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Reducing Fear of Crime for Sustaining Cities; A Case Study from Turkey

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Reducing Fear of Crime for Sustaining Cities; A Case Study from Turkey.

Abstract

In urban areas, fear of crime and feelings of insecurity constitutes as much a problem as crime itself. The fear of crime and feelings of insecurity keeps people off the public places where crime or anti-social behaviour are likely to occur and also limits people's behaviour to access to opportunities and facilities in their public environment. In other words, it creates a barrier to participation in the public life and thus reduces the liveability and sustainability of the city.

It is obvious that, level of the fear of crime is unequally distributed considering the varied user profiles and places of cities. This paper is aimed to analyse how fear of crime is influenced by a variety of factors including actual crime rate, physical and social characteristics of the environment etc. with a specific case study from Turkey, in order to create safer and liveable cities.

Keywords: Fear of Crime, Crime, Design, Cities, Sustainability.

1.INTRODUCTION

In urban environments people experience fear of crime in different and varied formats. The fear of crime and feelings of insecurity keeps people off the public places where crime or anti-social behaviour are likely to occur including, public transit areas, subways, bus stops, poorly-lit and managed areas, etc. In other words, it creates a barrier to participation in the public life and consequently it also reduces the liveability of the city. It is also believed that fear of crime can be reduced by a better design and maintenance of the built environment as well as public and personal safety tools.

It is obvious that, level of the fear of crime is unequally distributed considering the varied user profiles and places of cities. For instance; women and people with disabilities are more vulnerable to crime than the others. Therefore, they are more fearful in public spaces and they often limit their activities in order to protect themselves from any types of crime or fear of

crime. Additionally, fear of crime also limits people's behaviour to access to opportunities and facilities in their public environment. For instance; fewer people use streets; or city services may not be used by the people who really need them.

People, who live in cities, generally identify "highly-risky crime areas and dangerous places" as dark or deserted streets and public areas, parks, public transit areas, parking places, as well as places which allows some specific groups to live such as; homeless, drug additives, etc. Particularly women are very specific about the places that make them feel unsafe such as; poorly-lit areas and places that are isolated or deserted.

A variety of environmental and social features have been correlated with fear of crime. Characteristics that contribute to fear of crime do not always match those that contribute to crime. Areas that are feared are not always areas of high crime (Kirk 1988), and people often have an exaggerated perception of the level of crime in specific areas (Pyle 1980). In addition, individuals who are, because of their demographics, statistically less likely to be victimized often show the highest levels of fear of crime.

As mentioned, fear of crime is influenced by a variety of factors including the actual crime rate, the demographic and psychological profile of the individual, and the physical and social characteristics of the environment. Many studies suggest that fear of crime is not necessarily related to actual victimization, and crime affects more than its direct victims. Feelings of personal safety may be more closely correlated with individual demographics. For instance; some ethnic minorities or people with disability also experience higher levels of fear than the others. Studies also find that women and the elderly are more fearful (Riger and Gordon 1981, Nasar 1982 and Warr 1984). Perceptions of safety and vulnerability to crime differ significantly between men and women (Riger and Gordon 1981, Westover 1986, Kirk 1988, Loewen 1993).

On the other hand, lower-income groups tend to experience higher levels of fear than upper-income groups. While many members of these groups may actually experience higher levels of victimization because they either tend to live in higher crime areas or more often targeted by hate-crimes, some more fearful groups do not experience higher victimization rates. Studies also find that women and the elderly are more fearful (Riger and Gordon 1981, Nasar

1982, Warr 1984). Some statistics report that women have lower victimization rates for many types of crimes, yet women report a higher level of fear of crime.

Perceptions of safety differ significantly between men and women (Riger and Gordon 1981, Westover 1986, Kirk 1988, Loewen 1993). Considering women's reactions to crime Riger and Gordon (1981) have also explained that most female respondents felt themselves to be weaker than the average person of their gender. Women are more likely to use avoidance tactics such as restricting their night-time activities. In other words, women's greater fear limits their use and enjoyment of the public environment.

As a specific group, the elderly also have a greater fear of crime, although they have the lower rate of victimization. Similarly, fear of crime may be affected by many factors including changes brought about by experiences. Herzog and Smith (1988) have examined that characteristics of the built environment contribute to fear of crime in public areas and these features can be both physical and social. Physical features include maintenance, potential hiding places for potential offenders or criminals, poor lighting, isolation, vegetation, potential escape routes, etc. that have a great impact on increased fear of crime of potential users of the area.

2. PERCEIVING FEAR OF CRIME IN URBAN AREAS

Although the question -what is fear of crime- seems to have a simple answer, it does not have a clearly defined answer. People have differing views of what is considered as a criminal act and what is not. Unfortunately, crime and fear of crime are getting one of the most serious problems of cities and today there are increasing rates of street crimes and violence against persons. In other words, every person who lives in cities is potential victims for any crime incidents which increase feelings of insecurity.

Studies have shown that, crime and anti-social behaviour are more likely to occur if the design of built environment is unsuccessful. It is obvious that particular types of crime and fear of crime can be reduced by better design and maintenance of the built environment. In order to analyse this situation, the design features of the case area and whether it has any impacts on fear of crime and perceived safety or not have been considered in the light of the user questionnaire. In order to clarify the reasons of perceived safety, respondents have been

asked detailed questions about usage and design characteristics of the area. In addition to the recorded crimes, there are another types of crime or anti-social behaviour which are not recorded but existed in study area; such as physical or verbal harassment or vandalism have been considered according to the results of the questionnaire and interviews with police officers.



Figure.1. Güzelyalı Park

At that point, the safety questionnaire has consistently reported that there are specific differences between recorded incidents of crime and the fear of crime of the respondents. In other words, users of Güzelyalı Park perceive their risk to be significantly higher and therefore discourage people from using the area, particularly at night. Another crucial point is that users of the study area, particularly women, feel insecure and vulnerable to crime especially after dark and perceived fear of crime discourages them from using the area.

The respondents have been asked their professions in order to get a general idea about the users of study area. The answers are mostly; tradesman, official, housewife, student, doctor, financier, engineer, lawyer, shop assistant, street vender, etc. On the other hand, some of the respondents are retired and unemployed. Second of all, the questionnaire has been answered by design professionals such as; city planners, architects, landscape architects and industrial designers in order to see the effects of design on crime and fear of crime in different dimensions. By choosing respondents from different types of users, it has been aimed to reach

average responses and to find out how responses have changed considering the general users and professionals of design point of view.

The questionnaires are not only given to respondents but they are also answered face to face while they were in Güzelyalı Park and the respondents are asked not to write their names on the questionnaire to prevent respondents from any group effects or any other factors that may affect the answers. With a few exceptions, approximately all of the questions are answered by the respondents. This is why the analysis of the data reflects all of the pictures of respondents about asked questions. Safety Questionnaire has been responded by 150 users of Güzelyalı Park. In order to find out the different approaches from the design professionals and ordinary users point of view, the questionnaire has been asked both group of people.

Safety Questionnaire consists of five sections in order to obtain detailed data about the area and the users. First part of the questionnaire consists of general questions which aim to define the characteristics of users of the study area, such as; gender, age, education and professions. Considering the results, it is possible to have a general idea about the demographic characteristics of respondents. Although demographic characteristics of the respondents have not been considered as intermediary variables for the relationship between design and perceived safety, they are important to see which kinds of respondents answered our questions. As mentioned above; it has been tried to reach average users of the area to construct the sample of the study. Therefore, in this study, we have tried to reach the thoughts and observations of not only design professionals but also general users of the study area.

In the second part, respondents are asked to find out how they reach the area. The aims of these questions are to clarify the transportation habits of the respondents and their preferences about public transportation. Third part of the questionnaire includes specific questions which help us to learn about the usage characteristics of the study area, such as; the aim of respondents and general visit time, etc. In addition, respondents were asked if they usually come to the area alone or with somebody. This question is asked for two reasons; first of all, if the users of the area feel safe while they are alone or do they prefer visiting the area with someone. The second aim of this question is to find out whether the respondents are satisfied with the area and can they spend their spare time in there, or not. In the last part, respondents are asked whether they feel any fear of crime while they are using the study area. The last part of the questionnaire consists of several questions which were prepared in order to examine the

feelings and thoughts of respondents about design features and their feelings of security. At the beginning of the study, it has been suggested that besides many other factors (gender, age, etc.) there are close relationships between perceived safety and design features of the spatial built environment. In order to support this theory, the results of the questionnaire have been analyzed by using cross-correlation techniques.

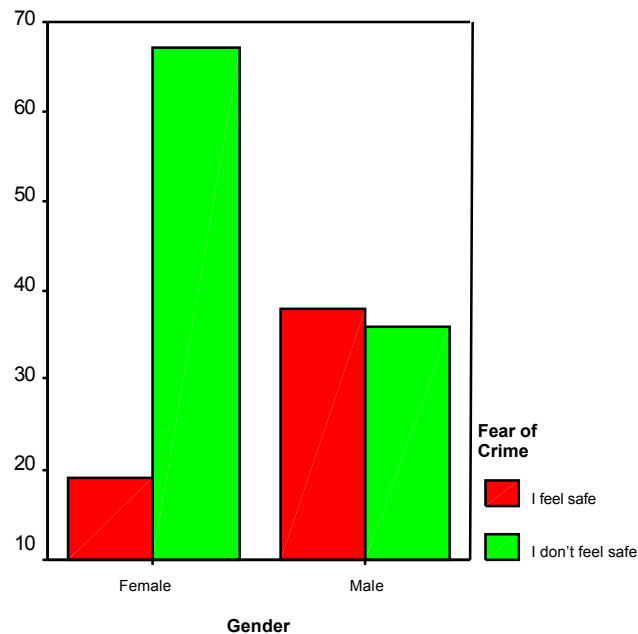


Figure.2. Fear of Crime by Gender

As a result, the questionnaire has shown that gender has significant effects on crime and fear of crime. Under the same circumstances, most of the women feel insecure in the area; however, almost half of the male users feel in danger. In other words, women are more vulnerable to crime and fear of crime than men do. No matter what their ages, women usually feel themselves insecure in cities, depending on bad circumstances such as; highly-risky crime areas and poorly-lit or designed public areas, etc.

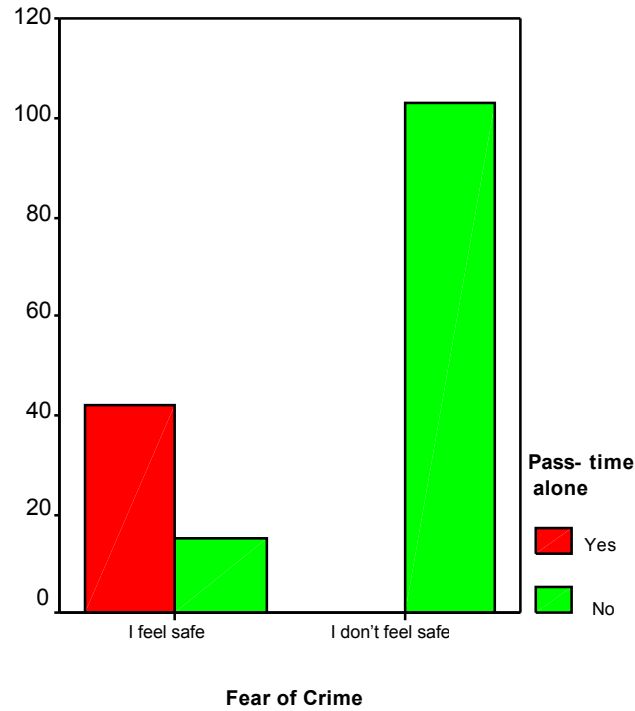


Figure.3. Fear of Crime by Pass-time Alone

The case of Güzelyalı Park has shown that people usually hesitate to use places where they feel insecure. They do not prefer being in these kinds of places if they do not have to. As a result, none of the users who do not feel safe in this area prefer spending time alone in the area. In addition, respondents explain that fear of crime is not the only reason for this result. They also add that, they do not prefer spending time in Güzelyalı Park, because of lack of activities and insufficient furnishing features of the area, such as; lack of shelters that protect people from the effects of weather, etc.

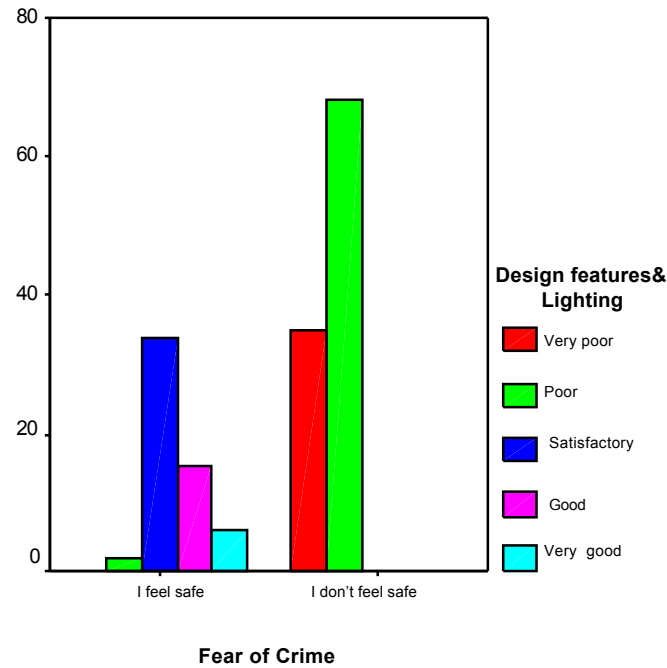


Figure.4. Fear of Crime by Design Features and Lighting

The results of the safety questionnaire have shown that there are close relationships between perceived safety and the design&lighting features of the area. Users who do not feel safe mostly explained that they avoid being in Güzelyalı Park after dark and empty hours of the area, because of poor design and lighting of the area. It is obvious that, better design and sufficient lighting makes public places safer, as well as attractive.

Results/Findings

Many crime-based researches suggest that fear of crime often affects people more than the actual risk to their safety. It is obvious that, perceptions of crime and safety influence how people choose to interact with spaces, places and other people. When people perceive that an environment is unsafe their behaviour is likely to modify in a way that reflects these perceptions. For instance, they might use the environment at specific times of the day/night, not using the environment at all. For some specific groups whose fear of crime is higher than others are more vulnerable to crime than others like women or elder people and this situation also reflects to their behaviours. Importantly, such modifications in behaviour occur even when perceived fears are not supported by actual crime statistics.

For crime to occur, certain conditions must be present including a target, a motive, and a potential offender. In this case, potential offenders take advantage of environments where the opportunity for crime to occur is present. These are environments where it is difficult to observe crime being committed, where an obvious target is present and where there are potential escape routes for offenders.

The links between design and safety from crime in urban areas have been recognised for many years. Crime Prevention through Environmental Design seeks to reduce the opportunity for crime to occur through the effective planning, design and place management of both the built and landscaped environment. In order to find out the general usage characteristics of the area and to analyse how users behave in this area, Güzelyalı Park has been observed through the study. During this process, the observation has been realized considering design features and land use, activity generators and also sense of ownership in the area have been considered, as well.

In this case, it has been paid careful attention to observe the whole area through different hours of the day. The observations have shown that characteristics and intensity of the users vary through the weekdays and weekend, as well as different hours of the day. On the other hand, they do not prefer spending their time in there because of lack of activities that keep people in the area and make it lively. At the same time, it is obvious that, most of the users of Güzelyalı Park are not satisfied with the design characteristics of the area. Because Güzelyalı Park is a wide open space, users usually complain about lack of sheltered areas that protect themselves from the weather conditions. In addition, being a poorly designed and poorly-lit area also has an effect on the useless of this specified area.

Users of Güzelyalı Park also think that the security precautions are not enough to make the area safe. Importantly, they usually hesitate to use particular parts of the area where their feelings of insecurity are high. In addition, there are some concealment and entrapment points which come out from the design characteristics of the area and increase people's fear of crime. In addition, the observations have proved that people do not prefer using the area, particularly after dark, because of insufficient lighting features. Through the observation process, the area is analyzed by considering these features as well as their design characteristics.

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