

**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**



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**A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF STUDENTS' UNIVERSITI SAINS  
MALAYSIA (HEALTH CAMPUS) ON PERCEPTION TOWARDS  
DEVIANT ACTS AND FEAR OF CRIMES ENVIRONMENT**

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment for the Degree of Bachelor of  
Sciences in Forensic Science

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**2007**

## **Certificate**

*This is to certify the dissertation entitled*

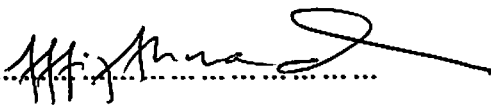
**“A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF STUDENTS’ UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA,  
(HEALTH CAMPUS) ON PERCEPTION TOWARDS DEVIANT ACTS AND  
FEAR OF CRIMES ENVIRONMENT”**

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## **Abstract**

The current study was a preliminary study in perceptions towards deviant acts and fear of crimes environment. It was designed to investigate and examine the perceptions towards deviant acts, fear of crimes environment together with self-reported delinquent activities among students in higher educational institutions. A sample of 1,006 students was selected from the local university which is Universiti Sains Malaysia, Health Campus, Kelantan in the 2006/2007 study session. A set of questionnaire was used to measure the perceptions towards deviant acts according to two main subscales. The first subscale was self-behavior perceptions towards deviant acts and the second subscales was self-feeling perceptions towards deviant acts. This paper also examines the student's fear of crimes environment and self-reported delinquent activities. The data were analyzed primarily by investigating the association between all the subscales in the present study according to the school of study amongst participants. These schools included School of Medical Sciences (PPSP), School of Dental Sciences (PPSG), and School of Health Sciences (PPSK). In addition, the difference between genders in all the school of studies regarding self-behavior perceptions towards deviant acts, self-feeling perceptions towards deviant acts, fear of crimes environment, and self-reported delinquent activities were also examined. The results were tested using Spearman rho and Mann-Whitney U test through SPSS/PC version 13 packages for statistical analysis. The result indicated that there are no significant differences in two of the three schools of study in USM, Health Campus which is PPSG and PPSK. For the PPSP students, there are significant differences in the subscales fear of crimes environment and self-reported delinquent activities. The result also showed significant differences between gender and

delinquent activities. The current study examined the relationships between ethnic groups and delinquent activities which are showed there is a significant difference in self-reported delinquent activities among the ethnicity.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **PREFACE**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Crime is a widely invoked and broadly familiar term. Crime is present not only in the majority of societies of one particular species but in all societies of all types. The legalistic definition of crime has been dominant, and such a conception of crime is most readily embraced by a literate public. The simplest legalistic definition of crime defines as a violation of the criminal law, or conduct leading to criminal prosecution (Michael & Adlar, 1933; Tappan, 1947). The major aims of the current study were to discover the people's perception of crime as a phenomenon that shaped the life of a person, and any significant social differences in its experience.

The study of popular perceptions is an integral part of the study of social life. In criminological and criminal justice research, people perceptions of the nature of criminal behavior and of crime as a social problem constitute an important area of investigation. The way people perceive crime is a central aspect of normative culture in general and formal social control in particular. According to Brodeur and Ouellet (2004), crime is an intentional act or omission in violation of criminal law (statutory or case law), committed without defense or justification, and sanctioned by the state as a felony or misdemeanour. According to Flanagan and Lederman (2001), in psychology and the cognitive sciences, perception means the process of acquiring, interpreting, selecting, and organizing sensory information. Sakinah (1991) stated that perception refers to an individual's observation which is how a person looks or sees himself or herself. The study about people

perception of crimes concern the fear of crime and perception of crime risk (Robinson & Mullen, 1998).

Perception of crime or fear of crime is generally understood as an emotion; a feeling of impending harm to one's being, whether such harm is real or imagined (Robinson, 1998). Fear can be justified or not justified, for example it is tied to a real threat or not. Perception of crime risk means an evaluative judgment; as assessment of the likelihood that harm to one's well-being will actually occur, based on accumulated information and stimuli from one's environment (Robinson et al., 1998). Fear may be a function of both perceived risk and perceived seriousness of an offense. In such a case, high perceived risk and high offense seriousness are both necessary conditions for fear, but neither is sufficient (Warr & Stafford, 1983). Thus, valid inferences about fear cannot be made solely from measurements of risk perception. According to LaGrange (1992), people think they are unlikely to be crime victims do not mean they are unafraid of crime, nor does a heightened sense of perceived risk automatically translate into heightened feelings of fear.

People's perception of crime may be influenced by social networks. Empirical research carried out by Austin, Woolever and Baba (1994) and McGarrell, Giacomazzi and Thurman (1997) reported that the amount of personal integration into social networks is associated with perceptions of fear of crime and the risk of victimization in community settings. This has been supported by Bursik and Grasmick (1993) who stated that such a link tended to concur with a systemic approach to the study of municipal communities and their respective neighborhoods involving analyses at both the micro and macro levels. Bursik et al. (1993) also have suggested that individuals who reside in

communities where strong relational networks are present tend to experience less crime and feel safer. Specifically, such integrative relational networks tend to increase the probability that residents will use informal means to control disruptive social activity within their neighborhoods. The presence of informal social controls in turn, results in less crime and increased feeling of public safety.

There are three suggested models that represent people's perception on crime. First is the 'victimization model'. This model claims that a victim of crime tends to express a greater degree of fear of further victimization than do their nonvictim counterparts (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981). High levels of fear of crime among women and the elderly (Will & Grath, 1995) are attributed to feelings of physical vulnerability. In the same light, the correlation between economic disadvantages and fear of crime (Will et al., 1995), and relationship between race and minority ethnicity and fear of crime (Covington & Taylor 1991), are explained by the fact that such socioeconomic and cultural groups tend to be at heightened social vulnerability. A study done by Grofalo (1979) found that previous victimization is positively related to the fear of crime. A prior research done by Garofalo and Laub (1978) have argued that little faith should be placed in the direct victimization model, given that those who are most likely to be victimized express low levels of fear of crime, and those who are least likely to be victimized express high levels of fear.

The second model is known as 'disorder model' which broadens the scope of the analysis of fear of crime and perception of crime phenomena by incorporating the character of neighborhood environment into analysis. This model reflects the belief that perceptions of disorder in one's area of residence lead to fear of crime (LaGrange, 1992).

Residents of disorderly neighborhoods tend to express a level of fear of crime that is often not congruent with the actual amount of crime occurring in the area (Skogan, 1986). Researchers working on disorder effects have categorized neighborhoods according to the presence of social and physical incivilities. LaGrange (1992) defined incivilities as low level breaches of community standard that signal erosion of conventionally accepted norms and values. Both social and physical indicators of disorder are used to derive an index of disorder for the neighborhood. The studies by McGarrell (1997) found the associations between incivilities and fear of crime to be positive and significant. This indicated that higher levels of incivilities predict heightened levels of fear of crime.

The 'social integration model' is the third model. It claims that the correlates of fear of crime have suggested that individual attitudes toward fear of crime in neighborhoods are often contingent on the degree of social integration that a resident enjoys. In support of the link between social integration and fear of crime, Hunter and Baumer (1982) found that higher levels of social integration, indicated by the ability to identify strangers in the area and feeling part of the neighborhood, may reduce fear of crime in local communities. Similarly, Lewis and Salem (1986) indicated that fear of crime was low in neighborhoods in which social ties were plentiful and citizens were well integrated.

Using a somewhat broader measure of social integration, Rountree and Land (1996) found that social integration serves to diminish resident's perception of danger in the neighborhood. In addition, a study done by Austin (1994) has found that social integration, indicated by participation in formal organizations tends to increase feelings of safety. The numerous empirical investigations of the link between social integration

and fear of crime have produced mixed results (McGarrell, 1997). For example, Baba and Austin (1989) found that social integration, as measured by the number of friends in the neighborhood and length of residence in the neighborhood had no significant effect on perceptions of safety when satisfaction with the neighborhood setting and prior victimization were controlled. Similarly, Riger, LeBailly, and Gordon (1981) found that social integration was not related to fear of crime among women, but that neighborhood bonds contributed to reducing levels of fear. Finally, Austin (1994) concluded that social integration, indicated by the number of friends that the respondents had in the neighborhood, was not a significant predictor of perceptions of safety when participant in formal groups and sociodemographic variables were controlled.

It is reasonable to expect attitudinal correlates to be more closely related to perceptions of seriousness of crime, since attitudes and perceptions are conceptually related at the psychological level. Indeed, some attitudes or attitudinal constructs have been empirically confirmed as strong correlates of perceptions of crimes. One of the most important of these correlates is religiosity. Newman (1976) found religiosity to have the most important conservative effect on all acts in four of the six countries of his study. In a study in Kuwait, Al-Thakeb and Scott (1981) found that upper or upper-middle class citizens tended to be against the reestablishment of Islamic penal law. The reason is not social class per se but the fact that these groups, which constitute a minority in most Middle Eastern Islamic countries, are generally less orthodox in their religious beliefs and are more exposed to the Western civilization.

A second attitudinal construct that correlates with perceived perception of crimes is authoritarianism, that is, “an orientation subjection to the control and hegemony of

powerful social and legal institutions and is opposed to individual autonomy and normative diversity” (Mentor & Dorne, 1998, pg.77). Abrams and Della-Fave (1976) found authoritarianism a strong correlate of condemnation of victimless crimes. More recently, Feather (1996) surveyed two samples in Australia to investigate the correlates of perceived seriousness for domestic violence, plagiarism, shoplifting, and resisting a police order in a protest against lodging. He found a direct positive effect of authoritarianism on perceived seriousness of crime.

In the current study, explorations about people perception on deviant acts are key important point. A deviant act is an undesirable aspect of social life. Deviant acts refers to violations of social norms (including legal norms) but many sociologists reject this behavioral or normative definition of deviance and see deviance instead as simply a label (Mayeda, 2006). Deviance in this view is that which we react to, through social control responses, as deviance. Deviant behavior usually evokes formal and informal punishment, restrictions, or other controls of society (McNulty & Bellair, 2003). These formal and informal controls constrain most people to conform to social norms. Despite the social sanctioning and controlling, however, we sometimes observe deviant behavior around us.

Generally, there are two types of deviant acts which are including primary deviation and secondary deviation. Primary deviation occurs when the individual commits deviant acts but does not adopt a primary self-identity as a deviant (Mayeda, 2006). It is an initial deviant act. It also means that the acts are short-term or cease with adult status. Primary deviance is usually correlated with social, cultural, structural and psychological conditions (Jang, 2002).

Secondary deviation occurs when the individual commits deviant acts and although recognizing that these acts are socially defined as deviant remains committed to continue them. This results in the adoption of a deviant self identity that confirms and stabilizes the deviant life style. According to McNulty et al. (2003), secondary deviance is also the deviance that results from being labeled as deviant. It evolves out of the offender's self-concept. It evolves from other's conception of a person. Secondary deviance is long-term and does not cease with adult status. Secondary deviance includes chronic deviant behavior by people who come to identify themselves as deviant. The distinction between primary and secondary deviance is important in the development of social policies that reduce the chances of primary deviance inducing secondary deviance (McNulty et al., 2003).

Some would go further still, suggesting that one can be deviant without behaviorally violating any rule or doing something that upsets others (e.g. people with physical/mental disabilities may be seen as deviant because they are devalued by society). The study of perceptions towards deviant acts is invaluable aspects in the present study. The study of these perceptions is an integral part of the study of social control. It can be concluded from the above review that the research on perception of deviant acts has contributed significantly in understanding informal normative culture and social control.

## **1.2 Literature Review**

Fear of crime and perception of crime risk can be as debilitating as criminal victimization. Perception of risk is an evaluative judgment; an assessment of the likelihood that harm to one's well-being will actually occur, based on accumulated information and cueing stimuli from one's environment (Robinson, 1998). According to Robinson and Mullen (1998), when people are afraid of being victimized or think that they will become victims of crime, they may change their daily routines and thereby enjoy life less. One of the most consistent findings in the literature are the surveys conducted by Innes and Fielding (2002). The surveys consistently demonstrated that citizens were extremely worried about the risks to their safety posed by criminal events and were actively engaging in risk avoidance measures in an attempt to reduce their exposure to perceived threats and hazards. The key finding of these surveys was that the fear of crime was paradoxical (Innes et al., 2002).

Much of the developmental researches in crime perception focus on fear of impending harm to one's well-being, whether such harm is real or imagined (Robinson, 1998). Fear of crime is measured either as a subjective feeling of lack of safety or as a perception about risk of becoming a victim of crime and has an obvious and direct relationship to previous victimization experiences (Samuel & Chung, 1998). Gaps between perceived risks and actual risks of crime are larger among victims than non-victims. According to Samuel et al. (1998) previous victimization experiences do not always exhibit the largest influences on fears or perceptions about crime. In response to this situation, the number of recent studies done by Farrall and Ditton, (1999) sought to better understand the cognitive and affective processes involved in fear of crime. The



critique of fear of crime encompasses both methodological and conceptual concerns (Innes et al., 2002).

The methodological critiques centre on the instruments typically used to measure respondent's fear of crime. For example, by deconstructing the meaning of some of the key terms within the standard survey questions used to measure fear of crime, Farrall et al. (1999) showed that respondents may not necessarily be afraid, but are rather thinking about crime, or feeling anger, outrage or annoyance about it. What researchers have understood as expressions of fear, may then, actually be a more neutral form of awareness about crime, or be related to the petty grievances and annoyances that they have recently experienced (Farrall et al., 1999). It is becoming increasingly apparent that people use fear of crime as something of a 'dustbin concept' (Innes et al., 2002) that is, when people talk about fear of crime, in addition to appraising their probability of victimization, they also tend to articulate nebulous and diffuse anxieties that they have about the state of society and their position within it (Girling, Loader & Sparks, 2000).

There are several factors that can be related to the perception or fear of crime such as gender (Schafer, Huebner & Bynum, 2006; Pantazis, 2000), age (Clarke & Lewis 1982; Mawby 1988), physical, psychological and emotional weakness (Whitley & Prince, 2005), environmental condition (Pantazis & Gordon, 1997) and media influences (Tewksbury, Miller & DeMichele, 2006). A recent study done by Schafer et al. (2006) on the fear of crime and criminal victimization had found that women express greater levels of fear than men. By using random selection method in a midwestern community in the United States, Schafer et al. (2006) found that female respondents were significantly more fearful than males. Jefferson and Hollway (2000) noted a gendered

dimension to the construction of fear, in that for women fear of crime tends to connote sexual assault, whereas for men it is physical assault. Other example is the study done by Warr (1984) who argued that even with the same levels of perceived risks as men; women are more prone to fear crime because they believe the consequences of victimization to be more serious. It is also consistent with the findings by Schafer et al. (2006) who stated that women felt less safe overall and were more fearful of personal victimization than men.

Perception of crime has also been associated with age, with studies showing that older people are generally more fearful of crime (Clarke et al., 1982; Mawby 1988). Warr (1984) argued that the greater fear of crime reported by older people can be attributed to their differential sensitivity to risk despite their lower exposure. For example, study done by Hough and Mayhew (1995) showed that although older people feel more unsafe in their local neighborhoods after dark they are less worried about being burgled and mugged than younger people. Another study done by Pantazis et al. (1997) found that the level of feeling unsafe among older people was conditional upon their level of deprivation, with the result that older people living in circumstances of multiple deprivations were seven times more likely to feel unsafe in comparison with elderly people who were less deprived. The difference in perceptions between young and old is substantial, although not nearly as great as the vast young-old difference in the violent crime rate (Emrath, 1998).

People's perception on crime also related to the environmental conditions such as poverty (Borooah and Carcach, 1997), socialization level (Demos, 1997), socioeconomic status and other environmental factors. The available evidence suggests that poor people

are much more fearful than the middle and high class groups of the population (Pantazis et al., 1997; Carcach 1997). This is supported by Jones (1987), who suggested that the experiences of fear among older people should be seen in the context of processes that result in them feeling socially isolated and de-skilled in relationship to their environment.

In addition, poor people's experiences of feeling unsafe should be contextualized in terms of other insecurities such as job loss and mortgage repossession, which may be connected to local, national and international processes (Pantazis, 2000). According to Gordon et al. (1997), people in 'multiply deprived' households which mean people who live in lots of problems were nearly three times more likely to feel unsafe in their local neighborhood compared with people in 'comfortable' households. This aspect of vulnerability of crime raises a number of important issues.

First, people living in circumstances of poverty may feel less able to protect their property from the threat of victimization because of expenses, rather than choice, will often dictate whether their household has adequate security measures. Secondly, where criminal victimization entails the loss of property, the impact of crime may be more significant for people without home contents insurance and this is more likely to involve those living in poverty (Pantazis et al., 1997). Thirdly, poor people may be exposed to potentially more threatening situations due to their greater reliance on public transport, which is consequential to their lack of private transport and/or inability to afford taxi fares (Pantazis, 2000). Fourthly, poor people may live in areas suffering from a higher degree of crime and 'incivility', both of which may enhance their perceptions of feeling unsafe (Hope, 1995).

There also a link between disorder and both neighborhood attachment and crime-related fear. Disorder directly affects fear when residents become concerned with the impact of such conditions such as rowdy youth, public drinking and panhandling. According to Taylor (1995), disorder indirectly affects fear through resident's perceptions and concerns. Social and physical decay may indicate a neighborhood has lost the ability to exert informal social control (Kelling & Coles, 1996), generating fear, and perceived vulnerability (Bennett & Flavin, 1994). In addition, according to Conklin (1975), and Lewis and Salem (1986) who noted that the perceived inability to control neighborhood conditions can erode residents' social ties and sense of community. Viewed in this way, disorder can be seen as starting a "spiral of decay" (Skogan, 1990), generating anxiety, helplessness, withdrawal, and the propagation of disorderly conditions.

Married residents express less fear than their non-married counterparts (Baumer, 1978; Haynie, 1998 and Mesch, 2000), perhaps due to lifestyle and activity modifications, as well as a decreased sense of physical vulnerability. Socioeconomic status had also been associated with perceptions of safety. Austin, Woolever, and Baba (1994) found a significant positive relationship between education and increased feeling of perceived safety. Others (Lee 1981; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Toseland, 1982) found that higher status was associated with lower levels of fear. These results, however, were not universal. Baba and Austin (1989), constructed measure of socioeconomic status by utilizing family income, education of respondent, and occupation of head of household and found that is no significant impact on perceived levels of neighborhood safety.

The media are also responsible for contributing to the information upon which people base on their assessment of risk. Chermak (1995: pg 96) noted that “the news media can be influential in shaping opinions and attitudes about crime”. One piece of research into press coverage found that those people who read the tabloids with the most sensational accounts also express the highest levels of fear (Tewksbury et al., 2006). In a series of interviews done by Chisholm, Patricia and Maclean (1993), they found that most respondents said that they had based their answers largely on media reports rather than on direct experience. Roomer, Jamieson, and Aday (2003) found that local television news is the nation's dominant source of information for crime and legal issues.

The public is bombarded with violent crime images as the media display local criminal events and sensational crimes happening in other places, giving the overall impression that crime is increasing and the criminal justice system is incapable of stemming the flow of criminal activity. Roomer et al. (2003) analyzed the competing theories explaining high levels of fear of crime as crimes decreased. They found strong support for the television-exposure hypothesis suggesting that individuals with higher levels of television viewing are more likely to “experience heightened perceptions of crime risk on both a personal and societal level” (Roomer et al., 1999: pg 3). The news media are the central location from which the public becomes informed about social issues (Tewksbury et al., 2006). It is only logical that citizens will tune-in, get online, or “read all about it” to find out what is going on locally, nationally, and internationally. One need only turn on the television to understand the centrality of crime and justice issues for the media.

There is one common approach to measuring fear of crime in surveys. This is to ask respondents how safe they feel when walking alone in their local area after dark. This measure is used in the British Crime Survey (BCS), and is sometimes referred to in the criminological literature as the global measure of fear because it makes no reference to a specific crime. One problematic feature with this type of question is that it is not sufficiently clear whether people's answers are referring to an emotional reaction to crime that is characterized by a sense of danger and anxiety, or judgments about perceived risks of personal victimization. Thus, a person expressing that they do not feel safe may be aware of relative risks as opposed to actually being afraid (Pantazis, 2000).

### **1.3 Related theories on perception**

According to the subcultural diversity perspective, people are more likely to be afraid because they are worried about the behaviors of people who look or act different. The disorder model asserts that people see incivilities as an indicator of crime and therefore feel more vulnerable and afraid (Bursik & Grasmick 1993; Sampson 1993). The community concern model sees fear primarily as a result of residents' concern that the community is different, or less safe, than it was in the past (Covington & Taylor 1991; Merry 1981).

### **Social Disorganization Theory**

Social disorganization is a key theory that has been used to explain how real and perceived community characteristics can increase fear of crime, especially when victimization risk is low (Taylor & Covington 1993). Characteristics of social disorganization include poverty, residential mobility, racial heterogeneity, and the

presence of gangs (Bursik et al., 1993). The concept of social disorganization was applied to the explanation of crime, delinquency, and other social problem by sociologists at the University of Chicago in the early 1900s. Rapid growth and changes were viewed as disorganizing or disintegrative forces contributing to a breakdown in the teaching and learning those prior social rules that had inhibited crime and delinquency in European peasant society (Thomas & Znanieki, 1918). In the early editions of his classic textbook, *Principle of Criminology* (1924, 1934, 1939), Edwin Sutherland invoked the concept of social disorganization to explain increase in crime that accompanied the transformation of preliterate and peasant societies where “influences surrounding a person were steady, uniform, harmonies and consistent” to modern Western civilization which he believed was characterized by inconsistency, and un-organization (Sutherland, 1934; pg 64).

Social disorganization has been defined as the inability of local communities to realize the common values of their residents or solve commonly experienced problems, such as disorder and crime (Bursik, 1988). Taylor and Covington (1993) found that social disorganization and groups of teens was also an important predictor of fear of crime. In particular, Taylor et al. (1993) argued that incivilities neighborhood characteristics that symbolize disorganization and disorder invoke fear because people think they are linked to problems with local teens, including crime. One of the important works in the development of criminology was Clifford Shaw’s works with Henry McKay and other collaborators on *Delinquency Areas* (1929) which described and sought to explain the distribution of a variety of social problems in the city of Chicago. Shaw and McKay (1929) found that certain areas in Chicago tended to keep high rates despite successive changes in the ethnic groups residing in them. This suggests that those

problems were (a) generated by the social conditions experienced by these groups rather than by any genetic or biological predisposition, and (b) by traditions of crime and delinquency that developed and are perpetuated through interaction among new and established member of social areas.

### **Social Control Theory**

Social control theories maintain that all people have the potential to violate the law and that modern society presents many opportunities for illegal activity (Larry, 2004). The most prominent social control theorist in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Travis Hirschi, viewed the motivations as so natural to human beings that no special forces were necessary to explain law breaking. Law breaking often the most immediate source of gratification or conflict resolution, and no special motivation is required to explain such behavior (Hirschi, 1969).

Humans beings as active, flexible organisms will engage in a wide range of activities, unless the range is limited by the process of socialization and social learning (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). However, such motivation are viewed as sufficiently common, diverse, transitory and situational that more explanatory power to be gained from focusing on the barriers or constraints that inhibit law-breaking outcomes than attempting to discern specific motivating forces (Gottfredson et al., 1990). Rather than being generated by one or a few dominant forces, the motives for delinquency are depicted as quite diverse, ranging from instrumental needs (stealing when one is poor and hungry) to emotional rage, frustration, and sheer thrill and excitement (Gottfredson et al., 1990). However, because most people are motivated to break laws at one time or