

Research Proposal (2): Qualitative orientation

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(I) Proposed Title

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- Crime Prevention Through Environment Design (CPTED)

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(I) Proposed Title

The Relationship between Juvenile Delinquency and Environmental Variables in New Town, Tuen Mun

(II) Introduction

The problem of juvenile delinquency in Tuen Mun's new town' has become more and more alarming in recent years. According to recent police statistics, the figure of 662 recorded juvenile arrests in Tuen Mun was the highest among all police districts in the territory in the first half of 1996. Such figures raise public concern about the occurrence of juvenile delinquency in the context of planned housing in the new towns. A number of questions arise, such as: " *Why does Tuen Mun suffer more Juvenile Delinquency than other places?* " ; " *Is the environment of Tuen Mun more favorable for Juvenile Delinquency than other places?* " and " *How far do the environmental features influence the chances of delinquency occurring?* ". Hence, the following hypothesis will be examined in my proposed study:

" The environment of Tuen Mun's new town invites and provides more opportunities for juveniles to commit delinquency than other new towns and urban areas of HK. "

I will compare juvenile delinquency in Tuen Mun's new town with two other areas in order to make the study more interesting. The first area, also a new town, is Tseung Kwan O, which has similar environmental features to Tuen Mun. The second area, Kowloon City, is an urban district and has different characteristics to Tuen Mun.

I will employ the "environmental perspective" in my study in order to attempt to explain the nature of juvenile delinquency. In addition, the related "situational crime prevention" approach which focuses on the "rational choice" of offenders will also be critically used to supplement an understanding of the factors involved in juvenile delinquency.

The following proposal presents the "What" and "How" of my study. Using the "environmental" approach to study juvenile delinquency is a novel attempt in Hong Kong; therefore, I will rely on the ideas and methods developed in the west by, for example, Newman(1972), the Brantingham(1990) and Clarke and Felson(1993).



(III) Brief Literature Review

Environmental Variables and Crime

The work of the pre-world war II Chicago researchers Shaw and Mcay made a major contribution to criminology by developing the "Ecological" approach to the understanding of the interaction between society and environment in crime causation. They theorized about social relations, urban social structure and their relationship with crime. Their study "*Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas*"(1942) showed that high crime areas usually straddled the industrial zone which was characterized by very high rates of residential turnover and low rates of home ownership. Shaw and McKay explained this phenomenon by the theory of "social disorganization". In short, they argued that differences in delinquency rates between areas was correlated with environmental variables like housing conditions, demographic stability and ethnic/social status.

Later, a geographer Davidson (1981) tried to give a full explanation for the relationship between environmental variables and crime. He classified environment into two categories-- physical environment and social environment. Physical environment referred to the structure and design of an area. For example, parks, leisure grounds, street patterns, commercial complexes and centers are the basic components of the physical environment. Social environment referred to a set of contexts which form the basis for social interaction outside the home such as school, recreation and neighborhood. Davidson's study suggested how both the social and physical environment provide opportunities for delinquency.

The latest studies about physical environment and crime by Taylor and Harrell (1996) show how physical features like housing design or block layout, land use, territorial features, and physical deterioration relate to crime risk. My study will attempt to define and examine the pattern of such environmental variables in Tuen Mun, Tseung Kwan O and Kowloon City. Differences in the kinds of environmental factors found in the three study areas may provide hypothetically an explanation for differences in juvenile crime in Hong Kong.



Rational Choice

Clarke (1983, 1993) has applied the "rational choice" perspective to a range of crimes. His studies examined how offenders think about a crime situation and how they choose the most "suitable" environment and opportunity to operate in or target to select. It suggests that the environmental features of a place will probably affect a potential offender's perceptions about a possible crime site, their evaluations of the likelihood of success and the availability and visibility of guardians. (Clarke, 1983,

1993, Felson, 1994, Taylor and Harrell, 1996) Therefore, my study will explore how juvenile offenders perceive such environmental variables and test whether they commit delinquency in a rational fashion.

A study by Beavon (1984, cited in Felson, 1994) demonstrated this rational choice assumption by showing that a shop located in an area with more converging streets suffered more crime than those located elsewhere. Because the street junctions and intersections made the offender feel that it was more convenient to access, escape and hide. With this kind of example in mind, my study seeks to find out how similar sorts of environmental features in Tuen Mun influence juvenile delinquents to make this type of rational choice.



Crime Prevention Through Environment Design (CPTED)

CPTED studies provide numerous detailed description and explanations of the relationship between crime and place with a view to minimize crime. For example, Jane Jacobs (1961) found a greater tendency for crime to occur in large publicly accessible areas created by the newer forms of urban planning. She pointed out that the new forms of design broke down many of the traditional controls on criminal behavior, for example, the ability of residents to watch the street and the presence of people using the street both night and day. She suggested that the lack of "natural guardianship" in the environment promoted crime. A decade later Oscar Newman (1972, 1980) contributed a seminal work on crime prevention and environment, using such concepts as "defensible space", "natural surveillance", and "community of interest". Concerning the relationship between the prevalence or absence of "guardianship" or "surveillance" and crime occurrence, my study will examine whether the environment of Tuen Mun's new town provides insufficient "natural guardianship" compared to Kowloon City which leads to a high delinquency rate.

Another major work on environmental criminology by Pat and Paul Brantingham (1990) further developed the concept of CPTED. The Brantinghams' suggested that "routine activity" such as the way the potential offenders live, work or go to school, and engage in leisure could influence the offenders to search for crime targets. For example, places near McDonald's restaurants and 7-eleven stores where youths like to gather after school may suffer more property crime than other places. Hence, the Brantinghams' suggested that schools should be kept away from shopping malls and convenience-stores so youths do not congregate at these places after school or at lunch time. Such a change of space or place could reduce some delinquency such as shoplifting. My research following the Brantinghams' suggestion will examine and compare what sorts of places and why they are prone to high juvenile crime in Tuen Mun.



(IV) Methodology

In order to test the hypothesis of the study and examine the main questions raised, the following methodology will be employed.

Participant Observation

Participant observation with a group of juvenile delinquents or marginal youths in Tuen Mun will be carried out. The aim is to collect more qualitative information about their life style and behaviour. Through cautious participation and observation of the juvenile delinquents' daily and routine activities, I hope to find out how their delinquent patterns have been influenced by environmental factors. I

propose to associate myself with Tuen Mun's juvenile delinquents through the help of the district outreaching social work team. I will ask them to introduce me to their clients and rely on a "snowball effect" to approach more subjects. This means making friends with one or more clients and then asking him/her to introduce their friends to me.



Individual Interviews

Individual interviews by a way of structured questionnaire will also be used to collect information about the juvenile delinquents' perception of the environment. The interview is especially important for examining questions like "What kind of environment could encourage juveniles to make the rational choice' to commit delinquency?". I will also attempt to interview police officers and security guards about the effectiveness of both natural and official "guardianship" in these communities.



Community Observation

To collect information about the physical features of Tuen Mun, Tseung Kwan O and Kowloon City, systematic observations will be carried out. Through several community surveys of the physical settings, I will measure the prevalence or absence of environmental features suggested by CPTED as significant to crime control. By comparing the physical environment of the three studied areas the different environmental influences on the opportunity for juvenile delinquency can be gauged.



Analysis of Official/Unofficial Statistic

In order to gain a fuller picture of the situation of juvenile delinquency in Tuen Mun, Tseung Kwan O and Kowloon City, a comprehensive analysis of the official statistics will also be undertaken. Besides official data, other sources of statistical data produced by agencies such as District Social Service Center or Youth Committee and Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department (Crime Victim Survey) will also be used. I will pay especial attention to information about the location of juvenile delinquency and the types of delinquency committed in particular places.



(V) Proposed Research Time-Table

Sept 1996----Apr 1997 : - Literature review

- Official contact with the outreaching social work team, RHKPF and other agencies- Community surveys of the three areas
- Design the questionnaires- Collection of official and unofficial statistic

May 1997----Jun 1997 :

- Statistical analysis of crime and place- Find the targets- Community observation (Tuen Mun)

Jul 1997----Sept 1997 : - Field Work

- 1st session Participant Observation of Tuen Mun's JD

Oct 1997----Nov 1997 : - Field Work

- Community observation (Kowloon City and Tseung Kwan O)- Interview the police officers and security guards

Dec 1997----Feb 1998 : - Field Work

- 2nd session Participant Observation of Tuen Mun's JD

Mar 1998----Apr 1998 :

- Analysis of the data obtained from the field work

May 1998----Aug 1998 :

- Write the Thesis



(VI) References

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