A Survey on Public Perceptions of Security and Confidence on Crime regarding Pick-pocketing, Theft, Burglary and Robbery in Phnom Penh, Cambodia today

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I. Introduction

The following research paper examines the level of crime that has been experienced by a sample group in Phnom Penh. The paper also examines public perceptions about security in Phnom Penh, and also the degree of public confidence about crime prevention in connection with pick-pocketing, theft, burglary and robbery.

According to OSAC (2015) criminal activity was high in Phnom Penh during that year. Pick-pocketing and purse snatching were commonplace, especially while riding in tuk-tuks (three-wheeled vehicles). Motorbike thefts most often occurred while the bike was being ridden, and armed robberies increased dramatically at night. Also, daytime robberies were also very common and the frequency of armed robberies involving weapons continued at high levels. Many of these crimes were committed by youth gangs operating virtually unimpeded throughout Phnom Penh.

Earlier research found that over two-fifths of Phnom Penh respondents feel unsafe or very unsafe ‘walking alone in [their] area after dark’ (46.5% in 2001 and 41% in 2006). Respondents also felt much safer ‘at home after dark’ with 29.5% feeling unsafe or very unsafe in Phnom Penh in 2006 compared with 39.5% in 2001 (Broadhurst, Roderic G. and Bouhours, Thierry, 2008).

However, previous studies and analyses regarding “Public Perceptions of Security and Confidence on Crime regarding Pick-pocketing, Theft, Burglary and Robbery in Phnom Penh, Cambodia today” are inadequate. The researchers therefore sought information from the General Commissariat of National Police, the Ministry of Interior on the police website, police.gov.kh/blog, but were unable to find monthly or annual data of crime in Phnom Penh.

This research therefore seeks to help fill this gap by way of a survey of crime experienced by respondents. This research also explores the attitudes towards crime in Phnom Penh as expressed by students, teachers and office staff in The University of Cambodia. Random sampling identified 145 respondents, 75 (51.7%)
male and 70 (48.3%) female, out of an intended sample size of 150. This sample size is limited, however the results can offer insights that may provide a useful comparison with earlier findings, and also provide a baseline for future research.

Researchers endeavored to provide reliable statistics. The stored data was collected into SPSS version 23.0 and analyzed by using mean, frequency, standard deviation, and percentages. Researchers verified the data analyzed with calculations in Microsoft Excel and then interpreted output data analyzed with the levels of measurements and justifications.

II. Victims of Crime and Perceptions of Crime

An average of 30.70% of respondents in this survey reported that they have been victims of criminal acts including pick-pocketing, theft, burglary and robbery in the last 12 months in Phnom Penh. 69.29% reported that they have not experienced these four types of crimes. However, 86 (59.3%) of the relatives of respondents reported that they have been victims of criminal acts, and 54 (37.2%) of respondents have not been victims in the last 12 months. In total, an average of 63 (47.01%) of respondents, victims and relatives reported that they have experienced crime regarding pick-pocketing, theft, burglary and robbery in the last 12 months in Phnom Penh; and 71 (52.98%) have not.

In terms of perceptions about public safety, respondents identified situations while riding or driving on the streets or in markets as somewhat unsafe and very unsafe. They felt very unsafe while leaving their workplace/school, at their location of living, in the shopping centers, and at home. Respondents also recorded that they felt that their property was somewhat unsafe when leaving their car outside their home, leaving their motorcycle/bike outside home, leaving their car/motorcycle/bike on the streets, and when wearing jewelry (gold and diamonds). Respondents felt that their property was very unsafe when left unattended at home ‘for a while’.

III. Confidence about Crime Prevention

Firstly, respondents reported that they were dissatisfied with police and the courts in terms of crime prevention regarding pickpocketing, theft, burglary and robbery. Respondents also recorded that their level of trust is ‘not much’ in the police/authorities being able to capture perpetrators and in the justice system to prosecute and punish perpetrators.
Secondly, respondents recorded that the services victims received from the court are ‘moderate’ but services from the police are ‘bad’. In total, more respondents (56.86%) reported that the police and courts had failed to take care of their problems relating to crime than respondents who reported that the authorities had taken care of such problems (43.13%).

Finally, this research also seeks to identify public perceptions about interaction between government and stakeholders (private sectors and NGOs) to reduce crime regarding pick-pocketing, theft, burglary and robbery. A majority of respondents found that such interaction between the government and stakeholders was ‘bad’.

IV. Summary of Findings

In general, this survey finds that people are less satisfied with their police services than they were in 2001/02. Major findings are as follows:

- 47.01% of the 134 respondents and their relatives have been victims of the criminal acts of pick-pocketing, theft, burglary and robbery in the last 12 months.
- Respondents experience high levels of insecurity and report that it is ‘somewhat unsafe’ leaving their workplace/school, riding or driving, at home where they live, on the streets, in the markets, in the shopping centers, leaving home for a while, leaving their car outside their home, leaving their motorcycle/ bike outside home, leaving their car/motorcycle/bike on the streets, and wearing jewelry (gold and diamonds).
- Respondents report that as victims of crime, the services they received are bad, and the public is dissatisfied with the performance of authority, police and court on crime prevention regarding pick-pocketing, theft, burglary and robbery.
- There is not much trust in the police/authorities being able to capture the perpetrator and in the justice system to prosecute and punish the perpetrator, and 29 (56.86%) out of 51 respondents reported that the authorities, police and courts had not taken care of their problems caused by criminal acts.
- 61 (42.1%) out of 140 respondents have not heard of the national dialogue on crime prevention regarding pick-pocketing, theft, burglary and robbery; yet the rate of joint work is bad between the government and stakeholders (private sectors and NGOs) to reduce criminal acts regarding pick-pocketing, theft, burglary and robbery.
V. Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, respondents reported a high level of insecurity regarding the specified crimes of theft and robbery. A majority also reported a lack of confidence in the Police, authorities and the courts to adequately protect them. Public security is therefore a major problem in Phnom Penh and the ability of authorities to redress these problems is uncertain.

This research paper has not sought to identify solutions to these problems – only to quantify them. However, this research indicates that there is a need, based on the above findings, for further research into ways that the government can better help to improve public safety.

The United Nation’s Guiding Principles for Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in the Context of Development and a New International Economic Order urge that “…community participation in all phases of crime prevention and criminal justice should be promoted and strengthened”. Similarly, the United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials states “…every law enforcement agency should be representative of, and responsive and accountable to, the community as a whole.” (UN, 2006). A survey of options on how to try and implement these ideals in Phnom Penh and Cambodia as a whole could be a valuable follow up to this research project.

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