

CRIME PREVENTION, FEAR OF CRIME AND VICTIMISATION: A CASE STUDY OF PANGSAPURI PELANGI, GEORGE TOWN, PULAU PINANG

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ABSTRACT

Crime has always been a focus of public interest. The public concern generated from such an event often demands more resources being directed towards crime prevention. Different approaches have been used to study crime in the residential setting. The victimisation perspective focuses on the characteristics of victims and potential victims in understanding crime. In line with this perspective, this article reports the findings of a research that examined the practices and habits of residents in preventing crime. It focused on residents' fear of crime and victimisation experience. Pangsapuri Pelangi Apartment in Penang was chosen as a case study for this research. The study involved a questionnaire survey of 199 residents. The findings show that various crime prevention measures were employed by the residents. In addition, the victimisation data suggests that more crimes occurred than what was in official police statistics.

Keywords: Crime, crime prevention, fear of crime, crime statistics and victimisation

Introduction

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Crowther, 1995) defines crime as: 'An offence for which one may be punishable by law... activities that involve breaking the law'. Siegel (2003) added that crime is a violation of societal rules of behaviour as interpreted and expressed by a criminal legal code created by people holding social and political power. Crime often creates anxiety among the public at large. One of the main reasons for this concern being the negative effects victimisation can have on the victims. It can involve property loss or damage, financial loss, personal injury and lead to negative psychological consequences such as fear of crime.

According to Greenberg et al., (1982), there are two main schools of thought attempting to account for the differences in crime rates in urban neighbourhoods. The first set of studies emphasises physical characteristics such as the spatial arrangement of buildings, street design and diversity of land use. This approach was originally inspired by Jacobs (1961) and later made famous by Newman (1972) with his Defensible Space theory. The other set of studies is concerned with the social characteristics of residents in the neighbourhoods, focusing on residential stability, racial and economical composition, and neighbourhood change. This type of research was exemplified in time was the works of Shaw and McKay (1942) at the University of Chicago. Social crime the front prevention aims to alter criminal motivations, which are perceived to lie in people rather than physical characteristics of the social environment. This is achieved by social policy-type measures such as housing, health and education policies (Graham, 1990).

Both bodies of research assume that the design of the physical environment or prevailing social conditions affects the ability of residents to exercise control over the physical space that they inhabit. In a

study on crime trends in Penang, Aldrin Abdullah et al., (2001) found that 90% of crimes recorded in Penang were against properties while violent crimes only accounted for 10% of the total crime. For property crimes, the study revealed that “breaking and entering” was the second highest recorded crime (23%) after “theft of motorcycles” (29%). However, the amount of loss under “breaking and entering” far exceeded “theft of motorcycles” and other property crimes. In the year 2000 alone, “breaking and entering” amounted to RMI6.4 million (33%) of the total recorded loss (RM50.2 million). As shown in Figure 1, for the state of Penang, most property crimes were reported to take place during night-time. Focusing on the modus operandi of “breaking and entering” during night-time, the statistics indicate that for flats and landed properties, most of the break-ins occurred through the front door followed by the window (Aldrin Abdullah et al., 2001). For traditional dwellings, the main entry was through the window followed by the back door. In Penang, for year 2000, the main trend for breaking and entering during daytime was similar for high rise and landed properties as most break-ins occurred through the front door (Figure 2). However, the two most common modes of entry for traditional dwellings were through the window followed by the front door.

In comparison, the results from the 1998 British Crime Survey (BCS) revealed that 55% of burglaries occurred through the back door of terraced and detached/ semi-detached houses (Mirrlees-Black et al, 1998).

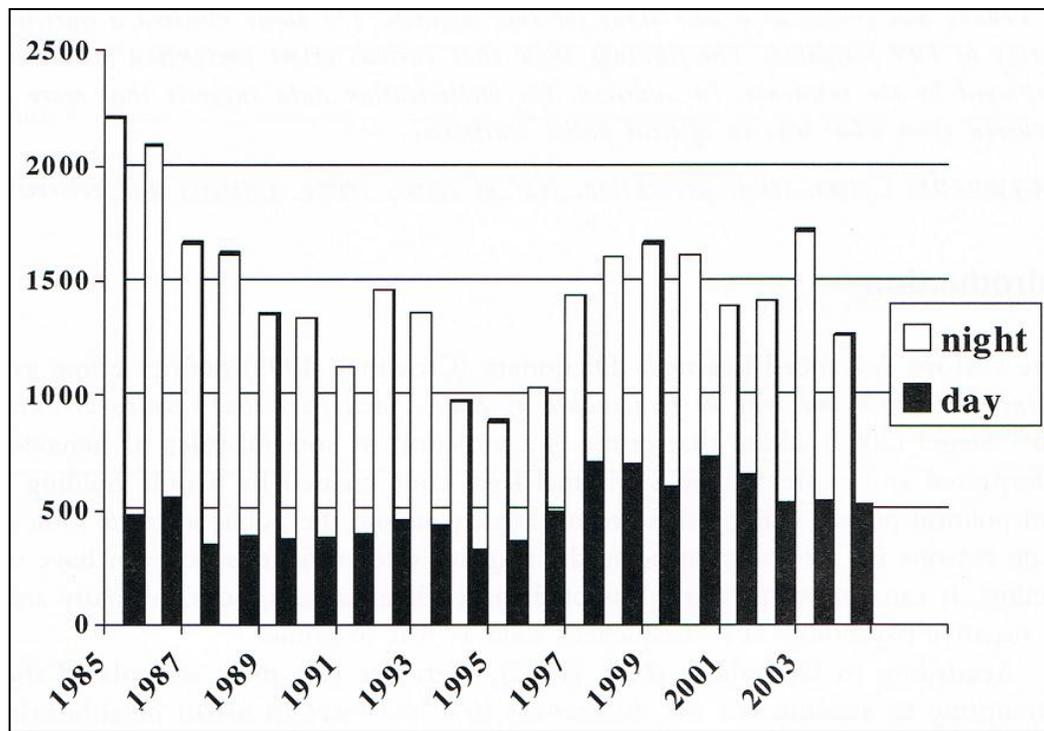


Figure 2: Breaking and Entering for the State of Penang (2000)

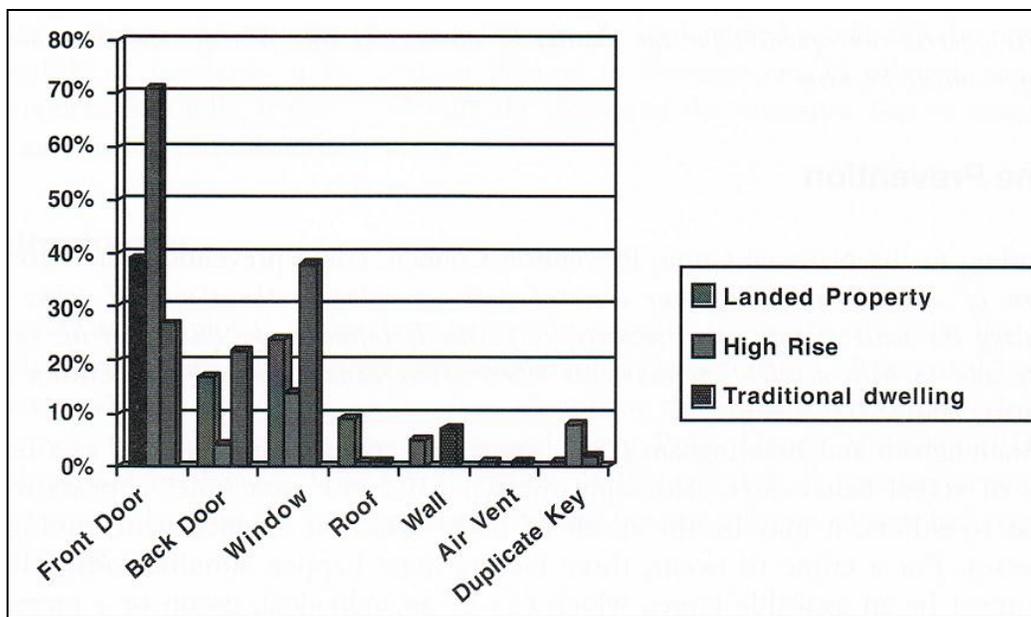


Figure 3: Breaking and entering for the state of Penang (2000)

Fear of crime

The term “fear of crime” is often used to cover different dimensions of fear such as not being prepared to go out alone at night or worry about specific offences. It is often linked to the perception and concern for safety that may or may not be the result of crime. However, what causes fear of crime is still to be ascertained. Many people have fears although they have not actually been victimised. In the early 1970s, it was thought that fear of crime was due to crime itself. However, this notion was discarded when it was found that fear of crime was more widespread than crime itself and that crime rates do not necessarily correlate well with fear of crime, even at the neighbourhood level (Taylor and Hale, 1986). According to Shapland and Vagg (1988), fear of crime is a greater social problem than crime itself because of a more substantial, restrictive and painful effect.

Similar to crime, fear of crime has several effects on individuals, community and urban neighbourhoods. First, it may lead people to be over-protective of their belongings. For example, Sampson and Wooldredge (1986) found that fear has led conducted more prosperous citizens to move out from the neighbourhood. Second, it may restrict perspective their activities, resulting in loss of social opportunities. Research suggests that people crime and who are afraid of being criminally victimised change their habits (Garofalo, 1981; Krahn and Kennedy, 1985; Riger *et al*, 1982; Skogan, 1986). Third, similar to crime, fear of crime may weaken the neighbourhood “chain” through feelings of suspicion or distrust. As Box *et al.*, (1988) argue: “Because of its intrinsically disturbing nature and its adverse consequences for the quality of community life, fear of crime has become a major social problem”.

Crime prevention

According to the National Crime Prevention Council, crime prevention refers to: ‘A pattern of attitude and behaviour directed both at reducing the threat of crime and enhancing the sense of safety and security, to positively influence the quality of life in our society and to help develop environments where crime cannot flourish.’ (Zelinka and Brennan, 2001).

Brantingham and Brantingham (1993) argue that crime must be viewed as a broad schemes of actual behaviours. Although one type of crime sometimes appears to be headquarter similar to others, it may be the result of many different incentives or etiological crime was processes. For a crime to occur, three factors must happen simultaneously. First, high crime there must be an available target, which can be an individual, group or a property. Second, there must be a person motivated to offend, and third, the opportunity to commit the offence must exist. Previous criminological research has focused mainly on the offender in understanding crime and the risk of victimisation. This includes Pangsapuri determining the social, physical and economic factors that influence people to offend. Section 111 On the other hand, other researchers have focused attention on the “opportunity income gro dimension”, exploring how changes in crime targets may reduce victimisation (Clark, the resident 1980; Clark and Mayhew, 1980; Mayhew, 1984).

However, many researchers have now moved from examining the consequences to the area, of crime as an activity of the offender to the experience of the victim, known as the victimisation perspective (Lewis, 1981). This view perceives that preventing crime is not only confined to understanding the motivations of offenders and then trying to change them. The victims’ behaviour, the characteristics of the physical and social environments also influence the frequency, type and distribution of victimisation. Changing these factors can often lead to a reduction in crime.

The involvement of the public in protecting their neighbourhood through participation in crime prevention schemes is very much encouraged by the police. This is partly due to the increasing costs of surveillance and the lack of manpower (Peel Regional Police Department, 1997). In the case of Penang, the ratio of policeman per population is reported to be at 1:400 whereas the recommended ratio by Interpol target is at 1:250 (Christopher. 2005). Studies focusing on the relationship between crime and the design environment in Malaysia are relatively few. Apart from the studies on gated communities (Nor Azhna Sulaiman and Yasmin Mohd Adnan, 2006), there has been no significant research conducted on the subject which focuses on the victims. In line with the victimisation perspective, this research is directed at the victims in order to further understand crime and to reduce the risk of victimisation.

Research objectives

There were two objectives of the study. Firstly, the study aimed to identify the practices or habits of residents at Pangsapuri Pelangi in Georgetown in relation to crime prevention. Secondly, it was to identify the degree of the residents’ fear of crime and the amount of victimisation.

Methodology

This research employed a two-stage process in selecting the study area. The first stage involved identifying the physical and demographic characteristics of potential housing schemes while the second stage involved identifying the crime levels of these housing schemes. Crime statistics were obtained from Polis Diraja Malaysia (PDRM) headquarters in Penang. Due to the nature of the research, it was important that crime was an issue in the study area and that the housing scheme chosen had relatively high crime rate.

Site Description

Pangsapuri Sen Pelangi was used as a case study for this research. It is located in Section 1 1E, Lintang Macallum 2, 10300 Pulau Pinang. It is an area of medium high- income group, situated near the seaside on the east coast of George Town. Most of the residents of Pangsapuri Sen Pelangi are from various ethnics, consisting of Malays, Chinese and Indians and work in the government sector. There are two access roads to the area. The first is by Gat Lebu Cecil and the second from Macallum Street Ghaut. The surrounding area consists of commercial buildings and an open space. To the south of the area is a 22-storey building of low cost apartments.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

The study employed a quantitative approach. A total of 250 residential units were selected from a total of 960 units of houses located within five blocks of apartments. A systematic sampling method was preferred to a simple random sampling method. Although both methods allow for generalisation, the systematic method ensured that the selection of respondents would be representative of all floors in each block. A 25% target was to ensure that the samples were not only representative but is sufficient for meaningful sub-group analysis (Prescott-Clarke et al., 1993). The head of household was identified for the study. Fifty questionnaire forms were distributed to each of the 5 blocks. After two weeks of survey, a total of 199 questionnaires were collected covering around 40 samples from each of the five blocks. The overall response rate was 77%.

The questionnaire consisted of 3 main parts. The first part covered demographic The 1 background such as working status, marital status, and age. The second part of the questionnaire covered crime prevention measures while the third part focused on fear describes, of crime and victimization.

Measuring Victimization

The victimisation study was conducted with the primary purpose of providing a more accurate picture of crime levels as well as validating the official criminal statistics provided by Penang PDRM. The questions used for measuring victimisation were adapted and modified from the British Crime Survey (BCS). It involved asking the respondents whether they have been the victims of a crime over the last 12 months prior to the survey.

Results & discussion

Background Information of Respondents

The results of the demographic variables reveal that respondents were of various if they w backgrounds. The statistical data for gender indicates that percentages of male respondents were higher (70%) than the female (30 %) respondents. In terms of age, 57.5% of the respondents were under the age of 40, 41% were in the 41-60 category and 1.5% of residents were aged 60 and above. The majority of the respondents in housing estates were married (74.4%) followed by bachelors (20.6%) and widows (5%). The occupiers were from various ethnic groups dominated by Malay (34%), Chinese (32%), Indian (23%) and other races (11%). The majority of the Malays (56%) worked deterred in the government sector, 61% of Indians worked in the private sector while 61% of Chinese residents were self-employed. The average household size for each home was in a safe between three to four people (48%). However, there were about 37% of residents living in a house with 5 or more members.

The monthly income data indicates that 24% the respondents earn between RM500 to RM1000 per month. Almost half of the residents surveyed make between RM1001 to mainly RM2000 a month

(47.2%). Twenty-four percent of the respondents are in the RM2001 as alarms RM3000 income group while merely 2.5% of the respondents earn RM300I and above per month

Crime Prevention Measures

The results reveal that a high proportion of residents (86%) watch their immediate since the neighbouring area daily in order to ensure safety. On the other hand, a small number of respondents (13%) do not look out for their neighbours giving reasons such as “minding their own business” and “busy with daily activities”. For those who watch (Table 1), 44% would watch at least once a day and 25% would watch between two to (12 1%) three times per day.

The high number of residents who were willing to look out for their neighbours would be a good deterrent to potential offenders as they provide, as Jacobs (1961) describes, “eyes on the streets”

Table 1: Frequency of Neighbourhood Watch

Frequency of neighbouring watch	Percentage
More than three times a day	11%
Between two to three times a day	25%
Atleast once a day	44%
Atleast once a week	10%
Atleast once a month	10%

Most of the respondents knew their neighbours (73%), 71% felt comfortable living with their neighbours while 81% of the respondents surveyed felt that they are accepted by their neighbours.

Findings from the survey show that 76% of respondents would tell their neighbours if they were going to leave their houses for long periods of time. Fourteen percent of them left their phone numbers while 3% actually left their keys with their neighbours. All 199 respondents checked their doors, windows and openings on a regular basis before they left their houses while 85% would leave their lights on or make their houses appear to be occupied before leaving. This is interesting since the 2004/05 BCS reported that households that were left unoccupied for five hours or more a day were more likely to have experienced burglary (3.3%), perhaps reflecting that burglars are deterred from entering occupied properties (Nicholas et al., 2005).

Through the survey, the study found that 82% of respondents kept their valuables in a safe place. However, surprisingly, 30% of the respondents also kept their keys in flowerpots, mail box or under the door mat.

Focusing on security system, the findings indicate that a huge majority of the residents had an additional security device (91 %). However, the devices used were mainly in the form of additional locks (54%) and not expensive security devices such as alarms (4%) or heat/movement sensors (2%). It is interesting to note that the 2004/ 05 BCS reported that households where there were no home security measures were far more likely to have been victims of burglary (14%) than those where there were simple security measures (2.8%) such as deadlocks on doors and window locks (Nicholas et al., 2005). The current study also found that the majority of residents who engage in more expensive security features were of Chinese

ethnicity. This is not surprising since their average monthly incomes (around RM2000) were higher compared to other races living in the area.

Pangsapuri Pelangi won the outstanding award for Rukun Tetangga participation for the state of Penang in 1999. However, only a few respondents (12.1%) reported that members of the *Rukun Tetangga* actually patrolled their blocks on a regular basis. Three-quarters of the respondents felt that *Rukun Tetangga* members do not patrol during the holiday and festive seasons. The findings also reveal that a high proportion of residents (84.4%) would want the police to patrol their blocks instead. The study found that only 130/s of the respondents were active members of the *Rukun Tetangga* group while a high proportion of respondents (87%) reported that they were not members at all. Most of the active members of the R.ukun Tetangga had been tenants in Pangsapuri Pelangi for more than three years. This is in line with findings from other studies which found that long-term occupants engaged more in property defence (Edney 1972) than short term occupants and were more territorial (Sommer, 1969; Altman & Haythorn, 1967; Aidrin Abdullah, 2001).

The occupations of *Rukun Tetangga* members are given in Table 2. The study found that 43.2% worked in the private sector, 26.6% were self-employed and 22.6% were working in the government sector. In addition, a total of 3.5% of the members were university students, 2.5% were part-time workers and another 1.5% had actually retired from their previous jobs.

Table 2: Occupation of *Rukun Tetangga* Members

Occupation	Percentage
Working in private sector	43.2%
Self employed	26.6%
Working in government sector	22.6%
Part time workers	2.5%
University Student	3.5%
Retired	1.5%

Crime and Fear of Crime

Questions regarding crime and fear of crime were based on The British Crime Survey (BCS). The findings indicate that half of the respondents (51%) were not fearful of being alone in their homes at night while 25% said that people were not safe being alone in their homes at night. Responses about safety in the home did not vary by age. However, perception of safety in the streets varied according to age. Older persons were more likely to say that they felt unsafe in their own street alone at night. This finding is consistent with a survey conducted by Kershaw et al., (2001) in which it was found that elderly men and women have higher fear levels.

According to official criminal statistics obtained from Penang PDRIVI, 24 cases of various crimes were recorded in the area during a 12-month period. These include 7 cases of car theft, 5 cases of burglary and 5 incidents of vandalism. On the other hand, the victimisation survey indicates that 17 respondents (9.4%) experienced car theft in the past 12 months prior to the survey. Since 91% of the respondents owned a car, the ratio of car theft was relatively high (at 9.4 per 100 vehicles). Focusing on the ethnicity of the victims, it was revealed that 8 of the victims were Chinese, 6 were Indians, 2 victims were Malay and one Caucasian. Attempted theft, vandalism and damage to vehicles recorded 8 cases during the 12-month

period. Focusing on theft of bicycles, the victimisation survey found that only 22 respondents out of 199 owned a bicycle. In the past 12 months, 3 incidents of bicycle theft were recorded in the area (25 per 100 bicycles).

There were 15 cases of attempted break-ins which occurred during the study period in the area. In addition, 7 respondents reported that they experienced 2 break-ins during the 12-month period. Overall, 11 per cent of the residents interviewed had experienced at least one domestic burglary in the previous 12 months. In comparison, the 2004/05 BCS reported that 2.7 per cent of households in England and Wales had experience similar crime in 2004 (Nicholas et al., 2005). Vandalism of public properties is also reported by the respondents. On the whole, 10 respondents reported that public properties were being vandalised. In most cases, they either involved graffiti or damage to public phones.

For several reasons, it is very difficult to compare police recorded crime rates with that of a victimisation survey. First, the way in which the data is recorded is different. Police statistics focuses on offences and measures the extent to which offences are committed in an area. On the other hand, a victimisation survey focuses on the victim and measures the extent to which offenders in the area commit offences. Second, the incidents from both sources were recorded at different times, although both sets of data refer to a 12-month period. Third, the official crime statistics were based on the total population of the housing scheme while the victimisation data was based on a sample of 199 respondents. Nevertheless, bearing these differences in mind, the victimisation survey indicates a higher reporting of crimes compared to that recorded by the police. This is not a unique trend as studies have shown that more crimes are recorded by victimisation surveys compared to official police statistics (Kitsuse & Cicourel, 1963; Wiles, 1975; Aldrin Abdullah 1999).

Conclusion

In order to help reduce crime, it is important to examine the habits and safety practices of the residents. The study found that most of the residents in the study area habitually watch their surrounding neighbourhood. This perhaps is due to a great feeling of “sense of belonging” among residents. In addition, many of the residents engaged in additional security measures. However, the additional measures used were very elementary in nature. Residents also ensured that their properties appeared to be occupied when they go out on holiday. The perception that this action ensures safety is well-founded since studies have shown that offenders avoid properties that are occupied or appear to be occupied. However, the study has found that some residents do not engage in good precautionary habits such as keeping their keys under the door mat and mail boxes. It is important to note that these practices should be discouraged as offenders are likely to search for keys left by residents in these familiar places. The victimisation survey conducted provides an alternative to police statistics. This is mainly due to the limitations of official police statistics. The findings of this research is consistent with other studies in which it was found that more crimes were reported in victimisation surveys compared to that recorded by the police.

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