

A Reflection on Selected Fear of Crime Factors in Ljubljana, Slovenia

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Purpose:

The purpose of the article is to present the selected fear of crime factors studies in the 2009 survey in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Design/Methods/Approach:

A literature review and discussion.

Findings:

The review of research shows that results of fear of crime surveys in Ljubljana do not differ significantly over the last two decades. The latest survey from 2009 implies that the influence of perceived probability of victimization in an emotional reaction is strongest among those who believe that consequences of victimization can be severe, and their own ability to defend from an assailant is low. Analyses have shown that the fear of crime is strongest in women and the elderly. Personal experiences with crime do not result in an increase in perceived probability of victimization, or influence fear of crime, nor do they affect the anticipation of seriousness of the potential consequences of victimization.

Research Implications:

The article contributes to reflections on fear of crime based on a literature and research review as well as utilization of new models of testing fear of crime factors.

Practical Implications:

The article provides insight for crime control and prevention policy makers who set priorities in crime control and prevention in urban environments.

Originality/Value:

The article presents an overview of fear of crime factors in the Slovene studies of fear of crime with a special focus on the 2009 survey.

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Razmišljanje o izbranih dejavnikih strahu pred kriminaliteto v Ljubljani, Slovenija

Namen prispevka:

Namen prispevka je predstavitev dejavnikov strahu pred kriminaliteto iz študije o strahu pred kriminaliteto v Ljubljani v letu 2009.

Metode:

Pregled literature in razprava.

Ugotovitve:

Pregled literature in raziskav kaže, da rezultati študij o strahu pred kriminaliteto v Sloveniji v zadnjih dveh desetletjih pomembno ne odstopajo. Zadnja študija o strahu pred kriminaliteto v Ljubljani iz leta 2009 kaže, da na strah pred kriminaliteto vplivajo zaznava resnosti viktimizacije, nesposobnost samoobrambe pred napadalcem, spol (ženske) in starost (starejši ljudje). Predhodna viktimizacija in ocena verjetnosti viktimizacije se nista pokazala kot dejavnika, ki vplivata na strah pred kriminaliteto.

Omejitve/uporabnost raziskave:

Članek, ki temelji na pregledu literature in raziskav, prispeva k razpravam o strahu pred kriminaliteto v smislu uporabe novih modelov za preučevanje strahu pred kriminaliteto in testiranje vpliva dejavnikov, ki vplivajo na strah pred kriminaliteto.

Praktična uporabnost:

Članek predstavlja dober vpogled v dejavnike strahu pred kriminaliteto in predstavlja osnovo za ustvarjalce kriminalitetne politike v mestnih okoljih.

Izvirnost/pomembnost prispevka:

Članek predstavlja pregled literature, predhodnih študij o strahu pred kriminaliteto v Sloveniji s poudarkom na študiji o strahu pred kriminaliteto iz leta 2009.

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Ključne besede: strah pred kriminaliteto, dejavniki, Ljubljana, Slovenija

1 INTRODUCTION

Research on fear of crime in Slovenia began in the 1990s when Pavlović (1998) investigated this phenomenon in 1992 and 1997. He conducted an International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) in Ljubljana and other regions of Slovenia. Meško and Umek (1999), and Meško and Farrall (1999) tested the socio-demographic and social-psychological models of fear of crime and replicated Van der Wurff's et al. study (Van der Wurff, Van Staalduinen, & Stringer, 1989). Meško and Farrall (1999) compared the results of their study with results from Scotland and the Netherlands and found out that there were no significant differences in fear of crime in the countries being compared. In the following decade, several studies used this model in sporadic surveys of fear of crime in urban neighbourhoods in Slovenia (Meško, 2000; Meško & Areh, 2003; Meško & Areh, 2004; Meško, Areh, & Kury,

2004; Meško, Fallshore, Muratbegović, & Fields, 2007; Meško, Kovčo-Vukadin, & Muratbegović, 2008).

The comparison of the results of fear of crime research showed that the fear of crime factors in the population of Slovenia did not change significantly. In 2009, the referenced models were upgraded with the following factors of fear of crime: socio-economic factors, social networks and interpersonal relations, disorder in the neighbourhood, probability of victimization, impact on life in case of victimization, and gravity of the offence, trust in public institutions, and preventive (precautionary) measures (Vošnjak, 2011).

2 FEAR OF CRIME FACTORS

Researchers investigating fear of crime (Van der Wurff et al., 1989; Stanko & Hobdell, 1993; Hale, 1996; Farrall, Bannister, Ditton, & Gilchrist, 1997; Meško, 2002) have tried to explain a large number of factors, and tested various models of fear of crime in their analyses. Important progress from the early research of exclusively demographic characteristics of respondents and their fear of crime was a study that included socio-demographic and social-psychological variables (Van der Wurff et al., 1989).

The fear of crime factors in the 2009 fear of crime survey were discussed by Vošnjak, Šifrer, and Meško (2011), where the authors empirically tested these factors. For the purpose of this article, I will summarise the main implication of the fear of crime factors and present the main findings from the 2009 survey in Ljubljana and present factors which can predict fear of crime in inhabitants of urban neighbourhoods.

2.1 Gender, age, and socio-economic factors

Common sense suggests that the fear of crime is stronger in people who are not confident in their abilities to protect themselves, either because they cannot run fast, are physically not strong enough to defend themselves, cannot afford protection of their homes, or need more time to recover after material or physical damage has been inflicted. Socio-demographic factors, such as gender, age, and socio-economic status, are related to individual vulnerability and influence the fear of crime (Hale, 1996).

Killias (1990) tried to clarify the concept of vulnerability. He pointed out that different perceptions of vulnerability probably stemmed from socialisation, which can be particularly noticed in differences between men and women. It is necessary to take into consideration personal vulnerability factors, especially gender which is a suitable starting point, because it continuously appears a significant fear of crime indicator in surveys. The hypothesis that women are more afraid of victimization than men, even though men are much more frequent victims of all sorts of criminal offences, with the exception of sexual violence has been confirmed. In women, fear of sexual violence increases fear of other criminal offences (Ferraro, 1995). As a

result of continuous contact with sexual harassment, women become more alert to the possibility of danger from their environment and feel the need for a safer lifestyle in order to protect themselves. However, it is necessary to be careful with the interpretation of these results. Regarding gender, a paradox is noticed as fear of crime is strongest in elderly women, although victimization is lowest in this group, and fear of crime is least expressed in young men, while they are most frequently victimized. Gilchrist, Bannister, Ditton, and Farrall (1998) and Meško and Areh (2003) mentioned the stereotypes of the so-called 'frightened woman' and 'fearless man'. Meško and Areh (2003) questioned these stereotypes with an empirical test of ideas of fearless women and frightened men. The stereotype of worried and frightened women supposedly originates from socialisation involving fear of the unknown and strangers, dependence on known men (father, brother, partner), and socialisation involving fear of public places. Feminists have criticised women's hysterical responses and over-reaction and reveal the fact that women are more sensitive and perceptive than men. They have also established that women witness and experience more violence (physical and sexual) at work, in the street, and at home. Stanko and Hobdell (1993) studied the relationship between victimization, gender, and dealing with victimization. They learned that male victims of violent criminal offences experienced great fear, suffered from phobias, sleeping disorders, became excessively careful, underwent personality changes, and became significantly more vulnerable, which bears strong resemblance to the reactions initially attributed to women.

According to Gilchrist et al. (1998), differences in the fear of crime between genders are supposedly only one more consequence of conclusions drawn from inadequate methodology, as is demonstrated by the above-mentioned feminist criticism. Even if it seems unlikely that fear of crime in women is exaggerated, it is increasingly evident that fear of crime in men was assessed too low. The low levels of fear of crime in men has always seemed unusual, since men (as a group) experience a high rate of violence, most often in public places, and usually from strangers. It seems that in surveys men do not want to answer in a way that would undermine their image of being invulnerable (Pain, 2000).

Fear of crime in the elderly and its influence on the quality of their life are discussed in the literature (Hale, 1996; Pain, 2000; Gray, Jackson, & Farrall, 2008). The age factor stands out in discussing vulnerability, and increases fear levels in people. There are a number of studies (Yin, 1982; Clarke & Lewis, 1982; Warr, 1984; Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; Meško 2002) claiming that this relation is of little or negligible importance, or conditioned by other factors, such as low income, single status, and health problems. Other studies (LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987; Pain, 2000) indicated that, under certain circumstances, the elderly experience less fear of victimization than the young.

Meško (2002) stated that the elderly are more dependent on monthly incomes (pensions), and that any loss of money, damage, or cost of medical treatment represents a larger burden for them than for other groups. In addition, recovery of the elderly, mainly victims of violent criminal offences (i.e. robbery, bodily injury), takes a longer time and is often related to more problems than with the young.

Income and education are important additional fear of crime factors. The rate of fear among the poor and less educated population is higher than in the white, rich, and more educated population. The higher level of fear of crime among people with low income and low education can be explained by environmental and contextual factors. They often live in neighbourhoods with a high crime rate and incivility. People from the lower socio-economic groups find it harder to protect themselves or their property, or avoid circumstances that generate fear of crime (Hale, 1996). In addition to material sources, it is necessary to pay attention on social resources, conditioned by the quality of social networks.

2.2 Social networks, social capital, and social cohesion

A certain level of social cohesion, human solidarity, loyalty, group and interpersonal attraction, and responsibility is typical in social groups and a society in general. All of these characteristics of internal social life are addressed by the term 'social climate' in a group. A good social climate is demonstrated by a high rate of social cohesion, predominance of positive emotions of group members, feeling of responsibility for the group's success or failure, and feeling of belonging to the group, and the group's appeal to group members (values). Low social cohesion is reflected in the predominance of negative feelings in group members, hostility and conflicts between group members, insufficient feelings of belongingness, absence of feeling of responsibility for the group's success or failure, and insufficient appeal of the group to its members (Ule, 2009).

Networking is a typical characteristic of a modern society. The level of involvement in the network structures of society influences a person's level of social integration and the quality of their life. Social capital is what helps spread the network and supplying the provisions necessary for enabling and maintaining integration in the modern networked world. Both formal and informal social networks are essential components of social capital (Martinjak, 2004). Kawachi, Kennedy, and Wilkinson (1999) point out the relation between a low supply of social capital and a high crime rate. They supported the thesis of social disorganisation, suggesting that the rate of social cohesion or social capital is essential for understanding the relationship between the crime-rate and a neighbourhood, a community, and even a society. Cohen and Prusak (2001) and Martinjak (2004) state that communities with a large stock of social capital have higher health-rates, better educational structures and economic growth, and a lower crime-rate.

2.3 Fear of crime and (social and physical) disorder in the neighbourhood

In addition to social relations in neighbourhoods, an important fear trigger is the disorder in these neighbourhoods. Meško and Umek (1999) linked fear of crime with characteristics of the physical environment in which people live as this relationship has not been fully clarified. Two forms of disorder (Meško, 2002),

physical and social, need to be taken into consideration. Signs of physical disorder are untidiness, run-down buildings, piles of rubbish, graffiti, vandalism, deserted cars, etc. The most obvious signs of social disorder are drinking bouts in public places, tramps, beggars, groups of youngsters roaming the streets, harassment, unconcealed drug trafficking, and using drugs in public places. Physical and social disorder is considered an indicator of a neighbourhood's disarray, the cause of crime, and increased fear of crime. Signs of disorder and untidiness attract potential offenders. Solving untidiness and disorder in a neighbourhood should increase the risk for offenders, decrease crime-rates, and reduce fear of crime levels (Meško, 2002).

A neighbourhood should be a safe environment and not represent a threat to people living there. The mere awareness that social and emotional support is available contributes to a lower rate of fear, and, consequently, to a feeling/belief of lesser vulnerability for people. The feeling of belonging to the community can help people establish trust in their own abilities, and thus decrease the feeling of possible victimization and fear of crime. If fear of crime is related to disorder in the neighbourhood, be it social and physical, the inhabitants of the neighbourhood recognise its signs, and on the grounds of co-operation suppress its influence. Integration in the community also helps in developing more detailed mental-maps of safe and unsafe places in the neighbourhood (Hale, 1996).

2.4 Probability of victimization and fear of crime

The likelihood of victimization is related to the perceived probability of victimization – it can function together with other factors, such as gender, age, place of living, official crime statistics, awareness of people, or other factors influence the fear indirectly, through generating a perception of potential victimization. Ferraro (1995) concluded that assessment of victimization probability is an important – yet not the most important, nor even the only – factor in developing the fear of crime. In addition, an important discovery is also that the likelihood of victimization can result in various reactions and consequences. It affects not only what people feel (fear), but also what they do (change of behaviour). Behavioural changes are demonstrated by purchasing safety systems, avoiding means of public transportation or changing daily routines. However, the question of how such behaviour affects fear of crime is not fully understood. It can intensify fear, it can decrease it, or it can have no impact on it at all. In his research, Ferraro (1995) discovered that behaviour changes can over a longer time period decrease the victimization risk assessment, but they do not decrease the fear of crime. Implementation of preventive measures to decrease victimization cannot generate fear of crime if it did not exist beforehand but it can increase existing fear.

2.5 Victimization impacts – direct and vicarious victimization

Skogan (1987) established that fear of crime is related to victimization. The results of his research, in Houston and Newark conducted at 6-month intervals, confirm

this relationship. Both bodily and material victimizations are related to fear of crime, especially the fear of recurrence of such events. Fear is also affected by recent victimization and its frequency. Skogan (1987) also indicates that victimization has merely a short-term effect on the fear of crime, and that temporal distance from the victimization act was not given sufficient attention by researchers (Meško, 2002). Fear of crime can be proportionate to the severity of a criminal offence experienced.

There is a perception that people are more afraid of being a victim of violence than of property offences. However, according to available data, the frequency of criminal offences decreases with their gravity; the more serious the offence, the less frequently it is committed. Therefore, if severity of a criminal offence was the only (or the most important) determinant of fear, individuals would be most afraid of criminal offences with the least likelihood of their occurrence. According to this, the strongest would be the fear of being a murder victim. Warr (1993) indicates that this conclusion is incorrect, and presents other factors regarding this phenomenon, such as exposure to risk, the severity of the consequences of a crime, inability to resist a criminal, social factors (size of the neighbourhood, tidiness, crime-rate), individual characteristics (gender, age, education, socio-economic status), perception of social disorganisation (vandalism, drugs), cognitive judgment of potential victimization, the crime-rate, police work, and direct experiences of victimization.

Severity of a criminal offence can, therefore, be only one of the determinants of fear (Warr, 1993). In addition, indirect experiences, such as knowing victims, or learning about victimized people from the mass media, can contribute to the increased perception of victimization risk (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981). They are the so-called 'crime multipliers', or processes, that take place in neighbourhoods and "spread" the influence of criminal offences (Taylor & Hale, 1986).

Data show that news about victimized friends or neighbours intensifies fear of crime in individuals, and indirect experiences with victimization increase worries about victimization as a direct experience. However, it must be noted that many inhabitants of a neighbourhood are informed about crime indirectly, through channels, which can inflate, reduce, or disfigure the real crime picture (Skogan, 1986). An individual's perception of risk can be additionally instigated by interpersonal communication with peers, family members, peers, friends, acquaintances and the media, while it can be moderated by their own experiences (Meško & Eman, 2009; Meško, Cockcroft, Crawford, & Lemaître, 2009).

One of the possible explanations of the increased fear of crime is a vicarious victimization. A crime victim who tells their story to others results in compassion and empathy with the victim's problems. An even more direct source of vicarious victimization is the media, which dramatically or realistically depicts various criminal offences. The most influential is television, which broadcasts an increasing number of TV series about police work, violence, and crime. The channels have been flooded with these series, which determine an individual's view of society and affect their perception of crime reality. Scenes from TV are not only limited to »street crime«, but they often emphasise vulnerability of homes, and show potential consequences of not behaving in a self-protective way and exposure to all kinds of danger (Meško & Eman, 2009). In addition, the print media have an important

influence on the fear of crime. In an analysis of British newspapers, Williams and Dickinson (1993) found out that fear of crime also depends on the way crime is presented in the crime section of a newspaper. Using a telephone survey, Chiricos, Hogan, and Gertz (1997) learned that people who watch TV a lot and listen to radio news, experience more fear of crime, which is especially more typical for women.

2.6 Trust in public institutions

After gaining independence in 1991, state institutions and the political system of Slovenia were burdened with high expectations about democratic institutionalisation. People evaluated very specific social, economic, and political changes, which affected their quality of life. Confidence in the political-system institutions had gradually decreased with the years, to increase at the end of the 1990s, at the beginning of the new decade (Rus & Toš, 2005). Nevertheless, it is the political-system institutions that people do not trust, with the least trusting people being the most active section of the population development: the younger, better-educated, socially high-ranked, less discriminatory, and less egalitarian. In short, the carriers of mistrust represent important potential for the democratic development of society.

Rus and Toš (2005) emphasised that trust is not everything; the power of democracy also lies in mistrust, provided that it is justified in the democratic system value-baselines, and expressed by sophisticated, better-informed citizens, or active individuals and groups trained and prepared to reform systems. Nevertheless, on the international scale, Slovenia has been ranked "somewhere in the middle". As far as the extent of expressed mistrust is concerned, it does not deviate significantly from traditionally democratic countries, with the exception that, in Slovenia, there is a lower rate of trust in political system institutions, and trust in the judicial system has disintegrated, while trust in state welfare institutions is adequately high; and, in addition to high confidence in the educational system, there is a high rate of confidence in the mass media.

3 DISCUSSION

In this section of the article, I will present and discuss findings from the 2009 fear of crime survey in Ljubljana, Slovenia in relation to the previously presented findings regarding the factors of fear of crime. A review of fear of crime research in Slovenia shows that no significant changes regarding the impact of fear of crime factors on fear of crime have been observed in the last two decades. This result can be attributed to the application of the same model which consists the same questions at all surveys as well as to the assumption that fear of crime factors stay quite stable in urban environments. Despite increasing crime and imprisonment rates in Slovenia since the mid-1990s (Meško & Jere, 2012), fear of crime surveys show that factors of fear of crime and its intensity seems to be quite stable. The model used in the 2009 survey included new variables and gave us an opportunity for an additional insight on fear of crime factors.

In the analysis of the 2009 survey, a fear of crime variable was included in the regression analysis as a dependent variable. Before the regression analysis a factor analysis of sections of the questionnaire was used. The results show that the used model of fear of crime explains more variance ($R^2 = .54$) than other models used prior to this study (Slovenia, 2001, $R^2 = .43$; Croatia, 2002, $R^2 = .43$; Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2002, $R^2 = .45$) (Meško et al., 2008) and imply some new findings and confirm findings from the previous surveys. The findings imply that the respondents in Ljubljana relate fear of crime to the impacts of different crimes on their lives. However, research did not confirm that the level of fear of individual crimes is proportional to their severity. It was established that respondents feel the most threatened by robbery rather than assault.

Regarding vicarious victimization, the perception of a violent crime, in which another person was victimized, has a greater influence on increasing fear of crime levels than the perception of a property crime. Regarding the perception of the probability of direct victimization, property crimes cause greater fear than violent crimes, while the results of the influence of vicarious victimization show the opposite. Knowing a victim of a violent crime has a greater influence on the fear of crime than knowing someone who was a victim of a property crime.

The present research confirms that perceived probability of victimization influences subsequent emotional responses; mostly in those who believe that victimization consequences may be severe. Women feel more threatened than men, and senior citizens feel more threatened than other age groups. However, it is necessary to be careful when interpreting these results because a classification analysis has shown a higher percentage of correctly classified units among women (83%) and a lower percentage of correctly classified units among men (59%). The results of the analysis indicate that the stereotype of the worried, frightened woman is justified to a large extent, and a lower percentage of correctly classified men confirm that the statements in general are true that exaggerate the estimations that men do not get frightened.

Respondents who feel most threatened are senior citizens over 56. Respondents in the youngest age group 18-21 feel less threatened, and the middle age group 31-55 feel the least threatened. Citizens in Ljubljana in the age group over 56 also have the greatest trust in public institutions. The anxiety due to criminal offences, the consequences of crime, and the impact on life in case of victimization, constantly increase with age, whereas confidence in the ability to defend from an assailant constantly decreases with age.

Respondents who have more trust in people who live in the same neighbourhood, have more friends and know more people who they can rely on, feel less threatened. Involvement in a social network is most typical of senior citizens who also find it most valuable. The results of determining the level of social involvement by establishing to what extent the respondents agree with the statements such as "The people in our neighbourhood can be trusted", "I have many friends in our neighbourhood", "There are many reliable people in our neighbourhood", and "When going shopping or for a walk, I meet many acquaintances" show that it is the senior respondents aged over 71 who agree the most with the listed statements, which indicates that senior citizens are more

satisfied with living in the neighbourhood together with other people and that they establish social relations more frequently. The youngest respondents (18-20) agree with these statements the least.

Apart from social relations in neighbourhood, an important factor, which also influences fear of crime, is disorder in the neighbourhood (Meško & Umek, 1999; LaGrange, Ferraro, & Supancic, 1992). This factor is not a significant for predicting the fear of crime in Ljubljana.

It was stated in the beginning of this article that income is an important factor which influences people's fear of crime, since the level of fear is higher among the poor, and poorly educated, than among the wealthy and well-educated. This statement cannot be confirmed. It could be assumed that those who are in a strong financial position can afford more "protection" than their fellow citizens. Hale (1996) states that people from lower socio-economic groups are less able to defend or protect themselves and their property. However, the results of this research do not confirm this thesis. Thus, in the research, social class as one of the main elements of social vulnerability, and as a factor in the fear of crime, is excluded, and we establish that the respondents from lower socio-economic groups would feel severe consequences due to victimization, and possible victimization would influence their lives to a greater extent. Those who are financially better situated do report better inter-personal relationships.

Previous victimization of respondents has less influence on the estimation of the probability of crime in the next 12 months, since the respondents who have already been victimized in their lives estimate that they will less likely become a victim of any crimes, such as street robbery, fraud, physical assault, theft, and street harassment in the next 12 months. Moreover, possible victimization in the next 12 months is believed that it would have less severe consequences for respondents who have already been victimised than for those who have never been victims of any crime. The variable 'probability of victimization in the next 12 months' is not a statistically significant predictor of the fear of crime as it was found to have no influence respondents present fear of crime.

The 2009 fear of crime survey in Ljubljana requires a follow up as it has been conducted only once. As it consists of questions from all previous surveys and new questions on fear of crime, the instrument needs to be additionally tested in the future studies of fear of crime. The results of this study also have significant implications for crime control and prevention policy makers who set priorities in crime control and prevention in urban environments and practitioners who implement crime prevention strategies (Meško & Kury, 2009). In addition, this survey needs to be used and tested in rural environments to test its applicability beyond urban neighbourhoods.

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