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Fear of Crime

John Doe

April 1, 2025

Fear of crime is an important matter and many researchers have studied this topic. As Lee (2001, p. 467) commented: "Since the late 1960s the 'fear of crime' has progressively become a profoundly engaging field of study for criminologists and other social researchers." Lee looked at the history of research on fear of crime and argued that researchers and politicians became interested in fear of crime in the mid-1900s. Specifically, Lee found that as statistical analyses of crime (and other social trends) started being more commonly used in the mid-1900s, researchers and politicians began to pay more attention to fear of crime. As Lee (2001, p. 475) put it, in the 1960s "victims were becoming a new concern of criminology."

Lee found that it was during the 1960s and 1970s that politicians in the United States became interested in fear of crime and the political purposes of fear of crime. In his article, he says that in the 1960s a "politics of law and order" developed in response to "a perceived growing lawlessness in the USA, and indeed to a perception that the public was becoming anxious about the steadily growing crime rate" (Lee, 2001, p. 476). Lee (2001, p. 480) concludes that research on fear of crime gave the politicians something to work with. He argues that, as research on fear of crime increased, politicians took an interest in the subject and used fear of crime for political purposes and began promising to "get tough on crime." As politicians became interested in public concerns about crime, more researchers started studying public concerns about crime and a cycle began, with research on fear of crime fueling political rhetoric about crime and all the political attention being paid to crime fueling more public concerns about crime and even more research on fear of crime.

In another study Hickman and Muehlenhard (1997) examined fear of rape among college women. In their article, "College Women's Fears and Precautionary Behaviors Relating to Acquaintance Rape and Stranger Rape," Hickman and Muehlenhard (1997, pp. 530-531)

describe a study of fear of rape which they did in Kansas. First they surveyed 30 female college students from an Introduction to Psychology course (as a Pilot Study) and then surveyed 151 female students, also from introductory psychology classes. Most of the young women they surveyed were White (84.1%), with few Blacks (6%) and even fewer Hispanics (less than 1%). The rest of the students were international students, Asians, or biracial. Also, most of the young women (76.5%) who took the surveys were freshmen (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997, p. 531).

Hickman and Muehlenhard (1997, p. 533) reported that about a third of the college women they studied had been raped (28.1%) and, among the women who had been raped, most were victims of acquaintance rape. Even though few of the college students they studied had been the victim of stranger rape, most of the young women were more afraid of being raped by a stranger than raped by someone they knew. Hickman and Muehlenhard (1997, p. 537) found that "women reported engaging in more precautionary behaviors because of their fear of stranger rape than because of their fear of acquaintance rape." Later in the article they said that "when women thought about situations in which they fear being raped, they thought primarily about stranger rape" (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997, p. 538).

In another study of fear of crime, Katz, Webb, and Armstrong (2003) did surveys of people in Mesa, Arizona. In contrast to Hickman and Muehlenhard (1997) who studied fear of rape, Katz et al. (2003) studied fear of gangs and gang-related crimes. They described four theoretical models of fear of crime: The Victimization Model, the Disorder Model, the Community Concern Model, and the Subcultural Diversity Model (Katz et al., 2003, pp. 98-105). Katz et al. (2003) wanted to figure out which theoretical model best explained fear of gangs. They were also "particularly interested in comparing general fear of crime to specific fear of gangs" (Katz et al., 2003, p. 107). They did telephone surveys of randomly selected households in Mesa, Arizona.

Most of the people who responded to the surveys were White (88.4%) and more than half of them (59.9%) were female, with the others (40.1%) being male. They also noted that it was hard to do the survey because only a quarter (25%) of the people selected to take the survey actually agreed to complete the survey (Katz et al., 2003, p. 110).

Their dependent variables were various forms of fear of crime. They asked about fear of being the victim of a nongang crime, fear of burglary, fear of walking alone at night, fear of being the victim of a gang crime, fear of gang members hurting someone in their family, and fear of gangs taking over their neighborhood. They also used many independent variables, including: gender, ethnicity, age, income, education, living in an area with lots of gangs, victimization, home ownership, and perception that the neighborhood was deteriorating (Katz et al., 2003, pp. 110-111). They found that many of the variables affected fear of crime and/or fear of gangs, but the effects of the independent variables on fear of crime and gangs were not consistent. For example, Katz et al. (2003, p. 115) found that: "Gender is significantly associated with fear of crime but not fear of gangs. Conversely, ethnicity is significantly associated with fear of gangs but not fear of crime." In general, they found that fear of crime and fear of gangs were pretty similar and concluded "that many of the factors that influenced fear of crime also influenced fear of gangs" (Katz et al., 2003, p. 119).

May, Rader, and Goodrum (2010) studied fear of crime in Kentucky. They conducted a telephone survey of 2,091 randomly selected residents of Kentucky. About half the respondents were male (48.5%), half were female (51.3%), and most were White (89.2%), with only 7.6% of the respondents being Black and even less being of another race (2.7%). The sample had people of different ages, marital statuses, education levels, and incomes (May et al., 2010, pp. 164-165). They used several different measures of fear, such as fear of being the victim of a crime and

defensive behaviors such as installing a burglar alarm or buying a gun. May et al. (2010, p. 168) found that "females were significantly more fearful of criminal victimization and were significantly more likely to perceive themselves at risk of victimization than males."

Some researchers have studied fear of crime in other countries. Nalla, Johnson, and Hayes-Smith (2011) studied fear of crime in Mumbai, India. They analyzed data collected from a survey called the International Crime Victims Survey which is conducted by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Institute (Nalla et al., 2011, p. 145). The surveys were conducted face-to-face by trained interviewers. Nalla et al. (2011, p. 147) examined data from 2,240 surveys given to people in urban and rural areas. About half the people who took the survey were male (44%) and the other half were female (56%). The survey measured the dependent variable (fear of crime) with two questions: "Do you feel safe in your area after dark" and "What would you say are the chances over the next twelve months someone will try to break into your home" (Nalla et al., 2011, p. 150). They found that people in urban areas were more fearful of crime than people in rural areas. They also found that women in urban areas were more afraid of crime than were men, but in rural areas gender did not affect fear of crime (Nall et al., 2011, pp. 150-154).

Hypothesis: Fear of crime will be higher among females than among males.

Null Hypothesis: Gender does not affect fear of crime.

Independent Variable: Gender

Dependent Variable: Fear of Crime

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COLLEGE WOMEN'S FEARS AND PRECAUTIONARY BEHAVIORS RELATING TO ACQUAINTANCE RAPE AND STRANGER RAPE

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Past research on women's fear of rape has focused on women's fears relating to stranger rape, even though most rapes are acquaintance rapes. In this study, 139 undergraduate women completed a questionnaire concerning their fears, precautionary behaviors, and beliefs relating to acquaintance and stranger rape. Women reported being more fearful of rape by strangers than by acquaintances, and they reported engaging in more precautionary behaviors because of fear of stranger rape than of acquaintance rape. When asked to self-generate situations in which they feared rape, they generated more situations in which they feared stranger rape than acquaintance rape. Paradoxically, they estimated that acquaintance rape was more common. Precautionary behaviors were best predicted by level of fear. A history of acquaintance rape had no effect on women's responses. Theoretical and educational implications are discussed.

> I have never been free of the fear of rape. From a very early age I, like most women, have thought of rape as part of my natural environment—something to be feared and prayed against like fire or lightning. I never asked why men raped; I simply thought it one of the many mysteries of human nature.
>
> —Susan Griffin

Most women live their lives in fear of becoming a victim of rape (Brownmiller, 1975; Griffin, 1971; Warr, 1985). This fear is not unfounded. Approximately 15%

This article is based on Susan E. Hickman's master's thesis, conducted under the supervision of Charlene L. Muehlenhard.

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FEAR OF GANGS: A TEST OF ALTERNATIVE THEORETICAL MODELS*

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On the basis of data on 800 randomly selected residents in a large southwestern metropolitan city, we assess the influence of four theoretical models on fear of crime and fear of gangs. In doing so, we compare general fear of crime to specific fear of gangs to delineate whether the same factors influence each or whether different fears are the product of different factors. The results indicate that while many of the factors that influence fear of crime and fear of gangs are similar, there are significant differences in the magnitude in which these factors influence our measures of fear.

In the 1980s, gangs and gang crime came to the forefront of the public's attention. They were symbolically, if not objectively, recognized by the public, legislators, and criminal justice officials as the cause of much of the nation's crime problems, in general, and the nation's drug problem, in particular (Spergel, 1995). Thus, gangs,

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The genesis of 'fear of crime'

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Abstract

The 'fear of crime' has, in the past three decades or so, developed as an important area of criminological research and inquiry. Debates have proliferated within and outside of the discipline of criminology about what crime fear might be, the rationality or irrationality of crime fear, which socio-demographic groups are most fearful of crime and why, and how to measure 'fear of crime'. This article traces the emergence of 'fear of crime' as a topic of criminological and governmental discourse. It argues that 'fear of crime' is not a pre-discursive 'social fact' but a contingent category born of a set of very particular discursive arrangements and shifts. As such it poses some serious questions about the power effects of doing 'fear of crime' research and about the relationships between criminological knowledge and the processes and practices of government.

Key Words

crime • criminology • fear • genealogy • governmentality

Introduction

Since the late 1960s the 'fear of crime' has progressively become a profoundly engaging field of study for criminologists and other social researchers. More recently debates about what 'fear of crime' might be and how it might be measured have proliferated and intensified. This is particularly true of the field since the early 1980s. Indeed, 'fear of crime' as an area of inquiry has had important implications for the broader criminological project—becoming, as Chris Hale (1996) has put it, almost a

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A Gendered Assessment of the "Threat of Victimization": Examining Gender Differences in Fear of Crime, Perceived Risk, Avoidance, and Defensive Behaviors

David C. May,[1] Nicole E. Rader,[2] and Sarah Goodrum[3]

Abstract

Rader has called for a change in how researchers study fear of crime, suggesting that fear of crime, perceptions of risk, and experiences with victimization are interrelated dimensions of the larger "threat of victimization" concept. In this study, the authors examine how each independent dimension affects additional theoretical dimensions of the "threat of victimization" and how these relationships vary by gender. Using data from residents of Kentucky, the authors estimate a series of multivariate linear and logistic regression models. The findings presented here suggest that gender differences do exist in the components of the threat of victimization and that many of the relationships in the Rader model are multifaceted, including the relationship between perceived risk, fear of crime, and avoidance and defensive behaviors. Implications of these findings for future research regarding predictors of the threat of victimization are discussed.

Keywords

fear of crime, threat of victimization, perceived risk, avoidance behaviors, defensive behaviors

Introduction

Fear of crime is an important area of research that has become increasingly popular in the last 30 years. Historically, researchers have questioned the conceptualization and operationalization of fear of crime. Several researchers have argued that the *emotive* feeling of fear differs significantly from *cognitive* perceptions of risk, suggesting that these two constructs should be measured separately (Dubow, McCabe, & Kaplan, 1979; Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; Garafalo, 1981), although the

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Prior Victimization, Region, and Neighborhood Effects on Fear of Crime in Mumbai, India

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Abstract Research in Western countries has found that prior victimization, region, and neighborhood effects, such as high population density, residential instability and low social cohesion as well as related characteristics such as litter, public drunkenness, and abandoned storefronts, are all significant predictors of fear of crime. The present study examined the extent to which these factors were associated with predicting fear of crime in one of the fastest growing economies in the world – India. Data from the International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS), conducted under the auspices of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Institute, suggest that, similar to findings from Western literature (with the exception of car theft and burglary), prior victimization is strongly related to fear of crime. However, contrary to findings from the Western literature, fear of crime appeared to be stronger among the middle classes than among the lower and higher classes. Moreover, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords Fear of crime · Crime in India · Perceived risk · Victimization · International crime Victimization Survey (ICVS)

Introduction

A substantial body of literature has been generated regarding fear of crime for more than a quarter of a century (Carvalho and Lewis 2003; Will and McGrath 1995). Such literature is

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