A systemic review of Malaysian public safety programs for preventing property crime

Nurfarhana Abd Malek | Hezrin Mohd Pauzi | Normah Awang Noh

Abstract Using a comprehensive assessment of the relevant previous research, the author of this essay aims to explore the public safety programs for preventing property crime in Malaysia. It analyses English-language articles on property crime and prevention in Malaysia from a variety of significant databases, primarily Google Scholar and MyJournal. For the purpose of selecting relevant articles, literature search was carried out using the keywords including crime prevention, property crime, and safety. Two databases were mined for a total of 433 articles, and a three-step screening process yielded 30 research that fulfilled our threshold requirement for theme synthesis. The study's literature evaluation offered insight into numerous property crime prevention tactics. A greater emphasis should be placed on the social approach to minimize the crime rate, particularly among the poor. Additionally, police and residents should be encouraged to work together to prevent property crime in Malaysia.

Keywords: property crime, public safety programs, crime prevention

1. Introduction

Crime, often known as an offence, is a significant societal problem that refers to an action that contravenes legal statutes. Crime is further characterised as an action that causes harm to both an individual (referred to as the victim) and society as a whole. The consequences stemming from criminal activities can produce varying degrees of short- and long-term adverse effects on the daily life of society, including property or money loss, fear of crime, reduced life satisfaction, increased psychological concerns, reduced quality of life, and other non-monetary costs. Additionally, crime raises the government's cost by increasing the number of police, officers, jails, mental health providers, and arranging campaigns or plans to combat criminal activities.

Property crime has a huge impact on individual’s financial and mental wellbeing, making it a serious national social concern (Pak & Gannon, 2023). Despite a recent decline in property crimes, the general populace remains fearful about crime. The 2015 Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported that approximately 7,993,631 property crimes were committed in the United States (US) contributing to a net property loss of $14.3 billion (Yin, 2017). Surprisingly, government statistics reported that over half (67%) of property crimes in the US were unreported mainly due to the absence of further legal actions. Nigeria has a high crime rate and is ranked 17th least peaceful state among other countries by the Global Peace Index (Badiola, 2017). In 2017, the National Bureau of Statistics reported 134,663 cases of offences in Nigeria, with property crime accounting for the majority of cases reported. Nearly one-third of Nigerian have been burglarized or robbed.

Property crime in Malaysia is one of the most serious crimes reported by the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP), such as housebreaking and theft or burglary (day and nighttime), vehicle theft (lorries, vans, motorcar, motorcycles, and scooters), snatch theft, and other theft types. Property crime accounted for approximately 80% of all crimes in Malaysia despite the number of cases decreasing by 44% from 93,735 in 2015 to 52,344 in 2020 (RMP, 2020). In 2020, theft (16,725 cases) was the most reported property crime followed by motorcycle theft (16,059 cases), housebreaking (14,040 cases), motorcar theft (4,599 cases), and other vehicle theft (921 cases). Nonetheless, the downward trend is not significant enough to alleviate social fear and anxiety (USM, 2008).

Public safety is essential for high quality of life (Ishak, 2016). Increased crime rates have been linked to a lower quality of life in affected communities, including a heightened sense of insecurity, loss of work enjoyment, and less freedom for socializing and recreation due to insecurity. Public safety and crime prevention are critical role to keep the people or communities safe. Both aspects require Malaysian government to collaborate with non-governmental organizations and strengthen property crime prevention. Thus, the Malaysian government implemented a ‘safe community’ concept inspired by a non-governmental organization, the Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF) following concerns that crime threats would eventually reduce many individuals’ quality of life. The ‘safe community’ concept is highly important to the public as enhanced public safety would lessen crimes.
High property crime rates are not a new phenomenon in Malaysia, and they may be influenced by environmental aspects, economics, social, political, demographics, and other factors. Economic theory predicts that as opportunities and economic progress grow, crime should decline. That’s because as legal ways of making money become more lucrative, the incentive to engage in illicit behavior declines (Ajide, 2021). Literature has highlighted four crime prevention approaches to ensuring public safety: (a) the legal system or the enforcement of policed control systems (Dantzker & Robinson, 2002); (b) social approaches (Bennet, Holloway & Farrington, 2006; Simons, 2002; Syarmila Hany, 2008; Welsh & Hoshi, 2002); (c) approaches regarding the crime perpetrators (Paul Michael Cozens, Saville & Hillier, 2005); and, (d) approaches through environmental design (Brantingham & Brantingham, 2005; Blakely & Synder, 1997; Jacobs, 1961; Newman 1972). Although many approaches were employed to combat crime, the effectiveness of these methods in Malaysia remains unclear, such as the relationship between property crime prevention and public or community safety (quality of life, fear of crime, and crime statistics).

Despite alarming statistics and growing concerns about property crime, few studies have emphasised property crime prevention in Malaysia and the topic has been largely neglected. Thus, the study aims to fill the literature gap by conducting and establishing a systematic review:

1. To investigate property crime prevention towards the public or community (residential) safety in Malaysia by:
   a. monitoring the authority enforcement efficiency;
   b. social control or community monitoring, including neighborhood watch and voluntary patrols;
   c. social issues;
   d. physical environmental (security design), residential security control features (CCTV), and physical elements, such as fencing, padlock locking systems, and alarm devices.

2. To investigate the relationship between property crime prevention measures and public or community safety (quality of life, fear of crime, and crime statistics) in Malaysia.

The systematic review findings have important implications for researchers, policymakers, and responsible agencies, such as enabling insurance companies to intervene in property crime prevention, human resource allocation, and law enforcement to decrease future property crimes. Understanding the most effective methods for preventing property crime in Malaysia, as well as the strategic circumstances that have the most impact is essential to fostering excellent public safety environments in the country.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Search Strategy

The study selection was based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) statement guideline as depicted in Figure 1 (Moher et al., 2009). The study focused on the extant literature on property crime prevention strategy and public safety in Malaysia. Articles on property crime prevention strategy and public safety in Malaysia from 2010 to 2021 were identified using databases, such as Google Scholar and MyJournal. The general keywords used to search articles in Google Scholar and MyJournal were ‘crime prevention’, ‘property crime’, and ‘safety’. A query string, which is a mixture of symbols and coding that allows the combination of all keywords when searching simultaneously to prevent repetitive searches, was used in the database. All references to the selected articles and review articles were reviewed to complement the database searches.

2.2. Selection and Extraction of Articles

The selection process was initiated by compiling all the journal article details using Microsoft Excel in case of article repetition in both databases. Subsequently, the ‘duplicate value’ function was used to discard the duplicate records. If duplication was present, data from MyJournal were retained while Google Scholar data were deleted. The filtering process was performed to prevent data recurrences during the information analysis process.

Study selection was conducted independently by two authors using the following steps:
(i) analysing the article titles;
(ii) reading the abstracts;
(iii) reading the full texts.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study selection were defined by two authors (see Table 1). A third author was required to resolve the dispute in cases of disagreement at each step. The final decision was made based on consensus or majority. The data of interest were exported and registered in a standardised spreadsheet post-study selection.

2.3. Data Extraction and Analysis

All paper characteristics in the review are listed in Table 2. The papers were analysed under the following headings: (i) type of crime, (ii) research instruments used, (iii) study design and sample size, (iv) predictor outcomes, and (iv) the main findings of each paper.
Table 1 List of inclusion and exclusion criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Inclusion</th>
<th>Exclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literature type</td>
<td>Journal articles (full)</td>
<td>Review articles, journal articles (abstract only), editorials, conference working papers or proceedings, books, book series, book chapters, and monograph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>2021-2010</td>
<td>Before 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Non-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Other countries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 Study diagram flow based on PRISMA.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Study Characteristics

Figure 1 depicts the study selection flowchart. Initial searches yielded 325 non-duplicate articles from two databases: 178 journal articles from Google Scholar and 147 journal articles from MyJournal. The abstracts and titles of the selected journal articles were reviewed to ensure that citations met the inclusion criteria. Overall, 218 articles were excluded after screening the title and abstract because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. Additionally, 107 articles were thoroughly examined with 77 being excluded during the full-text screening. Hence, the study consisted of 30 articles were included in the study. Figure 1 depicts a PRISMA-based study diagram.

The study identified 30 journal articles that met the methodological inclusion criteria in the review (Table 2). Three of the 30 articles focused on vehicle theft and burglary respectively. One article examined the hotspot area of snatch theft, five
articles analysed the prevalence, root cause, and consequences of property crime, while the remaining 18 studies investigated crime prevention strategies. The reviews were organised based on the intervention setting and three core settings were categorised: (1) social approach, (2) physical environment design, and (3) legal system or the enforcement of policed control systems.

3.2. Social Approach

Individual and neighbourhood poverty levels, according to the studies mentioned above, can influence criminal behaviour. One study employed spatial analysis to examine the impact of property crime rates on house income and poverty level (Zakaria & Abdul Rahman, 2016). Poverty was the primary factor associated with a higher rate of property crime in East Coast states. Although the poverty rate has decreased from 14.9% (2002) to 4.0% (2009), it remained high compared to Kuala Lumpur, which had rates of 0.5% and 0.7% in 2002 and 2009, respectively.

Household income and property crime rate demonstrated a positive relationship. Lower crime rates were found in the states with a higher household income, such as Johor, Selangor, and Kuala Lumpur. Specifically, Kuala Lumpur recorded the highest mean household income of RM4,930 in 2002, rising to RM5,488 in 2009. A regression analysis was carried out to evaluate the root cause of property crime, specifically car theft (Zulkifli et al., 2016). Studies reveal the increased number of foreigners in Malaysia as one of the major causes of increased crime. In 2020, Abdul Lasi and Yunusi reported that foreigners, unemployment, and poverty are the main factors causing increased crime rates in Kuala Lumpur. Thus, strategies to improve individuals’ financial status and better regulation of the number of foreigners should be implemented in order to reduce crime rates and ultimately provide a safer and better quality of life.

3.3. Physical Environmental Design

The Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategy received the most attention in the studies reviewed. Crowe and Zahm (1994) defined CPTED as a principle that assures crime prevention during the initial planning stages in order to reduce crime occurrence (Crowe & Zahm, 1994). The CPTED consists of four components: territoriality, surveillance, maintenance, target hardening and access control. Abdul Mohit and Elsawahli Hanan’s (2012) field study in Taman Melati demonstrated that the crime risk was higher in houses located in open spaces compared to those along the main road (Abdul Mohit & Elsawahli Hanan, 2012). In the surveillance perception, a low crime rate was predicted in houses located on the main road due to appropriate lighting installed along the road, which ultimately enhances the sense of security among residents. Nevertheless, the findings contradicted Jubit and co-workers (2020) in Kuching, Sarawak (Jubit et al., 2020) which found that hot spots for property crime varied by time and location. Interestingly, the current study discovered an uptrend crime rate during holidays and festive seasons.

The CPTED implementation aimed to improve an individual’s quality of life, manage residents’ fear of crime and reduce crimes. Fear of crime levels were accessed in both gated and non-gated residential areas were conducted. Abdullah and colleagues (2012) performed the first population evaluation in Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor and Precinct 9B, Putrajaya (Abdullah et al., 2012). Data from 171 respondents demonstrated a significant difference between the type of residence and the fear of crime. Among the respondents living within fenced elements surrounding the residential area (M = 5.84, SD = 1.23).

The second assessment examined the relationship between CPTED attitude and practice with fear of crime in gated and non-gated residential areas (Md Sakip et al., 2012). Based on the Pearson correlation analysis, an R-value of –0.40 and a p-value of < 0.01 was obtained, thus confirming that CPTED practice and fear of crime level are independent. Meanwhile, the study demonstrated a significant relationship between the CPTED perception and fear of crime level (r = 0.36, p < 0.01).

Two studies analysed the relationship between CPTED and victimisation in several Penang areas (Bayan Lepas, Taman Sri Nibong, and Minden Heights) through different analysis methods: partial least squares (PLS) path modelling and structural equation modelling (SEM) correspondingly (Marzabali et al., 2016; Marzabali et al., 2012). The application of the CPTED concept exhibited a negative relationship with victimisation. Thus, CPTED crime prevention programmes presented conflicting evidence of effectiveness.

3.4. Legal System or the Enforcement of Policed Control Systems

Reducing crime rates is one of the most important missions for maintaining the quality-of-life standards. The role of the government in crime prevention is to protect individual and property while also providing a criminal justice system. Law enforcement and police control are common strategies used by the government. The budget allocation for police expenditure has been enhanced to increase workforce and purchase more advanced equipment to improve the police control system. Thus, higher police expenditure will increase police force efficiency and effectiveness, thereby increasing the likelihood of arrest and decreasing a criminal’s incentive to commit crimes.

A cross-sectional study conducted in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor found that approximately two-thirds of the respondents agreed police were more effective in controlling property crime rates than neighbourhood watch or Rukun
Tetangga (Ishak, 2016). A survey carried out in nine geographic areas of Kuching demonstrated that cooperation between police and citizen resulted in a lower crime rate (Lau & Ali, 2019). Approximately 80.6% of citizens are actively involved in crime prevention activities due to the belief that the crime rate would reduce and create a safer resident area. Nonetheless, the obtained data contradicted Habibullah et al. (2014) where the police control system produced no difference in Malaysian property crime rates (Habibullah et al., 2014).

Future research into the effectiveness of crime prevention strategies for reducing property crimes in Malaysia should assess the efficacy of novel technological solutions as well as review known effective methods but no supporting evidence exists. Property crime studies should conduct outcome evaluations on the effectiveness of prevention strategies and a more comprehensive systematic review, to keep citizens and assist policymakers in policy revision.

There are numerous simple things that can be taken to improve the neighbourhood. First and foremost, by establishing a rapport with your neighbours and the local police department, you will raise awareness and make it easier to effect change in your community. Furthermore, install security cameras all around your house as an additional measure are advisable to deter crime in the neighbourhood.

4. Final considerations

The articles reviewed in the study provided an insight into various property crime prevention strategies. More attention should be focused on the social approach to reduce the crime rate, specifically among the poverty group. Furthermore, cooperation between police and citizens should be encouraged to reduce property crime in Malaysia.

Acknowledgment

The work was carried out with assistance from university grant (CMU-1065177*).

Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

References


Badiora, A., 2022. Nigerian property crime could be reduced if neighborhoods were better designed. The conversation


https://www.malque.pub/ojs/index.php/mr


