

Define fear of crime and explain why women live in greater fear of crime than men

Structure

- Introduction
- Main body (theories, research and criticisms)
- Conclusion

Introduction

- Define fear of crime – Garofalo (1981) defines fear of crime as an emotional reaction resulting from a sense of danger and anxiety with respect to thoughts about crime.
- Fear of crime forces people to behave in different ways, such as changing their usual lifestyles and avoiding certain locations where the people presume that crime is likely to occur.
- While different factors contribute to fear of crime, the focus of this essay is ‘gender’, that is, why women live in greater fear of crime than men.
- This work will draw on the ‘fear of crime paradox’ to show that more women than men live in greater fear of crime.
- It will draw on relevant crime statistics to demonstrate that although women live in greater fear of crime, more men are victims of crime than women.
- However, exceptions will be noted, i.e., women are more victims to sexual offences, particularly sexual assault and rape.
- The major criticisms of the research on fear of crime will be discussed, including their implications.

Main body

The fear of crime paradox

- The ‘fear of crime gender paradox’ or ‘fear victimisation paradox’ – the perception of vulnerability to crime victimisation.
- Fear of crime has a ‘cognitive dimension’ that contrasts real experience, i.e., greater number of people may live in fear of crime even at a time when crime rate is lowest and vice versa.
- The British Crime Survey found that fear of crime increased up to 53 percent among the members of the public at a time when the Home Office found that crime rate had fallen dramatically.
- Box et al.’s (1988) work shows that women live in greater fear of crime than men.
- Lawton and Clark (2015) found that this issue is consistent, that is, different researchers have made similar finding that greater number of women live in fear of crime than men.
- While there are several factors contributing to fear of crime, gender is currently understood as the ‘greatest factor’ predicting fear of crime in the society.
- Research found that women are less likely to be victimised than men (Hale, 1996) yet the former lives in greater fear than the latter who face higher victimisation.
- Evidence from the American Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) shows that males suffer higher rates of crime victimisation for all types of violent crime except sexual assault and rape.
- Statistics by the BJS found that over 73 percent of suspects arrested in connection with violent crimes in the country were males.

Explaining the fear of crime paradox; three explanations by Lewyn (1993)

1. Likelihood of victimisation by strangers

- Women's consistent fear that strangers may attack them on the street makes them to live in fear of crime.
- This is regarded as false assumption because chances of stranger victimisation are low for women.
- Women are more victimised by known persons than strangers, particularly intimate partners.

2. Physical vulnerability

- Women's perception of themselves as possessing poor physical strength and difficulty defending themselves from criminals contribute to their fear of crime.
- While the perception of poor physical strength is factual, BJS statistics show that women have not become more vulnerable to violent crime than men.
- This suggests that women should not worry about physical strength in the first place because they hardly require it as they are less victimised.
- Nevertheless, the BJS statistics show an exception – women are more vulnerable to rape and physical assault.
- It can be argued that their vulnerability to these crimes are serious enough to evoke the fear of crime because the nature of these crimes means that they often come with serious psychological traumas, physical injuries and even death in extreme cases.

3. Greater appreciation for risk of victimisation

- Women have greater appreciation for risk of criminal victimisation, hence, take more precautionary measures to keep safe.

- However, this theory fails to consider that women often fail to take precautionary measures for crimes they are more vulnerable to, such as intimate partner violence.

Criticisms

Point one

- Noon (2016) found that gender fear paradox is not unique to crime, rather women live in greater fear of any stressful events that evoke emotions, including ‘fear of snakes’.
- Thus, it is possible that this emotional reaction might have been interpreted by researchers as greater fear when this might not necessarily be the case.
- Therefore, research is recommended to investigate the role of emotions in responses to questions on fear of crime.

Point two

- Another issue that is worth raising here is the fact the studies investigating fear of crime most often draw on self-report surveys as Noon (2016) has found.
- Thus, there could be a problem of ‘social desirability’ – the tendency of research respondents to respond to questions in ways they consider as more socially acceptable than factual (Lavrakas, 2008).
- The implications of this is that since men are often prouder of their physical strength and can boast about feeling strong or not living in fear of anything, they can easily claim to researchers that they do not live in fear of crime even in situations when they are enslaved by such fear.
- As a result, their answers to researchers’ questions may not be true of their real feelings about crime.

Conclusion

- Fear of crime gender paradox has been explored – shows that fear of crime is more connected to cognitive dimensions than real-life encounters.
- Three major explanations for the gender differences in fear of crime have been provided based on Lewyn's (1993) work.
- Criticisms of the research studies on gender differences in fear of crime have been discussed.
- Overall, women live in greater fear of crime than men across histories and also in different cultures.
- Women's greater fear of crime is in contrary to their actual victimisation – men experience more violent crimes than women.
- Nevertheless, women experience more sexual assault and rape than men, but they live in fear of many crimes of which they are hardly victimised.