

WOMEN AND THE 'FEAR OF CRIME'

Challenging the Accepted Stereotype

ELIZABETH GILCHRIST, JON BANNISTER, JASON DITTON and STEPHEN FARRALL*

Professional empirically generated survey data about the fear of crime persistently indicate relatively small but statistically significant differences between fear rates expressed by men and women. Such differences are contrasted with objective crime victimization risk ratios; regularly magnified by amateur surveys; and have been ossified as stereotypes by the media. Subsequently, all women are believed to be fearful of crime; and all men fearless. The research reported herein encountered, paradoxically, fearful men and fearless women. A dissection of their qualitatively garnered feelings indicates, in a very provisional way, the general conditions under which crime-related fears are reduced and enhanced.

Recent years have witnessed an increased interest in the fear of crime from both academics and policy makers. A plethora of studies, including several sweeps of the British and Scottish Crime Surveys, have concluded that such fear continues to impinge upon the well-being of a proportion of the population (see, *inter alia*, Hough and Mayhew 1983; Chambers and Tombs 1984; Hough and Mayhew 1985; Mayhew *et al.* 1989; Maxfield 1987; Skogan 1990; Payne 1992; Kinsey and Anderson 1992; Anderson and Leitch 1994; Hough 1995; Mirrlees-Black *et al.* 1996; Anderson and Leitch 1996).

It is commonplace to assert that fear of crime has become a major social and political problem, perhaps bigger than crime itself (Hale 1993: 1–2; Bennett 1990: 14–15; Warr 1985: 238). Some results are discovered with monotonous regularity: for example, when fear of crime rates are compared with officially recorded (or unofficially self-confessed) victimizations, it is frequently discovered that women, and especially elderly women, are more fearful of crime but have less chance of being victimized than young men; and that young men, who are most likely to be victimized, are not fearful of crime at all (see e.g. Hale 1993: 15).

The professionally surveyed empirical reality in fact indicates that fear is not particularly great, and that the gender difference is not that startling. The latest British Crime Survey indicates that the male:female rates for being 'very worried' about burglary and mugging are 18:26 per cent and 12:26 per cent respectively (Mirrlees-Black *et al.* 1996: 51). The latest Scottish Crime Survey suggests that the equivalent male:female rates for being 'very worried' about housebreaking and mugging are 16:24 per cent and 11:25 per cent respectively (Anderson and Leitch

* Respectively, School of Psychology, University of Birmingham; Department of Social Policy and Social Work, Glasgow University; Law Faculty, Sheffield University and Director of Scottish Centre for Criminology, Charing Cross Clinic, Glasgow; Probation Studies Unit, Centre for Criminological Research, University of Oxford.

¹ The research reported in this paper was supported by an ESRC grant (No. L210 25 2007) under the council's *Crime And Social Order* research programme. Versions of this paper were presented at the Faculty of Law, Sheffield University; and at the British Criminology Conference, Loughborough University, July 1995. We are grateful for all comments on both occasions, and for the careful and useful remarks made by three reviewers from this Journal. Communications to the third listed author.

1996: Appendix A4.3: 111). Yet, as the authors of the latest British Crime Survey report point out, 'a common media portrayal is of many people living as virtual "prisoners in their home" because of fear of street crime. Figures quoted are usually obtained from surveys with unrepresentative samples and rather loose questions' (Mittlees-Black *et al.* 1996: 55).

The resulting media privileging of gender as the primary social division (with age as the runner-up) may have begun empirical life as a relative frequency, but has now separated and become ossified as an absolute mediated stereotype. Currently, all women are reported to restrict their lives due to the perceived threat of criminal victimization, and they are portrayed as feeling unsafe walking in the street and even whilst at home. Yet, when they are mentioned at all, men are portrayed as less fearful and even offhand about the threat of criminal victimization.

This article tries to rescue women—and men—from the condescension of stereotypography, and by illustrating the very real presence of—contrarily—fearless women and fearful men, attempts to tease out the conditions under which some women avoid fear, and the conditions under which some men are enveloped by it. If, by so doing, we begin to understand why some women are *not* fearful, we might understand why some are; if we start to learn why some men *are* fearful, we might see more clearly why most men are not.

The Worried Woman

The major stereotypical emphasis is on fearful women, and many explanations for their presence have been advanced. It has been suggested that, for example, women have an 'irrational' response to an objectively lower crime threat, that women are more vulnerable to attack than men are, that women are less able to defend themselves and less able to cope with victimization (Riger *et al.* 1978: 277, 278, 282). Susan Smith has suggested that women's responsibility for and thus concern about their children fuels their fear of crime (Smith 1989: 62). Alternatively, it has been suggested that women have less control over their personal space and over public space than do men and so fear more (Brooks Gardner 1990: 315, 316, 324; Pain 1991: 423; Pain 1993: 62–6), that women do suffer more low level victimization (in the sense that they suffer routine sexual harassment) which would explain higher fear levels (Stanko 1990), that women fear sexual assault and rape which is not generally a threat for men (Riger *et al.* 1978: 278; Warr 1985: 248), and unusual and serious crimes, which are rare and which often involve female victims are over-reported and exaggerated in the media (Ditton and Duffy 1982; Winkel and Vrij 1990: 264).

Some have argued that women are socialized into fear of public space, a fear of strangers and a fear of men, and they are also socialized into a dependence on known men (brothers, fathers, partners) and also socialized into a position of responsibility for offences against them as a form of 'contributory negligence' (Burt and Estep 1981; Sacco 1990: 500–1). More recently Warr has suggested that females may report exaggerated fears of some offences such as burglary as they assume that this will be a precursor to more serious assaults, such as rape (Warr 1984).

Many of the early assertions regarding women's seemingly unjustifiably high fear of crime have been challenged by feminist and realist researchers. It has been suggested

that women are *not* hysterically overreacting to a 'non-existent' threat when they report high levels of fear of crime. Rather, they are responding *sensibly* to the reality of their everyday lives (Hale 1993: 15–17). Feminist writers have suggested that women routinely face the threat of physical and sexual violence, on the street, at work and at home (Junger 1987: 382; Stanko 1990: 176). It has been suggested that the majority of women suffer regular low level victimization from men, in the form of sexist and sexual comments, and innuendo and unnecessary minor physical violations, and that their high fear levels merely reflect this reality (Junger 1987: 360, 381). Others have suggested that the treatment of female victims of violence (which focuses blame on the *female* victim) and the advice given to women as to how to avoid victimization (which focuses prevention of victimization on women's behaviour and the manner in which women present themselves in public) reinforces the fear of attack (Stanko 1990: 179–82).

Whilst this body of work has developed a challenge to the assumed irrationality of the hysterically fearful female, it has not questioned the underlying stereotypes that women are fearful and men are not. An exception is the work of Newburn and Stanko who directly challenge this assumption of homogeneity within gender groups. They write that 'the realists continue to talk of men and women as if they (too) were largely homogenous categories . . . such assumptions about social cohesion are perhaps overly optimistic' (Newburn and Stanko 1994: 159), and later 'the underlying philosophy [of realist victimology] that "crime is a problem for the working-class, ethnic minorities, for all the most vulnerable members of capitalist societies"—is too simplistic to allow for a properly realistic understanding of the scope of victimization' (Young, quoted in Newburn and Stanko 1994: 159).

Newburn and Stanko further argue that 'little is known about men's experience of victimization' and state that 'in the study of the fear of crime, of which gender is the most significant feature, there is considerable discussion of the disparity between women's and men's reported levels of fear. In much of the literature it is seemingly quite unproblematically assumed that men are reticent to disclose vulnerability' (p. 160).

Conversely, they claim that 'a proportion of men are significantly affected by crime' and 'the effects of violent crime are severe for a high proportion of men as well as women', and King adds that there are 'striking similarities between the reactions of male victims and those reported for women who have been sexually assaulted' (King 1992: 10). Research carried out by Stanko and Hobdell, which used qualitative interviews to explore the relationship between victimization, masculinity and the process of coping with victimization, indicated that in their study of male victims of assault, many 'reported fear, phobias, disruption to sleep and social patterns, hypervigilance, aggressiveness, personality change and a considerably heightened sense of vulnerability'; reactions which share some features with the reactions of female victims (Stanko and Hobdell 1993).

Yet others suggest that while there are similarities in men's and women's reactions to certain crimes, this is not necessarily true of worry about crime and this is not constant across all types of offence. For example, Pain suggests that 'whereas men and women worry equally about property crime, women are far more worried than men about personal crime' (Pain 1993: 57; see also MORI 1994). Equally, it is beginning to become apparent that men are as fearful, if not slightly more so, of car crime than are women (Mirrlees-Black *et al.* 1996: 51).

We can no longer assume that men and women are different yet internally homogenous groups. As Stanko and Hobdell (1990) conclude: 'No longer is it appropriate to dismiss men as "naturally" reticent'. Similarly it is inappropriate to portray women as irrationally fearful.

Methods

The data come from 64 qualitative interviews with (equal numbers of) men and women in Glasgow. A description of the full methodology can be found in Farrall *et al.* (1997), and thus only a brief summary will be presented here.

Following a short (quantitative) interview with an initial sample of 168 individuals, used to place respondents into one of four categories (produced by two dimensions—fear and risk—described as high or low), 64 selected respondents (16 from each of the four fear/risk groups) were interviewed about their feelings about crime. The 64 were also drawn equally from the four different housing areas (inner city poor, inner city affluent, outlying affluent, and outlying poor) which had been the geographical sampling frame for the initial interviews.

This follow-up was used to explore the ways in which men and women talk about fear, and to elicit further detail about the offences they were asked about during the initial interview, about the area in which they lived, and about their worries or fears more generally.

Responses from the (stereo)typical groups (i.e., high fear women and low fear men) were compared to those given by members of the atypical groups (i.e. high fear men and low fear women). Initially, concentration was on attitudes to four offences: housebreaking, assault, vandalism and car crime. Overall similarities and differences between the gender groups were considered and all responses examined to see whether men talk about crime similarly to each other and differently from women, despite different (quantitatively reported) fear levels; and to see whether all women talk similarly about crime, again despite different fear levels. These concerns were schematically distilled into three questions: one, do men and women talk about fear of crime differently? Two, do men and women give the same weight to the (fear-inducing or fear-reducing) cues to which they refer? Three, is the difference based not on gender, but on fear level?

Results

Fearful men and women

It is immediately noticeable, first, that the fearful (of both genders) cite 'vicarious victimization' (i.e., indirect experience of victimization, from friends, neighbours or the media) as a source of fear, as in this high fear female discussing assault:

Ye see that much on the telly and ye read that much in the paper . . . this one getting mugged . . . and an old man, an old woman, on 80 years an' aw that, even old women at 80 getting raped! . . . yer reading it constantly noo, it's no' a case . . . yer reading it once in a while, yer reading it aw the time. Every time ye

lift a paper or pit on the telly, yer hearing something. That's aw . . . its just kept alive in the brain as far as I'm concerned. (female, 58, inner city poor)

The fearful spoke similarly of housebreaking: 'just there's a lot of break-ins round here', 'you just hear about people getting broken into all the time', and, [you] 'see so much on television' were commonly described media through which fear was delivered, as these female and male respondents illustrate:

You're sort of a bit nervous of answering the door, specially when you see so much and read so much in the papers. (female, 70s, inner city affluent)

Concerning housebreaking . . . when you hear other people, people you meet with friends whose houses have been broken into, that will bring it into your mind, you start thinking about how likely you would be to get broken into. (male, 32, inner city poor)

Secondly, and also distinguishing the fearful from the fearless was apprehension about 'perceptually contemporaneous offences' (Warr, 1984: 699): serious victimizations that might immediately follow minor ones. Direct fear of specific types of assault, for example, sexual assault, was not mentioned, although some did mention the fear of weapons being used in a possible assault as a reason for them to worry. For example, a high fear female said:

The only thing that frightens me . . . and I know I shouldn't say it . . . is someone carrying a blade. If a person's got a knife . . . to me, I think that really . . . that would put more heart-failure into me than anything. (female, 45, outlying poor)

For the fearful, perceptually contemporaneous offending occurring with a burglary was also a source of fear, and this was so more often for women than men:

It's the thought of them coming into your house while you're in the house worries me much more . . . I mean if they come into the house when I'm not in, that's just too bad nothing I can do about . . . I still can't do anything if they do come in . . . but it would worry me an awful lot. (female, 75, outlying affluent)

Yet fearful men did mention it:

I think the worst thing . . . is the mess that they do . . . but I think it's the disturbance and the feeling that you know your personal things have been interfered with, scrutinized. (male, 69, outlying affluent)

It seemed that men and women had different beliefs about offences which might co-occur: women being more likely to think that a more serious offence, like assault, would happen during a burglary; for men, it was just their routines (or the contents of their houses) that would be left in disarray.

Both men and women did mention the idea of vandalism co-occurring with burglary as a reason for their worry about vandalism, as this high fear female explained:

My home, don't let anybody destroy anything inside, but outside no . . . I'm worried about inside the house, uh-huh, inside the house yeah. Outside, no. (female, 20s, outlying poor)

Although this was mentioned more by women than men, when it was mentioned by men, it was tempered by the fact that this type of event was seen as very unusual and unlikely, and so not a cause for concern. Consider these two high fear males:

I don't know why they'd come up and vandalize it. I could see them coming up here taking something for a purpose, to sell on, but I don't see the point in coming up here to vandalize . . . I don't see them coming up here to vandalize. (male, 17, outlying affluent)

The worst thing . . . is the mess . . . the type of burglary where they just do sheer vandalism for the sake of doing it, leaving excrement about the place and that sort of thing . . . although I haven't heard many cases of that lately. (male, 69, outlying affluent)

There were two explanations mentioned only by high fear men. One was the inconvenience and financial loss which would result from vandalism, and which would not be covered by insurance, and the other was they would worry about vandalism if it were 'personal' or meaningful, and perhaps indicative of a threat of violence, as this high fear man illustrated:

The only time ye really worry about it is if ye come up yer hoose an' somebody's like scraped it intae yer door or painted it on yer door somethin' like that because then it's maybe somebody, it's maybe somethin' personal an' it's somebody else just comin' tae get back at you or whatever. (male, 17, inner city poor)

A third distinguishing feature of the talk of the fearful was a sense of constant awareness of risk. A number of both men and women mentioned that they were 'aware of', or 'concerned about', assault, rather than being fearful of it (although in the earlier quantitative interview, they had claimed to be 'highly' fearful of it, see Farrall *et al.*, 1997). The comments of one of the high fear males illustrate this point:

It's just the thought of it. I'm always conscious of space, as soon as people come very close to me . . . if someone comes up to me, in the street . . . and they ask for the time, I may go towards my watch, but I'll never look at the watch . . . I'll keep my eye on the person. (male, 64, outlying affluent)

Four, this tended to be intensified (particularly for the fear of assault) 'in particular places' (unfamiliar, dark, quiet) and/or 'at particular times. (after dark, at night even in summer). Both groups also mentioned fear of assault connected to 'specific types of people': strangers, and junkies, but women mentioned more types more often than men, and for them, the list also included: alcoholics, drug dealers, and groups of youths. Comments, firstly from a high fear male and then a high fear female illustrate this point:

I don't sit and worry about it, maybe if I'm walking oot the toon . . . an' that, sometimes ye dae get kind of worried that it's gonnie happen. (male, 17, inner city poor)

As I said, I don't go out late at night because it's more likely to happen then . . . I suppose 'cause there's gangs like . . . hang about the corners . . . I just don't trust anybody that I don't know their face, I just don't. There's too many junkies . . . drunks . . . goin' about that probably even know me could do the same thing 'cause they don't know what they're doing. (female, 20s, outlying poor)

Familiarity with an area was often the only thing that reduced fear, but this was more true for men than for women as these two quotes from high fear men show:

Naw [I wouldn't worry about assault] no' in [outlying poor area] . . . maybe I would some other area altogether, I might, you know, that I don't know. (male, 58, outlying poor)

[You don't worry about being robbed or assaulted] 'cause you know mostae the people that stay roon here anyway, so you don't really worry about it. Just unless it's other people comin in fae different areas, that's the only thing, but doon here I know most of the people. (male, 29, outlying poor)

Feeling personally vulnerable was used to explain worry about assault. More women than men felt this, a point illustrated by this high fear female:

I don't know how I would react, how well I would come off in a situation like that . . . see myself as the victim I suppose. I don't know why, it worries . . . as I say, it worries me more 'cause I don't have anybody protecting me or anything protecting me. (female, 30s, inner city affluent)

Lack of domestic rather than personal security also informed worry, and both fearful men and fearful women talked of worrying about burglary if they had to leave their house empty. Good security was a factor which reduced this worry, as was having good neighbours, or a dog. Not perceiving one's house as an attractive target also reduced fear. For one high fear male however, it was the low level of security in his flat which made him fearful:

I worry quite a bit . . . mostly because one thing . . . we're on the ground floor, secondly the window locks in this flat are very old . . . for example, our front windows here . . . are single glazed original sash windows which are easy to either break or cut out. (male, 26, inner city affluent)

It is these people—the fearful—who like comforting commercial security devices and good neighbours. One of the high fear females worried because she had to leave her flat empty, and because she thought housebreaking was common in her area, but was somewhat reassured by the security devices she had installed and because she perceived that her neighbours would have a deterrent effect on potential housebreakers:

I don't worry about it all the time . . . see, I've got the wee alarm and that on my door, but when I go out I've got to check everything about 20 times . . . I'm worried 'cause I know that in the surrounding area you hear that hooses have been broken intae . . . but, I mean, I have to go oot . . . but I mean I've got good neighbours, they're aw old people an' they hardly ever go oot an' they hear everything. (female, 25, outlying poor)

Another of the high fear females did not worry as much as she might have done as she did not believe her house would be a particularly attractive target, and because she had various security devices installed. She explained:

[My husband] spoke to one of his clients who'd been done for burglary, and basically the chap said that unless you know there's sort of good stuff in the house you know there's no point [in breaking in], 'specially if you've got a burglar alarm. (female, 30s, inner city, affluent)

A key element of this fourth feature that distinguishes the fearful from the fearless is the over-estimation of risk.

A fifth source of worry for the fearful might be termed 'altruistic' or 'referred' worry (i.e., worry for someone other than oneself). In terms of assault, fearful men worried for women, and fearful women worried for their children. These differences are clear in the following examples, the first is a high fear male and the second a high fear female:

Oh, yeah, I do worry about Jane going out, yeah . . . well because she is my wife basically . . . I mean there's probably just as little chance of her being attacked as me, but the very fact that she's my wife, you know, you do worry about it. (male, 26, inner city affluent)

I worry about the boys, maybe if they are going to a concert in town or something, you worry about them coming home, there's so much badness now. (female, 58, inner city poor)

Sixth was 'contagious' worry: a factor mentioned only by women and which referred to the effect of other people's worry on their own fear levels. This may be related to vicarious victimization, and lead, in turn, to more precautionary behaviour. A number of women claimed that their partner's worry had increased their worry for themselves. This high fear female illustrates this feeling:

My husband would rather that I drove round there . . . which is always like a minute [on foot] whereas I would rather walk and there are sort of shortcuts that go from [inner city affluent area] through the flats just down there, I've been kind of warned not to go. (female, 30s, inner city affluent)

Seven, matching their keenness on domestic security precautions, most of the fearful mentioned the various personal precautions that they took. Only men mentioned carrying some sort of weapon to protect themselves, but both men and women did talk about taking other precautions to avoid getting into a situation where they could be assaulted. For example:

I don't carry an alarm but I always have keys in my hand . . . and I always tend to . . . if there's sort of, like, alleys or dark sort of gateways . . . or whatever, I always tend to deliberately either walk on the outside of the pavement or obviously on the road. (female, 30s, inner city affluent)

That's why we always get a taxi know just right down to our house 'cause the hill that goes down to the bottom, straight down into [an outlying poor area]. (male, 17, outlying affluent)

Instead of walkin' through the park . . . it's dark an' you're risking your life, you would just take a taxi . . . whereas we're safer that way, we get the taxi to bring us back. (male, 30s, outlying poor)

These quotes, the first from a high fear female and the second two from high fear males highlight the similarities between the genders. It seemed that, while many of the factors referred to by fearful people are common to men and women, some are used more by men and others more by women. High fear men reported less vulnerability, were less affected by the media and worried altruistically (for women) more than did high fear women. High fear women worried for their children, reported more vulnerability, were more affected by the media, feared a wider group of strangers than did high fear men, and were affected by their partner's fears for them.

Fearless men and women

Fearless men and women also tended to worry about assault in specific places, but from a shorter list of specific groups of people (only strangers, 'junkies') and at fewer specific times (after dark only). These quotes from a low fear female and low fear male provide examples:

Aw, during the day's awright, I'm no' frightened during the day. Just when it's dark, ye know, I don't mind the summer nights, it's the dark nights yer frightened of . . . ye cannae go about worryin' aw the time. (female, 57, inner city poor)

I do still get a little nervous if I see more than two people walking towards me, if I don't like the look of them . . . usually its people that look as though they are drunk, or they're high on something . . . as they're capable of doing anything. (male, 20, outlying poor)

They were also less worried about the areas that they lived in (although often these were the same areas that the fearful worried about). Fearless men and women mentioned familiarity with their area as a factor reducing their worry about assault, as did use of precautions—points illustrated by these two low fear males:

I wouldn't have said I worried about it . . . I've really got to know most of the people around this area and I know them quite well. (male, 20, outlying poor)

As I say if you're wi' somebody an' ye know them, or ye know a coupla guys that drinks in it, ye'd be awright but a total stranger . . . 'Oh aye! Who's he?' . . . I never drink up here very often . . . I've been up here a few year by the way, I know a few people right enough, but I don't have any truck wi' fucking dealers or sniffers . . . I keep maself tae maself, don't bother wi' nobody, let them get on wi' their life an' I get on wi' mine. (male, 44, outlying poor)

A second distinguishing feature of the fearless (when compared with the fearful) was their relative under-estimation of risk. This seemed to reflect a failure to absorb personally the 'vicarious victimizations' that concerned the fearful. Two of the relatively fearless seemed almost dismissive of the prospect of assault, for example, even though the first had had personal experience of it:

Well I've not been jumped in the past five years or something, so I don't see why it should happen this year . . . I just feel fine about it, I feel safe, you know. (male, 21, inner city affluent)

I think . . . if you've experienced it before obviously you are going to be more aware of it, or the possibility of it happening, but I've never actually thought of someone assaulting me. (female, 40, outlying affluent)

Both fearless men and fearless women talked about not feeling vulnerable and claimed that this reduced their worry. However, for men this was not feeling personally vulnerable, whereas for women this tended to mean not feeling that they were vulnerable due to their lifestyle. This difference is obvious from the following quotes, the first from a low fear male and the second from a low fear female:

Well I think it's because I'm about 6 feet ye know I mean I'm . . . I can look after myself, so I don't feel worried. (male, 30, inner city poor)

I don't tend to go out much by myself so I'm always with other people . . . I think that significantly reduces the chance of being assaulted . . . I honestly don't think I worry at all to be honest, about being assaulted. (female, 16, outlying affluent)

Relative under-estimation of risk was consistently referred to by a number of fearless men. Assault, for example, was thought unlikely, as here:

[I don't worry] because I realize . . . they're isolated incidents . . . it's not very regular, it's not very common . . . I don't really think about it. (male, 29, inner city affluent)

The fact that housebreaking, too, was seen as unlikely (or the fact that it was only occasionally seen as likely) was something which the fearless referred to when explaining their low worry levels, as this low fear female explained:

I'd say I don't worry about things unless they happen . . . so I think crimes against the house or whatever, don't worry me . . . I don't tend to worry about things that never happen and I'm hoping won't happen. (female, 40, outlying affluent)

Lack of experience of victimization, whether direct or indirect, and positive feelings about the area in which they lived—whether or not they felt safe there, were also used to explain their lack of worry. However, lack of vicarious victimization, and the idea that housebreaking was rare, was used more often by men than by women. This low fear man drew a distinction between the overall rate of housebreaking and the rate of housebreaking in his area when explaining why he did not worry:

[You] just hardly ever hear of people's houses getting broken into. So I never worry about it. Maybe if I lived in some areas that are a bit less safe and all that . . . maybe if I heard about it a lot with people around me getting broken into then I'd worry about it. But I hear about it so rarely that it doesn't worry me. You might hear about it on TV but that's something else, that's no' really a direct experience of it. If my friends and all that were getting broken into, I'd probably worry about it, but that doesn't happen so it's not a problem. (male, 21, inner city affluent)

Similarly, both low fear men and low fear women referred to their lack of experience of vandalism, both personally, and in their area, to explain their lack of worry. Both also referred to the fact they thought they were unlikely to be a victim of vandalism. As these low fear women explained:

[I don't worry about vandalism] as I said because there's never anybody hanging about. I'd see the point like fae the last place I came fae, when I stayed before here, there was always gangs hanging about there and vandalizing the place, but up here it's quite quiet. (female, 24, outlying poor)

I don't really worry about that [vandalism] much at all, basically I've never seen it happen. We've had parties and such up here and up the stairs and we've never actually seen any damage to the close [common stairway in flatted tenement block] or outside. (female, 24, inner city affluent)

And this point is also illustrated by this low fear male:

No, I don't worry about that [vandalism] at all . . . I hardly ever hear of things like that happening, so even less reason to worry. (male, 21, inner city affluent)

The fearless did mention vandalism during housebreaking, however the men used this as a factor which reduced their worry as it was unlikely, and 'you do not hear of much happening', while the women suggested this could increase their worry as they would be upset at the destruction. These comments, firstly from one of the low fear males, then from one of the low fear females, illustrate this distinction:

I've no' seen much vandalism about here anyway . . . I wouldnae like anybody tae break in and wreck the hoose . . . as I say, I don't think anybody would break in anyway . . . but I don't worry about any, no I don't. (male, 52, outlying poor)

[I'm more worried about somebody vandalizing the house] it's just the damage that's done, and more unpleasant. I mean if they're going to come in, steal something that can be replaced and go out again . . . if it's a clean mess as such, the window being taken out that can be replaced as well . . . It's just the thought of someone coming in and damaging the house would upset me more . . . Just the unpleasantness of it. (female, 40, outlying affluent)

A third feeling mentioned by low fear men (but not by low fear women) was that they could handle a situation of, for example, threatened assault and so did not worry. Indeed, a couple of the men who had been assaulted were annoyed that they had not handled it better rather than fearful because of it, as this low fear male explained:

I don't worry about it . . . I used to do martial arts and that . . . I think I could defend myself . . . if somebody did attack me, I think I know how to handle myself. (male, 21, inner city affluent)

Men and women who reported low fear of assault talked similarly about it, only fearing specific people, places and times and reporting that they had low fear due to taking precautions or not feeling vulnerable. However, for women, this lack of vulnerability arose from their lifestyles (not being out alone in places seen as dangerous) and for men, this lack of vulnerability was derived from a perception that assault was unlikely coupled to the feeling that they could cope with any threatened assault that might occur.

Only one of the fearless woman specifically mentioned the threat of rape and did so by saying that it was at the back of her mind but she kept reminding herself to remain calm and confident believing that by acting in this way she would avoid any such experience, as she said:

I suppose if I was to worry about anything the most it would be something like rape, that would be the most awful thing that I could think of that could happen to me . . . if I'm out I try and relax as much as I can and believe that if I'm comfortable in myself that nothing will happen to me. (female, 29, inner city affluent)

Fourth, in terms of housebreaking, many low fear men and low fear women suggested that the precautions they had taken (and the security measures installed) reduced their worry about it, as in this case:

You minimize [the risks] there are two things that bother me, car and burglary. Now, I've taken steps in both instances to reduce that as much as I possibly can, that's the end of the story really, therefore it doesn't bother me. (male, 73, outlying affluent)

Access to social support whether formal or informal was used more by women than by men to explain lack of worry, although men did occasionally refer to it.

But then again, as I say, the neighbours are quite good, they always keep watch, if they hear anybody at the door they come out and check an' see what's going on . . . so I've not really been that worried. (female, 24, outlying poor)

This could also relate to low worry about vandalism—the good security they had and the lack of people hanging around, were both reasons for the fearless not to worry. This low fear female respondent suggested that good security helped:

No [I don't worry about vandalism] these controlled entrances, they're a great thing. If anybody wants in they've got to, they canna get in without buzzing . . . I've never had anything to give me alarm or worry, no quite content. (female, 57, inner city poor)

The low fear men and women also were conscious of car crime, but talked about it less than the high fear respondents. A number of the low fear men did refer to taking precautions to avoid car crime as a reason not to worry about it, and the fact that the

effects of car crime would only be a hassle or an irritation was referred to by a number of the men and by one woman who referred to car crime. As this female put it:

Break into my car? No, it's an irritation. No, I've had my window broken three times and it's an irritation because then I've got to go and get it fixed. (female, 30s, outlying affluent)

And the opinion of a number of the males is illustrated by this man, who commented:

I don't worry, I suppose you could, I don't worry about them, but I have taken precautions like put an alarm system into the house and what have you and my car is alarmed so although I don't worry about it, I'm conscious it could happen and I'm aware of it and I want to do something to prevent it, if possible, I'm not sitting anxious about it and thinking maybe somebody will do it ye know. (male, 49, inner city affluent)

The fifth explanation given to explain why they didn't worry about housebreaking, was the idea that their house was not a target. This explanation was used more by men than by women. The comments from this low fear male illustrate this point:

No [I don't worry about burglary] because for a start I've not really got much to steal . . . I'm known in the area . . . and they only target people that they don't know, an' that. (male, 22, inner city poor)

There were a number of explanations given by low fear men which were not used by women: not worrying as the person knew the offenders and he or his friends would retaliate; not worrying for self but worrying because of the effect it would have on one's family; and not worrying at the idea of encountering a burglar as the burglar would be more scared than the 'victim'. Seeing the offender as weak rather than strong was a persisting, and sixth theme, as these two low fear males explain;

They're basically cowards, these people that break into people's houses . . . they don't want comeback . . . if they break into somebody, say, like myself . . . I'm going to attack them . . . and they don't want that. (male, 22, inner city poor)

No, I don't think I would [be frightened of coming across someone in my house] I would think they would be more frightened of me because they know they are in a situation, they are in the wrong, so they will be wanting to get away from me rather than me trying to get away from them. (male, 50, outlying affluent)

Alternatively, thinking about vandals, if respondents believed that the perpetrators were either non-threatening locals or children, then any vandalism was seen as less threatening. Further, if vandalism was perceived as random and impersonal, then it was also seen as less worrying. As this low fear female said:

Don't bother about that [vandalism] either. I mean it's like kids roon here if they see the hooes empty they maybe smash the windies . . . but its just like the kids 15'n aw that now, they stay in this street, there's nothing for them tae dae. (female, 20s, outlying poor)

It was interesting that men suggested vandalism was so unlikely as to be nothing to worry about, while the women thought the impact of such a thing would be so bad as to make it something to worry about. The meaning of vandalism and who was doing it, was also important, but, overall, vandalism was not an offence which provoked much fear for these relatively fearless respondents.

Implications

It seems that men and women refer to similar factors when talking about worry and crime, but there are great differences between low fear and high fear men and great differences between high fear women and low fear women. There are perhaps more similarities than differences between both high fear men and high fear women, and between low fear men and low fear women.

The fearful appear to have gathered more knowledge of victimization (whether direct or indirect); they appear to think that they have a higher risk of being victimized and see themselves as more vulnerable than the fearless. The fearful seemed to think their security measures were poor and they appeared to link more minor offences with more serious ones and so worried about the minor offences. For example, the high fear men talked about worrying about vandalism if it were meaningful (i.e. if there was a threat of attack) and the high fear women talked about worrying about vandalism if it occurred during a housebreaking, and of worrying about housebreaking due to the possibility of encountering a housebreaker, and then because there would be a risk of attack.

Although women seem to talk similarly to men who have similar fear levels, they refer to a wider range of situations, people and factors which inform their fears, apart from talking about car crime, where the men are more expansive. Also, both groups of men appeared to refer to more factors which reduced their worry. For example, both groups of men referred to familiarity with their area as a factor which reduced their worry about assault, but only the low fear women talked about this feature.

In general, the explanations given for worry about crime followed an expected pattern. That is, people who report high worry explain this by referring to their experiences of victimization and to the fact that they consider victimization likely. However, some of the explanations are somewhat counter-intuitive. For example, some of those who reported low worry thought that it was highly likely that they would be victimized, but did not worry as there was no point in worrying about a fact of life—about something they could not avoid. Other explanations, such as vicarious victimization, either informed or reduced worry depending on how other factors were employed. For example, people who thought victimization was likely, who considered themselves vulnerable either through personal characteristics or membership of a vulnerable group, explained that media stories about victimization informed their worry.

However, people who thought victimization unlikely and considered themselves not to be at risk as they were neither an attractive target, nor a member of a vulnerable group, mentioned media stories, but did not refer to them as a factor which increased worry.

Conclusions

What does this mean in terms of the large body of research into and recent literature on fear of crime? This exploration of men and women talking about their feelings about crime provides support for Newburn and Stanko's (1994: 160) suggestion that although it has been assumed that men are reticent to disclose their fears about crime, this is not

the case and perhaps merely reflects the previous methodologies employed. Similarly, this paper supports and expands upon the work of King (1992: 10), and Stanko and Hobdell (1993), who reported striking similarities between men's and women's experiences of, and reactions to victimization. Our data suggest there are striking similarities between men and women's fears about crime; in the steps they take to avoid crime and in the overall impact of crime in their everyday lives.

This research also provides some support for Maxfield's (1987) suggestion that men's worries about crime are 'altruistic', but, in addition, our data suggest that some women's fears are also 'altruistic'. The difference between the genders seemed to arise from the focus of those worries. That is, men reported worrying about women and women reported worrying about children. The data also supported a hypothesis proposed by Warr (1985: 245–7) that there may be differences in offences which would be perceived as occurring contemporaneously, and this could explain otherwise inexplicable differences in fear levels.

It further appears that women and men report different beliefs about certain crimes. For example, some women thought they would be likely to encounter a burglar, and so face the threat of assault, during a burglary and so reported worrying about it. However, some men thought that certain acts of vandalism might be connected to a threat of assault, and so worried more.

In general, our data provide *prima facie* evidence that men and women cannot be treated as independent, homogenous groups. There appear to be as many variations within gender groups as similarities between them. Equally, there are as many similarities across gender groups as differences between them.

What does this mean for future research into fear of crime? One way ahead is to develop more sensitive and probing tools for measuring worries about crime so that we can be more alert to the ways in which people understand their own victimization, the factors which people use to explain their awareness of crime, and the cues to which people refer when estimating their risk of victimization and vulnerability to crime.

What is clear is that we can no longer ignore men's vulnerabilities, nor can we consider worry about crime as relating solely to women. It is an issue for a broad range of *people*, and needs, in the future, to be addressed from this perspective. But there is more to it even than this. The challenge is not to develop more precise quantitative instrumentation, but more sensitive qualitative understanding. We now know *that* some women are not fearful, and *that* some men are fearful: yet we are some way from knowing *why* this should be, and we are a long way from knowing whether or not fear (or, fearlessness) encompasses shared meanings.

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