

# Perceptions of People on Police Efficiency and Crime Prevention in Urban Areas in Malaysia

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Crime cases from snatch thefts to murders, are becoming increasingly common in Malaysia according to the database of the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP), the current overall Crime Index in Malaysia was 147,062 for 2013 compared with 65,237 in 1977. The database also revealed that the number of property crimes reported in this country has always exceeded the number of violent crimes. Although in 2013, crimes related to property are higher (117,687) than violent crime (29,375), the gradual increase in the latter does worry Malaysians. Likewise, Malaysian Government had implemented a “safe community” concept, inspired by the Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF), a non-government organization, as they were concerned that the threat of violent crime and non-violent crime would eventually reduce the quality of life for many individuals. The concept is very important to the public as it is perceived as improved safety for the public with less crime. This study analyzes the public safety through their perceptions on the effectiveness of the policeman and suggesting few prevention actions against crime. The data were collected using a self-administered survey questionnaire. Specifically, this study focuses on the more developed states in this country. From the cross tabulation analysis, the majority of respondents agreed that the police are effective in controlling crime. Approximately, 72.1% of respondents felt that the police are efficient in controlling crime.

*Keywords:* crime, crime prevention, perceptions of people, police efficiency, public safety, quality of life

## Introduction

According to government data compiled in the first *Malaysian Well-being Report* released in 2013, the well-being of Malaysians has significantly improved over the past 12 years. Abdul Wahid Omar, a minister in the Prime Minister’s Department, commented that the Malaysian Well-being Index (MWI) was introduced as part of the government’s motive to reassess the current economic development model to ensure that the increase in income per capita was compatible with the betterment of people’s well-being.

The MWI was developed in 2013 to reflect the well-being of the *rakyat* using 14 components covering both economic and social progress. It builds upon the Malaysian Quality of Life Index (MQLI), which was first developed in 1999 to quantitatively measure the nation’s progress in improving the citizens’ quality of life. The MWI serves as an important benchmark for formulating policies and programmes towards achieving a high-income, inclusive, and sustainable nation.

The performance of the various indicators in the MWI showed that the public were able to enjoy better

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services in terms of access to communication, education, health, housing, and transportation. Living conditions were also enhanced through improved accommodation and basic amenities, greater conservation of the environment, and increased public safety. Safe community is a situation in which people can live, work, and play safely and healthily without worry. Through the safe community concept, safety for the public is improved, crime becomes less, and productivity of the people is improved.

### **Literature Review**

Social disorganization theory was one of the most important theories developed by the Chicago School during the 1940s and 1950s related to ecological theories. The original statement of social disorganization theory by Shaw and McKay (1942) focused on crime at the community or neighbourhood level. In this theory, they specified that several variables-residential instability, ethnic diversity, family disruption, economic status, population size or density, and proximity to urban areas can influence a community to develop and maintain relationships among them.

Glaeser (1999) argued that crime is an important subject to study and because crime represents a major social problem that has been a focus in developed countries. He also described time spent combating criminal activities as a social loss since it could have been spent on something more productive crime has many effects on the daily lives of citizens. Due to the fear of being victimized, crime affects everyone adversely, not just the victims (Stevens, 1983). The consequences of criminal activities are the costs incurred, including direct costs (immediate impact) and indirect costs (long-term effect). Examples of indirect cost include fear of crime, lower level of life satisfaction, psychological issues, decreased quality of life, and other non-monetary costs. Thus, crime not only affects the victims; it also threatens the non-victims and society as a whole.

Public safety is important particularly with regards to a high quality of life. It is an essential responsibility that must be shared by the Malaysian government and non-government agencies. Thus, public safety and crime prevention play an important role in helping the people feel safe. The increasing crime levels are associated with a diminished quality of life for affected communities, including a reduced feeling of safety, loss of enjoyment in work, and leisure activities and less freedom to socialise in communities due to feelings of insecurity. In a study published in *Crime Quarterly*, Moller (2004) suggested that in terms of quality of life, householders who had experienced crime were expected to register greater dissatisfaction with their lives than those who had not. The negative impact was thought to vary according to how recently the crime was experienced and the trauma resulting from the incident.

Public safety and quality of life can also be related with the current economy situation of a country. For example, during recession and economic boom of a country the public safety might not be the same. Habibullah, Baharom, Haji Din, Muhamad, and Ishak (2014) found that during recession, when unemployment rates are relatively high, people who lost their job may be more likely to remain in or near their homes and neighborhoods, thus, reducing the number of opportunities for crime. Thus, the public safety can be influenced by a change in the economy.

Several previous studies of the relationship between police strength and crime rates have resulted in mixed findings (Loftin & Mcdowall, 1982). For example, in their study, Loftin and Mcdowall (1982) found that police strength did not influence crime rate in Detroit.

Meanwhile, in another study, Greenberg, Kessler, and Logan (1979) argued that the impact of crime on enforcement practices can manifest itself in at least two ways. First, higher crime rates tend to reduce

enforcement efficiency, and second, high crime rates might tend to increase public fear of crime and thus lead to more efficient enforcement measures.

The relationship between police and public satisfaction also has been studied by Weitzer and Tuch (2003) among Americans' overall satisfaction with the police. Their findings show that feelings of personal safety (both during the day and at night in one's neighbourhood) increase the satisfaction with policing. The findings also reveal that the perception of effective crime control is a strong predictor of public confidence in the police.

### **Methodology**

Specifically, this study focuses on the more developed states (Malaysia, 2001) in Peninsular Malaysia, also known as West Malaysia, which consists of 11 states and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. The study, however, focuses on only four states, which are the most developed compared to the other seven states. Based on the composite index of development in 2000, the States of Johor, Perak, Pulau Pinang, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Selangor, and Kuala Lumpur were categorized as more developed states, while Kedah, Kelantan, Pahang, Perlis, Sabah, Sarawak, and Terengganu were categorized as less developed states.

The primary data were collected using a self-administered survey questionnaire to compile the related data. The survey aimed to analyse public insecurity regarding crime especially in the more-developed states in Malaysia. For the purpose of the study, only few areas were selected for the sample of the population. Questionnaires were distributed in the following areas: Wangsa Maju, Setiawangsa, Titiwangsa, Cheras, and Bandar Tun Razak in Kuala Lumpur and Ampang (Bukit Antarabangsa, Lembah Jaya), Gombak (Batu Caves), Serdang (Balakong and Seri Kembangan), and Puchong (Sri Serdang) in Selangor. These states are among the most developed states in Malaysia, based on the level of urbanisation in the Eighth and Ninth Malaysia Plan. Secondly, based on the data from RMP, these states have the highest crime rates.

The analysis on the perception of the effectiveness of police and neighbourhood watch to control crime is only part of the whole study done.

### **Perception of the Effectiveness of Police and Neighbourhood Watch to Control Crime in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor**

The profile analysis from the surveys conducted with households in Kuala Lumpur shows that there were a total of 63 respondents: 31 males (49.2%) and 32 females (50.8%). The majority of respondents were Malay (57.1%), followed by Chinese (23.8%) and Indian (19%) respondents. Respondents were aged between 18 and 61 years.

Respondents from Kuala Lumpur and Selangor were asked few questions on concerning their perceptions of the efficiency of the police in controlling crime in their area. From the cross tabulation analysis, the majority of respondents agreed that the police are effective in controlling crime. Approximately, 72.1% of respondents felt that the police are efficient in controlling crime. From the perspective of gender, the majority of both female and male respondents agreed that the police are efficient in controlling crime. However more female respondents (30%) believe the police are inefficient in controlling crime compared to male respondents (25.87%). The percentage of respondents who appreciate police efficiency reflects the public's satisfaction with police performance. The relationship between public satisfaction and police performance has been discussed by Garcian and Liqun Cao (2005).

Compared to police efficiency, more respondents perceived that neighbourhood watch or Rukun Tetangga is not efficient in terms of controlling crime.

From the perspective of gender, 74.2% of male respondents felt that the police are efficient in controlling crime in their neighbourhood, whereas 25.8% of male respondents felt the police do a poor job in controlling crime. Meanwhile, 70.0% of female respondents felt that the police are efficient, whereas, 30.0% felt the police were inadequately controlling crime. Female respondents were less satisfied with police efficiency compared to male respondents.

In the meantime, the profile analysis for Selangor shows there were 50 respondents; 31 females (62%) and 19 males (38%). In terms of ethnicity, 56% were Chinese, 30% were Malay, and 14% were Indian.

The respondents from Selangor were also asked about their satisfaction with police efficiency in controlling crime followed by a question on the neighbourhood watch. Public satisfaction with the police was quite low; only 38.8% of respondents were satisfied with police performance. The results in Selangor almost the same as in Kuala Lumpur, where female respondents (40%) are slightly higher than male respondents in expressing the police are efficient in controlling crime. The respondents in Selangor were also dissatisfied with the neighbourhood watch in their area; only 32.7% of respondents expressed that the neighbourhood watch was efficient compared to 67.3% who were not satisfied.

Even though there is an improvement in the country's crime rate, public perceptions of safety and police efficiency are still a challenge. Thus, government through Government Transformation Program (GTP) has introduced some of the initiatives in order to provide better services to the public. Among them are *Eight-minute response time*, this is to reduce police response time from 15 minutes to eight minutes in 2015. The eight-minute mark is a world-class benchmark and ensures that police respond to distress calls as quickly as possible.

### **Preventative Action Against Crime**

Crime can be reduced by creating high-quality urban environments and developing stable in the social and moral values. High-quality environments are pleasant (both at night and day) and ensure in urban housing areas, and ensuring that open spaces, parks, and pedestrian zones are conducive to various activities so that people are confident and less fearful of crime. In addition to working toward high quality of life in urban areas the government should also aim for stability in social relationships and good moral values. The combination of these elements will ensure that the areas which are fully urbanised are a favourable place to live. However, in order to reach this level of crime prevention, funds (either public cost or private cost) are required.

This section focuses on providing general information on the preventative action undertaken by the respondents against crime. Frequent analysis was used to provide the required information, such as the use of burglar alarms, door locks, fences, dogs, and security guards as well as the neighbourhood watch. The survey included questions pertaining to different security measures; the respondents were asked about their preventive action to protect their houses from criminal activities. First, they were asked whether or not they have an alarm in their house.

Based on the survey, it was found that some of the residents have a burglar alarm to protect their house. Of all the respondents who answered this section, the majority of respondents have special locks, which are much less expensive than any type of preventive security; furthermore, a small number of respondents have dogs to protect their homes. Additionally, respondents are also protected by a high fence in gated housing areas.

For those who live in condominiums or terrace houses, they have private security guards which are usually paid for by the housing community. In addition, respondents also claimed that they have a neighbourhood watch in their neighbourhoods.

This shows that though the public are aware of, and fear, crime in their area, they still do not depend on burglar alarms to protect themselves. The majority of respondents invested in special locks to protect their house. This may be due to the cost of installing the special locks being less expensive than other alternatives.

Majority of the respondents protect their homes by investing in special locks. In addition, many respondents' houses are protected by a high fence. Furthermore, a small number of respondents' houses have a security guard and a minority of respondents have dogs to protect their houses. Of the 63 respondents in Kuala Lumpur, 74.6% of respondents have special locks to prevent criminal activities. Furthermore, 44.4% of respondents choose to protect their house with a high fence; this is only suitable for those living in a terraced house. Only 11.1% of the respondents have installed a burglar alarm and 19% of respondents have security guards to protect their house. The minority of respondents in Kuala Lumpur protect their homes by installing burglar sensors. Finally, a small number of respondents (9.5%) have dogs to protect their homes.

Similar to the respondents in Kuala Lumpur, the respondents in Selangor mostly use locks to protect their homes. Approximately, 65.3% of respondents in Selangor have invested in locks, whereas 34.7% do not have locks; 28.6% of the respondents have a burglar alarm to protect their house. Furthermore, 44.9% of the respondents have fences for protection, and 18.4% use burglar sensors to protect their homes. A total of 24.5% of respondents' houses are protected by security guards and 24.5% of respondents' houses are protected by dogs. Lastly, only 10.2% of respondents' homes are protected by neighbourhood watch.

### Conclusions

Public involvement in fighting crime will help to reduce the burden borne by the police, relevant ministries, and the government. High-density housing areas should be monitored by police officers or local authorities, and old buildings must be maintained by local authorities to ensure they are not used for criminal activities (such as meeting places for drug addicts) or any violent crime. For example, one action individuals can take is informing police officers when they will be away so the police can look after their house by patrolling their neighbourhood. Additionally, communities in urban areas should be encouraged to get to know their neighbours and other members of the community through social activities. Personal relationships will help them to look after their neighbourhood. This study shows that people in Malaysia especially in more urbanised areas are very concern about their safety and crime situation. They also perceived the police efficiency as part of their public safety.

Furthermore, public security is important in ensuring economic development and quality of life of Malaysians, and the findings of the empirical analysis suggest increasing the number of police can help to reduce crime. Accordingly, the involvement of police plays a vital part in preventing crime. The government could increase the amount of money allocated to the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP). For example, in 2008 budget, the government had allocated RM six billion to RMP. With this large amount of money, the efficiency of RMP could be enhanced through the recruitment of new officers, additions of cars to the police fleet, and motorcycles to be equipped with the police presence. This will help the police to incorporation of motorcycle patrols (additional police presence). This will help the police improve their effectiveness in controlling areas with high crime rates.

The involvement of non-government agencies and the public will help to reduce the monetary cost of crime, for example the costs involved in preventing crime and assisting victims of crime.

Various suggestions on how to fight crime have been offered by the authorities, politicians, journalists, and other ordinary Malaysians. These suggestions have included better lighting of dark places, the installation of closed-circuit televisions (CCTVs), educating the public, and, inevitably, greater law and order enforcement.

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