
FEAR OF CRIME IN THE ARMENIAN QUARTER OF JERUSALEM: PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL CORRELATES

by

Nadera Shalhoub Kevorkian
Hebrew University

Abstract: *This study investigates fear of crime among the elderly in terms of differences between those who live in an open versus a closed environment. The sample comprised entire Armenian population living within the confines of the old city of Jerusalem, Israel. Half of the population lived within the closed confines of the Armenian Monastery (closed environment), while the other half lived in the adjacent open Armenian quarter of the old city. Results showed that fear amongst the elderly is greater when they live within an open environment. Furthermore, it was shown that image of the environment is perceived to be more risky within the open area, and that the perception of crime level and victimization is higher amongst the elderly living in the open area.*

INTRODUCTION

In the last 20 years, criminologists, victimologists, gerontologists, and policymakers have begun to concentrate more on methods of reducing fear of crime among the elderly, especially those related to the physical and environmental characteristics of places. The rationale for such a focus lies in that experiencing, or fearing crime affects negatively the way and quality of life, and the mental health status of the elderly (Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Sundeen and Mathieu 1977, 1976; Yin 1985, 1982, 1980; Cook 1981, 1978). Existing research shows clearly the paradox between the prevalence of crime perpetrated against the elderly and their level of fear of crime: elderly people constitute the most fearful age group, although statistical evidence shows that the prevalence of victimization among the elderly is the lowest (Yin, 1980; Cook, 1981). It should be noted here that although many definitions of fear of crime exist, Skogan and Maxfield's

Address correspondence to: Nadera Kevorkian, Institute of Criminology, Faculty of Law, Hebrew University, Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem 91905 Israel.

(1981:24) definition of "psychological state provoked by an immense sense of personal risk" will be used in this study.

The high rate of crime, and the fear of it in specific living areas, have increased the interests of researchers in studying the relationship between the physical environment and the prevalence of crime in specific areas. Two main groups of scholars have studied this phenomenon. The first group (e.g., Lavrakas, 1982; Podolefsky and Dubow, 1981; Taylor and Shumaker, 1982), concentrated on the different methods of controlling community crime. According to this viewpoint, citizens in a specific community take leadership roles by providing information to the police in their neighborhood, watching their neighbors' and their own properties, and taking action to safeguard and protect people when needed. The second group attempted to analyze the phenomenon from a different perspective in order to gain greater insight into the physical, social and socioeconomic conditions that affect level of crime. The focus was to delineate the relevant characteristics that promote criminal behaviors, and then to search for the kind of intervention or changes (e.g., better street lightening, greater police presence, community participation in policing neighborhoods,) that could combat it. Jacobs (1961), a leading advocate of this approach was followed by Newman (1972) and his theory of "defensible space," which emphasized the importance of promoting a defensible environment capable of increasing the feeling of safety within the individual in his or her own neighborhood (Newman, 1972). This group claimed that future planning directed toward the development of strong territorial behavior would reduce the prevalence of crime and other antisocial behaviors.

Specific characteristics of the elderly related to the aging process (e.g., social, psychological, and health conditions; residence; economic situation strongly influence their subjective perception of safety and increase their fear of crime (see, for example, Baumer, 1979; Bishop and Klecka, 1978; Cook, 1978; Goldsmith and Tomas, 1974; Reinman, 1976; Jacox, 1979; Lebowitz, 1975; Lawton, 1981). Fear of crime among the elderly has been attributed to ecological factors (Sundeen, 1977), demographic factors (Gubrium, 1974), and economic factors (Yin, 1985). Furthermore, fear of crime among the elderly was also found to be related to "vulnerability factors" such as age (Yin, 1982, 1980; Braungart et al., 1980), gender (Riger, Gordon and Le Bailey, 1979) and health conditions (Braungart et al., 1980). Other researchers did not focus on vulnerability factors but on the lack of external and internal control, or what could be called the feeling of "mastering the environment" (Neugarten et al., 1964; Rotter, 1966). Lawton (1981) found that fear of crime appears stronger in the presence of external controls. Moreover, other researchers have claimed that "envi-

ronmental peril" factors affect fear of crime, i.e., the existence of environmental indicators that could affect people's perceptions of the existence of crime (see, for example, Braungart et al., 1980; Clemente and Kleinman, 1976, 1977; Garofalo and Laub, 1978; Garofalo, 1979; Lizotte and Bordna, 1980; Merry, 1981a; Skogan and Maxfield, 1981).

Another important component found to be strongly related to fear of crime is the existence of a social and community support system. It was found that the existence of such a support system decreases fear of crime (Gubrium, 1973; Yin, 1980; Sundeen and Mathieu, 1976). Perception of the environment was also found to influence fear of crime (Furstenberg, 1972; Jacox, 1979). Fear of crime was less prevalent within environments enjoying good rather than bad reputations (Merry, 1981a). Finally, past victimization was also found to influence fear of crime: those who were previous victims or have experienced vicarious victimization were the most fearful of crime (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981). This paper will attempt to focus on the physical and social correlates of fear of crime.

RESEARCH STUDY

The entire Armenian community in the old city of Jerusalem, Israel lives within the confines of the walls of the old city (approximately one sixth of the entire space). A substantial portion (nearly 50%) of the community, however, lives within the confines of the Armenian Convent (monastery walls). The entrance to this section of the community is controlled by two main gates protected by guards appointed by the Patriarch of the Armenian community. The community within the convent walls (closed environment area) is characterized by a constellation of houses built capriciously around a large courtyard. Although the houses are old, poorly ventilated and damp, their proximity allows the neighbors to be within shouting distance of one another. It should be noted that many of the homes have communal baths, a clear indication of their close proximity. The Armenian community living outside the monastery (open environment) is an open-access area frequented by tourists, shoppers and pedestrians. Although the homes in this section of the city are similar to each other (including those located within the monastery), their entrances are not guarded. Furthermore, access to the homes or their courtyards can be achieved through their adjacent and contiguous roofs. Hence, entrance to these homes is precluded only by the locks on their doors and the iron bars on their windows. The elderly Armenian population resides equally within both environments. Hence, this arrangement provides researchers with an optimal opportunity to examine the relationship between perceptions of fear of crime among the elderly and the physical

environment. Our main hypothesis is that when the elderly live in a close and protected physical environment: their feelings of fear will decrease; their evaluation of being at risk of or falling prey to crime will be reduced; their image of their milieu and territorial feelings will be positive; and their perception of being victimized (directly or indirectly) will decrease.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The sample used in this study was composed of the entire elderly (men = 65, women = 60) Armenian population (N=129) living in the old city of Jerusalem, indicated by the records of the Armenian Church in Jerusalem. Eighty two (63.3%) members of the population are women; while 47 (36.4%), men. Nearly one-half of the sample (47.3%) are married, the widowed and divorced constitute 38% and the remaining 1.7% are single. The elderly were divided into two groups: those living within the confines of the Armenian Convent, and those living within the Armenian Quarter of the old city but not within the confines of the convent. The first group will be referred to as those living in the closed area (N = 64), the latter group, as those living in the open area (N = 65).

Components of Fear

Four components relevant to the subjective feeling of fear of crime were studied:

1. *Physical Environment.* Two environments were compared. The first (Armenian Convent) is a closed area that has only one main entrance, and another small one. Both entrances are closed at night, and entry into the convent during the day is restricted to residents and guests who have permission. The second area, whose residents are almost entirely Armenian, is a section in the old city of Jerusalem that is open to all pedestrians.

2. *Territorial Feeling.* This refers to one's feeling of belonging to a given area (e.g., neighborhood) and the extent to which the area is felt to be protected from intruders. Territorial feeling was measured according to three main variables:

- A. The degree of involvement in the neighborhood network.
- B. The degree of social support available to the elderly from their neighbors.
- C. The degree of feeling secure within one's residence.

3. *Image of Milieu.* This refers to the elderly's image of his environment. The image was measured through the questions: "Do you consider the place you live in a protected area?"; "Do you think crime has increased in

your living area?"; and "How safe do you feel while walking alone in your neighborhood at night?"

4. *Direct and Vicarious Victimization.* Direct victimization relates to whether an elderly person has ever been the victim of a criminal act. Vicarious victimization, on the other hand, is defined as the perception of an elderly person that he or she will become a victim of a criminal act, or whether he or she feels that crime is increasing and fears it.

RESULTS

It is clear from our data that physical environment is related to fear of crime. High victimization level, negative territorial feeling, and negative image of milieu were closely correlated within the open physical environment. For example, 32.8% of those who live in the closed physical environment (Armenian Convent) stated that they do not fear crime, while all (100%) of those who live in the open environment (Armenian Quarter) stated that they fear crime (See Table 1).

Victimization

More than two-thirds of the elderly who live in the open environment were victims of crime, compared with less than 11% of those who live in the closed environment. Vicarious victimization (knowledge of others who were victims of crime, or the interviewee's assessment that he or she will become a victim of crime) also was found to be related to physical environment. Eighty-three percent of those who were found to be vicarious victims live in the open environment. Furthermore, 75 and 25% of the subjects living in the closed environment assessed their chances of falling prey to crime as low or moderate respectively. Nearly half (47.4 and 52.6%) of the subjects living in the open environment, on the other hand, assessed the risk of being victimized by crime as either high or moderate; none felt that the risk was low.

Image of Milieu

Nearly three-fourths (73.9%) of those who live in the open environment had a negative image of their milieu, compared with less than 5% of those living in the closed area (See Table 1). As mentioned previously, "image of milieu" is composed of two subvariables: prediction of the elderly about

Table 1: Summary of Percentages and Chi-Squares for Cross Tabulation Results Between Physical Environment and Fear of Crime-Related Variables

| Variable | Physical Environment | | X | d.f. | p | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|--------|------|-------|---|--------|
| | Open | Closed | | | | |
| Fear of Crime | Yes | 100 | 32.8 | 62.5 | 1 | 0.0001 |
| | No | 0.0 | 67.2 | | | |
| Image of Milieu | Neg | 100 | 11.0 | 105.3 | 3 | 0.0001 |
| | Pos | 0.0 | 89.0 | | | |
| Risk | High | 73.9 | 4.7 | 94.5 | 3 | 0.0001 |
| | Low | 26.1 | 95.3 | | | |
| Crime Increase | Yes | 87.7 | 0.0 | 122.5 | 3 | 0.0001 |
| | No | 12.3 | 100 | | | |
| Territorial Feeling | Neg | 29.2 | 1.5 | 22.7 | 2 | 0.0001 |
| | Mod | 44.6 | 21.2 | | | |
| | Pos | 26.2 | 76.3 | | | |
| Social Support | Yes | 63.0 | 98.0 | 23.6 | 1 | 0.0001 |
| | No | 37.0 | 2.0 | | | |
| Community Involvement | Yes | 31.0 | 69.0 | 22.1 | 1 | 0.0001 |
| | No | 74.0 | 25.9 | | | |
| Feeling Secure | Yes | 7.7 | 90.6 | 90.3 | 2 | 0.0001 |
| | No | 86.2 | 6.2 | | | |
| Victimization** | Yes | 63.1 | 10.9 | 35.4 | 1 | 0.0001 |
| | No | 36.9 | 89.1 | | | |

* Involvement in community activities

** Direct victims of criminal acts

the existing risk factors in their physical environment, and their estimation of the increase in crime rate in their environment.

The results on risk predictability shown in Table 1 reveal that 39.5% of those who fear crime believe that they will become crime victims, compared with only 3.2% who do not fear crime. An examination of group membership revealed that nearly three-fourths (73.9%) of those who live in the open environment (Armenian Quarter, but not Convent) felt that

they were at high risk of becoming victims of crime, compared with only 5% of those who live in the closed environment (Armenian Convent).

In assessing increases in crime, the study found that 87.7% of the elderly who live in the open area feel there has been a high increase in the crime rate, compared with no such claims made by those who live in the closed area. Approximately 12.3% of the interviewees living in the Armenian Quarter stated that there was a slight increase in crime, compared with 3.2% of those living in the convent ($X = 122.59$, $d.f. = 3$, $p = 0.0001$).

Further examination of image of milieu showed that those who live in the closed area have very positive perceptions of their milieu, while the opposite is true of those who live in the open area. In an attempt to determine the relationship between fear of crime and milieu image, the study revealed that all those who have either negative or very negative images of their milieu fear crime. In contrast, 76% of those who have positive images of their milieu do not fear crime.

Table 2: The Relationship Between Social Support and Fear

| Level of Fear | Presence of Social Support | | Total |
|---------------|----------------------------|-------------|--------|
| | Present | Not Present | |
| Fearful | 58.7% | 100.0% | 66.7% |
| Nonfearful | 41.3% | 0.0% | 33.3% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| N | 104 | 25 | 129 |

$X = 13.7$ ($d.f. = 1$), $p = 0.0002$

Territorial Feeling

Examination of the social support network of the elderly, as depicted in Table 2, revealed significant differences found between those who perceived themselves to have or not to have a social support network. For example, 58.7% of the interviewees who felt that they had a social support network did not fear crime, while 100% of those who did not feel that they had such a support system feared crime. It should be noted here that the social support network available to the target group of this study (elderly) is made up of other elderly citizens and a small number of young people

who live with their elderly parents. Furthermore, almost all (98%) the elderly living within the closed area stated that there exists a social support system that provides help and support to them in times of need, compared with nearly two thirds (63%) of those who live in the open area (see Table 3). In essence, the overwhelming majority (95%) of Armenians in Jerusalem who felt that they did not have a social support network lived within the open environment.

Table 3: Relationship Between Physical Environment and Social Support

| Level of Social Support | Physical Environment | | Total |
|-------------------------|----------------------|--------|-------|
| | Open | Closed | |
| Available | 98% | 63% | 80.6% |
| Unavailable | 2% | 37% | 19.4% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| N | 64 | 65 | 129 |

$\chi^2 = 23.594$ (d.f. = 1), $p = 0.000$

The results pertaining to the relationship between social support and victimization, as depicted in Table 1, show that 70% of those who were victims stated that they did not have social support, compared with 11.1% of those who were not victims. Upon examination of whether the elderly perceive their neighborhoods as secure, it was found that a close relationship exists between place of residence and the elderly's assessment of the degree of security and protection existing within their neighborhoods. The feeling of security, however, is contingent upon location: those elderly who live in the closed area stated that they feel safe only when they are in their own residences (i.e., convent). However, when they leave the convent, their feelings of safety and security are reduced. It should be mentioned that the elderly basically do not travel a lot. To what extent feelings of security among the study population is a function of this factor is not known, especially among those who live within the confines of the convent.

The findings regarding social activity revealed that 55% of the interviewees were socially active in community matters. This relatively high percentage may be partially due to the availability and proximity of clubs and churches within the Armenian community in Jerusalem, irrespective of whether it is within or outside the confines of the convent. The results show, however, that 85% of those who are not active socially were fearful

of crime, compared with 55% of those who were active ($p = < 0.001$). Furthermore, it was found that 69% of those who live in the closed area are active in community matters, compared to only 31% of those who live in the open area.

The relationship between territorial feeling and physical environment shows that 95% of those who have negative territorial feelings are residents of the open area, and 76.3% of those who have positive territorial feelings are from the closed area (see Table 1). When examining the relationship between territorial feeling and fear of crime, it is clear again that all of those who have negative territorial feelings fear crime. And when examining the relationship between territorial feeling and image of milieu, it appears that almost all of those who have negative territorial feelings are those who also have negative images of their milieu. Furthermore, 80% of those who had positive images were those who had positive territorial feelings.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between physical environment and fear of crime amongst the elderly population in the Armenian quarter of Jerusalem. A review of the literature showed that fear of crime is closely related to a disrupted sense of one's community (Garofalo and Laub, 1978; Kahana et al., 1977). The results from the present study seem to confirm this thesis.

When examining the literature, we discover that there are different ways of examining fear of crime. Some researchers focus on ecological factors (Sundeen, 1977), while others such as Gubrium (1974), tie them to demographical factors, and still others focus on economic variables (see, for example, Yin, 1985). Our starting point, as shown in the literature review, is that people are deeply affected by their social and physical environments. Therefore, study of the characteristics of the environment could help criminologists build more preventable and protected areas, and could indirectly but positively affect the well-being of all individuals.

The present case study, especially because of the unique characteristics of the population examined, contributes to our understanding of the importance of the environment. This is particularly true as it relates to a very problematic population, the elderly. The literature suggests that fear of crime among the elderly is higher than among the rest of the population, although the actual victimization of the elderly is lower according to the criminal statistics (see, for example, Yin, 1980; Skogan and Maxfield, 1981). Our main hypothesis was that when the elderly live in a close protected physical environment: their feelings of fear will decrease; their

evaluation of the existence of crime risk will be reduced; their image of milieu will be positive; their territorial feelings will be positive; and their victimization, whether direct or vicarious, will decrease.

The results borne out by this study have shown that the semi-formal social control system existing in the closed area appears to control crime and prevent its residents from being victimized. Almost 90% of the residents in the closed area did not become victims of crime, compared with more than two-thirds of those living within the open area. Moreover, the vicarious victimization of those who live under the informal social control system was very low compared to those living in the open uncontrolled and unprotected area.

One of the most striking findings was that environmental protection (from all the aspects mentioned in the study) directly affects fear of crime. This finding is congruent with Newman's (1972) theory of the importance of "defensible space." The existence of defensible space leads to positive territorial feeling. The results also were congruent with similar findings by Yin (1980) and by Gubrium (1973, 1974) about the importance of social support systems. The results clearly show that social and community activities and participation help in reducing fear of crime, findings that have been corroborated by Yin's (1983) and Merry's (1981b) studies.

This study has sought to provide insight into fear of crime among the elderly by drawing attention to the effects of people's image of their physical environment. It is only when trying to list the part of the components responsible for the subjective, and at times objective, feelings of insecurity that the extent of the interaction among physical, social, and personal characteristics become apparent. Neither direct social control systems nor a strict legal system is enough. It is clear that there are a host of factors that, when taken together, give rise to particular criminal opportunities and simultaneously function to suppress others.

In view of this, it appears naive to ask how violent crime can be reduced still further, and whether indirect ways of social control, as seen in this study, could contribute to crime prevention strategies. So far, much has been achieved in the Armenian quarter already through means that are only imperfectly understood. It is difficult to say "let us continue with this process, but make it work better than it has been working" when we still haven't little clear information about the underlying processes that make it work.

What has been shown is the importance of physical and social environments that increase the feeling of safety and security. Perhaps this study was not based on a representative sample, and its interpretation of crime control may be inappropriate for other societies. But its findings are clearly worthy of consideration. The closed physical environment depicted

in the Armenian Convent has created feelings of safety among its residents, which were translated into greater community participation (e.g., church attendance, membership in community clubs) and feelings of empowerment. The Armenian elderly living within the closed environment felt that they had a sense of mastery of their environment, whereas the elderly living within the open area felt less secure in their daily activities, especially their fear of being victimized.



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