



Territorial Attitudes and Victimization: A tale of two neighbourhoods

Aldrin Abdullah, Massoomah Hedayati Marzbali,
Azizi Bahauddin, Mohammad Javad Maghsoodi

School of Housing, Building & Planning,
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia

aldrin@usm.my
Tel.: +6-012-410-4715

Abstract

One popular use of design strategies for crime prevention is territorial functioning. This study examines the relationship between territorial functioning and victimisation in two neighbourhoods with different crime rates. The quantitative-based method using a questionnaire survey was employed in this study. The survey covered residents' victimisation rates and territorial attitudes as a dimension of territorial functioning. A sample of 206 inhabitants from two neighbourhoods in the UK took part in the study. Through a hierarchical regression analysis, the study revealed that a high victimisation rate was associated with low territorial attitudes. People who perceived more territorial attitudes were less likely to be victimised than their opposite counterparts irrespective of the neighbourhood context.

Keywords: territorial functioning; territorial attitude, neighbourhood stability; victimisation.

eISSN 2514-7528 © 2018. The Authors. Published for AMER ABRA cE-Bs by e-International Publishing House, Ltd., UK. This is an open-access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of AMER (Association of Malaysian Environment-Behaviour Researchers), ABRA (Association of Behavioural Researchers on Asians) and cE-Bs (Centre for Environment-Behaviour Studies), Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/jabs.v3i7.263>

1.0 Introduction

Territorial functioning revolves around protecting a space and defending it against intrusion. It is based on the notion that residents are likely to protect spaces that belong to them, and over which they have some means of control. Territorial functioning consists of three main elements: attitudes, behaviour and markers, which often interacts with one another (Taylor, Gottfredson & Bower, 1984). Altman (1975) identified three different types of territory that exist relating to dimensions of occupancy duration and psychological centrality. They are primary territories, secondary territories and public territories. Primary territories are central to the lives of their owners. Secondary territories are not as central to the lives of the occupants as primary territories. These territories are the bridge between the total and pervasive control expressed in primary territories and public territories which are free for all to use. Public territories are the least central to the lives of the users. These spaces are usually occupied for a limited period. Examples of public territories include streets, parks and playgrounds.

Territorial functioning plays a vital role in the residential environment especially in primary territories such as the home because of its centrality to the lives of the occupants. Intrusion in primary territories such as the home is critical not only because it affects the quality of life of the owners but also because they are left with no other spaces to retreat into. There is substantial support that links territorial functioning with low-crime areas. Research found that the crime of violence against persons was lower in areas where the residents felt more sense of territorial responsibility towards the area (Taylor et al., 1984). This is important because it encourages the appropriation of territorial features to the deterrence of crime. Nonetheless, in gated communities where lower territorial functioning behaviour is more evident due to a lower sense of community, residents found a greater sense of security (Wilson-Doenges, 2000). Contrary to previous studies, Greenberg, Rohe & Williams (1982) found few differences in territorial functioning between high and low-crime neighbourhoods, and concluded that even when existed; it was more a characteristic of high-crime neighbourhoods. However, since the high-crime areas were also residentially less stable than the low crime areas, the results contradicted the findings of other studies that revealed a link between territorial functioning and population stability (Greenberg et al., 1982). This conflict between territorial functioning and fear of crime behaviour points to a need to investigate whether territorial functioning is a useful approach in reducing crime. However, to date, research focusing on the relationship between territorial functioning and demographic characteristics suggest that territorial functioning is more of a characteristic of stable neighbourhoods (Taylor et al., 1981). This is not surprising as satisfaction with local physical environment and perceptions of safety are closely linked (Austin et al., 2002).

Therefore, this study sets out two main objectives. The first objective, aside from the demographic characteristics, seeks to explore the victimisation aspects and its differences across high and low-crime neighbourhoods. Once this is established, the second aim will be to determine whether territorial functioning can be a deterrent for break-ins, and whether this effect will be contrasted across high and low-crime contexts.

2.0 Literature Review

In general, there are three approaches that can be vantage points for highlighting insights into neighbourhood crime prevention. The first is to investigate research related to residents' fear of crime and what they perceived to be problematic crime activities in their neighbourhood. Second, researchers can find a link between residents' victimisation experience and the resulting actions they adopt after their experiences. In general, conventional wisdom dictates increasing security and surveillance features as deterrent factors to victimisation and neighbourhood crime. The third perspective of crime prevention can be said to stem from Defensible Space theory of Newman (1972).

Brower, Dockett and Taylor (1983) can be said to be the first to argue on the territorial functioning concept as a complement to Newman's theory. They suggested the efficacy of defensible space theory, where fences act as a powerful security feature that discourages trespassing, a time when fences were not as prevalent in certain neighbourhoods. They found that real barriers not only may deter intrusion but also reflects residents' possessive behaviours. Taylor et al. (1984) later operationalized Newman's theory as the extent to which respondents felt responsible for what happened on their residents' area. In addition, the study covers an interrelated set of attitudes and behaviours concerned with control over who has access to which particular spaces and what activities goes on there. They found that although local social ties dampened crime and fear directly and indirectly via territorial functioning, physical factors alone cannot be relied on to preserve local order and feelings of security. In terms of socio-economic and demographic factors, previous studies have suggested a link between demographic characteristics such as age, family size and length of residence to the residents' victimisation experience in their local neighbourhoods (Chang, 2011). In general, there is a great consensus among research to suggest that more stable residents are relatively expected to have a lower victimisation rate.

Theoretical Model

With regards to territorial appropriation, residents who defended near-home space experienced the neighbourhood as a safer, more cohesive community than residents who did not possess such attitude (Brunson, Kuo & Sullivan, 2001). A study also found that older, established residents to be more territorial in the appropriation of their near-home spaces. Overall, it can be argued that Newman's defensible space concept neglects the complex underlying social processes that determine territorial functioning (Reynald & Elffers, 2009). Consistent with the literature, this paper improves upon the territorial functioning concept via measures of neighbourhood ties, and anticipates that:

H1: There is a negative relationship between territorial functioning and victimisation, regardless of the type of neighbourhood.

Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework of the study. The control variables are pre-controlled at the design stage of the study when samples were stratified along gender, age, marital status, ethnicity, education, ownership and income.

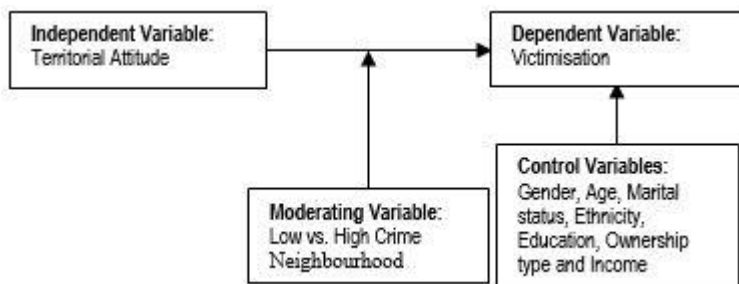


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of the study

3.0 Research Methodology

Respondents

This study focuses two high and low-crime neighbourhoods in the UK, which are predominantly occupied by low income people. However the selection of the neighbourhoods in this study was made based on contrasting crime rates, while having demographic and other features that are as similar as possible. Both neighbourhoods are located in a predominantly housing area with common basic shopping facilities provided within them. The neighbourhoods were also comparable in terms of size and population density. The demographic characteristics were also similar; comparable in gender balance, ethnicity, marital status, social class of head of households, tenure type and car ownership. Age composition was comparable though the number of children under the age of 15 was slightly higher in high-crime neighbourhood.

The main wage earner or the spouse was identified in each household. Prior to the survey, the respondents were asked a screening question. This was done on the doorstep. The question involved asking respondents whether they had lived at the address for at least a year. Respondents who have lived there less than a year were excluded from the interview. This was to give a reasonable time for the respondents to develop territorial attitudes.

Procedure

The study was quantitative in nature and the survey involved asking the residents to answer a questionnaire which was orally administered. It contained several questions that covered residents' background information, territorial attitudes in the residence area and a section that recorded victimisation incidence. A sampling frame was developed from the list of all properties. The respondents were randomly selected using the systematic sampling method. The survey involved 206 respondents from two neighbourhoods. Low-crime neighbourhood was represented by 102 respondents. High-crime neighbourhood had 104 respondents.

Variables and Measures

This study employed three items on neighbourhood familiarity as measures or proxies for *territorial attitudes*, adapted based on the work of Taylor et al. (1981). The scores were based

on a four-point Likert scale format ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The reason for using a four-point scale without a neutral answer was to force the respondent to take a stance. As the interpretation of the final score was based on the distribution of the respondents' score, it was important to avoid respondents from being grouped in the middle, non-committed category.

The questions regarding victimisation experience were structured based on the latest available British Crime Survey (BCS) which involved asking respondents whether they have been the victim of any household or personal crime in the past twelve months. The victimisation survey included one additional question in order to distinguish whether an incident occurred in the area or elsewhere. This information was important for the calculation of the crime rate of an area and separating high from low crime neighbourhood. However, for the purpose of investigating the research model in Figure 1, we have chosen number of household break-in attempts experiences as a measure for the dependent variable.

4.0 Results

Respondent Profile

A cross-tabulation analysis was used to partition the respondents' profile along the type of neighbourhood, that is, either high or low-crime rate. The results in Table 1 indicate that all the control variables (gender, age, marital status, education and income) indeed do not significantly differ across the type of neighbourhood. This is an important characteristic to show that proper sampling strategy has been taken into account and any statistical test results subsequent to this could not be attributed to sampling biasness. The results of chi-square (χ^2) test further shows that there is no significant association between elderly respondents and the type of neighbourhoods.

Territorial Functioning

Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to investigate whether any differences exist in terms of territorial attitude across the type of neighbourhood (see Table 2). The non-parametric Mann-Whitney was chosen since the study variables are ordinal-ranked across the nominal level of neighbourhood type. The results indicated that all the item measures for territorial attitude did not differ across type of neighbourhood. It can be safely stated that the respondents from both neighbourhoods perceived territorial attitudes irrespective of the neighbourhood type.

Victimisation

A cross-tabulation analysis was run to identify whether any association exists between the type of offence and the type of neighbourhood (see Table 3). There are no significant differences in terms of victimisation related to tempered vehicles (including stolen parts) between both neighbourhoods. However, high-crime neighbourhood has greater break-ins (including unsuccessful attempts) than low-crime neighbourhood. Therefore, we selected the number of break-ins as our dependent variable of study.

Table 1. Respondent characteristics: low versus high crime neighbourhoods

Demographic characteristics	χ^2 (p value)
Ownership of property	3.381 (ns)
Gender	0.071 (ns)
Age	6.283 (ns)
Marital status	2.124 (ns)
Ethnicity	2.469 (ns)
Final schooling age /education	2.422 (ns)
Respondent as main wage earner	1.744 (ns)
Total household income	1.462 (ns)
Respondents above 60 years	3.114 (ns)
Owned or use of vehicle	3.405 (ns)

Notes: Low-crime: N=102; high-crime: N=104; ns: not-significant

Table 2. Territorial attitude and crime: low versus high-crime neighbourhoods

Territorial Functioning	Low	High	Mann-Whitney U (p value)
I know the names of most of my neighbours	96.38	86.48	526 (ns)
I feel responsible for watching over my neighbour's house when they are on holiday	91.85	92.19	482 (ns)
I feel comfortable living among my neighbours	93.44	90.19	442 (ns)

Note. ns: non-significant

Table 3. Victimization: low versus high-crime neighbourhoods

Victimization	χ^2
Parts stolen from vehicles	0.44
Vehicle tempered or damaged	1.638
Burglary	3.36 ^a
Unsuccessful attempt at burglary	5.022*
Thing stolen from home	2.837 ^a
Deface or damage to house	4.749*

Note: ^a $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

The relationship between Territorial Functioning and Crime

The main objective of the study was to ascertain the link between territorial attitude (as a dimension of territorial functioning) and crime, and whether the strength of this impact differs across neighbourhoods. It should be noted that the study employed a composite score of territorial attitude by computing the three items. A reliability test of the measure demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .706). The hierarchical regression analysis was employed with a stepwise regression analysis entered in three consecutive blocks (see

Table 4). In the first block, it was revealed that territorial attitude did indeed influence (negatively) the number of break-ins. The second block reveals that there is a direct effect of type of neighbourhood on the number of break-ins. Nonetheless, the third block indicates that there is no evidence to suggest that the strength of the influence between territorial attitude and crime is further affected by the neighbourhood context. In other words, territorial attitude has a negative influence on the number of break-ins, regardless of the crime context of neighbourhoods.

Table 4. Hierarchical regression dependent variable: number of break-in attempts

Variables	Model 1 TA	Model 2 TA + ND	Model 3 TA + ND + (TA x ND)
Territorial Attitude (TA)	-0.186 **	-.178**	.175
Neighbourhood Dummy (ND)		.154*	.759 ^a
TA x ND			-.691
ΔF	7.511**	5.209*	1.970
ΔR ²	.035	.024	.009

Notes. Neighbourhood 1=Low-crime, Neighbourhood 2= High-crime. ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$ and ^a $p < 0.10$. Values for variables are standardised β .

5.0 Discussion

The study aims to examine the influence of territorial attitude in reducing victimisation by considering the moderating effect of low and high-crime contexts. In order to explore the effect of perceived territorial attitude of the residents on their victimisation rate, the study developed a survey tool for examining demographic characteristics, territorial attitude and victimisation rate. The relationships between victimisation and demographic factors such as age and gender as dimensions of physical vulnerability have received considerable attention in the literature. Demographic conditions such as income level can also influence burglar’s judgment and consequently the crime rate. The study seeks to examine the likelihood of the relationship between victimisation and demographic factors in order to explore which social factors are related to high-crime neighbourhood. Interesting, however, is the finding of the study that found no significant differences between all the control variables and the type of neighbourhood, indicating that the locations selected for the study are appropriate. As expected, the results further revealed that high-crime neighbourhood has greater burglary incidents than low-crime neighbourhood.

It is believed that more security devices may reduce burglaries, and burglars are less likely to commit crimes towards houses with more security devices. Furthermore, Perkins et al. (1993) found that higher levels of territorial attitudes have negative effects on victimisation rates. In terms of maintenance, Brown and Altman (1983) argued that non-burgled residents expressed more pride in the appearance of their homes compared to burgled residents. On the contrary, Austin et al. (2002) have found that there is a negative relationship between

victimisation and exterior maintenance. Evidence suggested that houses with poor maintenance are considered less defensible and more prone to crime than others.

In line with a large body of literature, the result of analysis confirmed that there is a negative significant influence of territorial attitude (as a dimension of territorial functioning) on victimisation rate (Hedayati Marzbali et al., 2012a, 2012b; Perkins et al., 1993). In addition, no evidence was found regarding the moderating effect of neighbourhood context on the relationship between territorial attitudes and victimisation. This is in line with the study conducted by Greenberg et al. (1982), where there are few differences in the level of territorial functioning between high and low-crime neighbourhoods. Bringing all together, it is possible to say that territorial functioning cannot attribute to a particular neighbourhood type. The study found that although territorial functioning is a useful tool in reducing victimisation rate, no evidence is found regarding the strength of the influence of this relationship based on the neighbourhood type. This implies that the study hypothesis was supported. As a limitation of the present study, this suggests that the strength of this relationship may depend on other factors behind the scope of this investigation such as neighbourhood configuration and the degree of social interactions. According to Taylor et al. (1984), physical factors alone cannot be relied on to protect residents against crime. A suggestion for future research is to study the role of neighbourhood design and planning features such as type of streets, neighbourhood configuration, types of land uses and social integration on crime and territorial functioning. Despite this limitation, the study contributes to knowledge on the subject matter both theoretically and methodologically, because there is a gap in the literature on examining the effect of territorial functioning on crime by focusing on high and low-crime contexts simultaneously. In sum, the moderating role of the neighbourhood context on the relationship between territorial functioning and victimisation was not supported.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) for providing financial support for this study.

References

- Altman, I. (1975). *The Environment and Social Behavior: Privacy, Personal Space, Territory, Crowding*. Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole.
- Austin, D. M., Furr, L. A., & Spine, M. (2002). The effects of neighborhood conditions on perceptions of safety. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 30(5), 417-427.
- Brower, S., Dockett, K., & Taylor, R. B. (1983). Residents' perceptions of territorial features and perceived local threat. *Environment and Behavior*, 15(4), 419-437.
- Brown, B. B., & Altman, I. (1983). Territoriality, defensible space and residential burglary: An environmental analysis. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 3(3), 203-220.

- Brunson, L., Kuo, F. E., & Sullivan, W. C. (2001). Resident Appropriation of Defensible Space in Public Housing: Implications for Safety and Community. *Environment and Behavior*, 33(5), 626-652.
- Chang, D. (2011). Social Crime or Spatial Crime? Exploring the Effects of Social, Economical, and Spatial Factors on Burglary Rates. *Environment and Behavior*, 43(1), 26-52.
- Greenberg, S. W., Rohe, W. M., & Williams, J. R. (1982). Safety in urban neighborhoods: A comparison of physical characteristics and informal territorial control in high and low crime neighborhoods. *Population & Environment*, 5(3), 141-165.
- Hedayati Marzbali, M., Abdullah, A., Razak, N. A., & Maghsoodi Tilaki, M. J. (2012a). The Influence of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design on Victimisation and Fear of Crime. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 32(2), 79-88.
- Hedayati, M., Abdullah, A., Razak, N. A., & Maghsoodi, M. J. (2012b). The relationship between socio-economic characteristics, victimization and CPTED principles: evidence from the MIMIC model. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 58(3), 351-371.
- Newman, O. (1972). *Defensible space; crime prevention through urban design* New York: Macmillan.
- Perkins, D. D., Wandersman, A., Rich, R. C., & Taylor, R. B. (1993). The Physical Environment of Street Crime: Defensible Space, Territoriality and Incivilities. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 13(1), 29-49.
- Reynald, D. M., & Elffers, H. (2009). The Future of Newman's Defensible Space Theory: Linking Defensible Space and the Routine Activities of Place. *European Journal of Criminology*, 6(1), 25-46.
- Taylor, R. B., Gottfredson, S. D., & Brower, S. (1981). Territorial cognitions and social climate in urban neighborhoods. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 2(3), 289-303.
- Taylor, R. B., Gottfredson, S. D., & Brower, S. (1984). Block crime and fear: Defensible space, local social ties, and territorial functioning. *Journal of Research in crime and delinquency*, 21(4), 303-331.
- Wilson-Doenges, G. (2000). An exploration of sense of community and fear of crime in gated communities. *Environment and Behavior*, 32(5), 597-611.