

PERCEIVED RISK OF VICTIMISATION AMONG INDIVIDUALS RESIDING IN CRIME HOTSPOT AREAS

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ABSTRACT. *Perceived risk of victimisation has been studied in relation to different types of crime, neighbourhood disorder, concentrated disadvantage, and urbanity. Echoing to this notion, this research was carried out to identify the perceived risk of victimisation among individuals residing in crime hotspot areas in Sarawak, Malaysia. Data was quantitatively collected among 365 respondents from three districts namely Kuching, Sibul, and Miri. The result of the study shows that majority of the respondents are highly afraid of sexual abuse, physical abuse, house breaking, theft, and fraud. It is deemed important to identify the perceived risk of victimisation among individuals residing in crime hotspot areas; thus, the predictors of contextual risk factors can be identified to propose crime prevention strategies that target vulnerable groups within the community.*

Keywords: Crime, Hotspot Area, Perceived Risk, Victimisation

I. INTRODUCTION

Urban expansion in contemporary time and rapid economic growth have contributed to mass migration, uncontrolled population, and increased poverty rate. As a result, these problems are contributing to a significant rise in crime rates. On a fundamental level, the increased crime rate heightens fear of crime among community members and diminishes an individual's well-being and mental health outcomes [1]. According to Reid et al. (2020) [2], perceived risk of victimisation is described as a cognitive response to the likelihood of being victimised. Myriad research output unfolds that exposure to community violence may impact an individual's well-being and social functioning. For instance, hearing or witnessing violent behaviour in the community may result in traumatisation, reduced sense of mastery over the environment, or unbalanced emotional regulation, and increased fear of personal safety [3,4].

Research examining the link between violent crime and perceived risk of victimisation unveiled that individuals who are deemed weaker, vulnerable, or defenseless have regularly experienced a fear of being victimized [5]. According to Patel et al. [3], Adlakha et al. [6], and Higgins [7] perceived risk of victimisation is contributed by multiple risk factors such as (i) individual vulnerability, (ii) previous victimisation experience, and (iii) neighbourhood environment. Besides, De Wall et al. [8] stated that perceived risk of victimisation causes an individual to avoid certain places or situations that could possibly lead to victimisation and/or evoke psychological consequences such as insecurity, stress, anxiety, and alienation.

Prior research work indicates that perceived risk of victimisation may heighten the fear towards crime and significantly mediates the effect towards individual factors (e.g., age, gender, and victimisation) [9,10] and social factors (e.g., social disorganization, and social incivilities) [4,6]. Furthermore, Danielsson [11] discovered that an individual tends to display a higher level of fear of becoming victims especially if their neighbourhood is associated with a greater incidence of social incivilities (e.g., gangsterism, beggars, and inconsiderate neighbours) or physical incivilities (e.g., dilapidated buildings, vandalism, broken windows, and abandoned cars).

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The research objectives of this study are to:

- (i) Identify the profile demographic of the Dayak communities residing in crime hotspot areas in Sarawak, Malaysia.
- (ii) Measure perceived risk of victimisation among the Dayak communities residing in crime hotspot areas in Sarawak, Malaysia.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

A cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data from 365 respondents to measure the perceived risk of victimisation among Dayak communities in Sarawak, Malaysia. The survey questions included sociodemographic questions about respondents' gender, ethnicity, residency area, and type of housing.

The respondents were also required to answer questions about perceived risk of victimisation. The research instrument used in this study is the Fear of Crime Survey developed by Ferraro (1995) with the reliability value of 0.80. Some of the survey questions were modified to suit the study context and to increase the respondents' understanding, reduce ambiguities, and facilitate quick responses.

Sample and Location of Study

The study data was gathered among the Dayak (Iban, Bidayuh, and Orang Ulu) communities residing in Kuching, Sibul, and Miri districts. These districts were chosen as the locations of study since they have been classified as crime hotspot areas in Sarawak. Due to the traveling restriction during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were recruited online and by word of mouth. A total of 365 respondents participated in this study based on non-random sampling.

Procedure

The data collection began in September 2021. The researcher formatted the questionnaire for online use and made it available through Google Form. The questionnaire contained a consent form that includes questions such as (i) "Do you belong to Dayak ethnicity (Iban, Bidayuh, or Orang Ulu)" and (ii) "Do you reside in Kuching, Sibul, or Miri district", before being granted access to the survey. If the participant did not answer "yes" to both items, they were not allowed to continue.

For the current study, the inclusion criteria required respondents to be 18 years of age or older, belong to the Dayak ethnicity (Iban, Bidayuh, or Orang Ulu), reside in Kuching, Sibuh, or Miri district, and be able to read English or Bahasa Malaysia, as the survey was prepared in both languages. Conversely, individuals under the age of 18 were not included as respondents, as they are unable to consent to participate in the study without parental permission.

Data Analysis

The obtained data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Meanwhile, a descriptive analysis was employed to measure the perceived risk of victimisation among individuals residing in crime hotspot areas in Sarawak, Malaysia.

Ethical Consideration

The respondents' participation in this study was completely voluntary and individual responses were recorded anonymously. The study objective was also clearly stated in the survey form. Besides that, it was made compulsory for all the respondents to tick the "YES" checkbox in the Google

Form that denotes their consent to take part in this study. No provision of benefits or incentives was given to the respondents.

IV. RESULT

The study results are presented in two primary sections, namely (i) demographic profile, and (ii) perceived risk of victimisation among individuals residing in crime hotspot areas in Sarawak, Malaysia.

Demographic Profile

A demographic profile essentially represents the respondents' basic information. Based on the descriptive analysis, most of the respondents were from the Kuching district (50.1%), females (74.8%), belonged to the Iban ethnicity (69.9%), and resided in terrace housing (43.8%) in the urban areas (77.0%).

Perceived Risk of Victimization

Perceived risk of victimisation encompasses five different aspects including (i) sexual abuse, (ii) physical abuse, (iii) house breaking, (iv) theft, and (v) fraud. Table 1 presents the respondent's perceived risk of victimisation.

TABLE 1 Perceived Risk of Victimization

No.	Statement					
		Not At All Afraid	Not Afraid	Not Sure	Afraid	Very Afraid
Sexual Abuse						
1.	How would you feel if you were sexually assaulted by someone unknown to you?	3.0%	4.7%	10.1%	13.7%	68.5%
2.	How would you feel if you were sexually assaulted by someone known to you?	4.1%	3.8%	11.0%	11.5%	69.6%
3.	How would you feel if you were sexually assaulted while you are unconscious?	2.2%	3.6%	12.6%	14.0%	67.7%
4.	How would you feel if someone tries to touch or kiss you without your consent?	3.6%	5.2%	10.4%	15.9%	64.9%
Physical Abuse						
1.	How would you feel if someone tries to kill you?	3.8%	2.2%	6.8%	7.1%	80.0%
2.	How would you feel if you are extorted with a knife?	2.7%	2.7%	6.8%	12.1%	75.6%
3.	How would you feel if you are attacked using a volleyball/scissors/wood/bottles/stones?	3.0%	2.2%	11.2%	19.7%	63.8%
4.	How would you feel if you are physically assaulted when using public transport?	2.5%	2.5%	12.3%	14.2%	68.5%
House Breaking						
1.	How would you feel if an unknown person breaks into your home when you are away?	2.7%	3.8%	12.1%	17.3%	64.1%
2.	How would you feel if an unknown person breaks into your home damaging the gate and windows?	1.9%	3.3%	10.7%	19.5%	64.7%

3.	How would you feel if an unknown person breaks into your home and absconds your money and valuables?	2.7%	2.7%	9.0%	20.5%	64.9%
4.	How would you feel if an unknown person breaks into your home and forces you to engage in sexual activities?	1.4%	2.2%	8.5%	12.1%	75.9%
Theft						
1.	How would you feel if someone broke into your car?	1.9%	2.5%	10.4%	16.7%	68.5%
2.	How would you feel if your money and/or valuables are stolen by force when you are in a public area?	1.1%	3.3%	10.7%	20.3%	64.7%
3.	How would you feel if unknown person tries to steal the grills and/or fence of your house?	3.0%	6.0%	16.7%	21.6%	52.6%
4.	How would you feel if unknown person steals your electricity or water meter?	6.6%	6.8%	22.2%	21.6%	42.7%
Fraud						
1.	How would you feel if someone you know deceives and falsely accuses you of possessing drugs?	2.7%	2.2%	7.9%	16.7%	70.4%
2.	How would you feel if an unknown person hacks your bank account/credit card/ pin number without your knowledge?	1.6%	3.0%	7.9%	13.7%	73.7%
3.	How would you feel if someone sells you stolen goods at a high price?	2.7%	9.0%	2.7%	64.9%	20.5%
4.	How would you feel if you become a victim of a tourism package scam?	6.8%	22.2%	6.6%	42.7%	21.6%

V. DISCUSSION

The obtained result depicted that 80% of respondents agreed that they are very afraid if someone tries to kill them, whereas 75.9% of respondents disclosed that they are very afraid if an unknown person breaks into their home and forces them to engage in sexual activities. There is mounting empirical evidence suggesting that individuals who have been the victim of property crime are more likely to develop fear towards property victimisation, whereas being the victim of a violent crime has impact on fear towards all types of crime [2,7,12]. In a similar vein, female victims of assault usually display a greater level of fear of crime compared to non-victimised women [12].

Extensive criminological literatures unveiled that females are more sensitive towards the potential consequences and risk of victimisation compared to men [4,8]. Furthering this, Rader et al. (2020) [4] and De Wall et al. (2021) [8] noted that men do not like to admit their feelings towards fear or tend to underestimate the potential risk of victimisation compared to their counterparts. On the other hand, a few cross-country analyses showed that most of the socioeconomic indicators were found to be weak (e.g., income and gender) or had null effects (e.g., age) towards fear of victimisation however, educational achievement was a significant predictor to fear of victimisation [2,7].

An individual's perception on perceived risk of victimisation is generally based on incidents occurring in their immediate social and/or physical environment [7,9,12]. Essentially, these factors are equally important in explaining their

perception on crime. For instance, the findings obtained through this study seem to confirm that perceived risk of victimisation does not only represent the fear of becoming the victim of a crime, but it also reflects abstract worries and uncertainties in our complex society.

Intuitively, it is reasonable to assume that a high incident of crime in the neighbourhood would increase the fear of crime and escalate feelings of insecurity among the general public. For instance, 68.5% of respondents agreed that they are very afraid if someone broke into their car. As the data was collected among community members residing in crime hotspot areas, hence the concern shown by the respondents is understandable. However, is also striking when some of the respondents responded that they are not afraid if someone tries to touch or kiss them without their consent (5.2%), breaks into their home when they are away (3.8%), and steal their money and/or valuables by force when they are in a public area (3.3%).

VI. CONCLUSION

Perceived risk of victimisation is a multi-faceted construct that responds to a complex interaction between vulnerability and violent incidents. The result of the study shows that the majority of individuals are highly afraid of sexual abuse, physical abuse, house breaking, theft and fraud. Hence, it is important for law enforcement authorities to pay attention to the public's perception towards risk of victimisation, particularly among young and elderly people since they are more vulnerable and might encounter difficulties in resisting potential attacks.

This study has some limitations. For instance, the data obtained from this research were only gathered from three different districts in Malaysian Borneo (Sarawak) and focused particularly on the Dayak communities residing at crime hotspot areas hence, caution should be taken when generalising the result. Despite this limitation, it can be fairly concluded that this study has yielded important results with respect to the perceived risk of victimisation among individuals residing at crime hotspot areas in Sarawak, Malaysia.

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