# The fear of crime in rural and urban areas and how it impacts society

Life

# Urban and rural essay

In its social and behavioural impact, fear of crime may be as potent as victimisation itself

Fear of crime has been embedded into the mental landscape of areas both rural and urban areas for some time, with the increasing complexity and sophistication of crime comes greater challenges for governments and local authorities to combat both the physical and psychological effects of crime. The fear of crime can not only infiltrate into the bedrock of a community but can affect its citizens in their very homes therefore it is critical to glean an insight into the nature of the ' fear of crime' and how it has been tackled and can be tackled.

When discussing the fear of crime it is important to distinguish it from the physically tangible effects themselves, such as physical harm and financial loss. Crime at its core is often motivated by a small selection of key driving factors, these include financial gain often associated with robbery and confidence tricks; there is also the raw emotional/psychological factors that are often the driving force behind more violent crimes such as assault and murder (Cromby et al, 2010) . The abject fear of crime however often manifests itself as more psychological in its nature for example the ' space' and ' feel' of an area in its subjective perception can drastically altered if there is a known presence of crime and what the degree of said crime is (Herbert and Brown, 2006). However to assert that the fear of crime may be as potent as the actual victimisation itself can be heavily discredited.

One must first view the geography of the crime to ascertain how it effects the subjective ' fear of crime'. It is argued that different types of crime take place in specific geographies, for example substance abuse and petty thievery often take place in deprived areas for a host of different reasons such as the financial gain to be made and the general poor quality of life (Lum, 2008). There is also a distinct split between the types of crime that can occur in both urban and rural settings, these are often governed by the differing types of population density and affluence of said areas (Mawby and Yarwood, 2010). Fear as it presents itself in its geography is often governed by the types of crime that occur and the ' visibility' of said crime, graffiti and vandalism are often primary determiners for the type of perception that a person might have for an area as they are highly visible and can be performed in large quantities, however some can viewed as art or expression (Mcauliffe and Iveson, 2011). The ' value' of crime is also critical to examine when viewing its effects on the fear of an individual, for example certain crimes are viewed as more ' socially' acceptable, corporates, high-value financial crimes and non-violent organised crime are often mot common In inner city and CBD areas but do not receive the kind of negative exposure that petty crimes receive despite them being vastly more detrimental for both the local community and in some cases the entire nation (Hall, 2013).

The social and behavioural effects of a crime can be wide and varied and are often dependant on the circumstances and environment that surrounds them. The type of crime is deeply tied into the effects it will have on an individual and the surrounding community, more violent crime will often have the most detrimental effect on an individual and can effect a person's

habits and behaviour, for example a person may not wish to visit an area where a violent crime happened out of fear that the same crime may happen to them (Breetzke and Pearson, 2014). Another common socio-economic effect of crime is the decline of real estate prices which can drive an area further into deprivation as only the poorest can afford to live in such places and can often multiply the levels of crime than what they were before the declines (Ceccato and Wilhelmsson, 2011). Whether the abject fear of crime is rational or not is deeply dependent on the statistics of an area and more specifically the frequency of crimes that happen. This however can be a double edged sword as members of communities which have a high frequency of crime can become habituated to the said level of crime and as such will not be greatly affected by the crimes happening and have even been found to be less inclined to report crimes (Wisneiski et al, 2013). If however a crime were to happen in an area which see's little to no crime, this may shock local residents as they may believe the area to be immune to crime, this is often a common phenomenon in small rural communities where crime is almost non-existent and can in fact have extremely detrimental effects on the individuals living in said community such as general fear and public outrage at law enforcement for ' allowing' such a crime to occur in an idyllic setting where crime is believed to be non-existent.

Overtime there have been efforts to reduce the perception of crime and more specifically the fear of said crime, these include government initiatives and legally backed legislation which has been aimed at tackling the root causes of crime itself. There have also been steps taken by local communities and councils to tackle crime and the fear it can produce, these

local communities include; the neighbourhood watch which has been a staple in British communities so some time, particularly in local areas. The neighbourhood watch works closely with local police and community support officers to share advice and resources aimed at tackling crime, these include proper instructions on how to properly secure homes from theft and burglary and how to get in touch with police if there is any suspicion of crime happening locally. However there has been some criticism aimed at these types of communities as many feel they alienate the less fortunate and are often viewed as one step away from ' Gated Communities', A problem seen greatly in more suburban areas of the United States in which communities isolate themselves from the surrounding greater area out of fear of crime and in particular can spark distrust and tension between often white more affluent communities from those labelled as criminals and miscreants (Helsley and Strange, 1999).

Some of the more rigorous attempts by governments to diminish the effects crime have on public behaviour and levels of fear have been aimed at tackling the immediate effects of crime that is known to generate high levels of public interest and fear, these include tackling signs of urban and rural degeneration such as graffiti and abandoned buildings where drug related crime can flourish (Brown, 2010). There has also been efforts to reduce the exposure these kinds of crime receive by local media as it is believed to ' stoke' the apparent criminals need for attention and justification, however these methods have met hostility and claims that they are both censorship and attempts to ignore or brush over the acts of crime and vandalism. However one of most widely employed strategies by the British government

and police force of reducing crime and eliminating the fear it creates is the use of CCTV (Cook and Whowell, 2011), this however is a strategy that has many opponents. First and foremost is the claim that excessive use of CCTV is a stone's throw away from a police state and many statistics have shown that the UK employs a surveillance system similar in scale and complexity to that of Communist China, this is often touted by opponents of CCTV as clear indication that this level of surveillance is simply unnecessary for a western nation that supposedly has no aims at controlling it citizens (Koskela, 2000). There are also claims and studies that suggest that CCTV may not the master deterrent that it has been claimed to be and that the amount of footage recorded is simply too vast to be viewed and correctly assessed by a shrinking British police force. However proponents of CCTV claim that the surveillance system has helped resolve an immeasurable number of crimes and public disturbances and has likely been the savoir for many people where without the use of CCTV the crime would simply be unsolvable.

The design and construction of a place has also been identified in having a significant impact on the levels of crime in the said area and thusly an effect on the fear of crime itself, therefore many governments and agencies in charge of constructing new living places are very mindful of how to ' design' out the crime. Lighting and spacing have been specifically identified in having a large impact over local crime, for example added lighting and reduced hiding spots have been found to discourage and diminish criminal willingness to conduct criminal activity, most notably burglary and drug dealing (http://www. securedbydesign. com/) . Many studies also encourage localised pride in their habitat such as keeping an area tidy and well-

managed, this has been found to reduce crime committed by locals and increases transparency for locals to report any crimes they suspect have happened. However this has been viewed as bordering on territoriality and can once again be contrasted with gated communities seen in the United States. The composition of the types of residents in a space have been reported to dramatically affect the likelihood of crime being present within an area and the overall effect said crime will have on the behaviour and actions of said residents. Studies have found that mixed resident spaces made up of different races, classes and nationalities have been found to reduce overall crime in an area and also increase communal spirit and unity. Some Communities that are homogenous have been found to experience higher rates of crime, however this is not the case for all communities. In the UK for example, communities made up of primarily white, young and welfare receiving persons have been found to experience large volumes of crime often originating within the community itself, contrasted with communities with higher incomes in which most crime committed comes from sources outside of said community.

Even with vast amounts of preventative measures in place, governments must still prepare for the psychological and behavioural aftermath of any possible crime, this is critical in instilling trust into citizens that they will be dually cared for in the event of a crime and can help reduce the possible impacts of the fear of crime itself, this is particularly important for those most vulnerable. Some of this methods include: ensuring that criminals are caught and processed in the shortest amount of time possible, this has two positive knock on effects, firstly it can be seen by potential criminals as a

deterrent for any prospective crime and it also instils a sense of safety and justice in those victimised by crime. Aftercare is particularly important too as it helps manage the psychological impact of being the target of a crime, some of the initiatives used to assist those targeted by crime include regular check-ups by police in a supportive role to ascertain the wellbeing of those effected by crime. A combination of these methods have been found to reduce the perceived fear of crime in most sections of society (Pain, 1997).

Although the fear of crime is something that can be seen in many communities throughout the world, its severity and complexity is extremely varied. The key to combating this lingering effect of crime is an approach which targets the root causes of the crimes themselves and instilling a sense of safety and security within communities without overly policing or invading personal spaces and liberties. Crime is said to be as old as humanity itself but how we deal with the effects of crime is a rapidly changing and ever sophisticating phenomenon that hopes to bring eventual peace of mind to those most notably affected.