

Fear of Crime and Victimization: The Greek Experience

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1. Introduction

In contemporary western societies there is a tendency to identify personal and collective insecurities with the fear of crime. The feeling of insecurity related to crime is not limited to the “perception that crime is so much a real and very serious threat, as to affect the management of daily life on a personal level” (Killias 2001: 399). Rather, it reflects citizens’ general fears that are directly linked to quality of life as well as doubts concerning the ability of relevant authorities to offer effective protection (Forum Européen pour la Sécurité Urbaine 1996: 19).

This tendency leads to overestimation of the size of the phenomenon of criminality and to spurious conclusions concerning linked threats, since fear of crime does not stem exclusively from personal experience, but also from the assimilation of the experiences of others, formulated by various information ‘conduits’. The fear of crime is also “fitting into broader narratives concerning anxieties about *the way society is today*” (Lupton and Tulloch 1999: 521).

In any event, the experimentally verified difficulties of linking insecurity with crime have reinforced controversy concerning its conceptual determination. A basic distinction that was established relatively early and has significantly contributed in studying the phenomenon is between ‘*fear of crime*’ (*peur du crime*) and ‘*concern*’ (*préoccupation*). In the first case, fear is “a rational or irrational state of alarm engendered by the belief that one is in danger of criminal victimization” (McLaughlin and Muncie 2006: 164). However, this apperception of threats is formed on the basis of *vulnerability*¹ attributed by respondents to themselves or those close to them. In the second case, insecurity is more generalized and “focuses on criminality as a social problem and not as a personal condition” (Robert and Pottier 2004: 218). More than likely, it is this form of insecurity that

¹ For the determinative role of this variable see Killias (2001); Killias and Clerici (2000); Box, Hale, Andrews (1988); Taylor and Hale (1986).

is being referred to by most respondents of relevant research and polls that say they fear they will be victimized, expressing their general social concerns “through the symbolically dense concept of crime”².

One of the ‘paradoxes’ that scientific experience seeks to clarify is the great difference between the low victimisation of certain categories of people (such as women and the elderly) and their especially great fear of crime. Relative to this issue, Steven Balkin had already posited in 1979, “the crime occurrences depend on both the amount of criminality in one’s environment and the adjustments one makes in avoiding it. It is this *ex ante* criminality upon which fears of crime and safety are based – not the rate of crime occurrences” (Balkin 1979: 344). From this point of view, certain persons, although exhibiting a high risk of victimisation, are not victimized since they don’t expose themselves to dangers.

The expression of similar feelings is dependent upon a series of factors of differing origins, such as the elements contributing to the quality of life of the inhabitants of an area, their trust in the penal system, but also on their broader socio-ideological perceptions. Shaking up this trust of citizens (very often) reflects the perception of a more general inability of the state and therefore challenges the state itself.

Within this framework, and under the influence of the significant role played by the media (Cario 2004) as well as the political exploitation of criminality related issues, large sections of citizens develop especially punitive and non-tolerant positions³ vis-à-vis specific population groups, which because of age, ethnic origins, and economic conditions incur the greatest distrust (Zarafonitou 2004). As *Robert and Pottier* (2004: 218) characteristically state “the anxiety that is related to security correlates to punitiveness and xenophobia: these three dimensions form a sort of solid behavioral syndrome”.

2. The role of victimisation

Research findings are not homogeneous concerning the relationship between past victimisation experience and the feeling of fear and insecurity, while distinguishing according to crime type. Thus, the research by Skogan (1987) on the victimisation of 1738 persons in two American cities and its evolution over the course of a twelve month period, assessed the intensity of this feeling after each victimi-

² According to the distinction made by Jackson (2004: 963) between *expressive* and *experienced fear*: in the first case the fear of crime is approached “as an expression of related concerns, funnelled through this concept of crime”, while in the second case “as much as summed expressions of threat and vulnerability”.

³ See also Kury, Obergfell-Fuchs, Woessner and Wuerger (2002); Zvekic (1997).

sation. The victimisation survey undertaken in two countries (Texas, USA and Baden-Wurttemberg, Germany) representing two different western cultures (Arnold and Teske 1988), found out that victimisation was “significantly associated” with fear of crime in Texas. According to those data, Texans were almost twice as likely to have been the victim of a crime during the previous year and “this may, in part, contribute to increased levels of fear of crime”. Nevertheless, it was not evaluated as crucial variable in their predictive model (Ibid: 378).

Research, in general, confirms the correlation between fear of crime and victimisation, noting, however, that this relationship is not a strong one (Quann and Hung 2002: 313), and explaining this conclusion through the mitigation of the emotion caused by victimisation, and therefore the mitigation of the relevant fear (Box, Hale and Andrews 1988) and the de-dramatization of criminality (Killias 2001: 400).

Within this framework, three basic explanations emerge attempting to delineate this complex relationship (Box, Hale and Andrews 1988: 352): a) victims may take more precautions and so become less fearful⁴, b) some neutralize the negative effects of being victimized, and so it becomes less salient to them and c) others simply allow the experience to atrophy as time passes. However, the picture is different in the event that this relationship is examined within an environment with a high ‘incivilities’ index. In this context and relative to the above, victimisation increases the fear of crime⁵.

Furthermore, this relationship is differentiated by the effects of other factors, such as the type of crime. Research by Killias, conducted in Zurich in 1998 and 1999, linked fear of crime of the inhabitants of certain areas with frequent victimisation in crimes against the person that took place near their homes (Killias 2001: 124-5, 405). However, research results do not converge on this point, either, since the 1989-2000 ICVS noted that victims of a household offence were “slightly more fearful of crime than victims of an offence against the person” (Quann and Hung 2002: 313). This “unexpected” conclusion is interpreted by researchers as the result of the great probability that the victim and perpetrator

⁴ Killias (2001: 402) also maintains that self protection and self-restraining measures that are taken after a first victimisation decrease fear of crime and therefore account for the negative correlation between this fear and the victimisation experience.

⁵ Within this framework, the main explanations expressed include the difficulties faced by victims in taking self-protection measures that are seen as effectively dealing with dangers and threats connected to the relevant areas, while the process of neutralization and ‘deadening’ of the negative repercussions of their experience as victims, because of their constant contact with “signs of environmental disorder”, that not only remind of them of their victimization, but also of a possible repeat (Box, Hale and Andrews 1988: 352).

may know each other in cases of crimes against the person. This creates greater conditions for rationalization on the part of the victim. This in turn engenders less fear relative to household victimisation where the invader is a stranger and the attack is more likely to be planned and with intent (Ibid)⁶.

3. The Greek experience

3.1 *Victimization and feelings of (un)safety*

This connection between fear of crime and victimisation, clearly and steadily come out of Greek research (Zarafonitou 2000; 2002). The latest such study was undertaken in three municipalities of the greater Athens metropolitan area, in the Spring of 2004⁷. The sample comprised 450 persons⁸ selected on the basis of residence (150 inhabitants from each area)⁹. The study saw the distribution, door-to-door, of a 39-question questionnaire that was completed in the presence of field researchers.

The examination of victimisation in this study followed international victimisation research methodology (Kesteren, Mayhew and Nieuwbeerta 2000: 80, 83). Two questions were posed that dealt with respondents' fears of walking within their home municipality and their fear of being home alone¹⁰, as well as a ques-

⁶ Where the aforementioned explanation by Newhart, Smith and Hill, *Victimisation and fear of crime*, *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 18(2), 1991: 217-239, is cited.

⁷ The data for this study come from a survey entitled "Insecurity, fear of crime and attitudes of the inhabitants of Athens to criminal phenomenon" (Zarafonitou 2004b).

⁸ Men represented 51.3% of the sample and women 48.7%. As concerns age the sample distribution was as follows: 19.3% were aged 15-24, 26.9% were 25-34, 22.2% were 35-44, 14.6% were 45-54 and 16.9% were over 55. 53.5% were married with children and 52.1% had a medium education. As concerns occupations, 40.9% were private or public employees, 24.9% were freelance professionals, 10% were students, 9.3% were pensioners, 6.9% were housewives, 4.5% were entrepreneurs and 3.5% were unemployed. Finally, 69.7% owned their own homes (something tried for Greeks overall), and two thirds had lived in the area for over five years.

⁹ Questionnaires were distributed to representative residents on the basis of address in such a manner as to cover the entire area. This method was realized in the following stages: An initial stratification was conducted based on existing administrative subdivisions using maps of the area. These subdivisions were further arranged in ten zones in a second phase. In a third phase, fifteen questionnaires there were further distributed. This methodology was augmented with on the spot observation of the areas in order to further "map out" their distinctive characteristics. The SPSS statistical software package was used to process the data along with additional multiple-regression analysis.

¹⁰ The questions were posed thus: "How safe do you feel walking alone in your area after dark?" and "how safe do you feel when you are at home alone after dark?" Available answers were: very safe, fairly safe, a bit unsafe, very unsafe and in certain cases they were just: "safe – unsafe".

tion concerning their perception of a possible future victimisation¹¹. The question relating to (un)safety walking in the street was chosen from among the three for correlation with personal experience of victimisation, since it expresses fear of crime more directly, as a perception of the threat of criminal attack, as mentioned.

According to the data above, it was found that the percentage of those feeling unsafe was greater among victims than among non-victims (72.8% vs 47.5%, *Table 1*). Respectively, responders with no victimisation experience felt almost twice safer than victims (52.5% vs. 27.2%).

Table 1: Victimization and feelings of (un)safety

Victims/No Victims	Victimization and feelings of (un)safety				
	Safe		Unsafe		Total
Victims	25	27,20%	67	72,80%	
No Victims	187	52,50%	169	47,50%	356
Total	212	47,30%	236	52,70%	448

$\chi^2: .000$

Multiple-regression analysis also reached the same conclusions. According to this, those that have fallen victim to crime feel insecurity almost three times as much (2.942) as the rest (*Appendix, Table A*). Previous research data give a similar (*Zarafonitou 2002: 105*), the multivariate analysis of which came to the conclusion that, during the year preceding the study, the victimisation process almost doubles (87%) the rate of additional fear possibility (*Tseloni 2002: 189*).

The role of indirect victimisation in the intensity of the fear of crime is also proven to be significant. Also according to the Greek research findings (2004), it was found that those having a former experience of indirect victimisation felt more unsafe than those that did not claim something similar (61.1% vs. 43.6%, *Table 2*) and therefore, security levels were higher among the latter relative to those registering indirect victimisation (56.4% vs. 38.9%). Within the framework of the above research, the influence of indirect victimisation seems less important than of the aforementioned direct experience.

¹¹ The question was: "How likely do you believe the possibility of becoming the victim of a criminal act in the immediate future?" and the answers were: very likely or likely enough, little or not at all likely.

Table 2: *Indirect Victimisation and Feelings of (un)safety*

Indirect victims/ No victims	Indirect victimisation and feelings of (un)safety				
	Safe		Unsafe		Total
Indirect victims	86	38,90%	135	61,10%	221
No victims	123	56,40%	95	43,60%	219
Total	209	47,60%	230	52,40%	439

χ^2 : .000

The examination of the hypothesis on the role of self-protection measures, possibly, taken by victims to mitigate fear, was conducted through the question “*what has changed in your everyday life after the victimisation of yourself, or some acquaintance*” (Table 3).

Table 3: *Changes in your life after the direct or indirect victimisation*

	Changes in your life after the direct or indirect victimisation	
Measures of safety in their houses (locks, alarm etc)	83	23,30%
Moving in another area	6	1,70%
Avoidance of some places	51	14,30%
Carrying weapons (knife, gun, spray)	16	4,50%
General unsafety	112	31,40%
Improvement of relations with neighbours	21	5,60%
No change	68	19,10%
Total	357	100,00%

From the registered answers, it was ascertained that more than half took absolutely no measures and answered either that they “feel generally insecure” (31.4%), or “nothing has changed” (19.1%), while 23.3% made reference to security measures taken at home (locks, alarms, etc) and 14.3% answered that they avoid certain areas¹². This image seems to confirm the relevant hypothesis that in part explains the positive correlation between victimisation and a fear of crime as a result also of not taking special measures to avoid the possibility of subsequent victimisation (Killias 2001: 402). However, it is more likely that a more general ‘unsafety’ and ‘worry’, as well as dissatisfaction for services rendered by the state (both in terms of protection from crime, and areas that influence quality of life, in general) is expressed through fear of crime.

¹² In the hierarchy of households without security measures (alarms, neighborhood watch, security locks) in the European victimisation study, Athens received fifth place with 12% (average:11%). Madrid, Edinburgh, Paris, and Copenhagen (25%, 23%, 22%, 15%) were in the first places, while London and Budapest were in the last positions (2%).The citizens of the last two cities seem to place greater emphasis on issues of self-protection, (Nyiri 2005).

3.2 Neighbourhood environment perception and quality of life

The tendency of combining quantitative with qualitative methodological approaches in researching the complex phenomenon of fear of crime seems to be developing in this direction¹³. One such approach focuses on the “social meaning” of the notions ‘incivility’ and ‘social cohesion’ (Jackson 2004: 960). Within this framework, it has been found that worry about crime is formulated by a series of subjective parameters, such as *the psychological perception of ‘vulnerability’, the general social attitudes, and the perception of everyday risk*¹⁴. Approaches of this nature, in any event, highlight the significant role of information concerning crime, which in large urban centers is almost exclusively dominated by the mass media.

Within this framework, those that registered unsafety in moving about at night in their neighborhood, explain this feeling as the result of the existence of a lot of foreigners, inadequate police patrolling, and deserted and badly-lit areas (23.7%, 22.9%, 15.2%). A significant factor that emerges is the lack of social cohesion since in 20% of responses insecurity was given as the result of the indifference of neighbors (9.6%) and the indifference of passers-by in the event of a criminal attack (10.4%, *Table 4*).

*Table 4: Reasons of unsafety**

	Reasons of unsafety	
Lot of foreigners	317	23,70%
Inadequate police patrolling	307	22,90%
Deserted and badly-lit areas	203	15,20%
Indifference of passers-by in the event of a criminal attack	139	10,40%
Indifference of neighbours	128	9,60%
Slums	63	4,70%
Rumors of crime occurrence	54	4,00%
Abandoned buildings	46	3,40%
Many homeless	30	2,20%
Dense circulation	25	1,90%
Night clubs	14	1,00%
Large crowds	14	1,00%
Total	1340	100,00%

* $v = 438$ (multiple answers)

¹³ See indicatively Lupton and Tulloch (1999), which examines cultural representations and the various levels of symbolism that contribute to the formulation of fear of crime.

¹⁴ For example, within the framework of this research, it was found out that persons with more ‘authoritarian’ views on ‘law and order’ were more prone to perceive ‘disorder’ in their environment and more easily linked it to consensual and social cohesion problems, and degradation of social structures and unofficial social checks (Jackson 2004: 960).

All of the above refer to the quality of life issue that emerged in this latest Greek survey, as satisfaction from services in health, education, public transportation, the environment, etc.¹⁵ According to the findings from the study, quality of life emerges as an important factor in insecurity, since 76.8% of those reporting fear were also unsatisfied by the quality of life in their municipality, while among the safe respondents the relevant figure was 58.0% (Table 5).

Table 5: Satisfaction from the quality of life in the area of domicile

	Satisfaction from the quality of life in the area of domicile			
	Safe		Unsafe	
Satisfied	89	41,99%	55	23,20%
Not satisfied	123	58,01%	182	76,80%
Total	212	100,00%	237	100,00%

$\chi^2: ,000$

This finding is also borne out through multiple-regression analysis, according to which those that are unsatisfied by the quality of life in their residential area feel twice as (2.042) unsafe as those claiming satisfied (Appendix, Table A). The inhabitants of Athens indeed ranked as their greatest problems (Table 6) drugs (25.5%), immigrants (21.2%), unemployment (19.9%), while criminality, in general, was in fourth place (13.2%)¹⁶.

¹⁵ The question concerning environment, that was included in the European Victimization Survey (EU ICS), is relevant to 'environmental disorder'. This question examines the stance of citizens of European capitals on the basis of certain characteristics that delineate the notion of 'deprived area', meaning: *youth on the streets, homeless persons, beggars, littering, graffiti, vandalism and public intoxication* (Hideg and Manchin 2005). Research data rate inhabitants of Athens first in negative assessments with 86%, along with inhabitants of Budapest. These are followed by the inhabitants of Brussels and Paris (84%), while the inhabitants of Lisbon are in last place (and therefore have the most positive image) (56%). This stance is correlated to (in)security.

¹⁶ The view is posed that criminality emerges as a main social problem when social concerns for unemployment subside, while in the opposite case, when unemployment takes on a dominant position, insecurity concerning criminality is overtaken (Robert and Pottier 2004: 237). Of course, it's much more likely that criminality in the responses of inhabitants of Athens is linked to drugs and therefore is ranked first. It's also not impossible that there is a linkage between immigrants and criminality, as well as with unemployment, something which has come out of other research.

Table 6: Most important social problems in their domicile area (multiple answers)

Most important social problems in their domicile area		
Drugs	297	25,50%
Immigrants	247	21,20%
Unemployment	232	19,90%
Crime	154	13,20%
Lack of sanity's structures	96	8,20%
Environmental problems	69	5,90%
Lack of education's structures	68	5,80%
Total	1163	100,00%

3.3 Attitudes to the police

Finally, for the unity of the syllogism it is imperative to refer to the significant role played in expressions of insecurity and fear of crime, by the trust of citizens to the penal justice system. The first studies in explaining fear of crime noted the decisive role that the presence of police can play, especially if the force is willing, effective, and acceptable by the community (Box, Hale and Andrews 1988: 353). This role becomes even more important in modern urban environments, because of the absence of informal social control and the loosening of social bonds. Within this framework, the police in the minds of citizens is “an organization in the service of the local population” and as such satisfaction from police services “constitutes a ‘logical’ criterion for its assessment” (Killias 2001: 429). In this way, the finding that those that feel more intense fear are those that are also most dissatisfied with the work of the police and who seek greater policing (Zvekić 1997: 8).

This image is also verified by Greek research results. More specifically, the 2004 study, in general, registers a negative assessment of the work of the police (Table 7) and almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents assess police work as not very or not at all effective (71.8%). This assessment, however, becomes even more negative when answers come from victims (75.8%) or those feeling insecurity (77.6%)¹⁷.

¹⁷ A corresponding ranking also comes out of international studies. The average satisfaction of inhabitants of European capitals with police work in the field of criminality is generally very high (72%) as is borne out by data from the aforementioned European victimisation survey. The inhabitants of Helsinki and Edinburgh are most satisfied with percentages reaching 90%, while those least satisfied are the inhabitants of Athens and Rome with 52% and 60% respectively (Nyiri 2005). This study also registers the great dissatisfaction of those that claimed victimisation within the last five years with almost a third (29%) believing that the police “does a fairly or a very poor job” in dealing with crime (20% for non-victims). The findings of the European crime survey especially highlight the great dissatisfaction with treatment by police of victims that proceeded with crime reporting to police.

Table 7: Evaluation of police job in their domicile area

Police is ...	Evaluation of police job in their domicile area					
	Total		Unsafe		Victims	
Effective	122	28,20%	53	22,40%	22	24,20%
Ineffective	310	71,80%	184	77,60%	69	75,80%
Total	432	100%	237	100%	91	100%

$\chi^2: .017; \chi^2: .344$

It is obvious, that the above significantly influence the general tendency for reporting crime to police, something also verified by international victimisation crime survey. According to these data (Kesteren, Mayhew and Nieuwbeerta 2000: 64), the average reporting rates for the six representative crimes has been within a narrow range of 51% to 53% for the countries taking part at least three times. It's worth noting that the rate of reporting is higher among Athens residents that took part in the 2004 Greek survey (64.5%), despite their much more negative image of police effectiveness.

4. Conclusions

According to the aforementioned Greek experience, a stable relation between fear of crime and victimisation is established. In fact, multiple-regression analysis pointed out that those that have fallen victim to crime feel insecurity almost three times as much as the rest. A similar correlation is verified in the case of indirect victimisation. The hypothesis, according to the aforementioned, of not taking self-protection measures by a significant number of victims can only partly account for this positive correlation. It is more likely that a more general 'unsafety' and 'worry', as well as dissatisfaction for services rendered by the state is expressed through fear of crime. Within this framework, quality of life emerges as a significant factor, as this is determined through services offered and the level of satisfaction from environmental and social conditions in the area of residence. This image is also borne out through multiple-regression analysis, according to which those that are unsatisfied by the quality of life in their residential area feel twice as unsafe as those claiming satisfied.

Inhabitants of Athens explain their feelings of insecurity as the result of the existence of a lot of foreigners, inadequate police patrolling, and deserted and badly-lit areas. A significant factor that emerges is also the lack of social cohesion. Athenians rank as most significant social problems drugs, immigrants, unemployment, and criminality, in general.

Greek research findings verify the standing correlation between lack of satisfaction with police and feelings of insecurity. More specifically, the 2004 study, in general, registers a negative assessment of the work of the police. This assessment, however, becomes even more negative when answers come from victims or those feeling insecurity. It's worth noting, however, that the reporting rates by victims to police is greater among Athens residents in comparison to international research findings, despite the much more negative image Athenians have of police efficacy.

In any event, and despite whatever vagueness in the conceptual content of insecurity and the difficulties of a spherical explanation of the phenomenon, insecurity has taken on global dimensions with indisputable effects on a personal and societal level. Thus persons feeling unsafety are led to self imposed restrictions in their daily lives downgrading their quality of life, exacerbating conflicts among citizens, and reinforcing stigmatizing stereotypes (racism, xenophobia) that lead to the marginalization of whole population groups and also whole neighborhoods. Citizens' punitiveness is reinforced, which acts in a disorienting manner towards the application of a rational social/preventive criminal policy. Also, personal initiatives in self-protection measures are affected to a significant degree with, often, dubious results.

The intensification of punitiveness that has been observed over the last few years on the part of a great percentage of citizens in Europe and the USA is not, however, exclusively due to their fear of crime but also to a series of other factors. Among these are: the level of information of citizens and the media, political conservatism, social problems, religion, etc (Kury and Oberfell-Fuchs 1998: 42). In any case, both insecurity and punitiveness on the part of the public are favorite themes for journalistic and political exploitation, offering, at the same time, favourable conditions for the emergence of "theories of the people" (Walter 2002: 1305).

It is obvious that the insecurity, either in the form of an immediate fear of crime, or in the form of anxiety over criminality as a social problem, significantly affects crime policy. Social pressure for taking harsher measures to deal with the phenomenon of crime, as well as a generalized tendency to politically exploit insecurity, have as a logical continuation the reinforcement of repression and the extension of the envelope for the penal intervention by the state. Within this framework, penal justice is now used as a 'tool' for managing social problems, thus contributing to their exacerbation and expansion.

Appendix

Table A: Multiple-regression analysis

Independent variables	Dependent variable
	Odds ratio (OR) (95% C.I)
Domicile area	
Centre	0,425 (0,244-0,742)
D1	0,809 (0,462-1,416)
D2	Reference category
Age	
25-34	2,067 (0,909-4,696)
35-44	2,087 (0,853-5,104)
45-54	1,472 (0,559-3,873)
55+	0,593 (0,173-2,036)
15-24	Reference category
Education	
High school graduate	1,582 (0,736-3,402)
University/College graduated	2,160 (0,911-5,123)
Has had no schooling/has had primary education	Reference category
Gender	
Men	4,794 (2,928-7,851)
Women	Reference category
Profession	
Free trader/Entrepreneur	1,130 (0,626-2,040)
Pensioner/housewife	1,096 (0,399-3,008)
Student undergratuated	2,063 (0,754-5,640)
Unemployed	1,990 (0,517-7,659)
Employee	Reference category
Victimisation	
No	2,942 (1,622-5,338)
Yes	Reference category
Sources of information	
Radio	0,727 (0,202-2,618)
Newspapers	1,766 (0,686-4,546)
Social environment	2,541 (0,584-11,052)
TV	Reference category
Satisfaction from the quality of life in their domicile area	
Yes	2,042 (1,219-3,421)
No	Reference category
Main social problems	
Other social problems	1,330 (0,295-6,000)
Unemployment	Reference category
Assesment of police work	
Effective	1,242 (0,744-2,073)
Ineffective	Reference category
Fellow lodger	
Family	0,780 (0,402-1,514)
Friends	0,777 (0,205-2,936)
Alone	Reference category

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