

## The Antecedents of Fear of Violent Crime in Selangor, Malaysia

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### Abstract

*The aim of this paper is to study on the factors toward fear of violent crime. The respondents for this study are whom involved as community police in their residential area. The main objective of the research is to investigate the relationship between perceived risk of victimization, media effects and lack of trust and confident toward police with the community fear on crime. The statistical result shown that perceived risk victimization has strongest relationship with fear of crime ( $r=.892$ ,  $p<.005$ ). Hence, the Royal Malaysia Police must ensure they run the security task effectively to ensure community hold the trust and confidence on them in ensuring harmonious environment preserved.*

**Keywords:** *Fear of Crime, Community Police, Violent Crime*

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### INTRODUCTION

Extensive research has shown that citizen satisfaction with the police is influenced by their perceptions about neighborhood crime and disorder (Johnson, 2016). Numerous studies have found that citizens had lower overall satisfaction and confidence in the police when they had higher levels of fear of crime in their neighborhood and higher perceptions of neighborhood disorder (such as trash, graffiti, abandoned cars, loud music, loitering homeless people, etc.) (Johnson, 2016). In Malaysia, violent crime rate has spiked up, for the first quarter of year 2016 (January to April), 4.6 percent increase in crime rate happened throughout the nation (Acryl Sani, 2016). This issue should be cured before other problem happened in the country. There are many reasons and factors that lead to the violent crime which will cause undesirable effects and impacts to an individual. According to Wittebrood and Junger (2002), violent crime can be described as a serious community issue, which is about the physical brutality in the house and outside the house, and also intimidating deeds and physical attack inside the house or even outside. The examples of the activities that consider as crimes such as rapes by the stranger, robbery either small or grand theft, murder, and burglary. The violent crime also can be described as the behavior of a person, against the property that he or she intend to threat, or an attempt to do some physical harms to the other person (Witterbrood and Junger, 2002). The seriousness of the physical harm depends on the weapons or guns that they use for it. Crime is the important basis of the uncertainty of

the people in a society and for this reason it will be the main sign for the security of the public in some countries, specifically in Malaysia (Tang and Lean, 2007). Inequalities in the income of the population are one of the factors towards the violent crime (Fajnzylber et al., 2002). The economic condition and bad social background make people tend to act outside their control.

Police force is always perceived by the public as being corrupt and lack of integrity. In recent time, the public has been critical of the police force regarding the high incidence of crime, perception of corruption in the Royal Malaysia Police (Polis Diraja Malaysia- PDRM), general dissatisfaction with the conduct and performance of police personnel and a need to see improvements in the service provided by the police (Khan, 2015). Due to that, the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) need to tackle the issue on community attitude of the force, particularly with those entrusted with the task enforcement (Fadzell, 2015).

## **FEAR OF VIOLENT CRIME**

There are many factors that lead to the degree of fear, such as in terms of gender, sex, age, any related experiences with crimes, their living styles, and others (Howard et al., 1999). Different people respond with the crime at different ways. Some of the people avoid the crime by defend themselves from the danger and not close with anything that can make them involves in the crime (Howard et al.,1999).

The people sometimes out of their control to push the police force to act to solve the problems. Sometimes the people are being too negative and they think that the police force do not do their job well and let the violent crimes to happen in the country (Frederick et al., 2013). Some other scholars also claimed that the actions of the people cannot be control as they think that the police and the authorities are having political manipulation and does not care about the social issues arise in the community (Johnson, 2016). The confidence of the people towards the police force is being downgraded because when they are becoming the victims of the crime, they seek for the police for getting protection and if the police cannot solve the problem in fastest way, they think that the police are ineffective and fail to do basic tasks (Loader, 2016). The people who are directly or indirectly experienced with the violence crime commonly become the people who are very negative and do not want to take a solution for their problem. They are only put the blame towards police force, government and media that provide violent crime stories to the public (Witterbrood andJunger, 2002). They think that their problem cannot be solved and they tend to isolate themselves, do not want to seek for treatment, and do not want to cooperate with the police force as they think that police force cannot do anything and they are ineffective (Grabosky, 1995).

The media also play important role to spread the news about the crime and the policies and strategies that launched by the government and police force. However, media also give bad perception of the people towards them. Nowadays media has shown extensive program or stories about criminal (Howard et al., 1999). This has made the people who watch the television having high level of fear because they get the experiences from the stories that they watch. Some researchers found out that fear of crime can lead to the victims to gain their protection, such as bringing the weapons to everywhere that they think not safe, learn on how to have self-defense techniques, having anti-crime equipment which is CCTV and many others (Doran and Burgess, 2012). Fear is more likely related with physical disturbance, such as heartbeat rate increases, body temperature drops, unable to speak, nervous, and others (Doran and Burgess, 2012). The media that reported with several issues regarding violent crime either in television, newspapers and others can make the people have a feeling of fear towards the crime (Edwards et al., 2008). It is sometimes important to the people to prepare themselves with anything bad happen in their life and thus it can make them take proper action when engaging with the bad situation. The media play vital role to make sure that the fear of violent crime among the society can be controlled (Beale, 2006). It is because when the media comes out with the stories and the solution for the violent crime, the people will more alert and they can take the story as learning process in the future. Thus, it can be said as the public fear of violent crime can be controlled through involvement and encouragement from the mass media (Cashmore, 2014).

## **METHODOLOGY**

PerBickman and Rog (1998), descriptive research or statistical research provides data about the population or subjects being studied; however, it can only describe "who, what, when, where and how" of a situation instead of what caused it. Therefore, the researchers use descriptive study by utilizing the technique of survey to specifically answer the research questions. Descriptive research is used when the objective is to provide a systematic description about the relationships between police and community in overcoming the fear of violent crime that is as factual and accurate as possible. This study embarked by using quantitative cross sectional design with correlational analysis used in analyzing the data.

The researchers used purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling, is a type of non-probability sampling technique (Zhen et al., 2006). Non-probability sampling focuses on sampling techniques where the units that are investigated are based on the judgment of the researcher (Snedecor, 1939). Usually, the sample being investigated is quite small. The main goal of purposive sampling is to

focus on characteristics of a population that are of interest, which will best enable you to answer your research questions (Toppet al., 2004).

The sample involved in this study are people involved as community police in nine district in Selangor which are District of Petaling, Hulu Langat, Klang, Gombak, Kuala Langat, Sepang, Kuala Selangor, Hulu Selangor and SabakBernam. Therefore, this design is significance and appropriate to be used by the researcher in assessing the antecedents that lead to fear of violent crime.

## FINDINGS

### *Descriptive analysis*

Table 1: *Profile of Respondents*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Age</i>	<20 years	4	2.4
	20 – 25 years	20	11.8
	26 – 30 years	53	31.4
	31 – 35 years	51	30.2
	>36 years	41	24.3
<i>Marital</i>	Married	123	72.8
	Single	45	26.6
	Divorced	1	0.6
<i>Race</i>	Malay	114	67.5
	Chinese	31	18.3
	India	21	12.4
	Others	3	1.8
<i>Gender</i>	Male	102	60.4
	Female	67	39.6

**N:169**

The above table shows majority of the respondents are male with 60.4% while female respondents are 39.6%. The age group of the majority respondents were between 26 – 30 years old with 31.4%, followed by the group of respondents between 31 - 35 years old with 30.2%, 36 – 40 years old and above, with 24.3%, 20 – 25 years old with 11.8% and less than 20 years old with 2.4%. Majority of the respondents in this study were Malay with 67.5% followed by Chinese with 18.3%, Indian with 12.4% and other races with 1.8%. Regarding to the marital status of the respondents, majority of the respondents was married with 72.8%, followed by the single respondents with 26.6%, while the divorced respondents only 0.6%.

## Normality Test

The normality test was used in measuring the goodness of data for the study. From table 2, the assumption of normality which is +2 and -2 is not violated as all the variables used in the study fall within the values.

Table 2: *Normality Test*

No.	Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis
1.	Perceived Risk of Victimization	-0.52	0.31
2.	Media Effects	-1.09	-0.66
3.	Public Trust Towards Police	0.57	-1.09
4.	Fear of Violent Crime	1.83	-1.56

## Correlational Analysis

Table 3: *Pearson Correlation*

VARIABLES		1	2	3	4
1	FEAR OF CRIME (DV)	-			
2	MEDIA EFFECTS (IV1)	.668*	-		
3	PUBLIC TRUST TOWARDS POLICE (IV2)	.402*	.462	-	
4	PERCEIVED RISK OF VICTIMIZATION (IV3)	.892*	.847	.815	-

N:169 \*sig: <.005

Table 2 shows that all the independent variables were positively correlated with fear of violent crime. Perceived risk of victimization has the strongest positive relationship with fear of violent crime as contrast to the other independent variables which is  $r = 0.892$  and  $p < 0.05$ . Media effects is positively influenced the fear of violent crime which indicates  $r = 0.668$  and it was significance as the significance level was  $p < 0.05$ . Public trust towards police also shows positive relationships towards job performance with  $r = 0.402$  and  $p < 0.05$ . Thus, this shows that all the independent variables were strongly correlated with job performance. This was supported by the Donald et al., (2013) who also studied the relationships that involved all three

independents variables strongly affecting the fear of violent crime. Perceived risk of victimization was the most influential factor that affecting the level of fear over the violent crime as it was the strongest relationship with the fear of violent crime. Lim et al., (2012) firmly argued that citizens in Malaysia become mentally depressed day by day due to some reasons including become a victim of violent crime and resulting in the increase of the level of fear not only towards the violent crime but also to live like they normally do.

## **DISCUSSION**

As mentioned before, perceived risk of victimization showed the strongest relationships with the fear of violent crime. Fear of victimization will depend on who is viewing the crime stories. Research indicates that residents in high crime urban areas who watch a large amount of television are more likely to be afraid of crime (Farrall, 2004; Farrall et al, 2006). The finding of the study shows that the way one's perceived the jobs done by police is a very crucial issue in reducing the fear over the violent crime among public. However, when it comes to locating the sources of how people perceived the police task, there is a tension regarding the concepts of what the public think that the police should be doing (Loader, 2016). The major perception was the job of the police is primarily to reduce the crime and provide safety. These findings were aligned with the statement by Khan (2015) which stated that perceived risk of victimization, public trust towards police and media were the factors that affecting the fear of violent crime among public. Some scholars commented on the semantic ambiguity of fear when applied to people's attitudes towards crime and its likelihood. Gunter (1987) claimed that there was a distinction to be made between the conceptual judgement of fear of crime and people's perceptions of their likelihood of being victimized. As some may have perceived them to be at high risk of criminal incidents, yet remaining unafraid.

The discussion above reveals the complexity of fear of crime as a concept and suggests that theoretical approaches will need to reflect the diversity of the phenomenon. In addition, the complexity of fear of crime also reflects the need to fully explore the concept of perceived risk of victimization (Keon, 2001). Hindelang et al. (1978) ultimately proposed a lifestyle theory of victimization: as personal victimization tends to occur disproportionately away from home, those people who engage in more activities away from home, especially leisure activities, have higher risks of victimization than persons who do not engage in leisure activities as frequently. Cohen and Felson (1979) likewise contend that risk of victimization depends on the social characteristics of the victims. According to the routine activities theory, people's everyday activities determine victimization risk by controlling the presence and interaction of three conditions: motivated offenders, suitable targets and lack of capable guardianship. Motivated offenders are persons "with both criminal inclinations and the

ability to carry out those inclinations” (Cohen and Felson 1979:590). Suitable targets include those persons and objects that are high in value, visible, and accessible. Capable Guardianship is protection provided by regular citizens as they go about their daily activities, or routine activities. Capable guardianship is often overlooked in sociological research because it implies the absence of crime and is difficult to measure. According to the routine activities theory, these three conditions are necessary for a direct-contact predatory violation, any act in which “someone definitely and intentionally takes or damages the person or property of another” (Cohen and Felson 1979:589), to occur. Persons are believed to decrease capable guardianship and increase target suitability (or risk) when they spend time away from their home or family.

The complexity of public opinion on crime is further evidenced in the fact that, although concern about crime ranks more highly than any other issue of public concern, spending on crime is not at the top of the list of preferred Government spending priorities and when asked to identify where State Governments should be spending money, the community appears to perceive spending on law and order as a lower priority than spending on health and education (Weatherburn et al. 1998). Public concern about crime may be driven more by media representations of it than by actual or anticipated personal experience. The low priority assigned to spending on law and order, relative to health and education, on this account, may just reflect the fact that these areas directly affect many more people than does crime. This is a difficult hypothesis to test using existing data because, although a good deal of research has been conducted both within Australia and overseas on public concern about or fear of crime, very little work has been conducted on the perceived risks of criminal victimization for example in Australia the only published studies on the subject appear to be those by Indermaur (1990) and the Queensland Criminal Justice Commission (1994). Furthermore, the fact that public perceptions of the risk of crime are conditioned to some extent by information about its incidence (absolute frequency) rather than by information about its prevalence (relative frequency, i.e. frequency per head of population) provides a further reason why media treatment of crime may unintentionally tend to distort the public impression of its prevalence and seriousness. Consider, for example, that in 1993 Australia recorded a total of 300 murders which means that a news story on murder in Australia can be run, if a media outlet so chooses, on average, approximately every 30 hours (Weatherburn et al. 1998).

## **CONCLUSION**

This study drew from a single model to hypothesize that perceived risk of victimization had a stronger effect on fear of violent crime in Malaysia. There are some

studies that consider perceived risk victimization as the motivating factor for fear of crime which shaping the way public perceived the works of police force and the neighborhood disorder which later create the sociological of fear to be a victim (Bryant and Shoemaker 1988; DeFronzo 1979; Smith and Uchida 1995; Kleck 1991; Sheley et al. 1994; DeJong 1997). These findings also have highlighted the effects of media and public trust toward the authority which supported the model to know the antecedents that for fear of crime. However, the relationship between risk perception and fear of crime needs more exploration. The existence of a relationship between the concepts is well established but how this relationship is formed remains uncertain. Other variables that might have an impact on fear of crime must be examined, e.g. neighborhood incivilities, socioeconomic status. A different angle would be to look at how people, depending on their ethnic background or sexual disposition, experience the fear of hate crime and the risk of being exposed to crime. After all, the aim is still in the right line which to support the national policy which relate to national key result area which is to ensure harmonious environment created in this nation. As we move toward high income develop nation, the numbers of crime too must be reduced to ensure better nation can be inherited to the next generation of Malaysian.

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