

# AN INVESTIGATION OF DETERMINANTS IN SHAPING THE COMMUNITY FEAR OF VIOLENT CRIME IN SELANGOR

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**ABSTRACT:** *Currently, in Malaysia, the level of fear over violent crime is high, thus it shows that the citizens feel less confidence and trust towards the police regarding reducing crime. According to a recent media report, 52.9 per cent of the population in Malaysia was affected by the fear of violent crime. This issue has become worsened and has to be cured before other problems happened in the country. There are many factors that lead to the violent crime and this issue will lead to the undesirable impacts to an individual. Thus, this paper investigated the relationships of the public trust towards police and media effects in shaping the community fear of violent crime. Respondents of this study comprised of both communities and police from 12 districts in Selangor. A sample size of 169 was taken for this study. This study used the correlation analysis to identify the relationships between the variables. It was found that that media effects and public trust and confidence towards police have positively influenced the fear of violent crime among public in Selangor. Therefore, new media such as social media should play a good role by disseminating the information related with crime prevention not portray the negative stories that related with crime.*

**Keywords:** fear of crime, crime reduction, media effects, trust and confidence, community-police engagement

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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 also burglary. The violent crime also can be described as the behavior of a person, against the property that he or she intend to treat, or an attempt to do some physical harms to the other person [4]. 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.

Inequalities in the income of the population are one of the factors towards the violent crime. The economic condition and also the social background that makes people tend to act outside their control. Violent crime is basically seen as a severe social issue. It is difficult to tackle this problem, because it comes with the political plan. It is also difficult to see the basis and also the growth of the violent crime. The media has been given big influence towards the crime and as the result, this problem usually becomes unpredictable [4]. Even though there are several crimes that reported by the victims, but not all of the reports are informed by the victims or the witnesses. It is important for the police to get the report from the witnesses because it will make the police to make investigation about the violent crimes.

In addition, fear of violent crime is a common issue nowadays. Many people feel scared of crime, and they think that they will be victimized at any time. 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. Different people respond with the

crime in different ways. Some of the people avoid the crime by defending themselves from the danger and not close with anything that can make them involved in the crime [1]. In Malaysia, it has been proven that Selangor had the highest violent crimes recorded, which are 91,962 cases as the year 2009. The following states that recorded high cases are Kuala Lumpur and Johor. Perlis had recorded the lowest cases of violent crime, which are 1,240 cases as the year of 2009. There are still arguments about the increased crime rates in Malaysia. This has made the people in Malaysia feel insecure and this affects the people's lifestyle either in a good way or vice versa. The policies that have made by the government regarding the violent crimes also give impact to the way of life of the citizen. The efforts made by the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) and the mass media are also giving well and somehow it gives problem to the society.

The police force and the government have to take action in order to reduce the crime that happens in the country. Public trust towards the police force is very crucial for reducing the fear of crime among the public. Previous researches proven that the level of public fear over crime will be decreased when their level of trust towards the police was high [11]. Many programs and policies have been organized for reducing the fear of crime among the public, particularly in hot spot areas whereby there is a high degree of risk for crime happened in the certain area [18]. The media also play important role in order to spread the news about the crime and the policies and strategies that launched by the government and police force. However, the media also give bad perception of the people towards them. Nowadays media have shown the extensive program or stories about criminal. 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. Fear is more likely related with physical disturbance, such as heartbeat rate increases, body temperature drops, unable to speak, nervous, and others.

Fear of crime is a manifestation of a feeling that one is in danger. Fear of crime is not an inherent characteristic of individuals, but rather something that may come and go, depending on and influenced by one's experiences, especially as they relate to one's position in society. Besides that, violent crime is basically seen as a severe social issue. It is difficult to tackle this problem, because it comes with the political plan. It is also difficult to see the basis and also the growth of the violent crime [6]. The media has been given big influence towards the crime and as the result, this problem usually become unpredictable. Even though there are several crimes that reported by the victims, but not all of the reports are informed by the victims or the witnesses. It is important for the police to get the report from the witnesses because it will make the police to make investigation about the violent crimes.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The following objectives were put forward to guide the conduct of the study:

- i. To investigate whether the media affect the community fear of violent crime since they get most of their crime information from the media.
- ii. To find out whether lack of trust and confidence in the police was a significant factor in shaping the community fear of violent crime.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

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. 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 a vital role to make sure that the fear of violent crime among the society can be controlled [21]. 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. The other scholars claimed that the media give a wide range of violence. The fear of crime, violence also give bad effect which are affecting the health of the people, emotional problems, and lead to the negative impact to the lifestyle of the people [18]. Some other scholar said that the people learn about the crimes in the television, newspapers and other sources of media. They take the news as their preparation and know more about the crime exposure, the effect of crime, the source of the crime and others [1]. This will help the people prepare what type of crime that they will face and how to overcome the problem or take proper action in order to avoid the crime.

The mass media are the main information that gives the biggest impact to the public fear of crime. It has been proven that the media can give solution to the problem that occur and reduce the victims of crime. The people that have watched or read crime stories argue that the experiences they get directly only come into action when the crime is directly exposed to them [19]. Some people are only relying on the mass media to get the information. The media that more focus on entertainment such as comic books, movies, and television

can also lead to the violence of the people, ruins the moral value of the people exposed the bad attitude of the people and many others [18]. The good impact of the media towards the fear of crime is that the media make the people more aware about the crimes and the people will feel more secure when they know about the crime [20]. It gives awareness to the people in preparing for the criminal issues from happening around them. The media also act as the reflector to the society and also the government. They will be the intermediaries between the government and the community in terms of giving the message in easiest way. [21]. The media contents regularly shaped their news or stories based on the demand of the viewer, which is based on demographic factors in order to produce the violence issue in the media. The newspapers also give effect to the people in a cost saving way because they don't need to pay more in order to get the news regarding violence crime and so forth from the government. This has proven that the media can give the best way in order to reshape the society and give awareness of the people towards the violent crime, and thus can indirectly reduce the crime rate in the country [21].

Some other scholars [12] found that the media gives a different perception for different people who are watch or read the media report. Some of them claimed that the media do not give effect to the crime, but the media is one of the resolutions in overcoming the problems of violent crime. It gives awareness to the people in preparing for the criminal issues from happening around them. News that generates through broadcast network can give more attention to the viewers' about the crime issues[12]. Thus crime news is more frequently broadcasted through commercial radio and the television. In a real situation, the media are commonly seen as being accused of overstressing about the risk of victimization, and this can cause the people see the world as scary and mean. The misinterpretation of the media also can make the people get confused and increase the political problem in the country as for making sure that the right political part can maintain and improving law and order.

The public service is one of the pillars of the National Integrity System. Due to that, the government is committed to eradicating corruption and developing a highly ethical society. Therefore, as civil servants, they should conduct themselves with integrity, fairness and honesty. In dealing with public as consumers, civil servants must be sympathetic to their problems, must act promptly towards consumer problems and complaints, being efficient and unbiased. Poor public service delivery may lead to the negative perceptions of the public. Malaysia's position in the Transparency International (IT) Corruption Perception Index(CPI) had dropped from 23rd in 1995 to 56th position in 2009 (Performance Management and Delivery Unit, 2010). Moreover, our position continues to decline from 56th position (CPI: 4.4) in 2010 into 60th position (CPI: 4.3) in 2011 [9]. As a result, corruption creates a loss to the Malaysian Government. For example, Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMUDAH) are estimated that corruption cost Malaysia as much as RM 10 billion a year, or 1 until 2 percent (%) of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) [7].

The NKRA on Reducing Crime was conceived in 2009 as a response to the rakyat’s growing concerns towards rising crime rates in Malaysia. At that time, crime was reportedly the second most important issue to the rakyat after the economy based on the various surveys conducted [7] Therefore, the NKRA on Reducing Crime identifies the need to improve public perception on the police performance and to enhance the public’s confidence in the police force. Therefore, in order to create a fundamental change on the management of crime and improve police performance, a study on public perception of the police is essential as it shows how the public views and assesses the local police can directly shape the way they respond to the police, the political support and cooperation they give to the police, and their willingness to participate in police and community anti-crime programs and effort.

In recent times, 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 [2]. Due to this, tremendous effort has been made to eradicate crime in Malaysia in recent years. The government has come out with Government Transformation Program (GTP) led by Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak. GTP is formulated in accordance with the principles of 1 Malaysia, People First, and Performance Now. The GTP is intended to provide all Malaysians an access to improve public services irrespective of race, religion and region. The GTP, with its seven National Key Result Areas (NKRAs) and eight Strategic Reform Initiatives of the New Economic Model, provides for the strategic framework and a new ecosystem for the Public Service.

In relation to that, the community fear of crime has made the people itself regarded the police as being corrupted, ineffective in carry out the duties in safeguarding the nation and also misused their power in improper ways. The scholar states that the police sometimes comes out with different figure of the crimes and portrays manipulation stories about the crimes to make the people more scared to move around [22]. This must be something that occurs behind the allegations of the police force, and it is the common factors that wear away the public trust on the police. The police must make sure that there will be mutual understanding between the police and the community in making sure the fear of violence crime will be reduced [10]. It is difficult to get mutual cooperation between the police and the public because there must be different opinion between the police and the public itself that may interrupt the solution from being able to make. Several serious violent crimes happened in the country but there is no one reported about the crime because the people get no assurance from the authority and the government. Thus, for them there is no need to tell the authority if the problem still cannot be settled down.

According to Commissioner Datuk Seri Mohd Bakri Zinin, the lack of concern among the public towards the warning from police is one of the important factor that leads to the community fear of violent crime. The criminals would have worried if people get in touched and concern about any issues happen surrounds them. They will difficult to make their

move if the people are looking and taking care about each other, regardless of races and religion. Poor cooperation may result on the increasing number of crimes for being happened. The police that take the full commitment in doing their job will feel demotivated if the people do not trust them and do not want to cooperate with them [17]. This can make the other serious violent crime issue to happen. Thus, the issue of lack of trust and cooperation will be the factors that lead to the community fear of violent crime. The problem will make the people having a feeling of antagonism about the police force and will be difficult in securing the public cooperation. The crime rates will furthermore increase if the people are unwillingly cooperating with the police force in overcoming the issues [23]. Participation of the police force with the community is important in order to make the people feel grateful and being appreciated. The sense of belonging between the people in the community can make the people aware about each others problem and take care of each other. Thus it can make the criminal difficult to do crimes in the community. The level of social control among the citizen can help the police force to do their work and reduce the violent crime [13].

**4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

In this study, the snowball sampling technique was adopted in selecting the participants to ensure that the respondents were the right respondents for this study. They are comprised of both communities and police from 12 districts in Selangor. 200 Questionnaires were used for data gathering and answering all the questions in this research but only 169 questionnaires were successfully collected by the researchers. The data obtained from the self-distributed questionnaires were analyzed to meet the objectives of the study. The findings will be used for reframing the current approach so that new strategies can be deployed for greater public and police cooperation. The implications of the findings, recommendations and suggestions for further research would also be given. The findings of this study were as the followings:

- i. To investigate whether the media affects the community fear of violent crime since they get most of their crime information from the media**

**Table 6.1 Correlations matrix between variables**

VARIABLES	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1 MEDIA EFFECTS	<b>4.81</b>	<b>0.79</b>	<b>.668</b> **	(1)	-	-
2 PUBLIC TRUST TOWARD S POLICE	<b>5.21</b>	<b>0.46</b>	<b>.402</b> **	<b>.462</b> **	(1)	-
3 FEAR OF VIOLENT CRIME	<b>5.20</b>	<b>0.53</b>	<b>.892</b> **	<b>.847</b> **	<b>.815</b> **	(1)

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

Table 6.1 showed that media effects positively influenced the fear of violent crime among public in Selangor which indicated r = 0.847 and it was significant as the significant value was p<0.01(Table 6.2). In Malaysia, public knowledge

of crime and justice is largely derived from the media. Most of the studies about media effects on the fear of violent crime questioning whether coverage of sensationalistic and violent crime create fear among public or not [24]. Moreover, frequent exposure to media coverage of crime may lead individuals to overestimate the risk of personal victimization [25]. The relationship between media presentations and fear of crime is dependent on the characteristics of the message and the audience.

It means that the presentation of large amounts of local crime news engenders increased fear among the public [8]. Besides, the effect of local news on fear of crime is stronger for residents in high crime areas and those who experienced victimization .

**ii. To find out whether lack of trust and confidence in the police was a significant factor in shaping the community fear of violent crime.**

Table 6.2 showed that Public trust and confidence towards the police also positively influenced the fear of violent crime among public in Selangor which indicated  $r = 0.815$  and it was significant as the significant value was  $p < 0.01$ . This finding shows that 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 desire to see improvements in the service provided by the police [26]. The public perceives the police as being corrupt, abusing their power and ineffective in carrying out policing work. The issue of lack of public confidence towards the police force will make public having a feeling of antagonism about the police force and will be difficult in securing the public cooperation.

**Table 6.2 Correlational of Independent Variables and Dependent variable**

ITEMS	STATISTICS	VALUE	P-VALUE
MEDIA EFFECTS	Pearson Correlation (r)	.847	0.000
PUBLIC TRUST TOWARDS POLICE	Pearson Correlation (r)	.815	0.000

\* Dependent Variable: Public fear of violent crime

**5. CONCLUSION**

It is evident that the fear of violent crime among public influenced by the media and the public confidence on the police performance in combating crime and curbing corruption. Recently, like a traditional media, new media such as social media is being used as another tool which is to engage communities in fighting crime. Therefore, the media especially new media, should play a good role by disseminating the information related with crime prevention not portray the negative stories that related with crime.

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