



People's Crime Perception, and Attitude toward Community Crime Prevention Activities in Japan

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Abstract

We distributed questionnaire booklets to households in Tsukuba city, Japan. The questionnaire assessed attitudes toward local crime prevention activities, perceptions about public safety and crime-related anxiety, and sociodemographic variables. Elderly people had more positive attitudes toward community crime prevention compared to younger people. In addition, people who had a greater sense of crisis about their communities tended to view community crime prevention as a personal responsibility, whereas people who reported a less consistent fear of crime tended to have a more aloof attitude toward community crime prevention activities.

Keywords: prevention, perceptions about public safety, fear of crime

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1.0 Introduction

Previously, it used to be a kind of common sense that water and safety are free in Japan. Currently, however, people's fear of crime has been growing. Possible reasons for this include changes in the social structure that could be attributed to a population inflow into cities, as well as the observation that families are becoming more nuclear. It should also be noted that a number of shocking incidents have recently occurred, such as the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack by a cult group in 1995 and the Osaka school massacre in 2001, which were reported one after the other in the mass media.

In Britain and the United States, there has been a trend toward "community crime prevention" based on urban or suburban communities (Ito, 1993). The same movement has also been increasing in Japan, due to growing security concerns. According to the national police agency, the number of crime prevention volunteer organizations has been increased by more than ten times (from 3,056 to 42,762) from 2003 to 2009 (National Police Agency, 2010, March). The Osaka school massacre has placed a particular focus on activities to protect children from crime. Currently, local governments, Non Profit Organizations, individual citizens, and households are organizing and participating in activities to increase the safety of local areas and to protect children from crime.

In December 2005, the Japanese government formulated "measures to protect children from crime" and called for people to focus on emergency security measures and on safe and secure town development. Although this government report emphasizes the importance of cooperation between participant subjects, respect for characteristics of the region, and promotion of community activities, it does not clearly describe concrete practice methods for bringing about positive outcomes. Because of this, once a certain activity in a community has received attention, many other communities tend to follow this lead without much consideration of the unique characteristics of their own communities.

Additionally, it has been repeatedly reported that many crime prevention volunteer organizations in Japan have difficulty sustaining their activities. Many such volunteer organizations in Japan rely heavily on senior citizens and younger people are very few in these organizations. Though community crime prevention requires the help of ordinary citizens, the number of people who are practically involved in such activities is small at present. How do the majority of people view community crime prevention activities and what attitudes are at play? What kind of people are potential participants in such activities?

In recent years, it has been suggested that community crime prevention has some effects on local communication about crime and an improvement in terms of residents' sense of security (Kojima, 2009). Until now, however, a systematic investigation of community crime prevention activities and attitudes has not been conducted in Japan. It has long been argued that these efforts are neither effective nor sustainable, because they are essentially based on a trial and error process. The aim of the present study was to investigate the current situation surrounding local crime prevention activities in Japan, and to explore the possibility of offering more effective evidence-based approaches to

implementing and supporting these activities. We specifically investigated the relationship between residents' anxiety about crime and attitudes toward crime prevention activities of residents.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Survey Strategy

The survey was conducted in early December 2009. We distributed questionnaires to all houses in five school districts in Tsukuba city, Ibaraki, Japan. A total of 4,111 questionnaires were distributed and collected by postal mail.

2.2 Respondents

A total of 945 questionnaires were collected (22.99% response rate). Four hundred and two (42.5%) of the respondents were male and 503 (53.3%) were female (40 of unknown gender). Age of respondents ranged from 22 to 91 years, and the mean age was 50.12 (S.D.13.60).

2.3 Questionnaire

The questionnaire we used in this study contained questions concerning respondents' attitudes toward crime prevention activities, crime-related anxiety, age, and sex. We used 14 items each rated on a five-point Likert-type scale to assess residents' attitudes toward crime prevention activities (all items are shown in Table 1, in the Results section) and 28 items each rated on a four-point Likert-type scale to assess crime-related anxiety (Table 2).

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Attitude toward community crime prevention

Responses to the 14 attitude items were entered into a principal component analysis (PCA), and four components were identified (eigenvalues > 1). Table 1 shows the results of the PCA.

The first component (PC1) had high loadings on items related to the active participation of local residents in crime prevention activities and their perceived effectiveness of those activities. PC1 can therefore be interpreted as representing an attitude that community crime prevention by local residents is a good thing and that the approach is effective ("affirmative evaluation"). The second component (PC2) had positive loadings on items relating to perceived effectiveness of the activity as well as on items relating to leaving such activities to others. PC2 likely represents the attitude that community crime prevention is effective but that the respondent does not need to do it by himself ("someone else's

problem”). The third component (PC3) had positive loadings on items that emphasize administrative activities, and negative loadings on items tapping perceptions of operational efficiency. PC3 appears to reflect the attitude that community crime prevention efforts by local residents are not well organized, and that such an undertaking should be performed by the administrative authorities (“need for administrative organization”). Finally, the fourth component (PC4) seems to be reflecting dissatisfaction with current activities (“dissatisfaction with the status quo”), based on negative loadings on items relating to the effectiveness of the activities, though there were also positive loadings on items related to willingness to participate. Though both PC1 and PC4 were related to participation in community crime prevention activities, there was nevertheless a large difference between them. PC1 was associated with a positive evaluation of the effectiveness of current crime prevention activities, while such evaluations were negative in PC4, which was also associated with negative attitudes toward residents working together. PC1 can be considered as an attitude to the effect of “I want to do it with them”, while PC4 reflects the view that “I can do it better than them.”

Table 1: Results of the principal component analysis of items assessing attitudes toward community crime prevention.

	PC1	PC2	PC3	PC4
1. We can leave community crime prevention to somebody enthusiastic.	-.326	.222	-.064	-.127
2. I would like to participate in those activities if there is an opportunity.	.340	-.093	.166	.408
3. Local residents should be actively involved in community crime prevention.	.331	.007	.263	.240
4. Those activities are not so effective.	-.328	.081	-.072	.226
5. Security of the region should be the responsibility of the administration and of the	-.075	.289	.575	.146
6. We can leave community crime prevention to the administration and the police.	-.285	.304	.217	.248
7. Crime prevention activities by local residents contribute to the safety of the	.295	.228	.048	-.347
8. Crime prevention activities by local residents are well organized.	.140	.425	-.481	.212
9. We live in peace thanks to those activities.	.216	.469	-.323	.081
10. It is a good thing that local residents work together at community crime prevention.	.328	.219	.134	-.291
11. Crime prevention should be carried out by Non Profit Organizations.	-.102	.474	.178	.111
12. It is undesirable that local residents conduct police-like activities.	-.200	.023	.267	-.062
13. Cooperation among residents, administration and the police is very important in community crime prevention.	.266	.118	.238	-.362
14. I find it a bother to participate in those activities.	-.303	.138	-.013	-.471
Eigenvalue	4.076	1.546	1.292	1.135
Cumulative %	29.12	40.16	49.39	57.50

3.2 Crime related perceptions

Responses to 28 crime-related perceptions and anxiety items were also put into a PCA, and seven components were extracted (eigenvalues > 1). Table 2 shows the results of this PCA.

Table 2: Results of the principal component analysis of items assessing attitudes toward community crime prevention.

	PC1	PC2	PC3	PC4	PC5	PC6	PC7
1. A lot of crime is happening in Japan.	.210	.113	.156	.127	-.266	-.133	-.374
2. A lot of crime is happening in my city.	.238	.217	-.123	-.025	-.112	-.022	-.295
3. A lot of crime is happening in my neighborhood.	.183	.264	-.284	-.052	.058	-.025	.027
4. A lot of crime is happening near my house.	.186	.265	-.279	-.012	.119	.026	.167
5. Thinking about me or my family being scammed causes me anxiety.	.236	-.092	.047	.196	.170	-.001	-.130
6. It is very unlikely that I or my family can be scammed.	-.108	.252	.173	.118	.081	-.097	.188
7. Thinking about someone breaking into my house causes me anxiety.	.249	-.131	.030	.307	.141	-.087	.033
8. It is very unlikely that someone will break into my house.	-.153	.297	.243	.126	.131	-.003	.045
9. Thinking about me or my family becoming a victim of sex crimes causes me anxiety.	.229	-.172	.065	.282	.161	-.068	.075
10. It is very unlikely that I or a member of my family will become a victim of sex crimes.	-.159	.320	.237	.114	.138	-.028	-.021
11. Thinking about someone breaking into my car causes me anxiety.	.238	-.125	.033	.244	.191	-.075	.116
12. It is very unlikely that someone will break into my car.	-.162	.318	.216	.161	.112	-.029	-.028
13. Thinking about me or a member of my family being threatened or assaulted causes me anxiety.	.239	-.168	.119	.263	.181	-.104	.093
14. It is very unlikely me or a member of my family will be threatened or assaulted.	-.178	.334	.193	.144	.104	-.023	-.041
15. Security is poor in Japan.	.221	.141	.125	.032	-.232	-.080	-.344
16. Security is poor in my city.	.245	.230	-.118	-.026	-.081	.012	-.267
17. Security is poor in my neighborhood.	.217	.264	-.227	-.032	.094	.001	.080
18. Security is poor near my house.	.204	.249	-.213	.021	.124	.038	.201
19. I feel a sense of stagnation with regards to society.	.120	.019	.159	-.310	.106	.327	-.061
20. Economic conditions are poor.	.143	-.024	.224	-.334	.060	.268	-.065
21. I am worried about my future.	.207	-.011	.278	-.183	.306	.190	-.067
22. I am worried about my family.	.203	-.024	.297	-.155	.248	.196	-.010
23. I have faith in politics.	-.090	-.015	-.059	.412	-.106	.520	-.112
24. I trust bureaucrats.	-.076	-.014	-.118	.325	-.123	.576	-.093
25. Heinous crimes are increasing.	.192	-.029	.269	.025	-.398	-.033	.205
26. I see crime-related news very often on the TV or in newspapers.	.172	.028	.270	-.002	-.366	-.030	.285
27. I often talk about crime with my family and/or friends.	.149	.072	.106	.032	-.339	.110	.375
28. I know a lot of people who were victimized during a crime.	.099	.147	-.096	-.064	-.025	.250	.353
Eigenvalue	6.574	3.434	2.326	1.771	1.451	1.370	1.061
Cumulative %	23.48	35.74	44.05	50.38	55.56	60.45	64.24

The first component (PC1) had positive loadings on items related to anxiety about being victimized and crime frequency, and therefore can be said to reflect fear of victimization. The second component (PC2) had positive loadings on the items relating to low estimation of the possibility of victimization, but also on items relating to poor public safety in the neighborhood, and this component can be named “optimism”. The third component (PC3) had high loadings on items relating to concerns about respondents’ families and themselves, and negative loadings on those relating to frequency of crimes in their neighborhoods. This component appears to reflect a somewhat vague anxiety about crime. The fourth component (PC4) had positive loadings on the items relating to trust in politics and negative loadings on those relating to poor social circumstances, and appears to represent a general trust in the government. The fifth component (PC5) had negative loadings on the items pertaining to frequency of hearing about crimes and to frequency of crimes happening, though this component also had positive loadings on items relating to

anxiety concerning one's family and oneself. This component appears to represent a sense of good security. The sixth component (PC6) had high loadings on trust in government and on poor social circumstances. The seventh component (PC7) had positive loadings on frequency of hearing about crimes and frequency of crimes happening in one's neighborhood, but negative loadings on frequency of crimes happening in one's city generally and nationwide. This component appears to reflect fear of neighborhood crimes.

3.3 Relationships between crime anxiety and attitudes toward crime prevention

To examine the relationship between crime perception and attitudes toward community crime prevention, principal component scores of attitude and crime perception were calculated and entered into a canonical correlation analysis. Two significant canonical correlations were identified. Explained variance was 53.44% by the first canonical variable, and 27.45% by the second, for a total of 80.89% of the variance explained. Figure 1 shows the standardized canonical coefficients of attitude, and security and anxiety with their canonical variables. It also shows correlations between the canonical variables.

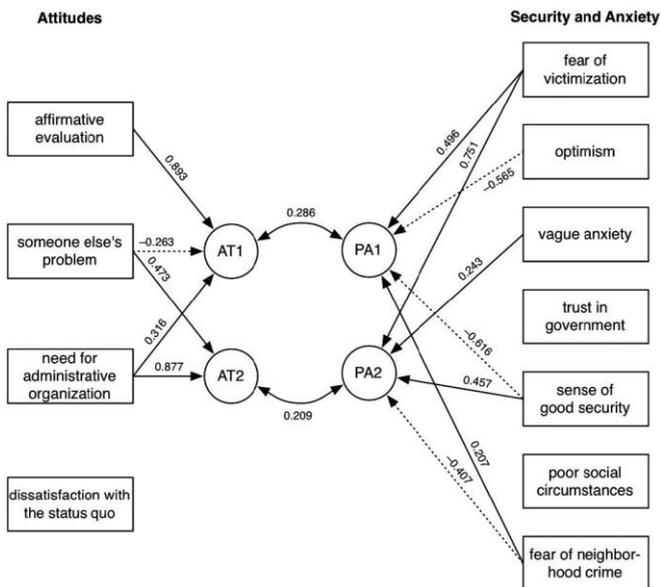


Figure 1: Results of canonical correlation analysis. AT1 and AT2 are the canonical variables for attitude scores and PA1 and PA2 are those for crime perception and anxiety scores. Solid lines indicate a positive coefficient value and dotted lines indicate negative values. Coefficients less than 0.2 have been omitted from the figure.

The standard canonical coefficients in Figure 1 show that the first canonical variable for attitude (AT1) was affected by affirmative evaluation (0.893), someone else's problem (-0.263), and need for administrative organization (0.316). This canonical variable can be interpreted as the extent to which individuals take community crime prevention to be a personally relevant issue. The second canonical variable (AT2) is a weighted sum of someone else's problem (0.473) and need for administrative organization (0.877), and can be interpreted as the view that community crime prevention can be left to others. A dissatisfaction with the status quo did not affect either of the two canonical variables.

On the first canonical variable pertaining to crime perception and anxiety (PA1), fear of victimization and fear of neighborhood crime had positive weights (0.496 and 0.207 respectively), while optimism and a sense of good security had negative weights (-0.565 and -0.616). This variable can be interpreted as a sense of emergent crisis with regards to community safety. As for the second canonical variable (PA2), the weights of the paths from fear of victimization and vague anxiety had positive values (0.751 and 0.243 respectively), meaning that this variable pertains to fear and anxiety. However, the weight of the path from sense of good security was positive (0.457), and that of the path from fear of neighborhood crime was negative (-0.407). This means that this variable is also related to perceptions of good public safety. This variable can perhaps be interpreted as an inconsistent fear of crime. Trust in government and perception of poor social circumstances had no influence on PA1 or PA2.

As seen in Figure 1, individuals taking community crime prevention to be their own issue (AT1) was correlated with a sense of emergent crisis regarding community safety (PA1, $r = .286$), and the attitude of leaving community crime prevention to others (AT2) was correlated with an inconsistent fear of crime (PA2, $r = .209$). These results suggest that people who have a sense of emergent crisis with regards to the safety of their communities tend to take community crime prevention as their own issue and to be willing to participate in such activities. Results also suggest that people who have a somewhat inconsistent fear of crime (i.e., "our community is safe but I'm worried about being victimized") tend to think that community crime prevention is not their business and that the administration will or should handle this issue. Therefore, realization of a sense of crisis could be a key factor in individuals taking community crime prevention seriously, such that they actually take part in such activities.

3.4 Sex and age differences

Canonical scores for each canonical variable were calculated for each respondent, and were entered into analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with sex and age group of respondents as independent variables. A Sex (2) \times Age (3) ANOVA showed that there was a marginally significant main effect of age ($F(2, 872) = 2.96, p = 0.05$) on the scores for the first canonical variable for attitude (AT1). Figure 2 shows mean scores of AT1 (taking community crime prevention to be a personal issue) for each age group. The results of a Tukey's HSD test showed that AT1 scores in the under thirties group were significantly

lower than in the over 60 years old group ($p < .05$). This result suggests that members of the younger generations participate less than the elderly in community crime prevention activities. This result is consistent with the fact that most members of volunteer crime prevention groups are people in their sixties.

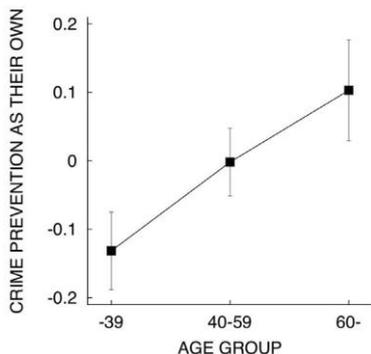


Figure 2: Mean scores of taking community crime prevention as their own issue (AT1) in each age group. Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

Table 3 shows the correlations between AT1 and PA1, and between AT2 and PA2 by the different age groups. Though viewing community crime prevention as a personally-relevant issue was less prevalent in younger age groups according to the ANOVA results described above, the correlations show that the relationship between this attitude (AT1) and a sense of emergent crisis (PA1) was in fact stronger in younger age groups. Taking these results together, it is suggested that people over 60 years of age in general view community crime prevention as personally-relevant compared to younger people, with a sense of emergent crisis little affecting their views. Though younger people are in general less likely to view community crime prevention in this fashion, those who do have a strong sense of emergent crisis with regards to community safety do tend to view community crime prevention as relevant.

The Sex \times Age ANOVA of the score of the first canonical variable for crime perception and anxiety (PA1) also revealed a significant sex difference ($F(1, 804) = 4.53, p = 0.03$). Figure 3 shows mean scores on PA1 (sense of emergent crisis) as a function of sex. Emergent crisis scores were higher in female respondents than in male respondents.

Table 4 shows the correlations between canonical scores by sex. The relationship between AT1 and PA1 did not change much across the male and female groups. The sex difference in PA1 described above likely represents a general tendency for women have a stronger fear of crime compared to men (Bennet & Flavin, 1994; Shimada, 2004; Snedker, 2003; Warr, 1984, 2000).

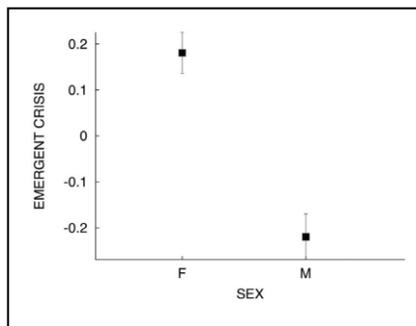


Figure 3: Mean scores of a sense of emergent crisis toward community safety (PA1) in male and female groups. Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

4.0 Conclusion

We investigated local residents' perceptions about public safety and anxiety related to crime, as well as their attitudes toward community crime prevention activities. People who have an emergent sense of crisis tend to have the attitude that community crime prevention is a personally-relevant issue and a corresponding willingness to participate in such activities. Though it is important to involve younger people in community crime prevention activities, the present results suggest that younger people's attitudes about community crime prevention may not be as conducive to active involvement as those of the elderly. On the other hand, in younger age groups the relationship between sense of emergent crisis and positive attitudes towards community crime prevention was even stronger than this relationship in the elderly. Although causing an unnecessarily excessive fear of crime is not desirable, changes in perceptions of community safety might serve to increase younger peoples' commitment to crime prevention activities.

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