



"A Passion for Excellence"

Fear of Crime

Fear of crime is a matter of concern to the general public, and to the Commonwealth government, for a number of reasons:

- it detracts from a person's health and well-being
- it may contribute to social isolation, depriving a person of full enjoyment of life, and
- it can have a negative effect on commerce.

Statements about fear of crime often fail to distinguish between perceptions of general risk, fear of personal victimisation, concern about crime as a public policy issue, and anxiety about life in general. Fear of crime is complex, in that some people may be afraid of particular types of crime but not of others. Moreover, some individuals may be fearful of crime in the home, but not in public places.

A number of factors have been associated with fear of crime in Australia and elsewhere. The factor most consistently and strongly associated with fear of crime is gender. Almost everywhere, women in general tend to be more fearful of crime than are men. Australia is no exception. Women are more fearful of being alone in their own homes, and of walking in their neighbourhood at night, than are men. Recent research confirms that women report significantly greater perceived risk and fear of crime than men, regardless of how fear of crime is measured.

This reflects lived experiences. Women's experience with harassment and violence contributes to fear of crime and reflects their perceived risk of abuse by spouses or family members, as much as by strangers.

It is generally assumed that older people are more fearful of crime due to the physical decline that accompanies the ageing process. The relationship between age and fear, however, is complex. Older Australians appear to be more fearful of crime in their own homes than are younger people, but are less fearful of crime in public places.

Other factors related to fear of crime include: graffiti, vandalism, or other aspects of the built environment which reflect a general state of disrepair. In addition, these factors may include the frequent presence of drunks, vagrants, or unruly gatherings of young men. These characteristics, individually but especially in combination, seem to suggest that the location in question is "out of control".

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