

Full Length Research Paper

Influence of traumatic event(s) and location of residence on fear of crime: A case study of undergraduate students in Nigeria

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This study investigated the influence of experienced traumatic event(s) (High/Low) and place of residence (on campus/off campus) on level of fear of crime among university students. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design and gathered data from a randomly selected 281 University students. The sample comprises 184 (65.5%) males and 97 (34.5%) females. Hypotheses generated were tested using inferential statistics. The results showed that traumatic event(s) had significant relationship with fear of crime at ($r = .394; <.01$); however, further correlation coefficient reveals that traumatic event(s) accounted for about 39% variance in fear of crime. Results from this study revealed that students who reside off campus reported higher fear of crime than those who reside on campus [$F(1, 277) = 202.06; <.05$]; while also students with higher experienced traumatic event(s) reported higher fear of crime than those with low experienced traumatic event(s) [$F(1, 277) = 40.16; <.05$]. However, place of residence and traumatic event(s) were reported to have no interactive effect on fear of crime [$F(1, 277) = 3.25; P >.05$]. Therefore, it was concluded in this study that traumatic event(s) and place of residence are significant independent determinants of fear of crime among university students. School management should hence design strategies which will help in containing crime incidence in university setting, and also try to build more residential male and female hostels on university campus.

Key words: Fear of crime, traumatic experience and place of residence.

INTRODUCTION

Fear of crime, which can be referred to as the emotional frightened state of being a crime victim, has been one of

the prime concerns of people in Nigeria, especially, university students. This is because crime has become

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an increasingly common occurrence in the Nigeria social environment. Fear of crime can further be viewed as an emotional reaction of anxiety for one's own safety. Fear of crime has been associated with people's perceptions of local problems, derived mainly from a high incidence of physical and social incivility.

This is not just a reaction to a concrete danger, but also to a potential one. There is a general consensus in the literature that the most significant effect of fear of crime is the reduced quality of life it imposes on those affected by it (Warr, 1990). The impact of fear of crime ranges from detrimental physiological changes to psychological reactions and behavioural adaptations (Hale 1996); however, such consequences could have negative impact on students' learning. In addition, more recently, there has been an emphasis on the multidimensional nature of fear of crime. Fear of crime has been discovered to affect certain areas of individual lives such as behaviour, politics, economy, and social life. In addition to the effect on individuals, communities can also be affected where fear of crime is high. In a way, residents in the community would prefer to engage in social withdrawal to be a victim of an unforeseen crime incidence.

Fear of crime is a widely recognized criminological phenomenon. As Warr (2000) explains, 'criminal events, at their most elemental level, are frightening'. While this is almost undeniable, would it be possible to suggest that this may be positive, rather than simply detrimental to public safety? Jackson and Gray (2010) explain that 'previous research on the fear of crime has focused almost exclusively on the negative, on the damaging face of public anxieties, on the corrosive impact of public perceptions of risk on health and well-being'. While psychological studies have speculated upon and researched possibly positive effects of fear (Gladstone and Parker, 2003; Holoway et al., 2006), only recently has criminological research begun to explore fear potential benefits (Warr, 2000; Jackson and Gray, 2010; Gray et al., 2011). Recent studies suggest that behavioural reactions may be useful in promoting 'functional fear', which 'encourages vigilance and stimulates precautionary activity' (Jackson and Gray, 2010). As stated by Skogan (1987), 'in other contexts, the ability to change to alter one's behaviour in light of experience is called "learning"'. While recent research observes the possibility of functional fear, a failing thus far is that none appear to study the possible role of traumatic experience and location in maintaining a functional amount of fear.

Traumatic experience occurs when individuals are exposed to traumatic events or situations, and this exposure overwhelms their ability to cope with what they have experienced. Traumatic events can include physical

abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence, community violence, crime incidence, or disasters. Youths exposed to traumatic events exhibit a wide range of symptoms, presenting with not just internalizing problems, such as depression or anxiety, but also externalizing problems like aggression, conduct problems, and oppositional or defiant behaviour. Although trauma does not necessarily cause these problems, traumatic stress can interfere with an individual's ability to think, display some normal certain behaviours, and can disrupt the course of healthy physical, emotional, and intellectual development. Traumatic event(s) in this study refers to prior direct or indirect experience (victim) of crime incidents such as burglary crime, sexual assault, robbery, threat at gunpoint, etc. Victims of crime may perceive crime differently from non-victims, which may affect their fear of crime. Research indicates that previous victimization can be a key predictor of fear of crime (Eschholz et al., 2003). Though there have been some measures to reduce the number of crime in the University settings, it is a point to note that reduced crime does not necessarily mean absence of fear of crime; hence, there is still need to further guarantee the safety of residents inside and outside the university community. Fear of crime is a social and political fact with concrete consequences for big-city life such as university settings. The costs of fear are both individual and collective. Fear can confine people to their homes; it undermines their trust in their neighbours, and, especially, in their neighbours children. Research also indicates that concern about crime has bad consequences for the neighbourhoods in which we live. It is difficult to organize activities in neighbourhoods where people fear their own neighbours. Fear of crime, hence, is a social problem as it may lead to decreased social integration, restriction of activities, increased security costs, and avoidance behaviours (Wyant, 2008). Some even suggest that fear of crime may help to increase crime by reducing informal social control as non-deviant individuals may be afraid to intervene in threatening situations for fear of being injured (Warner, 2007).

There have been past studies that have considered the influence that certain demographic variables have on fear of crime of individuals. Demographic variables such as; sex, location, etc. has been correlated with fear of crime of people, hence, this present study is set out to also add to the body of knowledge by also considering the influence which place of residence has on fear of crime of people. Place of residence in these study chooses to consider two (2) different settings; on campus and off campus.

The study therefore has set out to investigate whether there will be a significant difference between those

students who stay off campus and those who stay on campus considering their fear of crime and whether those who have experienced crime incidence before, either directly or indirectly will show a significant difference in their fear of crime.

According to Pain (2000), fear of crime is not an inherent characteristic of individuals, but rather something that may come and go, dependent on and influenced by one's experiences, especially as they relate to one's position in society. The feeling of fear of crime differs and depends on the situation in which one feels fear of crime (Schneider and Kitchen, 2007), design and the environment (Spinks, 2001), as well as their psychological and social life factors (Minnery and Lim, 2005). Fear of crime influenced by five factors, which are the physical environment (Harang, 2003; Nasar and Fisher, 1993), social environment (Ross and Jang, 2000), victimization (Banks, 2005), crime-specific (British Crime Survey, 2008), and crime problems in the neighbourhood (Gibson et al., 2002). The physical environment is the utilization of fixed elements caused by physical planning and design (Nasar and Fisher, 1993) and believed to give a significant effect on fear of crime (Harang, 2003). Meanwhile, the social environment factors involve subjective matters such as social problems and familial economic systems involving human relationships (Ross and Jang, 2000). As reported by O'Shea (2006), concerns on the social environment caused by the individual's unacceptable behaviour are public drunkenness, drug addiction, prostitution, juvenile loitering, delinquent behaviour and homelessness (Renauer, 2007; Welsh and Hoshi, 2002). The third factor is victimization. There have two types of victimization, namely direct and indirect victimization. Direct victimization refers to someone who has been a real victim of crime (Nasar and Fisher, 1993) whilst indirect victimization is when there is a fear of crime upon hearing the news of crime either from experiences of being a crime victim among relatives, friends, neighbours or from the media (Banks, 2005) which caused a traumatic feeling and fear on personal safety should become a victim of crime (Reid, 2000).

Crime problems in neighbourhoods and crime-specific are the other factors that frequently affect the feeling of fear of crime. According to Gibson et al. (2002), crime problems in neighbourhoods are often measured by asking respondents to rate how high the crime problem is in their neighbourhoods within a period of 12 months. Meanwhile, crime-specific measures a respondent's general sense of safety (Forest et al., 2000). The measure taps emotional fear by asking respondents how often they worry about specific types of crime. A study showed that past experience of traumatic event resulted in higher levels of fear of crime for burglary, sexual

assault, and robbery (Reid and Konrad, 2004). One study found that direct experience of crime leads to greater severity of threat of crime (Cates et al., 2003). Overall, it has been shown that as the degree of crime experience increases, so does the level of fear of crime (Smith and Hill, 1991).

Therefore, the study sets out to investigate the joint and independent effects of experienced traumatic events and place of residence on the level of fear of crime of undergraduates in Nigeria University.

Hypothesis

Traumatic event(s) will have significant and positive relationship with fear of crime.

Students who reside off campus and with high level of experienced traumatic event(s) will report significantly higher fear of crime than other dyads.

Experienced traumatic event(s), sex and place of residence will jointly and independently predict fear of crime among University of Ibadan undergraduate students. This was tested using multiple regression analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design. The study aims at investigating the influence of Experienced Traumatic event(s) and Place of Residence on level of fear of crime in some selected Nigerian Universities. The dependent variable was Fear of Crime and the independent variables were Experienced Traumatic Events and Place of residence.

Research setting

The researcher conducted the study in university environments in Nigeria. Respondents who reside on university campus and those who live outside the university campus were approached for the administration of the questionnaire.

Study participants

The participants for this study were undergraduates of a selected university. Three hundred (300) respondents were selected using accidental sampling technique across four different geographical locations within and outside university setting. Although, 300 instruments were distributed for the purpose of gathering data, however, 281 were retrieved at the end of the field work. It was revealed that a larger percentage of the respondents 184 (65.5%) were male participants, while the remaining 97 (34.5%) were female participants. Age distribution shows that 128 (45.6%) of the respondents were between the age range of 16- 20 years old, 126 (44.8%) were between the age range of 21- 25 years old, 18 (6.4%)

of the respondents were between the age range of 26- 30 years old, while the remaining 9 (3.2%) were 30 years old and above.

Research Instruments

A structured questionnaire was used as a tool for collection of information from the study participants. The instrument was designed to collect information on demographic features of the respondents, including certain psychological variables (include traumatic event(s) and fear of crime). The questionnaire comprises three sections; Sections A, B & C.

SECTION A: this section consists of socio-demographic items which require the participants to respond to. Socio-demographic variables are age, gender, place of residence, religion, faculty, ethnic background etc.

SECTION B: Fear of crime scale

This section comprises a 10-item fear of crime scale developed by Ferraro (1995). Respondents were required to say on the scale of 1-10, with 1 being 'not at all fearful' and 10 being 'very fearful', how much they would fear in each of the items. Individual responses were summed to a 100-point scale. An example of an item in fear of crime scale ("How much do you fear being cheated, conned, or swindled out of your money?"). The scale developer reported a cronbach alpha of .92. However, this study reported a cronbach alpha .76 as the local reliability of the scale.

SECTION C: Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument (MAYSI)

This is a 5- item sub-scale, developed by Grisso and Barnum (2000), to measure Prior experience of trauma. It has a dichotomized YES/NO response format. This scale was also adopted by Vaughan et al. (2010), and they reported a reliability coefficient alpha of .77 for males and .68 for females. An example is a MAYSI item ("Ever in your whole life had something very bad or terrifying happen to you before?"). However, local reliability of the scale in this study was reported as $\alpha = .89$.

Procedure

Purposive and accidental sampling techniques were adopted for the purpose of this research. Purposive sampling technique was used in choosing the geographical locations; while accidental sampling technique was used in the distribution of the research instruments; this is because all undergraduates in the selected university were given equal right to take part in the study in as much as he or she is still a bona-fide student of the university.

The researcher introduced himself to the potential participants and explained the purpose of the data collection using the questionnaire method. The issue of informed consent was clearly observed by collecting data from those potential participants who willingly indicate interest to participate in the study. However, in the process of briefing the participants, there was assurance that every bit of information supplied by the respondents will only be used for the research purpose and no personal identification such as name or other particulars would be required to participate in the study in

order to ensure confidentiality. The instruction on how the respondents should respond to each of the items was clearly stated on the questionnaire. The completely filled and retrieved questionnaires were therefore coded for data analysis.

RESULTS

Pearson Product Correlation was used in testing the relationship between traumatic event(s) and Fear of Crime. As presented on Table 1 (see appendix), it is revealed that traumatic event(s) had significant positive relationship with fear of crime at ($r = .394$; $P < .01$) and the strength of the relationship is a weak one. This entails that increase in level of traumatic event(s) will significantly lead to increase in the fear of crime among university students. Therefore, the results confirmed the stated hypothesis.

A 2x2 ANOVA was used in testing the main and interactive effects of traumatic event(s) and place of residence on fear of crime among undergraduates in Nigeria university. Results on Table 2 (See appendix) in place of residence was found to have significant main influence on fear of crime [$F(1, 277) = 202.06$; $P < .05$]; however, students who reside off campus were found to report higher fear of crime. Also, traumatic event was also found to have significant effect on fear of crime [$F(1, 277) = 40.16$; $P < .05$]; however, those with higher experience of traumatic event(s) report significantly higher fear of crime. Place of residence and traumatic event(s) were found to have no significant interactive effect on fear of crime [$F(1, 273) = 3.25$; $P > .05$].

Furthermore, Table 3 (see appendix) presents that participants who reside off campus and higher experienced traumatic event(s) were found to exhibit increased fear of crime with the highest mean score ($X = 75.73$; $SD = 6.79$) than other combinations; while students who reside on campus with low experience of traumatic event(s) reported lower fear of crime ($X = 52.26$; $SD = 9.75$). This confirms the stated hypothesis, hence, was retained in this study.

Multiple regression analysis was adopted for testing the joint and independent predictors of fear of crime, putting into consideration place of location, sex and traumatic experience. Results on Table 4 (see appendix) shows that traumatic experience, sex and place of location collectively accounted for about 52% variance in fear of crime among University of Ibadan undergraduate students [$R = .724$; $R^2 = .524$; $F(3, 277) = 101.77$; $P < .01$], while the remaining 48% could be assigned to other estranged variables not considered in this study. continuous analysis showed that place of residence and experienced traumatic event(s) independently predicted

62% and 24 variance in fear of crime respectively; place of residence = $\{\beta = .624; t=14.526; P<.01\}$ and experienced traumatic event(s)= $\{\beta = .248; t=5.815; P<.01\}$.

DISCUSSION

Previous studies have opined that direct experience of crime lead to greater severity of threat of crime (Cates et al., 2003). Moreover, Warr and Stafford (1983) point out in their article, they analyzed the degree of fear that is brought about by several offenses, as well as develop a model of the proximate causes of the fear of crime. The researchers contend that fear is high if subjects have once been victim of crime before, either directly or indirectly, but it is low if participants have never experienced crime before either directly or indirectly. The study's findings support this contention, with, for example, experience of murder crime ranking high on past experience of crime.

Furthermore, Covello et al. (2000) discovered that there was no significant difference between urban settlers and rural settlers in level of fear of crime in Netherlands. Sloan et al. (2000), who carried out a research on influence of location on fear of crime, dichotomized location into off campus and on campus. Using the t-test for independent sample among 732 students in some selected universities in US, the findings indicated significant influence of student's location on fear of crime. Students who stay on campus indicated to have high level of fear of crime, compared to those who stay on campus. However, there were other researchers that managed to come up with no relationship between the above subjects. For instance, Stiles et al. (2003) found no influence of past crime experience on fear of crime. These findings were affirmed by and Moore and Shepherd (2007).

Based on the findings from this study, it is recommended that security arm and other agencies in Nigerian universities concerned with maintaining security, identify certain areas in the university pose threat of crime attack to students at both night and days, and also draw up plans which will help in containing the Malady in the University.

Also, this study recommends that university authorities come up with ideas which will help in accommodating large proportion of bona-fide students of the university in hostels on university campus, which will directly and indirectly discourage renting of bed space outside the campus. However, this could be achieved by adding to the available male and female halls of residence in the university settings.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the present study has made important contributions to the body of knowledge on predictors of fear of crime, certain limitations of the study need to be considered. Firstly, the study considered one section of the population study: undergraduate students, leaving out of the study post-graduate students, Distance learning students (DLC), staff settlers in the university, and also diploma students, among others. Therefore, the generalizability to other population could not be guaranteed. Hence, future research on fear of crime in university setting should put into consideration all parties in the society under consideration.

Another limitation of this study is that students may not be willing to respond to the questionnaires honestly as they might think that they will not benefit from responding perhaps even be penalized for giving their real opinion. Future studies should adopt an online method which will go a long way in ensuring anonymity of the study participants.

Conflict of Interests

The author(s) have not declared any conflict of interests.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Summary of Pearson r correlation showing the relationship among experienced traumatic event(s) and fear of crime.

Variables	1	2	Mean	SD
Experienced traumatic event(s)	-	.394**	6.58	1.9
Fear of crime		-	63.04	12.8

** . Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 2. Summary of 2X2 ANOVA showing the influence of place of residence and experienced traumatic event(s) on fear of crime.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	25452.526 ^a	3	8484.175	113.346	.000
Intercept	910183.978	1	910183.978	12159.758	.000
trauma	3006.181	1	3006.181	40.162	.000
reside	15124.347	1	15124.347	202.056	.000
Trauma * Reside	243.228	1	243.228	3.249	.073
Error	20734.044	277	74.852		
Total	1162862.000	281			
Corrected Total	46186.569	280			

Test of between-subjects effects; Dependent variable: Fear of crime

Table 3. Descriptive statistics showing differences between sex, place of residence and traumatic event(s).

Trauma	Where do you reside?	Mean	Std. Deviation
Low	On campus	52.2551	9.74554
	Off campus	66.4286	8.96987
	Total	58.4914	11.74189
High	On campus	57.4333	8.20296
	Off campus	75.7237	6.78744
	Total	70.5472	10.95544
Total	On campus	53.4688	9.63094
	Off campus	71.0458	9.20336
	Total	63.0391	12.84337

Descriptive statistics; Dependent variable: Fear of crime.

Table 4. Summary of Multiple Regression Showing experienced traumatic event(s), sex and place of residence as predictors of fear of crime.

Variables	Beta	t-value	P	R	R²	F	Sig
Place of residence	.624	14.526					<.01
Sex	.007	.161	<.01	.724	.524	101.77	>.05.
Experienced traumatic event(s)	.248	5.815					<.01