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**ASSESSING THE KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS ON CRIME  
AMONG YOUTH IN MALAYSIA**

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***Abstract***

In Malaysia, reducing crime is one of the efforts that had been outlined in the Government Transformation Program (GTP). Various policies and efforts have been implemented to minimize crime rate, for instance, the establishment of Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF) in 1993. However, reported crime rates are still high and cases of violent crimes are still escalating. Furthermore, the rate of crimes committed by youth has increased despite the decrease in the country's overall crime index. This paper seeks to assess the level of youth knowledge and awareness on crime in Malaysia. A total of 953 sets of questionnaires were distributed among youth representatives, government agencies, non-governmental organization (NGOs) and Residential Committee. Data were analyzed using SPSS and presented through descriptive statistics related to the three research objectives. Results indicated that there is very little involvement in terms of crime prevention activities among youth. Although many still do not really understand the conducts that are considered as crime or otherwise, majority of the respondents were able to identify major crime acts such as killing, robbery and rape. The findings also revealed that youth dominantly obtained information through the social media and internet. Overall, there is a high sensitivity or awareness on crime. Hence, parental supervision, school counselling and involvement of enforcement agencies, besides community participation are significantly needed in addressing this problem.

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## 1. Introduction

Malaysia is undertaking rapid change in all fronts. Datuk Mohammad Mentek, the Secretary General Ministry of the Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government of Malaysia, in his speech in October 2016, claimed that Malaysia is on its track to support and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Progressively, Malaysia is doing well in the economy, science and technology sectors. However, in the midst of pursuing development, the increase in social ills needs to be addressed accordingly as well, in order to achieve a balanced nation. The rising crime level if being left unchecked may be detrimental to the society, thus jeopardizing Malaysia's aspirations. Moreover, the local media have been replete with reports of crimes and violence in Malaysia such as snatch thefts, sexual crimes, and kidnappings, in the last few years (Sidhu, 2006).

Crime can have a negative effect on society as a whole in ways that go beyond the residents of the community in which the crime occurs. It has given rise to a variety of problems related to fear of crime and has caused trouble for residents in urban areas (Nasar & Jones, 1997). The people still have doubts and skeptical about public safety despite a huge reduction in the crime index (Ahmad, 2017). For instance, an increase in the property crimes, has led the crime index in Malaysia rose 4.6 percent between January and April in 2016. According to the National Transformation Programme (NTP) Annual Report 2016, the rate saw an annual decrease of 9% annually between 2010-2016. In 2009, there is a total of 209,817 number of cases recorded while last year, it dropped to a total 112,354 cases (Kumar, 2017). Even though there was significant reduction in the crime rate, the trend showed an emerging pattern of aggressive behaviour among youths in Malaysia (Azizan, 2017).

Nevertheless, the most worrying part is that of crimes committed by our younger generation. The latest serious cases involving youth is bullying that caused fatality. Recently, we were appalled by two incidents, one, a Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia naval cadet, Zulfarhan Osman Zulkarnain, and the other, a student from Penang, T. Nhaveen, who were brutally bullied which led to death. Youth should be our greatest investment as future leaders. Every nation sought new approaches to harness the potentials of young people and addressing their issues (Olaleye, 2010). The youth of a country have a significant impact on the nation building as they shape the future of a nation by replacing the previous generation in key cultural, political and social roles. Thus, it is vital to determine whether people have knowledge of crime, and that if they are aware enough with crimes committed by youth. It is also important to investigate the sources of crime information youth seek.

Crime by youth is preventable. On that notion, a broad range of strategies for preventing and reducing crimes have been implemented by our government. A number of programs and policies as counter measures of crime involving youth were also done. Nonetheless, it does not really address the whole problem. For instance, the government introduced the Reducing Crime National Key Results Area (NKRA) to combat crime, as well as upgraded public security and the performance of the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM). In fact, reducing crime rate is one of the main concerns of NKRA and Government Transformation Plan (GTP) during the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011–2015).

Hence, concerted effort is needed not only by the law enforcement and related government agencies, but more importantly, with the help and involvement of all Malaysians will be significant in

preventing crime. Since youth constitute almost 43 percent of the total population in Malaysia, their participation in combating crime in the community is very crucial.

## **2. Problem Statement**

In Malaysia, the statistics of juvenile delinquency is increasing year by year (Sultan Mohideen et al., 2016). Crime is thought to be a complex phenomenon that has various cumulative effects on the aspects of finance and psychology such as the loss of justice, insurance, security, property, and victimization (Marvi & Behzadfar, 2015). Violent crime rates have spiked among the country's youth and becoming a serious problem. Youth and crime are in juxtaposition, especially those coming from dysfunctional families, who do not want to work or could not get regular well-paid work, thus lacking self-respect. They will seek fulfilment through the manufacture of excitement, thus crime (Campbell, 1993). Youth crime and other serious misconducts post significant threats on social, public, health, and economic problems in Malaysia and throughout the world. A study by Fajnzylber, Lederman and Loayza (2002) showed that a country's rising GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita was associated with declining robbery rates in 15 industrialized, 11 Latin American and the Caribbean, 4 Eastern Europe, 3 Middle East, and 12 Asian countries. Potential risk factors for crime victimization encompass conditions at the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels.

For example, the impact of crime on the economy can be segregated into the prevention cost, correctional cost and the lost opportunity of labour being held in correctional facilities. Costs related to crime preventions include private investment for crime prevention gadgets or equipment, government expenditures such as campaigns and education on safe society and police personnel expenditure. The correctional cost refers to costs such as correction facilities cost and prison personnel, while the lost opportunity refers to the loss of potential labour. The rising costs of operating the Malaysian crime prevention programs have prompted policymakers to consider directing resources toward the programs. Successful crime prevention programs could reduce long-term criminal justice costs, but implementing effective programs requires a better understanding of existing prevention programs. While variation in crime reduction and actual cost savings exists among different types of prevention programs, other program evaluations have also found that some prevention programs can result in greater cost savings than incarceration. In other words, crime has negative effects on the economy by placing a financial burden on governments and taxpayers due to increasing needs for correction facilities, police and courts as well as intangible costs including reduced quality of life and psychological trauma for crime victims. Besides, research conducted by Abdul Hamid and Habibullah (2009) indicated that crime results not only in the loss of property, lives, and misery but also cause severe mental anguish. The bottom line is that crime and the methods used to prevent it are costly.

On the community front, they will be affected by crime as well. They will be afraid to leave home and encounter groups of youth with bad attitude. It is imperative to know whether the rising rate of crimes in residential area means people in the neighbourhood are not aware of the crimes committed or are not bothered with the occurrences. Ignoring the actions may give way for the cases to repeat. Therefore, society also play a major role in preventing crime.

Alas, since the era of Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad efforts in reducing crime has been developed. The establishment of Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF) in 1993 has geared government efforts towards crime prevention. The Foundation has helped Malaysia to directly involve in crime prevention forum internationally. According to the 11th Malaysia Plan which was tabled by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak in the Dewan Rakyat on May 2015, crime prevention initiative would be intensified through the Safe City Programme and volunteerism programmes. However, government's effort to reduce crime as stated as the first NKRA in Government Transformation Program (GTP) seem hard to attract youth to involve in the strategies and programs provided.

### **3. Research Questions**

The study attempted to address the three main questions:

1. Do youth have knowledge about crime?
2. What are the sources of crime information youth turn to?
3. How aware are youth on crime?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose or objective of this study is threefold. They are;

1. To explore the extent of youths' knowledge about what crime is,
2. To identify what sources of information on crime they access,
3. And to determine their level of awareness on crime.

### **5. Research Methods**

A total of 953 sets of questionnaires were distributed among the respondents to accomplish this study. The respondents were sampled from youth representatives, government agencies, non-governmental organization (NGOs) and Residential Committee. Data were analysed using SPSS and presented through descriptive statistics related to the three research objectives. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part refers to the demographic characteristics of the respondents such as gender, religion, race, state, age, involve in crime prevention activities, membership of youth association, position in youth association and term of their involvement. The second part pertains to knowledge on crime, sources of information about crime, and exploring the awareness of crimes among youth.

### **6. Findings**

Out of the 953 sets of questionnaire distributed, 883 questionnaires were completed and returned. Table 1 summarizes the respondents' demographic background. Overall, there were slightly more female respondents at 59.4 percent (n=524) compared to male with 40.6 percent (n=358). The finding of the analysis showed that dominant respondents were members of Islamic religion with (87.8 percent, n=774) the highest percentage. Followed by members of Christianity (5.0 percent, n=44), then, Buddhist (4.6 percent, n=41) and Hindus with (2.4 percent, n=21). Similarly, the percentages respondents' races mirrored those of religion with the Malays recorded the highest number of respondents with 84.2 percent (n=739) while Indian recorded the lowest number of respondents with only 2.6 percent (n=23). Among

the states, Kedah recorded the highest number of respondents with 24.5 percent (n=216) while both Perlis and Negeri Sembilan recorded the least percentage number of respondents with only 0.1 percent (n=1) respectively. About half of the total respondents aged between 21-25 years old with 54.6 percent (n=480) followed by a 16.8 percent (n=148) aged between 26-30 years old and only 6.4 percent (n=56) are between 36-40 years old. Results indicated that there is very little involvement in terms of crime prevention activities among youth. Only 11.1 percent (n=97) compared to those who were not involved. The information pertaining membership of youth association was also collected. There are only a few respondents who were taking part being membership of youth association with only 12.8 percent (n=111). Majority of respondents are not members of such association with 87.2 percent (n=759). Respondent were then asked to answer their position in youth association as part of the analysis. The three choices of positions given are chairman/president, committee member and member. Majority of respondents are the member in youth association with 64.7 percent (n=75), followed by committee member with 33.6 percent (n=39) and only 1.7 percent (n=2) of youth hold position of chairman of their associations.

**Table 01.** Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

No.	Variable	f	%
1	<i>Gender</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	358	40.6
	<i>Female</i>	524	59.4
	Total	882	100.0
	<i>Missing</i>	1	-
2	<i>Religion</i>		
	<i>Islam</i>	774	87.8
	<i>Buddha</i>	41	4.6
	<i>Hindu</i>	21	2.4
	<i>Christian</i>	44	5.0
	<i>Others</i>	2	.2
	Total	882	100.0
	<i>Missing</i>	1	-
3	<i>Race</i>		
	<i>Malay</i>	739	84.2
	<i>Chinese</i>	52	5.9
	<i>Indian</i>	23	2.6
	<i>Others</i>	64	7.3
	Total	878	100.0
	<i>Missing</i>	5	-
4	<i>State</i>		
	<i>Perlis</i>	1	.1
	<i>Kedah</i>	216	24.5
	<i>Pulau Pinang</i>	3	.3
	<i>Perak</i>	4	.5
	<i>Selangor</i>	70	7.9

	<i>Kuala Lumpur</i>	3	.3
	<i>Negeri Sembilan</i>	1	.1
	<i>Sarawak</i>	70	7.9
	<i>Melaka</i>	3	.3
	<i>Johor</i>	209	23.7
	<i>Pahang</i>	27	3.1
	<i>Terengganu</i>	2	.2
	<i>Kelantan</i>	200	22.7
	<i>Sabah</i>	71	8.0
	<i>Labuan</i>	3	.3
	Total	883	100.0
5	Age		
	<i>15 to 20</i>	119	13.5
	<i>21 to 25</i>	480	54.6
	<i>26 to 30</i>	148	16.8
	<i>31 to 35</i>	76	8.6
	<i>36 to 40</i>	56	6.4
	Total	879	100.0
	<i>Missing</i>	4	-
6	Involve in Crime Prevention Activities		
	<i>Yes</i>	97	11.1
	<i>No</i>	779	88.9
	Total	876	100.0
	<i>Missing</i>	6	-
7	Membership of Youth Association		
	<i>Yes</i>	111	12.8
	<i>No</i>	759	87.2
	Total	870	100.0
	<i>Missing</i>	6	-
8	Position in Youth Association		
	<i>Chairman/President</i>	2	1.7
	<i>Committee Member</i>	39	33.6
	<i>Member</i>	75	64.7
	Total	116	100.0
	<i>Missing</i>	767	-
9	Term of Involvement		
	<i>Below than 1 year</i>	39	33.6
	<i>1 to 5 years</i>	60	51.7
	<i>6 to 10 years</i>	10	8.6
	<i>to 11-15 years</i>	2	1.7
	<i>More than 15 years</i>	5	4.3
	Total	116	100.0
	<i>Missing</i>	767	-

Table 2 listed 16 actions pertaining to whether these actions are considered as crime. Majority of the respondents were able to identify the act of killing and robbery as crime, with a percentage of 97.7 percent (n=863) and 97.3 percent (n=859) respectively. Rape comes in third highest with about 94.9 percent (n=838). Likewise, most of them think stealing and snatching are also considered crime. Out of 883 respondents, 78 percent (n=689) of the respondents regard that bullying is also part of crime. Among other actions that recorded quite high percentages include illegal fast driving/racing, bribery, gambling, and drug related activities and extramarital affairs. However, not all actions listed were regarded as crimes by the respondents. The following actions recorded readings of less than 50 percent when asked if they were crimes. For instance, when they were asked regarding their knowledge on loitering, only 23.1 percent (n=204) responded loitering is part of crime. Similarly, only 26.8 percent (n=237) thought smoking/vaping as crime. Almost half of the respondents deem watching pornography is part of illegal activities with 43.1 percent (n=380).

**Table 02.** Knowledge of Crime

No.	Action that consider crime	Yes f (%)	No f (%)	Total f (%)
1.	Kill	863 (97.7)	20 (2.3)	883 (100.0)
2.	Rob	859 (97.3)	24 (2.7)	883 (100.0)
3.	Steal	799 (90.5)	84 (9.5)	883 (100.0)
4.	Snatching	837 (94.8)	46 (5.2)	883 (100.0)
5.	Bully	689 (78.0)	194 (22.0)	883 (100.0)
6.	Illegal fast driving (Merempit)	606 (68.6)	277 (31.4)	883 (100.0)
7.	Rape	838 (94.9)	45 (5.1)	883 (100.0)
8.	Loitering	204 (23.1)	679 (76.9)	883 (100.0)
9.	Bribery	766 (86.7)	117 (13.3)	883 (100.0)
10.	Gambling	585 (66.3)	298 (33.7)	883 (100.0)
11.	Drug addict/Trafficking	794 (89.9)	89 (10.1)	883 (100.0)
12.	Glue/Kratom Addict	629 (71.2)	254 (28.8)	883 (100.0)
13.	Smoking/Vaping	237 (26.8)	646 (73.2)	883 (100.0)
14.	Watching pornographic	380 (43.1)	502 (56.9)	882 (100)
15.	Extramarital affair	534 (60.5)	349 (39.5)	883 (100.0)
16.	Illegal car/motorcycle racing	705 (79.8)	178 (20.2)	883 (100.0)

Table 3 listed the sources of crime information youth access. Only 881 out of 883 respondent answers this sections. The findings revealed that majority of respondents (91.5 percent, n=806) obtain

information through the social media. Most of the respondents were identified to receive the information on crime through news/internet and gadget with 68.4 percent (n=603). Nevertheless, almost 60 percent youth still rely on information from their friends. However, not as many respondents got information from the local community or magazine/brochure.

**Table 03.** Information on Crime

No.	Sources in getting crimes information	Yes <i>f</i> %	No <i>f</i> %	Total <i>f</i> %
1.	Social media (FB/Twitter/Instagram)	806 (91.5)	75 (8.5)	881 (100.0)
2.	Friends	496 (56.3)	385 (43.7)	881 (100.0)
3.	Local community	378 (42.9)	503 (57.1)	881 (100.0)
4.	News/Internet	569 (64.6)	312 (35.4)	881 (100.0)
5.	Magazine/Brochure	352 (39.9)	529 (60.0)	881 (100.0)
6.	Gadget (Whatsapp/Wechat/Line)	603 (68.4)	278 (31.6)	881 (100.0)

Table 4 reflects the degree of crime awareness among youth. The findings showed that overall, there is a high sensitivity or awareness on crime. Only less than ten percent are not concerned or not bothered with the crime around them, while six percent responded 'neutral', meaning they are clueless on crime.

**Table 04.** Degree of Awareness

No.	Degree of awareness	<i>f</i> %	Mean	Median	Std.dev
1.	<i>Not very concern</i>	10 (1.1)	4.2	4.0	0.734
	<i>Not concern</i>	21 (2.4)			
	<i>Neutral</i>	53 (6.0)			
	<i>Concern</i>	526 (59.6)			
	<i>Very concern</i>	273 (30.9)			

## 7. Conclusion

Crime is thought to be a complex phenomenon that has various cumulative effects on the aspects of finance and psychology such as the loss of justice, insurance, security, property, and victimization (Andresen & Jenion, 2008). At present there is an alarming growth on youth involved in delinquency and

criminal behaviour in urban and sub urban areas of Malaysia (Abdullah et al., 2015). Past research have found that students who were affected and became victims of crime demonstrate poor academic achievement (MacMillan & Hagan, 2004; Wei & Williams, 2004). This study was conducted to explore the knowledge on crime among youth, to identify where do youth get information or sources of crimes around them, and to gauge their level of awareness on crime. The study revealed that their level of knowledge and awareness on crime are high. Apparently, youth comprise a large segment of the total population in Malaysia (43 percent). Therefore, their involvement and commitment in preventing and combating crime is indeed essential. And since crime rates have spiked among the country's youth, every party must play a crucial and continuous role despite it being an age-old problem. Parental supervision, school counselling and involvement of enforcement agencies, besides community participation are significantly needed in addressing this problem. It is hoped that by mobilizing all parties in the country's crime prevention programs will eventually reduce crime rate and promote better lifestyle along with Malaysia's aspiration on becoming developed nation by the year 2020.

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