

UUMILC 2017
9TH UUM INTERNATIONAL LEGAL CONFERENCE

**THE ROLE OF NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH IN REDUCING
CRIMES IN THE COMMUNITY**

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Abstract

The crime rate in Malaysia is rising and threatens the people's security and safety. The Department of Unity and Integration through Neighbourhood Watch has taken various initiatives to maintain the safety of the local community. In this regard, the objective of this paper is to analyse the role of Neighbourhood Watch (Rukun Tetangga) in curbing crime in the local community. To achieve this objective, this paper focuses on case studies in Bagan Serai, Perak. Interview and fieldwork have been conducted to obtain information on the role of NW and the initiatives that have been implemented in the study area. The instrument of this study consists of an interview involving 3 respondents who are the Neighbourhood Watch members from 3 housing areas in Bagan Serai. This study uses a qualitative approach in analysing data that has been obtained. The result shows that the Neighbourhood Watch plays an important role in curbing criminal activities in Bagan Serai. To empower the Neighbourhood Watch in Bagan Serai, the present study proposes several recommendations for improvements. The recommendations are in line with the The National Key Result Area (NKRA) that is reducing crime rate.

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Keywords: Crime, Community, Neighbourhood watch, neighbourhood, NKRA.



1. Introduction

According to Global Peace Index (GPI) 2016, Malaysia was ranked at number 30 compared to Global Peace Index 2015 whereby it was ranked at number 28 (Institute for Economic and Peace, 2016 & Institute for Economic and Peace, 2015). One of GPI domain is societal safety and security. The communities are 'eyes and ears' to maintain the security of their area. Their role is significant in helping the government communicate its objectives, as well as assist the burden of police duty to prevent crime. Neighbourhood Watch is one of the mechanisms that can support to reduce crime which is the responsibility of its members themselves and create sense of safety as described by Zinalibdin & Lyndon (2016). Hence, Neighbourhood Watch (Rukun Tetangga) is a very important social organization to deal with social issues including crime (Jabatan Perpaduan Negara dan Integrasi Nasional, 2018). Its efforts to tackle crime in the community are in line with their position and mandate as set out in the Rule of Neighbourhood of 1975 (P.U. (A) 279/75) (Jabatan Perpaduan Negara, 1975). According to Haji Ali (2006), Neighbourhood Watch is a set of local communities that have an awareness of monitoring events occurring in neighbourhood and reporting on suspicious activities to the Police. The community can also act as an important agency to the Police by providing better inputs towards developing a Safe City. This is in conformity with the National Key Result Area (NKRA) which is one of the government's efforts to reduce crime rates.

2. Problem Statement

The government in dealing with crime has undertaken various efforts. Nevertheless, the crime rates are still at stake in the community. The question arises whether the Neighbourhood Watch is effective in curbing crime in the community? Thus, this study was conducted to assess the role Neighbourhood Watch in the Bagan Serai District in curbing crime.

3. Research Questions

- 1) What is the role of Neighbourhood Watch?
- 2) What are the Neighbourhood Watch activities to curb crime in the community?
- 3) What is a suitable recommendation for improvement in Neighbourhood Watch in curbing crime in the community?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the role of Neighbourhood Watch in curbing crime in the community.

5. Research Methods

In the present study, data were collected through various methods. The study used library research to collect relevant literature. The interview and observation were conducted during fieldwork in Bagan Serai, Perak Darul Ridzuan. The instrument of this study consists of an interview involving respondents

who are the Neighbourhood Watch members from 3 residential areas in Bagan Serai. The data obtained from the literature and interviews were analysed using the qualitative approach.

6. Findings

6.1. Background Information of Neighbourhood Watch

The Malaysian government in 1975 with its original purpose of ensuring the safety of the locals established the Neighbourhood Watch. The Neighbourhood Watch Essential Regulations Act 1975 has been promulgated for its establishment. While dealing with crime is the responsibility of the police, the community itself also plays an important role in protecting themselves and their families. Collaboration between the police and the community is vital to strengthen the security and to reduce crimes.

The late Tun Abdul Razak, the second Prime Minister of Malaysia, launched the Neighbourhood Watch scheme on 29 August 1975 in Kampung Kasipillay, Kuala Lumpur. The Neighbourhood Watch Scheme is established under the Essential Rule (Rukun Tetangga) in the Emergency Ordinance 1969. The initial establishment of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme was to ensure the safety of the population in certain areas as well as promoting national unity. In 2001, the emphasize of the program changed to the community development and ultimately create harmony in the society (Khan, 2013; Abdullah et al., 2013).

The Parliament of Malaysia passed the Rukun Tetangga Act in 2012 [Act751]. The act provides law relating to neighbourhood watch and Voluntary Patrolling Scheme and other related matters. Section 8 of Rukun Tetangga Act 2012 describes the functions of Rukun Tetangga Area Committee as follows:

- 1) to carry out such activities to enhance and strengthen neighbourliness, unity, goodwill, harmony, comfort, peace, cooperation, safety, welfare, health, economic well-being and quality of life among the members of community;
- 2) to receive information on, to observe and to enquire, all issues pertaining to community conflict in the Area and to report such information, observation and enquiry to the Director;
- 3) to take such steps as may be necessary or desirable to enable the residents to protect themselves against any criminal activities or disasters;
- 4) to provide community mediation for the purpose of conciliation or otherwise settle any dispute or difference among the members of community; and
- 5) to carry out any other functions or duties as directed by the Director General from time to time.

Dora (2011) in his study found that the level of knowledge, perceptions and acceptance of the various programs and activities of the Neighbourhoods Watch are generally high. This is an indication that Neighbourhood Watch in many situations has been quite successful in promoting and fostering national unity and contributing to the well-being of the people. The study by Nee (1999) conducted at Kampung Sembulan Lama, Sabah, which examines the population's reaction to the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, received a positive reaction from the population. However there are also some problems faced such as the use of leisure, interest, social relations and information dissemination. The result of the

study found that the lack of awareness about the benefits of the Neighbourhood Watch resulted in the activities organized by local Neighbourhood Watch Schemes to be less favourably received by their communities. Further, Mohamad (1979) has found several problems including the involvement of residents in the activities carried out by Neighbourhood Watch. This is due the population still has the inherent nature of carrying out responsibilities. In addition, some Neighbourhood Watch committees were found to be not effective. Another study by Haron (2015) found that Neighbourhood Watch plays important role in reducing crime within the community.

6.2. Neighbourhood Watch Activities

Based on information received during fieldwork, several community activities have been identified that are relevant to the present study. Among the activities can be explained as follows:

1) Social Activities

Several social activities have been conducted to strengthen the bonds and to enhance unity between members of the community in Bagan Serai. For instance, a bowling tournament has been organized for Rukun Tetangga committee members in the Bagan Serai parliamentary seat. The programme was held on 20th February 2016. Apart from that a lucky draw was also held. There were suggestions by participants to have the programme as an annual event. The above programme was officiated by the Member of Parliament for Bagan Serai, Rt.Hon. Dr. Haji Mohd Noor Azmi bin Haji Ghazali.

2) Educational activities

On 20th August 2016 the Voluntary Patrol Scheme (known in its Malay acronym 'Skim Rondaan Sukarela – SRS) was launched at the Rukun Tetangga Centre, Parit Buntar. The patrol scheme was conducted with the co-operation of Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM). It was organized to raise the citizens' awareness in handling security issues within the neighbourhood. It is hoped that the activity would spur individuals and the local community to involve voluntarily in ensuring neighbourhood harmony.

The government hopes that with the launch of the patrol scheme it would lead to closer collaboration between its members with the security agencies and the local government authority. This is also in line with the aims of the National Blue Ocean Strategy (NBOS).

3) Patrol Activities

The members of the patrol scheme make their rounds in the neighbourhood of Bagan Serai. For the purpose of the present study, observation was made for patrols that have been conducted in certain areas. Three areas were chosen and they are as follows: (i) Taman Serai Maju; (ii) Taman Serai Permata; and (iii) Taman Serai Permai. Most patrols start at 11.30 pm and usually last until 3 am. The patrols are necessary to curb criminal activities and it is the responsibility of the Neighbourhood Watch to ensure the safety of the residents.

The local Neighbourhood Watch Committee manages the Voluntary Patrol Scheme (VPS). The scheme is applied by a group of residents in a particular Neighbourhood Watch area that consists of at

least 20 members aged 18 and above. The main objective of the scheme is to assist the authorities to curb criminal activities and social problems within local community.

6.3. Activities organized by Neighbourhood Watch to curb crime

Several questions were given to respondents. Most of them said that crime is best deterred by patrols. The First Respondent stated that Voluntary Patrol Scheme (VPS) is the main activity conducted by Neighbourhood Watch to curb crime in Taman Serai Permai. He said that the patrol starts at 11.30 pm and ends at 2.30 am. They walk in groups and patrol the area for several days. The Second Respondent said that Voluntary Patrol Scheme (VPS) in Taman Serai Maju starts at midnight and lasts until 2 am. The patrol is divided according to residential blocks as determined by the local Neighbourhood Watch Committee. They patrol three times in a week. The Third Respondent was of the view that there were not many activities organised by the local Neighbourhood Watch to curb crime in Taman Serai Permata. He added that patrols were conducted when cases of break-ins happened in his neighbourhood.

It is observed that VPS do exist in the selected housing estates. They are quite useful to deter crime. However, each of them differs at the level of Neighbourhood Watch activity and the participation of the residents themselves in the VPS.

6.4. Resident's Participation in Neighbourhood Watch

Questionnaires were distributed to the residents in the selected areas to determine their participation in Neighbourhood Watch activities. It is found that they gave different answers.

The First Respondent commented that the levels of participation among elderly residents are very high. However, less participation comes from the youth. The Second Respondent said that the same attitude happened in Taman Serai Maju. According to him, only a handful of youths participated, if the local Neighbourhood Watch organised their activities. During the holidays the participation of residents in their Neighbourhood Watch activities decreased as compared to their activities on working days. In Taman Serai Permata, the participation in housing estate's Neighbourhood Watch is not that much since it has been recently opened. It is observed that the majority of the residents that are actively involved with Neighbourhood Watch activities are those who are within the age of 40-50 years old.

6.5. Cooperation among Neighbourhood Watch

The Respondents were asked on the cooperation among Neighbourhood Watch Committees in Bagan Serai.

The First Respondent said that it is quite difficult to have cooperation with other Neighbourhood Watch Committees since their neighbourhood (Taman Serai Permai) is quite far from other housing estates. Nevertheless, they have joined hands with other groups like the local mosque committee in organising clean-up events. The second and third respondents gave different answers. They stated that there was cooperation among Neighbourhood Watch Committees. For example, at the end of 2016 two Neighbourhood Watch Committees conducted joint patrols to combat break in that occurred frequently in their respective housing estates.

6.6. Success of Neighbourhood Watch in curbing crimes

The final question of the questionnaire requires the respondents to give their personal opinion on the efficacy of Neighbourhood Watch in addressing crimes in Bagan Serai.

The First Respondent was of the view that his local Neighbourhood Watch has been effective. He admitted that VPS is useful in deterring crimes. The local Neighbourhood Watch is also quite active in organising activities. The Second Respondent stated that Neighbourhood Watch has greatly helped to reduce the crime rate in Bagan Serai. This however depends on certain days and the presence of residents in their neighbourhood. The Third Respondent had the same view with the first and second respondents. He thought that Neighbourhood Watch does play a role in handling crime rate in Bagan Serai. To conclude, all respondents agreed that Neighbourhood Watch has been a success to curb crimes in Bagan Serai.

Based on the above discussion, it is observed that Neighbourhood Watch in Bagan Serai played an important role in curbing crimes. This can be gathered from the replies given by the respondents in which all of them said that Neighbourhood Watch is successful in preventing crimes. Furthermore, the respondents in the three selected areas: Taman Serai Maju, Taman Serai Permai and Taman Serai Permata agreed that Neighbourhood Watch has been effective in curbing crimes.

7. Conclusion

The success of Neighbourhood Watch largely depends on several factors. It should be noted that in most cases, a Neighbourhood Watch would be a success, if the committee members really understand their roles and responsibility in their neighbourhood. Another important factor is the level of participation and involvement shown by the local residents. The organisation should be a point of reference in addressing local security matters. They might need to have regular meetings in solving these issues. The local community also needs to give all their support to deter crime rate in Bagan Serai. There has been an increase of crime rate there lately. The local community should realise that Neighbourhood Watch has an important role to play. The Voluntary Patrol Scheme has been effective in reducing crime rate, thus contributing to a safer environment for the community.

Acknowledgments

The writing of this article includes the data collection process funded by the Grant Dana Pembudayaan Penyelidikan (RAGS) Kod 2015-0181-107-72 (RAGS/1/2015/SS10/UPSI02/4).

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