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University of Brighton

A qualitative exploration of gender differences in young adults' fear of crime

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ABSTRACT

Fear of crime (FOC) research has repeatedly found a 'paradox of fear', in which females are found to be more fearful of crime than males, despite lower victimisation rates. Previous research has relied on quantitative measures to explain the causes of this 'paradox', but there is a lack of existing literature regarding experiences of FOC and its effects, especially in young adults. This study utilised semi-structured interviews with 9 females and 6 males. Thematic analysis compared and contrasted the experiences of crime for both genders and revealed four main themes: Exposure to crime, Cautiousness, Vulnerability and Normalisation of fear. The findings indicate a heightened FOC among young females, which was experienced as frequent and normalised, whilst males experienced FOC as rare and fleeting. Due to these differences, females experienced a need to act cautiously and utilise avoidance tactics, whilst males displayed a care-free attitude. Females in this study believed their heightened FOC was inevitable, and many felt negatively toward this. These findings indicate that public discourse regarding crime serves to normalise young women's heightened FOC and reduces their quality of life. Public discourse should therefore aim to encourage feelings of safety in young women, in order to reduce their FOC.

KEY WORDS:	FEAR OF CRME	GENDER	NORMALISATION	PARADOX OF FEAR	INTERVIEW

Literature Review

Psychology and FOC

Since the 1960s, fear of crime (FOC) has become an increasingly popular topic for academic research (Fox et al., 2009; Hale, 1996) due to the growing use of household crime surveys which explore attitudes towards crime, alongside concern for the consequences of fear (Hale, 1996). Whilst noting that fear may be a healthy response to crime (Fox et al., 2009) since it may be sensible for individuals to take precautions to reduce their risk of victimisation; FOC can also be dysfunctional (Wilcox et al., 2007; Hale, 1996). In cases where fear is disproportionate to objective levels of risk, it may produce unnecessary stress and anxiety, leading to unhealthy or restricted behaviours (Fox et al., 2007; Wilcox et al., 2007) which in turn produce feelings of isolation (Hale, 1996). FOC is defined as an emotional response of dread or anxiety which occurs when an individual acknowledges a situation as possessing potential danger, be it real or imagined (Ferraro, 1995). In terms of the following research, FOC refers specifically to an individual's fear of personally being victimised, rather than a worry about crime in general (Gabriel and Greve, 2003). Thus, FOC is a predominant concern in academic research, due to the serious negative consequences it may have, and the increasing awareness due to crime surveys.

FOC, as a psychological concept (Gabriel and Greve, 2003), is defined as a negative emotional reaction produced by awareness of crime (Ferraro and LaGrange, 1987). This can be transitory; for example, a passing emotion when walking alone at night, or dispositional. As a disposition, it can be understood as the propensity to frequently experience fear, and is characterised by feeling fearful in more situations than other individuals, along with experiencing fear more intensely (Gabriel and Greve, 2003). Social-psychological theories, however, argue that FOC is related to four distinct psychological concepts (Van Der Wurff et al., 1989). Firstly, the Attractivity component describes to the extent to which people perceive themselves and their belongings as an attractive target to offenders. Secondly, the Evil Intent component reflects the degree to which a person attributes criminal intent to others. Thirdly, the Power component suggests that individuals experience fear when they measure their perceived control as lesser than that of the potential offender. Fourth and finally, the Criminalisable Space component refers to the extent to which the situation allows for criminal activity, for example, an alleyway at night may be perceived as easily criminalisable (Van Der Wurff et al., 1989). However, this perception varies between individuals; whilst social-psychological models acknowledge that an individual is affected by both their social and physical surroundings, emphasis is also placed on their comprehension and interpretation of these characteristics (Wall and Olofsson, 2008). Events are understood in terms of their context; thus, an individual's perception of risk is a product of their interactions and beliefs about the world (Wall and Olofsson, 2008). Risk judgements are formulated when an individual perceives danger in social and environmental cues (Steinmetz and Austin, 2014), and are both a cause and effect of fear; risk perceptions influence fear but are also influenced by fear (Ferraro and LaGrange, 1987). Hence, FOC is a psychological concept which necessitates further investigation, as the causes of fear are highly dependent on a person's interpretations.

The paradox of fear

Research has revealed that gender is the most accurate predictor of FOC, more than two times as strong as other variables, such as age, education and race (Hale, 1996; Ferraro, 1995). Findings have consistently shown that females are more fearful of crime than males (Nellis, 2009). Contrastingly, victimisation statistics show that females are far less likely to be victims of crime (Nellis, 2009); for example, in 2014/15, 2.6% of men were victims of violent crimes, compared to only 1.4% of women (Rossetti et al., 2016). Similarly, in 2015/16, 4.5% of males were victims of personal crime, compared with 3.8% of females, and in 2014/15, 331 males were victims of homicide, in comparison to only 186 female victims (MOJ, 2016). This finding is consistent across various forms of victimisation, including street crime (Pryor and Hughes, 2013), and hence, women's heightened FOC is often referred to as the 'paradox of fear' (Nellis, 2009; Pryor and Hughes, 2013).

A common explanation for the 'paradox of fear' is the vulnerability hypothesis (Hale, 1996), which argues that those who feel most incapable of protecting themselves are expected to be more fearful of crime than others (Hale, 1996). The vulnerability hypothesis highlights that women are both physically and socially vulnerable, and thus perceive their risk of victimisation to be higher (Warr and Stafford, 1983). Physical vulnerability is defined as exposure to threat, lack of ability to defend oneself, and the impact of victimisation (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981); women's heightened FOC is argued to be the result of greater concern for the consequences of victimisation, rather than a stronger belief in the likelihood of its occurrence (Warr and Stafford, 1983). Social vulnerability, on the other hand, refers to an individual's position in society (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981); women's subordinate status in a patriarchal society leads to amplified perceptions of vulnerability (Gordon and Riger, 1989). However, it is argued that modernisation, particularly in the late 20th Century, has led to an increase in gender equality and a decrease in patriarchy. Feminist movements have led to significant improvement in terms of women's involvement in the labour force, educational opportunities and in public life (Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Lo, Ash-Houchen and Gerling, 2017). Furthermore, feminist demonstrations, such as the 'SlutWalk', which protest victim blaming and slut-shaming (Carr, 2013), imply that young females are rejecting the notion that they should feel vulnerable. Hence, while women may continue to be more vulnerable in terms of physical ability, social vulnerability may no longer be a sufficient explanation for women's heightened fear in the 21st Century. It could be argued that in contemporary society, social vulnerability applies more to those who are underprivileged in terms of class, or marginalised in terms of race (Eijk, 2015; Rader, Crossman and Porter, 2012).

Socialisation theories argue that females are taught to be cautious and vigilant, whilst males are encouraged to be brave risk-takers (Goodey, 1998); suggesting that the paradox of fear is the result of gender roles. However, socialisation theories also argue that young boys are taught to adopt a 'fearless façade' and an unwillingness to express emotions which may label them as 'weak'. As a result, males are reluctant to admit to feelings of fear, whereas females are socialised to share their emotions, and hence are more likely to express their concerns (Goodey, 1998; Sutton and Farrall, 2005). This is evident in research which reveals that among males, fear is inversely correlated with scores on a social desirability scale, demonstrating that concern for social appearance impacts expression of fear (Sutton and Farrall, 2005). Therefore, it could be argued that the paradox of fear reflects a lack of disclosure of fear among men, rather than a genuine increase in female fear. However, it is argued that these theories ignore the role of increasing gender equality; whilst women remain aware of

their 'role' as vulnerable, they are increasingly taught to be independent, and view themselves as equal to males (Eijk, 2015). Through movements and protests which resist traditional gender roles, norms of 'femininity' have become contradictory (Eijk, 2015); there is no longer a clear link between socialisation and fearfulness. As those born in the 1980s and 1990s are more inclined toward egalitarian gender roles than previous cohorts (Donnelly et al., 2016), it may be necessary to explore young people's FOC, in order to evaluate the influence of gender role socialisation in the 21st Century.

Furthermore, the existence of the 'paradox' itself can be questioned; it is argued that official victimisation statistics fail to fully represent the extent of women's victimisation. Crimes for which most victims are female, such as rape and domestic violence (Elliot et al., 2004), are also least likely to be reported (Hale, 1996). Furthermore, women are often victims of a 'hidden violence' or 'sub-criminal' offenses, such as catcalling, which are not legally defined as criminal but may induce FOC (Stanko, 1995). If victimisation rates were to capture these forms of harassment, the heightened FOC found in females may appear less disproportionate and 'paradoxical' in relation to crime rates (Hale, 1996). However, the most prevalent explanation for women's heightened fear is the 'shadow of sexual assault hypothesis' (Ferraro, 1995). Research shows that women fear rape more than any other form of victimisation (Pryor and Hughes, 2013), and that rape is an 'ever-present' concern for the majority of women (Gordon and Riger, 1989); hence this theory argues that fear of rape impacts women's calculations of risk in terms of criminal victimisation. This hypothesis suggests that fear of victimisation is a reflection of fear of sexual assault; in other words, concern about sexual assault shadows fear of all forms of crime (Ferraro, 1995). This finding has been replicated across multiple studies (e.g. Lane and Fox, 2013; Lane et al., 2009). However, Hickman and Muehlenhard (1997) found that whilst women estimated that acquaintance rape was most common, they were more fearful of, and took more precautions against, stranger rape. Women's knowledge of rape did not mirror their concerns; thus, notions of vulnerability (Hickman and Muehlenhard, 1997), may again be necessary to explain the paradoxical nature of risk and fear. Furthermore, 'shadow-hypothesis' research is largely quantitative, and whilst some research has begun to deploy qualitative methods to investigate fear of sexual assault, this often has a narrow focus, and the potential of in-depth qualitative research is still to be explored (Hale, 1996). Alternative methods such as semi-structured interviews have been largely overlooked by previous FOC research, and may have much to offer in terms of deeper insights (Hale, 1996). Qualitative methods may also allow an exploration of how FOC is experienced and its implications, rather than focussing specifically on its causes.

Impacts of FOC

FOC can undermine quality of life through feelings of violation, hopelessness and frustration (Ferraro and LaGrange, 1987). Fear can lead to precautionary behaviours and attempts to protect oneself, which can be either pre-emptive or defensive. Pre-emptive avoidance behaviours include avoiding certain places, events and activities, whereas defensive behaviours include gun ownership and self-defence classes (May et al., 2009; Woolnough, 2009). Warr (1985) argues that the costs of fear fall primarily on women, as their heightened fear leads to use of avoidance tactics, such as minimising the amount of time spent alone (Woolnough, 2009). In one sample,

42% of women reported avoiding going out alone, compared to only 8% of men (Warr, 1985). Women's fear thus restricts their behaviours (Hickman and Muehlenhard, 1997), limits their mobility (May et al., 2009), and limits their choices in terms of social activity, living arrangements, choice of dress, and social interactions (Pryor and Hughes, 2013).

The majority of research into precautionary behaviours suggests that males do not engage in these actions, with the exception of carrying self-protection devices (Woolnough, 2009). Men are more likely than females to possess a weapon for protection (May et al., 2009); in 11- to 15-year olds, 34% of males reported having taken a weapon to school at least once, compared to only 9% of females (McKeganey and Norrie, 2000). This behaviour reflects fear, as these children were also more likely to have experienced harassment, violence and threats of violence, and reported feeling less safe (Kuntsche and Klingemann, 2004). However, it is contested that quantitative research significantly underestimates the extent of men's fear (Moore and Breeze, 2012), due to the lack of investigation of men's experiences, and the fact that most research overlooks men's reluctance to disclose their feelings of fear (Newburn and Stanko, 1994). To demonstrate this, Gilchrist et al (1998) deployed a qualitative method and found that, contrary to research which suggests that males do not use precautionary behaviours, there are striking similarities in the ways that men and women avoid crime. In this research, both male and female participants reported that domestic security, such as car and house alarms, good neighbours, and owning a dog reduced their FOC. The male participants in Gilchrist et al.'s (1998) study also described using precautions such as taking taxis, martial arts lessons, and generally 'keeping to themselves' in order to avoid, or defend themselves against, assault. Hence, whilst many researchers argue that men only respond to fear with defensive, external behaviours (May et al., 2009) in the form of weapon carrying, this research suggests that they also engage in avoidance behaviours.

However, the widespread use of precautionary behaviours and rape prevention programmes by women emphasise their heightened fear (Bedera and Nordmeye, 2015). Rape prevention literature provides advice on avoiding sexual assault; available in the form of brochures in police stations, leisure centres and University campuses (Campbell, 2005). Whilst it is argued that rape prevention should not intend to reduce women's activity (Fisher and Sloan, 2003), most advice is directed at women, and places the responsibility for reducing victimisation on females themselves (Bedera and Nordmeye, 2015). These strategies suggest that women should avoid being alone, particularly on dark streets (Campbell, 2005), and some programmes argue that effective rape avoidance relies on resistance tactics of screaming, fighting and fleeing (Ullman, 2002). These messages reinforce women's vulnerability, suggesting there are no safe places, no trustworthy people, and that being alone is dangerous (Bedera and Nordmeye, 2015). These notions are also pervasive in the media, through magazines, newspapers and TV shows (Campbell, 2005). Twitter hashtags such as #SafetyTipsForWomen offer traditional self-defence tips which focus on restricting women's behaviours in order to avoid victimisation (Rentschler, 2015). Similarly, popular women's magazines routinely publish articles which provide prevention advice; Cosmopolitan magazine, for example, offered "21 Potentially Life-Saving Tips" such as "Drink wine instead of cocktails" and "Do not let your friend go off alone with a guy" (Adeeyo, 2013). These articles imply that women must adjust their behaviours and state that women "*should*" know these strategies

(Adeeyo, 2013; Debusk, 2013), thus placing responsibility on women themselves. The widespread acknowledgement of this advice acts as a continual reminder to women that rape is a possibility which they ought to avoid (Campbell, 2005).

Furthermore, it is argued that the increasing visibility of gendered violence fails to problematise it, instead normalising society's perceptions of inequality (Kitzinger, 1994a). Similarly, it could be argued that widespread publicity of rape prevention advice represents the normalisation of women's heightened fear; the fact that women, rather than men, are often blamed, reflects an acceptance of the inequality that exists (McCarry and Lombard, 2016). Normalisation of women's heightened fear may be a means of exerting control over women's activities (Pryor and Hughes, 2013), in order to dictate and constrain their behaviours (Pain, 1991). However, normalisation of FOC has been largely overlooked by previous research.

The current study

The majority of the aforementioned research into FOC focuses specifically on women or the elderly, and hence an investigation explicitly investigating young people is lacking (Cops et al., 2012). This is surprising, considering those aged 20-24 are five times more likely to be victims of violent crime than those aged 55-64, and 16- to 24- year olds are twice as likely to be victims of personal theft as those aged 45-54 (Rossetti et al., 2016). Similarly, in terms of sexual assault, women aged 18-24 are at highest risk (Bedera and Nordmeye, 2015), and households whose head is aged 16-24 are most likely to be victims of burglary and violent crimes (The Poverty Site, 2011). Therefore, young people may be expected to be more fearful of crime, however this area is yet to be explored.

There is also limited exploration of student's use of self-protective behaviours; the existing research tends to focus solely on females, or on behaviours used specifically to prevent sexual assault. However, fulltime students are more likely to be victims of violent crime than those in other occupations (ONS, 2016a), and one study found that numerous students carried self-protection devices, of which 81.5% indicated they sometimes avoid certain areas due to concerns about crime (Wilcox et al., 2007). This implies that an investigation of young people's precautionary behaviours is required, specifically one which explores behaviours aimed at preventing various forms of victimisation, rather than merely focussing on sexual assault. Comparison of male and female behaviours is also scarce.

Finally, FOC research relies predominantly on quantitative methodologies such as surveys (Hale, 1996); qualitative methodologies involving less structured, more informal interviewing may be more appropriate when asking participants to discuss experiences of FOC (Pain, 1991). This study will hence use a qualitative data collection method and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), to explore the following research question:

> How do young males and females experience FOC?

This study aims to:

- examine young adults' experiences of FOC,
- examine whether young females experience a heightened FOC, particularly as part of their everyday life (and how they react to this),

- discover whether young males or females feel obliged to use methods of protection to avoid becoming victims of crime.

Method

Methodology and Epistemology

As discussed above, there is an absence of existing qualitative research regarding FOC. Thus, this study adopted a qualitative approach in order to gain in-depth understandings of participants' experiences of, and feelings toward, FOC. Critical realism argues that phenomena are produced by underlying structures which are not directly accessible. It thus recognises the impossibility of understanding reality, except through its effects, and the ways it is described and accounted for (Willig, 1999; Bhaskar, 1989). Through this, critical realism sits between a constructivist and objectivist ontology, and context is crucial, as mechanisms and structures which produce social phenomena must be acknowledged (Bryman, 2012). Hence, this study takes a critical realist standpoint in order to examine young people's experiences of FOC, acknowledging that these experiences can only be accessed through participants' descriptions, and recognising the contexts in which FOC is produced, in terms of social structures and popular discourses.

Participants

Students at the University of Brighton were recruited through the School of Applied Social Science Psychology Participant Pool (SONA). Sample sizes of 5-10 participants for each gender were chosen, as research suggests that smaller sample sizes increase opportunities to gain close involvement with participants (Bryman, 2012), and allow the researcher to prioritise depth over breadth (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Furthermore, previous research implies that in homogenous samples, saturation of codes and themes is arrived at relatively quickly (Guest et al, 2000), suggesting only a small number of interviews is necessary to get a reliable sense of variability within a data set, after which new data is no longer illuminating (Bryman, 2012).

The study used a purposive sampling method to recruit suitable participants in relation to the research question (Bryman, 2012). Participants were recruited from the student population in order to extend the limited understanding of students' FOC in previous literature, and as a result of prior suggestions that students are likely to be victims of crime (ONS, 2016a). Furthermore, restrictions were placed on SONA to ensure that participants were within the chosen age bracket of 18-24. This age group was selected due to the study's focus on young adults, and the specific restrictions replicated those used in the Crime Survey for England and Wales (ONS, 2016b), in which 16-24 is the youngest category. Due to the focus on university students, and the potentially sensitive nature of the study, those under 18 were excluded, leaving the age range for recruitment as 18-24 years old. Hence, the mean age was 20.29 (males - 21.67 and females - 19.25).

Due to gaps in the existing literature discussed above, this study aimed to compare gender differences; hence, both male and female participants were recruited, and SONA restrictions were used to advertise specifically to each gender. However, due to the overwhelming majority of female students in the School of Applied Social Science, male recruitment was difficult; resulting in a sample of 6 male and 9 female participants. All participants identified as White/British.

Males in this sample were statistically similar to the general population (ONS, 2016b) in terms of feelings of safety (100% versus 91%) and their previous victimisation

(16.7% versus 16%). Female participants, on the other hand, were more likely to report feeling unsafe than the average 16-24-year old (66.7% versus 40%), and were more likely to have been a victim of crime in the past year (44% versus 15%). Both male and female participants had lower perceptions of the likelihood of victimisation than that of the general population (0% males, 11.1% females versus 18%).

Method

This study originally intended to utilise a focus group method, as it is believed that group dynamics encourage open conversation (Kitzinger, 1994b) regarding personal beliefs, attitudes and feelings (Frith, 2000). However, when conducting a pilot study, it was found that participants' reliance on each other's answers prevented elaboration. Participants adapted their answers to agree with dominant members (Carey and Smith, 1994), leading to false impressions of consensus, which served to lose the detail of individual contributions (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010). Thus, interviews were chosen to allow the researcher to build rapport with participants, and encourage discussion of sensitive topics which participants may have felt less comfortable disclosing in the presence of others (Willig, 2013; Tomkins and Eatough, 2010; Powell and Single, 1996). Changing to interviews also removed the issue of confidentiality which is unavoidable in focus groups, due to the presence of other participants (Barbour, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they are flexible, and allow for a focus on the interviewee's understandings of issues and events, highlighting their own beliefs about what is important in relation to FOC (Bryman, 2016). An interview schedule (See Appendix A) was produced, in order to generate a degree of standardisation throughout the interviews, to facilitate comparisons across data and between genders (Morgan, 1996). Semi-structured interviews also allowed the researcher to adjust the ordering of questions, and utilise prompts and follow-ups, to encourage elaboration when discussing experiences of FOC.

This study also employed a survey method through the use of a short Demographic Questionnaire (See Appendix B) and Crime Survey Questionnaire (See Appendix C), in order to produce quantitative data which could be used to describe participants in relation to the general population. The Crime Survey Questionnaire asked participants for quantitative measures of fear, such as fear of certain crimes, and about their direct experiences of victimisation. This allowed the researcher to determine whether participants were statistically similar to the population in terms of their FOC. Each question in this survey was adapted from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (ONS, 2016b) in order to aid comparison.

Procedure

Participants met with the interviewer at the University of Brighton, at a time which was convenient for them. Interviews were conducted in sound-proofed booths designed specifically for the purpose of conducting interviews. Participants were asked to read through the Participant Information Sheet (See Appendix D) and sign the Consent Form (See Appendix E); the researcher then explained that the participant would be asked several questions, and requested they provide answers in as much detail as possible. Participants were then asked questions from the interview schedule; beginning with more general questions, and moving slowly to more specific and personal questions (Willig, 2013), to ensure participants felt comfortable with the researcher. Once the interview was finished, participants were

asked to complete the Demographic Questionnaire and Crime Survey Questionnaire. Finally, participants were given a Written Debrief (See Appendix F), which they were asked to read through and keep, before being thanked for their participation.

Analysis

Thematic analysis aims to recognise and organise patterns of meaning in a qualitative data set (Willig, 2013; Braun and Clarke, 2006), in order to identify themes that appear important in relation to the research question (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2005). This study chose to utilise thematic analysis because it is independent of theory and epistemology, and is thus flexible as it allows the researcher to determine their own theoretical status (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Willig 2013). As thematic analysis is compatible with both essentialist and constructivist paradigms (Braun and Clarke, 2006), it appeared suitable in relation to the study's critical realist epistemology. This allowed the researcher to implement an inductive approach, in which the data was approached without theoretically informed coding frames; themes were strongly grounded in the data itself, rather than reflecting any theoretical preconceptions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was also selected as it produces a rich and detailed account of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

In order to conduct thematic analysis, the researcher immersed themselves in the data by manually producing transcripts, which were then read and re-read multiple times. The data was then systematically examined in order to identify common codes, and aspects which appeared significant were labelled (Willig, 2013; Bryman, 2012) (See Appendix G, for an example). Initial coding was extremely detailed, in order to identify initial impressions of the data, and codes were repeatedly revised and changed in order to refine labels (Bryman, 2012). Codes were then grouped into overarching themes (See Appendix H) which represented the most important and revealing aspects of the data. Many codes were dropped, whilst new themes were produced by combining initial codes (Bryman, 2012). Due to the critical realist epistemology, themes were both manifest, in that they were directly observable in the data, and latent, in which meanings were implicit (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Next, each theme was placed in a summary table alongside quotations (See Appendix I) which illustrated them (Willig 2013; Bryman, 2012). This enabled the researcher to confirm that chosen themes were present throughout the data set, and refine the specifics of each theme. Representative and compelling extracts were then selected and analysed in order to relate the findings to both the research question and the existing literature (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Ethics

Participants were asked to read the Participant Information sheet prior to signing up to the study, and again before the interview began, in order to ensure they were fully aware of its nature and consequences. Fully informed consent was given through the use of a Consent Form. The issue of confidentiality was addressed by removing participants' names during the transcription process, and replacing them with participant numbers. Any information which could reveal the participants' identities, such as street names, was also removed or replaced during the transcription process. Furthermore, hard copies of participants' data were kept in a locked draw at the University of Brighton, and electronic copies were kept in password protected files.

In order to prevent potential psychological harm, participants were assured that the focus of the study was *fear* of crime rather than direct experiences of victimisation, and were reminded that they should not feel pressured to discuss direct experiences unless they were comfortable doing so. Through the use of the Participant Information Sheet, participants were fully aware of the topic in advance, and those who felt they would not be comfortable discussing relevant issues were advised not to participate. Furthermore, sources of additional support were highlighted to participants in both the Information Sheet and Written Debrief. Additionally, participants were assured at multiple points of their right to withdraw (BPS, 2009). Participants were reminded that if they chose to terminate the interview, their data would be removed from the study, and they would face no negative consequences. Participants were also reassured that they could remove their data up to one month after participation, and were fully informed of how to contact the researcher if they chose to do so. Finally, participants received a written debrief at the conclusion of their participation, in order to reassure them of the nature or the research, and provide them with an opportunity to request information about the outcome of the study (BPS, 2009). This study was approved by the University of Brighton Ethics Committee (See Appendix J).

Analysis

During thematic analysis, the codes which appeared most revealing in relation to the research question were developed into overarching themes. To ensure the reliability of the following analysis, the dissertation supervisor, who was blind to the gender of the participants, read and coded the interview transcripts. Interrater reliability was satisfactory at 0.85. Hence, this analysis will discuss four key themes: Exposure to crime, Cautiousness, Vulnerability, and Normalisation of fear.

Participants will be referred to as M# or F#, in which M represents male and F represents female, and the digit refers to their participant number. For example, M2 refers to the second male participant.

Exposure to crime

The first key theme identified in the data was the effect of exposure to crime on experiences of fear. This refers to ways in which participants were made aware of crime, such as via the media and through direct or indirect experiences of crime. It also relates to the perceived extent of crime, and consequently the perceived likelihood of victimisation.

The majority of female participants stated that fear was experienced due to high exposure to crime from various sources. F6 summarised this:

> "Whether it's a story on the news or a story about like, you hear something that's happened near where you live, or from someone you know, and as it gets closer into you, you get more scared."

Similarly, F1 explained:

> "Because we have increasing knowledge of the fact it's going on, you become more aware of it so then you think about it and you become more scared of it."

F4, on the other hand, believed her previous experience of crime was the predominant cause of fear:

> "I've been shown that I should be scared of it […] once it's happened to you you're scared that it's always going to be happening."

Similarly, male participants agreed that "what [they] do see of [crime] comes from the news" (M4). However, whilst participants of both genders were aware of the correlation between exposure to crime and experiences of fear, female participants used it to explain higher levels of fear, whilst males believed it reduced their FOC. For example, M6 argued:

> "I guess I'm less fearful because of the fact that I don't see any crime, and I don't hear much about crimes happening near me or to people I know"

Similarly, male participants felt they would experience more FOC "if I lived somewhere where I knew more people who had been personally affected" (M2) and if crime "was like visible where I am" (M3). This implies females and males interpret crime levels differently.

F4 supported this suggestion, believing:

> "Women have a lot better perspective of it […], we tend to see a lot more people committing crimes."

Furthermore, female participants explained that it was exposure to female victims, "hearing stories about girls going missing" (F5), rather than crime itself, which led to experiences of FOC:

> "We're more scared because we're always told about how we're like, in danger" (F9).

F6 elaborated:

> "I just think women being victimised is shown more than men being victimised […] they fear crime more because they're shown that they're more likely to be affected by it rather than men".

Many female participants agreed that the media over-represent the crime problem:

> "It's always in your face like there's a crime that's happened." (F7)

> "In your face every single day, like every moment of the day." (F3)

They also acknowledged that the media "sensationalise things and make it seem a lot worse" (F7). However, female participants still described more frequent experiences of FOC than males, suggesting they were influenced by media representations despite their awareness of its exaggerative nature.

Cautiousness

A theme of cautiousness was also identified. Cautiousness refers to feelings of wariness and the need to take precautions, in relation to perceived threats of crime. This theme highlights notions of cautiousness among female participants in comparison to the carefree attitudes of male participants, and describes the strategies that participants use to feel safer.

Cautious Vs Carefree

The majority of female participants described experiencing FOC through the need to be "on guard" (F6) or "wary" (F7) when alone. They believed it is important to be "conscious of who else is around" (F1) and "vigilant of [their] surroundings" (F6 & F8) when walking alone. Furthermore, females described the frequency of these experiences, for example, "I'm always scared and on guard" (F2), suggesting it is a regular occurrence. Female participants also discussed how cautiousness limited their behaviour, believing that walking home alone "is not worth the risk" (F5).

Whilst female participants aimed to be vigilant when out alone, they believed that males of their age "don't really care, don't see it as much of an issue" (F1). They compared experiences of FOC across genders, arguing that males would have "more of a carefree attitude than girls" (F5). However, some female participants felt this was the result of "social norms where they have to be macho and manly" (F8), arguing that males try to "act tough" (F3), and thus present themselves as less cautious than females.

Whilst one male participant felt it was important to "be aware and take precautions" (M2), which mirrors the wariness of the female participants, he went on to state that he felt "absolutely fine" (M2) alone at night. This sentiment was shared by all of the

male participants, for example M6 felt “I wouldn’t feel unsafe or anything if I were to walk home on my own”. When asked how they would feel walking alone, all male participants answered “Fine” (M1), “Alright” (M3) or “OK” (M5). This hence reflects the gender differences expected by female participants.

Strategies

Furthermore, throughout the data, female participants described using strategies to reduce their experiences of fear, such as staying in the company of others. For example, females explained that they “try to travel in groups” (F4) or “ask someone to walk with [them]” (F9). One female participant argued that physical company was “the best way to feel safe” (F4). Additionally, females explained that on occasions that they were alone, they employed tactics such as “carry my keys in my hand” (F8), “don’t put my headphones in” (F3), and “wear flat shoes so I can run away” (F4). Males, on the other hand, did not describe these tendencies as a result of FOC. Two male participants did, however, explain that they “walk [their] female friends home” (M5), which may represent an understanding of female FOC.

Female participants also explained that in the absence of physical company, they rely on mobile phones to feel safer. For example, “I phone my friends a lot when I’m walking home” (F3). Females described feeling safer when they “[have] my phone on [them] and charged” (F4), and explained that they “always text someone” (F6) as a pre-emptive measure when walking alone. The word “always” was reiterated throughout these descriptions, suggesting that contacting others is an entrenched response to experiencing FOC for female participants.

Female participants also stated that due to their shared experiences of FOC, they feel obliged to protect other females with similar strategies; either through company, “I walk my friends home” (F3 & F7), or through mobile phone contact, “I make sure people text me back if they’re going home” (P4). Almost all females described this method of protecting themselves or others; the majority stated that they ask their friends to “text me when you get home” (F5, F6 & F12). In contrast, male participants did not describe protecting others through mobile phone contact.

Vulnerability

A theme of vulnerability was also identified throughout. This refers to participants’ perceptions of the likelihood of victimisation, and lack of ability to defend themselves against crime. Gender differences in crimes which participants felt vulnerable to, and circumstances which increased feelings of vulnerability, will be explored. The impacts of participants’ perceptions of their own physical vulnerability will also be discussed.

Vulnerability to certain crimes

Female participants felt vulnerable to various forms of victimisation, particularly interpersonal crimes. “I’m more worried about personal kind of crime” (F4), those which are “very confrontational, like muggings or assaults” (F6). The majority of females agreed that “mugging” (F8) and “being attacked” (F9) were the main causes of FOC. Furthermore, many female participants reported that “rape [is] the crime [they]’d be most afraid of” (F8).

Male participants, on the other hand, did not perceive themselves as vulnerable to these crimes. They explained “I’ve never really felt like I’m likely to be mugged or

attacked or anything" (M2) and "I don't really have a personal fear of being sexually assaulted" (M3). Instead, they focussed on acquisitive crime when acknowledging experiences of FOC. For example, male participants "worry that my motorbike might get stolen" (M1), felt they "could be a victim of theft" (M5), and described experiencing fear of "fraud and internet sort of crime" (M2). M4 explained that experiencing FOC was the result of "fear of loss, the fear of losing items". On the occasion that male participants referred to interpersonal crimes, it was in relation to fear for others; for example:

> "There's like situations in which I would be like scared for someone else being sexually assaulted" (M3).

In accordance with crimes they felt most vulnerable to, the only avoidance strategies described by male participants were "locking my bike up, lock my car" (M4), "lock the doors" (M3 & M4) and "see whether a website's trustworthy" (M2).

Circumstances

Participants also described circumstances in which they felt more vulnerable to crime. Females felt that "time of day has a massive impact" (F1); they were more likely to experience FOC when "it's dark" (F3, F6 & F7), and "at night" (F8 & F9). Similarly, males reported that if they were to be fearful, it would occur "late at night" (M3) because that's when crime "might take place" (M1).

Female participants also felt that vulnerability is "depend[ant] on where you are" (F3). They cited "rough" (F5), "dodgier" (F3), "poorer" (F8) and "less well maintained" (F1) areas as being more likely to cause FOC. Similarly, both male and female participants also reported that "alleyways" (F8, F9 & M4) and "bigger cities" (M2) increased their vulnerability to crime. Females explained that FOC increased in these places because they were "less busy" (F9) with "not loads of people around" (F6), reinforcing the above finding that participants felt safer in the company of others.

Physical vulnerability

Female participants also described physical vulnerability as a factor which influenced experiences of FOC. The majority of females felt that their size; "my height" (F8) led to fear because of an inability to defend themselves, "I couldn't protect myself, I'm tiny" (F3). Similarly, participants focussed on gender as a factor in their FOC; "I'm a female as well, I'm more vulnerable to crime" (F8), because "stereotypically, women are weaker" (F6), and "less physically able to defend themselves […] in terms of strength" (P8). Similarly, males believed that "young women are more prone to feeling scared […] they are less able to run away or defend themselves" (M4).

In contrast, participants of both genders believed that "guys would be better off going and walking on the street than a girl would" (F5) because "there's a perception that most men are more able to defend themselves" (M2). Furthermore, the majority of male participants felt that "anybody who's not able to defend themselves" (M3) would be most likely to fear crime, particularly "younger and smaller" people (M2). M2 explained that he was less likely to confront someone "really like massive", suggesting that perceptions of physical vulnerability are also dependent on the characteristics of the potential offender. Some male participants did describe taking self-defence classes such as "ju-jitsu" (M2) and "mai-tai" (M3), but argued that this

was not an avoidance tactic; “I don’t go there because I’m scared of crime, I do it for fun” (M3).

Furthermore, both male and female participants felt that “older people” (M2) and the “elderly generation” (M1) were most likely to experience FOC, because “the elderly are seen as more vulnerable” (F7, M3 & F8) since “they’re less physically able to defend themselves” (F8). This further highlights the value that participants placed on physical vulnerability in relation to FOC.

Normalisation of fear

The final key theme identified during thematic analysis was one of ‘normalised fear’, in which participants described the frequency of experiences of fear, and how FOC is embedded in their daily routines. This was also emphasised through discussions of avoidance tactics, and advice received from others regarding victimisation. This theme was found primarily among female participants; the gender difference will be highlighted through comparisons with male participants’ descriptions of their experiences.

Many female participants discussed the regularity of experiences of FOC; they described thinking about it “on a pretty much daily basis” (F4), “all the time” (F12), and “every single time I do [walk home]” (F2). Through this, females explained that FOC is experienced “like an everyday thing” (F7) because it’s “always in the back of your head” (F8). This suggests that FOC is a frequent and recurrent experience for young females. Furthermore, female participants described the experience of FOC as “built in” (F4) or “instilled” (F8) in their lives.

Similarly, females described the ways in which FOC affected their everyday lives, such as through the normalisation of avoidance tactics:

> “I do things without thinking so much about it now […] where I’d have to think should I go down here or that way, I will now automatically go that way that looks safest to me without having to think about what I’m doing” (F4).

The use of the word “automatically” highlights how deeply embedded these strategies are in participants’ everyday lives. Furthermore, females discussed the effects of experiencing FOC on their everyday routines; they felt that it “can take a toll on your life because you’re kind of constricted” (F8). Female participants believed that FOC is a shared experience among young women, discussing how “many girls feel the same” (F3) and “all have the same views” (F8) on FOC, reinforcing the suggestion that FOC is normalised for young women.

Male participants, on the other hand, described experiences of FOC as rare, rather than an aspect of everyday life. They reiterated that their day-to-day lives were not affected by experiences of fear, for example, “it’s not something I’ve ever really thought about” (M5) and “it’s not like I stay up at night worrying about it” (M1). Similarly, males felt that experiences of FOC affected them “minimally” (M4), and less frequently than females; they “don’t think about it that much really” (M3), and “definitely not every day” (M2). Furthermore, males described FOC as fleeting; “sometimes I think about it, and then I don’t think about it, that’s it” (M3). This strongly contrasts with the female participants’ experiences of FOC, which were described as constant and long-lasting.

Furthermore, many females explained how experiences of FOC are normalised through the advice and instructions they receive from others. They described being "warned" (F8), and instructed, "You gotta do this, you gotta do that" (F5), for example, being taught "don't walk through alleyways […] don't wear certain things" (F3). Similarly, females described the prevalence of tips and advice on "how to protect yourself" (F9). In particular, they explained that they often receive "advice from parents" (F8), and from peers, "you share tips and stuff" (F4).

Additionally, females believed that their experiences of FOC were inevitable and unavoidable. Many felt that fear was necessary; "I wish I didn't have to bother with it, but there's no way around it" (F4) and explained that due to their beliefs about female victimisation, the gender difference in fear "shouldn't be fair but it is" (F5). Other females felt that their experiences of FOC were imposed upon them by others, "we shouldn't have to have that fear but we do because it's enforced upon us" (F1). Despite these differences, the majority of female participants agreed that they were frustrated by these experiences, arguing that they "want to be able to feel safe" (F9) and "shouldn't have to be at the point where I'm scared to be on my own" (F3). When describing avoidance tactics, females felt "kind of angry […] that I have to do that" (F4), and in relation to being cautious, they felt "it's so bad that you have to think like that" (F2). Finally, females described their everyday experiences of FOC as "so draining, so exhausting" (F4).

Discussion

This study aimed to gain a better understanding of how FOC is experienced by young males and females. The findings suggest that females experienced a heightened FOC in comparison to males, both in their quantitative measures of fear and their descriptions of experiencing FOC. This mirrors the predominant finding in FOC literature, which argues that females experience more FOC than males (Hale, 1996).

Participants discussed the effect of exposure to crime on their experiences of fear. This relationship reflects the 'victimisation perspective', which argues that criminal activity, or awareness of crime, determines levels of FOC in a community (Hale, 1996). Consistent with previous literature, which demonstrates that previous victims of crime are more likely to be fearful than non-victims (Callanan and Rosenberger, 2015; Fox, Nobles and Piquero, 2009), a number of participants felt direct victimisation was the cause of their fear. It is important to note here that 44.4% of female participants reported being a victim of crime in the past year, compared to only 16.7% of males. This may explain why females described more exposure to crime, and could partially contribute to their heightened FOC. However, it is important to distinguish between the effects of direct victimisation, and 'vicarious victimisation', which describes indirect experiences of crime through the media, friends, or family (Gilchrist et al., 1998; Fox, Nobles and Piquero, 2009). Similar to findings by Gilchrist et al. (1998), several participants in the current study also cited vicarious victimisation as the predominant cause of FOC. Whilst Gomme (1988) argues that the effect of vicarious victimisation is less than that of direct experiences, there is a lack of conclusive evidence on which form of victimisation has a greater effect on FOC.

Furthermore, the greater exposure to crime described by females reflects a disparity between perceptions of crime and likelihood of victimisation, as it contrasts with statistics which show women are less likely to be victims of crime than men (Nellis, 2009). This implies that it is presentation of danger, rather than extent of criminal victimisation, which increases females' perceptions of crime. It is argued that female fear is intensified by media representations and public discourse regarding the likelihood of victimisation, in which women are most commonly depicted as victims (Callanan and Rosenberger, 2015; Madriz, 1997). Consistent with previous research (Gilchrist et al., 1998), male participants reported being less affected by the media in relation to FOC, which may explain their lower perceptions of crime.

Due to their beliefs about crime, females conveyed the need to act cautious and limit their behaviours to protect themselves; this reflects Furedi's (2006) claim that society prioritises the principle of 'better safe than sorry'. However, contrary to Furedi's (2006) construct of a 'culture of fear', which suggests that this ideology is applied throughout society and thus across genders, only female participants described this attitude. This may reflect gender differences in personality; women are more than twice as likely to possess traits of wariness, whilst males are often carefree (Barber, 2016). However, participants also felt that gender differences in cautiousness reflected gender norms, in which males are encouraged to adopt a 'fearless façade' (Goodey, 1997). It could therefore be argued that males concealed feelings of cautiousness in the interviews, in an attempt to create favourable impressions of themselves. Future research should aim to measure the impact of self-presentation when describing experiences of FOC, for example through the use of a social

desirability scale (Sutton and Farrall, 2005). However, in contrast to their lack of cautiousness, males reported a tendency to accompany female friends who were walking alone. This represents an 'altruistic fear' for females, which is consistent with findings by Gilchrist et al. (1998), which argue that in relation to assault, men feared for women, rather than for their own safety. This 'altruistic fear' was also demonstrated by female participants when checking on their friends' safety.

An example of females' cautiousness was their frequent use of avoidance tactics. These descriptions are consistent with previous research, which argues that young women use "street-savvy" tactics to reduce the risk of victimisation, such as holding their keys when walking alone, and wearing shoes which allow them to run (Campbell, 2005; Riger and Gordon, 1981). Females also described a reliance on mobile phones when alone at night. It is argued that the sense of security provided by mobile phones is a primary motivator for ownership (Ling and Helmersen, 2000; Aoki and Downes, 2003), as they allow communication in the absence of physical proximity (Campbell, 2005b), and messaging often acts as a substitute for face-to-face talk (Kaveri and Greenfield, 2008). Thus, for female participants, mobile phones act as a replacement for physical company when seeking a source of protection. However, in terms of protecting others, it is argued that asking friends to "text me when you get home" is not about safety, but rather about solidarity; it is a means by which female friends show their love and concern for one another (Schaefer, 2018). This could explain why females were more likely to use this strategy, as it implies variations in friendship, rather than fear, are the cause of the gender difference. Nevertheless, females described feeling safer when calling friends, whilst males did not, which suggests that there does exist a gender difference in use of mobile phones as a source of protection. Future research should aim to investigate the relationship between mobile phone use and FOC, specifically in relation to gender differences.

A gender difference was also found in the types of crimes participants felt vulnerable to. Contrary to statistics which show males are more likely to be victims of personal and violent crime (Rossetti et al., 2016; MOJ, 2016), males described higher fear of acquisitive crime, whereas females reported fear of interpersonal crimes, such as assault or rape. Similarly, in quantitative measures, the majority of females reported worrying about physical attacks (66.7%) and rape (89.9%), whereas male participants stated they were 'not at all' or 'not very' worried about these crimes. These findings are consistent with previous research, in which females reported a higher fear of personal victimisation, whilst males experienced greater fear of property crime (Schafer, Huebner and Bynum, 2006). This difference can be attributed to popular representations of crime, which teach men and women which crimes they should fear, alongside where and when to be fearful (Madriz, 1997). Media representations often exaggerate the prevalence of interpersonal crime against women (Gilchrist et al., 1998), which serves to heighten female fear of such crime. These differences are also reflected in the avoidance tactics used by males, such as locking their doors, to prevent acquisitive crimes. This contradicts the belief that males only display defensive, external behaviours, such as weapon carrying, in relation to FOC (May et al., 2009). They are, however, consistent with Gilchrist et al.'s (1998) findings that males responded to FOC with precautionary behaviours, such as installing domestic security alarms. Despite this finding, males still described less use of avoidance strategies than females.

The different crimes feared by participants are also explained by findings which indicate that women expect a serious offence, such as assault, to follow a burglary, whereas men are more concerned about the disruption to their routines or possessions (Gilchrist et al., 1998). This reflects Warr's (1984) concept of 'perceptually contemporaneous offences', in which serious victimisations arise from minor ones, and echoes the 'shadow of sexual assault' hypothesis, which argues that females' heightened fear of interpersonal crime is an extension of their fear of rape (Ferraro, 1995). Thus, the gender differences found in perceived vulnerability to certain crimes may reflect heightened fear of rape among females. Furthermore, participants described different circumstances in which they felt more vulnerable to crime. For example, they cited certain 'criminalisable spaces' (Van Der Wurff et al., 1989) which increased their FOC, due to the perceived increase in the likelihood of victimisation. The importance of interpretation is shown through the number of places which were perceived as criminalisable; consistent with previous research, females described a range of situations which exacerbate their fear, whilst males cited more factors which reduced their FOC (Moore and Breeze, 2012). Both male and female participants described feeling more vulnerable in cities, reflecting previous literature which found that gender differences in use of avoidance tactics were lower for 'avoiding certain places in the city' (Warr, 1985).

Furthermore, participants indicated physical vulnerability as an important factor, supporting the 'vulnerability hypothesis', which argues that those who feel unable to protect themselves experience higher FOC (Hale, 1996). Previous findings show that self-assessed vulnerability, in terms of inability to defend oneself, is highly correlated with FOC (Killias and Clerici, 2000). Moreover, consistent with previous research (Gilchrist et al., 1998), males perceived themselves as less physically vulnerable than females. This could explain why males were less fearful of interpersonal crime, as they believed they could defend themselves against it, in comparison to acquisitive crime, which cannot be prevented through physical ability. The vulnerability hypothesis (Hale, 1996) was also reflected in participants' expectations about FOC in the elderly. Previous research suggests that age is correlated with increased vulnerability (Callanan and Rosenberger, 2015) and heightened FOC (Hale, 1996). However, a number of studies have found that older participants were less fearful than younger participants (Gomme, 1988), thus there is a lack of conclusive evidence regarding the relationship between age and FOC. Furthermore, few studies have accounted for both age and gender; whilst Weinrath and Gartrell (1996) found that elderly females were most fearful and young males were least fearful, the interaction between age and gender is yet to be clearly determined. Future studies may wish to define the effect of this interaction on FOC. Furthermore, studies which controlled for physical vulnerability continued to find a heightened FOC in women (Killias and Clerici, 2000), implying that vulnerability is only a contributory factor in gender differences in FOC.

The normalisation of FOC described by females reflects a 'culture of fear', in which awareness of crime is entrenched in the organisation of everyday life. It is argued that avoidance behaviour has become an aspect of daily life, even when one is not consciously aware of it (Furedi, 2006); this is reflected in the extent to which females used avoidance tactics, and the ease at which they could recall them. The normalisation of avoidance tactics support arguments that FOC is a source of informal social control used to oppress young women (Madriz, 1997) by restricting their behaviours and limiting their mobility (Hickman and Muehlenhard, 1997; May et

al., 2009). This is further emphasised by females' descriptions of places they avoid going. The normalisation of fear was also reflected in the prevalence of advice described by female participants. The reiteration of such advice acts as a continual reminder to young women that criminal victimisation is something they should fear (Campbell, 2005). Hence, the relationship between FOC and advice may be cyclical; heightened fear leads to increased pervasiveness of advice, but advice also serves to increase FOC. Hence, male participants' descriptions that they never, or infrequently, experienced FOC may be the result of receiving less advice regarding avoiding victimisation. These findings indicate that the current public discourse, and prevalence of information regarding FOC, reflects a gender inequality which serves to restrict the behaviours of young women. It could be argued that public discourse should aim to increase young women's feelings of safety by informing them of the actual likelihood of victimisation, to reduce their use of restrictive behaviours.

Furthermore, females' negative descriptions of their experiences support arguments that FOC undermines quality of life by causing feelings of hopelessness and frustration (Ferraro and LaGrange, 1987). Similarly, when asked to rate the effect of FOC on quality of life on a quantitative scale, female participants gave an average rating of 4.56 out of 10, compared to the average male rating of 1.62. This implies that FOC has a higher negative impact on females' quality of life than males. However, whilst female participants described negative feelings toward their heightened FOC, they believed it was inevitable, and presented a reluctant acceptance of these experiences. This finding indicates the extent of normalisation of gendered FOC, in which young females believe it is unavoidable.

Methodological Limitations

Due to the small sample size of the current study, it is not possible to generalise the findings to the wider population (Willig, 2013). It is also important to note that whilst all participants in the current study identified as White British, previous research has found that non-white students have greater levels of FOC than their white counterparts (Boateng and Adjekum-Boateng, 2015). Hence, a larger and more varied sample would elucidate whether the above themes were specific to the participants, or whether they can be applied to all young adults. Finally, due to difficulties in recruitment, the study was composed of 60% female and 40% male participants, thus the research may be more representative of female experiences of crime than male experiences. Therefore, it could be argued that more male participants would have resulted in alternative male perspectives being described, and thus the gender differences found are not definitive.

However, Haug (1987) argues that if an experience can be found in an individual, it is subject to universalisation. Whilst it is not possible to determine from a small sample how many people share an experience, the identification of its existence in an individual, or small group, demonstrates that it is possible within society (Willig, 2013). Hence, the implications of these findings are applicable despite the small sample size; if the current public discourse regarding FOC negatively impacts the lives of at least 9 young women, this is sufficient to deem it inappropriate, and it is hence important to consider adapting it to reduce such negative consequences.

Reflexivity

When conducting qualitative research, it is important to reflect on how the researcher has influenced the process and findings; personal 'biases'; should be acknowledged

in order to understand how the researcher may have impacted the study (Willig, 2013).

The researcher in the current study was a 20-year old female, and therefore identified strongly with the female participants. This may have led the researcher to focus more heavily on the experiences of females. However, the researcher endeavoured to reduce this bias through the use of a standardised interview schedule which was consistent across both genders, in order to ensure all participants were encouraged to discuss the same issues. Additionally, whilst the similarities between the researcher and participants may have increased rapport and allowed participants to feel more comfortable in the interviews, due to social desirability, these similarities may have encouraged participants to adapt their answers to impress or please the researcher. However, the researcher endeavoured to avoid leading questions and did not disclose the focus on gender differences until after the interview was complete, to avoid encouraging participants to disclose certain views. Furthermore, whilst every precaution was taken in order to ensure objectivity, the nature of qualitative research and thematic analysis relies heavily on interpretation, and it could thus be argued that the gender and age of the researcher may have impacted the analysis of the data, in terms of which themes were discussed. However, an independent observer agreed that chosen themes existed within the data; interrater reliability was satisfactory at 0.85.

Finally, as a young female who identifies as a feminist, the researcher's interest in the topic of gender differences in FOC was predominantly based on negative feelings toward the prevalence of advice and instructions given to young women. The researcher holds personal beliefs about the inequalities in society and the restrictive nature of crime-avoidance advice, and this may have impacted their interpretations of females' experiences. However, the researcher aimed to avoid leading questions, and repeatedly referred back to the entire data set when conducting thematic analysis, in order to ensure themes were apparent in the data rather than based on pre-existing beliefs.

Conclusion

This study aimed to extend existing literature on gender differences in FOC, by providing a qualitative exploration of how FOC is experienced. Due to gaps in the existing literature, this study focussed specifically on students between the ages of 18 and 24, and aimed to compare experiences of males and females in relation to a variety of crimes. This study met the three aims outlined in the literature review.

The findings of this study indicate a heightened FOC amongst young females, which was experienced as normalised, whilst males experienced FOC as rare and fleeting. Young females therefore experienced a need to act cautious and use avoidance tactics such as contacting others, whilst males displayed a care-free attitude. Furthermore, young females believed their heightened FOC was inevitable, and whilst some believed it was necessary, others felt angry regarding their experiences of FOC. Whilst these findings were often consistent with previous literature, this research provides an original contribution by delving further into how FOC is experienced by both young males and females; through a qualitative methodology it was able to examine how young adults are affected by fear of crime, and how this differs across genders. The concept of normalisation in relation to FOC is previously unexplored, and this study provides an understanding of how young females' heightened fear of crime is accepted as an inevitable feature of their everyday lives; although females' felt negatively toward these experiences, they did not believe they could be changed.

The findings of this study hence imply that the current public discourse and prevalence of advice regarding FOC reflect a gender inequality, which serves to restrict the behaviours of young women. Whilst it is important to inform young people of both genders on how to stay safe, encouraging females to employ avoidance tactics reduces their freedom and lowers their quality of life. It could be argued that if young females were more informed regarding their lower victimisation rates, and were encouraged to feel safe, gender differences in experiences of FOC would diminish. Furthermore, if young females viewed crime in the same way as young males, they would be less inclined to use avoidance tactics, and would hence be less restricted in their everyday lives. These findings therefore imply that a focus on increasing awareness of the genuine likelihood of victimisation would serve to reduce young women's FOC, and its negative impacts on their quality of life.

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