

# Nature and Patterns of Urban Crimes: With Special Reference to Colombo City in Sri Lanka

Shyamali WMW, Samarakoon MT, Wijewardhana BVN

University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

## ABSTRACT

Urbanization is a widespread occurrence across the nation. Urbanism has been affecting the rise in urban crime as a result of societal perception. According to empirical data, crime has risen in metropolitan areas. The study issue is dependent on the specific types of crime that occur in urban settings. The aim of the research is to identify the nature and patterns of crimes related to the urban area and to make recommendations for solutions. The study was conducted in Colombo Fort and Pettah using criminal records from the police's Criminal Record Division (CRD), and it used questionnaires, formal and informal interviews, group discussions, case studies, and observations to gather primary data from police officers, residents, and communities. Recorded data by police from 2010 to 2018, were evaluated using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Burglary was the most common crime, reported at 49%, and property-based crime quickly increased. The patterns of crimes throughout particular seasons are evident, and because of the urban structure, offenders can conceal their identities. Murders, drug dealing, and prostitution are anti-social activities that have hurt the neighborhood. Some geographic areas have been identified as the preferred locations (hotspots) for criminals to carry out their illicit activities. The city planning process is crucial in ensuring the timely implementation of the new idea, as industrialized nations including Sri Lanka adopt Crime Prevention through Environmental Design/Development (CPTED).

**Keywords**– CPTED, CRD, crime pattern, urbanization

## INTRODUCTION

Various research and theories have also been proved about the effect of physical and other environmental conditions on the occurrence of crime in urban societies. For that purpose, although urban planning is done with modern urban development methods, crime control and prevention related to urban areas have become challenging. Various development programs are being implemented for the development of Colombo city and to what extent these urban development programs have been affected in reducing crime compared to the past should be studied. The aim of this study was to study the nature and patterns of crime in urban society and the use of urban development planning in controlling that crime. It should be noted that the process of urbanization in which rural culture is displaced by urban culture has been a feature of human society from its inception. There is disagreement over what constitutes an urban region, according to the United Nations Population Bureau. Some nations have adopted definitions of cities based on population size and density standards that have been developed by some researchers. But in many nations, it is customary that administrative work is done through populated areas known as cities. Some nations establish cities based on their size, density, governmental levels, infrastructure, and other amenities, albeit this is uncommonly done solely on the basis of physical characteristics (Gordon and David, 2014). A region is categorized as urban based on common factors like a high population density or a high labor force participation rate in non-agricultural occupations. With the growth of industry came an increase in factories, and as a result, more and more individuals from rural areas relocated to industrialized areas to work in these businesses (De Silva, 2004). Due to these rapid migrations, the population has congregated in areas where companies were founded. As a result, the areas where the factories were situated gradually underwent urbanization. There is a case that can be made that this led to urbanization. As a result, the Industrial Revolution's technological

advancements have had an impact on both urban and rural communities (Gelles & Levine, 1999). Urbanization is a natural phase of civilization, as can be seen. It's also crucial to exercise caution when interpreting urbanization figures. By 2000, urbanization had increased from 10% to 50% (Schaefer, 2005). Gells and Lewin defined urbanization as the increase in the number of people residing in urban regions. The Gunasena Sinhala Dictionary defines urbanization as “having an urban environment” (Wijetunga, 2008). In 1938, Lewis Worth, a sociologist, provided the first sociological definition of the city in his article “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” which was based on four criteria. These are Constancy/Permanence, largest population size, Overpopulation and Social heterogeneity. He claims that there are two significant urbanization-related challenges. That is, the first of them is the isolation of personal lives. Social disarray is the second. When the aforementioned definitions are taken into consideration, it is evident that a city has a high population density. In Sri Lanka, the typical urban areas are currently categorized as municipal council areas under the urban sector. The Population and Housing Census – 2012 data show how Sri Lanka’s urban population has steadily increased.

**Table 01. Sri Lanka Urban Population – Historical Data**

Year	Population	% of Total	Change
2018	4,003,749	18.48	1.55%
2017	3,942,265	18.38	1.53%
2016	3,882,481	18.31	1.41%
2015	3,828,283	18.26	1.13%
2014	3,785,336	18.22	1.04%
2013	3,746,058	18.20	0.79%
2012	3,716,533	18.20	0.05%
2011	3,714,770	18.21	0.59%
2010	3,692,904	18.23	0.60%
2009	3,670,930	18.24	0.61%
2008	3,648,476	18.26	0.63%
2007	3,625,538	18.27	0.65%

(<https://www.macrotrends.net>)

People are frequently moved from rural to urban areas in emerging nations. This is because there are few career prospects in remote locations, inadequate educational resources, and inadequate socioeconomic resources. This allows for the identification of some unique urbanization traits.

- A significant proportion of the country’s total population resides in cities
- Increasing numbers of low-income families in urban areas
- Growing number of unskilled workers
- The emergence of a large number of unemployed youths
- Increase in illegal activities due to lack of jobs
- Health, educational and social problems due to the concentration of a large population in a small area (De Silva, 2004).

As a result, rural residents move to the city and attempt to stay there until their needs are addressed, which leads to excessive traffic in the metropolis. Due to unlawful settlements, a lot of people are forced to live in slums and shacks on tiny pieces of land. Numerous issues in the city are brought on by these impoverished individuals. Residents of urban societies cannot perceive any bond or relationship among themselves. Crime

has grown as urbanization increases, along with other challenges. The rise in crime in metropolitan areas has made them unpleasant places to live, particularly for women, and has made it difficult to preserve city peace. The main causes of the rise in crime in urban society now include competition in daily life, incorrect consumption of consumer goods and their accumulation, selfishness, cruelty, socioeconomic disparities, and emotions of unemployment and loneliness. Young people from wealthy households have occasionally turned to crime to support a lavish lifestyle in addition to the city's poor and slum dwellers. According to a 1983 study by Dutt and Venugopal, violent urban crimes like murders, kidnappings, robberies, and rapes are more common in India's north-central areas, but economic crimes like theft, fraud, breach of trust, etc. also occur there. It is obvious that this area's poverty contributes to economic crime (Chand, 2015). Also, research conducted on street children living in the vicinity of Colombo revealed that the street children who live in the center of the city are passing the stage of becoming criminals, they are involved in various fits of abuse and doing normal activities and living in the city (Wijewardena, 2015).

## LITERATURE

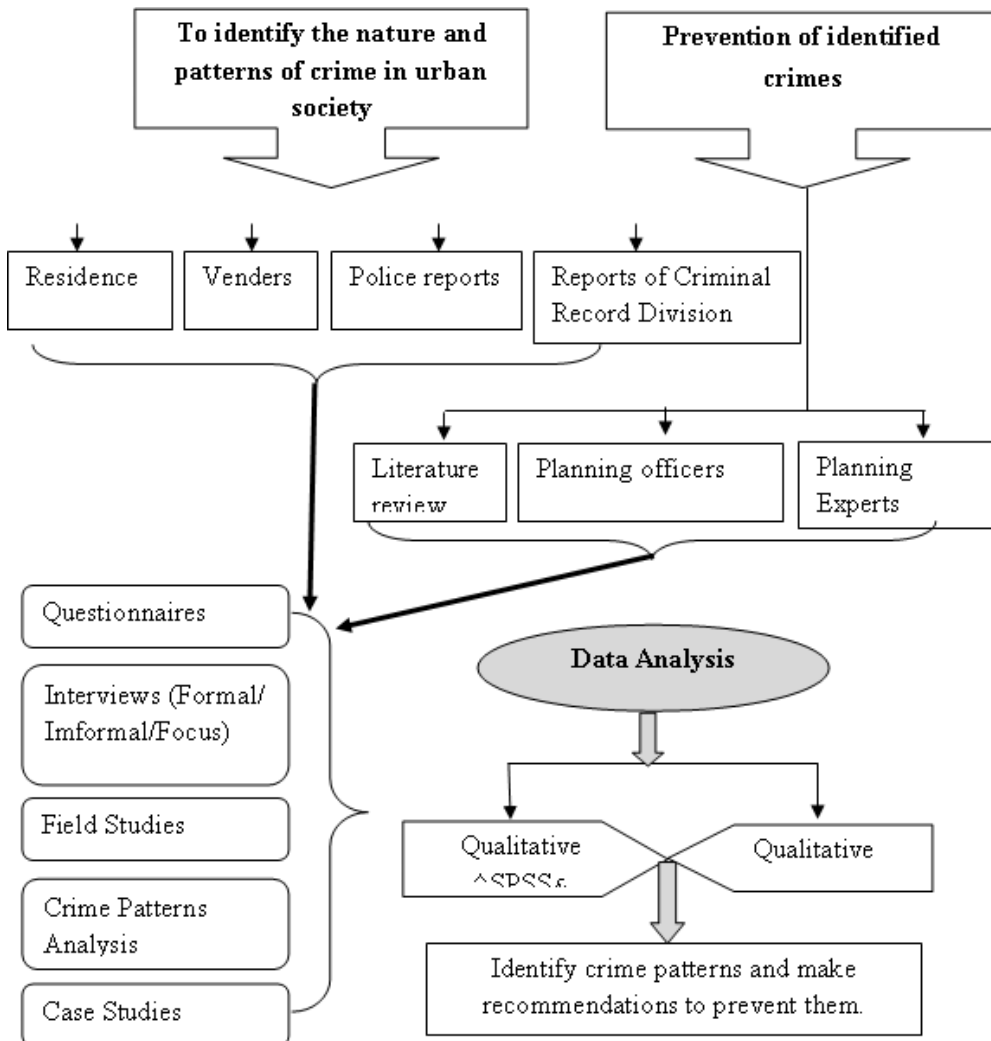
William V. Pelphrey provides a report on past, present, and future trends and patterns of crimes in the year 2000, with a primary emphasis on drug trafficking and violent crime within the study boundary. In urban civilization, crime has progressively increased. The US 2016 report mentions it. 22.7% of reported crimes were crimes against people, while 62.5% of reported crimes were crimes against property. Crimes against society make up another 14.8%. This featured animal cruelty in addition to prostitution and gambling. Additionally, as of 2014, the following is a list of crimes in America. Based on the Mirihana police jurisdiction, an investigation of the trends of urban crime in Sri Lanka has been conducted (Ratnayake, 2015). Identifying criminal hotspots is the main objective. The study aims to show the link between the environment and crime. It has been revealed that public buildings, parks, open spaces, and playgrounds are also utilized for this purpose. Road networks, locations where commercial activity takes place, and low-income neighborhoods tend to see these criminal patterns operating. This study, which used GIS technology, should be recognized for examining the nature of crime and omitting any observations on the frequency of crime patterns or how to prevent them. It also emphasizes neither how crimes operate in those contexts nor how to prevent them. Fernando investigated the geospatial patterns in Colombo's central business district in 2016. Using the Geographical Information System (GIS) and GPS technologies, research on crime trends was carried out. It has been found that the majority of crimes occur close to significant commercial malls, areas for public transportation, low-income residential neighborhoods, and major roads. The areas where crime is most prevalent have been found by researcher who has concentrated heavily on crime patterns, but they have not given much attention to the steps that can be taken to avoid crime (Fernando, 2016). Looking at the aforementioned study, it is evident that several studies have been conducted both nationally and internationally on the current patterns of crime in urban culture. The studies mentioned above make it abundantly evident that every element, including time, place, and geographic context, contributes to the existence of a single criminal pattern. Additionally, it was found in the United States' crime reports that crimes against property are more frequent than crimes against people. However, a number of strategies have been used to manage the current criminal trends in urban society. Numerous studies have been done and the facts have been revealed about the patterns of crime that are currently occurring in urban society. Additionally, environmental planning has been proposed as a way to recommend the elimination of urban gangs in Colombo city through Wijewardene's research (Wijewardene, 2015). The emphasis on other crime patterns in the city has been limited, despite the attention being paid to the environmental measures that must be implemented to curb young gangs.

## METHODOLOGY

Fort and Pettah, a significant commercial center in the city and an area with a high crime rate compared to other locations in the Colombo metropolitan area, were chosen as the research area. Special attention was

paid to these factors as well as the city planning process. (Police Record, 2017).

Figure 01 – Methodology



(Created by researcher, 2022).

The population of this research was all the trading community living in Pettah area, permanent residents, Police Officers serving Fort Police, and City Planning Field Officers of the City Council. Mainly four samples from four groups were used for the research. that is,

1. Trade community
2. Permanent urban residents
3. Police officers serving in Fort and Pettah Police Stations
4. Planning Field Officers

The total sample is **328**.

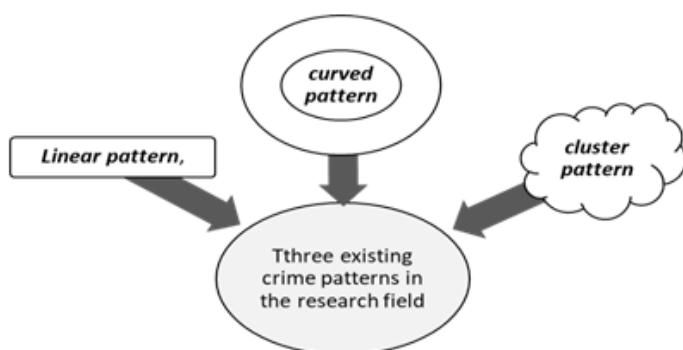
The sources used for data collection were primary and secondary. There, questionnaires, interviews (formal/informal/targeted), case studies and field observation were used as primary data collection methods. Data analysis was done by looking at certain special cases according to their point of view (Emic) and looking according to the researcher’s interpretations of the data provided by the people (Etic). Data analysis was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. SPSS software for quantitative data analysis. It has enabled a more meaningful analysis of the interrelationships between variables related

to urban planning and crime. The nature of detection of crimes reported to the police, especially in relation to the country of crime, and his tendency were analyzed under that. Geographical Information System: GIS software has been used to map high-crime areas and verify the facts of the analysis of those maps. Also, in the case study analysis, the same facts have been presented in the words of the data contributors and then analyzed.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research provided the opportunity to learn a great deal of information on social issues and crimes that originated in Colombo's urban setting. According to literature reviews, this research found that many crimes are perpetrated as a result of urbanization. The theft was a common crime, accounting for 895 offenses in the Pettah area and 395 in the Fort area out of the 1795 other crimes reported between 2010 and 2018. Eight years have passed without any reports of the usage or possession of heavy weaponry, automatic weapons, or supplies of women in the Fort region. Along with the offenses reported in the police reports, the following trends were found during the data collection that was done with the contributors. The community's responses indicated that the prevalence of drug usage, particularly in urban life, was the primary cause of crimes. The majority of delivery workers, particularly those who transport items to wholesale stores, utilize drugs. During field observation, differences in their behavioral habits were established. They used a variety of drugs, including powder, hashish, abhing, apple (a type of narcotic), etc. It was discovered that they frequently feel the want to steal in order to purchase these medicines. Pettah, a fruit dealer at the Gunasinghapura bus station, shared the following about his research-related experiences. *"Currently, over 100 drug traffickers are watching us. I picked up 2 boxes of apples the day before yesterday while chatting with one of them. 6000 rupees is one. Drug dealers are present everywhere in this area, so what else are you talking about, lady?"* The current insecurity could be better recognized through field observation. It is evident that there is a great deal of fear in the city of Colombo by looking at how security cameras are installed even in stores that are enclosed by curtains and constructed without planning. Additionally, the data producers found that the majority of crime occurs in areas where regular people congregate, like the bus stop, the area around the Bo tree in Pettah, the self-employment trade center, and the main street. In order to examine crime patterns, this study used crime mapping and crime report analysis techniques. Here, crime mapping is crucial for identifying criminal trends. Maps can be used to assess crime perpetrator gathering areas (Hotspots or clusters), etc., based on the many locations where crimes take place and their geographic backgrounds. This approach is only effective for crimes with clearly established geographic patterns. Using geographic information system technology, the locations of crimes have been plotted and examined in this study (GIS). The three existing crime patterns in the research area linear pattern, curved pattern, and cluster pattern were recognized, and the crimes that were reported there were examined in light of those three spatial patterns.

Figure 02 – Introduction to patterns of crime in the study area





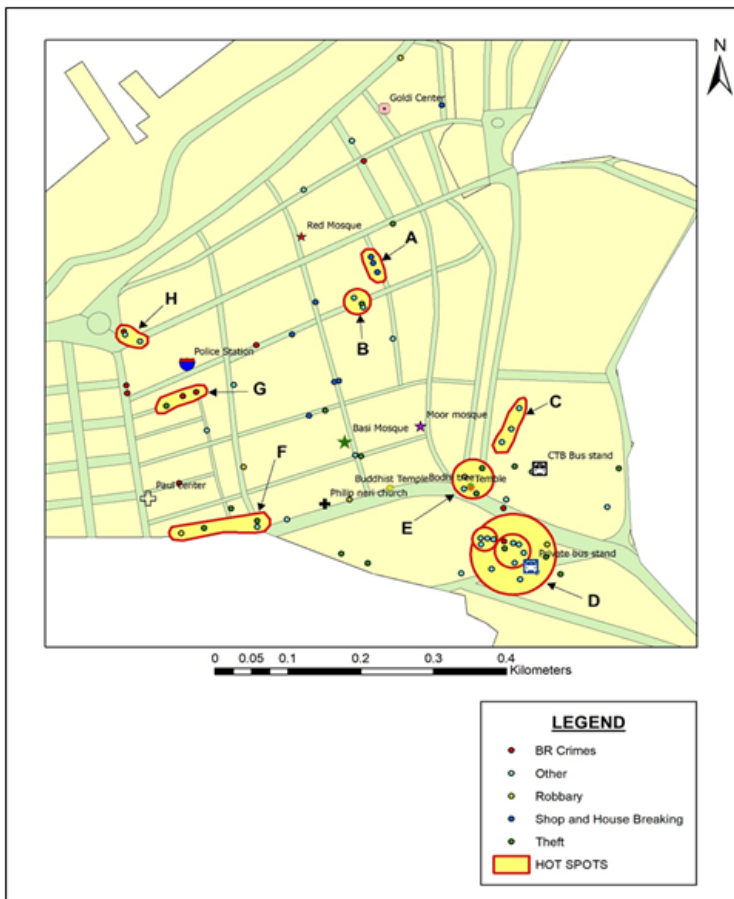
(Created By Researcher, 2019).

The location of those crime patterns in the area (according to the crimes reported to the Fort and Petaling Jaya Police in 2017 and 2018) is described in the following map number 1.

An examination of the police complaint data from 2017 reveals a clustered, linear, and indirect pattern of crime. As a result, the crime patterns discovered in the study’s field in 2017 and the locations where those patterns occur are as follows.

- ? Cluster Pattern      Private Bus Stands (Indicated by letter R on Map 1)
- ? Line Pattern        3rd Cross Street /Rohini Lane/Railway Station (shown in italics on Map 1)
- ? Curved pattern     around Bo tree in Pettah (Indicated by letter E on Map 1)

**Map No. 01- Crime locations in Fort and Petaling Jaya 2017-2018**



(Created by researcher, 2019).

Particularly, crimes tend to cluster in areas with private bus stops. In the private bus stop on Bastion Street, the clustering pattern is defined as clustering (several crimes occurring at one area). Additionally, there is a pattern of incidents that surround the Colombo Fort Bo tree diagonally. It has been determined indirectly that the crimes were committed close to the Bo tree. It is depicted on map no. 1. Additionally, map number 01 shows a linear pattern of crime in the third cross street. This line crime category includes offenses that appear on the street as a single line within the streets of the field, and a similar pattern of line crime was seen in the third cross street. The time meter is exceptional for spotting crime trends. As a result, questions

regarding the seasons and times of day when crimes are most likely to occur were raised.

*Table 02 – Respondents’ opinion on the times of the year when crimes occur*

<b>Times Area</b>	The beginning of the year	End The of the year	throughout the year	<b>Festive seasons</b>	don't know	Total
Pettah	3	4	20	<b>73</b>	22	122
Fort	7	9	31	<b>53</b>	54	154
Total	10	13	51	<b>126</b>	76	<b>276</b>

(Created by researcher, 2019)

When looking at the times of year when crimes occur, it seems that festivals have a larger predisposition for theft. People travel from all across the nation during certain times to get discounted things, which is the cause. During this time, crimes including stealing other people’s property, breaking wallets, and wearing gold necklaces are committed. Additionally, it is believed that stationery theft, particularly in the area of the People’s Park building, happens at the end of the year. The table above provides some insight into crime trends, though. It is rumored that stationery theft is more common in the area of the People’s Park building near the end of the year. The table above provides some insight into crime trends, though. The responses supplied by the respondents on the various hours of the day when crime tends to occur in the metropolitan area are displayed in Table No. 03 of the report.

*Table 03 – Time of day when crime occurs*

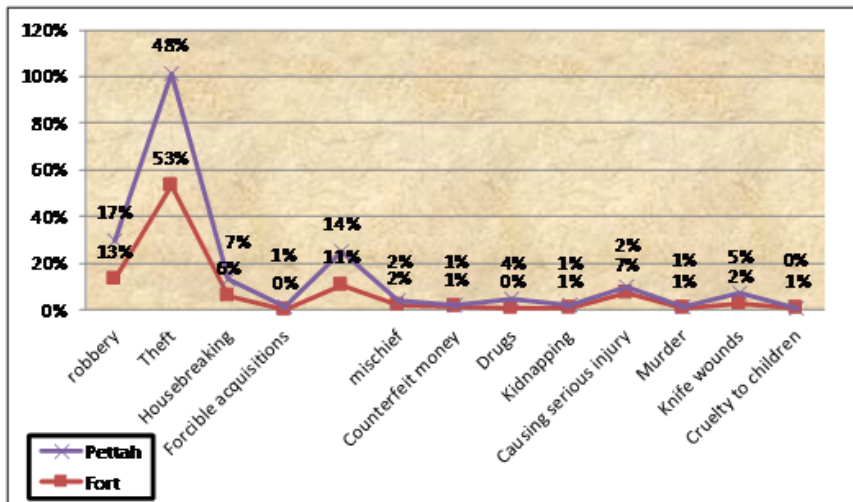
Time of day	quantity	Percentage
Early in the morning	4	1.45%
In the morning	5	1.81%
The afternoon	123	44.57%
In the evening	21	7.61%
Night	87	27.90%
Can't say	36	16.67%
Total	<b>276</b>	<b>100%</b>

(Filed research, 2019).

The research indicated that crimes have a larger propensity to happen in the afternoon than at other times, and that (44.57%) of crimes committed during the day were robberies, thefts, pickpocketing, cheating, drug offenses, etc. Most crimes occur during the daytime near bus stops, Fort Railway Station, Olcott Lane, etc. Additionally, the afternoon is when strangers to Colombo city are most likely to become victims, and this is also when theft of money, robberies, etc., are committed by luring clients. It was evident throughout the analysis of the reports indicated by the Crime Records Division that more crimes are perpetrated during the daytime, which is consistent with the remarks of the aforementioned data suppliers. However, it emerged from the interviews that prostitution and drug dealing take place at night. When asked which crime occurs most frequently at night, numerous were mentioned rather than just one. As a result, 27.90% of data providers mentioned nighttime crimes. The following thought came from the database of nighttime-specific crime. The probability for theft to occur at night is higher and stands at 47.13%. On the other hand, prostitution and drug use are commonplace on metropolitan streets. Street prostitutes frequently traverse the Pettah area at night and demand at least Rs. 500–700, according to evidence. These street prostitutes

demonstrated a method for hiring individuals who leave the office each month, particularly those who are employed by the three military forces. Additionally, these street prostitutes are associated with the city’s commerce community. The business community learned that these women, who were summoned to rooms in the same area as the men, were actually acting as gangs and committing different kinds of crimes by disguising themselves as prostitutes and fleeing with their wallets. The graph below shows the crime patterns and trends that have been recorded in the urban environment through data analysis.

Chart 01 – Nature of the crime in the area



(Created by researcher, 2019).

The majority of crimes are reportedly reported in Pettah regions, citing police reports. The Pettah area, as opposed to the Fort area, was a business center, according to information obtained from the police officers, which explains why. Individuals arriving to pick up items in a very disorderly and noisy area. The variety of commodities marketed in this extremely constrained area includes everything from mechanical to plastic goods, both wholesale and retail. Pettah is a significant hub for trade for those arriving in Colombo to look for work in Sri Lanka as well as those arriving to purchase those wholesale items. The folks that come for this reason are said to commit several thefts and robberies. The majority (49%) of the crimes in this area were thefts, as depicted in the chart above (figure 01). There were a lot of robberies and scams among them. It is evident that those with poor incomes who reside in Colombo’s slums and row homes frequently turn to crime. Heavy traffic jams and congestion occur daily as a result of a high number of people congregating in the fort region for office and business purposes. This crowding inside a small area fosters criminality. The trading community made it clear that the victim has a significant impact on how often crime is in urban settings. 86% of the data contributors claimed that their carelessness and lack of focus are to blame for this. Additionally, a pattern of shift in the tendencies of crime was discovered according to the seasons of the year. Compared to other months, the festival season is when crime is seen to rise. Crimes including drug usage, prostitution, murder, robbery, and rape have risen to the top of the list of crimes because metropolitan areas provide a setting where one may meet their wants and conceal their identity. It was discovered that small alleyways, crumbling structures, and specific locations made specifically for committing crimes are where crimes are frequently committed. It is crucial that city planning is done correctly in order to manage crime in the suburbs. The majority of nations around the globe are currently concentrating on preventing urban crime by utilizing Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design approach (CPTED).

## CONCLUSION

In the study of the findings and conversations, it was looked into how crimes are committed in Colombo



City, their patterns, and the social, physical, and environmental characteristics of the crime scene. Urban planning was taken into consideration when examining the environmental aspects of the locations where such crimes take place, and a link between city planning and crime was discovered. As aforementioned, I now have a better grasp of the types of crimes found in the data analysis as well as their trends. It is then possible to use the crime control method through the city's environmental planning system as the most effective method to control crime in the identified places and to take the necessary steps to implement it. This is done by identifying the locations where such crimes are committed and by identifying the environmental and physical characteristics of those locations. I contend that something needs to be done. Analyzing the patterns of crime in the urban society revealed that there is a relationship between urbanization and crime. The community is of the opinion that the weak performance of law enforcement agencies, especially to reduce crime, is the reason for the growth of these crimes. Because of this, the law enforcement agency should be strengthened. In particular, the way cities are designed and the socio-cultural environment affects the operation of crimes. Because of this, attention should be paid to how the cities are created and how the physical environment of the city should be set up to control existing crimes. In particular, the criminological concept of crime prevention through the environmental design used to control crime can be used for this purpose.

## REFERENCE

1. Ahmed, M., and Salihu, R.S. (2013). Spatiotemporal pattern of crime using geographic information system (GIS) approach in Dala L.G.A of Kano State, Nigeria. *American Journal of Engineering Research (AJER)*, 2 (3), 51-58.
2. Amis, p. (1995). *Making sense of urban poverty*. London: Mc-Millan Press Ltd
3. Automated Regional Justice Information System (ARJIS) Agency, (nd). *Identifying Crime Patterns*. Available on <http://www.justiceacademy.org/iShare/LibraryCrimeAnalysis/identifyingcrimepatterns.pdf> (2018/11/23)
4. Bruce, C., & Santos, R. B. (2011). **Crime Pattern Definitions for Tactical Analysis**. Standards Methods and Technology (SMT) Committee; White paper-2011.
5. Chand, S. (2015). 11 Major Problems of Urbanization in India. Available on <https://www.scribd.com/document/290166926/11-Major-Problems-of-Urbanisation-in-India> (2017/07/25)
6. De Silva, I. (2004). *Population Study in Sri Lanka*. Colombo.
7. Gelles, J. R., & Levine A. (1999). *Sociology an introduction*. United States of America: McGraw-Hill.
8. Gordon, M., & David S. (2014). *Urbanization Concept and Trends*. London: IIED working paper IIED.
9. Fernando, W.A.C.M. (2016). *Geo-Spatial Patterns of Grave Crime in Central Business District of Colombo City in Sri Lanka*. Available on <http://dr.lib.sjp.ac.lk/bitstream/123456789/4770/1/> (2018/01/26)
10. <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/LKA/sri-lanka/urban-population>
11. Rathnayaka, R. M. K. (2015). Distribution Pattern of Urban Crimes in Sri Lanka; with Special Reference to Mirihana Police Division. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, 2, 441-453
12. *Reports of Criminal Record Division*, (2018). Criminal Record Division. Colombo
13. Wijetunga, H (2008). *Sinhala Dictionary*. Colombo: Gunasena Cooperation.
14. Wijewardena, B.V.N. (2015). *The Impact of Youth Ganging on Anti-Social Behavior: A Criminology Study in Colombo City of Sri Lanka*, The Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Sri Jayewardenepura for the award of the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Criminology.
15. Worth, L. (1938). Urbanism as a way of life. *American Journal of Sociology*, 44, 1-24.