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NEWSLETTER OF THE WORLD SOCIETY OF VICTIMOLOGY

Methodological Shortcomings in the Measurement of the Concept of "Fear" in Criminal Justice Research

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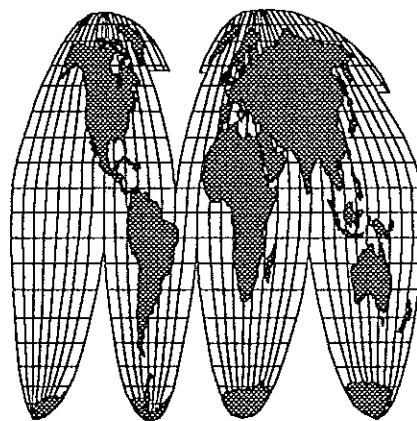
This research note explores issues related to defining fear of crime and how this is measured in research studies. It may be beneficial to those who study fear of crime to be aware of inconsistencies in the theoretical literature which affect how theory is applied to empirical study. The goals of this exploration are to promote greater consistency, interpretation, and comparability to work in the fear of crime literature. This may be achieved, in part, by adopting the psychological literature to this area of study.

Definitions and Measurement

The fear of crime is a multi-dimensional concept, and as a result it has been measured in a number of different ways. Fear has both cognitive and affective (emotional) components. There are certain environmental events that a person associates with pain. Criminal victimization is one of these events. Therefore, a person's self-perceptions of vulnerability result from 1) a calculation of the odds that a dangerous event will occur and 2) an estimate of one's ability to deal effectively with the situation (English and English, 1958; Coston and Finkenauer, 1993; Gibbs and Hanrahan, 1993). Psychologists refer to this concept of weighing chances as "thinking" (Sluckin, 1979; Windholtz and Sternlicht, 1989). Self-perceptions of vulnerability represent the cognitive component of this multi-dimensional concept. Anxiety, the source of which is unknown to the person, according to psychologists (Kaplan, 1965; Crow, 1971;), becomes fear once the individual has defined the

source of his/her anxiety. This source of defined anxiety is based upon a person's subjective understanding of the situation.

Researchers purport that the emotional



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reaction of fear causes psychological stress (Sluckin, 1979), and is caused when a person's well-being is threatened. Researchers have defined this emotion as "feeling" (Crow, 1971; Winholtz and Sternlicht, 1989).

Two emotions that can engage a person to lesser degrees than fear are worry and concern, respectively. Worrying is defined as an emotional response in which the one effected suffers from disturbing thoughts, uneasiness,

and annoyance (Windholtz and Sternlicht, 1989). Similar to the concept of fear, the person who worries actively seeks to diminish this emotion so he/she can feel better. A concern about a situation or event is defined as an interest or importance assigned to a matter that engages a person's attention (Sluckin, 1979; Winholtz, 1989). The result of this concern, however, does not automatically result in action taken on the part of the one who is effected.

Fear of crime and worries about crime may result in protective behaviors, such as avoiding places, carrying weapons, and/or managing devices such as the use of guard dogs or erecting fences. This psychological stress caused by fear prompts a person to engage in activity intended to alleviate this unpleasant feeling. Some researchers have defined this reaction as "doing" (Crow, 1971; Lazarus and Averill, 1972), and it results from fear, worry or concern. According to psychologists (Winholtz and Sternlicht, 1989), there are times when a person finds no easy way to reduce fear and an unpleasant outcome can not be avoided. For example, the escape from one fear-evoking situation may push the person into contact with another fear-evoking situation. Coston's (1994) research results showed that homeless women who wanted to reduce their fear of rape would spend most of their time avoiding the outdoors, particularly at night. However, their fear of theft and assault, the victimizations of which are rampant in shelters, were heightened. The calculation of perceived risk determines whether one experiences stress as either fear, worry or concern, and is directly related to the individual's realization of and his or her ability to deal with the threatening situation.

The fear of crime also has a physiological component. One that focuses on immediate responses to danger. Responses may include, but are not limited to, an increased heart rate, a loss over bodily functions, sweating, increased breathing, and/or fight-flight (Kaplan, 1965).

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From The Editor's Desk ...

This issue of the *Victimologist* contains contributions on a variety of themes. The research note by Charisse Coston addresses the important issue of measuring fear of crime. She argues that fear of crime is a multi-dimensional concept, consisting of several different components and provides suggestions for future research. The announcement from the Dutch-Algerian Cultural Foundation provides insight into international developments in victim assistance.

International cooperation is also the theme of the article by Jo-Anne Wemmers on the Fourth Expert Group Meeting on the implementation of the UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice on Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power.

Continuing the theme of international cooperation, the Editorial Board would like to do a series of short articles on the implementation of the

UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice on Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power. The World Society of Victimology has some 400 members around the world. Both the WSV and its membership actively contribute to the advancement of research on victims and victim assistance and the promotion of victims interests throughout the world. If members from around the world would write a short article on the implementation of the UN Declaration in their country or region, we could realize a comprehensive international overview.

The articles should not exceed two pages and should address one or more aspects of the UN Declaration, in a country or region. Possible topics include access to justice and fair treatment of victims, restitution, compensation and assistance. Contributions should be sent to members of the Editorial Board. The

deadline for inclusion in the next issue is May 30th 1998. Articles received after this deadline will be included in later issues.

Finally, the members of the Editorial Board would like to send their condolences to the family and friends of Benjamin Mendelsohn, who died in January of this year. The WSV is indebted to him for his important contribution to the field of victimology.

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Solidarity with Algerian Children

Since 1991 violence has been part of the daily life of Algerian people, spreading death across the whole country and destroying its social structure.

The madness of war has killed tens of thousands of people and horror is intensifying every day. There is little hope that this tragedy, which spares neither women nor children will stop soon. The ritual of death seems to be part of a long-term strategy.

This drama results in an amazing amount of deaths, together with a deep psychological trauma among the most vulnerable layers of the population which become even more vulnerable, in the countryside and in areas of social dwelling at the borders of the main cities; this is where violence is at its utmost and inhabitants are forced to flee from there to other safer places. In parallel to this internal exodus thousands of Algerian people were forced to leave the country.

The sudden deaths, the split in families and the forced exile are dismantling the structure of the large family, whose complex relationship scheme is the ground where the mechanisms of family solidarity find their roots.

The dismantling of this body, which is the corner-stone of the Algerian society has led to social and economic exclusion and weakened the society as a whole.

Violence threatens not only the

social balance of the Algerian society, it also has grave consequences for the health of the population, especially for children. Their trauma will have tremendous consequences since they are the adults of tomorrow. In a nutshell this is the future of the Algerian society which is at stake.

To combat the trauma and psychological disorder resulting

An announcement from the Dutch-Algerian Cultural Foundation

from the constant exposure of children to violence, many structures have been created in Algeria. These structures, which are part of state organizations and associations, have identified three types of urgent needs:

- need to install structures to listen to children, with skilled personnel accustomed to this kind of trauma
- need for documentation, with examples from previous experiences in other countries
- need for training, in the form of exchanges, gatherings, and distribution of education equipment

Due to the size of the drama and

the work to be done, the Dutch-Algerian Cultural Foundation (Nederlands-Algerijnse Culturele Stichting) suggests that a solidarity movement be implemented, starting from the Netherlands. The aim of this movement is to provide support to the associations and professionals who have to deal with children in Algeria, through the following actions:

- providing the professionals and associations resources in the fields of training and scientific exchanges in the areas of trauma treatment
- organizing workshops and seminars both scientific and practical in the Netherlands and in Algeria
- involving institutes in the Netherlands specialized in the care of children suffering from war trauma so that they can host children from Algeria once the need for psychological care has been identified.

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In past studies of the fear of crime all of the above dimensions of fear discussed herein have been utilized to assess a measure of units of analyses for fear of crime. And, generically speaking, these measures purport to explain all of the dimensions of the fear of crime. In a groundbreaking study published by Walker (1994), recognition is given to correlations between the various dimensions of fear which points to the similarities and differences between these concepts. To gain a full understanding of the fear of crime among the citizenry all of the dimensions of this phenomenon should be assessed. Although all of these variables represent dimensions of the fear of crime, they are essentially different from one another. For example, the classic question asked to gain a perspective on a person's fear of crime has been: "How safe do you or would you feel walking alone in your neighborhood at night...during the day" (Biderman, 1967; Ennis, 1967; Bishop and Klecka, 1967). These authors defined this variable as the fear of crime when it represents only one dimension of fear, self-perceived vulnerability. In future research studies, if only one dimension of fear is explored, the authors should define that measure as representing only a segment of this multi-dimensional concept. An alternative suggestion would be to utilize a multivariate approach and evaluate the full magnitude of fear.

A Causal Model?

The psychological literature appears to suggest that rather than exclusively examining correlates of these dimensions of the fear of crime, there may be theoretical support for a causal model that attempts to bring together the thinking, feeling, and doing aspects of this process (Meerlo, 1950; English and English, 1958; Thompson, 1979; Coston, 1995). For example, if a person knows the source of his or her anxiety then this emotion is conscience and can be referred to as fear. This emotional reaction of fear causes stress because his or her well-being is threatened. This feeling of stress prompts the person to actively attempt to alleviate this unpleasant feeling which, once resolved, results in lower stress levels and consequently less fear. Researchers should develop scientific tests of this theory. Although I do not have any specific suggestions for tests in this area, it seems apparent that sociological survey research that would focus on aggregates of people could be used. Researchers could explore other relevant literature and academic disciplines e.g., biological literature. Also, there may be some applicability of experimental and quasi-experimental research designs to research on

fear. Perhaps a meta-analysis would be a better way to approach this endeavor.

The Salience of Fear

Another suggestion derived from the social psychological literature is to examine fear, worry, concern or self-perceptions of vulnerability to crime in relation to other fears, worries, concerns, and/or self-perceptions of vulnerability that people have daily (Yin, 1980; Yin, 1982; Innes, 1982). Gibbs (1993) argues that an examination of the correlates of any of the dimensions of this concept is premature. First and foremost, the salience of fear of crime needs to be examined in comparison to other types of fears, worries or concerns of people.

In conclusion, if a researcher conceptualizes and operationalizes fear of crime as worry about crime then that is one dimension of fear that is represented. There may or may not be a correlation between fear and worry. Therefore, these two concepts should be tested in order to determine if there is a relationship. If researchers pay particular attention to the definitions, and thus the measurement of this phenomenon, the data would be comparable and have quality interpretative meaning. A suggested road map for study in this area would include first assessing the salience of the dimension or dimensions of fear of crime in relation to other fears, and then perhaps, longitudinal studies could be developed based upon the process(es) of this phenomenon. Finally, an examination of the correlates of the dimensions of fear of crime should be the goal of future research in this area. After researchers have taken these theoretical steps, we will have a well-ordered paradigm for measuring fear of crime with greater validity. This brief essay, hopefully, has consolidated the areas of concern thus providing more focus to the direction in this very important area of socio-emotional responses to crime.

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In memory of Benjamin Mendelsohn, Founder of Victimology

On Sunday, January 25th 1998, Benjamin Mendelsohn died in Jerusalem, Israel.

Benjamin Mendelsohn was born on April 23rd 1900 in Bucharest, Rumania, where he obtained his law degree. Mendelsohn was a penal lawyer and his initial interest in the victim originated in his intention to point out to the court the contribution of the victim to the criminal act. In 1937, he published his own system of dealing with penal defence, based on the analysis of the criminal act.

During the years 1937 - 1947, Mendelsohn continued to develop his system which he had invented for the defence of criminals and in 1947 he introduced Victimology - the science of the victim - in a lecture he gave to members of The Rumanian Psychiatric Society. His first version of Victimology consisted mainly of victims' categorization according to their contribution to the occurrence of the crime.

However, in later years Mendelsohn abandoned this position. In 1969 Mendelsohn presented an extended Victimology, dealing with victims of many types of occurrences including work accidents and victims of genocide. This extended version of victimology was further extended by Mendelsohn and in 1975 it became a "General Victimology" emphasizing the fact that Victimology was more than penal victimology, it included the study of all kinds of victims. Even victims of events beyond human control such as natural disasters were included in his General Victimology.

Many credit Hans Von Hentig with the foundation of victimology. However Von Hentig never used the term Victimology. Von Hentig laid the basis for academic research concerning the victim of crime. But Mendelsohn was the first to deal scientifically with the personality of the victim. Mendelsohn was the one who introduced the term "Victimology" and

presented it as a new discipline. He took an active part in the meeting in Münster, in 1977, which marked the founding of the WSV.

Victimologists today continue to struggle with many of the same issues which were first raised by Mendelsohn. For several years research on the role of victims of crime was considered taboo. Recently however, the debate on the role of the victim has been reopened. At the 10th International Symposium on Victimology held in Amsterdam in August 1997, several papers focussed on victim assistance and crime prevention. Spurred by the research on repeat victimization, victimologists are once again looking at the role of the victim in the criminal event and using this information to help avoid future victimization. The WSV is indebted to him will strive to keep the memory of his contribution alive.

Notes :

The above synopsis of Mendelsohn's work is based on: Hoffman, Hanoch, What did Mendelsohn Really say? In: International Faces of Criminology. Sarah Ben David and Gerd Ferdinand Kirchhoff (eds.), WSV Publishing, 1992, Monchengladbach.

Suggested Reading:

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For more information on publications by Benjamin Mendelsohn consult the bibliography of the WSV at: svbib@hotmail.com

10TH INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON VICTIMOLOGY RESEARCH AND ACTION FOR THE 3RD MILLENNIUM AUGUST 6 TO 11 2000, MONTREAL, CANADA

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FOURTH EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UN DECLARATION

Jo-Anne Wemmers

On February 26th and 27th 1998, the fourth expert group meeting on the implementation of the United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice on Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power was held in the United States capitol, Washington, D.C.. Previous meetings had taken place in Vienna, Austria (1995) Tulsa, United States of America (1996) and The Hague, The Netherlands (1997). The meeting was attended by experts from over 15 different countries and representatives of various international organizations.

In the August 1997 edition of the *Victimologist* (vol.1 no.1), it was reported that the third expert group meeting had led to the development of a manual for policymakers. At the fourth expert group meeting, a few changes were made to the manual including the title which is now: *Guide for Policymakers*.

Most of the available time was spent on finalizing the handbook for practitioners entitled *Handbook on Justice for Victims*:

On the use and application of the United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power. The handbook is designed as a guide for implementing victim service programs, and for developing victim-sensitive policies, procedures and protocols for criminal justice agencies and others who come into contact with victims. It consists of five sections: (1) the impact of victimization; (2) victim assistance; (3) the responsibilities of professionals; (4) advocacy, policymaking and law reform; (5) international cooperation.

Throughout the meeting key issues in victim policy were addressed including restorative justice, the relationship between victim support and crime prevention and transnational crimes such as child pornography. It was an ideal opportunity to exchange information on recent developments in victimology within the various countries represented and to pick up new ideas to improve the position of victims in one's own country.

At the end of the two days it was agreed that

the Guide and Handbook will be submitted to the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention at its seventh session, in April of this year, as an annex to the draft resolution on Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power by the governments of the Netherlands and Brazil. The Guide will be translated into the different working languages in advance of the seventh session. The resolution included the recommendation to translate the Handbook into the working languages of the United Nations and to widely disseminate the Guide and the Handbook. The resolution also includes a recommendation for the development of a database on best practices, case law and model legislation for the use and application of the Declaration. Also included in the resolution is the recommendation concerning the establishment of an International Fund for victims of crime and abuse of power, in order to support (a) technical assistance to develop or strengthen Victim support organizations within member states, (b) specific projects and /or activities of these organizations, (c) awareness campaigns on victim rights and crime prevention, (d) eligible victim claims as result of international and transnational crimes, where national avenues of resource and/or redress are insufficient.

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