

Chapter Two - Fear of Crime

Studies of victimization and of 'fear of crime' in Britain have overwhelmingly concluded that 'fear of crime' has a significant effect on society and the most famous of the studies on victimization and 'fear of crime' is the British Crime Survey (BCS). Calculations from the crime survey data indicate that about 40% of crimes reported to the police do not end up in the official statistics (Mayhew and Maung, 1992). The data from this survey are also known as the 'Dark Figures' or rather the unrecorded incidences of crime. The debate surrounding unrecorded crime has developed over the last three decades and unreported and unrecorded crime has become the centre of attention of criminologists.

The development of crime surveys as alternatives to police statistics have endeavoured to quantify the 'Dark Figures'. Two of the founders of the BCS, Mayhew and Hough, acknowledged that the increased attention given in later sweeps of the BCS to the distribution of risk "was to some extent, prompted by criticism of the superficial approach taken earlier on to the handling of questions about the relationship between risk of victimization and 'fear of crime'" (Maguire, 1997:170). Ironically, much of this criticism was led by Jock Young and others adhering to the 'left realist' school of criminology (see Matthews and Young, 1986).

Lee argues that "there is little doubt that the genealogy of the 'fear of crime' is intimately entwined with the development and deployment of crime statistics more generally—crime statistics we might say are a continuity within this genealogy. If we are to accept this we might situate the initial conditions of emergence of 'fear of crime' with the work of 19th-century European statisticians like the French lawyer Andre-Michel Guerry (1802–66) and the Belgian mathematician and astronomer Adolphe Quetelet (1796–1874). The work of these and other 19th-century actors made it thinkable to use statistics to understand criminology's objects of inquiry". (2001:472) He explains however, that it was not until much later, and on the other side of the Atlantic, that another set of discursive arrangements began to form around crime statistics that make 'fear of crime' research do-able (ibid).

The study of 'fear of crime' finds its roots in surveys such as the BCS and situational crime reduction theories by 'Right Realist' criminologists (see Clarke and Cornish 1985; Cornish and Clarke, 1986; Clarke and Felson, 1993). Studying the 'fear of crime' is a research field that has grown enormously in the past two decades. Yet according to Farrall et al (1997) it is beginning to be suspected that 'fear' is a term encompassing a confusing variety of feelings, perspectives, risk-estimations, and means different things to different people. There has been much debate regarding the results of the BCS survey. In fact, Farrall et al (ibid) suggest that what we know empirically may well be largely an artefact of the fact that the questions that are put repeatedly to respondents seldom vary, and the ways that those questions are put and the settings in which they are put, seldom change. Furthermore, there were concerns raised about worries over time and space in the sense that "'fear of crime' seems to have been conceptualised without any reference to time, space and social context" (ibid: 673). They carried out a major methodological study to measure 'fear of crime' and to test the validity of the traditional methodology.

Their study combined the use of both qualitative and quantitative research. They argue that 'fear of crime' may not be easily measurable and the rapid ascent of the 'fear of crime' in the 1980s may be the expression of inaccurate research. Their research concluded that results from 'fear of crime' surveys appear to be a function of the way the topic is researched rather than the way it is. They found that 'fear of crime' and to a lesser extent, victimization, were hugely overestimated and that "the political utility of 'fear of crime' is entirely dependent upon its being measurable" (1997:676). In a further study, Ditton and Farrall (2000) suggest

that the standard tools of the BCS exaggerate the prevalence of fear and so do questions about worry. They believe that this is due to the transitory or unstable nature of fear and they argue that the BCS survey presents respondents as having a level of fear or worry, thus eliciting summaries of perceptions of safety and the intensity (rather than frequency) of worry.

Their view is that this may serve to over-estimate the prevalence, because fear seems to be specific to a certain situation rather than spread over time (cit. op. Jackson 2002:22). Sparks argues that fear is not simply a quantity. It is also a 'mode of perception (...) it intelligibly summarises a range of more diffuse anxieties about one's position and identity in the world' (1992:14). His rationale was the identification of criteria for proportionality. In his analysis of the BCS, Hough argues that surveys are "undeniably blunt instruments for assessing people's anxieties about crime" (1995:3).

In this context, the definition of fear is subjective and can cover a range of emotions: from slight concern to deep anxiety. In a study carried out by the Department of Justice in Canada in 1994, a commonly accepted distinction was that identified by La Grange and Ferraro (1989) as either 'concrete' fear or 'formless' fear. Concrete fear refers to imminent danger while formless or abstract fear is more widespread, arising for example, from reported crime through media or by published works such as victimization surveys. In this sense, Maguire (1997) argues that the heightened awareness of crime becomes a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' as the different elements of the process feed off each other.

In his analysis of 'Fear of Crime', Jackson considers that "the policy context (of this phenomenon) its imperatives and priorities, its focus and attention on particular issues and perspectives – has deleteriously shaped research and debate" (2002:2). He argues that during the 1990s the perceived public 'fear of crime' seemed to be used in a 'grandstanding manner' to justify popular-punitive solutions to issues of law and order. This was identifiable in the battle between Conservative Home Secretary Michael Howard and Labour's Jack Straw as to which party had more draconian solutions to the problem of crime (Maguire, 1997). What has emerged from this political battle is a range of political solutions to a problem of 'fear of crime', seemingly identified by quantitative surveys with questionable results (see Farrall and Ditton: 2000), produced to placate party politics on crime, which is supposedly spiralling out of control.

Personal security in Western society is closely linked to 'fear of crime' but it is the recognition of 'fear of crime' as a distinct area of enquiry that raises theoretical problems about what it is we mean by the term (Zedner, 1997). However, critical literature on 'fear of crime' is limited, Shirlow and Pain (2002) concede that there is a paucity of academic work focusing on the socio-political power relations involved in 'fear of crime'. They argue that fear is politically constructed and deployed at different levels and "the consequences of the strategic responses to fear can be reactionary and defensive" (2002:5).

Jackson explains that the furthest point back that "the modern idea of 'fear of crime'- the contemporary manifestation of public attitudes and responses to crime, an object of study, a category of description, and a topic of considerable political salience – was the President's Crime Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice (1967) in the United States of America" (2002:4). Specifically, three reports were commissioned and were conducted simultaneously with other projects, all aimed to identify the 'dark figures' of crime or unrecorded victimization figures. According to Jackson, "these studies included questions about public attitudes towards crime and perceptions of their own safety" (ibid: 4-5).

The first victim survey included an index of anxiety or fear which was the combination of five questions. Jackson identifies these questions as eliciting an unstructured range of attitudes,

behaviour, beliefs and judgements in relation to crime, safety disorder and morality. Crucial to the development of 'fear of crime' was the belief that crime was a problem and people believed that they were more at risk than before which was a reflection of changes and threats within society. Thus according to Jackson, the connotation 'fear of crime' developed from the early studies. In other words, it developed from sociological investigations through crime surveys in tandem with increasing governmental interest in law and order (ibid, 2002).

The debate on measurements of 'fear of crime' has developed parallel to the growth of research on this subject. What has become apparent is that this field of research relies heavily on quantitative surveys which suggest that the phenomenon of 'fear of crime' is a prevalent social problem (Farrall et al, 1997). In this context, methodological concerns are now being raised in relation to quantitative surveys that explore 'fear of crime' such as the difficulties encountered by trying to turn social processes into quantifiable events as well as the conceptualisation of the term 'fear of crime', the design and wording (operationalisation) of the surveys and finally factors governing the quality of the data generated from these surveys (techniques) (ibid).

From the literature, it is suggested that quantitative and qualitative methods of research hardly ever produce the same findings. As previously mentioned, Farrall et al (1997) found that while 'think' and 'worry' clearly meant different things to their respondents, they argued that the fact that some respondents were able to offer different words to describe how they felt about crime, reinforces the assertion that the 'fear of crime' field may be plagued by poor conceptualisation and subsequent poor operationalisation.

Kemshall argues that in criminology, "the social approach to risk is emphasised particularly on fear and victimization, specifically through the social constructivist approaches in which investigations into 'fear of crime' are constructed through peoples' knowledge, discourses and approaches. The traditional concepts of real or imaginary fears and perceptions of risk are set aside in favour of research into how these fears and risks are the products of specific and/or conflicting discourses and 'cultural understanding'" (2003:62).

During an interview with a statistician from the Home Office in 2003, I asked his view on the usefulness of crime statistics and crime surveys in general. He replied:

"There was a feeling that we shouldn't publish crime statistics so often because it was leading to 'fear of crime'. But governments have changed and now we publish them more frequently. There was a group in the late '80s looking at 'fear of crime' and crime statistics and was leading this push that we shouldn't be publishing them more frequently. But that doesn't change people's perceptions. It's more of a political issue for the government. They want to be seen as 'We're doing a great job', that's important. They've got their targets that they are trying to achieve (...) and (crime) makes nice news stories and what the media does is to produce reports around it obviously showing the worse possible cases you can do. I see statistics as being the first part of the core and then you need to look behind the statistics. It is to actually know what's going on and not just take simple statistics and accept them, but say what they mean in reality".

This interview highlights the fact that those working with crime statistics within government institutions recognise that there are problems with the publication of data and how these data are perceived by the public.

Lupton (cit.op. in Kemshall, 2003), believes that crime is seen as frequent and considered to be highly likely to happen 'someday' although also random as to who, where or when it might

strike. In fact, she argues that reactions to ‘fear of crime’ frequently lead to a desire for protection, either through support for more police and/or Neighbourhood Watch schemes; the purchase of products that provide a feeling of safety and security such as alarms or locks and/or the purchase of insurance as a prevention against the risk of loss of life or property. The issue of risk, particularly of property theft, is in tandem with increased anxiety about violent crime and personal safety.

According to Lupton (ibid) this is a paradox because on the one hand, there is a certain fatalism regarding property crime, considered a fact of late modernism against which people are able to insure, and on the other hand, there is an increase in the calculation relating to violence and public spaces. Or rather, Lupton argues that people have developed a dual approach to crime: “a fatalism regarding the likelihood of crime combined with caution and increased responsibility for self-protection against physical threat” (ibid: 62).

In Britain the period between 1970 and the 1980s was significant in the debate relating to ‘fear of crime’. Cohen (1972) and Hall et al. (1978) developed the notion of moral panic which was supported by Gerbner and Gross (1976) and their ‘Mean World’ concept which identified people’s perception of crime exacerbated by the mass media.

Public concerns about crime during the late 1970s and early 1980s became increasingly a social and political issue which was closely linked to the statistical evidence of recorded offences which rose from 2.5 million in 1975 to 3.4 million in 1985. Garland contends that the rise in crime statistics was no longer abstract but took on a vivid personal meaning in popular consciousness and individual psychology (cit.op. in Jackson, 2002).

There were two specific issues that gave momentum to the debate on ‘fear of crime’. The first was a significant increase in the budget for the control of crime by the Thatcher government as law and order was put more and more on the political agenda. The second was the development of crime prevention through the influence of Rational Choice theorists such as Marcus Felson and Ron Clarke. The outcome had the effect of sensitizing the public to crime and enhancing fear (Lee 1999 cit.op in Jackson, 2002).

Concurrently, studies in the U.S. using quantitative methods of research in the form of surveys were developed in tandem with theories such as Wilson and Kelling’s ‘Broken Windows’ theory⁵ as well as social incivilities which were used as indications of social disorganisation and instability.

A key theme within these studies and theories was evidence of the direct or indirect role of victims and their ‘fear of crime’ (Jackson, 2002). What became more of interest to criminologists was the methodology used in the so-called ‘victimization’ surveys and how measurements of emotion about perceived threats were gauged (Ferraro and LaGrange, 1987).

As mentioned previously, Shirlow and Pain (2002) believe that as a social problem, ‘fear of crime’ has been widely used for political ends (also see Ditton and Farrall 2000; Garland, 1996; Sasson, 1995). They posit the reasons for the sudden discovery of ‘fear of crime’ in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and why the quick association with certain social identities. For example they contend that women and older people were uncritically identified as irrationally fearful and people of colour were assumed to be the object, rather than subject, of fear.

⁵Broken Windows was the brainchild of the criminologists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling (1982). They argued that crime is the inevitable result of disorder. If a window is broken and left unrepaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares and no one is in charge. Soon, more windows will be broken, and the sense of anarchy will spread from the building to the street on which it faces, sending a signal that anything goes.

Shirlow and Pain examined the methodological critiques and found that previous research (Gilchrist et al, 1998) has raised and begun to explore some of the issues around men's fear. They also found that there has also been a discernible shift away from a concern with older people's fear towards examining young people's concerns about crime. Accordingly, Shirlow and Pain argue that men and young people (and especially young men) are commonly constructed as provoking fear in others, yet when research is approached in new ways, allowing for the possibility that men's and young people's fear may manifest differently, both have found significant problems.

Thus, they argue that being 'angry' about the threat of criminal victimization is overlooked in favour of being 'afraid' of it. They point out that little is known of the meaning or range of meanings that respondents infer with the term 'anger', but further research - which they argue is needed - might well show that anger about crime is as complicated a concept as 'fear of crime' has transpired to be (ibid).

Stanko and Hobdell (1993) point out that the theories of 'fear of crime' fail to address issues of how power mediated by economics and social differences (age, gender and ethnicity) influences fear in terms of the risk of victimization. According to Newburn and Stanko (1994), men are under-researched because of the belief that they are unwilling to admit to their vulnerability therefore research on male fear continues to be sidelined. Though it could be argued that men are under-researched because they are not perceived as victims of crime, this is because victimization tends to suggest weakness and vulnerability. Thus it may also take for granted that members of society with a 'threatening' image such as motorcyclists, would not be eligible as cohorts of victimization studies.

Goodey (1997) argues that the fearful or fearless experiences of crime and danger while by definition, at different ends of a continuum of fear, can no longer be viewed as gendered experiences. However, she has not perhaps considered that there may be *a priori* a preconception or preconditioning of researchers in deciding which member of society constitutes a victim – irrespective of gender, class or nationality. For this reason, in chapters eight and nine, I examine issues that appear to go beyond these assumptions in relation to fear of crime.

Criminological Theory – Right Realism

The pragmatic approach to the management of crime and its impact is linked to Rational Choice Theory (Clarke and Mayhew, 1980; Clarke and Cornish, 1985; Cornish and Clarke, 1986; Clarke and Felson, 1993). This theory identifies the offender as a rational, calculating actor who is capable of working out the cost and benefit of his criminal activities thus becoming a 'homo economicus' or rather "a product of the insurance industry and an industry with a vested interest in situational crime prevention" (O'Malley, 1992:264).

The concept of 'Situational Criminology' or the 'criminology of everyday life', as identified by Garland (1996), highlights ways of "raising the costs and lowering the benefits to deter crime and make opportunities less attractive" (Kemshall, 2003:126). This has been supported by other works relating to the control or planning of environments to 'design out crime' thus moving from the offender or person, to focus on "the opportunities to commit crime and is thus 'offence-based' which is both spatial and temporal" (Hughes, 1998:63). In fact, Cohen (1985) argues that the emphasis on 'responsibilisation' leaves the individual subject largely shunned, indeed he believes the consequences mean that 'the game is up' for all policies directed to the criminal as an individual, either in terms of blame and punishment or in finding the motive or cause. He contends that "the talk is now about spatial and temporal aspects of crime, about systems, behaviour sequences, ecology, defensible space, target hardening" (ibid: 146-8).

The relationship between situational criminology and rational choice theory can be identified in versions of this theory such as Cohen and Felson's 'Routine Activity' (1979), Cornish and Clarke's 'Situational Criminology' or 'Situational Crime Prevention'⁶ (1986). In 1993, Ron Clarke and Marcus Felson co-edited the book 'Routine Activity and Rational Choice'. Sutton (2004) describes Ron Clarke as one of the earliest proponents of Rational Choice as a theory of Criminology. In 1986, Clarke, together with Derek Cornish developed the rational choice perspective of criminology, known today as 'Situational Criminology' which is based on the concept that "crime is purposive behaviour designed to meet the offender's commonplace needs for such things as money, status, sex, excitement and that meeting these needs involves the making of decisions and choices, constrained as they are by limits of time and ability and the availability of relevant information" (Clarke, 1997:9-10). In other words, according to Cornish and Clarke (1986), criminals make apparent rational decisions to engage in specific criminal activities. There are four components to situational crime prevention:

- 1) A theoretical foundation drawing upon routine activity and rational decisions;
- 2) A standard methodology based on the action research paradigm;
- 3) A set of opportunity-reducing techniques or target hardening;
- 4) A body of evaluated practice including studies of displacement (Clarke, 1997:6).

Although the last component is based on Gary Becker's economic theories of crime (1993), Clarke's rational choice theory utilises the economic theory in a decision diagram rather than in a normative model in order to avoid criticism relating to non cash rewards and to the fact that crime "has a reckless element as opposed to the pure self-maximising decision making" (ibid, 1997:9). The assumption in the application of this theory to criminology is based on the premise that:

- 1) Humans are purposive and goal oriented;
- 2) Humans have sets of hierarchically ordered preferences or utilities;
- 3) In choosing lines of behaviour, humans make rational calculations with respect to:
 - a. The utility of alternative lines of conduct with reference to the preference hierarchy;
 - b. The costs of each alternative in terms of utilities foregone;
 - c. The best ways to maximise utility (Turner, 1991: 354)

The second component of situational crime prevention is 'action research methodology' or a research model in which researchers and practitioners i.e. police, work together to determine the problem, find solutions and evaluate the results. The influence of the action research model is identified in the following five stages:

- 1) Collection of data about the nature of a specific crime problem;
- 2) Analysis of the condition that allows or facilitates commission of the crime in question;
- 3) Systematic study of possible means for blocking opportunities to commit the crime in question and analysis of cost;
- 4) Implementation of the best measures;
- 5) Monitoring the results and spreading the information (Clarke, 1997:15).

In 1998, Felson and Clarke set out the framework for a practical theory for crime prevention based on their view that "individual behaviour is a product of an interaction between the

⁶ This version relies on the view that crimes have unique characteristics that can be analysed in order to arrive at solutions of prevention.

person and the setting. Most criminological theory pays attention only to the first, asking why certain people might be more criminally inclined or less so. This neglects the second, the important features of each setting that help to translate criminal inclinations into action” (ibid: 1).

The underlying theme of this concept is that “no single cause of crime is sufficient to guarantee its occurrence; yet opportunity above all others is necessary and therefore has as much or more claim to being a ‘root cause’” (ibid:1). In other words, Felson and Clarke’s theory rests on a single principle that easy or tempting opportunities entice people into criminal action. This principle is found in each of the new opportunity theories of crime, including the Routine Activity approach, Crime Pattern Theory and the Rational Choice perspective. (...). They lead to the inescapable conclusion that “opportunity is a cause of crime” (ibid: 1).

Crime Prevention and Risk

According to Hughes (2002a), social theorists are increasingly developing the discourse of crime prevention and risk management and linking these to late modernity in scenarios such as that of the privatised fortress cities (Davis 1998; Feeley and Simon, 1992, 1994; Shearing and Stenning, 1981; O’Malley, 1992); the authoritarian statist-communitarian model (Fukuyama, 1996; Chua, 1997); The inclusive, civic, safe cities model (Stenson, 1995; Burns et al, 1994; Castells, 1994), which van Swaaningen notes, is characteristic in Europe and represented by a “stronger social democratic communitarian tradition” (1997:180). He argues that this is now under threat by the neo liberal importation of European politicians of the deregulated, privatised ideology of consumer choice – and the criminalisation of those unable to choose, which dominates the ideology of governance in the UK.

The concept of privatization has an important influence on crime policies. Crawford (1999) identifies four key areas in the extension of privatization:

- The use of private security firms in the provision of community safety;
- The ‘civilianisation’ of policing e.g. the use of volunteer personnel and agencies in areas like victim support;
- The increase in privately and corporate governed spaces like gated communities, shopping malls and in a more ‘insurance-based’ and economic approach to policing, in the sense that policing defends these spaces rather than contributing to the overall moral welfare: citizens in their roles as consumers, enter into these areas and tacitly agree to the rules of conduct;
- The decline of use of public spaces and the retreat from these public spaces (especially in cities) to family and home life. This ‘privatism’ is accompanied by increased ‘fear of crime’. This distancing contributes to more fear and a weaker tolerance of crime (ibid).

Conclusion

The development of crime reduction technology has had a fundamental role in defining social structures. Lianos and Douglas (2000) argue that the increase of technology in human relations is not due to crime and deviance. Rather, they believe it is generated by the economy and is promoted by the state as capitalist competition and as a means of perpetuating existing social structures and the supremacy of the developed world. However, technology in the form of automated machines or devices, while not exerting power, even when imposing constraints, nonetheless favours specific relationships of power. In this context, Lianos and Douglas contend that automated machines operate on the basis that their users are potentially dangerous because the user(s) are perceived and analysed through categories of menace. This

'dangerization' can be applied to the social world in terms of continual assessment of public and private spaces which may be threatened by other people. They believe that it has become a major criterion for identifying those who should be avoided (ibid).

Studies of 'fear of crime' have highlighted a deep awareness of vulnerability and according to Hough (1995), victimization has become the most important concern of our citizens. Lianos and Douglas argue that "deviance has become a perfect domain for exploring risk and danger because it refers directly to mutual perception of groups and individuals" (2000:112). They ascertain that "it is not behaviour as such that is of interest but the connotations assigned to behaviour in terms of social belonging. In the context of the dangerized social world, deviance is a mere instrument for perpetuating social division as it dissociates from legal offences and become connected to perceived probable threats. In tandem with the development of dangerization is the growth of privatization in areas of security and criminal justice" (ibid).