Is It Safe Out There? Understanding the Portrayals and Reality of Crime

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ABSTRACT: Concerns regarding public and personal safety in today's socioeconomic conditions have become worrisome. The situation is acerbated with mass media portrayals of violent crimes that seem to occur daily. The purpose of this paper was to investigate the actual and estimated degree of risk to crime being faced by Malaysians in their environment. This was done through a) a comparison of conflicts across the world, b) a comparison of prison populations across several countries, c) a trend analysis of various crimes in Malaysia between 2000 and 2007. It was through these analyses that Malaysia's position with regard to public safety was determined. A survey on work safety and workplace violence was also carried out in two hospitals (n=94). This was done in order to exemplify the breadth of violence and people's concern regarding safe environment. Findings suggest that Malaysia's environment is relatively safe in comparison to many other countries. However, this does not necessarily mean that the severity of violent victimization should be discarded or go unheeded by the general public. The impact of such violence on the victim and his/her family must be addressed in terms of post-incident support as well as swift and harsh justice against perpetrators.

Keywords: criminology, crime trends, public safety, fear of crime, violence, health

Introduction

According to Young (2003:1) "Crime is a subject of perennial interest". This means that crime is a constant issue in social life. The mass media is satiated with incidents of murder, rape, theft, and terrorism to name a few of the several types of crimes. This pattern of morbid interest has continued for decades. The more gruesome a criminal incident, the more coverage and the more people talk about it. We are likely to either participate or hear conversations of crime at least once a day – in reading the newspapers, listening to the news, conversations at work, or conversations during meals.

These everyday conversations imply two concerns. The first is that they reflect the concern of ever-rising rates of crime (feelings about what this means and what ought to be done about it). The second draws implicit explanations as to what causes crime, and how to effectively deal with it. Incidentally, people may be unaware that the processes and tools to combat crime are actually based on criminological theories and strategies.

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Generally, the occurrence of crime is a result of collusion between various integrating factors. These include socio-economic conditions and needs, the immediate environment, the psychological make-up of perpetrators and victims, and opportunities for the commencement of crime. Each of these factors should not be separated or deemed as the sole reason for criminal activity and unsafe social environments.

To illustrate, Kedward (1986) outlined key issues in the 1980's regarding violence at work: a) size, scale and seriousness of the problem, b) underreporting, c) worker blame and self- blame, and d) a vicious circle was thus created whereby workers kept quiet about violence. This perpetuated the myth that violence at work was a rare occurrence. This perception relieved employers of the need to tackle the problem, and fostered the belief that violence victimization must be the employee's fault. In addition, reluctance to accept that violence is not random may lead to the minimization of the problem.

From the example above, a multitude of factors coalesce to create a situation whereby crime is likely and makes an environment unsafe. These problems has hampered the efforts of those who have attempted either to throw light on the matter or establish policies and change practice to take account of it. The late nineties saw further loss of momentum in making environments safe, as the pressures of new legislation and dwindling resources took their toll (Pease, 1997; Neuman and Baron, 1998).

These pressures left people exposed and vulnerable to crime and violence. While research (Pemberton *et. al*., 2000; WHO, 2002; Hesketh *et al*., 2003; Upson, 2004) continued to produce evidence of the problem faced by people exposed to violence, response remained at low key and was sporadic in Malaysia. By the end of the decade, formal and informal information suggested that levels of violence and abusive behaviour were unacceptably high.

This indicates that the state of affairs that previous researchers (Merton, 1938; Smith, 1987; Poyner and Warne, 1988) observed may be out of date or are no longer relevant. Attempts must be made to update information and understanding of the phenomena of crime and violence in the Malaysian environment. The arrival of this particular research could not have come at a better time.

There is a need to address the complexity of crime and criminal behaviour; and what these mean to our immediate environment. The study of crime as it currently stands can no longer remain satisfied with demystifying traditional correctional-oriented crimes. This is especially pertinent in lieu of today's unsafe environment due to, among others:
a) Economic instability
b) The influx of legal and illegal immigrant workers
c) Natural disasters
d) Changing gender-oriented roles
e) Merging of cultures
f) National crime rates
g) Mass media portrayals of serious and violent crimes

Objectives

The following are the research objectives relating to safe environment:-
1. To briefly discuss factors that foster unsafe environments and increase the likelihood of criminal activity.
2. To compare Malaysia to other countries with regard to criminal incidents. In this manner, Malaysia's position in terms of safe environment may be measured.
3. To examine crime trends in Malaysia. From this objective, the types of crime more common to Malaysia may be identified. This analysis also evidences the reality of crimes that occur as opposed to the fear and mass media portrayal of crime.
4. To identify the existence of violence in Malaysian hospitals. Traditionally, hospitals have been seen as places to seek medical assistance from harm caused elsewhere. The burgeoning literature however suggests that

incidents of violence against hospital staff are common.

Definition of terms

Three terms are defined here. The first is 'violence'. This is followed by an explanation of the term 'victim'. The last term to be defined is 'safe environment'.

The definition of 'violence' is varied and contentious. Definitions typically echo criminological theories on the nature of criminal and violent behaviour. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1989), violent crime is "an act punishable by law, as being forbidden by statute or injurious to the public welfare". It is any activity that violates the sanctioned laws of a country. Related to this is the notion of 'criminal', which describes a person who is guilty or convicted of a crime, as well as activities relating to crime or its punishment. Thus, on this basis, what is regarded as violent crime in England may not be regarded as such in Malaysia and vice versa.

Stokdale and Phillips (1991) found that the conditions for defining an incident as aggressive or threatening, or as involving violence, differ among individuals and across occupational groups. It may also differ between policy makers and recipients of violent behaviour. The problem of achieving an agreed definition of violence is a recurrent theme in the available literature.

According to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE, 1987), defining what is meant by violence is an essential but difficult task. A number of past research studies (Poyner and Warne, 1986; Smith, 1987; Paoli, 2000) did not even define violence, but rather left the responsibility to the individual and subjective perspective of respondents. The Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS, 1988) are of the opinion that clearly written definitions are necessary for the development of reporting procedures and for setting up standards.

A definition of violence and issues pertaining to it can be found in several statutes in Malaysia. Among these include: Criminal Justice Act 1953, Act 345; Criminal Procedure Code (as at 15th March 2008), act 593; and the Malaysian Penal Code (as at 1 January 2006). Information from these statues perceives violence from different angles. For example, in the Malaysian Penal Code, Section 146, violence constitutes force:-

"Whenever force or violence is used by an unlawful assembly or by any member thereof, in prosecution of the common object of such

assembly, every member of such assembly is guilty of the offence of rioting."

When the concept of violence is exemplified into various types of negative behaviours, the law perceives violence as causing hurt:-

"Whoever causes bodily pain, disease or infirmity to any person is said to cause hurt."

Section 319, Malaysian Penal Code (as at 1 January 2006)

Violence is also seen as behaviour and/or the cause of behaviour resulting in grievous harm:-

The following kinds of hurt only are designated as "grievous":
  a) emasculation;
  b) permanent privation of the sight of either eye;
  c) permanent privation of the hearing of either ear;
  d) privation of any member or joint;
  e) destruction or permanent impairing of the powers of any member or joint;
  f) permanent disfiguration of the head or face;
  g) fracture or dislocation of a bone;
  h) any hurt which endangers life, or which causes the sufferer to be, during the space of twenty days, in severe bodily pain, or unable to follow his ordinary pursuits.

Section 320, Malaysian Penal Code (as at 1 January 2006)

The definitions provided above means that violence involves the perceived act of violation, whether verbal, physical, or psychological towards an individual(s). 'Violence' is not limited to actual physical abuse but also includes the fear of violence. This definition encompasses a broad spectrum of possible violent incidents.

Understanding the term 'victim' is important in order to obtain a more comprehensive insight into the nature of crime. The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) defines 'victim' in several ways, among which included the following three:
  a) A person who is put to death or subjected to torture by another; one who suffers severely in body or property through cruel or oppressive treatment.
  b) One who perishes or suffers in health, etc., from some enterprise or pursuit voluntarily undertaken.
  c) One who suffers some injury, hardship or loss, is badly treated or taken advantage of.

Related to this is the notion of being 'victimizable' – a situation in which an individual or group of people

is capable of being victimised (Antilla, 1974; Karmen, 1990). This situation varies from individual to individual on the basis of personal characteristics, opportunity for crime or violence, and the presence of the potential perpetrator. 'Victimization' is the action of victimizing, or being victimised, in various senses by an offender (Antilla, 1974). This may be in the form of verbal, physical, psychological, visual or other forms of abuse.

In connection to this, 'victimize' has the meaning of "to make a victim of, to cause to suffer inconvenience, discomfort, annoyance, etc., either deliberately or by misdirected attentions; to cheat, swindle or defraud; or to destroy or spoil" (The Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). 'Victimology' is thus the study of the victims of crime and violence, especially of the psychological effect on them (Bidermann, 1974). This definition is pertinent to the situation in which many employees may find themselves during the course of their duties.

Method

Three archival analyses and one survey were carried out to achieve the objectives stated earlier:

Objective One - To briefly discuss factors that foster unsafe environments and increase the likelihood of criminal activity through archival analysis.

Objective Two - To compare Malaysia to other countries with regard to criminal incidents through:-
  a) a comparison between countries on safe environment (as of October 2008).
  b) prison populations across the world (as of 1st October 2008).

Objective Three - To examine crime trends in Malaysia through a trend analysis (between 2000 and 2007) of various crime statistics based on Malaysian police records.

Objective Four - To identify the existence of violence in Malaysian hospitals through a survey regarding patterns of violence in two Malaysian hospitals (2004).

Factors that foster unsafe environments

As mentioned previously, a crime incident is the result of a collision between various integrating factors. This section briefly discusses the factors of socio-economic conditions and needs, the immediate environment – which includes the natural environment and man-made environments, the psychological make-up of perpetrators and victims, and opportunities for the commencement of crime. Each of these factors contribute to foster unsafe

environments and increase the likelihood of criminal activity. It is noted here that the above factors are not the only factors that contribute to unsafe environments.

Socio-economic conditions

Many researchers, for example Rock (2002), Reimen (2004), Hallsworth (2005), and Reiner (2007), believe that socio-economic conditions trigger criminal activity. The recent and still commencing global recession has caused job loss, business foreclosures, hikes in the prices of consumer goods, and loss of properties. According to the Economist (October 9, 2008), the American economy lost 159,000 jobs in September 2008. The GDP shrank in Germany, France, Italy, and Spain in the last quarter of 2008. Japan's economy also dwindled. The financial forecast for 2009 is grimmer with an increase in unemployment rates worldwide and weaker purchasing power amongst consumers.

All of these have contributed to increase criminal activities as a means of survival, not only for the individual but also for entire families. The loss of steady income and a higher poverty baseline has created financial difficulties for people used to living at a higher standard prior to the recession. In order to support their lifestyles and dependents, affected individuals may resort to burglary or robbery. This is evident from recent crime spikes in regions such as Europe, North America, and Asia (Krug *et al.*, 2002; Buscaglia and van Dijk, 2003; Bussmann, 2007). This indirectly makes local environments unsafe from street and commercial crime.

The immediate environment

The immediate environment has a large role in determining criminal activity in two ways. The first is related to homelessness and environmental conditions. The second is concerned with crimes against nature and the environment.

Due to the loss of homes and properties, national internal conflicts, and wars, temporary homes have mushroomed (Mirchandani, 2008) in countries like the United States of America, Canada, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Darfur. These phenomenons of tent cities have created human vulnerabilities to harsh environmental temperatures, unsanitary conditions, shortages in basic amenities, risk of contracting diseases, and more importantly the risk of crime victimization.

The desperation of those living in such temporary homes has led to criminal activity. Theft of blankets, warm clothing, water, and food are common. These subsequently create distrust and fear between neighbours, which in turn may trigger the eruption of violence. Child labour and abuse is also evident, with parents or older siblings requiring younger children to ensure the survival of families living in these temporary places.

Crimes against nature and the environment include illegal logging, hunting and killing of endangered species, open burnings, and pollution. These in turn have repercussions on human and wildlife habitats. It creates a hazardous cycle of harm. For example, illegal logging and careless development projects loosens the top layers of earth and creates landslides and floods. This is evident from recent reports (Wong, 2008; The Star Team, 2008; Khalid, 2008). Flora, fauna, and human lives were badly affected in each incident.

Psychological make-up of perpetrators and victims

Another important element that may trigger criminal behaviour and make the environment unsafe is the psychological make-up of perpetrators and victims. An individual's psychological make-up is a combination of genetics and nurture. Both nature and nurture are integral in determining the likelihood of criminal behaviour and potential victimization. Twin, adoption, and family studies seem to depict genetics as a precursor to criminal activities. Research has shown that some, but not all criminals have family members who are or were criminals themselves (Tehrani and Mednick, 2000; Joseph, 2001).

Likewise, some victims of crime had a history of victimization or have family members who were earlier victimized (Farrell and Pease, 1993; Maker *et al.*, 2001). Polvi *et al.,* (1990) found that repeat burglaries tended to occur within six weeks of the first incident. In another study (Hearden and Magill, 2004) two thirds of interviewed burglars returned to the property they had previously burgled and took more goods. Daigle *et al.* (2008) evidenced that repeat victimization of rape tends to happen in the same month of the initial victimization.

With regards to nurture, studies (Garnefski and Okma, 1996; Holmes *et al.*, 2001) have shown the association between upbringing, education, and social lifestyles with criminal activities. According to Newburn (2007) a large portion of crime is committed by young people who were enticed into a lifestyle of crime by peers, group affiliation, and social expectations. In fact, one fifth of crimes have been accredited to juveniles (Nicholas *et al.*, 2005). An earlier study (Home Office, 1995) found that more than 50% of males and almost 30% of females aged between 14 and 25 admitted to committing one or more crime.

Opportunities for the commencement of crime

Opportunities for the commencement of crime are directly linked to the infrastructure and social norms of a given environment. Socio-spatial analyses of crime provide evidence for the occurrence of crime in high-risk areas. Shaw and McKay's (1942) empirical mapping of delinquent residences indicated that factors within an environment create opportunities for a multitude of crimes for example theft, robbery, and rape.

Shaw and McKay (1942) utilized Burgess' (1925) zonal theory of city development and found that the rates of juvenile delinquency had a distinct spatial pattern. Crimes linked to juveniles centred in areas where factories and poor residences intermingled. Such areas have a high resident mobility rate and have a heterogonous population. These aspects make it attractive for criminal activity as such pursuits have a higher probability of going undetected and unreported.

Based on this theory, crime is less likely to occur the further away a location is from a particular city. The rationale lies in the paucity of likely targets and the travelling required by potential perpetrators. However, this does not indicate that suburban areas are safer than urban areas. Crimes that occur in the suburbs may be different in nature, reflecting the surrounding environment.

Measures of safe environment

Measures of safe environment are via identifying countries that are a) at war either within itself or with other countries, or b) determining the rate of recorded crime and violence in individual countries. The assumption is that countries at war or those with high rates of crime and violence have unsafe environments for its people. War is understood as an *actual, intentional* and *widespread* armed conflict between political communities (Orend, 2005). In this instance, political communities are defined as entities which are states or intend to become states. Political pressure groups, like terrorist organizations, might also be considered political communities. Personal and individual physical conflicts do not count as a war, nor do fights between gangs, or a feud between two families. These incidents are known as acts of violence and are defined in the next section.

Fearon (1995) and Frisbee (2008) identified three types of war. The following explanations were extracted from Frisbee (2008):

Attrition warfare

This is the most common type of war. In attrition warfare, forces attack in an attempt to destroy enemy forces. Units move to trap and concentrate fire on the enemy. The quantity of soldiers is usually the decisive factor. Examples include World War I and World War II.

Maneuver war

Maneuver War is fought to destroy the enemy's will to fight. Desert Storm was an example of this type of war. In this type of war, soldiers infiltrate the enemy and attack the enemy support structure, or headquarters. In this manner, the enemy's morale is attacked.

Revolutionary war

Vietnam and Afghanistan were Revolutionary Wars. There are no definite lines of battle and it may not always be possible to identify the enemy. This type of war is also known as intrastate armed conflict.

Revolutionary war is about intangibles, about emotions and beliefs rather than killing enemy troops. Tactics commonly used in this form of warfare are Guerrilla tactics. The Guerrilla seeks to evade destruction and turn the people against the government and the government against the people. According to Project Ploughshares (2008) there are three types of intrastate armed conflict:-

a) State control wars
   These centre on struggles for control of the governing apparatus of the state. These wars have typically been driven by ideologically defined revolutionary movements, decolonization campaigns or simply as a mechanism for the transfer of power from one set of elites to another. Either communal interests or ethnic interests or religious interests are significant to the conflict.

b) State formation conflicts
   Such conflicts centre on the form or shape of the state itself and generally involve particular regions of a country fighting for a greater measure of autonomy or for outright secession. Similar to state control wars, communal or ethnic interests are usually central to struggles for regional autonomy or secession.

c) Failed state war
   This refers to wars in which the armed conflict is neither about state control nor state formation. The wars are centered on local issues and disputes involving violence in the absence of effective government control. The primary failure is incapacity to provide minimal human security for individual citizens.

Results and Discussion

What is the link between crime and the environment?

From the brief discussion in the previous section, crime and the environment are linked in two ways. A negative environment creates the need and opportunity for crime. In addition, the resources available in the environment, and human greed and selfishness make crimes against nature likely. Factors like social and economic concerns and natural conditions perpetuate criminal lifestyles.

Until these factors are rectified in the form of better living conditions and the internalization of safe environments within the psyche of people, perpetrators of crime would justify their behaviour and continue to make the immediate environment unsafe for themselves and others. Better living conditions need not mean an inundation of capital. The implementation and enforcement of just laws is one method. The success of this method is evidenced from the more or less harmonious living of people in Dignity Village in the United States of America (Dignity Village, 2008).

Membership in the village is through application review and is dependent on four rules of behaviour. The basic tenet of tent city living is no violence and no criminal activity. If caught, offenders are exiled from the village. In the face of becoming ousted from community living, incidents of crime become rare.

Recycling and making full use of available resources is another method which does not require added capital. Ingenuity and creativity in improving quality of life has become a by-line in the current economic downturn. Examples of ingenuous products include recycling wheat waste, through compression, into cork-like planks for furniture manufacturing. Kitchen, garden, and other green waste can be recycled into compost. This process allows natural bacteria to break down the waste into fertile topsoil for agricultural purposes.

Energy conservation, waste minimization, and pollution prevention also improve living conditions. These in turn have the potential of reducing opportunities of crime against the environment. Such efforts and processes also have the advantage of creating gainful employment and industrious work teams. Environmentalism therefore becomes as a lifestyle choice. In this manner criminal behavior may be decreased and environments become safer for habitation.

How do countries compare with regard to safety?

The mass media portrayal of specific and/or sensationalized violence does not depict the actual prevalence of crime in any given country. Normally, the most severe or traumatic incident amongst a range of crime incidents that occur in a given time frame is broadcasted. This distorts people's perception regarding environmental safety. In order to understand the reality of crime in the environment, it is necessary to identify and compare levels of conflict at a global level.

A comparison between countries on safe environment

The following **TABLE 1** shows current wars and armed conflicts throughout the world. Information was obtained and adapted from a report on armed conflicts (Infoplease, 2008). Broadcasted news seems to depict the world in chaos with various countries at war with one another. In reality, the countries of warring parties (with the exception of USA) do not insinuate that the whole region or continent is at war.

The consequences of wars are namely the loss of many lives, the major destruction of private properties, and instability within the area of conflict. Unlike street crime or property crime, the impact of war is experienced by society as a group. It results in epidemic fear, distrust, and anger beyond individual feelings. Everyone within the community has a very real probability of becoming a causality of war. Sometimes innocent civilians or whole families die as a result of suspicion or accusations connected to either a rebel group or a group that supports the government.

When the mass media obtains information on such conflicts, incidents are sometimes magnified and are supported by violent imagery. Analyses of the content of media representation of crime have focused more narrowly in the legally defined category of terrorism. However, viewers tend to personalize as well as generalize such incidents to encompass a much larger geographic area.

TABLE 1 illustrates that many countries in Africa, Latin America, Europe, and Asia are not at open conflict with their neighbours. It is inappropriate to stigmatize all of Latin America (which includes Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Peru) or all Asia (including Central Asia, Southeastern Asia, and Northern Africa, totaling more than 50 countries) as being areas of civil unrest or high risk of death/harm due to its socioeconomic environment. This may indicate that many areas of the world are actually safe to be in.

TABLE 1- A comparison of safety amongst various countries (Source: Infoplease, 2008)

Main warring parties	Type of conflict	Year began[1]
Middle East		
U.S. and UK vs. Iraq	Attrition	2003
Israel vs. Palestinians	Maneuver	1948
Yemen: Government forces vs. Shabab al-Moumineen (The Youthful Believers)	State control	2004
Asia		
Afghanistan: U.S., UK, and Coalition Forces vs. al-Qaeda and Taliban	Attrition	2001
India vs. Kashmiri separatist groups/Pakistan	Maneuver	1948
India vs. Assam insurgents (various)	Failed state	1979
Philippines vs. Mindanaoan separatists (MILF/ASG)	State control	1971
Sri Lanka vs. Tamil Eelan[2]	Revolutionary	1978
Africa		
Algeria vs. Armed Islamic Group (GIA)	Failed state	1991
Côte d'Ivoire vs. rebels	Failed state	2002
Somalia vs. rival clans and Islamist groups	Maneuver	1991
Sudan vs. Darfur rebel groups	Maneuver	2003
Europe		
Russia vs. Chechen separatists	State formation	1994
Latin America		
Colombia vs. National Liberation Army (ELN)	State control	1978
Colombia vs. Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)	Failed state	1978
Colombia vs. Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC)	Failed state	1990

NOTE: As of Oct. 2008.
1. Where multiple parties and long-standing but sporadic conflict are concerned, date of first combat deaths is given.
2. 2002 cease-fire collapsed in 2006.

Prison populations across the world

Knowledge of prison populations is another source to determine the safety levels of a given country. As of 2006, it is estimated that at least 9.25 million people are currently imprisoned worldwide (Walmsley, 2006). Prison populations include incarcerated offenders and those awaiting trial or in remand. A study carried out in King's College of London (International Centre of Prison Studies, 2008) ranked Malaysia's prison population as 35th highest from a list of 218 different countries. The highest prison population is found in USA and the lowest is found in San Marino. An adaptation of the results of this survey is illustrated in **FIG. 1**.
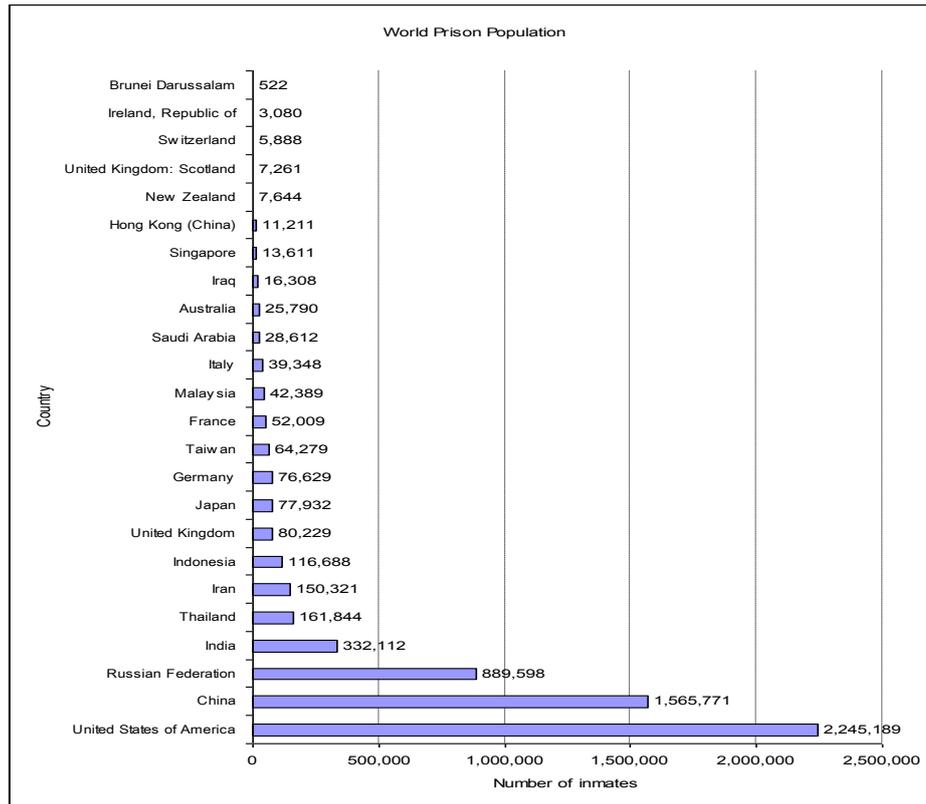
The implications of this survey include:-

A higher rate of crime in Western and developed countries as opposed to Eastern and developing or underdeveloped countries.

A possibly better criminal justice system and lower tolerance of crime in countries with high prison populations.

An overall safer environment in which to live in for countries with lower prison populations.

The degree of unsafe environment a country experiences may be evidenced from the rate of overcrowding in prisons. Prison overcrowding is one of the most challenging problems faced by criminal justice systems worldwide. Overcrowding in prisons imply three main issues. The first is that the reality of criminals in a given country exceeded the projection when prison institutions were built. Admittedly, some prisons were built several decades ago, and it is possible that the projection took into account a 10 or 20 year forecast instead of the 30 years or more, beyond the projection (Vagg, 1994; Schwarzenegger, 2006).

World Prison Population

Country	Number of inmates
Brunei Darussalam	522
Ireland, Republic of	3,080
Switzerland	5,888
United Kingdom: Scotland	7,261
New Zealand	7,644
Hong Kong (China)	11,211
Singapore	13,611
Iraq	16,308
Australia	25,790
Saudi Arabia	28,612
Italy	39,348
Malaysia	42,389
France	52,009
Taiwan	64,279
Germany	76,629
Japan	77,932
United Kingdom	80,229
Indonesia	116,688
Iran	150,321
Thailand	161,844
India	332,112
Russian Federation	889,598
China	1,565,771
United States of America	2,245,189

(Adapted from: International Centre for Prison Studies, 2008)

FIG. 1- Prison populations across the world

TABLE 2 below provides an illustration of prison overcrowding for various countries. Countries with occupancy rates of more than 140% are deemed as in a state of crisis. Overcrowding in prisons has negative consequences on the wellbeing of prisoners and makes prisons less manageable. Data was obtained from the International Centre for Prison Studies (2008). In Europe, prison populations are on average 130 per cent of official capacity. In the USA the figure stands at 108%. In Bangladesh, prison populations stand at 302% of official capacity – the highest rate in South Asia. Kenya has the rate of prison overcrowding is the highest in the world, with prison occupancy at around 285% capacity.

TABLE 2- Overcrowding rates in prison (Adapted from: International Centre for Prison Studies, 2008)

Country	Prison population	Prison capacity	Occupancy rate
Australia	27,224	20,503	105.90%
Bangladesh	83,000	27,451	302.40%
Brazil	440,013	255,057	149.40%
Canada	35,110	35,170	91.30%
India	373,201	263,911	141.40%
Indonesia	128,876	70,241	166.10%
Israel	22,788	23,796	92.20%
Kenya	47,036	16,886	284.30%
Malaysia	50,305	33,201	127.40%
Spain	72,171	45,811	140.00%
United Kingdom	83,508	73,779	113.20%
USA	2,299,116	2,096,645	108%

Secondly, the rate of capture and imprisonment has increased as a result of three possible scenarios. The first scenario is where criminals are caught due to the vigilance of victims or members of the public. People seem to become less tolerate to crime and may have a tendency to report incidents that previously were seen as insignificant (Bowling, 1999; Dennis and Erdos, 2005). The second scenario is concerned with a better criminal justice system, for example Africa's proactive movement of anti-crime (refer to United Nation's Office on Drugs and Crime 2002).

The third scenario is related to policy changes to incarceration durations (Eck and Maguire, 2000; Robinson, 2002). As more violent crimes seem to occur, the public has pressured governments to increase incarceration penalties to safeguard vulnerable groups. Imprisonment is increasingly being used for minor and petty offences. The mentally ill and drug users are also more likely to be detained in prison than in an appropriate care institution.

Next, with the increase in population size of a given country and dwindling resources, some people resort to crime as a means of survival, or as a means to obtain wealth other than through legal employment. According to Reiner (2007), studies linking crime and social, economical, political or a combination of these three circumstances are numerous. Rapid changes in a country's political economy results in restlessness, dissatisfaction, agitation, fear, anger and other feelings that are conducive to deviant behaviour. This is reflective of Merton's Anomie theory (1938).

Violent imagery in the television and cinemas, as well as violent video or online games acerbates the situation by distorting acceptable social norms. Williams (1986) and later, Wykes (2001) provided evidence that children imitate violence. The mass media's portrayals of delinquent behaviour seem to increase tolerance towards crime and violence. According to Allen *et al.* (1997), around 20% of all films are crime movies, and nearly 50% of all films have significant crime content. In such crime movies, murder or other violent crimes is the main feature.

Is Malaysia's environment safe?

From the second objective, the next step is to determine Malaysia's safety level. Global statistics serve to outline the problem, but in order to obtain a better understanding regarding a country's safe environment national crime rates must be examined. Thus, the second objective of this paper is addressed here.

The rate of reported crime in Malaysia is depicted in **FIG. 3**. The key word for this analysis is *reported crime*. Reported crime refers to those crimes reported to the police by either victims, or family members or friends of victims. Reported crimes do not refer to the reality of crime in Malaysia as underreporting is a serious problem. This issue is addressed following an explanation of **TABLE 3**.

The table was produced from Polis DiRaja Malaysia (PDRM, 2008) crime reports. The various types of crime used for this trend analysis included murder, rape, burglary, and robbery. The trend analysis was carried out for the years 2000 to 2007. In this manner, the types and rates of crime would yield average likelihood of those crimes in the near future as well as provide a more accurate depiction on Malaysia's safety level.

TABLE 3- Crime rates in Malaysia 2000-2007 (Source: RMP, 2008)

CRIME	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Murder	551	608	516	565	565	497	604	588
Rape	1,210	1,354	1,418	1,471	1,718	1,887	2,435	3,177
Buglary	12,204	11,333	12,203	13,963	13,221	1,842	2,658	7,067
Robbery	722	566	425	381	224	217	247	202
Causing Harm	5,104	4,699	4,440	4,368	4,196	4,246	5,716	6,806
Snatch theft	15,082	14,368	14,640	15,798	11,536	9,617	9,551	11,127
Total	**34,873**	**32,928**	**33,642**	**36,546**	**31,460**	**18,306**	**21,211**	**28,267**

Based on **TABLE 3**, incidents of snatch theft was among the most dominant crime between the years 2000 to 2007 in Malaysia. This was followed by property-based crimes. Despite mass media coverage, murder and rape are not as common. Nonetheless such violent crimes have more severe and sometimes fatal consequences. The effect of lost of life and/or

trauma of sexual abuse cannot be as easily ameliorated as financial loss.

On an annual average, murders occur at the rate of 562 while reported rapes occur at the rate of 1834. In any given year, over 9,300 burglaries and around 373 robberies would be reported. Around 12,715 snatch

thefts and 4.947 incidents of harm are reported annually. Incidents of murder are unlikely to spike above 700 incidents in the next few years.

Crimes categorized as 'causing harm' would remain between the ranges of 4,000 to 7000 incidents in the next few years. However property crime may escalate, especially with the global financial crises. Incidents of snatch theft, robbery, and burglary may rise as commodity prices soar.

Following the above analysis, the next step is interpreting results in relation to a) the reality of crime incidents, and b) likelihood of occurrence based on the population (per 100,000 people). This is pertinent in lieu of underreporting. In general between 10%-15% of all crimes are reported (Rock, 2002). Based on this assumption, around 85% of crimes are unreported to the police. The following is the estimated number of crimes (ENC) that occur in Malaysia for 2007 and likelihood ratio (shown in **TABLE 4**) based on data in **TABLE 3**:

TABLE 4- ENC in Malaysia (2007)

Type of Crime	ENC in 2007	Likelihood Ratio
Murder	747	3.01
Rape	5,435	21.90
Burglary	13,074	52.67
Robbery	374	1.51
Causing harm	12,591	50.73
Snatch theft	20,585	82.93

Information in **TABLE 4** indicates that Malaysia's environment is unsafe with regard to property crime for example burglary and snatch theft. For every 100,000 people in Malaysia, nearly 53 people were victims of burglary and nearly 83 people were victims of snatch theft. Amongst a population of 100,000 people, 22 people were raped in 2007. Murder of a Malaysian is rare in comparison, with three people for every 100,000 population.

This implies that Malaysia's environment is relatively safe from serious violent crime, especially so when compared to other countries. A comparison of rape rates in the year 2002 across different

countries place Malaysia as being safer than many developed countries. The figures are shown in **FIG. 2** below and are per 100,000 populations. Data for the other countries were obtained from the Eighth United Nations Survey (2003).

People living in countries like South Africa, Canada, and the United States of America have a higher probability of being raped in the course of their lives. Saudi Arabia, Japan and Scotland have amongst the lowest rates of ENC per 100,000 populations. As far as rape is concerned, these countries are safe environments.
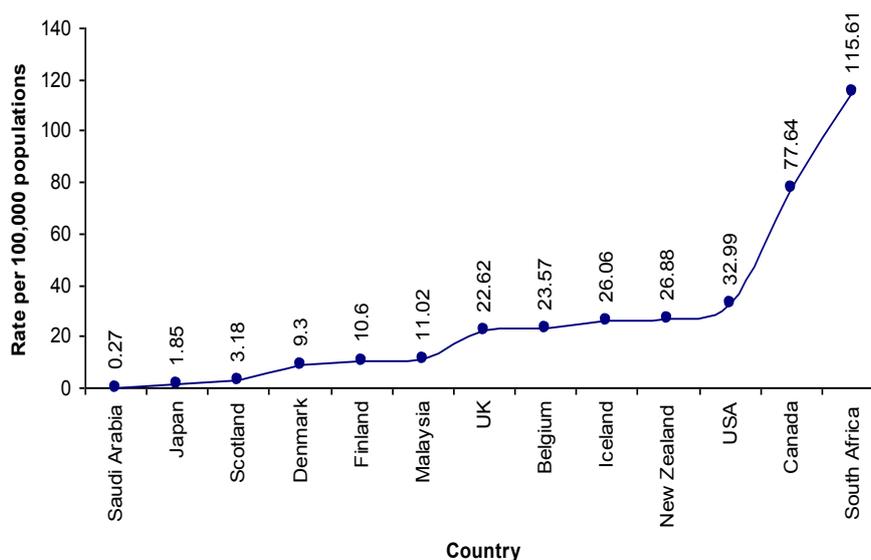

FIG. 2- Comparison of rape rates per 100,000 populations (2002)

A survey regarding violence in Malaysian hospitals

The fourth objective of the paper is addressed here. The purpose was to investigate the prevalence of crime in Malaysia as being not limited to only the street or domestic dwellings. This was carried through identifying types of violence in two Malaysian hospitals. Hospitals were selected on the assumption that such places were unlikely to have high crime rates as they are normally places for people seeking medical aid.

However, literature on workplace violence suggests that hospitals are vulnerable to violence, especially physical and verbal (Hislop and Melby, 2003; Upson, 2004). Those working in hospitals are more likely to be exposed to people who are either intoxicated, ill, suffer from mental illness, or under the influence of some substance (either drugs or alcohol), than those working in banks and retail outlets. This range of possible perpetrators makes hospital staff vulnerable to potential violence.

The survey presented here was conducted in 2004 with 162 respondents. Results indicated that although not as prevalent as crime occurring elsewhere, crime does occur in hospitals. **FIG. 3** below illustrates the type and degree of violence experienced by Malaysian hospital staff whilst on the job.

The most prevalent type of violence experienced by hospital staff in 2004 was psychological-based violence, followed by verbal violence. Threats of violence and physical violence were less likely to occur against hospital staff. Sexual violence and violence involving a weapon had among the lowest number of incidents in 2004.

Around 54% of the sample admitted that their experiences of violence affected them psychologically. Around 47% of respondents were demotivated as a consequence of the violence that they experienced. Nearly 25% of the entire sample were stressed as a result of the violent incident that they had experienced in the past twelve months. Only a minority of cases in this sample was time-off taken (around 3%). In 98% of the cases, staff continued what they were doing prior to the violent incident after being victimized.

The survey also suggests that offenders are by and large normal members of society who, due to unrealistic expectations of the health service, or dissatisfaction with the quality of care resort to violence. Violence is seen as a means to either actualize a person's expectations or express his/her frustration with the situation. Therefore, theories linking aggression to genetics, or mental illness are inappropriate to explain why seemingly normal people become violent.

From the survey, there seems to be some evidence for the fear amongst Malaysians that crime, and in particular violence, is a serious problem. Despite official police reports which depict Malaysia as being generally safe, incidents that go unreported as well as sensationalized crime in the media portrays the opposite. Unfortunately, anecdotal accounts of victimization will remain as stories unless they are reported and appropriate action is taken. This underlies the need to report crime, no matter how insignificant or tedious it may be.
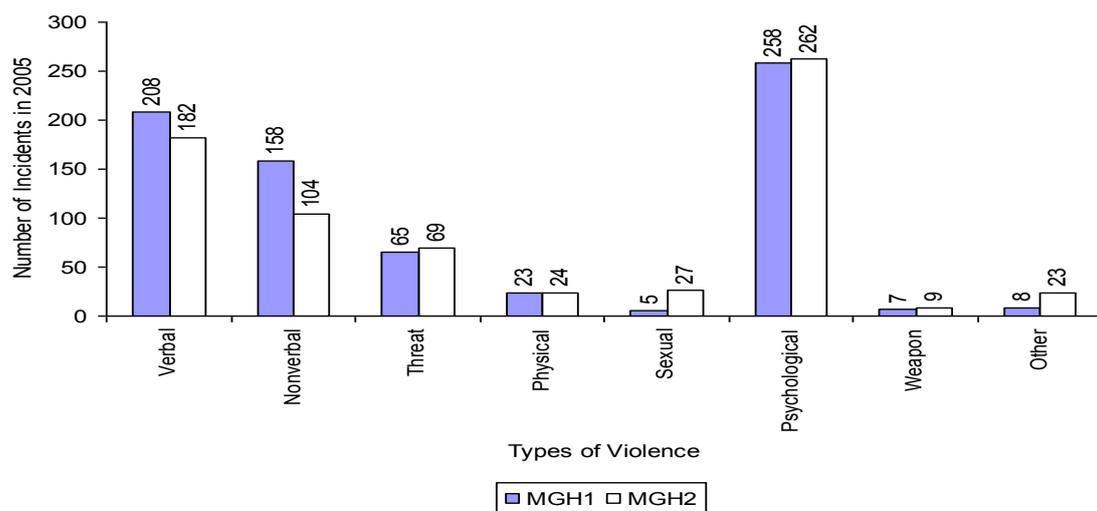

FIG. 3- Patterns of violence in Malaysian hospitals in 2004

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has sought to depict the degree of safety from crime in Malaysia's environment. In relation to this, five dimensions were examined. The first was by discussing several factors that foster criminal activity and victimization. The second was by looking at locations of conflict around the world. The third was by investigating world prison populations. In the fourth dimension, crime trends in Malaysia between 2000 and 2007 were explored. The final dimension looked into crime incidents in Malaysian hospitals.

Generally, Malaysia has a safe environment compared to many other countries. Currently Malaysia is free from war- either state related or terrorism related. Although overcrowded, the prison population in Malaysia is manageable and not in a state of crisis as in other places.

However, this does not mean that personal safety should be taken lightly. Over the past decade, crime in Malaysia occurs in fluctuating patterns. It is the responsibility of all individuals to ensure safety for themselves and those under their care. Being alert to the immediate environment is a measure of ensuring safety from crime as well as a means to reduce future incidents.

The spectrum of violence against hospital staff indicates that violence must be dealt with in a manner that not only punishes the offender but also deters future violent behaviour. Results from the survey suggest an urgent need to implement strategies to prevent the occurrence of violence in order to safeguard the safety of hospital staff at work, to maintain order on the premises, and to illustrate a violence-free zone for quality health services.

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