Fear of Crime in Gated and Non-gated Residential Areas

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Abstract

Physical environmental elements such as gated elements are believed to have an effect towards the reduction of fear of crime in residential neighbourhoods. In Malaysia, the typical form of residences is that involving gated individual houses, while residences without gated elements are relatively a new development concept. Therefore, a survey on fear of crime among residents in housing areas with gated and non-gated residences was conducted in Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor and Precinct 9B, Putrajaya. This research discovered that respondents inhabiting a gated residential area exhibit a higher fear of crime level (M=5.84, SD=1.23) when compared to respondents living in a non-gated residential area (M=3.85, SD=1.66).

1. Introduction

Beginning from the late 1960s, fear of crime has become a major social problem demanding scientific understanding and social reaction (Renauer, 2007). Therefore, fear of crime has attracted a significant amount of research interest in recent years since it was developed as a research focus in the UK (Evans & Fletcher, 2000). Social research in Europe, North America and elsewhere regularly find widespread fear...
of crime (Gray, Jackson, & Farrall, 2008). Studies such as the European Social Survey, the British Crime Survey and the International Crime Victim Survey all substantiate the view that all across Europe, fear of crime is common and a problem in its own right, separate from crime itself (Hale, 1996). In reducing fear of crime, physical elements such as gated elements become a major factor. Hence, the gated community residential concept has caught the attention of developers and attracted popular demand due to the belief that the gated element is able to reduce acts of crime in residential areas (Blakely & Snyder, 1997; Setha Low, 2004), thus reducing fear of crime (Blakely & Synder, 1997; JPBD, 2009). However, in Malaysia, typical residential developments comprise elements of gating at every individual lot while the concept of non-gated individual residential units is still seldom applied. In Malaysia, the development of gated community residential concept entails two elements of gate namely at every individual lot and also around the perimeter of the residential area which is coupled with a security guard post at the entrance to the residential area. Thus, the practice of gated community residential areas in Malaysia is also known as a gated and guarded community which is targeted at the higher income earners (JPBD, 2009). Therefore, the objectives of this study are to investigate the feeling of fear of crime among residents in gated and non-gated individual residential areas within the Malaysian context. Gated residential areas in this study can be defined as a residential area which is fenced according to individual lots and has no control for access and egress to the housing area itself. Access and egress control is only within the individual lots and normally utilizes the fencing element or together with other security systems such as closed circuit television (CCTV), dogs and others. In addition to this, the definition used for non-gated residences in this study is referred to individual lots within residential areas that are unfenced and have no access or egress control such as gated elements, either within the individual lots or at the overall residential neighborhood area.

2. Literature review

Crime is a social problem commanding national attention. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey Report (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002), an estimated 24.2 million crimes occurred in 2001. The cost to victims, their families and the general public in monetary terms is of great magnitude. The estimated total cost of crime in 1994 was 19.58 billion dollars. The categorized costs of crime are ‘cost in anticipation of crime’, ‘cost as a consequence of crime’ and ‘cost in response to crime’ (Supt Goh Boon Keng, 2006). In Malaysia, the total cost of crime in 2004 can be divided into two categories, which are criminal justice system costs and crime costs. The estimated total costs of those crimes were RM15,359 million (Supt Goh Boon Keng, 2006). Although the cost in monetary terms is visible, the social cost of crime, such as the fear of becoming a victim of crime, is less apparent (Hale, 1996). In fact, the fear of crime is purported to be higher than actual crime rates and the effect of fear of crime causes individuals to implement avoidance strategies such as staying in at night or avoiding certain areas (Stiles, Halim, & Kaplan, 2003).

Fear of crime can be described as a “wide range of emotional and practical responses to crime…individuals and communities may make” (Pain, 2000). It is a manifestation of a feeling that one is in danger. According to Pain (2000), fear of crime is not an inherent characteristic of the individuals but rather something that may come and go, dependent on and influenced by one’s experiences, especially as they relate to one’s position in society. Some studies have postulated that fear of crime is assumed to be signs or symbols of criminal victimization (Stephen, Emily, & Jonathan, 2007), as the frequency of one becoming a victim of crime will induce a higher feeling of fear of crime (Gray, Jackson, & Farrall, 2008). Nevertheless, individual understanding of fear of crime differs as it depends on the situation in which one feels fear of crime (Schneider & Kitchen, 2007), design and the environment (Spinks, 2001), as well as their psychological and social life factors (Minnery & Lim, 2005).
In general, research shows that fear of crime is influenced by five factors, which are the physical environment (Harang, 2003; Nasar & Fisher, 1993), social environment (Ross & Jang, 2000), victimization (Banks, 2005), crime-specific (British Crime Survey, 2008), and crime problems in the neighborhood (Gibson, Zhao, Lovrich, & Gaffney, 2002). The physical environment is the utilization of fixed elements caused by physical planning and design (Nasar & Fisher, 1993) and is believed to give a significant effect on fear of crime (Harang, 2003). This is directly related to physical vulnerability which is the perception of increased risk to physical assault. This form of vulnerability stems from a decreased ability to fend off attack because of issues such as limited mobility or the lack of physical strength and competence (Franklin & Franklin, 2009). Such vulnerability is termed as environmental physical disorder referring to disorderly surroundings such as abandoned cars, vandalized property, trash, vacant houses and deteriorated homes (Painter, 1996). Neighbourhood residents who perceived their local surroundings to be physically disorderly are more likely to exhibit higher levels of fear (LaGrange, Ferraro, & Supancic, 1992).

Meanwhile, the social environment factors involve subjective matters such as social problems and familial economic systems involving human relationships (Ross & Jang, 2000). As reported by O’Shea (2006), concerns on the social environment are caused by the individual’s bad behaviour such as public drunkenness, drug addiction, prostitution, juvenile loitering, delinquent behaviour and homelessness (Renauer, 2007). These forms of delinquencies are also termed as social vulnerability where neighbourhood incivilities are the manifestation of social disorder that threatens individual residents more than the actual experience of crime (Franklin & Franklin, 2009).

The third factor that influences fear of crime is victimization. There are two types of victimization, namely direct and indirect victimization. Direct victimization refers to someone who has been a real victim of crime (Nasar & Fisher, 1993) whilst indirect victimization is when there is a fear of crime upon hearing news of crime either from experiences of being a crime victim among relatives, friends, neighbours or from the media (Banks, 2005). A person who has been a victim of crime is said to have a heightened feeling of fear and anxiety (Stephen, Emily, & Jonathan, 2007) as a result of being a victim of crime thus making him more wary about crime and his personal safety (Wilcox, Quisenberry, & Jones, 2003). This behaviour is believed to be related to the human psycho-biological system’s reaction towards behavioural changes to current situations brought about by past experiences (Jeffery, 1976). On the contrary, Reid (2000) contended that a person who has never been a victim of crime may also exhibit fear of crime. In fact this type of person is said to feel a higher level of fear as compared to a real crime victim (Farrall & Gadd, 2004). Indirect victimization is caused by a traumatic feeling and fear on personal safety should he become a victim of crime (Reid, 2000).

Crime problems in neighbourhoods and crime-specific are the other factors that frequently affect the feeling of fear of crime. According to Gibson et al. (2002), crime problems in neighbourhoods often are measured by asking respondents to rate how big the crime problem is in their neighbourhoods within a period of 12 months with regards the following: (a) house break-ins or theft, (b) vehicle theft, (c) acts of vandalism such as broken windows, damage to public property, (d) drug dealing; and (e) physical assault on individuals. Conversely, crime-specific measures a respondent’s general sense of safety (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987) The measure taps emotional fear by asking respondents how often they worry about specific types of crime. The specific questions used to create this measure of fear come from the British Crime Survey (2005) and Renauer (2007) who asked respondents, “Within a period of 12 month, how much do you worry about the following: (a) house break-ins, (b) physical assault, (c) vehicle theft, (d) sexual harassment and (e) rape”.

As a result of society’s fear of burgeoning crime, the quality of their life has slid. Based on the Quality of Life Report Malaysia 2004, urban society in Malaysia has seen a deterioration in the quality of their life from the aspect of security. This security aspect was measured based on crime rates and road accident
statistics. This report indicated that during the period of 1990 to 2002, the public security index has gone down by 19.9 points. Average criminal cases have risen from 3.8 cases in 1990 to 6.2 cases in 2002. The security component has become more critical as in recent times, the incidences of crimes involving snatch thefts, burglary and petty thefts have become more frequent. The security aspect is closely associated with social peace of mind and both are pre-requisites for a steady and stable development (UPE, 2004).

3. Methodology

The research method included a structured questionnaire, which was administered in the context of face-to-face structured and formal interviews. The settings of the interviews were the preselected residential areas in Presint 9 in Putrajaya and Seksyen 4 Bandar Baru Bangi. The focus of this study involves groups of residents earning a medium high level of income between RM3000 to RM5000 and are categorized as able to afford medium high cost houses (JPBD, 2009; Putrajaya, 2009). The study employs the population survey approach on two individual gated residential areas in Bandar Baru Bangi and individual non-gated residential areas in Putrajaya. The site study on individual gated residential areas in Bandar Baru Bangi involved 275 households while that in Putrajaya involved 201 households. The study’s respondents comprised of heads of households or the main breadwinner in the household. Hence, either the husband or the wife was selected as the study’s respondent on account of their responsibility towards the residence. In the event both parties agreed to be the study’s respondents, only one will be randomly selected. Before commencing questionnaire and observatory studies, a preliminary site study was conducted to identify unoccupied residences such as neighbourhood watch beats, kindergartens, child care centres, storage buildings and vacant residences. Out of 476 residences, 19 have been eliminated from the respondent selection list as they have been identified as having non residential use. On the whole, this population study involved a total of 457 residences and 171 respondents.

In selecting the study site, the selection of individual non-gated residences was done first followed by the selection of individual gated residences. This was because individual non-gated residences in Malaysia are very limited and Putrajaya has been chosen as the study area because it is the first residential area in Malaysia to practice the non-gated concept in residential areas (Roslan Talib, 2009). Besides that, individual non-gated residences were also selected earlier in order to suit similar selection criteria with individual gated residences. This selection was adapted from Wilson-Doenges’s (2000) study that selected gated community residences first before selecting non gated community residences. Residential selection criteria was based on site area criteria adapted from studies by Perkins et al. (1993) and Wilson-Doenges (2000) which are: have resided in the area for a minimum of 5 years; ethnic composition are similar; and home ownership based on residential lot size also must be similar. In addition, the layout of the neighborhood must be uniform, indicating that it is located within a neighborhood. Based on these criteria, Road 9B and 9D in Presint 9B Putrajaya were selected as the study site for individual non-gated residences and Road 4/7, Seksyen 4, Bandar Baru Bangi was selected as the study site for individual gated residences.

4. Results and Discussion

The measurement model for the fear of crime (FOC) construct, the results show the factor loading value for every dimension of fear of crime, which are CPR(0.49), CS(0.39), PE(0.90), SE(0.97), and VIC(0.86) are more than 0.3, which shows the suitability of each item in measuring the latent variable (fear of crime) (Sellin & Keeves, 1997). Apart from the factor loading value, several indices were employed to judge whether the model tested fits to the data, such as Chi-square, Chi-square/degree of freedom ratio, and goodness of fit indices. According to Hair, Black, Babin dan Anderson (2006), the
construct of fear of crime achieves good fit between the models and the data because the model is not significant ($X^2(4)=5.051$, $p>0.05$), the value of Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)=0.98, Normed Fit Index (NFI)=0.99, Comparative Fit Index (CFI)=0.99, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)=0.99, are more than 0.09, and Root Mean Square of Approximation (RMSEA) is less than 0.05.

Based on the population study, from the data of 171 respondents, this study discovered that there is a significant difference between the type of residence with the fear of crime ($t(146.34)=-8.79$, $p<0.05$), where respondents who lived at individual gated residences (IGR) ($M=5.84$, $SD=1.23$) exhibited a higher fear of crime when compared to respondents occupying individual non-gated residences (INR) ($M=3.85$, $SD=1.66$). Among the dimensions of fear of crime (FOC), it was discovered that all FOC dimensions, namely, CPR, CS, PE, SE and VIC were higher in gated residences. This is based on the mean scores registered by these dimensions; CPR (IGR=3.46, INR=1.86), CS (IGR=3.06, INR=1.30), PE (IGR=5.81, INR=3.86), SE (IGR=6.01, INR=3.99), and VIC (IGR=5.80, INR=3.77), where the values were all relatively higher in individual gated residences (IGR) when compared to individual non-gated residences (INR). These findings are as illustrated in Figure 1.

![Fig.1. Dimensions of fear of crime in gated and non-gated residential](image)

Note: IGR=individual gated residences, INR= individual non-gated residences, CPR= crime problem in residential areas, CS= crime-specific, PE= physical environment, SE= social environment, VIC= indirect victimization

These findings have refutes the statement made by Blakely and Synder (1997) that residents who inhabit gated residential areas have a lower fear of crime when compared to those in residential areas that do not have fencing elements. Nevertheless, this difference in findings is believed to be linked with the application of the fencing element in itself. The gated element based on the scope of the study conducted by Blakely and Synder (1997) involved the installation of fencing elements surrounding the housing area which forms the community neighborhood, where the application of the fencing element makes it known as a gated community. On the other hand, in this study, the application of the fencing element only involves individual residential lots alone, without any fencing element installation along the perimeter of the housing area. Besides this, the findings of this study are also believed to be directly linked with the local communities of both residential areas (IGR and INR). This is congruent with the study by McMillan and George (1986), where it was found that good community relationships within residential neighborhoods are able to reduce fear of crime and at the same time elevate the sense of safety.

In addition to this, this study also discovered that marital status registered a significant difference ($t(79)=5.11$, $p<0.05$) in INR, where unmarried respondents ($M=6.54$, $SD=1.70$) demonstrated a higher sense of fear when compared to married respondents ($M=3.59$, $SD=1.43$). This finding contradicts the statement by Hipp (2010) which contended that married residents have a higher fear of crime as they are more concerned about the safety of their family and children. However, the finding of this study implies
that the lifestyle of an unmarried respondent influences the level of fear towards crime. This had been previously stated by Tseloni and Zarafonita (2008) where it was asserted that the lifestyle of an individual will be able to exacerbate his or her fear of crime. This is due to the fact that these individuals might be prone to be involved in issues that are connected to disturbances, which may subsequently lead to criminal acts, such as fighting or brawling (Joseph, 1997).

For the demography concerning duration of stay at the residential area, this study discovered a significant difference in terms of fear of crime in Individual Non-gated Residences (INR) ($F(4,76)=4.30$, $p<0.05$), where it was found that the older a respondent is, the lower the fear of crime reported. This finding is contrary to the study conducted by Austin, Furr and Spine (2002), where they found that as a respondent gets older in terms of age, a higher level of fear of crime will be registered due to factors concerning the reduced ability of the respondent’s physical body to ward off harm or enemies. However, this study discovered findings that are converse to this previous study. This is believed to have a connection with the respondent’s knowledge about the surrounding residential area in the context of crime occurrences. This is as discovered by Hipp (2010), where the duration of an individual’s stay in a housing area will influence his or her fear of crime as they will become well versed about their residential neighborhood in terms of crime incidences.

5. Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to investigate the fear of crime in individual gated residences (IGR) and individual non-gated residences (INR). The findings of this study proves that within the context of gated and non-gated individual residences, respondents who occupy individual gated residential areas demonstrate a higher fear of crime when compared to their counterparts who live in non-gated residential areas. This situation is believed to be linked to factors involving community relations; lifestyle and surrounding environment, which all influence the fear of crime. Therefore, it is pertinent that a more comprehensive and detailed study be undertaken in the future regarding community relations and its correlation to fear of crime, in terms of the connection and influence between these two elements in residential neighborhoods, especially within the context of individual gated and non-gated residences.

References


JPBD. (2009).


