PROPERTY CRIME INCIDENCE AND PATTERNS IN MALAYSIA FROM 2007 TO 2017

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Abstract

Crime is a social problem faced by all communities and ranges from property loss or damage to violent events such as murder and robbery. Crime trends are associated with many factors including mental health, unemployment rates, educational status and policing strategies. In this article, we provide property crime datasets for Malaysia from 2007 to 2017. The data were gathered from all reported cases at district police stations and contingent (state and federal territory levels) headquarters. This information was extracted from the Malaysian Police Reporting System (PRS) and divided into five categories; theft, car theft, motorcycle theft, van/lorry/heavy machinery theft and housebreaking. Overall, there were 1,361,320 property crime cases were reported from 2007 to 2017. Theft and motorcycle theft were observed to be the most common types of property crime in Malaysia. In general, property crime cases continue to decline from 163,317 cases in 2007 to only 77,562 in 2017 due to government initiatives and a proactive policing policy. The same downward trend in overall property crime was also observed at state and federal territory levels and is mainly due to a drop in the volume of theft and motorcycle theft cases.

Keywords: Property crimes, housebreaking, crime trends, proactive policing policy, Malaysia

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INTRODUCTION

Public safety is a critical aspect of community welfare. Many countries are facing public safety disturbances due to increases in criminal activity and changes in crime trends. These crimes range from property loss or damage and housebreaking to violent events such as murder, robbery and rape. Crime trends are associated with many factors, including, but not limited to, socio-economic conditions, social inequality and unemployment rates (Hale, 1998; Talha, 2008; Fougère et al., 2009; Newburn, 2016). They are also related to the effectiveness of pragmatic actions such as policing strategies for crime prevention and the efficiency of the criminal justice system.

The Royal Malaysia Police (RMP), a leading law enforcement agency in Malaysia classifies crime into two indices, property and violent crimes. Property crimes include theft, car theft, motorcycle theft, other motor vehicle (van, lorry, heavy machinery) theft and housebreaking cases while murder, rape, robbery and voluntarily causing hurt are classified as violent crimes. Other crimes such as domestic violence are broadly classified as non-index crimes. However, both index and non-index crimes are recorded in the Police Reporting System (PRS), the online platform developed by the Royal Malaysia Police to record and store data on crimes reported by the public (Hakim et al., 2019a).

In this study, we provide recent data for property crime in Malaysia over the period from 2007 to 2017 extracted from the PRS. Combined with our previous report on violent crime cases (Hakim et al., 2019a), the property crime statistics presented here provide more extensive documentation of index crimes in Malaysia. Both, property and violent crime datasets can thus made more widely available to potentially interested groups of readers including the general public, the forensic community and the entire body of law enforcement practitioners. These data can now further be aligned with other socio-economic factors that may be associated with property crime and can be used as guidelines to evaluate and revise existing enforcement practices, legislation, crime awareness programs and policing strategies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a retrospective study based on property crime data extracted from PRS with written permission from the Inspector General Police of Malaysia, as previously described for violent crimes (Hakim et al., 2019a). Current practice at Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) is to group property crime cases into five classes; theft, car theft, motorcycle theft, van/lorry/heavy machinery theft and housebreaking; refer to Table 1 for legal definitions. Therefore, the reported property crime cases deposited with this data article only represent those classes of property crime cases as investigated by RMP in Peninsular Malaysia, Borneo

(Sabah and Sarawak) and Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. It is important to note that reported property crime cases in the Federal Territories of Putrajaya and Labuan were included with the Kuala Lumpur and Sabah records, respectively. Data were analysed using descriptive analysis implemented in a Statistical Package for the Social Science software IBM SPSS version 25 (released 2017, Armonk, NY: IBM Corp) and shown in the forms of tables and line charts.

Table 1: Legal definition of property crimes in Penal Code (Act 574), Laws of Malaysia

Type	Definition
Theft	Is defined and classified based on Section 378-379 Penal Code (Act 574), Laws of Malaysia: *Whoever, intending to take dishonestly any movable property out of the possession of any person without that person's consent, moves that property in order to such taking, is said to commit "theft". Whoever commits "theft" shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to seven years or with fine or with both, and for a second or subsequent offence shall be punished with imprisonment and shall also be liable to fine or to whipping.*
Theft of a motor vehicle (motorcycle; car; van; lorry; and heavy machinery)	Is defined and classified based on Section 379A Penal Code (Act 574), Laws of Malaysia: *Whoever commits "theft of a motor vehicle" or any component part of a motor vehicle shall be punished with imprisonment for a term of not less than one year and not more than seven years, and shall also be liable to fine. In this section— component part, in relation to a motor vehicle, includes any tyre, accessory or equipment; motor vehicle means a mechanically propelled vehicle intended or adapted for use on roads, and includes a trailer drawn by a motor vehicle.*
Housebreaking	Is defined and classified based on Section 457 Penal Code (Act 574), Laws of Malaysia: *Whoever commits "lurking house-trespass" or "housebreaking", in order to commit any offence punishable with imprisonment, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years, and shall also be liable to fine; and if the offence intended to be committed is theft, the term of the imprisonment may be extended to fourteen years; and for every second or subsequent offence shall in either case be liable to fine or whipping.*

RESULTS

The incidence of property crime cases in Malaysia over the last decade is shown in Table 2 and Figure 1. Overall, there were 1,361,320 property crime cases were reported from 2007 to 2017 with motorcycle theft and theft being the most common types of property crimes in Malaysia (Table 2 and Figures 1-6). In general, property crime cases continued to decline steadily from 163,317 cases in 2007 falling to 77,562 by 2017 (Table 2 and Figure 1). However, car theft, van/lorry/heavy machinery theft and housebreaking cases do show small year to year fluctuations in this trend between 2008 to 2014, 2007 to 2013 and 2007 to 2009, respectively (Figures 2-6). The downward trend in property crime was also observed at state and federal territory levels (Table S1-S14 and Figures S1-S14) which may be due to particularly large declines in the volumes of theft and motorcycle theft cases. Sabah, Sarawak and Negeri Sembilan are exceptions where the drop of property crime cases was also due to substantial decreases of housebreaking cases (Figures S6, S11 and S12 and Tables S6, S11 and S12).

Table 2: The total number of property crime cases in Malaysia

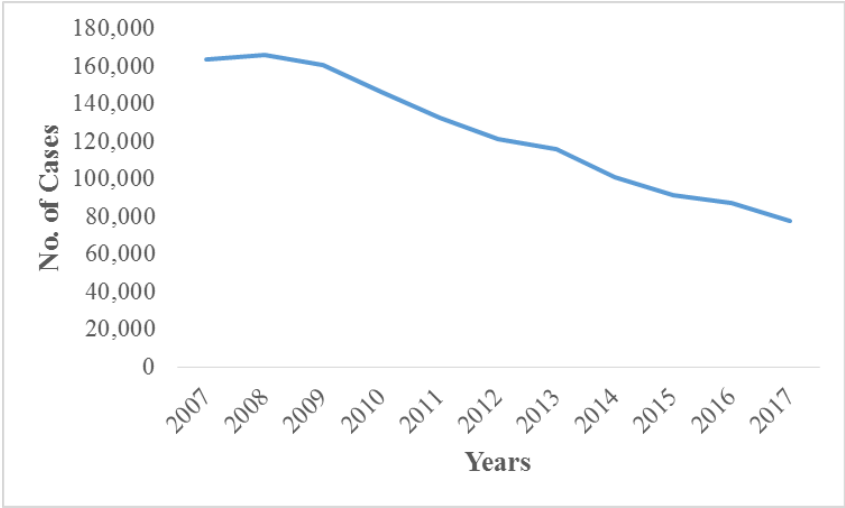| Year	Theft	Car Theft	Motorcycle Theft	Van/Lorry/Heavy Machinery Theft	Housebreaking	Total cases
2007	44,646	12,428	67,606	5,047	33,590	**163,317**
2008	41,215	15,198	67,359	6,263	35,588	**165,623**
2009	40,864	14,222	61,394	5,524	38,570	**160,574**
2010	36,406	15,290	54,557	4,774	35,052	**146,079**
2011	30,502	16,110	50,896	4,472	30,200	**132,180**
2012	24,299	16,196	51,259	4,526	24,939	**121,219**
2013	21,405	16,733	49,133	4,981	23,317	**115,569**
2014	19,664	13,407	43,025	4,076	20,587	**100,759**
2015	18,078	12,049	38,565	3,395	19,286	**91,373**
2016	19,894	10,607	34,754	3,050	18,760	**87,065**
2017	19,204	8,482	31,577	2,099	16,200	**77,562**
Total	**316,177**	**150,722**	**550,125**	**48,207**	**296,089**	**1,361,320**

Figure 1: The pattern of total property crime cases in Malaysia from 2007 to 2017

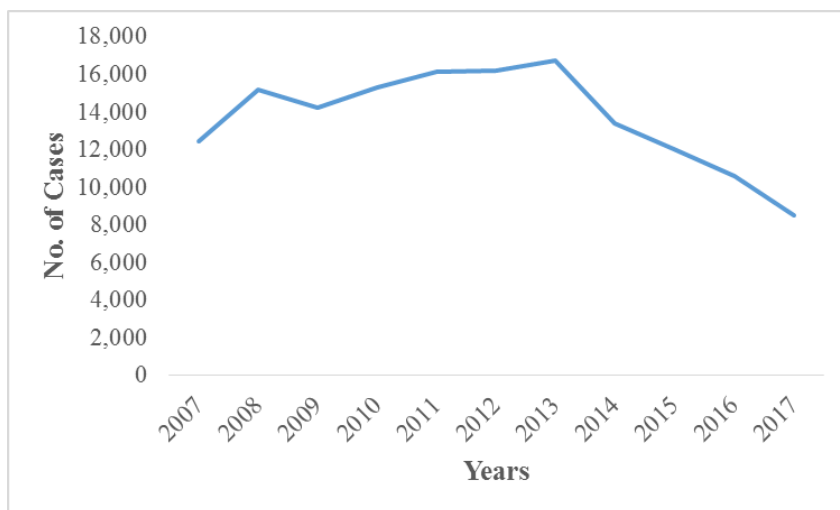**Figure 2**: The pattern of theft cases in Malaysia from 2007 to 2017

Figure 3: The pattern of car theft cases in Malaysia from 2007 to 2017
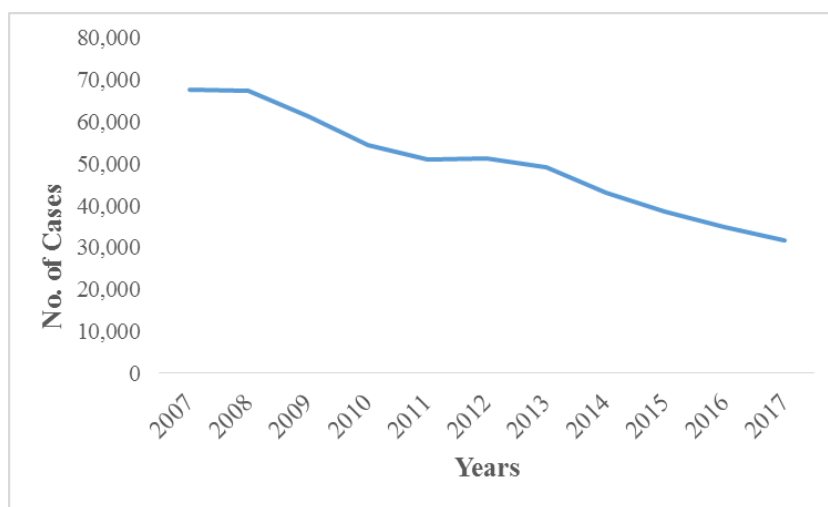
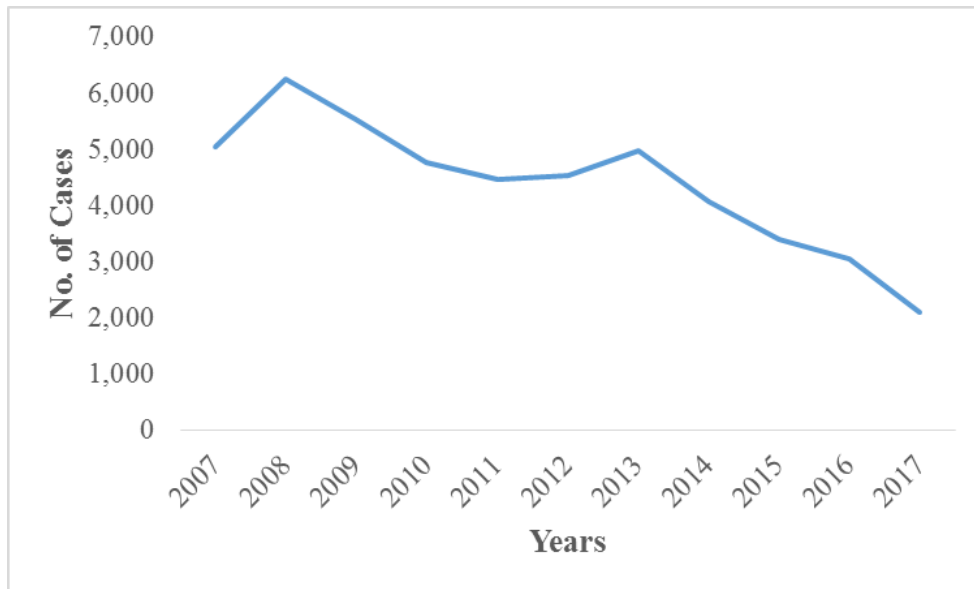**Figure 4:** The pattern of motorcycle theft cases in Malaysia from 2007 to 2017

Figure 5: The pattern of van/lorry/heavy machinery theft cases in Malaysia from 2007 to 2017
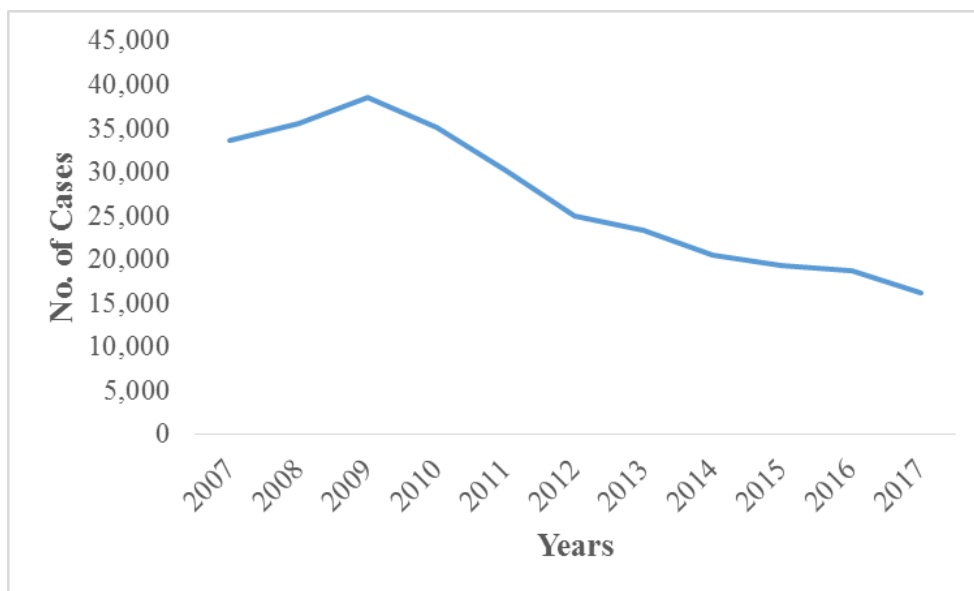

Figure 6: The pattern of housebreaking cases in Malaysia from 2007 to 2017

DISCUSSION

A total of 1,361,320 property crime cases were reported in these 11 years (Table 1). The property crimes are thus the most common (80.5%) index crimes compared with violent crimes cases (19.5%) reported in the same period in Malaysia (Hakim et al., 2019a; Jubit et al., 2020). A descriptive analysis shows that, the total property crime cases increased by 1.4% only in the year 2008 compared with 2007. In 2008, Asia and many other regions faced an economic downturn due to the global financial crisis (Keat, 2009; Lai & Ravenhill, 2012). This observation suggests that property crime rates may be driven by monetary returns (Soh, 2012; Ghani, 2017; Ishak & Mhd Bani, 2017). However, in general, the incidence of property crimes does continue to show a decreasing pattern from 2007 to 2017 and a similar trend was observed and reported for violent crime cases for the same 11-year period (Hakim et al., 2019a).

The downward trend of property crime in Malaysia is also derived from various social initiatives and proactive policies, which include the National Transformation Programme launched in 2010. In this program, seven National Key Results Areas (NKRAs) were identified following a series of dialogues, interviews and surveys with the public, focus groups, practitioners, academicians and experts. These NKRAs include improving student outcomes, increasing the living standard of a low-income families, improvements to basic infrastructure in the rural areas and to public transport in urban areas and reducing living costs, crime and corruption (PEMANDU, 2010; The Star Online, 2011). Accordingly, many crime prevention initiatives were launched such as increasing police presence, establishment of a new court for hearing of street crime cases and empowerment of community-oriented policing (e.g., *Rakan Cop*). The Safe Cities program led by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in 2004 for example was expanded to include 151 local authorities across the country following the introduction of Government Transformation Programme (Shamsudin, 2008; PEMANDU, 2010; Shamsudin et al., 2013). The Safe City program is delivered via several crime prevention initiatives including installation of close circuit television monitors (CCTVs), safety mirrors, motorcycle locking systems and the integration of geographic information system methods (GIS) into Police Reporting Systems located at each police station for crime mapping (Muhamad Ludin et al., 2013; Lim et al., 2020). These measures have undoubtedly helped to reduce crime rates in Malaysia. In particular, index and street crimes decreased by more than 11% and 45% in 2012, as compared with figures recorded in 2011 and 2009, respectively (Shamsudin et al., 2013).

We would note two main limitations of the property crime data reported here. The first limitation is that there may be many crimes that were not reported and thus not recorded in the Police Reporting System. For example, it was estimated that there were more than 10 million crime cases in England and Wales

in 1981, but less than 3 million cases were reported and included in the official police count (Jansson, 2008). The large number of unreported crime cases is due to the nature of the crimes committed (e.g., ones where there is no loss or damage to the property) and to negative perceptions of the criminal justice system (e.g., delay, ineffectiveness or with the assumption that the crime cannot, or will not, be solved by enforcement agencies or perhaps will not even be investigated). Therefore, several initiatives to improve the public perception of safety and performance of our criminal justice system are warranted. These include those listed in the Government Transformation Programme (e.g., to improve response time to emergency calls, increase the number of investigating officers and clear up the backlog of thousands of relatively minor criminal cases) should be delivered to increase the fraction of crime cases reported in Malaysia (PEMANDU, 2010, Hakim et al., 2019b, Hakim et al., 2020).

The second limitation is the accuracy of criminal case classification by the police. Currently, only those crime cases classified under the Malaysia Act Penal Code 574 are officially recorded and included in national crime statistics. Other crime cases classified as No Further Action (NFA), Refer to Magistrate (RTM), or No Offence Declared (NOD) were not included in these statistics, even when there is evidence of direct participation by criminal elements (Amar Singh, 2005).

CONCLUSION
This article provides novel data for five categories of property crime cases extracted from PRS for the years 2007 to 2017 and are divided into five indices (theft, car theft, motorcycle theft, van/lorry/heavy machinery theft and housebreaking). Overall, property crime cases in Malaysia declined continuously throughout this period falling from 163,317 cases in 2007 to only 77,562 in 2017.

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