *pengkid*. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data show that the physical appearance of a *pengkid* that can be clearly observed by the public can be adopted as an identification mechanism to recognise a *pengkid*. It is suggested that a female who has 75% of the criteria (i.e., 12 out of 16 physical indicators), can be identified and referred to as *tegar* or a hardcore *pengkid*. A female who has 50% of the physical indicators (i.e., eight out of 16 physical indicators) is referred to as *pengkid pertengahan*. Lastly, a female who has 25% of the physical indicators (i.e., four out of 16 physical indicators) can be referred to as *pengkid tidak tegar*.

Table 5 highlights the percentages of respondents who agree with each of the statements that represents behavioural indicators of a *pengkid*. Similarly, the percentages were compiled and placed according to a ranking order. This means that the statement with the highest percentage indicates the statement most respondents agree to and can be taken as the main behavioural indicator of a *pengkid*.

Based on the qualitative findings on the behavioural indicators of a *pengkid*, almost all of those who were involved in the interview agree with the behavioural indicators of a *pengkid* as stated in the questionnaire. Generally, their opinions can be divided into two categories: explicit behavioural aspects and implicit behavioural aspects. The former refers to the actions or behaviour of a *pengkid* that can be clearly observed and noticed. For example, a *pengkid* smokes, walks, acts and reacts like a male, speaks hoarsely and likes to hold and hug females. The implicit behavioural indicators, on the other hand, refer to the action or behaviour of a *pengkid* that is not obvious and can only be known by those who are close or have an intimate relationship with the *pengkid*. Such actions include having sexual interest towards females and having sex with females.

The followings are some excerpts from *pengkid* that support the behavioural indicators of a *pengkid*.

> "Style of conversation like a man. They use of rough language such as "gua", "lu" and so on. They use rough voice. Some of them really have rough voice because they are used to it. The walking style is just like men. For those who have long been a *pengkid*, it's hard for people to identify whether she is actually a woman. The way they sit, eat, laugh like men. They laughed loudly ". (*Pengkid*-1)

"*Pengkid* usually walks, talks and does something really like a masculine man. They can be identified through their social groups. Usually in the group, there are some *pengkid* and some normal women who are usually also [their] couples to the *pengkid*." (*Pengkid*-2)

Based on the above quantitative and qualitative data on the behavioural indicators of a *pengkid*, it can be concluded that there are clear indications of a *pengkid*'s behaviour which can be used to identify and recognise a *pengkid*. It is suggested that a female who has 75% of the criteria (i.e., nine out of 12 behavioural indicators), can be identified and referred to as a hardcore *pengkid*. A female who has 50% of the behavioural indicators (i.e., six out of 12 behavioural indicators) is referred to as *pengkid pertengahan*. Lastly, a female who has 25% of the behavioural indicators (i.e., three out of 12 behavioural indicators) can be referred to as *pengkid tidak tegar*.

Table 6 presents the statements on the factors that contribute to the *pengkid* problem as agreed to by the respondents. Generally, external or environmental factors are perceived to contribute significantly to the *pengkid* problem. These environmental factors include peer influence and pressure, problematic family background and influence from the media. Interestingly, a statement on single-sex school is perceived as a contributing factor by more than 50% of the respondents. The reason for this agreement must be explored and discussed further.

4. CONCLUSION

The Shariah Law in Malaysia states that, *"any man who wears women's clothing and acts like a woman in any public place for immoral purposes is guilty of an offense and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding one thousand ringgit or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year or both"*. This means the *maknyah* or transvestites can be identified and convicted. It is suggested that this law should also apply to *pengkid* who can harm the society as much as those with gender identity crises. The problem of *pengkid*, if allowed to continue, can become a norm for the society, and when this happens, people will no longer think that it is wrong. Therefore, it is hoped that the findings of the research can create awareness among the community and sensitise them to the importance of tackling and curbing the *pengkid* problem. Pressure groups can create awareness and emphasise the dangers of *pengkid*. Seminars or national discourses on *pengkid* should be organised by both NGOs and government agencies in Malaysia. Various parties, such as the Department of Religious Affairs, religious scholars, statutory bodies and non-statutory bodies, NGOs, civil and Syar'ie lawyers and scholars should be invited to discuss the gravity of the issue of *pengkid*. In addition, the legal authorities should also play an active role in enforcing the necessary laws related to *pengkid*. Most importantly, parental monitoring of children's activities is significant to curb the prevalence of *pengkid*.

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APPENDIX

Table-1. The Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	525	40.45
Female	770	59.32
No response	3	0.23
Age	335	25.81
13-20	644	49.61
21-30	145	11.17
31-40	110	8.47
41-50	36	2.77
51-69	28	2.16
Ethnic group		
Malay	1176	90.60
Chinese	31	2.39
Indian	33	2.54
Bumiputera	41	3.16
Others	9	0.69
No response	8	0.62
Religion		
Islam	1209	93.14
Buddhism	29	2.23
Hinduism	31	24.03
Christianity	15	11.62
Others	10	0.77
No response	4	0.31
Marital status	857	66.02
Single	411	31.66
Married	23	1.77
Divorce	1	0.07
Others	6	0.36
No response	-	-
Academic background		
Primary school	18	**1.38**
PMR	90	**6.93**
SPM	541	**41.68**
STPM	144	**11.09**
Certificate	151	**11.63**
Diploma	197	**15.18**
Bachelor's	131	**10.09**
Master's	18	**1.39**
PhD	0	**0**
Others	0	**0**
No response	8	**0.62**

Source: Findings on demographic details of respondents

Table-2. Identification and Awareness of the Existence of *Pengkids* Existence

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	997	77.81
No	293	22.57
No response	8	0.62
Total	1,298	

Source: Findings on knowledge and awareness of *pengkid* among respondents using descriptive statistical analysis

Table-3. Ways by which *Pengkid* are Identified

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Reading	362	27.89
Observation	540	41.60
Socialisation	375	28.89
No response	21	1.62
Total	1298	

Source: Findings on the ways by which respondents know about *pengkid* using descriptive statistical analysis.

Table-4. Physical Indicators of *Pengkid*

Highest Rank	Physical indicators	The percentage of respondents who agree with the statements (%)
1	Hides breasts	91.6
2	Wears male clothes	91.2
3	Wears male accessories	91.1
4	Has short hair	91.0
5	Does not have male sexual organ	90.5
6	Wears male shoes	89.9
7	Does not have Adam's apple	87.9
8	Does not use any make-up	87.9
9	Hides buttocks	86.1
10	Wears chest girdle	84.8
11	Wears large and loose trousers	83.4
12	Wears large and loose shirts	80.8
13	Does not reveal the hip or waist shape	76.4
14	Does not wear a bra	58.6
15	Has a masculine appearance	53.5
16	Has a male body structure	48.2

Source: Findings on the percentages of respondents who agree with each of the statements that describes the physical indicators of a *pengkid* using descriptive statistical analysis.

Table-5. Behavioural Indicators of *Pengkid*

Highest Rank	Behavioural indicators	The percentage of respondents who agree with the statements (%)
1	Behaves like a man	93.2
2	Walks like a man	92.3
3	Attracted to females	90.0
4	Likes to hold, embrace or hug a woman companion	85.0
5	Has sexual interest in other females	84.3
6	Likes to pamper female companions	83.4
7	Smokes cigarettes	79.5
8	Speaks hoarsely	78.2
9	Speaks with a strong tone	75.3
10	Has sex with female companion	75.3
11	Hates men	59.5
12	Admires men (to the extent of wanting to be a man)	59.3

Source: Findings on the percentages of respondents who agree with each of the statements that represents behavioural indicators of a *pengkid* using descriptive statistical analysis.

Table-6. Factors that Contribute to the *Pengkid* Problem

No.	Factors	The percentage of respondents who agree with the statements (%)
1.	Peer influence and pressure	91.3
2.	Problematic family background	84.0
3.	Mass media influence	74.4
4.	Personal curiosity	72.9
5.	Influence from other *pengkid*	72.5
6.	Lack of attention from significant others	72.3
7.	Effect from failure in love	71.1
8.	Lack of love from parent(s)	68.5
9.	Environment in which a *pengkid* grows up	67.0
10.	Single-sex school	66.8

Source: Findings on the statements on the factors that contribute to the *pengkid* problem as agreed to by the respondents using descriptive statistical analysis.