



ISSN: 0975-833X

Available online at <http://www.journalcra.com>

International Journal of Current Research
Vol. 9, Issue, 12, pp.63561-63565, December, 2017

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF CURRENT RESEARCH

RESEARCH ARTICLE

TERRITORIAL FUNCTIONING AND VICTIMIZATION IN NEIGHBOURHOODS

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 08th September, 2017
Received in revised form
14th October, 2017
Accepted 20th November, 2017
Published online 31st December, 2017

Key words:

Territorial Functioning,
Crime Prevention, Victimization,
Fear of Crime.

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Citation: Syarmila Hany Haron, 2017. "Territorial Functioning and Victimization in Neighbourhoods", *International Journal of Current Research*, 9, (12), 63561-63565.

ABSTRACT

Territorial functioning represents a collection of behaviors, markers, and attitudes expressed by people in small groups as a way to manage their environments and the spaces they physically occupy. This paper examines attitudes and marking behavior associated with territorial functioning by residents of two housing areas in Malaysia that differed in terms of land uses and in residents' perceptions of the level of crime in their neighborhoods. In the study, 144 participants participated in a survey. They reported levels of crime similar to the ones reported in a British survey of crime in 2015. The data generated by the survey were then analyzed in SPSS using descriptive and structural equation modeling that combined the three elements of territorial functioning behavior, markers, and attitudes to create an overall measure of territorial function. The results of the analysis indicated that territorial functioning is negatively associated with the number of break-ins of homes in a neighborhood regardless of the type of neighborhood.

INTRODUCTION

Crime is a significant concern in every country in the world, and numerous scholars, law enforcement agencies, and policymakers are involved in multiple efforts to reduce crime and enhance safety for citizens. Naturally, a primary concern is the level of police protection provided in terms of the number of officers deployed given the population. Debate is ongoing about the effect of an inadequate ratio of officers to citizens on curbing residential crime (Bukit Aman Police Headquarters, 2002). According to Interpol (International Criminal Police Organization INTERPOL, 2017), the ideal ratio of officers to citizens is 1:250. In Malaysia, there are approximately 120,000 officers and a population of 31.7 million, resulting in a ratio of 1:270. In research conducted by Haron (Haron, 2001) in Pangsapuri Pelangi Georgetown, Malaysia, a survey showed that 84% of the responding residents expected the police to patrol while only 12% said that their civilian neighborhood watchers actually patrolled the residential blocks. A majority of the residents also indicated that the patrols were not conducted on holidays (74%) and that they occurred only once a day (69%). In another study by Osman *et al.* (2011) involving gated community housing in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, a majority of the respondents (79.3 %) stated that the local patrol service was provided 24 hours a day; the rest said

it was provided during the night between 7p.m. and 7a.m. These studies of the effect of patrolling residential areas support the notion that the number of police officers patrolling neighborhoods affects the level of crime; both found that, to reduce crime, patrols must be done at least four times a day in high crime areas rather than only occasionally (*The Star Online*, 2013). According to Habibullah *et al.* (2014), on the other hand, the number of police personnel deployed does not have a significant effect on the number of violent crimes: murders, gang robberies without firearms, robberies without arms, rapes, assaults, and thefts of lorries, cars, and motorcycles, hence supporting Becker's (Becker, 2013) model of crime. A number of other crimes, however, are reduced to a greater extent as the number of officers deployed increases: attempted murders, gang robberies with firearms, armed robberies, night house burglaries, bicycle thefts, and other thefts. Another approach to crime prevention in Malaysia is a "neighborhood watch" style program called "Ops Cantas" that includes various policing strategies and is being implemented nationwide (*Sinar Online*, 2014). It was introduced in October 2013 and led to a reduction in break-ins of 456 cases in 1999 and 1,661 cases in 2000 and a decline in burglaries of 914 cases in 1999 and 2,346 cases in 2000 (Bukit Aman Police Headquarters, 2002). These results convinced the Malaysian government to establish neighborhood watch programs in residential areas where crime rates were high (*Sinar Online*, 2014). According to the Government Transformation Program's 2013 Annual Report by the Royal Malaysian Police the rate of crime generally dropped to 49,059 in the first 116

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days after the “Ops Cantas” was launched 36,974 property crimes and 12,085 violent crimes; during the same period prior to the program, there were 52,320 cases. Territorial functioning has been proposed as an effective way to reduce crime (Taylor, 1988). In his foundational work, Taylor (1988) defines territorial functioning as a system of attitudes, sentiments, and behaviors that are specific to a clearly marked location. These behaviors, patterns, and markers signify that a group has some expectation of exclusivity of use of a space, as well as responsibility for and control over activities in that space. Territorial functioning is the mechanism by which unwanted people are excluded. It often involves physical barriers such as walls, fences, hedges, and locks that physically obstruct entry and communicate that the spaces, usually close to a home, are private and not for public use. However, territorial functioning can also be expressed by people’s behavior and attitudes, such as carefully maintaining a courtyard and the exterior of a house to express that it is important to them. According to Brower, Docker, and Taylor (Brower, 1983), people living in areas where the threat of criminal activity is high resort to multiple territorial displays, believing that intruders are less likely to trespass when plantings and fences are present. The study verified that fences are a powerful security feature because they require a would-be intruder to make a deliberate effort to enter and communicate that the home’s occupant is determined to keep them out. For example, in a study of residential defensible space in public housing, Brunson, Kuo, and Sullivan (Brunson *et al.*, 2001) found that tenants who safeguarded near-home spaces viewed their neighborhood as safer than residents who did not maintain such markers. In the 1970s, Oscar Newman (Newman, 2012 & 1996) established the concept of defensible space as an approach to architectural design that maximized the ability of residents of a community to control the spaces surrounding their homes with a goal of reducing crime. As the concept developed, however, the complexity of the social processes that make up communities and defined their territorial functioning was often overlooked (Reynald and Elffers, 2009). This paper examines the relationship between territorial functioning and victimization in two types of residential Malaysian neighborhoods and the effects of their different social and demographic characteristics on that relationship. This study contributes to future efforts by planners and policymakers to design housing communities that provide greater security for residents and reduce crime.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The primary objectives of the study, which employed a household survey, were to (1) identify associations between residents’ demographic characteristics and the outcome of territorial functioning and victimization, (2) examine any differences between two types of neighborhoods in territorial functioning, fear of crime, and perceptions of the severity of crime, and (3) analyze any associations between the types of offenses that occurred and type of neighborhood in which they occurred. Figure 1 presents a model of the variables analyzed in the study. Two neighborhoods in Selangor, Malaysia occupied by both low-income and high-income residents were selected as study sites. They are typical of a majority of ungated landed residential properties in urban Malaysia. The neighborhoods, called council estates, differed, however, in terms of residents’ perceptions of the crime rate, with one viewed as having significantly less cases of crime (the low-crime estate) than the other (the high-crime estate). In general, crime rates are higher

in council estates than in other types of tenancy such as proprietor-occupied and private-rented sectors; these particular neighborhoods were selected because of the large difference in crime rates according to police reports and their similarity otherwise in terms of residents’ demographic and social characteristics. Both are situated in mainly residential areas with commonly available basic shopping facilities provided within the estates. They are also similar in terms of rent rates, overall population, geographic area, and population density and consist of similar percentages of gender, ethnic background, marital status, heads of household, tenancy categories, and car ownership. To assure confidentiality, the estates are not identified by name. The data set for the study was obtained using a survey of households’ main wage earners or their spouses. The administrators of the survey approached each household and asked two screening questions while still on the doorstep whether they were the main wage earner or the wage earner’s spouse and had the respondent lived at the address for at least a year. Respondents who had not resided there for a year were eliminated so that the sample would consist of individuals who had had a reasonable amount of time to develop and implement territorial attitudes and display markers. The survey asked respondents to rate the degree to which they agreed with three statements describing territorial functioning (knowing their neighbors’ names, feeling responsible for their neighbors’ properties in their absence, and feeling comfortable living among their neighbors), how fearful they were of being victims of five crimes (burglary, assault, sexual harassment, rape, and vehicle theft), and the degree to which they felt five other crimes occurred in their neighborhood (burglary, car theft, vandalism, drug abuse, and hooliganism) (see Table 1). A cross-tabulation analysis was used to partition the respondents’ profiles by type of estate—a high or low fear of crime. The analysis showed that none of the control variables (gender, age, marital status, education, and income) varied significantly between the two estates. This is an important measure in ensuring that the sampling strategy is not biased

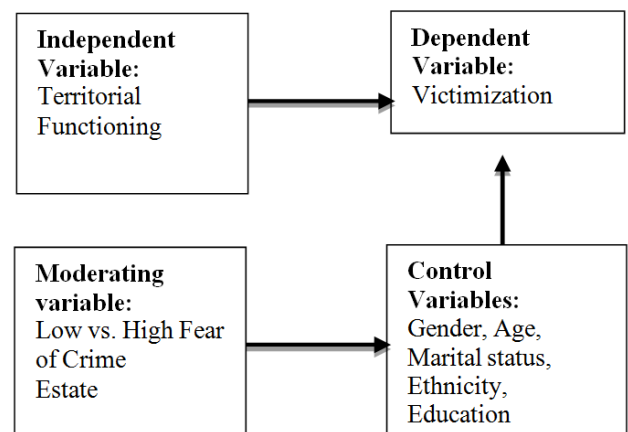


Figure 1. Theoretical framework for Territorial functioning and Victimization

RESULTS

Territorial Functioning, Fear of Crime, and Perceived Crime

To identify differences in the two estates in *territorial functioning, fear of crime, and perceived crime*, a nonparametric Mann-Whitney U-test was conducted using the responses from the survey.

Table 1. Territorial Functioning, Fear of Crime, and Perceived Crime in the Low-crime and High-crime Estates

	Low-crime Estate	High-crime Estate	Mann-Whitney U-test
<i>Territorial Functioning</i>			
I know the names of most of my neighbors	95.36	76.35	510
I feel responsible for watching over my neighbor's house when they are on holiday	90.25	91.20	465
I feel comfortable living among my neighbors	89.54	85.14	419
<i>Fear of Being a Victim of a Crime</i>			
Being burgled	288	167	98
Being assaulted	15.22	13.25	91
Having a vehicle stolen	14.66	11.72	74.3
Being sexually harassed	13.79	15.21	83
Being raped	15.78	17.79	91.5
<i>Perception of the Prevalence of a Crime</i>			
Burglary	81.23	53.10	1520**
Car theft	78.42	56.71	1567**
Vandalism	77.76	56.34	1587**
Drug abuse	77.08	61.39	1685**
Hooliganism	76.27	58.28	1726**

**p<0.01, *p<0.05.

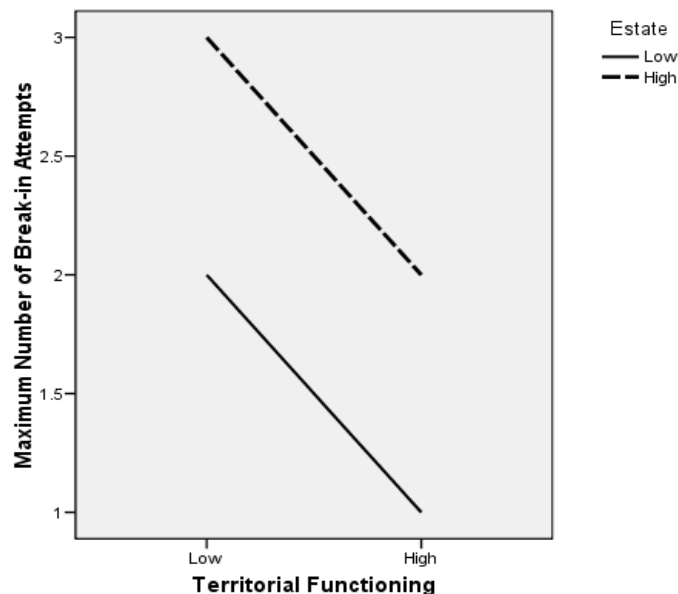
Table 2. Victimization: Low-crime vs. High-crime Estate

Type of Crime		Estate		
		Low-crime (n=58, 40.28%)	High-crime (n=86, 59.72%)	Total
Parts stolen from vehicles ($\chi^2=0.54$)	Yes	16 (53.3%)	14 (46.7%)	30 (21.5%)
	No	31 (36.9%)	53 (63.1%)	84 (78.5%)
Vehicles tampered with or damaged ($\chi^2=2.7$)	Yes	10 (25%)	30 (75%)	40 (35.7%)
	No	30 (41.7%)	42 (58.3%)	72 (64.3%)
Burglary [†] ($\chi^2=3.58$)	Yes	2 (28.6%)	5 (71.4%)	7 (4.9%)
	No	72 (52.6%)	65 (47.4%)	137 (95.1%)
Unsuccessful attempt at burglary* ($\chi^2=5.022$)	Yes	4 (19%)	16 (76.2%)	21 (14.6%)
	No	61 (49.6%)	62 (50.4%)	123 (85.4%)
Defaced or damaged house* ($\chi^2=4.749$)	Yes	5 (33.3%)	10 (66.7%)	15 (13.6%)
	No	52 (49.5%)	53 (50.5%)	105 (95.5%)

†p<0.10, **p<0.01, *p<0.05.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression of the Dependent Variable: Number of Trespasses

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Variables	Territorial Functioning (TF)	TF + ET	TF + ET + (TF x ET)
Territorial Functioning (TF)	-0.191**	-0.185**	0.167
Estate Type (ET)	—	0.161*	0.745 [†]
TF x ET	—	—	-0.677
ΔF	7.677**	6.007*	1.96
ΔR^2	0.041	0.029	0.008

Notes: Estate 1= low-crime; Estate 2= high-crime. **p< 0.01; *p <0.05; [†]p < 0.10. The values for the variables are standardized β s.**Figure 2. The effect of territorial functioning and trespasses: Low-crime estates vs. high-crime estates**

The nonparametric test was selected because the study variables were ranked ordinally for the nominal estate type. The results of the analysis are reported in Table 1. The analysis indicates that none of the measures of territorial functioning varied with the type of estate. Likewise, there were no significant differences between the high-crime and the low-crime estates in terms of the five fear factors of being *burgled*, *assaulted*, *sexually harassed*, and *raped* and of having a *vehicle stolen*. Thus, it appears that the two estates share a similar degree of fear about those crimes. There were differences, however, in their perceptions of the prevalence of the five types of crime in their neighborhoods. Residents of the high-crime estate perceived the rates of burglary, car theft, vandalism, drug abuse, and hooliganism as significantly higher than residents of the low-crime estate. The comparison confirms that the two neighborhoods selected for study were indeed heterogeneous in terms of some perceptions of crime.

Victimization

A second cross-tabulation analysis was conducted to determine if there was any association between being a victim of five types of offenses and the type of estate. Those results are reported in Table 2. The analysis identified no significant difference between the low-crime and the high-crime estates for tampering with vehicles and stolen parts. However, residents of the high-crime estate perceived the number of successful and attempted break-ins as much greater than residents of the low-crime estate.

Relationship between Territorial Functioning and Crime

In the third analysis, the model described in Figure 1 was run using the data from the survey to determine whether the relationship between territorial functioning and crime was affected by the type of estate. Those results are presented in Table 3 and further illustrated in Figure 2. The results show that territorial functioning is negatively correlated with the number of break-ins in both estates.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research is concerned with territorial functioning as a method of crime prevention. Scholars have measured territorial functioning using numerous methods (Foster *et al.*, 2011; Dustan *et al.*, 2015) but little attention has been paid to cross-validation of individual features such as socio-economic characteristics (Abdullah *et al.*, 2013). Malaysia is an important area for studies of territorial functioning because attitudes and territorial markers have a stronger influence there than in nations in the United Kingdom (Abdullah *et al.*, 2013). The results of this study demonstrate that territorial functioning has a negative impact on incidences of burglary in both low-crime and high-crime estates. To be truly successful, efforts to reduce crime in neighborhoods in Malaysia cannot rely on police resources alone. Programs must involve and obtain the cooperation of residents, the police, and the private sector. Malaysia's neighborhood watch program represents one such effort and relies on territorial functioning to convey to criminals that residents will protect their properties. When considering new housing or programs, planners should classify the various crimes and problems prevalent in a neighborhood and design measures specifically to address those problems and later assess their effectiveness in terms of crime, resident surveillance, interactions, and territoriality. A

reduction in incidents of crime is not a precise indicator of the accomplishment of a program. Detailed assessments should be completed to identify the factors that led to a reduction in crime. For such an evaluation to be useful, a "fine-grained" characterization of the program that takes the program method, type, and requirements into account will be vital. Further research on territorial functioning should examine additional settings such as gated versus ungated communities with high and low rates of crime. Future studies could also broaden the analysis of various types of territorial function to provide a more comprehensive picture of its effect on crime. Such comparative studies could make significant contributions to our understanding of the effects of territorial functioning and crime prevention.

Acknowledgements: This material is based on work supported by Universiti Sains Malaysia under a short-term grant. The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this material are solely those of the author.

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