

Crime Reduction through Building Social Capital: A Fundamental Strategy

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to highlight the helpful ways forward for urban areas in seeking to tackle issues of crime and violence. This study assesses social capital as a fundamental strategy in crime reduction in urban areas of Shiraz, Iran. Data were collected using survey questionnaire. Results indicate that although there is strong cooperation and social cohesion for crime reduction, but the urban areas still face challenges and constraints which hinder their contributions in crime reduction. There are many social causes of crime and the police regularly work in collaboration with crime problems. However, social conditions such as availability of youth programs, educational opportunities, the state of the economy, employment opportunities, particularly youth jobs are some of the factors that have positive impact on crime reduction rates. But the findings of this study show a fundamental strategy for crime reduction through building social capital. Hence, it is expected that the findings of this study could be utilized by the judicial and social leaders for their future follow-up and reassessment of building social capital for crime and violence reduction.

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1. Introduction

Global trends indicate that crime rates have been on the increase. For instance, over the period of 1980 to 2000, total recorded crimes increased from 2300 to 3000 crimes for every 100,000 people. This trend is, however, not replicated in all regions of the world. Crime and violence are typically more severe in urban areas and are compounded by their rapid growth. A recent study has shown that 60 per cent of urban areas in developing countries have been victims of crime over a five-year period, with victimization rates reaching 70 per cent in parts of Latin American Countries and Africa (UN-Habitat, 2007).

Crime and the fear it generates are among the most important determinants of individual welfare and of the expected returns to many economic activities. It is both intuitive and confirmed by recent theoretical literature that individual choices of crime participation may be significantly affected by the presence of civic norms and associational networks (Buonanno, Montolio & Vanin 2009). Cultures of fear of crime and violence are widespread in both developed and developing countries (UN-Habitat, 2007).

The question is: How the urban area can offer a viable solution for crime and violence reduction? My answer to this question is building social capital. This answer is supported by the literature and research evidence from the fields of community development (Aref, 2011), health (Chervin et al., 2005; George et al., 2007) and Education (Smyth,

2009). In such a situation, building social capital denotes empowering local people to reduce crime and violence in urban and rural areas. Hence, this paper attempted to outline the concept and level, of social capital and its limitation towards crime reduction in Shiraz, Iran.

2. Literature Review

Since the early 1990s, economists have collected more and more empirical evidence on the social determinants of criminal behavior. The crime effects of neighborhood, family, peers, and networks have been widely studied by, among others, Case and Katz (1991), Glaeser, Sacerdote, and Scheinkman (1996), Ludwig, Duncan, and Hirschfield (2001), Kling, Ludwig, and Katz (2005), and Calvo-Armengol, Patacchini, and Zenou (2005). (Buonanno, Montolio & Vanin 2009).

Crime is a social phenomenon. It can be reduced through building social capital. However, there is scant literature on social capital for crime reduction. Empirical works on social capital, most of which are based on the experiences of Western societies, indicate that communities endowed with a diverse of social capital will achieve superior outcomes in multiple spheres such as, crime reduction and violence while, communities with a low level of social capital tend to have a poor performance in these spheres. Overall, crime can be reducing by investing in social capital.

This research is guided mainly by the theoretical framework of social capital theory, and

also, by empirical studies from previous work. This research contributes to providing a basis for measuring the social capital influences community's participation in crime reduction.

Empirical work on crime and on social capital is typically affected by several methodological problems, the main of which are, besides omitted variables, measurement errors, endogeneity, and spatial correlation. Measured crime rates crucially depend on report rates, which not only vary significantly across crimes and space but, most important, appear to be positively related to social capital (Buonanno, Montolio & Vanin 2009).

To date some researchers agree that the forces of social capital influence important political and social phenomena (Aref, 2011; Putnam, 1993; Putnam, 2000; Strzelecka & Wicks, 2010). Perceiving social capital holistically as a resource for individuals, communities and regions, exposes complex community processes. This is because networks of relationships often have the potential to accelerate democratizing processes and local democratic cultures within their members (Strzelecka & Wicks, 2010).

2.1. Strategies aimed at reducing crime factors

The main elements in strategies designed to achieve the reduction of crime factors are measures to tackle violence against women, programmes to prevent youths, particularly young males, from slipping into a life of crime, as well as strengthening of social capital. This includes improving the ability of people, groups and communities as a whole to challenge the problems of crime and violence and the provision of community facilities that facilitate or provide more opportunities for processes of this nature. Elements of approaches to the strengthening of social capital can be found in many of other policy responses since this seems to be a very common factor in crime prevention programmes that combine several of these approaches (UN-Habitat, 2007).

Strengthening of social capital is not only about improving the ability of groups and communities to respond positively to problems of crime and violence, but is also about the creation of community assets that assist with these processes. Efforts to improve social capital relates to what the city offers its residents in terms of education, employment, sporting and cultural activities. All of these are likely to be helpful in tackling crime and violence because they improve opportunities to participate positively in the life of the city, and offer positive lifestyle alternatives to individuals (UN-Habitat, 2007).

2.2. Effects of social capital on crime

Social capital² is a concept that tries to capture the essence of community life. The concept is based on the idea that communities work well or poorly based on the ways in which people interact. It emphasizes the social dimension of life and how it is lived in specific places (Mignone, 2003). Social capital is a conceptual extension of human capital, which is itself an abstract notion of physical and financial capital (Smith et al. 1992, p.77). Regardless of the context, this concept has been used productively in many areas of research. Woolcock (2001) had counted at least seven fields that had employed the concept of social capital: families and youth, schools and education, community life, work and organizations, democracy and governance, problems related to collective action, and economic development. Today, physical and mental health, immigration, and public protection could be added to that list (Franke, 2005, Domingues & Gonçalves 2012).

Several theories, developed by sociologists and criminologists, imply a negative effect of social capital on crime (Buonanno, Montolio & Vanin 2009). However, very few empirical studies also investigate directly the link between social capital and crime. Among them, most attention has been devoted to violent rather than property crime, as in Rosenfeld, Messner, and Baumer (2001), Lederman, Loayza, and Mene'ndez (2002), and Messner, Baumer, and Rosenfeld (2004). Chamlin and Cochran (1997) and Heaton (2006) consider the effects on property and violent crime of social altruism, proxied by charitable donations, and religious participation, respectively. (Buonanno, Montolio & Vanin 2009).

Hence, this paper attempted to outline the concept and level of social capital towards crime reduction in Shiraz, Iran. However, up to now there is a little literature on the effects of social capital on crime reduction in Iran.

2.3. Measures of Social Capital for crime reduction

The most complex and debatable issue is how to measure social capital, given its multidimensional and multifaceted nature. Putnam (2000) argues that the more general forms of social capital are trust and social participation. In particular, he subdivides social participation into political participation, civic participation, religious participation, altruism, and volunteering (Buonanno, Montolio & Vanin 2009). The common dimension of it usually is seen from the point of view of sources, scope of activity and degree of implementation. Dimension from sources of social capital including (1) civic social capital and (2) governmental (institutional social capital). From

scope or area of activity, social capital can be divided into (1) bonding social capital, (2) bridging social capital and (3) linking social capital. While using the degree of implementation in society, it encompasses (1) structural social capital and (2) cognitive social capital.

Social capital can be divided into levels: individual level and group level. At the level of individual social capital, we can explore interpersonal relationships, that is, ties between individuals, or social participation, the ties between individuals and groups or organizations. At the level of collective social capital, we can explore the associative dynamic by focusing on the intra organizational ties as well as ties that exist among groups and organizations, within a community and beyond a community (Franke, 2005). In order to account for this multidimensionality, and based on previous study the below domains of social capital have been chosen and measured for this case study.

Social networks: Understanding the groups and networks that enable people to access resources and collaborate to achieve shared goals is an important part of the concept of social capital. Informal networks are manifested in spontaneous, informal, and unregulated exchanges of information and resources within communities, as well as efforts at cooperation, coordination, and mutual assistance that help maximize the utilization of available resources. (Dudwick, Kuehnast, Jones, & Woolcock, 2006).

Social trust: This dimension of social capital refers to the extent to which people feel they can rely on relatives, neighbors, colleagues, acquaintances, key service providers, and even strangers, either to assist them or do them no harm. Adequately defining

“trust” in a given social context is a prerequisite for understanding the complexities of human relationships. Sometimes trust is a choice; in other cases, it reflects a necessary dependency based on established contacts or familiar networks for solve the community problems (Dudwick et al., 2006).

Cooperation: Cooperation is closely related to the dimension of trust and solidarity (Mohd & Rosli 2012, Galluzzo, 2012), however, the former dimension explores in greater depth whether and how people work with others in their community on joint projects and/or in response to a problem or crisis. It also considers the consequences of violating community expectations regarding participation norms (Dudwick et al., 2006).

Social Cohesion: It focuses more specifically on the tenacity of social bonds and their dual potential to include or exclude members of community. Cohesion can be demonstrated through community events or through activities that increase solidarity, strengthen social cohesion, improve communication, for coordinated activities, promote civic-mindedness and altruistic behavior, and develop a sense of collective consciousness (Dudwick et al., 2006).

Empowerment: Individuals are empowered to the extent that they have a measure of control over the institutions and processes that directly affect their well-being. The social capital dimension of empowerment explores the sense of satisfaction, personal efficacy, and capacity of network and group members to influence both local events and broader political outcomes (Dudwick et al., 2006).

3. Analytical Framework

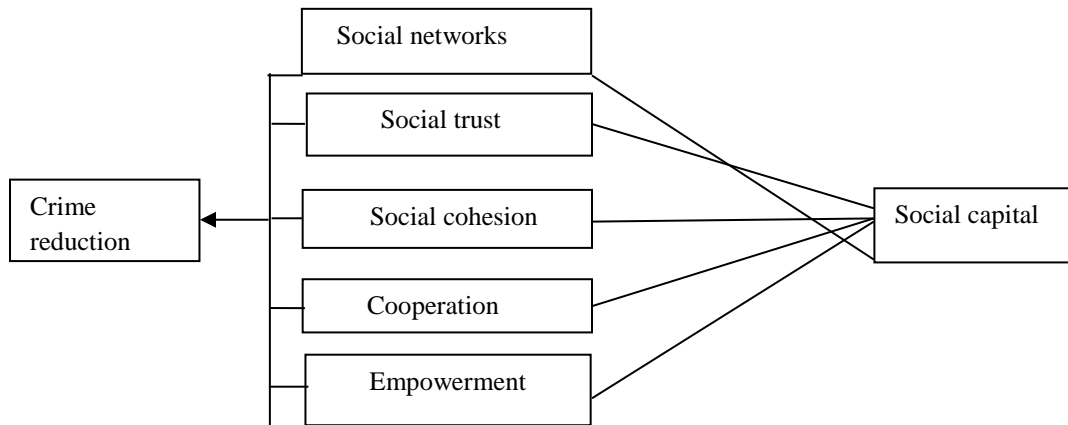


Figure 1. Analytical framework.

4. The Study Area

This study was carried out in urban areas of Shiraz, Shiraz is one of the cities and also the capital of Fars province. Shiraz is the economic center of southern Iran. As of 2006, Shiraz has a population of 1,227,331, the majority of whom are Persian. Most of

the population of Shiraz is Muslims (Wikipedia 2012).

Shiraz is the most safety city in Iran. However the crime rate has been increased in the past 3 years (Numbeo 2012). According to Numbeo (2012) crime rates in Shiraz, Iran is indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Crime rates in Shiraz, Iran.

Crime rates	Percent
Level of crime	62.50
Crime increasing in the past 3 years	91.67
Worries home broken and things stolen	66.67
Worries being mugged or robbed	75.00
Worries car stolen	58.33
Worries things from car stolen	70.83
Worries attacked	79.17
Worries being insulted	70.83
Worries being subject to a physical attack because of your skin color, ethnic origin or religion	20.83
Problem people using or dealing drugs	54.17
Problem property crimes such as vandalism and theft	58.33
Problem violent crimes such as assault and armed robbery	50.00
Problem corruption and bribery	95.00

Source: (Numbeo 2012).

5. Research Methods

This study was carried out in Shiraz, during the period October and November 2012. This study is based on quantitative method to investigate the level of social capital in crime reduction. The study used survey design, where a questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was structured around a Likert scale. The respondents answered each statement based on five scales. The value of each response for these items on the questionnaire is as follows: 0 = Never, 1 = Seldom, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often and 4 = Always.

The respondents were 375 urban residences, where each citizen was chosen based on cluster sampling. The populations of this research were, above 18 years of age, who live in Shiraz. The respondents were asked to answer these questions which were constructed to gauge their level of social capital for crime reduction.

The questionnaire was piloted tested to have its contents validated. Statements for level of social capital were tested for their validity using Cronbach's alpha. Descriptive analysis was employed to determine the level of social capital for crime reduction in Shiraz, Iran

6. Results

This study to determine the importance of social capital for crime reduction used descriptive statistics. Table 2 reveals the mean score of five domains of the social capital including: cooperation, network, social trust, social cohesion and empowerment. Table 2 reveals the findings of the analysis, which show the differences between dimensions of social capital in crime reduction (max=4, min =0). Using the mean of the total score as a standard indicator, it was found that generally social capital domains in cooperation and social cohesion was high whereas the level of social trust, network, and empowerment were low.

Table 2. Total scores of social capital for crime reduction

Domains	Mean	Standard deviation
Cooperation	2.77	0.82
Social network	1.48	0.67
Social trust	0.90	0.88
Social cohesion	2.89	0.92
Empowerment	0.70	0.80

Table 2 showed the differences in the domains of social capital for crime reduction. Using the mean it was found that the level trust and empowerment for crime reduction is lower than domains (0.90, and 0.70 respectively). Levels of social capital in cooperation, social network, and social cohesion have a more scores as compared to social trust and empowerment (2.77, 1.48, and 2.89 respectively). It shows urban residence do not have enough trust with each other and also with the local government and have not been empowered to influence policies and expand their opportunities in crime reduction.

Generally, the findings reveal that the level of building social capital for crime reduction in urban areas of Shiraz is low. This means that most people are not involved in the process of crime reduction. For the residence to be effective in crime reduction they should come together and interact with local police and other authorities. Local residence should be more involved in community actions and influence decision-making processes that affect their lives, and their communities.

7. Conclusion

This study promises to make a significant contribution to the study of social capital in crime reduction in urban areas of Shiraz, Iran. From the investigation, it can be concluded that, there is a low level of building social capital for crime reduction in urban areas of Shiraz. The findings of this study showed that the level of social capital for crime reduction in low, except for domains of cooperation and social cohesion.

The findings from this study are especially valuable for establishing some conceptual and empirical baselines for subsequent studies of social capital in crime reduction in Iran. This finding will assist judicial and social leaders in understanding the barriers of building social capital in crime reduction in Iran. Since social capital has impacts upon the way how community policies are implemented in each community, the central government could design relevant policies to cultivate the social capital that has positive effects on crime policies.

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