Determinant of Criminal Activities by Some Nigerians Residing In Malaysia: A Socio-Economic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Even when statistics from various international institutions indicate a relatively higher prevalence of crimes among the locals, the increasing trend of a spike in crime rates among immigrants especially of African descent in Malaysia is also bothersome. Given the rise in the number of reported criminal activities involving, specifically, Nigerians in Malaysia, it becomes necessary to understand the underlying motives for such behaviour as part of the attempt to arrest this trend. The current study explores the factors contributing to criminal behaviour among some Nigerians residing in Malaysia. In view of the prominence of socio-economic factors in explaining criminal behaviour, this study explores this rising phenomenon from a socio-economic perspective. In addressing this objective, this study employs the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), whereby the socio-economic factors are ranked according to their contribution to the crime rate. It is expected that the findings of this study will shed light on the root causes of this menace, thereby offering policy makers greater information and insight with which to more effectively curb such criminal activities.

Keywords: Analytical hierarchical process, crime, Nigerians, socio-economic

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia's economic growth, especially after the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s as well as the accommodating disposition of its people, apparently made it a popular destination for immigrants. Without prejudice to the economic benefits that such surge in migration has brought to Malaysia, the issue of unintended social menaces and outcomes it has had to grapple with in recent years has also received both policy and research attention. When viewed in the context of the rise in the incidence of criminal activity in Malaysia, a corresponding increase in the number of immigrants is easily viewed as a possible anecdotal explanation (Del Carpio et al., 2013).

The increasing trend in crime is an ongoing threat to the security and prosperity of Malaysia (Habibullah & Baharom, 2009). The cost of crime is felt by both the citizens and the government. While it may result in emotional disturbance and psychological insecurity for the people, crime is also a significant factor in the lack of confidence besetting the commercial sector, thereby likely reducing foreign investment in Malaysia. Moreover, an increase in crime calls for larger budgets to address it that could have been utilised for more productive endeavours. The opportunity costs associated with the cost of curbing crimes are, thus, enormous.

Even though evidence in the extant literature is mixed regarding the relationship between crime rate and increasing number of immigrants, the comprehensive study carried out by Del Carpio et al. (2013) in a World Bank-commissioned study found no such significant correlational relationship. This is, however, at variance with the prejudice if not apparent stereotype among the locals in a nation that the immigrants are the likely culprit of any criminal activity noted in the society (Nikolaos & Alexandros, 2010).

In the case of Malaysia, such stigma seems to be attached to immigrants from some countries apparently due to the frequency of involvement of the nationals of those countries in crime. For instance, the current Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Zahid, while he was serving as the Home Minister, was reported to have reeled out some statistics and informed Parliament in November 2014 of the worrying increase in crime rates involving Nigerian students[1]. With such unfortunate statistics, the perception of locals about their migrant guests from Nigeria cannot, therefore, be faulted. However, the stigma and stereotype created would obviously also subsume the many positive contributions that notable Nigerians are also making to the Malaysian economy.

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[1]The Home Minister reported that Nigerian students were involved in more than 40 criminal cases, while about 400 were behind bars. He also noted that Nigerian students accounted for more than a third of the cases of immigrants overstaying their visas. http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2012/03/27/Tighter-visa-rules-for-foreigners-seeking-to-study-in-Msia/

The efforts of the Malaysian government to strengthen crime control and prevention are commendable. These are important for reducing the long-term impact of crime on society and the government. Crime prevention, especially, is an important mechanism for minimising the cost of crime. A thorough understanding of the causes of crime is needed to achieve effective intervention in terms of controlling and preventing crimes. The contribution of socio-economic factors to criminal behaviour is among the important determinants explaining criminal behaviour. Such a line of inquiry posits that unemployment, a general lack of basic needs and absence of means of sustainable livelihood are among the major factors that instigate criminal behaviour. Focussing on data collected from certain Nigerians convicted of crimes while residing in Malaysia, this study adopts the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) model to rank the collected data according to the various categories of socio-economic variables based on their likely intensity to contribute to criminal behaviour.

Literature Review

Social-economic factors have often been emphasised as an important factor contributing to criminal behaviour. Alonso-Borrego, Garoupa and Vasquez (2011) examined the relationship between immigration and crime rate using an econometric model. The findings of their study indicated that cultural proximity, economic conditions and education play significant roles in the tendency of a person's becoming involved in criminal behaviour.

In similar vein, Freedman, Owen and Bohn (2013) suggested there was a high tendency of criminal behaviour among immigrants with limited opportunity to legal jobs. Immigrants with little education are more likely to engage in criminal activities due to their limited opportunity of securing a legal job in a highly literate environment like Malaysia. The existence of academic fraudsters who engage in smuggling migrants make it easy for people who have little or no education to secure student visas in order to legalise their status (European Commission [EC], 2010).

In a related study by Buonanno and Montolio (2008) where socio-economic factors were explored in terms of their contribution to criminal activities, it was revealed that unemployment is highly and significantly related to crime rate. This has been explained in terms of committing crimes in a situation where opportunities to secure legal income are greatly limited compared to the number of illegal opportunities available. In addition, the study found that lack of education played a key role in influencing criminal activities. This is based on the belief that the more educated a person is, the greater his chances of earning higher income, which consequently reduces the propensity to commit crime. More so, the study concluded that education incorporates civic components that increase the individual's moral stance and affect his perception of crime.

Dutta and Husain (2009) in their study on crime in India revealed that high conviction rates potentially increased crime rates. This may be explained in terms of deficiencies in the criminal detection and corrective system. Among the economic variables, economic growth was an important factor of criminal behaviour. This is because strong economy presents many opportunities for earning a legitimate income, thereby minimising the incentive to commit crimes. The opposite is true in times of economic difficulty when unemployment rates are high (Freedman et al., 2013).

Gilbert and Sookram (2009) explored the socio-economic determinants of crime rates in Jamaica. The crime variable was represented by the rate of violence per 100,000 persons. Social economic factors were represented by expenditure on education and healthcare. According to the findings of the research, the size of the police force, economic conditions and clear-up charge significantly contributed to the economic conditions in Jamaica. As indicated in the article, economic hardship in the 1970s made it difficult for the majority of Jamaicans to bear the cost of living, which pushed up the crime rate in Jamaica. Those with lower income in particular sought alternative means of survival, which often translated into criminal activity of various kinds. The findings of Weatherburn (2001), who indicated the significant impact of poverty on criminal activities, support the above finding.

Based on the study by the Centre for the Study of Democracy (CSD) (2010), which assessed the contribution of corruption to organised crime in some selected European countries, public offices influenced by some external and internal factors significantly aid organised crime by immigrants. The finding of a study located in Spain revealed the presence of widespread corruption within the social, economic and political spheres, which attracts organised criminal groups, encouraging them to participate in corrupt exchanges and indirectly boosting other illicit activities. As a result of corruption by those supposed to abate and prevent crimes, criminals become more confident and derive more gains from criminal activities due to the reduced probability of being apprehended for their crimes.

Similar cases have been reported in the case of Bulgaria, where those involved in organised crime secured much political influence. According to the study, organised crime generated wealth from drugs, smuggling and prostitution and merged with corporations and groups that owned privatised state-owned assets. Through such means, they were able to transform their accumulated wealth into political and administrative power. This influence in the political and administrative structures provides opportunities for companies to use corruption to win public tenders, avoid taxes and systematically break laws to gain competitive advantages. According to the report, organised crime networks

have found their way into most public institutions, including the police, customs and prosecutors' offices. As a result, all levels of politics and government administration are under some degree of their influence.

Most extant literature on crime make use of secondary data to investigate criminal behaviour with econometric models to examine criminal behaviour. Notable among such studies are Dutta and Husain (2009), Gilbert and Sookram (2009) and Buonanno, (2003). The present study differs from other studies as its approach is based on primary data using the Analytical Hierarchical Process (AHP). The AHP framework ranks the factors contributing to criminal behaviour. Therefore, the researchers anticipate that the findings of this study will serve as a potential guide for policy makers towards more informed decision-making regarding combating criminal behaviour in Malaysia, especially that involving Nigerians.

METHODS

This study explored the socio-economic factors that significantly contribute to criminal behaviour among some Nigerians residing in Malaysia. The identified factors were then ranked according to their effect on crime based on the opinions of several selected Nigerians, who by the virtue of their experience both at home in Nigeria and residence in Malaysia, were expected to understand to some degree the motivations that lead to criminal behaviour among some Nigerians residing in Malaysia. Through the AHP framework, the following factors were identified: poverty, education, law enforcement, unemployment, probability of arrest and cultural influence.

The application of the AHP framework involved the pairwise comparison of the elements within the matrix regarding which compared element contributed more or less to criminal behaviour. Table 1 depicts the input matrix of the respondent judgement. Each of the elements in the matrix is compared with another.

AHP has gained popularity among researchers because it has a number of advantages, such as, in particular, its ability to accommodate subjective criteria. It is systematic and thorough, easy to apply and

Table 1
Input matrix of the respondents' judgement

	Poverty	Education	Law Enforcement	Unemployment	Probability of Arrest	Probability of Conviction	Culture
Poverty	1	A	….	…	…	…	k
Education	1/a	1					p
Law enforcement			1				
Unemployment				1			
Probability of arrest					1		
Probability of conviction						1	
Culture	1/k	1/p					1

can accommodate multiple decision makers in solving a particular problem (Islam & Rasad, 2005).

The above matrix indicated that attribute 1 was a times more important than attribute 2 and *k* times more important than attribute 6. All the diagonal elements of the matrix must be equal to 1 because the element is compared with itself, indicating equal importance. The elements at the lower triangle of the matrix are the reciprocal of the upper triangle. The above matrix containing all the elements identified for prioritisation consisting of a 7x7 matrix. The pairwise comparison of the element was then used to obtain the priorities for the seven elements. In order to obtain the priorities, the geometry mean of the pairwise comparison was computed and served as an input in the pairwise comparison matrix.

Table 2
Rating on the verbal judgement of importance

Verbal Judgement of Importance	Numerical Rating
Equal importance	1
Equal to moderate importance	2
Moderate importance	3
Moderate to strong importance	4
Strong importance	5
Strong to very strong importance	6
Very strong importance	7
Very strong to extremely strong importance	8
Extreme importance	9

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the AHP. We start by presenting the descriptive statistics. Table 3 below provides information about the respondents:

Table 3
Profile of the respondents

Variable	Category	Freq.	(%)
Gender	Male	9	75
	Female	3	25
Marital status	Single	2	16.7
	Married	10	83.3
Age	25-30yrs	2	16.7
	31-35yrs	5	41.7
	36-40yrs	5	41.7
	41 & above	0	0
Region	North	3	25
	South	9	75
Level of education	Bachelor	1	8.3
	Master's	5	41.7
	PhD	6	50.0
Type of employment	Public Sector	9	0.75
	Private Sector	2	0.22
	Self Employed	1	0.03

Table 3 shows that the total number of respondents who were perceived as having a relative understanding of some of the conditions that can influence criminal behaviour among some Nigerians residing in Malaysia is 12. The number of males and females who participated in filling the AHP questionnaire was nine and three, respectively, representing 75% and 25% of the total number of respondents. Two of the respondents were single while 10 were married. Regarding the age of the respondents, two were within the range of 25-30, five were in the range of 31-35, while five were in the age bracket 36-40. In relation to the state of origin of the

respondents, three were from North Central Nigeria while the remaining nine were from Southwestern Nigeria. Half of the respondents held PhD degrees. Regarding the type of employment of the respondents, the majority worked in the public sector while one was self-employed.

Table 4
The results of the AHP ranking of the socio-economic factors

Categories of Socio-Economic Rank	Factors	Weight
Poverty	0.381	1
Education	0.208	2
Law enforcement	0.161	3
Unemployment	0.106	4
Probability of arrest	0.75	5
Probability of conviction	0.42	6
Culture	0.028	7

Out of the seven socio-economic factors identified, poverty was ranked the highest with a weight value of 0.381. The lowest ranking variables were probability of arrest, probability of conviction and culture. Literature that investigated the contributing factors to criminal behaviour emphasised the variable of poverty (Weatherburn, 2001; Freedman et al., 2013). Poverty is an interplay of many factors, for instance, unemployment. As explained by Nikolaos and Alexandros, (2010), a person who is unable to meet basic needs has a higher likelihood of engaging in criminal activities. For instance, *The Star*, a newspaper, dated Tuesday, 27 March, 2012 reported the move by Malaysian authorities to impose tighter visa rules on selected countries, including

Nigeria, due to the increasing cases of visa violation. Some of the Nigerians involved in crime probably enter Malaysia on a student visa with the intent of working rather than studying. This finding is consistent with that of Adewale (2011), who noted that the Nigerian students' academic sojourn in Malaysia is more often than not moderated by economic consideration and the possibility of simultaneously working and studying. Quite a number of the student respondents in the qualitative study acknowledged that the student visa was meant to grant them entry and legal stay, while their main intent was to work to pay back the source from which they got the money to travel to Malaysia in the first place. There is a high possibility that such kinds of people will resort to criminal activities after unsuccessful attempts of securing a job due to the lack of the requisite qualifications.

The three highest probable contributions after poverty are education, law enforcement and employment with the weight 0.208., 0.161 and 0.106, respectively. Regarding the effect of education on deciding to become involved in criminal activities, many studies indicated a negative relationship between education and criminal behaviour. This indicates that greater education means reduced likelihood of engaging in criminal activities (Machin, Marie, & Vujic, 2011). The following three reasons explain why education serves as a deterring factor to crime: income, time and patience or risk averseness. A person with a high level of education has greater opportunity of securing a job that would facilitate regular

income and as such finds less incentive in becoming involved in crime. Furthermore, such a person has limited time to invest in criminal behaviour. This finding suggests that most Nigerians with a low level of education are more likely to become involved in criminal activities.

The effectiveness of law enforcement plays a significant role in curbing criminal activities. The significance of law enforcement in explaining criminal behaviour has been emphasised by Freedman et al. (2001) and Levitt and Miles (2006). The perception of criminals about the ineffectiveness of law enforcement could induce criminal activities. The increasing crime rate signifies weakness in law enforcement.

The limitation of this study is the inconsistency of its ratio of 0.31, which is above the maximum of 0.1. In such a situation, a re-voting is preferable, whereby the respondents are informed about the result and asked to check and revise their rating (Abduh, 2013). The inability to meet with the respondents due to time limitations prevented a re-voting. Nonetheless, it is envisaged that such inconsistency would not have serious negative implication on the findings in this study.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the determinants of criminal behaviour based on selected microeconomic factors obtained from previous studies on criminal behaviour.

The objective of the study was to rank the identified factors in accordance with the degree to which they contribute to crimes using an AHP framework. Questionnaires were distributed to 12 respondents to discover their views on the importance of the identified variables in accordance with their level of contribution to crime. Our findings indicated that a low level of education, which prevents people from securing legal jobs and decent earnings, induce criminal behaviour among some Nigerians residing in Malaysia. In addition, the findings suggest that ineffective law enforcement is among the reasons for a surge in criminal activities. Since prior literature indicated no consensus regarding the factors that make an individual likely to commit crime, no single strategy can be recommended as an effective means of combating criminal activities. In line with the findings of this study, policy makers are recommended to incorporate the identified factors in their approach to combatting crime.

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