

THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF THE FEAR OF CRIME: A COMPARISON OF SLOVENIAN, SCOTTISH AND DUTCH LOCAL CRIME SURVEYS¹

GORAZD MEŠKO • STEPHEN FARRALL

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Research and theorising about the fear of crime has, in the main, been dominated by researchers who have relied upon sociological or socio-demographic variables to account for variations in fear levels. Whilst this body of work has contributed greatly to our understanding of the fear of crime, we are still far from a full understanding of this important and most corrosive aspect of contemporary society. This article compares three independent evaluations of what is currently just about the only social psychological model of the fear of crime. The data, collected in Slovenia, Scotland and Holland, sheds further light on both the social psychological model proposed and the wider study of the fear of crime.

For example, the conceptualisation of the original social psychological model contained four components (the attractiveness of the respondent as a target, the intentions of potential assailants, the power of the respondent in relation to the potential assailants and the areas in which attacks may take place). However, only two of these components consistently entered the empirical models, suggesting the original conceptualisation could be 'pared down'.

INTRODUCTION

The fear of crime is nowadays one of the most researched topics in contemporary international criminology. In the United Kingdom and United States, crime surveys have expanded rapidly since the late 1960s. For example, the British Crime Survey now biennially interviews in the region of 10,000 residents of England and Wales. This survey has shed light on attitudes to policing, victimisation, perceptions of risk and people's fear of crime. Similarly, in Slovenia, two major crime and victimisation surveys have been undertaken to date. The first in 1992 and the second in 1997 (Pavlovic 1998). The findings of the UK and USA research are now well known. A plethora of studies have concluded that the fear of crime impinges upon the well-being of a large proportion of the population. Some have even gone as far as to suggest that the fear of crime is now a larger problem than crime itself (Hale

1992, Bennett 1990 and Warr 1984). Chambers and Tombs (1984:29) reviewing the 1982 British Crime Survey (Scotland) reported that "more than half of the respondents (58%) said that at some time in the past they had been concerned about the possibility of being a victim of crime".

As well as receiving much attention at an empirical level, many have attempted to explain the fear of crime. These efforts have tended to be dominated by researchers

Gojazd Meško is an assistant professor, College of Police and Security Studies, Kotnikova 8, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia. Stephen Farall is a research officer, Centre for Criminological Research, University of Oxford, 12 Bevington Road, Oxford, OX2 6LH.

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