Snatch Theft Prevention Through Safe City Program in The United Kingdom

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Abstract:

In United Kingdom, Safer Cities Program was introduced as a crime prevention initiative which is currently operated through 20 projects in England. This program aims to reduce crime, to lessen the fear of crime, and to create safer cities where economic enterprise and community life can flourish. The program provides funding for individual projects, with the United Kingdom Home Office and Audit Commission responsible for monitoring and evaluating Safer Cities. The United Kingdom Home Office Research and the Safer Cities program illustrated there are some places and people that are prone to multiple criminal victimisations, by the same or different crime over time. This is termed 'repeat victimisation'. Programs to prevent repeat victimisation have addressed residential and commercial burglary, car theft, domestic violence and racial attacks. Reducing repeat victimisation is increasingly used by the United Kingdom's police as a key performance indicator. In the United Kingdom, crime prevention and community safety initiatives through Safer Cities Program has been correctly targeted at repeat victims in burglary cases. This success should be referred as a model to other countries that face alarming statistics and rampancy of snatch theft cases.

Keywords **—Crime, Snatch Theft, Safe City, United Kingdom.**
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I. INTRODUCTION

Street crime especially snatch theft had risen dramatically through late 2001 and early 2002. In response, then Prime Minister Tony Blair launched and led the Street Crime Initiative, involving all the criminal justice agencies such as police, prosecutors, courts, prison and probation service. Many other government departments participated, including Education, Culture and Sport, Transport and local government. This holistic approach was successful whereby it quickly reversed the rise in snatch theft, which fell by well over 20% by the end of 2003.Experts argue that focusing on repeat victimisation as a crime prevention strategy ensures that the crime prevention is focused upon those people and places in highest need of intervention; and scarce crime prevention resources are more strategically focused.This kind of comprehensive approach to reduce street crime have been successfully implemented in the United Kingdom.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The objective of this paper is to provide valuable input to the authorities responsible in implementing Safe City Program in the countries other than the United Kingdom to create a safer environment that is free from crime, snatch theft in particular. Apart from that, the findings from this paper could assist the relevant bodies in all countries involved in implementing Safe City Program in formulating policies and strategies as well as may give rise to future research to improve the implementation of Safe City Program.

III. SAFE CITY: DEFINITION AND CONCEPT

Safe city concept and initiatives have been successfully implemented in the United Kingdom, Canada, United States ("US") and Australia. Discretion in police response and law enforcement is an important and powerful tool in the production of the safe city. Oxford Dictionary defines the word 'safe' as "protected from or not exposed to danger or risk and not likely to be harmed or lost" and 'city' as "a large town or the city centre". The Eastern Regional Organisation for Planning and Housing (EAROPH), a non-governmental organisation (NGO) which gained its NGO status from the United Nations defines safe city as "a city free from crime and free from fear of crime".

The Safe City concept appeared in the ideas of Jane Jacobs through her journal entitled "Life and Death of American Cities" and it was published in 1961. Based on personal observation, Jane Jacobs proposes the basic concept of safe city whereby she states that if a city's streets are safe from barbarism and fear, the city is thereby tolerably safe from barbarism and fear. According to her, the Safe City establishes an ambitious scale of investigation in which safety in cities is an immensely complex interconnected subject; it touches on the perceptions and psychology of individuals, and the impact that the built environment has on opportunities for crime, physical contribution to economic renewal and decline, resultant population flows, middle-class flight to the suburbs, even global instability and threats of international terrorism. She claimed that diverse land use is a key factor in preventing crime and suggests that neighbourhoods have many different functions such as residential, commercial, and leisure activities' centres. For Jacobs, the more people are in public, the opportunities for crime and disorder are drastically reduced, given that people act as the 'eyes and ears' of the street. In other words, natural surveillance is increased when people take the street and therefore, a city that is perceived as safe would draw large crowds, thereby increasing the perception that the city is safe, which in turn, might

actually make the city safer. Her idea of safe city concept have been accepted as the main guideline for town planning in the United States and later elaborated and extended by Oscar Newman in his Defensible Space Theory.

IV. STREET CRIME AND SNATCH THEFT IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Crime is a complex phenomenon that occurs when an offender, a victim, and a law converge in time and space. Despite general classifications of crime (property crime, violent crime, white-collar crime, or nuisance crime), its cumulative impact has many monetary and psychological costs which are property loss, insurance, law enforcement, the judiciary, corrections, victimization and safety. As such, crime prevention or crime reduction can have positive effects on society. Correspondingly, much evidence-based crime prevention activities aspire to prevent the convergence of an offender and a victim in time and space.

Simon Halls worth in his book adopts a broad definition of street crime as all crimes perpetrated in publicly shared place. A report prepared for the Crime and Drugs Division, Government Office for London defines street crime as crimes recorded as robbery of personal property and snatch theft. Street crime is also used to describe the offences of robbery, attempted robbery, and snatch theft from the person irrespective of the location. In year 2002 the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom described the problem as a 'national emergency'. A rise in street crimes was indicative of general lawlessness and held the view that street offences were 'gateway crimes' to more serious offences.

According to The Lifers Public Safety Steering Committee of the State Correctional Institution of Pennsylvania, two of the major factors that contribute most heavily to this street crime culture are economic and psychological. Unemployment, living costs, and an intense desire for material wealth drive the first major component of the street crime culture. The second major component of

street crime culture consists of psychological forces, especially those that influence men's self-image based on distorted conceptions of manhood. The paramount need in the street crime culture for respect, proving one's manhood and being viewed as courageous, drive this second aspect where the lives of others are of less value than the image they have of themselves.

Marian FitzGerald et al. define street crime as a class of crime which combines two main elements: it has the characteristics of a property offence; but it is also a crime of violence. Street crime was highest in areas where there are pockets of intense deprivation and a large proportion of the population overall is unemployed, but a large enough number of local residents also have the sort of income to provide opportunities for street crime, especially where there is a relatively high level of turnover in the population as well.

Meanwhile, the term snatch is defined as to pull or take something away quickly, to quickly steal something from someone, and to quickly take the opportunity to do something. In relation to that, the term theft is defined as the crime of stealing.

Based on Scottish Crime Survey, snatch thefts are thefts from the person which involve some element of force as well as speed. According to Khadija Monk, Justin A. Heinonen and John E.Eck, snatch theft tactic occurs very quickly whereby there is no verbal communication occurs between the offender and the victim before the robbery and the offender typically grabs visible property (e.g., purses and cell phones), then escapes. The U.S. snatch-thefts are often combined with pick pocketing in official statistics, making it difficult to determine its true prevalence and incidence. In fact, snatch theft might be officially regarded as snatch theft only if the victim is injured, even if the robber uses force not resulting in injury and this issue has important implications for problem analysis because this crimes identified as "street thefts" are actually street robberies.

Jonathan Smith contents that snatch theft is often classified as personal robberies which occurred in open public spaces, primarily a street, but also footpaths, alleyways, subways and parks. Street robbery is often used by police forces (and particularly the Metropolitan Police Service) to describe the offences of robbery, attempted robbery and snatch theft from the person irrespective of location. He further stated that snatch thefts refer to those incidents where an offender snatches property away from the victim, the force being applied to the property as opposed to the person, and the victim being immediately aware of what has happened. In some snatch offences, victims were at first approached with some innocuous request to set the victim off guard, such as asking for the time of day, while in other cases they were approached from behind and caught unawares as the suspect grabbed the property from the victim. These may be traumatic to the victim whereby it leaves one physically unscathed and may as well challenge one's sense of invulnerability and security.

In the United Kingdom, snatch theft is categorised as robbery in the circumstances where the offender steals and uses force on any person or put any person in fear of being then. It was held by the Court of Appeal that whether force had been used or not is a matter to be left to the jury and the jury were entitled to conclude that pulling a bag down amounted to force. Section 8(2) of the Theft Act 1968 provides that a person convicted on indictment of robbery or assault with intent to rob shall be punished with maximum punishment of imprisonment for life.

Designing out crime initiatives are underpinned by a variety of planning policy guidance notes and Acts of Parliament including Section 17(1) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which states:

"*Without prejudice to any other obligations imposed upon it, it shall be the duty of each authority to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area.*"

Furthermore, the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 extend this duty beyond crime and disorder to include low-level anti-social behaviour and environmental crime such as litter, graffiti, fly-posting, nuisance vehicles and fly-tipping. Further support is derived from elements within the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Police Reform Act 2002 and the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003. Significantly, since the early 1990s, the United Kingdom police forces have commonly appointed a designated architectural liaison officer or crime prevention design advisor to consult on designing out crime issues at the development proposal stage. This evident that in the United Kingdom, there are legislations which have been made to legislate and execute crime prevention through environmental design.

IV. SAFE CITY PROGRAM IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND RELEVANT LITERATURE

In the United Kingdom, Safer Cities Program was launched in March 1988 by the Department of the Home Office. It aims to reduce crime and fear of crime and to address the social, physical and economic problems of disadvantaged urban areas, particularly the council housing estates. The program takes a partnership or multiagency approach. Safer Cities Program focuses on five main areas. First is the involvement of voluntary bodies and the private sector in the design and delivery of Safer Cities initiatives. Second is the drastic tackling on a range of crime problems such as domestic and commercial burglary, domestic violence, vehicle crime, shop theft, crime against small business and disorder issues such as graffiti and vandalism. Third is the use of key indicator by the police which is the decrease of the fear of crime because of successfully reducing crime per se. Forth is the implementation of situational approaches focusing on physical security measures to prevent burglary in both domestic and commercial settings. Fifth is implementation of socially orientated initiatives such as educational and publicity campaigns and support for people to ensure that all possible predictors of crime and disorder are addressed.

The United Kingdom Home Office Research and the Safer Cities program illustrated that there are some places and people that are prone to multiple criminal victimisations, by the same or different crime over time. This is termed 'repeat victimisation'. Reducing repeat victimisation is increasingly used by the United Kingdom's police as a key performance indicator. Experts argue that focusing on repeat victimisation as a crime prevention strategy ensures that crime prevention is focused upon those people and places in highest need of intervention and scarce crime prevention resources are more strategically focused.

In the United Kingdom, the main strand of the literature on Safe City has highlighted that crime prevention and community safety initiatives through Safer Cities Program has been correctly targeted at repeat victims in burglary cases. Of importance is the recent literature which has focused on the importance of the responsibilities of built environment professionals for safety in public spaces through design intervention intended for crime prevention and the control of human behaviour. In addition to that, the literature has suggested that even in the most advanced Safer Cities in the United Kingdom, there is no specific and most important strategy is yet identifiable to be focused on, and no fully self-sustaining structure is in place to develop one and take it forward since all the measures under the Safer Cities Program mustbe implemented simultaneously in order to prevent crimes.

The existing literature has focused solely on the crime opportunities which depend on everyday movements of activity, where the literature mentioned that the snatch theft offenders pay closer attention to the absence of people and safety measures. Considerable literature has also discussed on the key points of additional safety measures for Safer Cities Program for the future which are among others by promoting higher density in depleted urban neighbourhoods,

equalising the incentives to renovate old buildings, improving public transport and managing neighbourhoods to encourage a social mix. Of interest is the literature on the unpredictable shifts of snatch theft and robbery cases in the United Kingdom which indicates the needs for improvised and advanced safety measures in the urban spaces.

The review of the literature indicates that much of the Safe City literature in the United Kingdom have focused more on the repeat victimisation, the role of built environment professionals, enhancement of current safety measures, crime opportunities and trends of crimes.

A wide range of built environment features may help to reduce fear and enhance safety. These include features that make neighbourhoods look "defended" (attractive landscaping, clear assignment of semi-public spaces to specific units, etc.), design elements that discourage disorder (no graffiti, improved maintenance, etc.), and opportunities for surveillance (seating near outdoor public spaces, windows overlooking the street, etc.). The earliest foundation of crime prevention by means of design can be traced as long ago as the 1960s and 1970s. It was initially grounded by Jane Jacobs, author of 'The Death and Life of Great American Cities', who proposed the safe city concept and made several suggestions about how physical redesign might reduce crime, for example, buildings should be oriented toward the street to provide more natural surveillance, and outdoor spaces should be placed in proximity to intensively used areas. In line with that, there are four classical theories with regard to crime prevention by means of design namely crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), defensible space, situational crime prevention and environmental criminology.

Throughout academic criminology, the concept of 'crime prevention through environmental design'(CPTED) is generally understood as a manipulation of things and conditions surrounding people and property which influences the selection of targets by motivated criminal offenders, in order to reduce or eliminate the probability of criminal offences. The notion of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) appeared in a 1971 book by criminologist and sociologist C. Ray Jeffery. The theory is based on the argument that most crime events are associated with the opportunities created by environmental design, meanwhile the CPTED approach is based on reducing opportunity, which aims to manipulate the built environment in order to affect users' behaviour that will reduce crime and the fear of crime. CPTED is also known as 'designing out crime', as it is a proper design and effective use of the built environment which can lead to a reduction in the fear of crime and the incidence of crime, and to an improvement in the quality of life.

In his book, C. Ray Jeffrey described criminal acts according to the settings and reinforcement provided by crimes and concluded that "to change criminal behaviour we must deal directly with criminal behaviour by removing the environmental reinforcement which maintains the behaviour". He suggested several methods of behavioural and environmental engineering that would increase the protection of private property, increase social contacts in settings that formerly produced isolation, make theft insurance contingent on citizens taking specific steps towards crime prevention, and promote citizen involvement in protecting their neighbourhoods. He further suggested that other examples of environmental prevention include deterrent patrolling; the placement of humps in roads to reduce speeding; the development of multiple social uses of unsupervised space in high crime areas; the electronic monitoring of the location and activities of offenders on parole, probation, or diversion; and the use of incentives to encourage voluntary surrender of handguns.

The strategies employed in this CPTED approach are natural surveillance, natural access control, territorial reinforcement and maintenance. Natural surveillance concept refers to the arrangement of physical design features involved with the activities and the people to maximize opportunities for surveillance at the right moment in

time and space, consequently leading to crime discouragement. This concept refers to the fact that offenders prefer those places with less observational control. It suggests that landscaping features can be designed to foster natural surveillance from within the home premises by residents and at the same time from the exterior by passers-by and neighbours. Natural access control involves the managing of a design to control the ingress and egress of persons to and from a specific space. This approach focuses on the management and design strategies to direct pedestrians and vehicular traffic to an easy flow, simultaneously discouraging criminal activities. Meanwhile, territoriality focuses on creating residents recognizable and identifiable zones within communities, so that people would feel connected and, thus, would attempt to defend their own community. It involves the use of physical design to encourage a sense of propriety among citizens while, at the same time, creating environments where the perceived probability of resident intervention is high. The image of development can encourage or discourage crime, which means that it can offer increased perceptions of vulnerability or isolation by way of design and maintenance.

Considering crime reduction by design features, the most influential study is perhaps the Defensible Space Theory established by Oscar Newman. This theory refers to the systematic way in which the physical design of urban residential environments can be manipulated to create spaces or places that are less vulnerable to crime by providing residents with more opportunities to control their space and defend it if necessary. Newman extended Jane Jacobs' ideas by proposing that the manipulation of the physical environment would largely influence the residents themselves but to some extent his work was contradictory to Jane Jacob's work. He concentrated on territorial functioning in his defensible space model and focused more on the architectural approach of the residential area rather than on the urban planning approach and unlike Jane Jacobs, who based her ideas on observation, Newman posits his theory based on empirical study. In his theory of Defensible Space, Newman focused on those physical design ingredients that contribute to a secure environment which are territoriality, or a proprietary interest in one's property; and surveillance, or the ability to observe what is going on in lobbies, elevators, streets, parking lots, and the like. He suggested that public, semiprivate, and private space could be designed to improve territoriality and surveillance.

The Defensible Space Theory further explains that in part of territoriality, the sub-division of space into zones of influence and control should result in a clear delineation between public, private and semi-private space. These zones of control are created using barriers and suggested the use of fencing, gateways, burglar-proofing, locks and walls as examples of real, physical barriers that would reduce both crime and fear of crime in residential areas. Meanwhile, in natural surveillance, he suggests that windows and doors that are designed to face each other along a street have better visibility of the private and public space around residences. Thus, he argues that 'defensible space' can be created when houses or buildings are oriented to face each other and overlook public spaces. This increases the observability of an area, thereby increasing the probability that potential offenders to be spotted more easily or caught in the act. Newman's concept of Defensible Space came to be the core of most environmental design and planning related to crime prevention, including a series of demonstration programs funded by the U.S. Department of Justice's Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) during the 1970s.

Situational crime prevention was initiated by Mayhew, Clarke, Sturman and Hough, and Clarke and Mayhew in their work for the United Kingdom Home Office Research Unit, and also by Canadian researchers Brantingham and Brantingham in 1981. This approach is based on the Opportunity Theory of Crime Prevention which was developed during the 1970s. Indeed, it is a general approach in reducing opportunities for any kind of crime, occurring in any kind of setting which contributes to social welfare. Situational crime prevention is

defined as "a preventive approach that relies, not upon improving society or its institutions, but simply upon reducing opportunities for crime". Situational prevention comprises opportunity-reducing measures that are directed at highly specific forms of crime; involve the management, design, or manipulation of the immediate environment in as systematic and permanent way as possible; make crime more difficult and riskier, or less rewarding and excusable as judged by a wide range of offenders. In addition to design concerns, the theorists focus on legal and management issues, thus, this crime prevention method can comprehensively respond to some limitations of other crime prevention methods.

The theory of Environmental Criminology is derived from the work of Brantingham and Brantingham in 1981. This analytical framework is concerned with the characteristics of crime events in which Brantingham and Brantingham have noted that for any crime to occur, some factors must happen simultaneously: the victim or target, the specific location, the legal setting, and the technical or mechanical requirements of the crime. It has been defined that "the study of crime, criminality, and victimization as they relate first, to particular places, and secondly, to the way that individuals and organizations shape their activities by placed-based or spatial factors". The theory explained that crime could be understood in more depth by exploring its geographical components. Crime choices are made in regard to how potential criminals move about, where they regularly go, where they come from, and how their social and physical environments are constructed. Brantingham and Brantingham considered the environmental criminology within the planning process which argued that "most of planning proceeds with little knowledge of crime patterns, crime attractors, crime generators, the importance of edges, paths and nodes or the site specific solutions that facilitate or even encourage crime". Generally, this concept further focuses on investigation on non-residential land uses through two particular categories in relation to land uses: crime attractors and crime generators.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the background and literature review of this paper, it is evident that the effort to prevent snatch theft in the United Kingdom by implementing the Safe City Program is a success. It is observed that in order for other countries to acquire comprehensive and effective prevention of snatch theft, the law and policy regulating the implementation of Safe City Program must be improved by having a tighter law and policy enforcement such as the position in the United Kingdom.

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