

# Fear of Crimes among the People in the Southern Border of Thailand

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## Abstract

This research is part of the 2016 National Fear of Crime Survey, where the authors analyze the data specific to the areas in the responsibility of the Southern Border Provinces Police Operation Center with a focus on two objectives, including (1) to study the level of fear for crimes among the people in the area and (2) to study the factors associated with such level of fear. The data are collected from 400 samples comprising people in the Southern border provinces during the month of January 2017 by way of questionnaire. The statistical analysis addresses the frequency, the percentage, the mean, the standard deviation, and Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis, with the 5-percent significance level. The results show that overall the people's level of fear for crimes is moderate (average 4.51 out of 10). Above all, the fear for future crimes (in the year 2017) appears greater than the past year (the year 2016) by about 4.74 percent. The level of fear is correlated with gender, religion, marital status, area of residence, occupation, income, physical and mental strengths, social network in the neighborhood, disorder in the neighborhood, awareness of risks of facing crimes, and experience of crimes among the residents in the area.

**Keywords:** Fear of Crimes, Terrorism, Southern Border Provinces

## Introduction

Research on fear of crimes continues to be an area of great interests among academics in criminology worldwide, starting from its early appearance in the U.S. publications aiming to explain the public reaction to crimes and to represent the people's anxiety with regards to the urban chaos during the 1930s (Bačanović & Jovanova, 2012: 479). Thanks to the suggestion made in the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967 cited in Warr, 2000: 452) that "the most damaging of the effects of violent crimes is fear, and that fear must not be belittled", the criminological studies have expanded from merely focusing on the direct victims of crimes to also those indirect victims, or in other words, those who fear of them.

The development in related research among the European academia was not of the same level of intensity as in the U.S., as research in this area was virtually unknown prior to the 1960s, but the study on fear of crimes has gained prominence since the late 1960s (Lee, 1999: 227) among both criminologists and other social scientists (Lee, 2001: 467) and even gone as far as suggesting that fear of crimes may pose a problem in conducting daily lives (Ackah, 2000: 555) and may pose a bigger problem than the crimes themselves (Ewald, 2000; Beckett & Sasson, 2004).

The Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, University of Maribor, Slovenia, affirms the importance of the issue in the late 2010s and the early 2020s (Meško & Fields, 2012: 381) by publishing the special issue of the Journal of Criminal Justice and Security in the topic of

“Fear of Crime in the Capitals of South Eastern Europe” in 2012. This marks another development of indicators for fear of crimes, which earlier began with the use of “average risk” (Newburn, 2013: 365-366), an indicator later considered inappropriate (Burruss, Schafer & Giblin, 2010: 5) at least by four invited editors because it was unclear, particularly when it comes to the cross-cultural measurement (Meško, Kury, Bren & Vošnjak, 2012: 386). For Thailand, the survey shows that more than a decade earlier as many as 77.7 percent of people in Bangkok feel unsafe from crimes while outside their home (Hemarajata, 1983: 425), which leads to a later suggestion that crimes present the most urgent problem that should be solved before other problems (Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 1993: 101). The matter has been included in the Royal Thai Police’s 2012-2021 strategies (Royal Thai Police Strategy Office, 2014: 4-5), and considered as part of the crime prevention and suppression policies in 2014 that at the top priority “importance should be given to the control and the reduction of severity in crimes by which the people feel their life and properties are threatened, and emphasis given to cases involving properties in the public realm which sparks fear of crimes felt by the people”. (Royal Thai Police Strategy Office, 2014: 10).

However, the efforts to explain people’s feelings in this matter have been few, such as the Division of Research and Development, Royal Thai Police (1996), and Chummanikul (2000), and Neesang (2005). The Faculty of Social Administration at Thammasat University and the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at Mahidol University are the pioneer institutions in such matter, with the greatest interest being paid to the group believed to be most sensitive or to require special care, such as women (Bubpachat, 1996; Rouchanukul, 2009), business operators (Pethploynil, 2003), residents of slums (Wattanasin, 2003), tourists (Amornmunepong, 2005), and elderlies (Sammastian, 2009). The College of Government of Rangsit University has added to the effort and filled in the gap of knowledge by expanding the knowledge base to also address the feelings of university students (Jermsittiparsert & Akahat, 2016) as well as the members of surrounding communities (Jermsittiparsert, Trimek & Vivatthanaporn, 2015). It has also conducted a national survey with its own budget along with the 2016 Crime Victimization Surveys, for which the College serves as the consultant and which are funded by the Office of Justice Affairs, Ministry of Justice of Thailand.

This research is part of the 2016 National Fear of Crime Survey, from which the authors take the data collected from the areas under the responsibility of the Southern Border Provinces Police Operation Center, including the provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, and some districts of Songkhla, namely, the districts of Sabayoi, Natawee, Taypa, and Jana. The analysis is defined by two objectives. First, the data are analyzed to examine the level of fear of crimes among the people in the Southern border provinces in the past year (2016) and in the near future (2017). Second, the data are analyzed to examine the factors that are related with such levels of fear.

## **Research Methodology**

**Population and sample:** The population of this research includes the people residing in the areas under the responsibility of the Southern Border Provinces Police Operation Center. The sample size is determined under the assumption that the population size is unknown, the confidence level at the 95-percent level, and the sampling error at the 5-percent level. With Cochran’s formula (1977), the resulting sample size is 400 samples. The 400 individuals are systematically sampled by first choosing two out of the four Southern border provinces, choosing two districts from each of the two provinces selected, and choosing two local administrative areas from each district. Out of the two local administrative areas chosen from each district, one must be a city or town municipality, and the other must be a sub-district municipality or a sub-district administrative organization. From each of these local

administrative areas, one village is chosen. In total, eight villages are chosen, and from each village, 50 samples are selected.

**Data collection:** The authors collect data during the month of January 2017, using a questionnaire developed by the authors themselves based upon related ideas, theories, and research. The questionnaire is divided into two sections. The first section addresses personal factors, such as gender, age, religion, marital status, area of residence, occupation, income, physical and mental strengths, social network in the neighborhood, disorder in the neighborhood, awareness of risks in facing crimes, and experiences involving crimes. The second section addresses fear of crimes, which breaks down into the period spanning over the year 2016 (1 January-31 December 2016) and the period spanning over the year 2017 (1 January-31 December 2017). The reliability of each item is established by testing the internal consistency. The Pearson product moment correlation coefficient finds that the reliability is equal to 0.90.

**Data analysis:** The authors conduct such statistical analyses as finding the frequencies, the percentages, the means, the standard deviations, and Pearson's correlation coefficients, with the statistical significance set at the 0.05 level and the correlation coefficients interpreted according to the Hinkle, William, and Stephen's criteria (1998).

## Research Results

**Personal factor:** The sample contains mostly females (65 percent). The average age of the sample is 44. Most individuals in the sample cite Islam as their faith (67 percent). They are mostly married (79.2 percent). Thirty-eight percent of the sample cites farming and agriculture as their occupation. Their income is approximately 6,763 baht per month. The samples are also equally split between urban and rural residents. Physical and mental strengths are reported to be at a high level (average 7.16 out of 10). The social networking in the neighborhood is reported to be at a moderate level (average 6.07 out of 10). The disorders in the neighborhood, the awareness of risks of facing crimes, and the experiences involving crimes are reported at a low level (average 3.53 out of 10).

**Fear of crimes among the people in the Southern border provinces:** The people in the Southern border provinces of Thailand moderately fear of crimes, rating the fear at 4.51 out of 10 on average. The fear of crimes for the year of 2017 (average 4.61 out of 10) exceeds the fear of crimes for the year 2016 (average 4.40 out of 10) by about 4.74 percent, as the upward trend can be observed for all types of fear. The most interesting changes are fear for terrorism, which moves from the seventh greatest fear to the top fear, and computer-related crimes, which moves from the ninth greatest fear to the fourth, with the levels of each of these fears increasing by 12.35 percent and 10.80 percent respectively. Even though the levels of fear for crimes that may be life-threatening or may cause bodily harms increase somewhat, such as fear of physical assault (increasing by 4.14 percent) and fear of homicide (increasing by 7.13 percent), they remain the crimes that people in the areas relatively fear the least.

**Table 1** Fear of crimes among the people in the Southern border provinces of Thailand

Fear of crimes	2016		2017		Change
	Mean	Ranking	Mean	Ranking	
Physical assault	4.11	10	4.28	11	+ 4.14%
Homicide	4.07	11	4.36	10	+ 7.13%
Theft or robbery	4.28	8	4.50	9	+ 5.14%
Home robbery	4.50	4	4.52	8	+ 0.44%
Home invasion when not home	4.49	5	4.69	5	+ 4.45%

**Table 1 (Con.)**

Fear of crimes	2016		2017		Change
	Mean	Ranking	Mean	Ranking	
Rape or sexual assault	4.48	6	4.54	7	+ 1.13%
While leaving home at night	4.64	1	4.65	6	+ 0.22%
Property fraud or embezzlement	4.64	1	4.78	2	+ 3.02%
Bribery by government officials	4.60	3	4.73	3	+ 2.83%
Computer-related crime	4.26	9	4.72	4	+ 10.80%
Terrorism	4.29	7	4.82	1	+ 12.35%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.40</b>		<b>4.61</b>		<b>+ 4.74%</b>

The analysis for the factors most highly related to the fear of crimes among the people in the Southern provinces of Thailand is done by the analysis of Pearson's correlation coefficients between the fear of crimes and the twelve personal factors. It is found that the fear of crimes is correlated with nearly all factors, except only for age. The awareness of crime risks with the coefficient equal to 0.613, the disorders in the neighborhood with the coefficient equal to 0.377, and the physical and mental strengths with the coefficient equal to -0.349 respectively are the three factors most strongly correlated with fear of crimes

**Table 2** Factors related to fear of crimes among the people in the Southern border provinces

	Pearson's correlation coefficient with fear of crimes	p-value	Correlation level
Gender	- 0.121*	.016	Very low
Age	- 0.084	.095	Very low
Religion	- 0.347**	.000	Low
Marital status	- 0.145**	.004	Very low
Residential area	0.245**	.000	Very low
Occupation	- 0.182**	.000	Very low
Income	0.160**	.001	Very low
Physical and mental strengths	- 0.349**	.000	Low
Social network in neighborhood	- 0.107*	.033	Very low
Disorders in neighborhood	0.377**	.000	Low
Awareness of risks of facing crimes	0.613**	.000	Moderate
Experience of crimes	0.246**	.000	Very low

Remarks: \* means p-value  $\leq .05$ ; \*\* means p-value  $\leq .01$ .

## Conclusion and Discussion

Even though the unrest in Thailand's Southern border provinces, especially since 4 January 2004, has been broadcast in many media channels (Puengnet, 2015; Komchadluek, 2017) and its increasing severity has led the Royal Thai Police to issue the order number 590/2547 dated 10 September 2004 in order to establish the Royal Thai Police Frontline Office at the Provincial Police Region 9's Training Center in the Yala province, aiming to resolve the problems as quickly as possible, five years from then the area produced one of the largest numbers of casualties in the world, third only to Iraq and Afghanistan (Jensantikul, 2013: 83). Effective on 6 February 2009, the government has subsequently upgraded the aforementioned Royal Police Frontline Office to the Southern Border Provinces Police Operation Center and established a departmental command center within the Southern Border Provinces Police Operation Center, respectively citing the Royal Decree on the Royal Thai Police's

Administrative Structure (Second edition), B.E. 2551 (2008) and the Ministerial regulation to establish divisions or otherwise-called departments in the Royal Thai Police (Third edition), B.E. 2551 (2008) (Southern Border Provinces Police Operation Center, 2016). In addition, some of areas have been declared “an area where incidents taking place impact the kingdom’s internal stability”.

Interestingly, the results of this research show that the fear of crimes among the people in the area is only at the moderate level, and the awareness of crime risks as well as the experiences of crimes only at the low level. Despite the news regarding the terrorist incident that once again takes place covering 18 districts in all four Southern border provinces (Issara news’ Southern Office, 2017) in 2016, the people in the area express their fear of terrorist crimes at a low level. This contrast may be a preliminary piece of information for the parties involved to rethink whether or not the feelings among people in the capital that the severity of what the media call “crisis” is high, “full of danger, and devoid of safety” and that it is “not in the government’s power to be able to protect the people” (Bilmanoch, 2010: 27) is consistent with what actually happens or, at least, consistent with the feelings among the people in the affected area.

When considering the factors that are related to fear of crimes, in this case primarily it is still found that gender is the best predictor of fear of crimes (Chockalingam & Srinivasan, 2009). This is consistent with Wattanasin (2003), Callanan & Teasdale (2009), May, Rader & Goodrum (2010), Meško, Šifrer & Vošnjak (2012), and many research in the past. However, these work tend to also show that the level of fear of crimes is higher among females than males (Mesch, 2000; Pantazis, 2000; Chadee, Austen & Ditton, 2007) by two to three times (Hilinski, 2009: 84-85; Özascilar, 2013: 269; Newburn, 2013: 366) although the level of fear of crimes among females tend to be higher than the chance that they would actually fall victim to those crimes (Chui, Cheng & Wong, 2013: 481). It must be asserted here, however, that in the case of Thailand, similarly to a previous study by Jermsittiparsert, Trimek & Vivatthanaporn (2015) and Jermsittiparsert & Akahat (2016), males (average 4.96 out of 10) turn out to have a higher level of fear of crimes than do females (average 4.27 out of 10).

Even though the finding of this research that age is not correlated with fear of crimes is consistent with Renauer (2007) and Poonyarith, Kanyajit, Sokantat, Nakpong & Unmareng (2017), it is not consistent with Ackah (2000), Kury, Obergfell-Fuchs & Ferdinand (2001), Chockalingam & Srinivasan (2009), and Jermsittiparsert & Akahat (2016). Moreover, this research also finds that the religious difference exists in the areas of interest, and that religion is a factor that is related to fear of crimes, consistent with Boyle & Haire (1996, cited in O’Mahony & Quinn, 1999: 233). It is clear that the Buddhist people in Thailand’s Southern border provinces in particular are more fearful of crimes (average 5.87 out of 10) than the Islamic people (average 3.86 out of 10), partly because in recent times there are many indications that Thai Buddhists and Buddhist communities may increasingly become threatened and become the target of the attacks (Jitpiromsri, 2006).

In addition, the marital status (consistent with Jermsittiparsert & Akahat (2016)), the residential area (consistent with O’Mahony & Quinn (1999), Miceli, Roccato & Rosato (2004), Chockalingam & Srinivasan (2009), occupation (consistent with Raksatham, Chotchakornpant & Sahapattan (2016), Poonyarith, Kanyajit, Sokantat, Nakpong & Unmareng (2017)), and income (consistent with Kury, Obergfell-Fuchs & Ferdinand (2001) but inconsistent with Jermsittiparsert & Akahat (2016)) are also factors related to fear of crimes. Above all, it appears from the survey that students and university students (average 5.79 out of 10) are the occupational groups that express the highest level of fear of crimes. This is consistent with an undeniable fact that schools have become important targets of unrests in the areas of interest (Human Rights Watch, 2010; Komchandluek, 2015).

The data analysis also confirms that fear of crimes is inversely correlated with people's physical and mental strengths (consistent with McKee & Milner (2000)) and to social network in the neighborhood (consistent with Ferguson & Mindel (2007) and Meško, Vošnjak, Muratbegović, Budimlić, Bren & Kury (2012)). The fear of crimes is also positively correlated with the disorders in the neighborhood (consistent with McCrea, Shyy, Western & Stimson (2005)), the awareness of crime risks (consistent with Smith, Tostensson & Johansson (2001), Wattanasin (2003), May, Rader & Goodrum (2010), Özascilar (2013), and Jermstittiparsert & Akahat (2016)), and the experiences of crimes, whether the experiences are derived from the exposure to the media, from relatives and/or close friends being victims of crimes, or from being the victims themselves (consistent with Wattanasin (2003), Tseloni & Zarafonitou (2008), May, Rader & Goodrum (2010), and Jermstittiparsert, Trimek & Vivatthanaporn (2015)). In this connection, giving priorities to strengthening the social networks and reducing the disorders in the areas may imply that the conditions of fear of crimes among the people in the area would be reduced as well.

## Recommendations

Under the hypothesis that while keeping people "safe" is the most important objective of the government, making people "feel safe" is also equally important, and to undertake this responsibility, the police appears to be most suitable (Cordner, 2010: ix). The Royal Thai Police, therefore, should have clear operating procedures with regards to systematically improving their understandings of fear of crimes among the people in the area. To coincide with the making of four-year administrative plans, the regular conduct of the National Fear of Crime Survey every four years should be considered, so that the information could be used to determine more clearly the objectives of each section of the police force in relation to crime protection and suppression, especially in case of the Southern border provinces of Thailand.

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