FEAR OF CRIME AFFECTS QUALITY OF LIFE

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ABSTRACT

The current crime situation today creates public anxiety and is a constant source of discussion and debate along the corridors of academia, profesional and parties involved in the field. Almost every day we hear news of crime which increases our feelings of fear and highlights our concern regarding the level of public safety. This anxiety also reflects the Statistical Crime Report from the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) indicating an increase in criminal cases from the year 2005 to the year 2007. This fear concerns the dip in quality of life that could affect social activities and the national economic well-being. Feelings of fear of crime exceeding actual crime rate gives an illustration of the ebb of social life today and loss of faith in designs for public safety. Fear of crime affects many people and needs to be taken seriously. Although statistically most people have a low chance of becoming a victim of crime, many people nevertheless fear crime. This scenario occurs because almost everyday we come across reports of crime and violence in Malaysia. There have been many reports of crime: snatch thefts, rapes, and other sex-related crimes, assaults and murders, child abuse and ill treatment of foreign maids, hold-ups and petty thefts, kidnappings, fatal road accidents, etc. With this barrage of media reporting, there is an air of anxiety and fear as to what the future will hold for our Malaysian society and subsequently their quality of life. These reports give the impression that our safety in Malaysia is decreased. This follows the depreciation of Public Safety Index in the Malaysian Quality of Life Index (MQLI) 2004. Therefore, fear of crime has become an important issue of public concern which detracts from the quality of life. This paper will discuss the existing causes of fear of crime and trends of crime in Malaysia as important aspects of deterioration in quality of life of Malaysians. Prevention of crime through environmental design will also be discussed in this paper as it has now become a national initiative in overcoming the stated problem in Malaysia.

Keyword: **Crime, Fear of Crime, Quality of Life, Crime Prevention through Environmental Design.**

1.   INTRODUCTION

Fear of crime has become an important issue of public concern which detracts from the quality of life and which adversely affects social and economic well-being. Therefore, fear of crime has attracted a significant amount of research interest in recent years since it developed as a research focus in the UK. The rationale for its development as a research focus includes the following: First, the fact that fears of crime is a much bigger problem than crime itself. In fact fear of crime directly affects quality of human life in universal. According to data from the _British Crime Survey_ (BCS) report in

2004/2005 (Team, 2005), the gap between fear levels and victimization rate was illustrated. In that report it was shown that fear of house-breaking incidents (burglary) is as high as 12 percent over real crime at only 2.7 percent. While worry over car theft incident was as high as 13 percent over real crime at 8.2 percent and worry over terrorism was as high as 10 percent over real crime at 3.6 percent. In Malaysia, the data on worry over crime is also worrisome. According to Amar Singh Sidhu (2006) who reported in his survey that 89 percent of the respondents were "worried" to "extremely worried" about the occurrence of crime in their neighborhood. Only 11 % or a ratio of one in ten of the respondents was not worried.

Secondly, fear of crime will affect the quality of life. This is according to the British Crime Survey about how much quality of life is affected by 'fear' of crime (as opposed to worry about crime). The survey found that almost two-thirds of people (64 percent) felt that fear of crime had a low impact on their quality of life and a further 31 per cent said it had a moderate impact. Only five per cent of people considered that their quality of life was greatly affected because of their fear of crime. These shows the proportion of people who felt that their quality of life was greatly affected by their fear of crime has been relatively stable over time. Additionally, the proportion of people who said that fear of crime had a low impact on their quality of life has been gradually increasing over time, rising from 50 per cent of people in 1998 to 64 per cent in 2004/05 (Jonathan, 2005). These may reflect the nationally decreasing levels of worry about the individual crime types as shown over this period. However, these situations are different than the scenario in Malaysia. According to the Quality of Life in Malaysia Report 2004, all components of the MQLI recorded improvements with the exception of public safety and environment which decreased to 80 percent. This decline indicated that the problem of crime has deteriorated to such an extent as to impact on fear of criminal action. This phenomenon of the level of fear of crime being higher than the actual crime rates is very unnnerving. This situation has caused the lives of individuals to become more erratic and gives rise to suspicion of unknown persons.

2.   WHAT IS FEAR OF CRIME?

Based on studies by previous researchers, a few definitions of 'fear of crime' have been identified. 'Fear of Crime' can be grouped into two paradigms, a rationalistic and a

symbolic one (Donder et al., 2005). The rationalistic paradigm interprets fear as a consequence of risk and vulnerability with regard to crime and victimization. The symbolic paradigm interprets fear of crime as a consequence of more general feelings of vulnerability and dissatisfaction that become feelings of being threatened of crime and victimization. This definition is supported by David J. Evans dan Fletcher (2000) who proposed that the feeling of fear manifests on an individual's experience and an expression of one's sense of danger and anxiety at the prospect of being harmed. A different approach is taken by Van der Wurff and Stringer (1986) who postulated that there are three components playing their parts in fear of crime; namely, the existence of a certain element of well-being, the perception of a threat to that well-being, and the feeling of inability to cope with that threat. In general it can be concluded that an individual's physical attributes and the environmental factor translate into a feeling of fear. A lack of knowledge of self-defense arts and also the inability to fight off any victimization incident makes a person feel unsafe. In addition, an environment that gives the illusion of being unsafe such as being too quiet, copse, lack of social activities, loafing, drunkenness and etc may attract criminal activites.

3.   WHY SHOULD THERE BE WORRY ON CRIME? WHAT ARE THE CAUSES

Extreme concern on 'fear of crime' may cause the existence of abnormal life among society and its environment. This fear is caused by some factors leading to a high concern rate. Research in the past has identified a number of factors that influenced fear of crime and perceptions of safety. These factors could be divided into general areas of focus, namely: (1) rising crime rate, (2) increasing number of urban population, (3) crime experience, (4) demographic factors, (5) income level, and (6) environmental concerns.

3.1   Rising Crime Rate

Crime is a social phenomenon. A criminal act may be defined as an act or any offence posing a risk to society and all these acts or actions may be convicted as an offence under the law and the person commiting the act will be liable to a fine or jail (Mohd Reduan Aslie, 1990). According to a report comparing criminal actions among selected countries, Malaysia is the only country with the lowest crime rate with the exception of Indonesia. This is calculated based on 100,000 inhabitants where it was found that the crime rate in Malaysia is still at a controlled level of 624:100,000 inhabitants. This is still

a small figure as compared to that of the other countries; for example the index in Switzerland: 5,004:100,000, Hong Kong: 1,085:100,000, Japan 2,250:100,000, Australia; 7,475:100,000 and Singapore 703: 100,000 (MCPF, 2004, Nor-Ina Kanyo and Norizan Hj Md Nor, 2007). However, by referring to statistics on national crime trend, it was found that the national crime index increases almost every year. From the statistics, it was indicated that national crime index increased from 70 823 cases in the year 1980 to 156 455 cases in the year 2004. That was an increment of 85 632 cases or at 120.9 percent within a period of 24 years. Based on the current crime trend in Malaysia, the increase in crime rate from the year 2005 to 2007 shows a critical situation.   According to the crime statistics report by the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) 2008, the result shows cases relating to rape, group armed robbery, battery, theft, motorcar theft, motorcycle theft, snatch theft, daytime burglary and nighttime burglary is on the increase annually. This scenario can be explained through table 1 below that shows a worrying increase in crime rate.

Table 1:   Crime Type in Malaysia by Year 2005 Untill 2007

CRIME	2005 (Cases)	2006 (Cases)	2007 (Cases)
Murder	497	604	588
Attempted Murder	94	*	*
Rape	1,887	2,435	3,177
Molest	*	2,023	*
Group Armed Robbery	40	68	77
Group Robbery	1842	2,658	7,067
Armed Robbery	317	247	202
Robbery	13,210	18,446	17,241
Blackmail	*	1,549	*
Criminal Blackmail	*	6,336	*
Rioting	*	2,261	*
Battery	4,246	5,716	6,806
Theft		37,128	44,617

Vans/Lorries/Heavy Vehicles Theft	34,317	6,328	5,047
Motorcar Theft	5,507	11,101	12,427
Motorcycle Theft	9,711	64,858	67,584
Snatch Theft	51,709	9,551	11,127
Daytime Burglary	**9,617**	**8,253**	**9,159**
Nighttime Burglary	**6,923**	**19,060**	**24,440**
TOTAL	**157,459**	**198,622**	**209,559**

Non Index Crimes (BJI)
Source: PDRM (2008

This rising crime rate will raise the sense of concern among the people on the probability of crime happening in their housing area. This situation will cause a disruption of community living in undergoing daily life and simultaneously threatening the quality of life. All these forms of crime must be eliminated because they can cause various injuries to the body, the well-being of society and the country as a whole.

3.2 Increase in number of People in Direct Porportion with the Rise in Crime

Crime is often associated with the municipality. Generally, the rise in crime rate in urban areas occurred beginning in the 20th century. According to the Home Office Research Study, crime in the United Kingdom increased at five percent annually starting from the 1920s (Landman, 2003). This could be due to the increase in the number of population leading to the rise in crime rate in urban areas. This was proven by the report on The Quality of Urban Life in Malaysia (2002), where it was found that the average criminal case in urban areas increases from 7.4 cases for every one thousand inhabitants in the year 1990 to 13.7 cases in the year 2000. This situation becomes more critical with the increase and expected increase in urban population. Based on statistics from the Malaysian Statistics Department, the percentage of urban population have increased from 26.8 percent in the year 1970 to 34.2 percent in the year 1980 and 50 percent in the year 1990. In the year 2020 the percentage of urban population is expected to hit 73 percent (Nor-Ina Kanyo & Norizan, 2007). This means that the population of Malaysia is projected to increase by 2.6 percent each year. According to Amar Singh

Table 2.0: Expected Population Growth Rate and Crime Rate in Malaysia

Year	Population Growth (No/%)	Crime index	Future Crime Index
2000	23,494.9	167,173	-
2001	24,012.9	156,469	-
2002	24,526.5	149,042	149,042
2003	25,048.3	156,315	152,917
2004	25,580.9	156,455	156,893
2005	26.25		160,972
2006	26.93		165,157
2007	27.63		169,451
2008	28.35		173,857
2009	29.09		178,377
2010	29.85		183,015
2011	30.63		187,773
2012	31.43		192,655
2013	32.25		197,664
2014	33.09		202,803
2015	33.95		208,076

Sidhu (2006) this estimate will be equivalent to the crime rate in the future at about 2.6 percent. Schedule 2.0 below will explain the increase in population rate to be directly proportional with the rising crime rate in future.

According to Schedule 2.0 below, the future crime index will rise by as many as 3000 to 5000 cases, indicating that the crime problems in Malaysia is in deplorable circumstances. Nor-Ina Kanyo & Norizan (2007) proposed that this problem of criminal behaviour is probably caused by the need to accommodate daily expenditures from the aspects of infrastructure, accommodation, public amenities and other needs leading to an unhealthy environment. This is further exacerbated by a lack of fixed income, a deluge of foreign immigrants in urban areas, drug addiction brought on by failure in life (Amar Singh Sidhu, 2005).
 Source: Amar Singh Sidhu (2006)

3.3   Crime Experiences

One's personal horrific experience of crime or those criminal experiences heard from their friends, neighbours or other persons can result in lifetime trauma. Furthermore, readily available crime information from the mass media and electronic media like

television, newspapers, magazines and others display dramatic and graphic criminal images impacting on an individual's emotional state (Stephen Farrall et al., 2007, Howard, 1999a, Amar Singh Sidhu, 2006). According to Grabosky (1995), the influence of the media in determining whether there will be a sense of anxiety or otherwise is very obvious. In Britain, readers of tabloid newspapers reporting on sensational stories relating to crime have reported a high sense of anxiety and fear of crime. This is contrary to readers who prefer 'broadsheet newspapers' who are less anxious about crime.

3.4   Demographic Factors

Three demographic variables – sex, age and socioeconomic status have been shown to influence attitudes on crime and safety. Research generally indicated that women experienced higher levels of fear of crime than men (Grabosky, 1995; Austin et al., 2002, Roh & Oliver, 2005). According to Donder et al., (2005), these defferences between the sexes can be explained by a higher level of personal fear. Women are four times more likely to feel unsafe walking alone after dark than men; five times more likely to be worried about rape than men; and three times more likely to be worried about physical attacks. This situation could be due to the fact that women are physically vulnerable, are physically weaker and unable to defend themselves when attacked. Heightened fear of crime had been shown to cause women to limit their personal and social activities more than men (Austin et al., 2002).

Age was a second demographic characteristic associated with fear of crime and perception of safety. As a person become older his/her level of fear of crime will increase. This follows a review by Ziegler and Mitchell in 2003, which concludes that sixteen studies found that elderly people experience more fear of crime, two studies did not find any difference between young and elderly people and that seven recent studies found that elderly people are less afraid than younger people (Donder et al., 2005). According to Austin et al., (2002), socioeconomic status has been associated with perception of safety. He stated that educational level and feelings of perceived safety have a positive relationship between them.

3.5   Income level

Income level rates predominantly influence the level of worry of crime. A person with a high level of education is more inclined to gain good employment with a high income level. The opposite happens for those with a lower education level. These levels of income two things have a close correlation with the sense of anxiety and worry of crime. This was concurred by Donder et.al (2005); Grabosky (1995), who were of the opinion that those with a high income level are more capable of acquiring a security system contrary to those earning low income. Studies found that poor elderly people are most fearful. According to the report, poor people (54%) feel twice as unsafe on the street as rich people (25%) (Donder et al., 2005). Hale (1996) states that poor people mostly live in unfavourable districts; they cannot protect themselves, have fewer contact with political networks and have less control over things.

3.6   Environmental and Neighborhood Considerations

Social and physical conditions of neighborhood have been linked to both emotional and behavioral outcomes of neighborhood residents. Various physical and social aspects of one's neighbourhood tend to be related to fear of crime. These factors simultaneously influence social environment aspect. Lack of neighbourhood cohesion, as represented by the feeling that neighbours tend not to help each other, is an important factor associated with fear of crime.   Austin et al., (2002) stated that higher level of satisfaction with the neighborhood environment led to higher levels of perceived safety. The existence of neighborhood uncivilities and other signs of deterioration might lead residents to believe that the level of social control in the area was deteriorating and sparked concern and fear among residents. According to community concern model, Roh & Oliver (2005) stated that the community concern perspective, fear of crime is related with people's perception of the quality of life in their neighborhoods.   A neighborhood with a lower life quality often corresponds to an area that lacks structural characteristics necessary to control social problem like crime. In sum, people living in a neighborhood of a lower quality and high crime rates are more likely to exhibit perceived fear of crime because they realize that no social control mechanism in their community works.

Apart from that, physical environment such as damage of public property, vandalism littering and any such situation will give rise to the imagination that the area is less

secure. This is made worse when that area is overflown with rubbish and junk and beverage containers reflecting loafing activities. These circumstances will give rise to sense of anxiety for criminal action when being in the area. An environment obscured from view is also susceptible to criminal action. Such an area could become a criminal hideout.

4.   THE IMPLICATIONS OF ANXIETY OF CRIME

This anxiety can change an individual's behaviour in life. This involves a change in their social activities, preferring and feeling safer staying at home than outdoors. In terms of changes in physical environment, they will be more cautious by installing security apparatus, good lighting systems and cleaning up their house compounds including maintenance of their landscape (Richard and Ted, 2007). These anxieties may appear small but they actually impact on the quality of life of Malaysian society that should be given attention in restoring their belief in the level of security in Malaysia.

4.1   Decreases in the Malaysian Quality of Life

The existence of criminal behavior factors has made the community's anxiety towards their environment more critical. This resulted in their perception of safety appear threatened while they conducting their social activities. This ongoing state caused an abnormal life and deteriorated their quality of life. According to the *Laporan Kualiti Hidup Malaysia* 2004, the life of the urban population in Malaysia has undergone deterioration in life quality from the aspect of safety. This safety aspect is measured by the crime rate and accident rate on the streets. The report shows that during the period 1990 – 2002 the public safety index has declined by as much as 19.9 point. Average criminal cases have increased from 3.8 cases in the year 1990 to 6.2 cases in the year 2002 where more than four per five criminal cases involve property. The security component has become more important as lately crimes involving snatch theft, burglaries and theft cases are more prevalent. The safety aspect is closely related with social well-being and both are prerequisites to stable and sustainable development. Therefore it needs to be overcome to enhance the quality of life of people in the urban areas (Unit Perancang Ekonomi, 2004, Jabatan Perancang Bandar dan Desa Semenanjung Malaysia, Amar Singh Sidhu, 2005). Figure 1 (below) shows the Malaysian quality of life. The blue line indicates the reading for the year 1990 and the black line is the reading for the year 2002.

Figure 1: The Malaysian Quality of Life
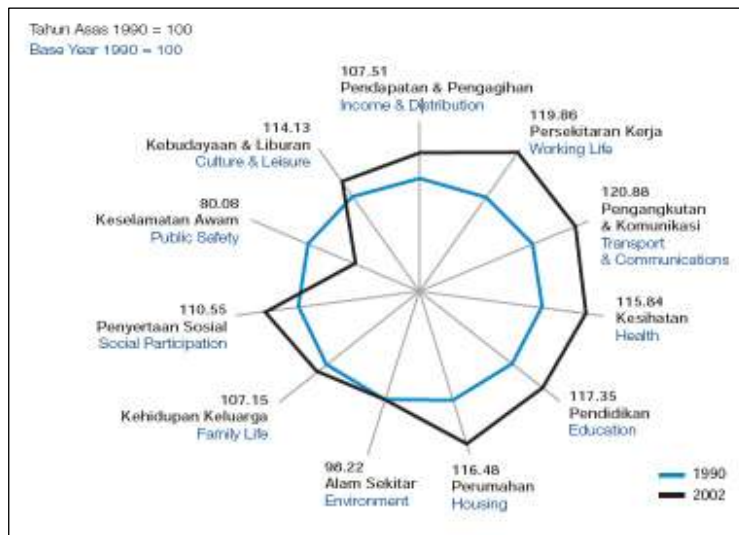
Source: Report on the Quality of Life Index Malaysia, 2004

4.2　　Efforts to Overcome Crime Problems

As public security and well-being are crucial aspects of quality of life, various programmes have been introduced to eradicate crime and misconduct. Programmes promoting control by the community were given priority to inculcate a harmonious relationship between the police and the public. Neighbourhood surveillance and patrol schemes, Volunteer Reserve Police Squad (*Polis Simpanan Sukarela)* and *Rakan Cop* were launched to strengthen the cooperation between the police with the public to boost public safety. Under these programme, inhabitants had been trained to more sensitive on those matters happen in each area and cooperate with the police to prevent undesirable matter. Organization based upon community and private sector also be encouraged to cooperate with the police close to improve public safety. Under these programmes, the public is trained to be more attuned to the events happening in their areas and to cooperate with the police to prevent untoward incidents. Community and public sector-based associations are encouraged to forge closer rapport with the police to enhance public safety. At the same time, the police will further enhance its role to reduce crime in this country. Steps to maintain public confidence through close rapport networking and positive image are further reinforced through implementation of improved personal management practices and adoption of more effective strategies and methods to detect, prevent, and fight crime. Police enforcement is concentrated in urban areas with higher crime rate through placement of mobile police units and

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constructing more police stations in higher density urban areas. The effectiveness of the police force in maintaining order and preventing disorder through the implementation of a public-friendly enforcement approach has wide-ranging effects in reducing crime rate in recent years.

The government has also implemented several programmes in efforts to reduce crime rate through the Malaysia Plans. Through the Sixth Malaysia Plan [1991 1995], the Rakan Muda Programme was introduced aiming to help youth elude themselves from unhealthy activities especially criminal activities. In the Seventh Malaysia Plan [1996 2000], the government has unveiled the Caring Society Programme and Neighbourhood Watch Committee with the widespread aims to foster neighbourliness to help lessen crime in residential areas. The National Social Service Programme was introduced in the Eighth Malaysia Plan [2001 2005] aiming to boost the spirit of cooperation and partnership among government agencies, private agencies and non-governmental organizations [NGO] to voluntarily help stamp out crime. The latest is the Ninth Malaysia Plan [2006 2010] whereby the government has introduced Lifelong Learning Programmes and Unity Activity Centres to mould knowledgeable communities in conducting patrols, organizing crime prevention associations. (Nor Eeda Haji Ali, 2006).

5.   Crime Prevention through Environmental Design

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design' (CPTED) is a process to ensure crime prevention at the preliminary planning stage by trying to eliminate criminal action opportunities and it is taken into account from the design. This concept was introduced by C. Ray Jeffery (1977). The concept's development is in line with the development of the Defensible Space Theory concept by Oscar Newman. The CPTED definition is used by the National Crime Prevention Institute (NCPI) which is an effective use and design methodology suitable for construction in environments that could reduce worry of criminal action and is an improvement in the quality of life (Howard, 1999b, Cozens, 2002). In other words CPTED is based upon the idea and design of built-environment management to create a difference in crime prevention by increasing policial opportunities simultaneously reducing opportunities for criminal action.

According to Crowe (2000), CPTED involves three strategies in crime prevention namely natural access control, natural surveillance and territorial reinforcement. For the first and second strategies, access control and natural surveillance focus more on the criminal's perception of risks which may and would be faced in a space, that space being under observation control by the community in that area. Meanwhile, territorial reinforcement strategy is based upon the assumption that physical design may enhance a consumer's feeling and perceptions towards a property in his vicinity is the ownership of the region or his community area.

Concomitantly, the 'Safe City' concept based on the slogan that crime prevention is better than crime elimination was introduced in the year 2004. This approach is based upon the crime prevention gospel through the reduction of opportunities for a criminal to commit crime because most crimes happen unprompted produced from the opportunity that exists. This concept had underlined 23 crime prevention steps focusing on physical environmental design, strengthening the target areas and social activities and public awareness on criminal actions (JPBDSM, 2007). The 'Safe City' concept was in fact the brainchild of the Crime Prevention Foundation Malaysia (YPJM) as early as 1998 and Bangsar has been chosen as the pioneer in the implementation of the concept. The concept was reported to have curtailed crime by as much as 12 percent (Ahmad Kamil Mohamed, 2007). According to the then Minister of Housing and Local Government, Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, at present, the only city that has fully implemented this safe city concept is Shah Alam City under the Shah Alam City Council (MBSA) which has fully implemented 23 crime prevention steps through the 'Safe City' concept. The city has been gazetted as a safe town and is able to minimise crime rate (Berita Harian, 2006).

Lamya Rostami Tabrizi and Ali Madanipour (2006) have found other perspectives to crime prevention. They are based on an approach called 'space or place' that often became criminal attractions. This involves a combination of the police community and crime prevention community which is also a combination of design changes concept with space utilisation management.   Secondly, the policy of 'situational crime prevention' which focuses on crime level reduction is based on elimination of criminal action opportunities. It focused more on the 'setting of crime' than on the occurrence of

criminal activities, building reduction of criminal action opportunities concentrating on criminal forms targets, management proposals, environmental design or manipulation in systematic methods making crime more risky and less successful.

6.   Conclusion

Reducing fear of crime and crime itself is a challenge faced by all Malaysians. The nature of crime is sufficiently complex that no one agency of government can assume sole responsibility for it.   It cannot be prevented without cooperation of all parties. Various efforts and methods were implemented but the outcome is yet to achieve satisfactory level. The research about fear of crime is actually widely conducted in other parts of the world. However, there is a lack of research in this field in the Malaysian context. From the literature, research on fear of crime have not focused on the gated community and how the community interacts with that situation.   Therefore, a progressive effort should be induced among Malaysian researchers to conduct more research on fear of crime and investigate its effect on the Malaysian people.

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