

Crime and Crime Prevention Strategies: A Descriptive Analysis of Trends, Patterns, and Feasibility of Community Policing in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT: *All countries around the world take various crime prevention initiatives to control crime to safeguard the peaceful living of their citizens and ensure socio-economic development of the countries. This study aims at studying the nature and trend of crime in Bangladesh and examines the history, structure, operational management, functional process, and success of community policing. It also attempts to investigate the feasibility of practicing community policing in the Bangladeshi context. This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to collect relevant data using secondary sources. The results show that Bangladesh has been practicing both formal and informal crime prevention mechanisms. Formal crime control uses the law and government agencies, such as police, courts, and prisons to deter crime; while informal crime control employs moral and social institutions such as the family, religion, peers, and neighborhood groups to prevent deviant behaviors. The study also finds that the rapid modernization and substantial urbanization subsided the informal social justice system and strengthen the formal legal institutions. Overall, community policing was found to be a feasible strategy to control crime in Bangladesh with some modification and by improving the existing structure.*

KEYWORDS: crime, crime prevention strategies, community policing

INTRODUCTION

Crime is a great concern for human societies which hinder the peaceful existence of human being. Law enforcement agencies around the world are taking existing effective strategies and brand-new techniques to control and prevent crime. Crime Prevention is defined as the various strategies taken by individuals, communities, businesses, different organizations, and governments to focus on various social and environmental factors that exacerbate crime situations (Morgan et al. 2011). Any preventive measures or policy may cut back, prevent or eradicate crime victimization, so a government can take the initiative and the law enforcement agencies would implement those policies accordingly. However, as a key responsibility of preventing crime, police take several strategies to control crime most effectively. First-hand knowledge from the real field, cutting-edge knowledge, and research can help take the most effective techniques to prevent crime. It can be done by the governments and non-government organizations to decrease the fear of crime as well as the rate of crime victimization (IPC: 2008). This study makes an effort to analyze the nature and pattern of crime, investigate the

existing crime prevention strategies adopted by the Bangladeshi police force and examine history, trend, operation, structure and success of the community policing. This paper will also study the feasibility of community policing to prevent crime in the Bangladeshi context.

Rationale

Crime prevention is considered as the topmost approach to control and eliminate crime and help build livable communities. Existing research shows that effective crime prevention programs can ensure less crime victimization, promote community safety and contribute to the development of modern, peaceful, and vibrant communities (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2008). Crime prevention can also enhance the quality of life of all citizens which results in durable benefits regarding plummeting the expenses associated with the criminal justice system and other social costs originating from crime (UN, 2002). Until now, various models of crime prevention have been developed so far to control crime efficiently, which are being revised from time to time to comply with the emerging criminal challenges. Additionally, in regard to crime prevention, a one-size-fits-all theory is not an effective strategy, rather it involves a thorough understanding of a local crime problem—location, socio-economic condition, demographic features of the neighbors, and so on. It also requires the time of occurrence, who is committing the crime, and who is impacted by it (NSW, 2022).

In Bangladesh, there is only a handful of studies on crime prevention have been conducted so far, which are not enough for taking effective crime prevention measures. Therefore, studying the patterns of crime and effective crime control strategies are important endeavors to mitigate crime victimization and ensure peaceful societies. This study, henceforth, attempts to show the most effective crime prevention strategies and especially focus on community policing whether it is an efficient technique of crime prevention and adds value to the existing scholarly contributions of this field. It may also help frame pertinent policies in regard to the crime prevention approaches.

Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to examine the pattern of crime occurrence and victimization in Bangladesh and evaluate the existing crime prevention strategies. Apart from the main objective, there are some additional secondary objectives of the study, which are listed below:

- To understand the trend of crime occurrence in Bangladesh
- To recognize existing crime prevention strategies of the Government of Bangladesh and the police force.
- To examine the history, nature, trend, structure, function, and effectiveness of community policing in the Bangladeshi context, and its suitability to practice in the future.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct this study, the qualitative research method with a descriptive research design was employed. Data and information were gathered from secondary sources such as books, research journals, periodicals, articles, magazines, and newspapers to understand the existing model and strategies of crime prevention, and cross-check with international crime prevention agencies and various governments' data and reports.

FINDINGS

Crime Trend of Bangladesh

From 1990 onwards, the crime rate, particularly the violent crime rate in Bangladesh was on an increasing trend (United Nations, 2005). In 1996, particularly, the overall crime rate was 78 crimes per 100,000 citizens (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2005); which worsened to 87 per 100,000 citizens by 2006 (Bangladesh Police, 2011). Furthermore, the murder rate was 2.7 per 100,000 at that time (Bangladesh Police, 2011). Organized robbery gangs were common (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2005). The robbery rate was 5.1 and the theft rate was 5.7 per 100,000 citizens (Bangladesh Police, 2011). It is worth mentioning that underreporting of crime is very common in Bangladesh, particularly for property crimes (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

Crime Prevention Strategies of Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the formal crime prevention mechanisms of law, police, courts, and corrections trace their roots to British colonial rule, but there are many modern approaches that have been included and adopted by the law enforcement agencies to control crime (World Factbook, 2011). One of the thumb rules of controlling crime in Bangladesh is punishment or deterrence, and police are the main force to maintain law and order situations (Azad, 2008). There are about 120,000 police officers assigned to more than 500 police stations across Bangladesh, a rate of 80 officers per 100,000 citizens (Bangladesh Police, 2010). Bangladesh's correctional system is national and can trace its roots back to the Prison Act of 1894 (Das & Palmiotto, 2006). The incarceration rate is about 51 per 100,000 (Walmsley, 2010).

Before British rule, Bangladesh practiced an informal justice system based in the local community. The village leaders played a key role in finding a harmonious solution for the disputant revelries in both criminal and civil problems. In addition, as the majority of people of Bangladesh are Muslim so religion plays a pivotal role in informal crime control. This religious system tends to resolve minor crimes, whereas the formal government system deals with more serious, violent crimes. However, as with the growth of the modernization process, economic development, globalization, and rapid urbanization, many of the past informal social crime prevention mechanisms are trailing their power.

Community Policing in Bangladesh

Among various crime prevention strategies in Bangladesh, a community-based prevention program or community policing is the most discussed and practiced one. Community policing, a relatively new concept in Bangladesh, is being studied not only by the police but also by NGOs and community-based organizations, as a means to bring the community and the police together in controlling crime at the community level. Before the establishment of formal community policing in Bangladesh, police used to work at the community level to provide safeguard villagers and their property at night known as *Chowkider* and *Dafader*. The history of Community policing started in 1992 in Mymensingh and Natore Districts and then extended to other parts of Bangladesh. This technique of policing was later bolstered by a 2008 national strategy for community policing (TAF, 2013). The Police Reform Program (PRP) outlines the standards and guidelines for the operation of over 20,000 Community Policing Forums and the

training of key personnel. The Forums are designed to ensure the participation of the local community to resolve local problems in a participatory manner, conduct outreach programs like school visits and various awareness campaigns on local issues (PRP, 2009) Furthermore, as part of the police reform program to enhance Crime Prevention mechanisms, the Crime Prevention Center (CPC) was created as the focal point at the Police Headquarters in Dhaka for supervising all community policing efforts nationally (TAF, 2013). It is considered as the central research wing, policy formulation, and strategic action taking unit for Bangladesh Police, to bridge between Police and civil society to implement community policing most effectively (PRP, 2009).

Community Policing in Local level

The initiative of establishing community policing is fully owned by the police with the active participation of the local communities, decisions are taken mutually, and funds are collected locally to support the activities (UNDP, 2009). The community policing is supervised locally by an advisory council at the district level, consisting of the District Police Superintendent, additional District Police Superintendent, and Assistant District Police Superintendents. This council can appoint important and interested persons to the committee. This council meets at least once a month to review the law and order situation of the district and takes necessary initiatives to prevent existing criminal offenses. At the 'thana' (local government administrative unit) level, a committee with one convener, one treasurer, and six members is formed. Finally, at the grassroots level, the union or ward unit consists of one convener, one treasurer, and six members. At the very grassroots level, a patrol team of 12 persons consisting of members from ansar, village police, village defense party, village security guards are formed. This number may be more or less depending on the requirement. A police sub-inspector under the supervision of the officer-in-charge of the station usually forms relevant committees, maintains records, and allocates the jobs of community patrol units (Hasan, 2005).

Challenges

The existing structure and functions of community policing in Bangladesh are poorly organized, hence need to be more well-restructured. Bangladesh needs to take strategic planning and desire to implement the appropriate community policing system genuinely-- learning and strategies can be received from the developed countries. It is, however, well studied and commonly believed that community policing has shown to be a successful strategy to control crime, is a quite feasible crime prevention strategy in Bangladesh, and can be the most effective strategy to prevent crime in the future. Having said that, we need to bring some modifications in the systems and basic structural changes in its operations to implement it more efficiently (Alam et al., 2001). It is to be noted that the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh has called for strengthening the community policing programs to build a safe and peaceful society on the occasion of inaugurating the Police Week-2017 at Rajarbagh Police Lines in the capital on 23 January 2017 (The Daily Star, January 24, 2017: 3).

CONCLUSION

Crime prevention nowadays is an essential tool to decrease the crime rate, including reported and unreported crimes. It makes the community safe and ensures that people's rights of speech are respected. It is also imperative to promote community through empowering community

organizations, emboldening community leadership, and responding to the community problem. To do this, a good police-public mutual relationship, teamwork, partnership have to be ensured and thus changes should be made in the national strategy of policing, training manual, attitude, curriculum, and activities of Bangladesh Police. Through establishing and practicing proper community policing, Bangladesh police can easily bring success at the operational level and reclaim public support and recognition, which is also a prerequisite to bringing success in crime prevention endeavors.

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