Promoting Community Crime Prevention for a Safer Community

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Abstract

Based on the level of fear of crime expressed by the community, a need to convey evidence-based and practical ways for community crime prevention arose. Based on this notion, a university community service programme, Kelantan Safe Community (SafeCom2012) was conducted by the Forensic Science Programme of Universiti Sains Malaysia in the Kelantan state of Peninsular Malaysia as a mean for local social transformation. To affect a holistic transformation, the aims of this programme were to promote crime prevention at the community level by facilitating significant contact between relevant crime-prevention bodies and the community, and the application of forensic science in crime prevention. Multiple approaches were applied as outcomes of joint planning and resources to transform community crime prevention. A total of 275 citizens of various demographic background were educated on the importance of crime prevention, crime in religious and moral context. A survey was distributed among participants during registration which was returned at the end of the event. Results indicated that 100% of respondents (n=115) agreed that their awareness level of community crime prevention increased and 98.5% agreed that the programme aims were achieved. The implications of the programme include the need for better multi-agency collaboration in ensuring that community crime prevention becomes a sustainable social transformation agenda.

Keywords: crime prevention, community, education, forensic science, university-community engagement

Introduction

In the pursuit of actualising Malaysia as a developed nation by 2020, reducing crime rate is one of the main concerns of NKRA and Government Transformation Plan (GTP) (Official Portal of Ministry of Home Affairs, 2013). *The NKRA Reducing Crime* initiative is led by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA). These initiatives include crime prevention, crime tracking and arrest, trial of offenders, punishment and rehabilitation (Official Portal of Ministry of Home Affairs, 2013). In addition, the initiative aims to improve public perception and to increase service delivery by the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) (Official Portal of Ministry of Home Affairs, 2013). In order to

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achieve the stated aims, the NKRA Division was formed at the end of 2009 to plan, prepare, coordinate and monitor the implementation of the 55 initiatives as proposed by the Crime Lab (Official Portal of Ministry of Home Affairs, 2013).

The involvement of the community in preventing crime reflects the public support in this matter (Byrne, 2002) which further serves as an effective solution. Public awareness and perception of fear of crime are important indicators for community safety and need for quality life. Despite the decrease in fear of crime index among the local public in previous year, the overall percentage was still considered high in this nation (from 52% to 48.9% in 2010 and 2011, respectively) (Performance Management and Delivery Unit [PEMANDU], 2011). Although crime rate in Kelantan, particularly, is lower compared to other states such as Selangor and Johor due to urbanisation, educating the local communities serves as a proactive prevention strategy in combating crime. Through this, the possibility of being a victim or involvement in crime may be reduced thus hindering the rise of crime rate.

With the main objective to promote crime prevention at the community level, a joint programme was organised by USM's Forensic Science programme and the Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF) Kelantan Chapter, in conjunction with Universal Children's Day (20 Nov 2012), International Day of Elimination of Violence Against Women (25 Nov 2012), and the International Day for the Abolition of Slaves (2 Dec 2012). This university-community engagement programme was expected to transfer knowledge and practical skills to Kelantan communities on crime prevention, crime in religious and moral contexts, and the application of forensic sciences in crime investigation.

Kelantan Safe Community 2012 (*SafeCom2012*) is a part of USM's effort to assist in improving knowledge, actions, and conducts of community members (Division of Industry and Community Network, 2012) regarding individual and community safety. In addition, this programme contributed to crime prevention and reduction. Four objectives were listed in the organisation of the programme:

1. Leading academic collaboration with the Kelantan Islamic Religious Affairs Department (JAHEAIK) on crime prevention from the Islamic perspective
2. Leading academic collaboration with MCPF Kelantan Chapter on crime prevention base on community involvement
3. Provide the immediate community with knowledge to reduce crime opportunities
4. Communicate practical knowledge to reduce vulnerability of crime victimisation.

SafeCom2012 targeted police personnel, staff and students from local colleges and institutions, parents, and concerned community members. This group of participants are expected to initiate the awareness in crime prevention within the larger community. As a means to support the government's effort in fighting crime, *SafeCom2012* serves as cohesive and multi-level mechanism to fight crime. The sharing of knowledge and know-how being relating to issues of criminal law in Malaysia from academia to society were anticipated to help communities fight crime and social problem.

Methodology

In achieving the aforementioned objectives, several activities were held. These included interactive forensic science, RMP (Royal Malaysian Police) and *Rakan Cop* exhibitions and poster presentations. Table 1 below depicts the activities that were carried out.

Objective	Activity
Crime prevention from the Islamic perspective	Talk by JAHEAIK representative: Crimes based on syariah: teachings and lessons
Crime prevention based on community involvement	Opening speech by SAC Datuk Jalaluddin Abdul Rahman, Head of RMP Kelantan RMP crime-fighting demonstration
Knowledge to reduce crime opportunities	Forum Forensic Science, RMP and MCPF Kelantan Chapter Talk by representative of the Forensic Science programme Video documentary on 'pukau' (the use of hypnotism in crime) Interactive Forensic Science exhibitions
Practical knowledge to reduce vulnerability of crime victimisation	Video documentary on 'pukau' (the use of hypnotism in crime) Interactive Forensic Science and RMP exhibitions and posters RMP victim rescue demonstration

Table 1: SafeCom2012 Objective-oriented Activities

Participants

SafeCom2012 was successfully organised at the Student Development Centre, USM, Kelantan, on 29 November 2012. Approximately, 275 people participated, excluding *SafeCom2012* committee members. However, 115 people returned completed surveys.

Instruments and data collection

For the purpose of improving future programmes, a participant's feedback survey form was designed for *SafeCom2012.* The survey consisted of two parts: quantitative (Section A) and qualitative (Section B). The survey was explorative in nature and questionnaire items were provided bilingually (English and Bahasa Malaysia).

Section A of the survey acquired participants' views on the programme using a 5-point Likert Scale. Responses ranged from 1 = very unsatisfactory to 5 = very satisfactory. Four questions were asked in this section. Section B requested participants to provide comments regarding achievement of objectives and what could be done as considerations for future and similar programmes. Three open-ended questions were asked in this section.

The feedback survey form was distributed to the participants during registration. Committee members who were responsible for the registration notified registered participants of the survey form and asked them to return the form at the end of the event. In addition, the master of

ceremony had reminded the participants several times throughout the event to fill in and return the forms to committee members before leaving the event.

Data analysis

For the purpose of this report, only basic statistical analyses were carried out. Analyses were carried out using Excel 2011 software. Items in Section A were analysed to generate frequencies and percentages. Items in Section B were analysed manually and common answers were categorised together. Following that, responses were keyed into Excel 2011 to obtain generic themes.

Results

Respondent demographics were not asked as the purpose of the survey was explorative in nature and to determine whether the objectives of *SafeCom2012* were met. In general, out of the 275 registered participants, 115 people returned completed questionnaires. This was a return rate of 42%.

Section A

Section A represents participants' views on the programme. Table 2 below provides the result summary for Section A. With regards to the overall success of the programme, most of the participants (95.6%) responded being either satisfied or very satisfied. Nearly 91% of those who responded were either satisfied or very satisfied with the information or content provided in the programme.

ITEM	Responses in percentage				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Overall success of the programme	-	1.4	9.2	44.4	45.1
2. Information or content provided in the programme	-	2.1	7.0	45.1	45.8
3. Location and food	2.1	3.5	36.6	38.0	19.7
4. Services provided by the committee	-	2.1	15.5	38.0	44.4

Note: 1 = very unsatisfactory, 2 = unsatisfactory, 3 = acceptable, 4 = satisfactory, 5 = very satisfactory

Table 2: Participants' views on the programme

Most of the respondents found the location of the programme and the food as being acceptable or better. A small percentage (2.1%) found the location and food very unsatisfactory. Most (nearly 98%) of the returned survey forms evidenced that the services provided by the committee were acceptable or better.

Section B

Section B presents participants' comments regarding achievement of objectives and what could be done as considerations for future similar programmes. Table 3 shows the result for the first and second questions in Section B. Percentage of participants who agreed and disagreed of the questions are presented.

	Questions	Results
1.	Crime and crime prevention levels before and after attending *SafeCom2012*	100% agreed awareness of community crime prevention improved
2.	Achievement of *SafeCom 2012* objectives	98.5% agreed the objectives were achieved.
		1.5% disagreed the objectives were achieved due to: • Duration of the programme was too short • Depth of information was too much for the stipulated time • Not enough time for question and answer sessions during talks • More crime prevention/victim rescue live demonstrations

Table 3: Comments regarding achievement of objectives

In the last part of Section B, participants were asked to elaborate their suggestions that could be taken into consideration as improvements for future and similar programmes. After manual categorisation, nine themes emerged. The results are shown in table 4 below.

	Theme	% of respondents
1	The use of more video documentaries and live demonstrations as communication mediums	18.4%
2	Have more similar programmes	16.8%
3	Improve time management	8.8%
4	Improve the location and facilities (bigger and more comfortable)	8.8%
5	Have a similar programme in public locations for example shopping complex	8.8%
6	Have more youth participation	8%
7	Increase reading materials and the involvement of other crime prevention agencies	7.2%
8	Make the programme longer, preferably two days	5.6%
9	Include more interesting activities that involve participants	5.6%

Table 4: Themes for programme improvements

Discussion

The organisation of *SafeCom2012* was based on the primary goal which was to promote crime prevention at the community level. In achievement of this goal, several collaborations were formed involving MCPF Kelantan Chapter, JAHEAIK, and the RMP. In addition, four main objectives were outlined to realise a safer community in the Kelantan setting. At the end of the event, feedbacks from the participants were expected to indicate successful achievement of the goal and objectives of the event.

SafeCom2012 was considered successful in achieving the promotion of crime prevention at the Kelantan community level. This is proved by the majority of participants who indicated satisfaction with the overall success of the programme. In addition, all participants agreed that their awareness level for crime and crime prevention were improved after attending *Safe Com2012*. This indicated that the organisation of *SafeCom2012* successfully assisted in

improving the understanding and knowledge of the community regarding crime and crime prevention from several perspectives.

Apart from the primary goal of *SafeCom2012,* the four outlined objectives were also successfully achieved, as indicated by majority of participants. Nevertheless, a very small number of participants believed that the organisation of *SafeCom2012* lacked the achievements of some objectives. These included the short duration of the programme (half a day), depth of information which is too much for the provided time (about 45 minutes per session using non layman terminology), and insufficient time located for question and answer session (about 10 minutes per session).

All these comments lead to the suggestion to increase the duration of similar events in the future. In addition, some participants suggested for more live crime prevention demonstrations. This indirectly demonstrated the tendency for the community to gain knowledge through visual action rather than only auditory talks. Suggestions for programme's improvement also indicate similar observations.

The promotion of crime prevention from the Islamic perspective

The first objective of *SafeCom2012* was to promote crime prevention from the Islamic perspective. In Malaysia, both the civil and Syariah law are complimentarily practiced. Thus, knowledge of crime from the Islamic perspective is equally important to be learned by the local community who are largely Muslims. It is not only important to safeguard one from becoming victims of crime, it is also essential to educate the community to avoid involvement in criminal behaviour through the religious perspective.

Responses from the survey indicated that this objective was achieved. However, the terminology and contents presented were too deep for the participants to absorb given the short-time frame. Participants wanted more knowledge and visual demonstrations related to safeguarding themselves from becoming crime victims. It emerged from the committee members themselves, that understanding crime prevention from the Islamic perspective was valuable to them. The knowledge gained may be of use in their future careers in the field of Forensic Science and in order to understand criminal behaviour.

The promotion of crime prevention based on community involvement

The second objective of *SafeCom2012* was to promote crime prevention base on community involvement. These efforts included community recruitment in *Rakan Cop*, support or involvement in community policing, neighbourhood watches and having community members becoming the 'eyes and ears' of police personnel. It is known that the aptitude of law enforcement has its own limitations where the police force cannot be expected to be everywhere every time.

Therefore, the direct involvement of community in crime prevention should be proclaimed as the strongest level of safety guardianship following law enforcement. In line with this, it is crucial to increase community awareness regarding the importance of their roles and involvement in crime prevention efforts. This is rather than leave all the responsibility solely on the law enforcer.

The efforts to promote crime prevention by appealing for community involvement in *SafeCom2012* were done through several ways. The first way was through the opening speeches by the Kelantan RMP Head and MCPF Vice President. They shared information regarding current statistics and efforts to combat crime in Kelantan communities and elsewhere.

Secondly, crime-fighting demonstrations were conducted by the RMP. It was held in front of the Student Development Centre, USM. The open-space location attracted many community audiences, both participants and non-participants of *SafeCom2012* to see the police in action in

mock crime-fighting demonstrations. The demonstrations successfully showed the level of professionalism, warrior-like capabilities and skills of Malaysian police officers.

Based on participants' responses this objective was achieved. Perceptions regarding police involvement, high crime rate and insecure neighbourhoods were improved for the better. Based on statistical information, the public was made aware of the reality of crime in Kelantan.

The public were also informed on how community involvement had successfully led to the arrest and subsequent punishment of various types of criminals elsewhere. The feedback from *SafeCom2012* committee members revealed that the knowledge gained throughout these efforts demonstrated the diverse policing tasks that were involved in making the community safer. The speeches reiterated that crime prevention is a continuous joint effort between many agencies.

The promotion of crime prevention by providing knowledge to reduce crime opportunities

The third objective was to promote crime prevention by providing knowledge to reduce crime opportunities. For activities in *SafeCom2012* were conducted to achieve this objective. The activities were an interactive crime prevention forum, a forensic science talk, a video documentary, and interactive exhibitions. The forum was panelled by representatives from the Forensic Science Programme, RMP and MCPF Kelantan Chapter. A total of 12 questions were posed to the panel to describe the role of different agencies to prevent crime and reduce crime opportunities.

The talk by a representative of the Forensic Science programme shared research and evidence-based examples of the role of forensics in crime investigations. The myriad scientific advancements in evidence collection and interpretation enabled participants to understand several things. Firstly, criminals will be caught sooner or later as there are many ways to link a crime scene to a criminal. Secondly, the media portrayal of solving crimes, especially in such dramas like CSI and Criminal Minds is untrue and should not be believed as fact.

The video documentary focused on the use hypnotism in criminal activities. The documentary was originally aired on television in 2011. The showing of this documentary equipped the public with better knowledge to reduce becoming victims of crime opportunists. At the same time, the contents of the video debunked the myth of using supernatural powers as a crime mechanism. It was shown how sleight of hand and the power of suggestion were used to commit various crimes.

The interactive exhibitions included participants from the Forensic Science Programme, RMP and *Rakan Cop*. In total, eight booths and over 30 posters were involved in the exhibitions. At each booth, there were personnel to explain and demonstrate the use of either science or crime investigation related instruments. In addition, participants were allowed hands-on experience in interpreting evidence.

Responses from all participants indicated that the interactive exhibitions were a success with overcrowding of booths. However, some complaints were received. The complaints were on the space allocated for interactive hands-on and the increase in temperature during overcrowding. These suggested that for future and similar events, more space and air cooling systems are recommended for the comfort of participants.

The promotion of crime prevention through practical knowledge to reduce vulnerability of crime victimisation

The forth objective was to promote crime prevention through practical knowledge to reduce vulnerability of crime victimisation. The achievement of this objective was done through three

activities. The activities were the video documentary on use of hypnotism, the interactive exhibition and the RMP victim rescue demonstration.

Through the first activity, the video documentary provided visual means for participants to obtain practical knowledge to reduce vulnerability of crime victimisation. This was via ways to be more alert of surroundings and not to be too trusting of what people. Participants were taught to be aware of common mechanisms or modus operandi used to fleece victims.

Via the interactive exhibitions and posters, the public are better equipped to handle a potential crime incident by avoiding lures or snares get out by potential criminals. In addition, the exhibitions provided practical knowledge to the community to look out for potential evidence in aiding the police to capture suspects. Lastly, the RMP victim rescue demonstration showed the public about efforts taken by police to rescue victims. It involved a car chase within the USM compound when a woman was 'kidnapped'. The car stunts and control shown by the police were extraordinary in their pursuit of the 'criminals'.

Responses from the survey indicate that this objective was achieved successfully. In fact, from the feedbacks received it appeared that the more visual and interactive communication mediums were better received by participants compared to the talks. The main reason for the better response was because there were visual aids that go beyond auditory cues in making people understand how crime prevention works.

Limitations

After discussion with participants and committee members, three main limitations were identified. The first centered on the location of the programme. Some of the participants felt that the location was not appropriate. This was due to its location between student hostel blocks and the sports centre. There were limited parking and the road leading to the event's location was narrow, making it difficult for buses to maneuver. As a recommendation, future programmes should be conducted at a location that is more spacious and easy to reach.

The second was on the small turn-up rate of participants. *SafeCom2012* was targeted to reach around 350 participants from inside and outside USM. Lack of information regarding this event might have contributed to the small number of participants. In future programmes, media effort should be increased in promoting the event, particularly regarding the main objective of the event.

The third was the low return rate of survey forms. Lack of continuous communication between the committee members and the participants may explain this limitation. In addition, some of the returned forms had to be rejected due to incomplete information or illegible hand writing. To improve return rates, communication between committee members and participants should be improved.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations mentioned, *SafeCom2012* was viewed a success by many parties. It marked the first of several achievements. Firstly, it marked the collaboration between the Forensic Science programme and other agencies. These agencies included JAHEAIK, MCPF Kelantan Chapter and the RMP. Secondly, the forum was the first platform of its kind panelled by three different agencies focusing on community crime prevention in Kelantan. Thirdly, this was the first academic-community engagement on sharing crime prevention knowledge and skills using a multi-pronged approach. Finally, through simulation exercises, the Kelantan community learned how to confront criminals and reduce the probability of becoming victims of crime.

Acknowledgments

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