

A Trend Analysis of Violent Crimes in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT: The mass and social media depict rising crime rates, especially violent crime; subsequently illustrating an uncivil, dangerous and unsafe environment. The focus of this study was on determining whether these portrayals are reflective of actual crime occurrences and provide information beyond prevalence rates. Based on the lack of structured information, this trend analysis sought to discern longitudinal patterns underlying the incidences of violent crimes throughout Malaysia between the years 2004 and 2013. An archival time series analysis from police records was performed. Relevant information was obtained with permission, from the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP); regarding various types of violent crimes. For the analysis, all reported cases of violent crime were taken into consideration. In total, 314,675 cases were reported in the ten year duration throughout Malaysia. From the RMP records, the categories of violent crime for this study were: murder, rape, burglary and battery. In general, violent crimes in Malaysia occurred in a fluctuating pattern. Unlike media depictions, violent crime rates are not steadily increasing. The highest number of violent crimes were recorded in the year 2009 (42,365 cases) followed by the year 2008. Three highest type of violent crimes recorded were gang robbery without fire arm, robbery without fire arm and battery. Selangor had the highest recorded cases (91,962 cases) followed by Kuala Lumpur and Johor whilst Perlis had the lowest recorded cases (1,240 cases). In order to formulate effective strategies to reduce the risk of violent crime, the extent and nature of such crimes need to be understood. For that, a trend analysis is vital as it detects significant variations of violent crimes over time. Therefore, the results of this present study may be beneficial for many key personnel such as policy makers and criminal justice figures. These in turn could be used as a diagnostic tool for the prevention of violent crimes.

Keywords: Malaysia, violent Crime, trend analysis

Introduction

There has been a lot of debate about the rise of crime rates in Malaysia in the past few years. This belief, whether it is true or not, is affecting the way Malaysian live their life, react to government policies, and even in determining their votes. New programme often begin or end their broadcasts with accounts of violent crimes committed by both locals and foreigners. Despite the efforts by the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP), newspapers and articles in the internet continue to report crime as one of the most pressing problems in society. Contradictory, according to The Malaysian Quality of Life 2011 Report issued by the Economic Planning Unit; the public safety sub-index improved by 10.8 points in 2010, due to the reduction in the number of crimes per 1,000 population. Similarly, the crime rate decreased by 12.0 per cent from 712 crimes cases per 100,000 people to 628 cases in 2011, partly due to the continuous efforts taken to reduce crime rates (Economic Planning Unit, 2012). Relevant to this current paper, it is important to determine whether these portrayals are reflective of actual crime occurrences or not, and provide information beyond prevalence rates, especially in view of perceptions on fear of crime and the need for effective crime prevention.

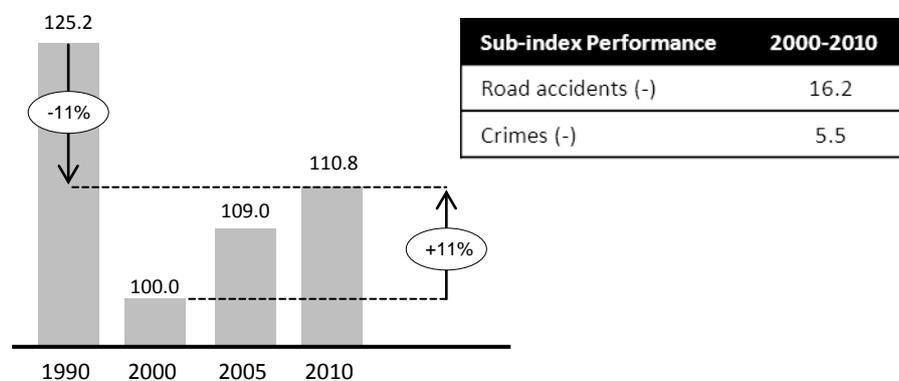


Figure 1: Trends of Public Safety 2000-2010 (Adapted from: The Malaysian Quality of Life 2011 Report, Public Safety Sub-Index)

Furthermore, Index Crimes statistics released by the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU, 2013) for the 1st quarter of 2012 compared to 2013 also showed a reduction in crime rates in Malaysia. Indexed crime for the period of January-June 2012 totaled 76,247 reported cases (Sukumaran, 2013). This dropped by 2,120 cases to 74,127 in 2013 (Ibid). However, the Democratic Actions Party in media statements stated that this reduction in crime rates does not justify the perception of an increase in unsafe environment

and people may have been misled by the statistics (Pua, 2013). According to Pua (2013), the crime rates are actually "relatively unchanged" thus increasing the public's anxiety and apprehension on the increase of crime.

With the exception of limited national studies, little information has been presented in the local literature regarding violent crime rates. Two to five years comparison of the crime rates are unlikely to represent the overall scenario of violent crimes in Malaysia – which has been commonly used to compare changes in crime trends. Another limitation of those studies is their limited attention on specific types of violent crimes (for example: murder, robbery, rape), location (for example: city, rural areas) and details (for example: gender, ethnicity) about victims and offenders. There was still much that remained unknown regarding violent crimes in the country prior to this current study.

In general, the epidemiological knowledge on violent crime incidents in Malaysia has been insufficient. Having such knowledge will allow a better understanding regarding violent crimes in Malaysia, in particular vulnerability issues and selection of targets. In addition, the detailed trends of violent crimes as well as victimization rates may provide input regarding case investigation and most importantly, enables preventive social intervention.

Materials and Methods

A longitudinal archival analysis was performed to investigate and document the trends of violent crime incidents in Malaysia from 2004 to 2013. Official statistics were obtained from the Crime Investigation Department, Royal Malaysia Police (RMP, 2014) upon request. Information was gathered on seven types of violent crime, state, and number of victims.

It is mentioned here that Malaysia, as a member of the international police community; uses the phrase 'Index Crime' to quantify crime. Index Crime is defined as "Crimes that are reported with sufficient regularity and with sufficient significance to be meaningful as an index to the crime situation" (RMP, 2014). RMP then further divides this Index Crime into two categories which is Violent Crime and Property Crime.

Table 1 depicts the types of violent crimes and its corresponding Penal Code section. Violent crime generally includes crimes of violence that are sufficiently regular and significant in occurrence. The types of violent crime are: murder, gang robbery with firearm, gang robbery without firearm, robbery with firearm, robbery without firearm, rape and lastly voluntarily causing hurt. For the purpose of this study, the category ‘attempted murder’ was omitted as many cases were verbalized without physical action and in some cases overlapped with ‘voluntarily causing grievous hurt’.

Table 1: Types of violent crimes

Type of violent crimes	Act 574, Penal Code section
Murder	302
Rape	376
Robbery with firearm	392 & 397
Robbery without firearm	394 / 392
Gang robbery with firearm	395 & 397
Gang robbery without firearm	395
Voluntarily causing grievous hurt	324 / 325 / 326

Therefore, for the purpose of this study, only seven types of violent crime were included in the longitudinal archival analysis. Since data were obtained from police records, some information relating to the violent crimes incidents were not disclosed due to the confidential nature of the information. For further understanding upon the subject, six months archival investigation involving violent crimes in the district of Seremban were obtained with permission and studied to provide information regarding the victims involved hence, providing an overview on the victimization rate of violent crimes in Malaysia.

Results

The trend analysis of violent crimes between 2004 and 2013 is shown in **Figure 2** below. The ten year (2004-2013) archival analysis showed that a total number of 314,675 violent crime incidents were recorded throughout Malaysia. In general, violent crimes occurred in a fluctuating pattern (RMP, 2014). The highest number of violent crime incidents were recorded in the year 2009 (42,365 cases) followed by the year 2008 (35,159 cases).

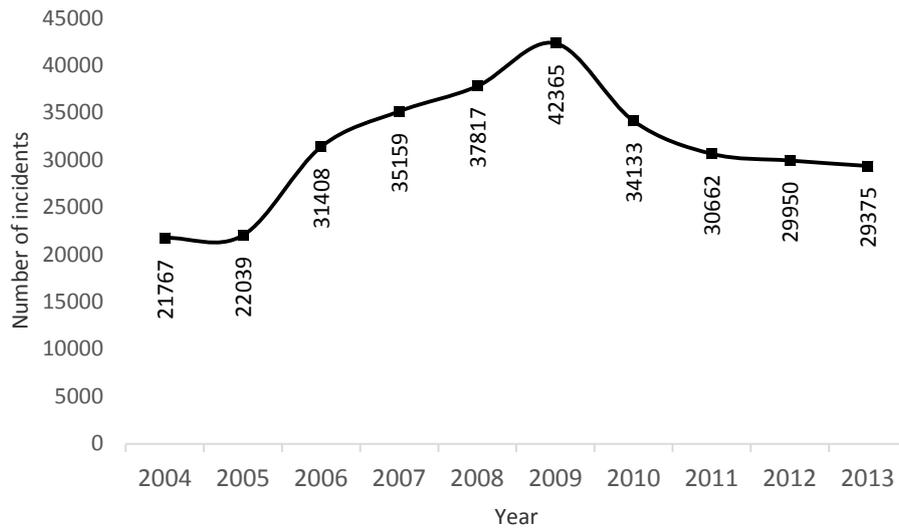


Figure 2: Trend analysis of violent crimes incidents in Malaysia, 2004-2013

There was an increase in the number of recorded violent crime incidents from 2004 to 2009 (20,598 incidents or 94.6%). Violent crime incidents steadily decreased after the year 2009. There was a decrease in 575 reported cases between the years 2012 and 2013.

However, it must be noted that a sizeable proportion of crimes goes unreported and thus unrecorded as part of the index crime. Research showed that the decision to report a crime depends upon a whole range of factors, such as the place where it was perpetrated, the identity of the offender and whether it was thought appropriate to report to the police (Mayhew, Elliott & Dowds, 1989). These unreported crimes reflect the dark figures of crime (Amar, 2005). Thus, the actual number of violence in Malaysia is estimated to be much higher.

Figure 3 depicts the frequency of violent crime incidents across the states in Malaysia between the years 2004 and 2013. The distribution of violent crime cases across states in Malaysia is highly skewed, in which certain states had reported a very high number of violent crimes, while others had relatively low rates. The highest number of violent crime cases was observed consistently in Selangor in the time period of ten years (2004 – 2013) with 91,962 cases, followed by Kuala Lumpur with 59,050 cases, and Johor with 49,105 cases. The least number of cases were recorded in Perlis, Terengganu, and Kelantan with 1,240, 3,869 and 6,821 cases respectively.

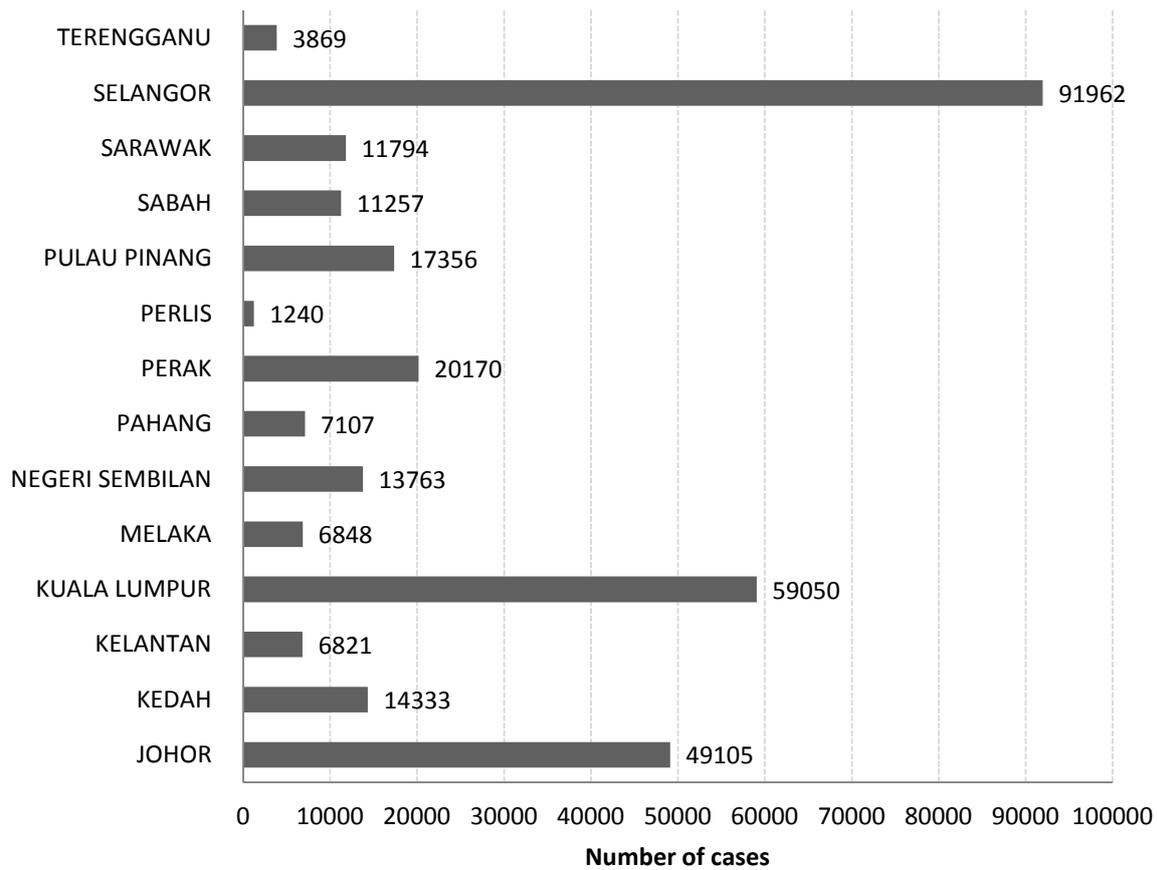


Figure 3: Number of violent crimes incidents according to states in Malaysia, 2004-2013
 (Source: RMP, 2014)

A subjective look is now made to the types of violent crimes that contributed to the violent crimes trend from 2004 to 2013. As shown in **Figure 4**, 314,675 violent crime incidents were recorded in Malaysia for the ten years duration. Gang robbery without firearm accounted for 52.05% of the total violent crimes whereas robbery without firearm contributed 15.21%. Further analysis showed that robbery (robbery with firearm, robbery without firearm, gang robbery with firearm and gang robbery without firearm) formed the bulk and accounted for 68.9% of all violent crimes reported between 2004 and 2013.

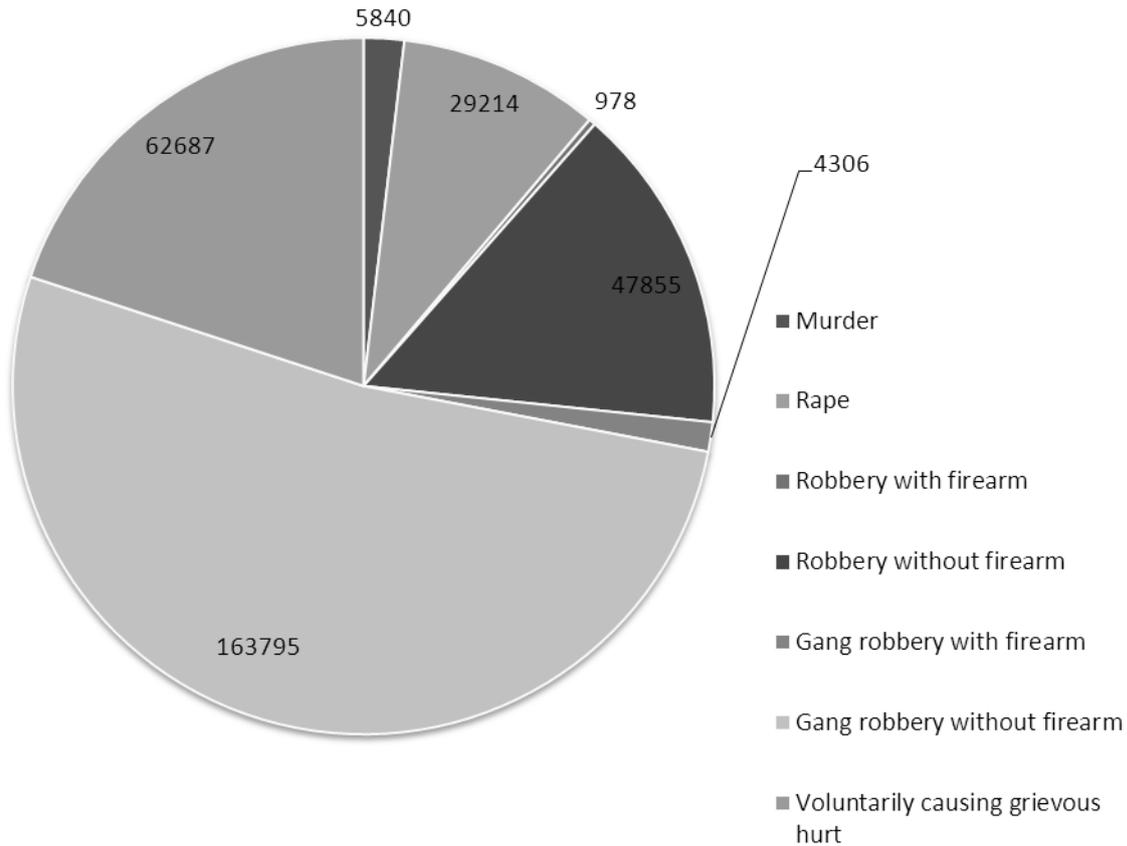


Figure 4: Types of violent crimes recorded, 2004-2013 (Source: RMP, 2014)

In contradiction with media reports, rape, murder and gang robbery with firearm were the least types of violent crime. Of all the violent crimes that occurred in the ten years longitudinal analysis, rape accounted for 9.28%. Murder accounted for 1.86% while robbery with firearm accounted for 0.31% of all violent crimes between the years 2004 and 2013.

When compared per annum, except for the year 2007, incidents of gang robbery without firearm dominated as the most common violent crime in the ten year duration. The percentage of this type of crime for each year ranged from 20.17% (in the year 2007) to 61.98% (in the year 2006) of the total violent crimes in that particular year. This was followed by incidents of battery with percentages ranging from 17.58% (in the year 2008) to 23.76% (in the year 2010).

Table 2: Trend of violent crimes, 2007-2013 (Source: RMP, 2014)

Violent crimes/ Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Murder	590	654	601	568	530	602	627
Rape	3176	3494	3840	3693	3270	2964	2718
Robbery with firearm	197	76	155	309	52	17	21
Robbery without firearm	17235	4959	4862	3834	3871	3275	3565
Gang robbery with firearm	75	182	815	1809	318	110	98
Gang robbery without firearm	7093	21804	23722	15809	16084	16738	16647
Voluntarily causing grievous hurt	6793	6648	8370	8111	6537	6244	5699
TOTAL	35159	37817	42365	34133	30662	29950	29375

As shown in **Table 2**, there was a major rise in gang robbery without firearm from 2007 to 2008 with 14,711 cases or by 207.4%. During the same duration, cases recorded for murder, rape, and gang robbery with firearm increased 11%, 10%, and 143% respectively. Cases recorded for robbery without firearm and with firearm decreased drastically by 71% and 61% respectively for the same duration.

Since 2011, the rates of four types of violent crimes have been decreasing. These were rape, gang robbery with firearm, gang robbery without firearm, and voluntarily causing grievous harm. The highest decrement of violent crime incidents was noted from the year 2009 to 2010 with less 8,232 incidents reported or by 19.43%. The reduction of gang robbery without firearm (33.36%) and robbery without firearm (21.14%) were the major factors for this decrement.

In order to achieve the aim of identifying victim trends, the numbers of victim from seven types of violent crimes were also obtained. **Figure 5** depicts the number of violent crimes victims in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan from January to June 2014. In total, 193 people had been victims of violent crime.

The obtained statistics indicated that some types of violent crime have more victims than other types. These were namely gang robbery with firearm (72 victims, 37.31%) and voluntary causing grievous hurt or battery (56 victims, 29.02%). In comparison, only four people were victims of robbery with firearm and four people were victims of murder.

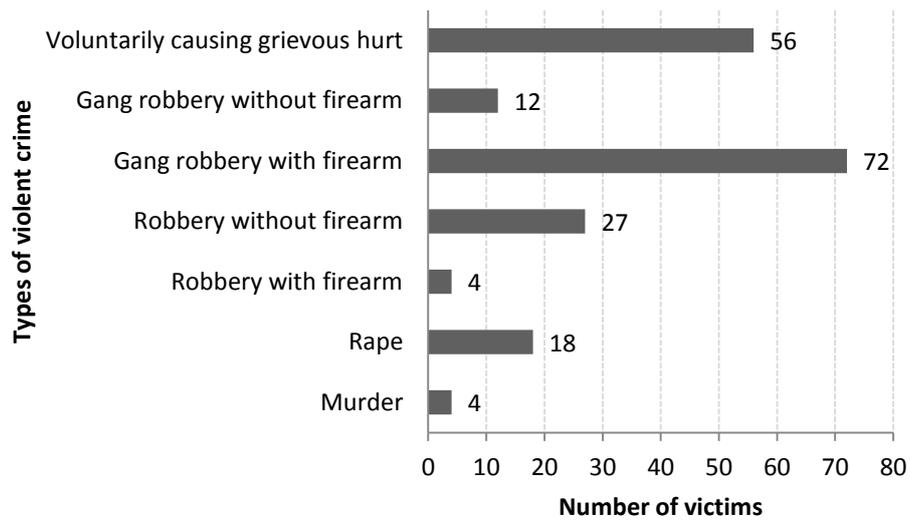


Figure 5: Number of victims within six month in Seremban district (Source: RMP, 2014)

In the attempt to measure crime, two basic standard measures are commonly employed to gauge the volume and risk of violent crimes. ‘Simple crime counts’ refer to the total volume of any crime (Mohammad Rahim *et al.*, 2013). The formula is shown in figure 6 below.

$$\text{Victimisation rate per } 100,000 = \frac{\text{Number of violent crimes victims}}{\text{Total population size}} \times 100,000$$

Figure 6: Victimization rate formula

Based on the above formula, a simple calculation was made to determine the violent crime victimization rate in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan from January to June 2014. The results of the calculation are 61. The total number of victims was 193 and the population was 316,543 (as obtained from *Jabatan Statistik Malaysia*, 2010). This means that for every 100,000 citizen of Seremban, 61 people were or may become victims of violent crimes.

About 79.8% or 154 victims were victimized in the urban area of Seremban including Rahang, Senawang, Seremban 2, Lobak and Temiang. More males than females were victimized with 154 and 69 victims respectively. Those 193 victims consist of 73 Indian, 56 Malay, 35 Chinese and 29 from other races such as Kadazan, Bajau, Vietnamese, Myanmar and Indonesian. Regarding the nationality of victims, the majority of the victims seemed to be local people. These information are shown in table 3 below.

Table 3: Victim variables of violent crimes in Seremban, January to June 2014
(Source: RMP, 2014)

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY (n=193)	PERCENTAGE
<i>Location according to Police Station</i>		
Rahang	19	9.84
Senawang	40	20.73
Seremban 2	26	13.47
Jalan Campbell	69	35.75
Rantau	7	3.63
Mambau	9	4.66
Kuala Sawah	5	2.59
Paroi	14	7.25
Sikamat	4	2.07
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	154	64.24
Female	69	35.75
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
Indian	73	37.82
Malay	56	29.00
Chinese	35	18.13
Other	29	15.02
<i>Nationality</i>		
Malaysian	173	89.64
Non-Malaysian	20	10.36

Discussion

The mass and social media depict rising crime rates, especially violent crime; subsequently illustrating an uncivil, dangerous and unsafe environment. Based on the lack of structured information, this trend analysis sought to discern longitudinal patterns underlying the incidences of violent crimes throughout Malaysia between the years 2004 and 2013. From the archival time series analysis performed, it shows that there is an increase of violent crimes incident from 21,767 in the year 2004 to 29,375 in 2013. Violent crime has grown by 35% during this period. The highest number of reported violent crimes incident was in the year 2009 with 42,365 cases.

The increase of population during this period may have influenced the violent crime rate. It may be argued that a better means of measuring the actual growth of crime is to base it on a per 100,000 population index per specific year. When this measurement was used, violent crimes index per 100,000 also showed an increase - from 84.0 in 2004 to 98.0 in 2013. This is an increase of 16.7%. In the year 2009 which recorded the highest violent crimes incident, the violent crimes index per 100,000 was 150.9.

Based on the trend, it is clear that the rate of violent crimes is fluctuating and worrisome. Also, it should be noted that, these figures do not include unreported cases that had happened in Malaysia. Thus, the actual number of violent crimes in Malaysia is estimated to be much higher than that reported.

As such, there may be some truth in the public's perception of rising crime rates. Despite official statistics indicating a reduction of overall crime, crimes that are comparatively more violent – meaning a higher likelihood of physical and emotional harm as crime outcomes; appear to be increasing. This was shown with the increase of murders since the year 2011 and robbery with firearms since 2012; both which have been the forefront of media attention. Incidents of robbery with firearms are of particular concern as Malaysia has very stringent laws governing the ownership and use of firearms.

If we take into consideration only robbery per 100,000 for the year 2012 (RMP, 2014), the robbery rate per 100,000 in Malaysia was at 105.2. This was way above Hong Kong (12.4), Japan (3.5), Mongolia (28.2) and Philippines (49.0) (UNODC, 2013). This indicates that more strategies and prevention measures need to be taken.

A previous study on crime levels and trends in Malaysia indicated that based on the population growth rate, crime rate will grow at the rate of 2.6% annually with property crime making up 90% of the crime reported whilst the rest would be made up of violent crime (Amar, 2006). However, the estimated percentage of violent crimes at 10% is steadily increasing showing a 19.9% increase of the crime reported in 2013 with 29,375 violent crime incidents. This shows that although property crime is still the main contributor to the index crime, violent crime is increasing at a worrying rate. A study on the rise of crime in Malaysia

from the year 1980 to 2004 also stated that violent crime is growing at a faster rate than property crime (Amar, 2005).

There are many factors that explain the trend and rise of violent crimes. Downes (1995) found that increase of crime and inequality are profoundly linked. Here, inequality includes both economic and racial inequalities. Crime rates and inequality are positively correlated within countries and, particularly, between countries, and this correlation reflects the causation from inequality to crime rates, even after controlling other crime determinants (Fajnzylber *et al.*, 2002).

In addition to the inequality factor, a number of credible factors are also manifested in criminological literatures. For example, social disorganization, social stress, and poverty (see Linsky *et al.*, 1995; LaFree, 1999; Alvarez and Bachman, 2002). Furthermore, the influx of illegal weapons from neighbouring countries such as Thailand, despite strict laws; may also facilitate the occurrence of violent crimes in Malaysia (The Straits Times, 8 August 2013; New Straits Times, 23 September 2013; The Sun Daily, 23 October 2013). Other possible explanations for the increment in number of violent crime incidents may be due to the high population rate and immigration from neighbouring countries (My Metro, 17 September 2012).

Details on demographic information of victims of violent crime are very important in understanding the phenomenon of violent crimes within each country. According to Levinson & Martin (1980) different communities have a variety of practices, beliefs, social norms and legislations that mutually interact and influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of its members and as such, crime prevention based on the cultural phenomena of one community, especially of Western-origin; may not be as effective in Malaysia. Gathering such details also allows the researcher to identify and determine the variation in risk of victimization among different groups within the population.

From the six months statistics obtained, the highest victims race recorded were among Indians. The higher prevalence of Indians being victimized can be explained by several factors which include the involvement in petty crime, gang related activities, and other social deviancy such as alcoholism and substance abuse (see Amar, 2005). In relation to this, information released

from the Malaysian Ministry of Home Affairs (The Star, 2013) revealed that nearly 72% of wanted gangsters were of Indian ethnicity, followed by those of Chinese ethnicity (20%). In addition, Rahim *et al.* (2013) found that between the years 2010 and 2012, the highest annual average murder victimization rate was observed among Indian. In comparing rural and urban areas, it was expected that a large portion of violent crimes occur in urban areas. This finding supports the assertion of previous researches, for example Mazlan (2012) and Hafazah & Siti (2012). Due to more opportunities, more potential gains and increasing population and migration urban environments are more at risk as hotspots, in particular Rahang and Senawang.

In this study, men were more than twice likely compared to women to be victimized. This validates Siegel's (2010) assertion that males are more likely to suffer in violent crime compared to females except for in cases of rape. Local studies have also shown the same trend, for example Rahim *et al.* (2013) found that between the years 2010 and 2012, the highest annual average murder victimization rate was observed among men. Based on this alarming trend, it can be suggested that there are more effective preventive measures need to be taken to curb these incidents. Some local studies have also shown the need for better crime prevention by way of environmental design (Siti & Aldrin, 2013), volunteerism (Hafazah & Siti, 2012), and crime prevention campaigns (Amar, 2006) which needs to be improved upon. Therefore, the present study proposes the urgent need of effective legislation and pro-active crime prevention strategies to curb these heinous incidents.

Conclusion

These archival analyses offer a better understanding on the epidemiology of violent crimes in Malaysia. The information from the analyses could be used to characterize violent crime incidents and types of violent crimes that appears to becoming more and more prevalent in Malaysia. The present epidemiological knowledge derived from this study is considered vital elements to criminal justice figures in order to implement sustainable solutions and risk-focused crime preventions. Therefore, it is anticipated that the present study would be of benefit in addressing the nature of violent crime in Malaysia which is parallel to the aim of Malaysia's National Key Result Area in reducing crime.

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