

PERCEPTION OF CRIME AND PRIORITY OF JUSTICE IN THE SOUTHERNMOST PROVINCES OF THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

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This research aimed to study the perception of crime and priority of justice in Thailand's southernmost provinces and to suggest solutions to the government agencies related to crime issues in those provinces. The researcher selected two criminological theories including Rational Choice Theory and Conflict Theory as the framework. This quantitative research collected questionnaires from 1,200 respondents and used descriptive statistics including numbers, percentage, average and standard deviation. The respondents were from Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala, 33.33% each. 50% of them lived in the municipal areas and the other 50% lived in the area managed by the Sub-district Administration Organization. The research found that the representative samples felt that crime issues in their residential community was at a low level. Regarding crime types, it was found that the people thought that most crime involved drugs. The representative samples' confidence in safety provided by the government agencies was at a moderate level. However, government agencies should set priority to the justice process. Firstly, to follow up offenders to be punished according to the law and increase legal penalties followed by correct litigation, fast and fair action, including prevention and reduction of the number of crime incidents. The result also showed that people's feeling of safety when walking alone in the community was at a highest level. People in the area still thought that the residential community had a relatively low level of crime, different from the perspective of outsiders or views from mass media.

Keywords: Crime; perception; priority of justice; Thailand

1. INTRODUCTION

Violence in the southernmost provinces including Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala remains high due to the struggle with the insurgency movement that caused the loss of both lives and property of the people and the government. The following information about the unrest between January 4, 2004 to January 4, 2015 can be concluded that 1) there were 16,969 incidents of unrest in various forms, at an average of 4.24 events per day; 2) all the unrest occurred can be divided into 9,000 incidents that involved insecurity and action by an insurgency movement, at an average of 2.25 events per day. (Tongkachok et al., 2016). The number of deaths and injuries throughout the 11 years (2004-2015) of violence in southernmost provinces (only relevant cases for security reason) caused a total of 3,929 deaths, divided into 2,610 civilians or 66.43%, 509 soldiers or

12.95%, 365 police officers or 9.29%, 138 teachers and educational personnel or 2.70%, 18 monks or 0.46% and 321 villains. There were 9,602 injuries, divided into 5,548 civilians or 57.78%, 2,453 soldiers or 25.55%, 1,422 police officers or 14.81%, 147 teachers and educational personnel or 1.29%, 24 monks or 0.25% and 31 villains (Puengnet, 2015). This research, therefore, aims to study the opinion of people about the trend of crime in the area, how people in the area feel, and causes of crime, including comments on relevant government agencies in the area that leads to this research.

This study has the following objectives:

1. To study the perception of crime in the southernmost provinces
2. To study the perception of priority of justice in the southernmost provinces
3. To suggest solutions to relevant government agencies to crime in the southernmost provinces

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher selected two criminological theories on crime, criminal justice and conflict, consisting of Rational Choice Theory and Conflict Theory with details as follows:

2.1 Rational choice theory

Becker (1976) mentioned individuals' rational choice in the book "The Economic Approach to Human Behaviour" that a sane individual independently chooses to do or avoid doing illegal action by rationally making decision. The individual chooses to express illegal behaviour, depending on the highest satisfaction and benefits both on property and mind he receives. The hypothesis, according to Becker's Rational Choice Theory, is consistent with the concept of Classical School of Criminology on free will, believing that free will determines human behaviours as per the following saying:

"Humans rationally seek the highest material and mental benefits. When they make decision to choose to do or avoid doing any action, they will rationally consider various existing alternatives"

(Beccaria and Voltaire, 1770).

Factors satisfying humans are wealth, skills, receipt of mercy and kindness, and being respected or accepted. Factors causing suffering consist of disappointment, hunger or thirst, no liberty, loss, and pain. According to the theory of Classical School of Criminology, humans choose to commit crime depending on individual factors, and humans are rational and able to choose to do or avoid doing any action. The mentioned concept brings about the determination of law and justice process to suppress humans' crime behaviour. Apart from satisfaction and suffering, Becker's Rational Choice Theory stipulates that people consider consequences in advance before making a decision to commit crime. Apart from benefits, humans who commit crime consider the possibility of other people to know about their behaviour including possibility of arrest.

2.2 Conflict theory

Criminology theory that can be used to describe such conflict situations is "Conflict Theory", which states that the process of enacting and enforcing laws will reflect the existing conflicts between groups and attempts to control power to rule. Crime behavior is therefore a behavior of a group with less power or insufficient power to protect its benefits and objectives.

Vold's work has a philosophy derived from the idea that humans are social animals, which means human beings are both a part of society and a product of association of people in society. A group is formed from consistent benefits and needs of people, the study of behavior is therefore important. Conflict is not an unusual phenomenon of society, but it is the basic phenomenon of every society. Groups will conflict with other groups when the benefits and objectives match or encroach on each other or cause competition for benefits. Generally, there is a law to control the behavior of people in society. Vold (1958) therefore considered that the law will be used as a tool of a group to protect its benefits and objectives. Any group that has the power to enact laws will do it to protect the benefits of its group. Therefore, the process of enacting and enforcing laws will reflect the existing conflicts between groups and efforts to control the power to rule. Crime behavior is therefore a behavior of a group that has less power or insufficient power to protect its benefits and objectives. Even the theorists who support harmony at the beginning also noticed that laws that are prescribed and laws that are applied are often done for one particular group. However, the notion of this observation is not the heart of a harmonious theory, but it is the heart of a conflict theory, diversity and lack of unity which are attributes of modern society. Conflict theory demonstrates the nature of society with conflicts between groups at all times. The structure of society is work management, agglomeration and creating a balance between beneficial groups (Vold, 1958). The unrest in the southernmost provinces of Thailand is caused by a group of people who believes

in different religious faith from that of the Thai state. When the Thai state's Buddhism belief and faith contradicts with the Muslim way of life in the Deep South, it causes conflict potentially leading to violence.

Other thinking researchers were found to agree with Vold. Gusfield (1967), a social scientist from a university in Chicago, presented two works showing conflict between two cultures that led to political conflicts and the struggle to protect benefits of each group. Although the benefits in this case are not a matter of social or economic power, it is about political status. Gusfield presented the theory of "Status Politics" to explain the movement to refrain from taking intoxicant. This theory asserts that it consists of many groups of people in society, which are divided by not only economic status, but it may also be divided by discipline status, which results in different values, norms and patterns of life of the population. The honors of the group will be expressed in politics and government schools or other social institutions.

Sellin is the first to present the concept of conflict theory. In his book, he presented that cultural conflicts are one of the major causes of crime in a society that became larger, expanded and developed continuously resulting in different patterns of living in terms of social values and conflicts. Cultural conflicts may occur when:

1. The culture of the group is close.
2. The law of one group has an influence on another group.
3. A member from a group migrated into another group (Wolfgang et al., 1970).

These caused different cultural conflict patterns of each population in society. Traditional societies were often without conflict, because there was no population of various races. When society became larger, it often consisted of populations from many races or different nationalities. Sellin has divided cultural conflicts into two forms:

1. Conflicts caused by two different cultures (Primary Cultural Conflict), such as the border area of the country, colonization and power amplification etc.
2. Conflicts caused by secondary culture (Secondary Cultural Conflict), when the main culture of the society that has a significant difference from the newly formed secondary culture.

A society that has cultural conflicts, the law will come from the civilization or the culture of the ruler. Therefore, the culture of other minorities may be legally constituted as inferior.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This quantitative research collected questionnaires from 1,200 respondents and used descriptive statistics including numbers, percentage, average and standard deviation. The respondents were from Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala, 33.33% each. 50% of them lived in the municipal areas and the other 50% lived in the area managed by the Sub-district Administration Organization.

The population consisted of people living in 3 provinces namely: Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat.

Representative Sample: the researcher selected the 3 groups of population by Systematic Sampling, calculated from the sample size formula with unknown population with large number (Cochran, 1977) as follows:

$$n = \frac{P(1-P)Z^2}{d^2}$$

n refers to Number of samples required

P refers to Proportion of the population that the researcher wants, randomly assigned to 50% of the total population

Z refers to Confidence level at the statistical significance level of 0.05, which is equal to 1.96.

d refers to Proportion of tolerances that can occur, which is equal to .05

$$\text{Substitute: } 384 = (.50)(1-.50)(1.96)^2/(.05)^2$$

Hence, each population group had a total of 384 samples needed per population. To reduce errors, the researcher therefore adjusted the sample size to 400 samples per province, so the researcher collected the questionnaires from all 3 population groups, totaling 1,200 samples by covering all occupations and religions. The two halves of the respondents were from the urban areas (in municipality) and rural areas (out of municipality), relying on research assistants who were students in the area to facilitate data collection. For data collection from the urban areas (in municipality) and rural areas (out of municipality), each half in each province where the researcher randomly recruited 2 districts, each with 2 units of local government by a city municipal as an urban area and a sub-district administration organization as a rural area. Finally, the 1st village or the closest administrative unit in that district was surveyed at random from the total number of houses in

that village. For example, the total number of houses was 200 households and $200/50$ was equal to 4. Therefore, 1 out of 4 households could represent as a sample. In conclusion, there were 50 household samples of each village. Statistical Package for the social sciences (SPSS) was used to process and analysed the data in descriptive statistics i.e. mean, standard deviation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents were 53.9% female and 46.1% male. 23.8% of them were 40-49 years old. The respondents are 33.33% each from Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala, 50% of them living in municipal area and the other 50% living in the area managed by its sub-district administration organization. The research found that the representative samples thought that crime issues in their residential community was at a low level. The samples' attitude towards crime in the southernmost provinces showed that the living community was relatively safe in life and property at high level. Regarding crime types, it was found that the people felt that most crime involved drugs.

The level of crime was interpreted by 10-point Likert Scale as follows:

- 0.00 to 2.00 is extremely low.
- 2.01 to 4.00 is low.
- 4.01 to 6.00 is moderate.
- 6.01 to 8.00 is high.
- 8.01 to 10.00 is extremely high.

Table 1: Confidence in Safety Provided by the Government Agencies

| The Government Agencies | \bar{x} | SD | Interpreted |
|--|-----------|------|-------------|
| Police | 5.13 | 2.20 | Moderate |
| The province administration (Governor and marshal) | 4.60 | 2.24 | Moderate |
| The local administration (village headman, village security guard, etc.) | 4.69 | 2.24 | Moderate |
| The local government organization (the Sub-district Administration Organization, the Municipality and the Provincial Administration Organization) | 4.57 | 2.23 | Moderate |
| Total | 4.75 | 2.23 | Moderate |

Table 1 shows the confidence in safety provided by the government agencies. The representative samples felt confident in safety provided by the government agencies at a moderate level ($\bar{x} = 4.75$, SD = 2.23). Regarding safety providers, it was found that the people have the most confidence in the safety of life and property provided by police ($\bar{x} = 5.13$, SD = 2.20), followed by the local administration ($\bar{x} = 4.69$, SD = 2.24), the provincial administration (Governor and marshal) ($\bar{x} = 4.60$, SD = 2.24), and the local government organization ($\bar{x} = 4.57$, SD = 2.23).

Table 2: Perception of the Overall Problems of Crime in the Residential Community

| The level of crime comparing between 2015 and 2016 | Number | Percentage |
|--|--------------|---------------|
| Dramatically decrease | 156 | 13.00 |
| Decrease | 245 | 20.42 |
| Remains stable | 739 | 61.58 |
| Increase | 52 | 4.33 |
| Dramatically increase | 8 | 0.07 |
| Total | 1,200 | 100.00 |

Table 2 shows the perception of the overall problems of crime in the residential community. As for crime trends in the residential community in 2016 compared with 2015, it was found that the opinion about the overall problem of crime in the residential community in 2016 remained unchanged from 2015 (61.58%). There were only 8 representative samples (0.07%) who indicated that the level of crime had dramatically increased. The mass media was the outstanding source of reference regarding crime trends. Moreover, the opinion about safety when walking alone in a residential area showed that people still felt safe when walking alone in a residential area. In terms of causes of crime, the availability of drugs in the area is was at the first place followed by economic problems / poverty and non-education. In addition to the above causes, drunken

quarrels by people outside the community and organizing large events in the community also caused crime in residential community.

4.1 Perception of crime in the community

The level of crime would be interpreted by 10-point Likert Scale as follows:

- 0.00 to 2.00 is extremely low.
- 2.01 to 4.00 is low.
- 4.01 to 6.00 is moderate.
- 6.01 to 8.00 is high.
- 8.01 to 10.00 is extremely high.

Table 3: Perception of Crime in the Community

| Level of Crime | \bar{x} | SD | Interpreted |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Robbery | 2.74 | 2.19 | Low |
| Vehicle Crime | 2.59 | 2.16 | Low |
| Burglary | 2.71 | 2.20 | Low |
| Agricultural Crime | 2.56 | 2.28 | Low |
| Sexual Harassment | 2.33 | 2.23 | Low |
| Assault | 2.42 | 2.17 | Low |
| Fraud | 2.48 | 2.20 | Low |
| Illegal Drug | 4.03 | 2.89 | Moderate |
| Gambling | 2.76 | 2.20 | Low |
| Total | 2.74 | 2.27 | Low |

Table 3 shows the perception of crime in the community. The perception of crime in the community of the representative samples showed that the representative samples felt that the residential community had a low level of crime ($\bar{x} = 2.74$, $SD = 2.27$), which is different from the sense of perspective from outsiders or views from mass media. Regarding crime types, it was found that the residents felt that the residential community had most problems concerning illegal drugs ($\bar{x} = 4.03$, $SD = 2.89$), followed by gambling ($\bar{x} = 2.76$, $SD = 2.20$), Robbery ($\bar{x} = 2.74$, $SD = 2.19$), burglary ($\bar{x} = 2.71$, $SD = 2.20$), and vehicle crime ($\bar{x} = 2.59$, $SD = 2.16$).

Prevailing recommendations to tackle crime in the Deep South was to have in place legal measures or flagship policies in solving drug issues. Although many measures were implemented to suppress drugs-related crimes, it was not possible to solve such problems. The cause of the crime in the residential community arose from the availability of drugs in the area. Agencies involved in each area should have a systematic solution. Moreover, the relevant agencies must seriously suppress drug crimes and immediately enforce laws against offenders.

4.2 Priority of justice

Table 4: Priority of Justice

| Priority of justice | Number | Percentage |
|---|--------------|---------------|
| To follow-up of offenders to be punished according to the law | 212 | 17.67 |
| Increasing legal penalties | 212 | 17.67 |
| Correct litigation, fast and fair action | 180 | 15.00 |
| Prevention / reduction of the number of incidents that occur to people. | 176 | 14.67 |
| Lawyer assistance | 83 | 6.91 |
| Rehabilitation of the offenders | 75 | 6.25 |
| Witness protection | 73 | 6.08 |
| Rehabilitation of the victims | 72 | 6.00 |
| Compensation | 60 | 5.00 |
| Respect for the right | 48 | 4.00 |
| Others | 9 | 0.75 |
| Total | 1,200 | 100.00 |

Table 4 shows the number and percentage of priority of justice from the sample of 1,200 respondents. According to the table, government agencies should set priority to the justice process. Firstly, to follow up offenders to be punished according to the law and increase legal penalties ($N = 212$, 17.67%) followed by correct litigation, fast and fair action ($N = 180$, 15.00%), including prevention / reduction of the number of crime incidents ($N = 176$, 14.67%).

Suggestions for improvement to government agencies related to crime issues in the southernmost provinces were that the authorities or agencies involved in the prevention and suppression of crime in the

southernmost provinces should implement special measures to prevent such problems. Relevant authorities and agencies need to improve public confidence to increase a level of security. Government agencies must set or design methods for ensuring safety of life and property of people in a concrete way and the relevant agencies must cooperate or have special missions to provide security for people in the southernmost provinces. There must be a process of healing or a plan to reduce the impact on the quality of life of people in the area. The media should advise people on how to protect themselves from the untoward events that may occur. Government agencies should prioritise the justice process of tracking offenders, prosecuting them for legal punishment, and increasing the legal penalties with quick, correct and fair action. Authorities including other relevant agencies, such as schools, families, temples must help to raise awareness among the youth to prevent crime in the community.

4.3 Discussion of research results

The result of the perception of crime in the community of the representative samples showed that the representative samples felt that the residential community had a relatively low level of crime. Regarding crime type, it was found that the residents felt that most crime incidents were related to drugs. The cause of crime in the residential community showed that drug epidemic in the area is at first place followed by economic problems / poverty and non-education. In addition to the above causes, drunken quarrels by people outside the community and organizing large events in the community also caused crime in residential community. This is pertinent to the viewpoint of Vold (1958) who stated that crime behavior is therefore a behavior of a group that has less power or insufficient power to protect its benefits and objectives.

In terms of recommendations to government agencies, government agencies should set priority to justice process, especially the follow-up of offenders to be punished according to the law and increasing legal penalties followed by correct litigation, fast and fair action, including prevention AND reduction of the number of incidents that occur to people, which is relevant to the Rational Choice Theory of Becker (1976) that brings about execution of law and justice process to suppress humans' crime behavior.

Relevant agencies, especially the local administrative organizations, should improve the environment in the community for safety, such as the installation of CCTV cameras and lighting in the area or including security checkpoints in community. Before issuing a policy, relevant agencies should explore or understand the real issues of the area to be able to find a solution or establish guidelines or policies to solve the issues properly.

5. CONCLUSION

Crime situation in the 3 southernmost provinces is indeed not higher than other areas in Thailand. People in the area still have a feeling that the residential community has a relatively low level of crime, which is different from the perspective of outsiders or views from mass media. However, drug problems are still a major crime problem in the area, which government officials still need to focus on, not unlike any other areas in the country. Besides, government agencies should give priority to follow-up of offenders to be punished according to the law and increasing legal penalties.

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