

# The role of community participation in promoting social security from viewpoint of people in Kermanshah, Iran

Seyed Ramin Ghasemi<sup>1</sup>, Soheyla Reshadat<sup>2</sup>, Noorallah Moradi<sup>3</sup>, Mansour Rezaei<sup>4</sup>, Nader Rajabi Gilan<sup>5</sup>, Vajiheh Armanmehr<sup>6</sup>

*Journal of Research & Health*  
Social Development & Health Promotion  
Research Center  
Vol. 4, No.2, Summer 2014  
Pages: 657-665  
Original Article

1. MSc in Social Welfare, Social Development & Health Promotion Research Center, Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran

2. Assistant Professor of pediatrics, Social Development & Health Promotion Research Center, Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran

3. **Correspondence to:** MSc in Social Welfare, Social Development & Health Promotion Research Center, Gonabad University of Medical Sciences, Gonabad, Iran

Tel/Fax: +98 533 7229025

Email: norallah.moradi@gmail.com

4. PhD in Biostatistics, Assistant Professor of Biostatistics, Social Development & Health Promotion Research Center, Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran

5. MSc in Social Research, Social Development & Health Promotion Research Center, Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran

6. MSc in Sociology, Social Development & Health Promotion Research Center, Gonabad University of Medical Sciences, Gonabad, Iran

Received: 18 Dec 2012

Accepted: 20 Jul 2013

How to cite this article: Ghasemi SR, Reshadat S, Moradi N, Rezaei M, Rajabi Gilan N, Armanmehr V. The role of community participation in promoting social security from viewpoint of people in Kermanshah, Iran. *J Research Health*2014; 4(2): 657-665.

## Abstract

Security has always been one of the most fundamental human needs. Also people's participation is an important factor in providing sustainable security. This study was designed with the aim of determining the role of people's participation in social security promotion. The local residents had already expressed their concerns about the lack of security in the area through completing a prior 5-year continuous needs assessment (2006 to 2010) and through a voluntary structure participated in promoting neighborhood security. Data were collected using a 40-item researcher-made questionnaire and were analyzed in SPSS-16. The mean age of the participants was 41.86, and 57% were women. The community participation in some instances such as; "reporting thugs and drug dealers to police" with 32.2%, "removing trespassers in the area" with 32.9%, "fixing the lighting of the streets" with 34% were highly effective in their opinion. However the participation in areas such as; "reducing crime and offenses" with 35.8%, and "reducing unemployment and poverty" with 44.1% met with little impact, and in regard to "promoting local security" with 45.4% of the total votes was listed as an average effect. The Study indicate that people view their participatory activities in the area of security with 60% as influential. Therefore, it can be concluded that people's power and capabilities in promoting local security can help the authorities, especially if the people's needs in these matters are assessed and prioritized.

**Keywords:** Social Security, Participation, Viewpoint

## Introduction

Security has always been one of the most fundamental human needs, and its provision is considered as one of the major ongoing concerns of the authorities in any society, since ensuring and sustainability of life can only be achieved under the sense of security. The importance

of security is as such that in Islam security provision is even set to be of higher value than justice and according to the Holy Quran, verse 55 of "Al-nour" (The Light) surah: "One of the objectives of the rule of God and substituted "al-salehin" (righteous) and outline of Imamah has been the introduced as

the implementation of security”[1]. The social security is also an important dimension of security and one of the essential human needs, and it had been a remarkable phenomenon from the beginning of social life [2]. Security means elimination of danger, but “social security” is a concept that has not been defined in sociology and the scope of its definition is mixed with the concepts such as social order and social unity, to a point that some people believed that social security is the same as the social order or social unity. The financial, life, job, emotional, and moral securities could be considered as social security dimensions [3]. Also, social security may mean that governments alone could not be the sole provider of security but people also must assume responsibility in providing their own security [4]. Governments, people, and society are considered as the reference of providing security from different aspects[5], but in the meantime, the focus has been on the government and the role of its sovereignty. Yet today, other non-direct governmental mechanisms have been emphasized in providing security by the society itself as the security reference [6]. In fact, the experts believe that people cannot ignore their sense of responsibility toward ensuring security when their livelihood is threatened with danger and transfer such responsibilities to government alone [7].

Urban life has created numerous life and financial dangers and has exposed people’s lives to harm in terms of life, finances, job, emotions, ethics and psychoaffective issues. Although police has been the pivotal institution in providing security and calm in the society, this institution needs more “social capital” to be more effective, and one of the elements in providing this additional social capital is the creation of trust and increasing public participation [8] because security in the cities will provide peace and tranquility for its residence and allow their life to take its natural course [9]. People’s participation can be considered as society’s involvement in various projects in order to solve their problems [10]. Today, it is recognized that without people’s

participation and cooperation in their own affairs, it would be difficult for the authorities to succeed. In fact, the use of participatory development processes based on optimized participation of local people as social capital is necessary [11]. "Participation is a tool for increasing the opportunity of public participation in the decision-making process so that they can benefit from their activities." [12] This cooperation enhances project credibility and makes people's assistance in the process promote quality of implementation, continuity, and stability of projects [13]. Based on the related social security issues at the community level, benefits can be realized from issues such as potential public participation in reducing security problems, because security can be established more quickly and last longer by social participation. In many countries, the local and nongovernmental authorities play an important role in providing security services [14]. For example, in many African countries where the government has failed in providing total security, people themselves have attempted to establish their own security, for instance they have created groups for the protection of motorcycles used for transporting goods and passengers or protection of farms against the nightly raids [15]. There are not many available studies in regard to providing and improving the social security at the community level. In a study on the role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in providing the social security in Tehran, the importance of participation of NGOs in providing security has been emphasized [2]. The results of an opinion poll conducted in 2001 in the city of Kermanshah showed that 86% of the total respondents somehow did not feel secure. The results from the study also indicated that the sense of security in Kermanshah residents was less than average level [16]. The results of another survey conducted in 2007 in the public “Abadani and Maskan” neighborhood of Kermanshah showed that issues such as poverty and unemployment, violence, and traffic problems, lighting system problems

at night, etc. are among issues related to the security which are identified by the people and require appropriate actions in order to alleviate their concerns [17]. In Kermanshah's Abadani and Maskan neighborhood consist of 21,000 households with a low to average socioeconomic level, public participation was formed in a semi-organized and completely voluntary manner in 2006. People themselves took measures to identify their problems including issues related to local social security and the required follow ups in order to solve them. This participation has continued in the past several years. Therefore, this study was designed and conducted with the aim of investigating the local public's point of view in regard to volunteer participation in promoting the social security at the community level in Kermanshah's Abadani and Maskan neighborhood.

### Method

This research was a cross sectional study that evaluated the public participation activities in the area covered by the Research Center for Social Development and Health Promotion of Kermanshah from the public's point of view in winter of 2010. The participation included activities in a 5-year period and several stages including: attracting public's participation, dividing the area into 24 geographical blocks, and organizing the public as block representatives and the council of trustees. Local problems were identified by the block representatives and for the follow up were forwarded to the council of trustees. The council members conferred with holding consultation sessions in finding ways to solve problems and the follow-ups and necessary actions targeted toward solving community problems were completed in all cases. In this research, after examining the documents found in the research center archives and council of trustees archives, a list of main activities of public participatory with relevant agencies based on the needs assessment in the area was formed [17], and accordingly a questionnaire was designed in order to achieve the objectives of the study. This questionnaire included 40 Likert-scale items related to the objectives of the research. A number

of questions were assigned to the demographics of the responders. Content validity was used to determine the validity of the questionnaire, and relevant experts approved it after examining and making some modifications. To determine reliability, the questionnaire was completed by 35 participants (10% of the total sample) with the calculated value of Cronbach's alpha of 0.94. Multistage sampling method was used to select the participants from local residents. The area was divided into 24 geographical blocks (this division was carried out originally at the beginning of creating the public data bases, in the mentioned area for the purposes of conducting collaborative research projects and organizing public forces). Then 14 individuals were selected from each block using systematic sampling. This way, the first house from the northeast point of each block was selected in the sample and then for completion of the second questionnaire, the tenth house was selected and this procedure was continued until the selection of all needed samples in each block was completed. The sample size came to a total of 298 participants based on the below sampling formula. In order to increase the study power, 10% was added to this figure and as total of 328 people were recruited. Of these, 324 people completed the questionnaire.

$P = 0.25[18]$ ,  $d=0.05$ ,  $\alpha = 0.05$ ,  $Z_{1-\alpha/2} = 1.96$

For completing the questionnaire, trained questioners were used who had been familiarized with questionnaire and how to complete it in a briefing session. The questioners were volunteers at the research center of social development and health promotion of Kermanshah who had high school diploma or higher education. The inclusion criteria included living in the area for the past five years and being familiar with the activities taken place in the area. Data were analyzed in SPSS-16 software using the descriptive statistics, one and two dimensional tables, and calculation of the numerical indicators such as means and standard deviations.

**Results**

Of 324 people who participated in this study, 182 (56.7%) people were female. The age range of the respondents was between 17 and 87 years old with the mean of  $41.86 \pm 13.79$  years. In

terms of employment status; most (116 people) were housewives (36.9%), and in terms of educational level, most (123 people) had high school diploma (38.9%) (Table 1).

**Table 1** Demographic profile of respondents according to gender

	Gender			
	Male N(%)	Female N(%)	Total N(%)	
<b>Age</b>	Less than 30 years old	26 (19.3%)	54(30.9%)	80 (25.8%)
	31-40years old	21 (15.6%)	50(28.6%)	71 (22.9%)
	41-50years old	38 (28.1%)	40(22.9%)	78 (25.2%)
	51-60years old	29 (21.5%)	28(16%)	57 (18.4%)
	More than 60 years old	21 (15.6%)	3(1.7%)	24 (7.7%)
<b>Education</b>	Below HS Diploma	46 (33.6%)	70(39.1%)	116 (36.7%)
	HS Diploma	48 (35%)	75(41.9%)	123 (38.9%)
	Above HS Diploma	43 (31.4%)	34(19%)	77 (24.4%)
<b>Employment</b>	Employed	69 (50.4%)	21(11.9%)	90 (28.7%)
	Unemployed	12 (8.8%)	31(17.5%)	43 (13.7%)
	Retired	56 (40.9%)	9(5.1%)	65 (20.7%)
	Housewife	0 (0%)	116(65.5%)	116 (36.9%)
<b>Total</b>	139 (43.3%)	182(56.7%)	321 (100%)	

**Table 2** The role of community participation in preventing delinquencies and crime in the area covered by the center from the people's point of view

Rate of influence	No influence	Little influence	Average influence	High influence	Do not Know
	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
<b>The purpose of participation</b>					
Report activities of suspicious companies to the police	36 (11.1%)	50 (15.5%)	75 (23.2%)	83 (25.7%)	79 (24.4%)
Preventing anti-revolutionary slogan graffiti around the study area	27 (8.4%)	33 (10.2%)	68 (21.1%)	106 (32.9%)	88 (27.3%)
Removing thugs near local girls' school	43 (13.3%)	56 (17.3%)	71 (21.9%)	127 (39.2%)	27 (8.3%)
Reporting thugs and local addicted drug dealers to the police	50 (15.5%)	70 (21.7%)	70 (21.7%)	104 (32.2%)	29 (9%)
Informing the police on bullying, pickpockets, and thieves	53 (16.5%)	72 (22.4%)	73 (22.7%)	91 (28.3%)	32 (10%)
Reporting unlicensed shops and pursue their licensure	45 (13.9%)	76 (23.5%)	89 (27.6%)	38 (11.8%)	75 (23.2%)
Resolving the problems arising from presence of vendors in streets	46 (14.5%)	50 (15.7%)	81 (25.5%)	51 (16%)	90 (27.8%)
Reporting violating local bakeries and taking corrective measures	57 (17.9%)	69 (21.7%)	88 (27.7%)	60 (18.9%)	44 (13.8%)
Preventing accumulation of heavy vehicles in the residential area	44 (13.7%)	46 (14.3%)	77 (24%)	28 (8.7%)	126 (39.3%)

The research results showed that 2.8%, 38.3%, 44.8% and 14.2% of the participants believed that community participation had respectively no, little, average and high impact on increasing

social security in the areas covered by the center.

In regard to the role of community participation in preventing delinquencies and crime in the

**Table 3** The role of community participation in increasing security in the area covered by the center from people's point of view

Rate of influence	No influence	Little influence	Average influence	High influence	I do not Know
The purpose of participation	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
Removing thugs and those who cause group brawls in the area	43 (13.5%)	66 (20.7%)	68 (21.3%)	105 (32.9%)	37 (11.4%)
Removing addicts who gather at nights around the 750-unit apartment complex	35 (10.9%)	58 (18.1%)	51 (15.9%)	78 (24.4%)	98 (30.6%)
Activating the local 110 police station	28 (8.6%)	73 (22.5%)	54 (16.7%)	129 (39.8%)	40 (12.3%)
Presence of police consultants at the research center and provide free services	18 (5.7%)	55 (17.5%)	70 (22.3%)	77 (24.5%)	94 (29.9%)
Increased Police patrol in the crowded areas	28 (8.7%)	63 (19.6%)	90 (28%)	105 (32.6%)	36 (11.2%)
Eliminating some of the nightly security problems in the area by providing night guards	49 (15.3%)	67 (20.9%)	95 (29.6%)	85 (26.5%)	25 (7.8%)
Establishing night patrols by "basij" (the volunteer guardians) to help in providing security	54 (16.7%)	46 (14.2%)	69 (21.4%)	84 (26%)	70 (21.7%)
Allocating more facilities to the local police stations	39 (12.2%)	76 (23.8%)	74 (23.1%)	52 (16.3%)	79 (24.7%)
Fencing off vacant lots and unfinished construction sites	83 (25.9%)	71 (22.2%)	60 (18.8%)	38 (11.9%)	68 (21.3%)
Organizing and removing unauthorized stalls of "Tagheh-Bostan" area	31 (9.6%)	69 (21.4%)	70 (21.7%)	72 (22.4%)	80 (24.8%)
Construction of "basij" (volunteer guardians) site in the area	51 (15.8%)	54 (16.7%)	75 (23.2%)	78 (24.1%)	65 (20.1%)
Assessing old and dangerous wooden electrical street power posts	24 (7.4%)	70 (21.7%)	75 (23.2%)	104 (32.2%)	50 (15.5%)
Correcting and establishing adequate night lighting in the local pedestrian areas	41 (12.8%)	56 (17.4%)	88 (27.4%)	109 (34%)	27 (8.4%)
Establishing regional addiction prevention projects	70 (21.8%)	64 (19.9%)	83 (25.9%)	59 (18.4%)	45 (14%)
Consumer price controls and establishing new-year's shopping market	72 (22.3%)	79 (24.5%)	71 (22%)	58 (18%)	43 (13.3%)
Entrepreneurship workshops for people	57 (17.9%)	57 (17.9%)	62 (19.4%)	42 (13.2%)	101 (31.7%)
Installing speed bumps in some crowded streets	25 (7.8%)	52 (16.3%)	105 (32.9%)	104 (32.6%)	33 (10.3%)
Installing road traffic signs in the area	44 (13.7%)	66 (20.6%)	86 (26.8%)	77 (24%)	48 (15%)
Resolving traffic problems in major intersections	56 (17.4%)	69 (21.4%)	70 (21.7%)	84 (26.1%)	43 (13.4%)
Reporting accident-prone streets of the area to the authorities	45 (14%)	62 (19.3%)	82 (25.5%)	49 (15.1%)	84 (25.9%)

area, the results showed that the following issue were of the most important influential factor from people's point of view: "preventing anti-revolutionary slogan graffiti around the study area" with 32.97%, "removing thugs near local girls' school" with 32.2%, and "introducing thugs and some local addicted drug dealers to the police" with 32.2% (Table 2).

In regard to the role of community participation in improving the traffic status in the area, most participants (32.9%) believed installing speed breakers in some crowded streets and "installing traffic signs in the area" (26.8%) were moderately influenced by this participation. Also, most people considered participation highly effective in "removing traffic problems in main intersections of the area" with 26.1%. However, in regard to "reporting accident-prone streets of the area to the authorities" with 25.9%, most people were unaware.

In regard to the role of community participation in increasing security in the area, most

participants considered a greater role for people's participation in regard to "removing thugs and those who cause group brawls in the area" with 32.9%, "activating the local 110 police station" with 39.8%, "increased police patrol in the crowded areas" with 32.6%, "assessing old and dangerous wooden power posts" with 32.2% and "Correcting and establishing adequate night lighting in local streets" with 34% (Table 3).

In regard to role of community participation in reducing poverty and unemployment in the area, in most cases, most respondents were unaware of such issues. Next came the following: "identifying underprivileged and needy families in the area" with 23.4%, "identifying the local philanthropists" with 22.3%, "collecting cash and non-cash assistance from local philanthropists to help deprived residents" with 24.6%, "distributing public assistance among the local deprived residents" with 25.6%, "identifying poor

**Table 4** The role of community participation in reducing poverty and unemployment in the area covered by the center from the people's point of the view

Rate of influence	No influence	Little influence	Average influence	A lot of influence	I do not Know
The purpose of participation	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
Art carpet training classes for the local female-headed households	32 (10%)	54 (16.9%)	63 (19.4%)	54 (16.9%)	117 (36.6%)
Identifying underprivileged and needy families in the area	47 (14.7%)	75 (23.4%)	73 (22.8%)	42 (13.1%)	83 (25.9%)
Identifying the local donors	47 (14.7%)	72 (22.3%)	55 (17%)	41 (12.7%)	108 (33.4%)
Collecting donors' aids to assist the deprived	40 (12.5%)	79 (24.6%)	72 (22.4%)	40 (12.5%)	90 (28%)
Distributing public assistance among the local deprived residents	46 (14.4%)	82 (25.6%)	65 (20.3%)	35 (10.9%)	92 (28.8%)
Providing support helps (providing dowries, wedding rings, etc.) to young local couples	61 (18.9%)	60 (18.6%)	56 (17.4%)	38 (11.8%)	107 (33.2%)
Providing loans by donors to the local needy people	67 (20.9%)	63 (19.7%)	42 (13.1%)	29 (9.1%)	119 (37.2%)
Identifying poor children in need of education assistance	43 (13.5%)	81 (25.4%)	58 (18.2%)	40 (12.5%)	97 (30.4%)
Identifying poor patients and introducing them to providing charity care by physicians	54 (16.7%)	80 (24.8%)	55 (17%)	24 (7.4%)	110 (34.1%)
Helping to create jobs for the local unemployed	107 (33.3%)	75 (23.1%)	37 (11.5%)	22 (6.9%)	80 (24.9%)

children in need of education assistance” with 25.4%, and “identifying poor patients and introducing them for charity care provided by physicians” with 24.8%, where public participation was considered as having little influence (Table 4).

### Discussion

In general, the results of the research showed that the respondents deem the effects of participation in various areas of social security as relatively positive. Although there are no similar studies conducted in this regard, various measures have been taken by the police for the purposes of establishing and increasing security with the help of public participation. In Chicago (in the United States of America), police with employing a plan named “Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety” in 1981 for the purposes of establishing security in the city used the help of local public participation for example in patrolling blocks, apartments and school, and while it increased the city’s security, it also helped to increase the trust level between the police and the citizens [19]. In this study, also given the important role that people play in security issues, it was determined that public participation in the area of study in regard to issues such as dealing with thugs and gangs, eliminating the trouble of drug dealers and hooligans, resolving problems in the crowded areas for improving traffic, establishing meetings with local police authorities, and activities related to poverty and unemployment, and other mentioned issues in findings section.

One of the areas related to public participation issues in this study which had a relatively positive influence from the respondents’ point of view was the activities in the areas of dealing with local thugs, gangs and thieves, and nightly patrols by the local people in the form of “basij”. Similarly, public participation in establishing security and protection of motorcycles for the purpose of transporting goods and passengers or protection of farms against nightly thefts in some African countries was qualified as positive influences [15].

One of the areas of interest in the discussion of the social security in this study is the issue of poverty and economical difficulties. Although from respondents’ point of view, public participation in issues such as poverty and unemployment have not been much of an influential factor, approximately 38% of respondents believed that public participation had a positive influence in reducing poverty and unemployment. And yet, poverty and unemployment issues remain profound and widespread issues, sporadic acts do not exert any great influence on finding solutions for them. Samadi’s research in 2005 also pointed out to the same results in that the center of all social security treating the individuals and families is the economical threats [20].

Safiri (2008), in a study conducted in Tehran, showed low financial and life securities and also the sense of insecurity in children under 10 years old are among the fears of families in Tehran [2]. In this study, some issues such as dealing with thugs, gangs, those who bother student, increased police and basij patrols, combating drug dealers and hooligans, and also the reports of thefts, pickpockets, and other similar issues are also from the subjects that are related to the financial and life security of the people and are pursuit and followed up by the people themselves.

In this study, one of the issues that attracted people’s attention was the repair and correction of area’s night lights. In this regard, the results showed that 61% of the respondent believed public participation in this regard had a great positive influence. Almasifar, also pointed out that lighting and designing lighting system in the parks are among influential elements in providing security and in a way it reduced being taken unawares [21].

Also, public participation in improving the area’s traffic by conducting necessary follow ups such as installing traffic signs and speed breakers in some streets had an average influence from the people’s point of view. In fact, organizing public participation in social issues related to their lives along with its importance and value are very difficult

and challenging. People play different roles in their family and society because of their social life conditions. They are required to perform their various duties as a result of these roles, therefore, inducing enough motivation for individuals to spend their valuable time to improve public services requires effort and careful consideration - given that they are time consuming. This is among a few important limitations that confronts research in this field. In this research, public's participation for the purpose of identifying security issues in their living areas and targeted follow ups in groups for solving difficulties of the area through related organizations or using people's potentials continued throughout consecutive years and reached favorable results despite all difficulties such as administrative bureaucratic issues and lack of response from the responsible organizations, and also possible differences in preferences of participants. Thus, the role of public participation in social security promotion in the areas covered by the research center of social development has been valuable and effective in viewpoint of 60% of the people.

### Conclusion

The results showed that most people believed that participatory activities in providing security in the area have been influential; thus it can be concluded that utilizing people's power and capabilities in promoting local security can help the authorities, especially if the needs of people in these regards are reviewed and prioritized. Furthermore, given the results of the research it can be said that creating public participation and its continuity in the urban areas, however difficult and time consuming, it could be implemented and be used as an inexpensive but reliable tool in institutionalizing the sense of responsibility in citizens and creating favorable effects in the area.

### Acknowledgment

This article is the result of research project approved by the Research Center for the Social Development and Health Promotion of the city of Kermanshah, and was financially

supported by the administrative office of research and technology of the Kermanshah University of Medical sciences, which we acknowledge. Also, we would like to thank the Council of Trustees members for their effort and cooperation in the area covered by the research center in implementation of this research. Also, we thank the representatives of each of the 24 blocks in this study.

### Contributions

Study design: SRG, SR, NM

Data collection and analysis: NM, MR, MR

Manuscript preparation: NM, VA, NRG

### Conflict of interest

"The authors declare that they have no competing interests."

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