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Social Integration, Community's Sense of Perception of Safety among Neighborhood Communities in Klang Valley Area

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Abstract

Perception of safety has become a concerning issue in Malaysia. It is proven by the rapid growth of gated community in Malaysia due to public concern over the safety of their family. The important of the topic is to find out in what extent the social capital such as concept of social cohesion and sense of community besides environment design in helping to create perception on safety among residential community area in Klang Valley. The aim of this study was to determine the relationships between social cohesion, sense of community towards safety perception in Klang valley area community. The methodology was uses a quantitative approach and survey techniques using descriptive and inferential analysis. A total of 500 respondents covering gated and non-gated neighborhood communities in the Klang Valley area. Respondents were selected through multi-stage sampling method. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire form by the respondents with minimal monitoring by the researcher. A set of questionnaires that includes a combination of several scales were used, namely demographic background, social cohesion, sense of community and safety perception. Analysis was used is descriptive analysis, Pearson correlation and multiple regression. Major finding of the study is respondents who have better sense of community will create a better perception of safety in gated and non-gated resident. It is believed that the findings of this study would add new perspective on how social cohesion is important to create better perception of safety to their neighborhood community. Therefore, responsible parties such as local authorities need to give more emphasis to programs that build social capital among residents and eventually create a safe environment in a neighborhood. For further research, researcher can include environmental design as a second variable in strengthen social capital (sense of cohesion and sense of community) to build good vibe of perception of safety among gated and non-gated communities in Malaysia.

Keywords: Neighborhood, Social Cohesion, Sense of Community, Safety Perception

Introduction

From the statistics, the crime trend in Malaysia shows a tendency towards property crime because the number of reported cases is higher compared to violent crime cases. Based on

Sidhu (2005) almost 90% of crimes that occur in Malaysia involve theft and robbery of property which mostly occurs in residential areas. Among the seven types of crime categories, crimes against property, namely burglary at night, recorded the highest number in the past seven years compared to crimes against other property (PDRM, 2016). According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), a crime against property occurred in every 3 seconds compared to violent crimes that are estimated to occur every 22 seconds (Kornblum, 2008). In addition, a report from PDRM (2006), found that most criminal cases occurred at night is higher than during the day, i.e. 118 442 compared to daytime which is 43 346 cases from 2000 to 2005. While the study conducted by JPBD (2014) showed that 47.10% of the population felt unsafe at night.

Based on a study done by Uittenbogaard (2014) in the city of Stockholm, shows that property crime is concentrated in the evening, while terror crime is concentrated at night. This is because the weak bonding between society is seen as a major weakness in community relations where residents fail to identify foreigners who infiltrate into their area. Social cohesion is one of the components of social capital. Social cohesion is seen as a bottom-up process that is based on relationships between groups different social living in a neighborhood (Morrison, 2003) Based on a study conducted by Rountree and Land (1996) showed better social cohesion within a community, indirectly has a significant relevance which has a low level of risk of crime. In addition to the common taste community is the core component of social capital (McNeill, Kreuter & Subramanian, 2006) and it is part of which network support allowing one to rely on such networks (Saranson, 1974). A sense of community is very important as an indicator to the well-being of life based on (McNeill et al., 2006). Berry & Welsh (2010) state that the existence of a common sense of community is very important in the neighborhood aspect to increase feelings of security and eliminate opportunities to crime (Austin et al., 2002). Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the relationships between social cohesion, sense of community towards safety perception in Klang valley area community.

Perception of Safety

Perceptions of safety or concern for safety are interpreted as feelings arising from observations, experiences and emotions that are free from any form of injury or being a victim of crime for self, family, and surrounding society including property (Covington & Taylor, 1991). The perceptions of safety is not static and it can change because it is influenced by internal (subjective) and external (physical) factors, especially those related to factors of education level, community integration and residential design that also affect the perception of security (Covington and Taylor, 1991). Fear of crime is subjective in nature and is assessed and analyzed in line with the development of criminal facts (de Leeuw, 2016). The increase in crime is influenced by various factors and one of the factors is the urbanization process that influences the increase in crime problem in most cities in the world (Rasidah, 2012; Pokhariyal & Muthuri, 2003; Gold, 2002; Pallen, 2002).

The problem of crime is becoming increasingly complex and difficult to curb as a result of current advances in science and technology (Sidhu, 2005). Fear of crime has significance to stress in the city that can cause dangerous effects from a psychological point of view (Abdullah et al., 2014). Based on Gabriel and Greve (2003), fear of crime is defined as emotions or feelings of danger and anxiety resulting from the threat of physical crime. This is also

supported by Yuan and McNealey (2016), who state that fear of crime causes the individual to limit their movements and activities which in turn causes the person to change the routine of life in terms of behavioral, emotional and psychological responses (Foster et al., 2014).

Factors Affecting Perception of Safety

Several past studies have examined the relevance of social cohesion to a perception of safety. Often these studies of social cohesion are associated with fear of crime. Based on Haynes and Rader (2015), social cohesion such as social support, trust and social relationships in the local area form the characteristics of the neighborhood separately. According to Jenson (1998), the term "social cohesiveness" is used to describe processes that do not just involve a state or country, but also a sense of commitment and duty, as well as a desire or the ability to live together harmoniously anywhere.

Previous literature mentioned social cohesion is related to social integration, stability, and integration failure (disintegration) (Berger, 1998; Olofsson, 1999). Social cohesion is related to the situation and integration and the level of integration will also determine the level of social cohesion in a society. Cohesion of relationships between neighborhoods is important in helping the problems faced by their neighbors. There is a strong relationship between fears about crime with social cohesion.

Social cohesion between neighborhoods is important in helping the problems faced by their neighbors. Concerns about crime also have a significant correlation with social cohesion. Lack of contact will cause the feeling that no one can help them if they are in danger and at the same time increase the sense of anxiety about criminal conduct. Social cohesion is a very important element to ensure that a community is in a state of peace and harmony and it is a prerequisite to a stable state and a society without conflict (Abdullah et al., 2016). Social cohesion within the neighborhood also allows residents to build shared bonds that lead to an increase in a sense of shared ownership among the community. The sharing of resources among the population is part of a theoretical model that highlights social cohesion that not only has a positive impact on health (Putnam, 2000) but can also reduce crime rates (Hirschfield & Bowers, 1997; Lee, 2000).

Referring to McMillan & Chavis (1986) sense of community is defined members of the group who feel they are the property of the community and very important to each other's, sharing trust in community members as well as the need for commitment to enable the community continues to be together. Having a strong sense of community will produce positive results to both the individual and the community at the level geography and level of relationship. At the neighborhood level, the community will feel secured and safe, more participation in community relations, propensity to vote, help others and involved in volunteers (Schweitzer 1996).

Having a strong sense of community will also improve an individual's level of well-being in other terms increasing a sense of joy, reducing a sense of anxiety and giving a greater sense of self-efficacy (Davidson & Cotter, 1991). Based on the study of Bachrach and Zautra (1985), they found that a strong sense of community will result in a rapid response to dangerous threats where this strong relationship will increase individual effectiveness levels and help communities deal through emphasis on their community in a proactive manner. Most researchers have identified many factors related to the sense of community and

sometimes they contradict each other. Sometimes the correlation is obvious, as opposed to the study conducted which is not of a direct nature in the study of the common sense of the community. Concepts related to community participation make it difficult to draw clear conclusions. However, in stable housing and low crime rates, a sense of community is usually formed even when the community is newly established, this is because residents are given the opportunity to build relationships and social bonds (Long & Perkins, 2007; Sagy et al., 1996). It can therefore be concluded that low crime rate and stability of residential areas are very important in shaping the sense of community.

Methodology

Since the Klang valley region (Kuala Lumpur and Selangor) has a high crime rate in Malaysia, a sample of existing neighborhoods communities was obtained there. Klang Valley is a region in Malaysia that includes Kuala Lumpur and its suburbs, as well as urban and suburban regions in the state of Selangor. Approximately 7.5 million people live in the Klang Valley (Gazette, 2012). Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula a total of 343 samples were required for this study. In this study, the sample selection procedure is multi-stage sampling. Samples of respondents were selected from four districts in Klang Valley area namely, Sepang, Petaling, Klang, Hulu Langat and Kuala Lumpur. The sample should be distributed fairly among all residential regions and the study's target population. Therefore, the number of respondents for this study is 500. The question statements from the original instrument in English are translated into Malay to facilitate the respondents to answer the questionnaire.

Section A: Demographic social

Section B: Social cohesion

Section C: Sense of community

Section D: Perception on safety

Data collected were analyzed using Statistical Package Social Science (SPSS) version 24.0. In order to achieve the objectives of this study, descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used while inferential statistics such as Pearson Correlation and Multiple Linear Regression were employed to determine factors influencing perception of safety.

Results

The final sample included 500 respondents (176 males and 324 females), majority of respondents (66.0%) aged between 21-40 years old. The mean age of the respondents in this study was 33.21. It can be concluded that the middle age is the most numerous groups in this study area compared to the young. In terms of educational level, the study found that most respondents have a degree, which represents 39.4% and more than 50% or more than half (65.8%) earning less than RM3000. The results of the study also showed that 43.6% of the respondents lived in their home more than 11 years and above. As for the type of residence, the study found that the majority of respondents (54.8%) live in unfenced areas and 39.0% of respondents live in terrace houses.

Table 1
Socio-demographic respondents (n=500)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
20 years old and below	46	9.2
21-40 years old	330	66.0
41 years old and above	124	24.8
Mean: 33.21		
Gender		
Male	176	34.2
Female	324	64.8
Salary		
No income	14	2.8
Less than RM3000	329	65.8
RM3000-RM4999	62	12.4
RM5000-RM6999	41	8.2
RM7000-RM8999	21	4.2
More than RM9000	33	6.6
Level of education		
Does not go to school	2	0.4 %
Primary school	5	1.0%
Secondary school	102	20.4%
Certificate (A-level)	22	4.4%
Diploma	77	15.4%
Undergraduate	197	39.4%
Postgraduate (Master/Phd)	95	19.0%
Duration of stay		
5 years below	181	36.2%
5-10 years	101	20.2%
11 years and above	218	43.6%
Type of residents		
Gated	226	45.2%
Non-gated	274	54.8%
Type of properties		
Low cost flat/Apartment	144	28.8%
Condominium Penthouse/Loft/Duplex	41	8.2%
Terrace	3	0.6%
Townhouse	195	39.0%
Semi-D	6	1.2%
Bungalow/Cluster/Villa	24	4.8%
Shop houses	18	3.6%
Village houses	1	0.2%
	68	13.6%

Table 2

Level of Perception of Safety

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
Low (1.00-2.39)	11	2.2	1.984	0.167
Moderate (2.40-3.69)	486	97.2		
High (3.70-5.00)	3	0.6		

Next, the focus is into the respondent's perception of safety. As presented in Table 2, a large majority of respondents (97.2%) have a high moderate perception of safety. A total of 2.2% of the respondents have low level of perception of safety.

Table 3

Factors affecting perception of safety

Factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
Social cohesion				
Low (1.00-2.39)	0	0	3.406	0.337
Moderate (2.40-3.69)	413	82.6		
High (3.70-5.00)	87	17.4		
Sense of community				
Low (1.00-2.39)	37	7.4	3.57	0.035
Moderate (2.40-3.69)	238	47.6		
High (3.70-5.00)	225	45.0		

Table 3 shows that more than three-quarters or more precisely 82.6% of the respondents had a moderate level of neighborhood social cohesion while only 47.6% had a moderate level of sense of community.

Table 4

Relationship between independent variables and perception of safety

Independents Variables	r	p
Social cohesion	0.013	0.387
Sense of community	0.164	0.000

One of the focal points of this study is to inspect any relationship that occur between perception of safety and selected independent variables. To achieve this, Pearson product-moment correlation was employed. Data shown in Table 4 indicates that all the two independent variables which are social cohesion ($p = 0.387$) have insignificant relationship with perception of safety. Meanwhile, the sense of community ($p = 0.000$) has significant and positive relationship with perception of safety.

Table 5

Factors that contribute to perception of safety

Independents Variables	Beta	t	p
Social cohesion	0.035	0.756	0.45
Sense of community	0.174	3.783	0.00

To further analyze the data, multiple linear regression was employed for the purpose of revealing the significant contributors among the predictor variables in explaining perception of safety. Based on the results of the multiple linear regression performed as in Table 5, the

value of R^2 is 0.028 indicating that as much as 2.8% which has been described by the independent variable to the dependent variable. Analysis found that there was an insignificant relationship of social cohesion to security which is felt for which the value of p is 0.45. Whereas, the analysis of the common sense of the community gives a significant contribution to perceptions of safety with a p value was ($p = 0.00$). As illustrated in Table 4.27, the largest coefficient of community common sense is 0.174 shows that if a unit of community common sense increases, then perceptions of security (perceived security) will increase by 0.174. Hence the hypothesis successfully rejected

Discussion

From the results, it is noted that respondents who have better sense of community will have better perception of safety. A sense of community exists a significant relationship to perceived safety factors, harassment and physical and social factors, fear of crime factors and finally trust factors in authorities. The results here are consistent with a number of past studies that emphasized on relationship between sense of community and perception of safety (Schweitzer, 1996; Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Bachrach & Zautra, 1985). According to Schweitzer (1996), a strong sense of community will produce positive results to both the individual and the community at the level geography and level of relationship. The community will feel secure and safe, more participation in community relations, propensity to vote, help others and involved in volunteers. Having a strong sense of community will also improve an individual's level of well-being in other terms increasing a sense of joy, reducing a sense of anxiety and giving a greater sense of self-efficacy (Davidson & Cotter, 1991). They also found that a strong sense of community will result in a rapid response to dangerous threats where this strong relationship will increase individual effectiveness levels and help communities deal through emphasis on their community in a proactive manner.

Conclusion

The study of perceptions of safety and their relationship with aspects of social cohesion and sense of community is an important study in this neighborhood community. Therefore, responsible parties such as local authorities need to give more emphasis to programs that build social capital among residents in a neighborhood, improved in terms of design, provisions to implement community programs in the neighborhood, provide areas that encourage community such as parks and recreation areas, more frequent maintenance and strengthening programs between communities in the neighborhood and the authorities.

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