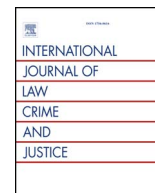




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Position Paper

Plus Bouhan: A new community-based approach to crime prevention in Japan

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ABSTRACT

The number of crime prevention volunteer organizations in Japan has continued to increase and at the end of 2014, there were some 48,000 such organizations with a total of approximately 2.8 million members. However, other statistics show that the majority of volunteers are men in their late seventies. In response to this situation, the author advocates the “Plus Bouhan” (Plus Crime Prevention) approach, which adds aspects of crime prevention to daily activities in communities.

The aim of this study was to investigate whether two activities carried out by “Plus Bouhan” could diversify the range of crime prevention volunteers and what influence they could have on volunteers’ activity and attitude. The first practice added a crime prevention aspect to a daily gardening activity and the second added a crime prevention aspect to walking and jogging.

The volunteers completed questionnaires and the results showed that residents who had previously been indifferent to crime prevention activities took part in these activities. In particular, many office workers in their thirties and forties took part in the second activity. These results show the utility of “Plus Bouhan” in diversifying the range of crime prevention volunteers and changing their activity and attitude.

1. Introduction

From the end of World War II to 1980, the number of annual crimes reported in Japan ranged between 1.3 and 1.5 million. A common saying that “water and security are available for free” represented the low crime rate for many years. However, crime began to surge in 1995, the same year 6434 people lost their lives in the Great Hanshin Earthquake and a sarin gas attack was carried out in Tokyo’s subway system. Reported crimes reached a peak of 2.85 million in 2002, and in September 2003, the Ministerial Conference on Measures against Crimes, which comprises all cabinet members and is led by the Prime Minister, was established to formulate an “Action Plan for Realizing a Powerful Society against Crime.”

As a result of various crime prevention measures, by 2012, the number of reported crimes had decreased to less than half the peak number reported in 2002 (Fig. 1). The number subsequently decreased to less than 1.2 million in 2015, the lowest since World War II. Japan has a lower crime rate (number of recorded crimes per 100,000 people) for homicide and theft than France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. The theft rate in Japan is less than 30% that of the United States, while the homicide rate is less than 20% (Fig. 2). However, the nation’s sense of security regarding crime remains low (Cabinet Office, 2012) and in addition to reducing crime, improving citizens’ sense of security is thought to be important.

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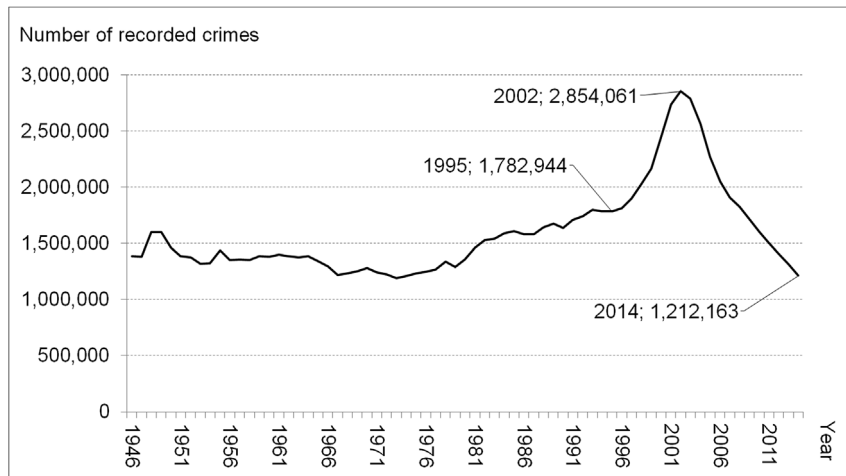


Fig. 1. Number of recorded crimes in Japan (Source: Ministry of Justice, 2015).

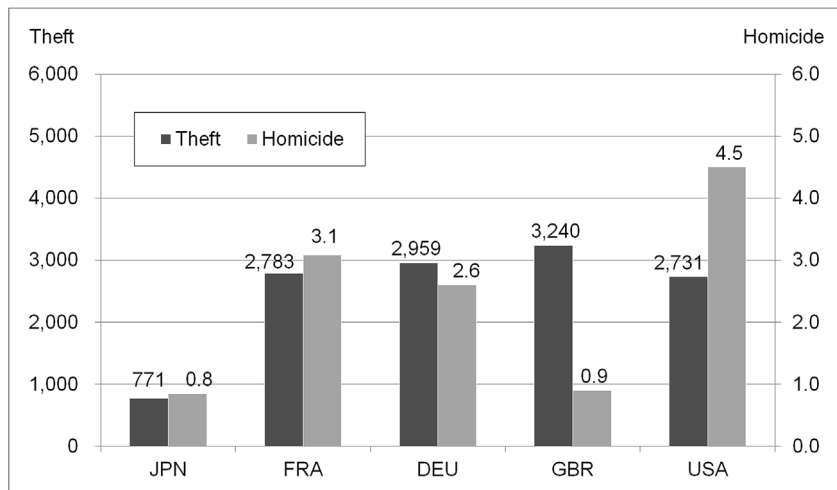


Fig. 2. Comparison of international crime rates (Source: Ministry of Justice, 2015).

1.1. Crime prevention volunteers

One of the reasons for the decrease in reported crimes is thought to be the increase in unpaid citizen volunteers who patrol their local communities (Ministry of Justice, 2014). According to the National Police Agency, the number of crime prevention volunteer organizations has continued to increase since statistics were first recorded in 2003, and at the end of 2014, there were some 48,000 such organizations with a total of approximately 2.8 million members (Fig. 3). These figures indicate that 1 in 38 adults in Japan is a crime prevention volunteer. Most crime prevention volunteer organizations consist of local residents and parents of elementary school children (National Police Agency, 2015) and are independent from the police unlike community-oriented policing in the United States, which requires an intimate partnership between citizens and the police (Smith et al., 1997). Among organizations comprised of local residents, neighborhood associations are the most common. Neighborhood associations are basic organizations that promote a sense of security and familiarity by cleaning and patrolling the local area (van Houwelingen, 2012).

Although the activities of crime prevention volunteer organizations are too various to describe, which activities are recommended can be deduced based on descriptions of crime prevention activities and of existing organizations on the National Police Agency's website. The volunteers patrol neighborhoods twice a day, especially when elementary school children are on their way home, and at night. About five to ten volunteers are typically involved in each patrol and the members rotate to share responsibility. Volunteers gather at a base such as a community center to review information on recent crimes and strange events in the area given by the local police, and then patrol their neighborhoods, saying hello to neighbors and picking up trash along their routes. In case they come across a crime or a suspicious person, they do not intervene, but make noise with whistles and portable buzzers to warn the people around them. To be easily recognized by potential offenders and neighbors, volunteers usually wear uniforms (e.g., caps, windbreakers, armbands or sashes with prominent colors and text such as "Crime Prevention Patrol") and carry a red flashlight at night.

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