



Fear of Crime in 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 ($M=3.85$, $SD=1.66$).

Keywords: Crime, fear of crime, gated and non-gated residential areas, confirmatory factor analysis

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1.0 Introduction

Fear of crime has become a serious social problem demanding scientific understanding and social reaction (Renauer, 2007). In reducing fear of crime, physical elements such as gated elements become a crucial factor. Hence, the gated community residential concept has caught the attention of developers. Therefore, its attracted popular demand due to the belief that the gated element is able to reduce acts of crime in residential areas and reduce fear of crime (Atkinson, Blandy, Flint & Lister, 2004; Blakely & Snyder, 1997; JPBD, 2009; Setha Low, 2004 & Thuillier, 2003). 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 coupled with a security guard post at the entrance to the residential area. Thus, the practice of the gated community residential areas in Malaysia known as a gated and guarded community which 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 fenced according to individual lots and 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 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.

2.0 Literature Review

Crime is a social problem commanding national attention. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey Report (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002), estimated 24.2 million crimes occurred in 2001. The cost to victims, their families and the general public in monetary terms is of considerable magnitude. The estimated total cost of crime in 1994 was 19.58 billion dollars. The categorized costs of crime such as 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 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 (Fowler & Mangione, 1986; Stiles, Halim, & Kaplan, 2003).

Fear of crime is a manifestation of a feeling that one is in danger. According to Pain (2000), fear of crime is not an inherent characteristic of 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. The feeling of fear of crime is differs and 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). Fear of crime 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 believed to give a significant effect on fear of crime (Harang, 2003). 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 caused by the individual's unacceptable behaviour such as public drunkenness, drug addiction, prostitution, juvenile loitering, delinquent behaviour and homelessness (Renauer, 2007; Welsh & Hoshi, 2002). The third factor is victimization. There have 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 the news of crime either from experiences of being a crime victim among relatives, friends, neighbours or from the media (Banks, 2005) which caused a traumatic feeling and fear on personal safety should become a victim of crime (Reid, 2000).

Crime problems in neighbourhoods and crime-specific is the other factors that frequently affect the feeling of fear of crime. According to Gibson, Zhao, Lovrich and Gaffney (2002), crime problems in neighbourhoods often measured by asking respondents to rate how high the crime problem is in their neighbourhoods within a period of 12 months. Meanwhile, 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.

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 deterioration in the quality of their life from the aspect of security. This security aspect measured based on crime rates and road accident statistics. The 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 closely associated with social peace of mind and both is pre-requisites for a steady and stable development (UPE, 2004).

3.0 Methodology

The research method included a structured questionnaire, which 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 categorized as able to afford medium high cost houses (JPBD, 2009; Putrajaya, 2009). The study employs the population survey approach on individual gated residential (IGR) areas in Bandar Baru Bangi and individual non-gated residential (INR) areas in Putrajaya. In IGR, it involved 275 households and 201 households in INR. The study's respondents comprised of heads of households or the main breadwinner in the household. A preliminary site study conducted to identify unoccupied residences such as neighbourhood watch beats, kindergartens, child care centres, storage buildings and vacant residences. Out of 476 residences, 19 eliminated from the respondent selection list as they identified as having non residential use. Out of 457 residences, only 171 respondents contribute in this study. The selection of INR done first followed by the selection of IGR. In Malaysia, INR are very limited and Putrajaya chosen as the study area because it is the first INR in Malaysia to practice the non-gated concept (Roslan Talib, 2009).

4.0 Results and Discussions

The validation of the fear of crime construct with five dimensions, namely, physical environment (PE), social environment (SE), indirect victimization (VIC), crime-specific (CS), and crime problems in residential (CPR) areas done by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS and SPSS software. CFA is a measurement model which developed by the correlation between latent variables and several indicators (items) or known as variable and error manifests. The CFA method is able to ensure and validate the items used in measuring latent variables by taking into account the value of the variances. The result of the measurement model for fear of crime construct is as shown in Figure 1.

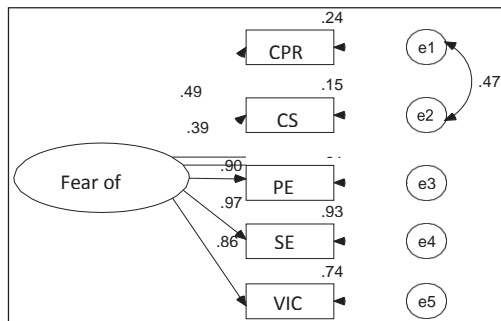


Figure 1: Measurement Model on Fear of Crime Construct

Figure 1 demonstrates the measurement model for 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 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 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 discovered that all FOC dimensions, namely, CPR, CS, PE, SE and VIC were higher in gated residences. This 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 2.

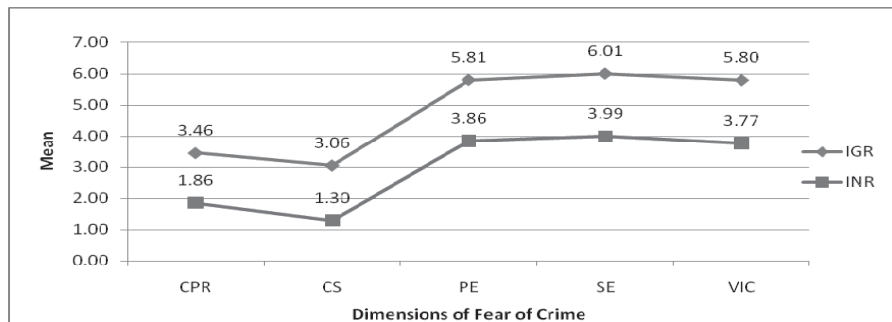


Figure 2: Dimensions of Fear of Crime

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 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 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 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, this study also discovered that gender demography 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 previously stated by Tseloni and Zarafonita (2008) where it 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 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 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 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 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 become well versed about their residential neighborhood in terms of crime incidences. This finding is as shown in Figure 3.

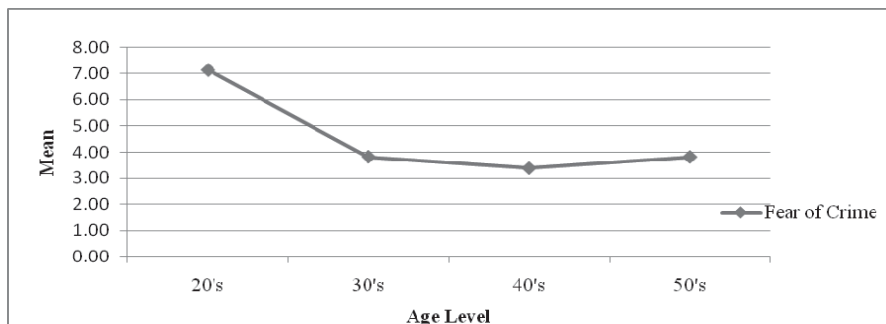


Figure 3: The Level of Age Towards The Fear of Crime

5.0 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 prove 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 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 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.

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