

The Victim in International Perspective

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Fear of Crime in Australia

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One of the largest social surveys ever conducted in Australia is the National Crime Victims Survey¹ conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics during 1975. Data were collected from 18694 people throughout the country. This paper explores the answers of these respondents to the question: 'If you are walking out alone in your neighbourhood at night would you feel very safe, reasonably safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe?' Our purpose is to tentatively attempt to identify those sections of the Australian community who are most afraid of crime based on these answers.

The Sample

Dwellings for inclusion in the stratified multi-stage area sample were selected from all parts of Australia excluding the Northern Territory, rural regions, and locations with a population of less than 500 people. Of 10500 dwelling sites originally selected, 9200 contained effective households, of which 8414 provided data for the survey. These households contained 18694 persons aged 15 years and over, each of whom supplied some data. The remarkable household response rate of 91,5% is only possible, of course, in a survey which has the legal authority of the Bureau of Statistics.

In the discussion of the data which follows the question of statistical significance is ignored. Since all of the cross-tabulations considered in the paper spread the huge sample fairly evenly among a small number of cells, even slight trends in the data are statistically significant.

Fear and Concern About Crime in Perspective

Australians do not evidence the degree of fear and concern about crime which seems to be a feature of life in countries such as the United States². One of the questions in the National Crime Victims Survey was 'Is there anything that you don't like about your neighbourhood?' Only 1,8% of respondents mentioned 'crime or fear of crime' (including juvenile delinquents) as something they did not like about their neighbourhood. 'Inadequate facilities and services', 'noise', 'traffic', 'neighbours', 'pollution', 'bad roads', 'animals', and 'overcrowding' were all (in descending order of importance) matters of greater concern than 'crime or fear of crime'. We shall see that it is only in pockets of the Australian community that fear of crime is a real issue.

Table 1*: *How safe individuals feel walking alone in their neighbourhood at night; by age in %*

	15 and under 20	20 and under 25	25 and under 30	30 and under 40	40 and under 50	50 and under 60	60 and over	Total
Very safe	24.2	24.4	27.2	28.3	29.3	29.5	23.1	26.7
Reasonably safe	52.6	48.7	48.7	48.1	49.2	45.8	43.7	47.9
Somewhat unsafe	16.1	18.4	16.3	16.3	13.3	15.3	17.8	16.2
Very unsafe	7.1	8.5	7.8	7.3	8.2	9.4	15.4	9.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

* 'Not stated' and 'Not applicable' categories have been excluded in the calculation of all percentages in this paper.

The Aged Feel Less Safe

Table 1 presents a breakdown to the question about how safe respondents feel in their neighbourhood by age groups. Consistent with the remarks in the preceding section, it can be seen from the total column in Table 1 that only 9,2% of the sample felt 'very unsafe' in their neighbourhood, and only 16,2% 'somewhat unsafe'.

Fear of crime is remarkably constant among all the age groups in Table 1 up to the 60 and over group. Compared with the remainder of the sample, about twice as many of the 60 and overs felt 'very unsafe' in their neighbourhood. One possibility which must be considered here is that the aged might feel less safe for reasons not related to crime, perhaps because they feel unsafe on their feet. Even among the aged, this is likely to be the case for only a minority of respondents since the question is asked in the context of a survey about crime. The 'feeling safe walking alone in your neighbourhood' question is surrounded by questions on firearms ownership and questions on whether the respondent has been a victim of various types of crime during the previous twelve months. Confidence that the finding that old people feel less safe in their neighbourhood represents a greater fear of crime among the aged is bolstered by the consistency with findings from other countries of heightened fear of crime among people over 60³.

The apparently high fear of crime among the aged cannot be explained by the fact that they have an objectively high probability of being a victim of crime. Respondents to the survey who were over 60 years of age had lower than average victimization rates for most types of crime⁴. Nor do the aged spend a large proportion of their time outside in public space where they are at greatest risk of victimization. Their fear may be explicable in terms of their impaired physical capacity rendering them less confident of their ability to handle a crime event.

Women Feel Less Safe

The most dramatic difference in feelings of safety was according to sex (see Table 2). Of those survey respondents who said they felt very unsafe, 89.1% were women. Surveys from other countries also produce findings indicating greater fear of crime among women⁵.

Like the aged, the female respondents to the survey showed lower real rates of victimization than males on most types of offences⁶. The exceptions to this trend were of course sexual offences. It may be that even though women are less likely to be victims of most types of crime, the few crimes of which they are disproportionately the victims are crimes which are inordinately fear-provoking. This is especially true of rape. One is reminded of Brownmiller's forceful statement:

Man's discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times along with the use of fire and the first crude stone axe. From prehistoric times to the present, I believe rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more nor less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear⁷.

Whether the intimidation is conscious or unconscious, and engaged in by *all* men or only most, the indisputable fact remains that the intimidation of women by the prospect of rape is a pervading reality of Western culture. This reality is illustrated by one of the respondents in Paul Wilson's study:

I guess I think about rape pretty much first thing each day because that's how I decide what I'm going to wear. When I'm feeling insecure I try to be more conventional in my dress⁸.

People Who are Widowed, Separated or Divorced Feel Less Safe

Table 3 shows that people who are widowed express a fear of crime much greater than that expressed by people who have never married or are now married. Respondents who were separated or divorced, while not as afraid as those who had been widowed, still were much more likely to say that they felt unsafe than the never and now married respondents.

Table 2: How safe individuals feel walking alone in their neighbourhood at night; by sex in %

	Male	Female	Total
Very safe	43.5	11.0	26.7
Reasonably safe	48.2	47.7	47.9
Somewhat unsafe	6.2	25.4	16.2
Very unsafe	2.1	15.9	9.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Perhaps the experience of losing a spouse renders people more insecure and fosters a feeling that they have lost an important source of protection. Interestingly, it was the separated and divorced respondents to the survey, not the widowed respondents, who had higher real rates of victimization than other groups on all types of crime⁹.

Low Socio-Economic Status People Feel Less Safe

Among respondents with jobs, 'craftsmen' and people with professional and managerial work were those who exhibited the lowest levels of fear of crime. The

Table 3: How safe individuals feel walking alone in their neighbourhood at night; by marital status in %

	Never married	Now married	Widowed	Separated or divorced	Total
Very safe	27.6	27.6	14.7	25.5	26.7
Reasonably safe	50.4	47.9	41.6	44.9	47.9
Somewhat unsafe	15.1	16.0	21.8	16.7	16.2
Very unsafe	6.9	8.5	21.9	12.9	9.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 4: How safe individuals feel walking alone in their neighbourhood at night; by employment status in %

	Not in the labour force	Un-employed	Employed part-time	Employed full-time	Total
Very safe	16.3	25.0	23.9	35.8	26.7
Reasonably safe	47.2	48.1	49.6	48.1	47.9
Somewhat unsafe	22.0	16.0	18.7	10.8	16.2
Very unsafe	14.5	10.9	7.8	5.3	9.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

tion rates¹³. In sum, these Australian results tend to mirror American findings that while very large cities like New York are far from the objectively most dangerous in which to live, the fear of crime is greatest in these very large cities¹⁴. Perhaps fear of crime is more a function of the volume of crime taking place in the city than of the crime rate per capital. The very largest cities, because of their sheer size, have a more constant flow of sensational crimes to keep the media busy in the business of generating shock and fear.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that in the general Australian community the risk of crime is perceived as one of the least important of neighbourhood problems. Most Australians feel safe out walking alone in their neighbourhood. Nevertheless, there are certain segments of the Australian community which are especially

Table 7: How safe individuals feel walking alone in their neighbourhood at night; state capitals versus other urban areas
in %

	State capital cities	Other urban areas	Total
Very safe	22.7	36.3	26.7
Reasonably safe	48.2	47.3	47.9
Somewhat unsafe	18.1	11.5	16.2
Very unsafe	11.0	4.9	9.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 8: How safe individuals feel walking alone in their neighbourhood at night; by state capital
in %

	Sydney	Mel- bourne	Bris- bane	Adelaide	Perth	Hobart	Total
Very safe	20.7	21.9	20.9	29.3	25.0	33.6	26.7
Reasonably safe	47.0	46.7	52.7	49.0	51.3	49.4	47.9
Somewhat unsafe	20.3	18.4	17.8	13.5	15.5	13.0	16.2
Very unsafe	12.0	13.0	8.6	8.2	8.2	4.0	9.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

subject to feelings of insecurity about crime. The largest, and most frightened of these groups is women. Also particularly susceptible to fear of crime in the streets are the aged, the widowed, the unemployed and poor, and the inhabitants of Australia's very largest cities.

The data reviewed here show that it is not necessarily the sections of the community which are most likely to be the victims of crime who have the greatest fear of crime. Indeed if we look directly at whether people who have been victims of various types of crime have a greater fear of crime, we find from the Australian National Crime Victims Survey little support for such a relationship. For some types of crime it is even the case that people who had been victims expressed a greater feeling of safety than respondents who had not been victimized. For many, the imagination, fed by media sensationalism, might be worse than the reality.

Perhaps we are less likely to further our understanding of fear of crime through an investigation of the objective realities of crime than through exploring the social construction of crime in the mass media. Fear of crime may be responsive to the law and order posturings of politicians who find it convenient to paint a picture of society as being under threat from within. Such fear as exists may be more the product of the crime waves manufactured in the mass media than responses to fluctuations in real crime rates (and we know that there is little relationship between media crime waves and real crime rates)¹⁵. Certainly the inordinate fear of crime among women is not so much a function of the objective risks which they confront when compared to men, but rather a concrete manifestation of the ideological importance in a sexist culture of keeping women dependent on men for protection. The objective reality of rape, bad as it is, is surely of less importance to women than the way that fear of rape hems them in to a protected day-to-day existence. Women, more so than men, are the targets for the scaremongering of law and order campaigners. While fear of Communism might be seen as the most appropriate topic for an address to a local Returned Servicemen's League by an astute conservative politician, law and order might be perceived as an even more appropriate topic for an address to the Country Women's Association.

Notes

¹ For the Bureau of Statistics publication which provides basic findings of the survey and more detailed comments on sampling and standard error than are provided in the present paper see, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1975 *General Social Survey: Crime Victims*, Ref. No. 4105.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 1979.

² See H. Erskine, 'The Polls: Fear of Violence and Crime', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 38, 1974, pp. 131-145, and United States Department of Justice, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service. *Criminal Victimization Surveys in the Nation's Five Largest Cities. A Comparison of 1972 and 1974 Findings*. Washington, 1976. This report at p. 172 claims that over 40% of respondents were afraid to walk alone at night in their own neighbourhoods. See also Richard F. Sparks, Hazel G. Genn and David D. Dodd. *Surveying Victims*, Chichester, John Wiley, 1977, in which similar findings are reported for the United Kingdom.

³ See M. Hindelang, M. Gottfredson and J. Garofalo. *Victims of Personal Crime*. Cambridge, Mass., Ballinger, 1978, p. 179 which shows that persons aged 65 years or more are more likely than other age groups to say that they felt very unsafe in their neighbourhoods at night. Sparks et al *op. cit.*, p. 208 report 'older persons being more likely to say that the streets were unsafe: in Brixton, over 88% of those aged 61 and over gave this answer.' On the other hand Irvin Waller and Norman Okihiro report (in *Burglary: The Victim and the Public*. Toronto, University of Toronto, 1978, p. 82) 'an increasing amount of worry as one gets older followed by a sharp reduction after sixty.' This finding applies, of course, only to burglary.

⁴ See J. Braithwaite and D. Biles, 'Overview of Findings from the First Australian National Crime Victims Survey', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 13 (1980), p. 41-51.

⁵ Hindelang et al *op. cit.* p. 178; Erskine *op. cit.* p. 131; Sparks et al *op. cit.* p. 207; and Waller and Okihiro *op. cit.* p. 82.

⁶ Braithwaite and Biles, *op. cit.*

⁷ S. Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976, pp. 14-15.

⁸ P. R. Wilson, *The Other Side of Rape*, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, p. 3.

⁹ Braithwaite and Biles, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ J. Braithwaite and D. Biles, 'On Being Unemployed and Being a Victim of Crime', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 14 (1979), p. 192-200.

¹¹ For evidence from other countries consistent with this conclusion see James Garofalo. *Public Opinion About Crime: The Attitudes of Victims and Nonvictims in Selected Cities*. Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service, Washington, 1977, p. 20; Erskine *op. cit.* p. 132; Sparks et al *op. cit.* p. 208; and Waller and Okihiro *op. cit.* p. 82.

¹² For a discussion of some of the evidence on this question see J. Braithwaite, *Inequality, Crime, and Public Policy*, London and Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.

¹³ See J. Braithwaite and D. Biles, 'Crime Victimization Rates in Australian Cities', submitted for publication.

¹⁴ We understand that research being undertaken at Northwestern University in the United States, which is currently in draft form, will provide empirical support for this claim when it is published.

¹⁵ See Cohen's (1973) case study of the Mods and Rockers, Windshuttle's (1978) work on hooliganism and Braithwaite and Barker (1978) on Bodgies and Widgies. Davis (1952) has shown systematically how in Colorado there was no correlation between the number of column inches devoted to crime in the press and the number of crimes actually committed. See also Antunes and Hurley (1977). S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, London, Paladin, 1973. K. Windshuttle, 'Granny Versus the Hooligans', in P. R. Wilson and J. Braithwaite, *Two Faces of Deviance: Crimes of the Powerless and Powerful*, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 1978, pp. 15-25. J. Braithwaite and M. Barker, 'Bodgies and Widgies: Folk Devils of the Fifties', in: Wilson and Braithwaite, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-45. F. Davis, 'Crime News in Colorado Newspapers', *American Journal of Sociology*, 57, 1952, pp. 325-330. G. E. Antunes and P. A. Hurley, 'The Representation of Criminal Events in Houston's Two Daily Newspapers', *Journalism Quarterly*, 54, 1977, pp. 756-760. See also Hans Joachim Schneider, *The Influence of Mass Communication Media on Public Opinion on Crime and Criminal Justice*. Council of Europe (ed.): Collected Studies in Criminological Research. Strasbourg 1979, p. 121-160.

PART III: VICTIMS IN CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR SYSTEMS

Female Victimization in Nigeria

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In many of the Nigerian tribes females are subjected to different types of victimization. Some of these victimizations include killing, ostracism, and in some cases banishment. Different cultures have different ways of resolving a crisis; some stress the use of violence while others demand that such crisis situations and conflicts be resolved in some other way, not by violence'. The data used in this paper were collected by students of the University of Nigeria Nsukka from their different villages. Other data were obtained from newspaper reports and books authored by British colonial officers.

Among the several tribes of Nigeria, particularly in the southern part of the country, there is a great abhorrence of all births that are considered abnormal. Anything unfamiliar or deviating from the general trends of known events is looked upon with suspicion and distrust. Epidemic disease, constant deaths of both children and adults, heavy thunderstorms that destroy farm crops are some of the crises that people face.

In some of the tribes in Nigeria, giving birth to twins and some other types of what are regarded as abnormal births are defined as crisis situations. One of the most unfortunate birth taboos is that prohibiting the birth of twin babies. This taboo was, in years gone by, in force throughout the greater part of Nigeria. Most of the traditional taboos are at present prohibited by the Nigerian criminal code, but newspaper reports and other sources of information prove that in some of the remote rural areas, the taboos are still being practised.

Under old Igbo law and also that of some of the other tribes in Nigeria it was incumbent that twin babies should be destroyed without delay. At the same time, reproaches were heaped upon the stricken mother for being the author of such a forbidden issue. It is sometimes alleged that this aversion to twins is rooted in the belief that it is contrary to human nature. The order of mankind is to propagate by means of single births; there must be a difference between the human species and brute creation. To function as an animal is to degrade humanity; a mother of twins is brought down to the level of a common beast. She has fallen from her position and, in doing so, has brought disgrace upon herself and her household.