

# The fears of crime and the outcomes criminology essay



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The outcomes of the fear of crime were for very long time overlooked by criminologists and psychologists and only in last 25 years fear has become an important research topic (McGarrell et al 1997). Recently, more attention has been put on this matter which is now recognised as a growing phenomenon which significantly influences the quality of life. Some may argue that the fear of crime is a consequence of individual having contact whether directly or indirectly with criminal events (Sparks, 1992). Saying that, it is important to remember that the indirect contact with crime may occur through the media representation or interpersonal communication and have a damaging effect on individual's quality of life. Worrying fact is that many researchers such as Hindelang (1974), Fowler and colleagues (1974) or Boggs (1971) have established that the relationship between the levels of fear of crime and experience of it are two different things. This means that although, the number of reported crimes continues to drop and according to statistics, the chance of becoming the victim of crime is the lowest it has been for last twenty years (Home Office, 2009), society is increasingly becoming more anxious about safety (Home Office, 2006).

Therefore, from this observation it can be speculated that the fear of crime is the problem itself, not the crime. So, this essay will firstly introduce to overview of the crime and the fear of it, including statistics and the lack of accordance between what has been found about the crime levels and the fear of crime. Secondly it will engage with theoretical assumptions related to the topic and critically evaluate theoretical assumptions. Thirdly, this paper will demonstrate the influence of the mass media on the increase of the fear

of crime. And finally, it will draw the relevant conclusion based on proposed arguments and clarify that ' the fear of crime is a problem in its own right'.

To begin with it is relevant to familiarise with statistics of the actual levels crime, the fear of it and demographic groups. According to the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) the relationship between these three aspects is rather not proportional. As found by Skogan (1976), the fear of crime is more common within the demographic groups which were least frequently victimised such as women or elderly. He found that although, the most incidents of victimisation were reported by young, Black male - this group is least fearful of becoming a victim of crime. Instead, older females, both Black and White have been accounted to be most fearful of crime (Skogan, 1976). Many researches challenged this inconsistency and for instance, Stinchcombe and colleagues (1977) introduced the idea of ' vulnerability' in order to explain the higher levels of fear in the elderly and women. Briderman (1976) however, made the connection between the primary fear of crime and strangers and came up with the hypothesis that ' fear of crime is the fear of strangers'. However, this theory can not be confirmed in practice. Although women are being told from the young age to be conscious of strangers, they are actually more likely to become a victim of an intimate partner, friend or another relative than by a stranger and according to study by Rennison (2001) fifty four percent of violent assaults reported by women are carried out by someone known to the victim.

Although, there is a noticeable progress within the victimization perspective which has occurred in recent years in order to distinguish difference between the fear, worry, risk and concern - the results did not change drastically <https://assignbuster.com/the-fears-of-crime-and-the-outcomes-criminology-essay/>

(Sparks, 1992). Analysing the more recent statistics it can be noticed that this kind of demographical segregation of fear is still prevalent (Home Office, 2006). In general, according to the findings from the British Crime Survey in 2008/09 it has been found that 16 percent of people, who were asked, thought that they were very likely to become a victim of crime; however it has been found that only 2 percent were actually a risk (Home Office, 2006). Moreover, the segregation of crime, such as personal/property, single/multiple or direct/indirect was designed to improve the understanding why some demographic groups are more fearful of becoming a victim, however in fact did not have much effect in practice.

The following part of this paper will link the issue of the fear of crime to the broader theoretical assumption and introduce to different models of victimisation. The earliest research on the fear of crime was based on the victimisation model which linked the fear of crime to experience of it (Snell, 2001). Although Skogan and Maxfield (1981) documented that association, others found that such as connection does not exist or the impact of victimisation on the level of fear is minimal (Liska et al, 1988). Furthermore, this model was repeatedly questioned as those who are at the highest risk of victimisation are least fearful and those who are at the lowest risk are the most concerned about becoming a victim (Skogan, 1976).

Therefore the Indirect Victimisation Model was developed. This theory assumes that people who recognize themselves as the most defenceless and vulnerable to crime, such as elderly or women, will have the highest levels of fear (Snell, 2001).

The Community Concern Model, firstly recognised by Taylor and Hale (1986) assumes that the level of the fear increases within the communities which report their neighbourhood as less satisfying due to the loss of the social control over them. There is a lack of attachment between the neighbours what increases the fear of victimisation within own neighbourhood (Snell, 2001). However, it can be argued that by introduction of CCTV or the Neighbourhood Watch and therefore increase of the social control could cause even higher concern of criminal activities in the area and therefore, higher fear of crime.

The Subcultural Diversity Model theorises that the fear of crime increase if living close to someone whose has got a different cultural background (Snell, 2001). The study suggests that foreign behaviour due to the cultural beliefs may become difficult to understand and therefore fearful (Merry, 1981).

Secondly, it is important to acknowledge the power of media representation, or rather we should say, misrepresentation, which increase the level of the fear of crime. According to the study by Surette (1998) who measured the impact which media representation has got on the fear of crime, it has been found that readers of those newspapers which tend to report crime in dramatised and excessive way are more fearful of crime. The concept of the moral panic feed by the mass media was firstly acknowledge by Cohen(1987) who described it in the term of ' amplification' of the perception of disorder between the ' Mods' and ' Rockers'. The relationship is that similarly, the tabloid press is responsible for the misrepresentation of the actual level of crime by focusing on selective crime news which win the audience and therefore sell the newspaper. He also believed that by the <https://assignbuster.com/the-fears-of-crime-and-the-outcomes-criminology-essay/>

increase of misrepresentation by the media can increase the level of reporting crime and therefore pressure the police to increase arrests (Cohen, 1987).

Therefore, it needs to be recognised that through the exaggeration and overrepresentation, media can stir up public indignation and create the social problem and moral panic in society. Even more worrying is the fact that although the media covers only those erratic stories - not 'sensible' ones, the majority of people, when asked about the actual level of crime; attribute their knowledge to TV and newspaper gossip (Williams and Dickinson, 1993). This use of the limited information gained from the unreliable sources such as media is also called 'symbolic interactionism' (Ferraro, 1995). However, as it has been noticed by Yin (1980), media representation of crime has got the most influence on the elderly people especially if the victim of the story was also an elderly person.

Therefore, that is another example of the fear being greater than the actual level of crime as older people are least likely from all demographical groups to experience the victimization (Lee, 1982). That may be attributed to the fact that elderly are not to be seen on the busy street on Friday night as most of young people, therefore they less likely to become victimise. Lawton (1981) suggested that vulnerability of elderly may become the foundation of the fear of crime. He also researched that during the criminal activity such as robbery or physical attack, elderly are more likely to experience serious physical injuries which in effect may lead to helplessness and dependency which they may fear more than the crime itself.

Consequently, that can have an effect on the quality of life of elderly. It has been speculated that if the incident of attack on older person took place outside his/her home that may lead to this person fearing to stay out the house for any reasons. The same can be hypothesised about the burglary. If elderly person's house was robbed while they were not there, they may not want to leave the house again as they feel they should stay in and protect they belongings in case of another robbery. Therefore, it shows the loose of control, freedom and quality over their lives and some may say isolation from society. The study by Hough (1995) is a great example of life deprivation due to the fear of crime as he found that among women age 60 who live in the city more than one in ten never went out after dark.

The media representation of crime is also accountable for the formation of social exclusion which is mainly concerned with inequalities between different groups of people and different areas. It has been argued by Young (1988) ' crime itself is an exclusion: as are the attempt to control it by barriers, incarceration and stigmatization' (p. 26). It has been found that the fear of crime whether on the street or at home is higher among poor population than privileged (Home Office, 2009). That may be due to the fact of allocation, as residents of housing estates are more likely to witness the violence on the street or antisocial behaviour in their local area in comparison to privileged population.

' Crime is seen both as a product of social exclusion and a cause of it, where social exclusion is seen as a series of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown'.

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(Pantazis et al 2006, p. 275)

Furthermore, it is fundamental to acknowledge the current concern about terrorism which by the attack on the innocent, civilian people made the society realise that we are all potential victims. However, in this case it is the government and the military officials who with the facilities of mass media deliver information, or rather we should say, fear to society (Balkin, 1979). Some may argue that crime is politically popular as it sets out new moral targets for the government which can use it as a tool during the campaigns. However, in fact it is another example of creation of the moral panic which separates differences between nationalities and therefore limits 'social mixing' between them and increases fear, paranoia and the mistrust between different groups (Cohen, 1987). Meads (1934) has argued that there is an existence of the 'generalised other' in society which recognises 'us' as 'good' and 'them' as 'bad'. Therefore there is a tendency to exclude 'them' for 'our' security' due to the fear of crime from 'them' and that is an evident example of social exclusion.

Summarising, the primary purpose of this essay was to indicate that the fear of crime is a problem itself - not the actual level of crime. It has been demonstrated that although the level of crime is falling down and is at the lowest point for last twenty years, public fear of victimisation is growing up. Statistics from the British Crime Survey (BCS) and Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) have been used in order to demonstrate that 'paradoxical' phenomenon. In order to validate the statement that 'the fear of crime is a problem in its own right' and to help with understanding why some groups are more fearful of crime than others, the theoretical <https://assignbuster.com/the-fears-of-crime-and-the-outcomes-criminology-essay/>



models have been included. These, demonstrated that some populations due to the physical inability to defend themselves also called 'vulnerability' (women, elderly) or social and economic position may fear the crime greater than others (men, privileged). Moreover, this essay has critically evaluated the media misrepresentation of the actual crime level and how that falsification can shape the moral panic and social exclusion in society. It has been also acknowledged that the concern about terrorism acts, which are often used by politicians during campaigns, is responsible for increasing the level of the fear of crime in society. Overall, it has been learnt that the fear of victimisation is greater than the actual level of crime therefore 'the fear of crime is a problem in its own right' because it affects people's lives and controls their everyday actions. It is suggested for the society to not rely on the media representation and discontinue thinking about being victimised since as the 'real' statistics show - it is not very likely to become a victim of crime. However, it is important to remember that the fear of crime may also not always be a negative thing as it may encourage assertiveness and prompt the implementation of preventative measures.