Youth Participation in Crime Prevention

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Introduction

Citizen participants in the maintenance of local peace and order is a tradition and many municipal governments across the globe have undertaken efforts to promote and encourage citizen participation in community based collaborative partnerships to build safe and prosperous communities. Recent studies (Sherman at al. 1997, Weisheit, 1984) have also suggested that school-based crime prevention programs have great potential as a means by which to promote public safety. Schools and colleges are by definition institutions of socialization that inculcate students into the norms, attitudes and values of conventional society. Consequently, their ability to influence youth is substantial and their utility as a locus for crime prevention should be examined closely as this study would do.

In order to understand the successful implementation of any new policy or program in policing, it is necessary to understand the thinking of its respondents in being able to ensure the program can be implemented effectively as what this paper and program tries to discuss.

Malaysia

Reducing crime is a vital part of Malaysia's plans to become a fully developed country. Crime and the fear of crime impact people's quality of life, sometimes with devastating effect. Crime also has a substantial economic cost. In the United Kingdom for example, researchers at the Home Office estimated the cost of crime to be in excess of GBP 60 billion p.a., which is over 5% of GDP. According to statistics from the Ministry of Home Affairs: Malaysia experienced a 15-percent increase in juvenile cases from 3399 in year 2012 to 8704 cases in year 2013 (*Berita Harian*, 9th April 2014). Bukit Aman Police Crime Prevention and Eradication Director Datuk Wira Ayub Yaakob also reported that in 2013, nationwide violent crime among minors involving cases such as rape and murder aged between 12 and 17 had significantly gone up by 47 percent (*The Star* 10th April 2014). According to Dato' Seri Hishammuddin bin Tun Hussein, Minister of Home Affairs:

"Crime affects all Malaysians, irrespective of race, religion, gender or income levels. To protect our loved ones, we have set ambitious targets to reduce crime levels significantly for which I, as the Lead Minister, am accountable for delivering. Achieving these targets will require concerted efforts by all law enforcement agencies and also the help of community members. While we are starting to see some positive signs at the nationwide level for street crime, we have much more to do to create a Malaysia where the fear of crime is substantially reduced. I humbly ask that all Malaysians join hands with all the agencies involved in fighting crime at all levels such that we can all live in a safer nation."

The aspiration of the Malaysian government's National Key Results Area (NKRA) is to improve public safety across Malaysia over the next two to three years and achieve visible results within the first 6 to 12 months. The government plans to achieve results through targeted actions focused various outcomes, one of which includes improving public perception of safety by promoting public participation and shared responsibility through volunteerism, especially amongst the youth and across races. Current high levels of concern about crime have existed for some years, as the results of the surveys in 2005 and 2009 have shown. Yet even if crimes can be reduce, public perception of the level of crime must be countered, which can remain unchanged and can sometimes even worsen while absolute crime figures are decreasing. Increasing the public's participation in crime awareness and prevention activities contributes towards increasing their general awareness and improving their sense of security. Other countries have shifted towards more community-based policing. This is in part because it helps reduce crime, but also because it reduces the fear of crime. Examples of this include the neighbourhood policing programme in the UK, where every neighbourhood has a dedicated team of police officers and community support officers. In the USA, a number of police departments have introduced innovative ways for the general public to communicate with the police including public meetings and online forums. Such interactions let the public share their local priorities, which enables the police to respond accordingly, and keep the community updated on the police's actions and its achievements.

This is an opportunity to build upon Malaysia's significant tradition of volunteerism, from Rukun Tetangga schemes to organised volunteer programmes such as JPAM and RELA. This would not only bolster the capacity of the police service, it would also involve more of the rakyat in efforts

to reduce crime. Increasing the rakyat's sense of safety, encouraging volunteers and communicating with the rakyat on crime comprise strategies to reduce the fear of becoming a victim of crime and improve the public's perception of safety. One of the targets of the Malaysian government is to also increase volunteers to help with crime prevention. One of this is the Crime Awareness Team (CAT) which will harness the power of the almost 1.5 million young people who are members of youth groups. Teams of young people aged 15 to 25 years will be provided with leadership skills training and encouraged to learn about community safety and policing issues in their districts.

With the call by the Malaysian government for the youth of the nation to be actively involved in volunteering in helping with crime prevention this study specifically focuses on a breakthrough programme in youth community policing and mentoring program set up to become the voluntarily arms, eyes and ears of the authorities in combating crimes, bullying and gangsterism among youth. This pilot study aims to equip participants with skills / knowledge on crime prevention and tools to enable them to communicate and share safety information more effectively.

Method
Data from this pilot study was gathered from a workshop conducted amongst youths at the tertiary level. A total of 106 questionnaires were given out before and after the workshop. The response rate was 100%. The sample of respondents who returned the surveys were similar in both instances. Students from institutions of higher learning were invited to participate. The criteria of selection were: 106 students from six universities signed up and were placed in a team building camp for a three day time frame. During this time, these students were given various activities, talks and workshops. The students were asked to complete a survey form pre and post training based on three categories. These categories were based on hypothetical criminal situations, decision making and problem solving. The survey asked students of their perception on crimes such as gangsterism, drugs, violent behavior, bullying, usage of weapons and enforcement agencies. This is similar to Goldstein's (1990) framework that identified three goals of policing as enforcing the law, maintaining order and dealing with non-criminal activities.

Findings

Findings of the survey revealed that the respondents were between the ages of 19-23 and most of whom average achievers in university (58.33%) were receiving B's. The racial distribution was not proportionate with Malay (93.62%), Chinese 1.06%, Indian 3.19% and others (indigenous) 2.13% (See Figure 1.0) In terms of gender, 65.4% who attended the training were female while 34.6% were male. In identifying students preference to confide in a confidant when faced with a problem, 47% mentioned they would confide in their parents, 43% mentioned friends while 2% mentioned teacher while 3% mentioned they would confide in a counselor.

Bullying

Respondents were aware that bullying was a wrong act and they should not be respected (34%) Respondents often or sometimes saw someone being bullied in their school (54.28%) whereas 46% mentioned that if someone bullied them they would physically harm them (the bully). Although 33% of the he respondents were unsure if bullies should be expelled for their actions 47% felt strongly that they should be expelled for this action. 70% of respondents did not agree to the fact that it was okay to bully a woman because she was the weaker gender neither were they agreeable to the fact that it was okay to bully anyone smaller than them (68%).

Weapons

Respondents were aware that weapons were dangerous and could cause harm. 50% of the respondents felt that they would report any persons with a weapon while 44% were unsure of the action they would take while 45% of respondents felt students with weapons should be expelled.

Law, Rules and regulation

The respondents admitted that they followed rules well 68.86% and knew that they would have a lot to lose by getting into trouble with the law (42%). The respondents were not sure about the law and did not have a clear understanding as to the decision that they would make pertaining to law making. This includes the fact that they were unsure if it was okay to break the law to help a friend (35%), or if it was okay to break the law if the law seems unfair (33%).

Conflict and Consequence

When given hypothetical situations about what they would do if they were in a particular situation of conflict, it was found that respondents were unsure. Nevertheless, 49.6% believed that were able to stay out of trouble, 46.23% believed that the consequences of choices can be positive or negative,40.20% believed that conflict is a normal part of life while 40.20% felt that everyone has the right to express their opinions. Meanwhile 26.67% disagreed with the statement that those who avoided violence were weak.

Conclusion

Developing young people today with skills in problem solving and decision making is extremely pivotal. Evidence from this pilot study proves there is a need for young people to be involved in meaningful leadership experiences especially in tertiary level where young leaders can be borne and can be more engaging in community and nation-building as adults. It is also obvious that there is a great need for more meaningful roles for young people within leadership and governance structures. Youth can take a more *proactive* approach through tertiary-based prevention programs to thwart major issues in crime plaguing this nation such as bullying, drugs, weapons, gangsterism and even terrorism.

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