



## Examining social cohesion and victimization in a Malaysian multiethnic neighborhood

Massoomeh Hedayati Marzbali <sup>a,1</sup>, Aldrin Abdullah <sup>a,\*</sup>,  
Nordin Abd Razak <sup>b,2</sup>, Mohammad Javad Maghsoodi Tilaki <sup>a,3</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University Sains Malaysia, School of Housing, Building & Planning, USM, 11800 Pulau Penang, Malaysia

<sup>b</sup> University Sains Malaysia, School of Educational Studies, USM, 11800 Pulau Penang, Malaysia

Available online 13 April 2014

---

### Abstract

The ecological theories linking neighborhood characteristics to victimization have rarely been tested in Asia. This article examines three conceptual models of social cohesion (collective efficacy, sense of belonging and feeling of morale) that are designed to explain the residents' victimization in Malaysia. This study focuses on the effects of social cohesion on crime using a sample of 294 ethnically diverse residents living in a high-crime neighborhood. The study shows the relevance of all three conceptual models in predicting victimization for both males and females. The findings indicate that a greater sense of belonging and feeling of morale among the neighborhood residents is significantly associated with lower levels of victimization. Contrary to the literature, the collective efficacy measure was associated with higher reported victimization. Our model also links social cohesion measures to neighborhood racial heterogeneity, a finding that adds knowledge to the study of ethnic diversity and crime–community relationships.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Social cohesion; Feelings of morale; Sense of belonging; Victimization; Neighborhood

---

---

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +60 12 410 4715.

*E-mail addresses:* [hedayati@usm.my](mailto:hedayati@usm.my) (M. Hedayati Marzbali), [aldrin@usm.my](mailto:aldrin@usm.my) (A. Abdullah), [norazak@usm.my](mailto:norazak@usm.my) (N.A. Razak), [maghsoodi@usm.my](mailto:maghsoodi@usm.my) (M.J. Maghsoodi Tilaki).

<sup>1</sup>Tel.: +60 17 447 1295; fax: +60 4 657 6523.

<sup>2</sup>Tel.: +60 17 455 9554.

<sup>3</sup>Tel.: +60 17 405 8454.

## 1. Introduction

The ecological theories linking neighborhood characteristics to victimization have rarely been tested outside the context of the United States and Western Europe (Villarreal and Silva, 2006). There is growing recognition that perceived cohesion and the neighborhood context contribute significantly to the residents' well-being. One of the theories that links neighborhood structure to crime is social disorganization theory (Wong, 2012). This theory, which originated from the work of the early Chicagoan researchers (Shaw and McKay, 1942), hypothesized that the crime rate is a function of neighborhood cohesion, which is the result of informal social control (Rountree and Warner, 1999). This theory focuses on the direct relationship between community characteristics and crime through the mediation of social processes (McCrea et al., 2005). Traditional social disorganization theory focuses on crime and disorder rather than on the fear of crime. However, some studies have linked neighborhood structure and cohesion to both crime and fear through the incivilities thesis (Markowitz et al., 2001). In addition, several studies have found that social cohesion and neighborhood safety are associated with social disorganization theory, which takes into consideration the fact that neighborhoods with a high sense of social cohesion are able to control their surrounding area and, as a consequence, experience less crime (Hale, 1996; Steenbeek and Hipp, 2011; van Wilsem et al., 2006).

Neighborhood cohesion enables the residents to bond together, which leads to an increase in their sense of belonging to the community. The sharing of resources among residents is part of a theoretical model that posits that social cohesion positively affects health outcomes (Putnam, 2000) and reduces crime rates (Hirschfield and Bowers, 1997; Lee, 2000). Brown et al. (2003) viewed neighborhood cohesion as the socio-psychological bonds to the social and physical surroundings. The previous research has defined neighborhood cohesion as the ability of residents to recognize strangers as well as the degree of their sense of belonging to their neighborhood (Hunter and Baumer, 1982). Neighborhood cohesion is one of the inhibitors of crime and fear, and neighborhoods with high levels of cohesion are associated with low levels of crime and fear (Lewis and Salem, 1986; Perkins et al., 1990; Rountree and Land, 1996).

However, the present study defines social cohesion as the degree to which the residents perceive cohesion within their neighborhood. The underlying assumption is conceptualized based on social disorganization theory, where the residents' perceived social cohesion is associated with low crime rates (Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999). Despite the importance that early social disorganization theorists attributed to poverty as a key factor diminishing neighborhoods, the extent to which the effect of neighborhood disorganization on crime is mediated through the social cohesion among residents as a community characteristic remains insufficiently understood. Yet, the organization of urban communities in developing countries may challenge the stereotypes presented in previous studies on the effect of structural characteristics, specifically the effects of poverty and ethnic heterogeneity on crime. This article examines social disorganization theory in the context of urban Malaysia, focusing on high-crime middle class multiethnic residents. The present study employs structural equation modeling (SEM) approach using bootstrapping estimation to understand the relationships between ethnicity, social cohesion and crime.

### *1.1. Neighborhood cohesion and victimization*

Social disorganization theory focuses on the direct relationship between the neighborhood structure and crime through the mediation of social cohesion (McCrea et al., 2005; Rountree

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1097898>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1097898>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)