research notes

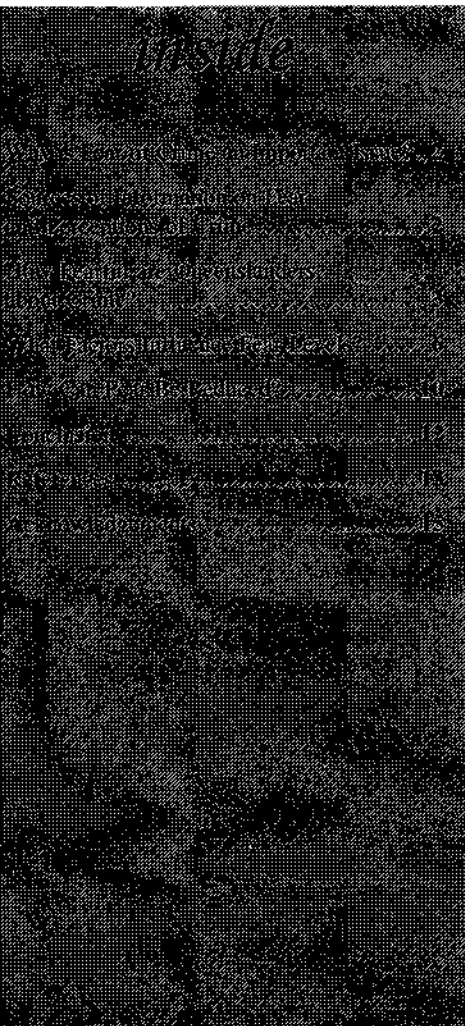# Fear of Crime

Introduction

The purpose of this Research Paper is to inform the public, police and policy makers about issues associated with the fear of crime. The main questions addressed in the paper are:

- Why is fear of crime an important issue?

- How fearful are Queenslanders about crime?

- Is the level of fear increasing?

- What factors influence levels of fear?

- How can fear of crime be reduced?

Why is Fear of Crime an Important Issue?

Quality of Personal and Community Life

People's quality of life may be seriously affected if they are fearful of crime. They may be reluctant to leave their homes and their movements may be restricted to avoid areas or situations which they see as unsafe. They may feel anxious about being home alone, especially at night, and may have trouble sleeping.

A certain level of fear may be "functional" in that it may encourage people to be more careful and to engage in protective behaviour. However, fear of crime becomes a problem when the anxiety which people experience is out of all proportion to the actual risks of being a crime victim.

Fear of crime can also have wider costs to the community. Public facilities such as carparks and public transport may not be fully utilised and excessive money may be spent on security devices for the home and person. Where fear of crime is widespread within a community, it can lead to alienation, isolation and the disintegration of social networks. This process is particularly evident in some American cities (Wilson & Kelling 1982; Skogan 1987).

More generally, it can be difficult to develop and maintain rational crime justice policies and to use law enforcement resources sensibly in a climate of alarm about crime.

Improving Police Performance

Many police services now identify reducing fear of crime as an important organisational goal. For example, the Queensland Police Service (QPS) has recently specified as its first aim to 'encourage and work with local communities to solve crime and improve neighbourhood safety and security' (QPS Corporate Plan 1993/94).

The Personal Safety Program of the QPS states that 'members of the QPS work with the people of Queensland to reduce the fear and threat of personal violence' and to guarantee that 'victims of personal violence receive a timely and professional response'. The QPS proposes to measure the performance of the Personal Safety Program by methods such as regular community surveys. Police need to be aware of the factors which contribute to fear of crime, and of ways in which the level of fear in the community might be contained or reduced if they are to improve performance in terms of these measures.

Sources of Information on Fear and Perceptions of Crime

In Queensland, several surveys have provided information about people's perception of crime and levels of fear in the community:

Queensland Crime Victims Survey (1991)

The Queensland Crime Victims Survey was conducted in 1991 by the Queensland Government Statistician's Office (GSO) in conjunction with the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC). The survey covered some 6,000 households in Queensland. The survey was used primarily to collect data on victimisation. It was also designed to gauge respondents' perceptions of their safety when they were alone at home at night or walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark and their perceived likelihood of becoming the victim of various household or personal crimes (e.g. having their home broken into and something stolen, being attacked and robbed, having things stolen from their car).

Surveys of Attitudes Towards the Queensland Police Service (1991, 1993)

In the 1990s, two surveys on Attitudes Towards the QPS were conducted on behalf of the CJC. The most recent survey, undertaken in July 1993, interviewed 900 people throughout Queensland. Respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions of crime levels in their neighbourhood, town/city and Queensland as a whole. Additionally, items were included which tapped respondents' perceptions of personal risk. Similar questions were asked in a survey conducted in 1991.

Toowoomba Community Surveys (1993, 1994)

The Toowoomba Beat Policing Pilot Project is a joint initiative of the CJC and the QPS. In May 1993, prior to the commencement of the pilot project, 800 residents were surveyed in the two areas where the project was to be conducted and in four adjacent 'control' areas. This survey included questions on respondents' perceptions of risk and feelings of personal safety, similar to those asked in the Queensland Crime Victims Survey 1991. The survey was repeated in June 1994 after the pilot project had been in operation for approximately a year. The areas in which the two surveys were conducted have a population of approximately 24,000 people, representing a broad cross-section of the Toowoomba community.

Queensland Police Service Police Beat Project Surveys (1992, 1993)

In December 1992 the QPS introduced and piloted a Police Beat community policing initiative in three shopping centres (Garden City Shopping Centre, Mt. Gravatt; Chermside Shopping Centre, Chermside; and K-Mart Plaza, Rockhampton). Prior to this, shoppers in each centre were asked if they felt the initiative would provide an effective policing presence in shopping centres. During the piloting periods over Christmas 1992 and Easter 1993, passing shoppers were surveyed about a range of fear and safety issues such as how safe they felt walking alone in the carpark during the evening and whether a police presence would help alleviate their fear. These surveys were conducted by the Research and Evaluation Branch of the QPS in conjunction with the Community Development and Crime Prevention Unit of the Queensland University of Technology.

Mulgrave Community Safety Attitude Survey (1994)

The Mulgrave Community Safety Attitude Survey was a collaborative research endeavour, spearheaded by the Mulgrave Shire Council and ACRO (A Community and Safety Research Organisation Incorporated), conducted over three months in 1994. The study was undertaken in response to extensive media commentary and public discussion on issues of law and order in Mulgrave Shire, which forms part of Cairns. The questionnaire was designed to gauge the perceptions of Shire residents on issues of crime and safety. More specifically, the instrument contained a range of indices of fear of crime. Questionnaires were distributed to households and high schools throughout the Shire. Responses were collected from 7,327 residents consisting of 4,362 adults and 2,965 students.

How Fearful are Queenslanders about Crime?

Measures of Fear

The 1991 Queensland Crime Victims Survey included two indices of fear of crime. Respondents were asked how safe they felt when:

- alone at home at night

- walking alone in the streets after dark.

Answers ranged from feeling 'very safe' to feeling 'not at all safe'. Ninety per cent of respondents reported feeling 'very safe' or 'fairly safe' when alone at home at night. Sixty-eight per cent of respondents reported feeling 'fairly safe' or 'very safe' when walking alone in the streets after dark. Overall, most respondents felt 'very safe' or 'fairly safe' from crime in both settings. However, more respondents felt safe in the home environment at night than they did walking alone in the streets.

The 1994 Toowoomba survey contained the same two indices of fear of crime. In this survey, 89 per cent of respondents said that they felt 'very safe' or 'fairly safe' alone at home at night. This result was very similar to the finding from the Queensland Crime Victims Survey (1991). On the other hand, only 48 per cent of the Toowoomba respondents felt 'very safe' or 'fairly safe' walking in the streets alone after dark.

Figure 1 compares the responses of men and women in the 1991 Queensland Crime Victims Survey to these two questions. Women felt less safe than men whether in the home or on the street. This difference was
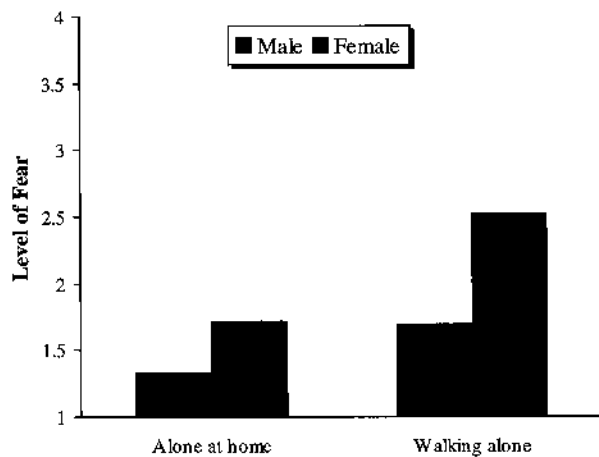
FIGURE 1: FEAR OF CRIME BY GENDER

Source: Queensland Crime Victims Survey (1991) (n = 6315).

Note: Levels of fear were measured as follows: 1 = 'very safe', 2 = 'fairly safe', 3 = 'not very safe', 4 = 'not at all safe'. The figure shows the average score for each group.

particularly marked with regard to walking alone in the street at night. Possible explanations for the different levels of fear of crime expressed by men and women are considered later in the paper.

These figures give some indication of the degree to which Queenslanders are concerned for their personal safety. However, the questions asked above referred to two quite specific situations. Many people seldom walk in the streets after dark. There are other situations where people may be more likely to feel fear, such as in carparks or on public transport after dark. Also, the questions in these surveys only asked people how *they* felt about their own safety. People may also feel concern for family members or people they know.

The Mulgrave Community Safety Attitude Survey (1994) asked respondents to indicate how safe they felt across a range of social settings. The overwhelming majority of respondents felt unsafe 'when approached' (74%) and when in 'Cairns City Place' (66%). A large proportion of respondents felt unsafe 'at night' (40%) and 'at the shopping centre' (30%). Respondents felt safest 'in the day', 'at home' and 'when travelling'. For these three scenarios, no more than one in seven respondents felt unsafe.

Perceptions of Personal Risk

An analysis of data from the 1991 Queensland Crime Victims Survey established that the higher a person's perceived level of risk, the more likely he or she was to feel fearful about crime. This relationship held for all crimes except the perceived risk of being sexually assaulted. Concern about sexual assault was not significantly related to fear of staying home at night but was related to fear of going out alone at night.

About three in 10 Queenslanders believe there is a 'very high' or 'high' risk that they will be a victim of crime (Attitudes Towards the Queensland Police Service 1993). However, the level of risk perceived by individuals varies according to the nature of the crime.

In the 1991 Queensland Crime Victims Survey, respondents were asked to indicate the likelihood of the following three crimes being perpetrated against them in the next twelve months:

• home broken into and something stolen

• attacked or robbed

• sexually assaulted.

Of the three offences, respondents identified 'home broken into and something stolen' as the most likely event to occur (Figure 2). Respondents perceived 'attack or robbery' as the next most likely offence to be committed. Respondents were least likely to feel they were at risk of being 'sexually assaulted'.
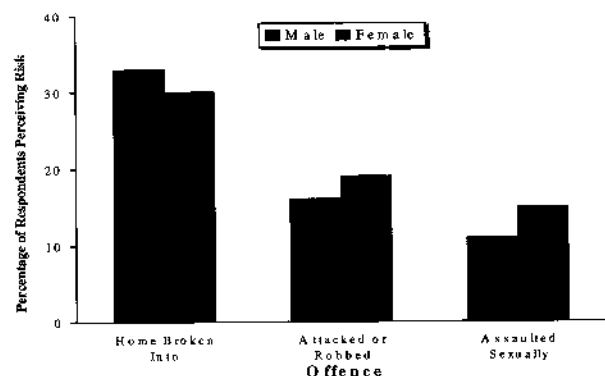

FIGURE 2: PERCEPTIONS OF RISK OF VICTIMISATION BY OFFENCE BY SEX

Source: Queensland Crime Victims Survey (1991) (n = 6315).

Note: Percentages are of respondents who believe the event is 'very' or 'fairly' likely to occur within the next 12 months.

Notable differences were evident between men and women across the three indices. Men believed they were more likely than women to have their home broken into and something stolen. However, women were more inclined than men to feel that they were at risk of attack, robbery or sexual assault.

Perceptions of Neighbourhood Crime

People generally see their own neighbourhoods as safer places than the wider community. For instance, in the 1993 Attitudes to QPS Survey, 73 per cent of respondents said that the level of crime in their neighbourhood was lower than the average level of crime in Australia as a whole. Similarly 50 per cent of those surveyed considered the risk of crime in their neighbourhood to be 'low' or 'very low', whereas only 10 percent described crime in Queensland as a whole as 'low' or 'very low'. A possible explanation for these differing perceptions is that:

> For most people the evidence of daily life in the neighbourhood simply does not correspond to what they are being told is the state of crime. This clash of evidence, between people's direct experience of their neighbourhood and the statements of officially accredited experts concerning crime "in society" is resolved for most people by assuring that crime really is a problem — but not locally. (O'Malley 1991, p. 8)

However, it should be noted that, even at the local level, the treatment of the crime issue by the media, politicians and other opinion leaders can affect how people see crime risks (see below).

How Realistic are People's Perceptions of Risk?

In 1990/91 the rate of break-ins or attempted break-ins in Queensland was about seven per 100 households (Queensland Crime Victims Survey 1991). Four per cent of women and five per cent of men reported they had been threatened with force, violence or damage to personal property. The rate of victimisation for attack/assault was four per 100 (five per 100 for males; three per 100 for females). Compared with Figure 2, these findings suggest that people tend to overestimate the risk of being a victim of serious crime, in particular crime against the person.

Are Levels of Fear and Perception of Risk Increasing?

There is some evidence that public concern about crime has increased over the last few years. These data came from two sources: the CJC's 1991 and 1993 surveys on Attitudes to the QPS and the two Toowoomba surveys.

Results from the 1993 Attitudes Towards the Queensland Police Service survey indicated an increase in the perceived level of crime risk since 1991. In 1993, 31 per cent of respondents described the crime risk to themselves as 'high' or 'very high' – up from 23 per cent in 1991.

Concern about crime in Toowoomba increased over the year 1993-94. In mid-1993, 45 per cent of survey respondents felt 'not very safe' or 'not at all safe' walking alone in the street after dark. By mid-1994, this figure had increased to 52 per cent. Figure 3 presents data comparing the perceived likelihood of victimisation in Toowoomba in May 1993 and June 1994. The results indicate that respondents' perception of the likelihood of victimisation increased significantly over the 13 months for two of the three indices examined. In other words, respondents felt more vulnerable to burglary, and to being attacked and robbed in 1994 than they did in 1993.
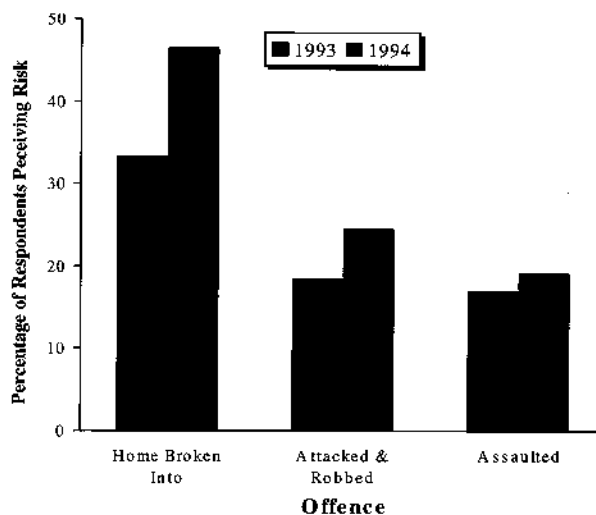

FIGURE 3: PERCEPTION OF RISK OF VICTIMISATION BY OFFENCE BY YEAR

Source: Toowoomba Crime Surveys (1993, 1994) (n = 800 per survey)

Note: Percentages are of respondents who believed the event was 'very' or 'fairly' likely to occur within the next 12 months.

It is interesting to compare these changes in perceptions with trends in the actual level of crime in Toowoomba over the same period. The two surveys included eight items asking respondents if they had been a victim of crime in the preceding 12 months (refer to Table 1). The survey data indicate that there was no statistically significant increase in the rates of victimisation across any of these eight items between 1993 and 1994. Police statistics on reported crime for the Toowoomba Police District show a rise in residential burglaries and car thefts, but little or no increase in reported crimes against the person.

TABLE 1: RATES OF VICTIMISATION
(TOOWOOMBA, 1993, 1994)

Offence	1993 (n = 800) %	1994 (n = 800) %
Break and Enter	6.1	7.5
Item Stolen from Outside Home	13.0	13.3
Outside Home Vandalised	9.8	10.8
Motor Vehicle Stolen	1.1	2.5
Motor Vehicle Vandalised	7.0	9.0
Threat made -- with weapon	1.3	0.5
Other Assault	3.0	2.6
Item Stolen from Person	1.8	1.3

Source: Toowoomba Community Surveys (1993, 1994).

Note: Table shows the percentage of people who reported having experienced one or more of these crimes in the preceding 12 months.

On the basis of trends in the number of burglaries reported to the police, the survey respondents may have been justified in perceiving that the risk of being burgled had increased. However, the increase in the perceived risk of being assaulted or attacked and robbed cannot be attributed to an increase in the actual risk of victimisation.

To understand why people have become more sensitised to violent crime, it is important to consider the role of other factors, such as the treatment of crime and law and order issues by the media. There has been a high level of media coverage and political discussion about crime issues particularly over the last year or so. This has occurred both locally in and throughout Queensland. It is likely that the pattern of coverage in the media contributed to the perception of respondents in the Toowoomba surveys that the risk of violent crime had increased.

What Factors Influence Fear Levels?

Factors which researchers have identified as influencing levels of fear have included:

- direct or indirect experience of victimisation (as a victim, witness or acquaintance of a victim)

- gender

- age

- level of home security

- the local physical environment ("signs" of disorder including graffiti, rubbish in the streets)

- media treatment of crime issues.

Victimisation

It is often thought that people who have recently been victims of crime will be those who are most fearful of being victimised in the future. On this basis, it has traditionally been assumed by policy makers that the main way of making the community feel safer is to reduce the level of crime in the community. However, research has shown that the relationship between fear and recent victimisation is not as strong as originally thought.

Figure 4 presents data comparing the level of fear of crime expressed by individuals across four groups (Queensland Crime Victims Survey 1991).

Respondents were classified into one of four groups:

- those not subjected to any crime in the past 12 months (n = 5439)

- victims of non-domestic assault (n = 385)

- victims of one or more assaults by either a current spouse; an ex-spouse or a de facto partner (n = 58)
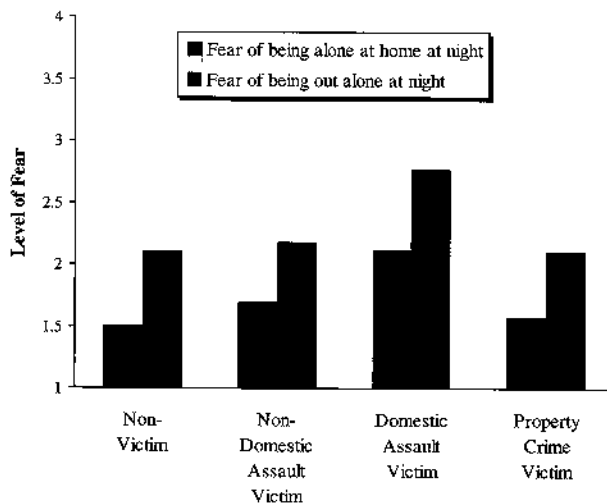
- victims of property crime (n = 433).

FIGURE 4: **FEAR OF CRIME BY TYPE OF PREVIOUS VICTIMISATION**

Source: Queensland Crime Victims Survey (1991) (n = 6,315).

Note: Levels of fear were measured as follows: 1 = 'very safe', 2 = 'fairly safe', 3 = 'not very safe', 4 = 'not at all safe'. The figure shows the average score for each group.

It is evident from Figure 4 that, for each group, levels of fear were uniformly higher in relation to being out alone at night than to being alone at home at night. It is also apparent that victims assaulted by present or former spouses and partners were significantly more likely than members of the other three groups to express concern about being 'alone at night at home' or 'out alone at night'. However, there were no significant differences in the average levels of fear expressed by non-victims and victims of assault or property crime.[1] In part, this may have been because:

- The survey asked respondents only about crimes which occurred in the last year. It is possible that some of the "non-victims" who expressed feelings of fear had been victimised on an earlier occasion.

- The fear questions did not always correspond with the circumstances in which the respondent was victimised. For example, if a person was assaulted in a hotel, this could have made him or her more

fearful about entering that particular hotel, without affecting his or her feelings about being alone at home, or walking in the local neighbourhood after dark.

Due to the survey methodology employed, the incidence of domestic violence was almost certainly underestimated. For this reason, care must be exercised in generalising from the results of this survey. Nonetheless, it is significant that women who reported having been subject to domestic violence experienced higher levels of fear than non-victims and victims of other types of crimes.[2] As noted earlier, fear is related not only to being alone at home at night, but also to being outside the home. This finding suggests that domestic abuse may contribute to a general sense of fearfulness – if a person does not feel safe at home, where can she or he feel safe? Another consideration is that not all domestic assault – especially that involving ex-spouses – necessarily takes place within the home. It may be quite rational for some victims to see the street and other public places as more dangerous than the home.

Gender

Overseas research consistently indicates that gender is one of the most important factors in fear of crime (Baumer 1978; Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Gordon and Riger 1989; Stanko 1990). Consistent with this research, data from the Queensland Crime Victims Survey (1991) shows that males and females differ markedly in their fear of crime (see Figure 1). In 1991 only two per cent of males reported feeling unsafe when alone at home at night, compared to 11 per cent of females. Forty-five per cent of women reported feeling unsafe when walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark as opposed to only 12 per cent of men. Men were also more likely to report feeling very safe than were females.

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[1] The QPS Report on an Evaluation of Police Beat, Christmas 1992, found fear of crime to be greater for those who had been victims of crimes such as harassment, intimidation and physical attacks in the last twelve months. However, this is not consistent with the findings of the 1991 Crime Victims Survey. The divergent results may be due to the differing circumstances in which the two surveys were conducted. Hence, the Police Beat survey was concerned specifically about fear, safety and police presence in shopping centre contexts, especially carparks.

[2] In the survey 54 (93%) of the 58 identified domestic violence victims were female. Women who were separated/divorced or in de facto relationships experienced more threats of violence (eight per 100 and six per 100 respectively) than married women (two per 100). These women also experienced more instances of assault, with a rate of seven per 100 for women in de facto relationships and six per 100 for those who were separated/divorced, compared with a rate of one per 100 for married women. However, these differences may have been partly a product of the survey methodology: it is possible that women who had been assaulted by their current partners were less willing to give frank answers than those who were separated.

Although women report greater levels of fear, their recorded risk of victimisation is lower than that of men. For example, according to the Queensland Crime Victims Surveys (1991), the rate of assault for Queensland women was three per 100, compared with five per 100 for men. The rate of threats of violence was four per 100 for women, compared with five per 100 for men (Women's Policy Unit 1992). However, as stated previously, violent crime against women is generally thought to be under-recorded, particularly where such crimes are committed 'in the home'.

Women take greater precautions for personal safety than men and are more likely to restrict behaviour to avoid danger. Women are particularly likely to be concerned about the possibility of attack by strangers, although in reality most violent crime against women is committed by someone the victim knows and often trusts. According to the Queensland Crime Victims Survey (1991), 65 per cent of attacks and assaults on women were by someone known to them. Only 41 per cent of males were attacked or assaulted in similar circumstances.

It has been suggested that women are more fearful than men due to their higher levels of physical and social vulnerability (Skogan & Maxfield 1981). Women are less likely to feel that they can physically defend themselves from potential assailants – who are usually male. Crimes of violence against women are frequently deliberately focused acts of intimidation. According to Braithwaite and Biles, 'it may be that, even though women are less likely to be victims of most types of crime, the few crimes of which they disproportionately are the victims are crimes which are inordinately fear-provoking' (1980, p. 338).

Age

It is commonly asserted that older people experience greater fear of crime than younger people (Clarke & Lewis 1982; Jeffords 1983; Baldassare 1986). However, the 1991 Queensland Crime Victims Survey provides little evidence to support this view. Figure 5 shows that there was little difference across the six age cohorts examined in terms of the level of fear experienced. In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that people feel a little safer alone at home as they get

older. People aged between 30 and 54 felt marginally safer walking alone at night than those aged 15 to 29, or 55 or over, but the group differences were quite small.
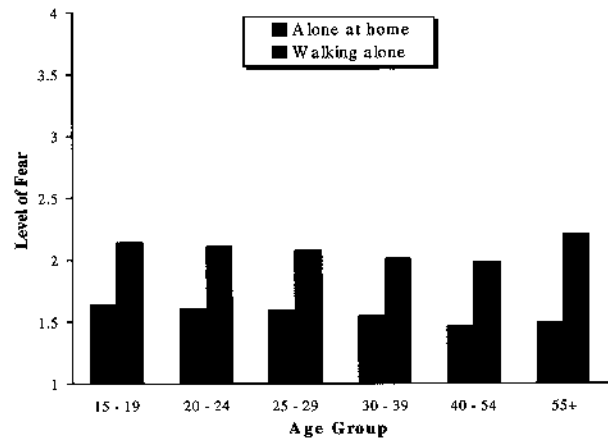

FIGURE 5:   FEAR OF CRIME BY AGE

Source: Queensland Crime Victims Survey (1991) (n = 6315).

Note: Levels of fear were measured as follows: 1 = 'very safe', 2 = 'fairly safe', 3 = 'not very safe', 4 = 'not at all safe'. The figure shows the average score for each group.

In reality, the elderly are significantly less at risk of victimisation than other age groups (refer to Figure 6). This finding holds whether the victimisation takes the form of 'weapon used/attacked', 'person/property threatened with force' or 'property stolen/damaged'.
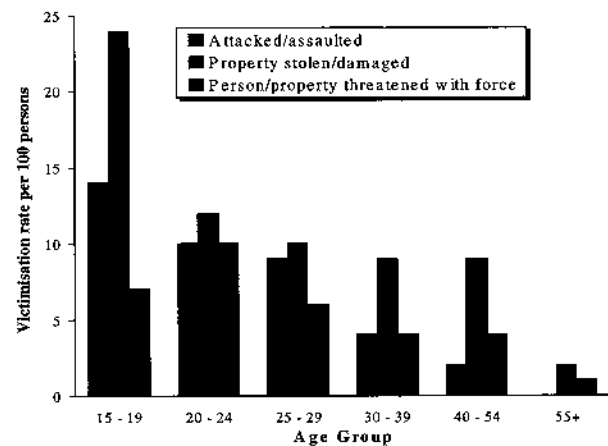

FIGURE 6:   REPORTED VICTIMISATION BY AGE BY TYPE OF VICTIMISATION

Source: Queensland Crime Victims Survey (1991) (n = 6315).

Note: Attacked/assaulted includes deliberate use of weapon.

The data indicate that younger people are the age cohort most likely to be victimised. Respondents in the 15 to 19 age cohort were more likely than respondents in other age cohorts to have been 'attacked/assaulted' or had their 'property stolen/ damaged'. Those in the 20 to 24 year age group were most likely to have their person or property threatened with force.

Home Security

Figures from the Queensland Crime Victims Survey (1991) show that only 18 per cent of respondents did not have any form of home security. The main types of security which people installed were:

- Intercom (3%)

- Burglar alarm on premises (3%)

- Windows that need special keys for opening (7%)

- Lights on timer or sensor switch (9%)

- Bars or grilles on the windows (16%)

- Security chain/bolts on the doors (24%)

- Outside doors with double locks or deadlocks (28%)

- Dog on the property (35%)

- Security screen doors (43%)

Of those who reported *having some form* of home security, 93 per cent said they felt very safe or fairly safe alone at home at night. Of those who reported *having no form* of home security, 92 per cent reported feeling safe alone at home after dark.

It would seem on the surface that the presence of security devices on the premises makes little difference to a person's sense of safety. However, it may be that a proportion of those people with some form of security initially installed these measures because they were more fearful. Those without any home security may never have felt the need for such devices.

The Local Environment

Carach, Thomas, Cranich and Frampton (1993) sought to identify the factors which explained fear of crime in Queensland. Using data from the Queensland Crime Victims Survey (1991), they found that neighbourhood cohesion helped to decrease the level of fear. By neighbourhood cohesion, the authors meant whether respondents felt people in their area helped each other.

Carach et al. identified "incivilities" as an important environmental factor influencing fear of crime. Factors contributing to fear of crime included the presence of drunks and vagrants on the street, vandalism, graffiti and houses appearing run-down. Individuals residing in an area with such characteristics were approximately one and a half times more likely to feel fear when alone at home at night than individuals living in areas free of such social problems.

The Media

One of the most influential factors that shape people's perceptions and fear of crime is the media. As Lichtenstein et al. note, 'fear sells' (1978, p. 575). Media reporting of crime is, in turn, influenced by the way in which key opinion leaders, particularly politicians, treat the crime issue.

Some sections of the media tend to portray images of crime as involving random victimisation and irrational criminal behaviour and the violent or unusual is often emphasised (Baker et al. 1983; Heath 1984; Williams and Dickinson 1993). The media may contribute to people having an unrealistic view of the level of criminal activity and personal risk and to an individual's increased sense of fear. Sensational and vivid reporting of certain crimes such as rape and murder can lead people to overestimate the risk of being a victim of such crimes (Lichtenstein et al. 1978). Similarly, if elements of the media choose to focus attention on a particular type of crime, such as "home invasions" or attacks on the elderly, this can easily create the impression that there is a crime wave, even though there may be no statistical evidence of an upsurge in such crimes.

How Can Fear Be Reduced?

Fall in Crime Levels

Reducing victimisation rates has traditionally been seen as the most direct way of reducing the level of fear. According to this view, if fewer people are victims, fewer will have direct experience of crime and, presumably, fewer will know of or hear about others' victimisation.

The limitation of this approach, as discussed above, is that the amount of fear felt by a person may not always be closely related to the actual risk of victimisation. Beliefs about personal risk may be more affected by crime information sources such as the media than by direct or vicarious victimisation. The comparison of fear and victimisation levels in the two Toowoomba surveys lends support to this point. These surveys showed there was no real increase in crime against the person between mid-1993 and mid-1994, yet there was a clearly discernible increase in fearfulness and perceived levels of risk.

On the other hand, exposure to family violence may have a direct impact on levels of fear. Although women are less likely than men to become victims of many types of crime, they are more likely to be victims of domestic violence, and are more concerned about the risk of this type of violence. Strategies which help reduce the incidence of family violence *could* therefore lessen the overall level of fear experienced by women in the community.

Policing Strategies

Several studies, mostly undertaken in North America and the United Kingdom, have examined the impact of various types of policing strategies on fear of crime. The main findings have been:

- Heightening police visibility through increased mobile patrols is unlikely to reduce fear of crime and may even add to public anxiety (Kelling et al. 1974). If people suddenly see more police cars around their area, they may infer that crime in their area has actually become worse.

- On the other hand, providing a regular and approachable police presence in public spaces such as shopping centres and malls may make people feel safer when visiting these places. The Police Beat Shopfronts established by the QPS appear to have had a positive effect in this regard (QPS 1992, 1993).

- Regular foot patrols in residential areas can help reduce feelings of fear, especially if the patrols form part of a broader community policing strategy (Rosenbaum 1988; Bottoms 1990.) The impact of such programs is likely to be greatest where:

  - there is a significant level of fear in the area where the program is located and there is more scope for the patrols to 'make a difference'

  - patrolling is undertaken when and where people are most likely to feel fearful

  - the officers on 'the beat' aim not only to increase their visibility, but also to address some of the problems which give rise to feelings of fear in the community, such as poor lighting, vandalism, graffiti and offensive behaviour.

One of the most important findings to emerge from research on the impact of policing strategies is that many of the factors which contribute to fear of crime are not within the direct control of police. Efforts at reducing fear are most likely to be effective if police do not claim exclusive ownership of the problem and other agencies and organisations such as local councils, housing authorities, public transport bodies, community groups are involved in devising strategies. Some examples of inter-agency approaches are discussed below.

Managing and Designing Public Spaces

As indicated, the physical and social environment of the local community is one of the factors which influences fear. The QPS recently introduced the Safety Audits program, which is now administered and monitored through the Neighbourhood Safety Audit Unit of the Department of Administrative Services. The program involves the community, local government, police, business organisations, public utilities and Telecom working together to inspect the

neighbourhood and determine actions necessary to make the community safer. The program has two goals: the first is to reduce opportunities for crime, particularly assault in public places; the second is to reduce fear of crime through improved facilities and understanding of safety issues. Audits are undertaken by small community teams noting aspects of the environment which make people feel unsafe. The teams suggest strategies for improving safety. The emphasis is on identifying local needs rather than using a general policy. There are currently around 70 programs in place in Queensland (data provided by Safety Audit Unit).

Safety Audits have led to better lighting and public telephones being installed at many railway stations. Bus stops have been situated near other public transport or taxi ranks, because there are more likely to be other people in or near these locations. No evaluation of Safety Audits has as yet taken place. However, anecdotal evidence from the Neighbourhood Safety Audit Unit suggests that communities find them both efficient and effective in addressing their worries regarding public transport and street lighting.[3]

Other methods of changing the environment to reduce fear of crime in public places include modifying housing estates/housing design, regenerating buildings and recreation areas, and eliminating signs of neighbourhood deterioration such as graffiti. Public thoroughfares and streets that are clean and in good condition are likely to make residents feel safer because there are no visible signs of vandalism or other criminal activity. Careful planning of buildings and surrounding space can help ensure that people who are walking alone at night in the street will feel less afraid. By contrast, numerous corners or alleys may heighten levels of fear.

Targeting Specific Groups

Another strategy for reducing fear is to find out which people in a particular area feel most fearful and then focus on addressing their particular concerns. One example of this approach is the Home Secure program, which is a government funded scheme run jointly by the Department of Housing and the QPS. There are currently local Home Secure Projects in 32 Brisbane suburbs. Home Secure is aimed at those over sixty years of age and involves home visits by a police officer who gives advice on safety and crime prevention issues. The home visits are undertaken only at the request of homeowners. The major benefit of this program is that advice is tailored to individual needs and lifestyles.

The extent to which the program has been successful in reducing fear amongst the elderly has not yet been determined. Care needs to be taken by those who provide advice that they do not overstate crime rates and unnecessarily alarm home owners. Consideration should also be given to whether this program should be restricted to elderly people, given that their level of fear does not appear to be significantly higher than the rest of the population.

Educating the Public about Risks and Actual Crime Levels

As discussed above, many people acquire their knowledge about crime, particularly serious crime against the person, from media reports rather than from direct or indirect experience. It is therefore essential that accurate crime statistics and information about risks be provided to enable people to make sensible choices about crime prevention for themselves and their property. The police have a particularly important role to play in educating the public about crime risks through the media and via local community committees, Neighbourhood Watch and related community policing initiatives. People need to be encouraged to take sensible preventive measures but it is important that they not be alarmed unnecessarily. Community and police initiatives to reduce fear will not work if the media and other opinion leaders overstate people's personal risks and sensationalise crime.

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3   Twenty-seven per cent of respondents in the Mulgrave Community Safety Attitude Survey (1994) indicated they would feel safer in the community if there were changes in street lighting and transport in the local environment.

Conclusion

The key findings presented in this paper are:

- The great majority of Queenslanders report feeling 'very' or 'fairly' safe when alone at home at night. A substantially smaller number feel safe walking alone in the streets after dark.

- Most people see their own neighbourhoods as safer places than the wider community.

- People tend to significantly overstate the risk of being a victim of crime, particularly violent crime.

- Research from Toowoomba indicates that public anxiety about violent crime has increased in that city over the last year or so, even though the likelihood of being a victim of a crime against the person did not increase. This increase in fear levels may have been partly due to the emphasis placed on crime by the local media.

- Women are generally more fearful about crime than are men.

- Victims of domestic assault, most of whom are women, are more fearful than the rest of the community. Otherwise, recent victimisation does not appear to make people feel less safe in their homes or in their local neighbourhood.

- The elderly are not notably more fearful than the rest of the population and the actual risk of crime for elderly people is well below average.

- People who live in run-down areas, with vandalised buildings, graffiti on the walls, and so on, tend to experience higher levels of fear. Improving the environment in these areas is one way of reducing fear of crime.

- Careful planning and design of public spaces, for example, by improving lighting and lines of sight, can help to make people feel safer in such spaces.

- The media, political figures and other public commentators can have a significant impact on the level of public concern about, and fear of, crime. It is vitally important that accurate information about the extent and nature of crime is widely disseminated and that issues relating to crime are reported responsibly by the media.

- Well designed and targeted policing strategies can help reduce public anxiety about crime. However, it is unrealistic to expect the police, by themselves, to have a major impact on fear levels in the community. Local government, city planners and community and support groups also have important roles to play.

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