

## Revisiting Fear of Crime in South Africa

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### Abstract

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A large volume of literature exists about the fear of crime and highlights its importance in most areas of the world. This paper differs from standard literature reviews which cover studies generated by national and international crime victim surveys. This paper is based on survey research which generated a national probability sample of 2,400 South African respondents and examines fear of crime in an attempt to identify the factors which predict that phenomenon in South Africa. This study continues a series of papers about crime and victimization in South Africa and attempts to make a contribution to that country's literature on fear of crime, and the national dialog on crime prevention. The study identified four variables that predicted fear of crime, being a crime victim, an urban resident, the perception that the police are corrupt and poverty. The fact that so many respondents had been crime victims within the preceding year was a surprising finding, even for South Africa, with one third of the sample either a property or violent crime victim, and 8 percent of the victims experienced both types of crime. The most important policy issue identified by the study was the repeat or multiple victimization of respondents.

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### Introduction

There is a growing research literature devoted to the fear of crime which signifies its importance in most areas of the world. Literature reviews such as those conducted by Hale (1996), Breetzke, and Pearson (2014), and Farrall et al. (2009) tend to concentrate on national and international crime victim surveys. These surveys show that a wide range of survey populations demonstrate at least some degree of fear of crime. In that context South Africa stands out because, as Baghel (2016) indicated, in South Africa the fear of crime is not just at the level of fear but can better be described as hysteria, paranoia or obsession. This level of fear of crime has had consequences both for policing responses and popular responses (like lynching) to crime.

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This study is a continuation of several earlier papers that focused on South Africa, particularly those about trust of the police (2013), predicting violence (, 2014) and especially fear of crime and victimization of South East Asians residing in South Africa (2015). This paper builds on this final paper, attempting to make a contribution to the South African literature on fear of crime, and also to add to South Africa's national dialog on crime prevention.

### **The Fear of Crime in South Africa**

South Africa is rated the 8<sup>th</sup> highest country in the world in terms of its fear of crime rate. South Africans have a basis for that fear in that violence is the 10<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in South Africa, 14<sup>th</sup> in the world, and 8<sup>th</sup> in terms of the top causes of death in the country. South Africa has had one constant source of data regarding fear of crime, namely the National Victims of Crime Surveys (NVCS), conducted in 1998, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2014 and the latest in 2015/2016. There has been a steady stream of results from these surveys over the years, for instance, Mistry (2003) showed that crime in South Africa had declined from 1998 through October 2003; however, respondents felt less safe. In the 2003 survey, 23 percent felt safe walking alone at night in their area compared to 58 percent in 1998. More than half of South Africans felt that crime had increased in the areas where they live over the past three years. The 2007 NVCS (O'Donovan, 2008) revealed that there was a gap between the levels of crime reflected in official statistics, which had continued to decline, and public perceptions of crime levels which had continued to increase.

The 2010 Victims of Crime Survey (Victims of Crime Survey, 2011) showed that more than 40 percent of households believed the level of both violent and non-violent crime had decreased in their area from 2008 to 2010. Less than 30 percent thought crime had increased. One-third of households (33 percent) indicated they avoided going to open spaces alone because of fear of crime, 22 percent of households would not allow their children to move around unsupervised by an older person or to play freely in their areas, and 15 percent would not permit their children to walk to school alone. Police response time and police visibility were two issues raised in the in the 2010 NVCS and both are relevant here. Respondents in South Africa were asked about the visibility of the police in their area. Although almost 80 percent of surveyed households were satisfied with the police in their area, police presence was an issue, with quotes like "they do not come in our area" or "they are lazy" were common. When respondents were asked about traveling time to the nearest police station, 66 percent indicated it would take 30 minutes or less. This is important because police response time has been a continuing complaint in the NVCS since they began.

The 2014 Crime Victim survey showed that respondent perceptions about crime and safety of households in South Africa differed according to several factors, and were affected in different ways; meaning their perceptions about crime are not the same. Most of the households thought that the levels for both violent and non-violent crimes had increased in their areas of residence during the period of 2011 to 2014, while 28 percent thought that crime was still the same.

The latest report, 2015/2016, showed that during the last five years South African households experienced a sharp decline of home robberies and housebreakings from 931 000 (7 %) in 2010 to (807 000) 6 % in 2015/16. The percentage of households experiencing other crimes remained constant or declined marginally over the same period. Theft of personal property also saw a steady decline from 889 000 (3 %) in 2011 to 712 000 (2%) in 2015/16. Despite the good news about achievements over the last five years, South Africans felt that violent and property crime was increasing to the extent that the majority of households do not feel safe to walk alone in parks or allow their children to play freely in their neighborhoods.

When asked about their opinions on crime, households thought that housebreaking/burglary and home robbery were the most common and most feared types of crime. This is in agreement with the actual count of household experience of crime, where housebreaking/burglary and home robbery also emerged as the most prevalent household crimes. Actually, the prevalence of housebreaking/burglary essentially remained unchanged at about 5% between 2010 and 2015/16, representing about 647 000 cases in 2015/2016. About 712 000 (2%) individuals experienced theft of their personal property, while 254 000 (about 1%) experienced assault in 2015/16. Crime reporting rates varied a lot depending on the type of crime from 95% in the case of murder to 17 % in the case of crop theft. The majority of households said they did not report crime incidents to the police because they believed the police could not or would not do anything.

The survey showed declining trends in the households' levels of satisfaction with the police and the courts between 2010 and 2015/16. In 2011, an estimated 64 % of households were satisfied with the police in their area, while about 59% were satisfied with the police in 2015/16. The decline in satisfaction with the police was most severe in the Western Cape from 71 % in 2011 to 57% in 2015/16. Those who were satisfied with the courts thought that courts passed appropriate sentences, while those who were satisfied with the police were of the opinion that the police were gender and disability sensitive and tolerant.

The survey also provides evidence of decline in police visibility during the last five years. From 2011 to 2015/16, a noticeable decline was observed in the percentage of households who felt safe walking alone both during the day or when it was dark while throughout the period the majority felt safer walking during the day than in darkness. Slightly more than a third of households felt safe walking alone in their area. As a result of fear of crime, households in South Africa take measures to protect themselves and their property.

More than half of the households took physical protection measures for their homes and slightly more than a third of vehicle owners took protection measures for their vehicles. When asked about what they perceived to be the motive for perpetrators for committing property crimes, more than three-quarters of households in South Africa thought that property crimes were committed because of drug-related motives. The perception that drugs were a reason behind the high prevalence of violent and property crime featured predominantly in Eastern Cape (90 %), Western Cape (85 %) and Gauteng (81 %).

### **Earlier Research in South Africa**

Trust of the police in South Africa had been the topic of an earlier paper (, 2013).. The findings from that paper revealed four significant predictors of mistrust of the police. In order of their magnitude they were interpersonal trust, perception of corruption, race and the poverty. Based on the literature review there were some surprising findings, including the fact that fear of crime and victimization and police visibility were not found to be significant predictors of trust of the police, nor were demographic measures like education, gender or age. The next study ( , 2014) was designed to identify the factors that predict violence in South Africa . The overall objective was to interpret the implication of the identified factors for violence prevention programs; this research was grounded in the built environment literature. Six factors that predicted physical violence in South Africa were identified. These were being a victim of property crime, poverty, gender, age, fear of crime in the home and the respondents' faith. The most surprising findings were related to re-victimization, with about 60% of victims of violence were also victims of property crimes. Fear of crime was another predictor of violence victimization, yet that appeared to be a logical response, given the fact that respondents identified as crime victims were likely to have been victimized multiple times. This helped explain fear of crime in those who had been victimized but this finding could not be generalized to non-victim respondents.

The final paper (Fry, 2015) looked at the fear of crime and victimization for a small proportion of the South African population, South East Asians who account for 2.5 percent of the South African population.

Based on an earlier Afrobarometer survey, Round 5, the research identified 102 person who were classified as South East Asians. Their responses to the rest of the South African sample were compared and what separated South East Asians from other South Africans was their belief that their ethnic group was treated unfairly by the government. This included the lack police stations in their areas, age, poverty, their trust of neighbors and their fear of being a victim of a violent crime. The purpose of this paper is to expand the scope of that earlier study to all of South Africa, based on a national probability sample.

### **The Need for the Present Study: A Third Way**

Besides the above need for further research, there are limitations to both crime victimization surveys and police reports, and this paper will present a third way, the Afrobarometer surveys. Victimization surveys are likely to produce higher crime estimates than police-recorded administrative data, due to the fact that many crimes are not reported to the police. Victim surveys also deal with incidents which may not necessarily match the legal definition of crime. Although data from crime victim surveys are likely to elicit better disclosure of criminal incidents than data from police records, they can also be subject to undercounting, as some victims may be reluctant to disclose information, particularly for incidents of a sensitive nature. like sexual abuse; they also may be reluctant to admit not reporting crimes to the police.

The most basic difference between victimization surveys and police records of crime measurement is the method of data collection. Police-reported statistics obtain data from police administrative records. In contrast, victim surveys collect both household and personal information about their victimization experiences through face-to-face interviews. The survey covers victims' experiences of crime, including the impact of crime on victims. One factor that affects the accuracy of statistics is influenced by the ability of people to recall past victimizations.

Police-reported statistics normally collate information on all incidents reported to a variety of police stations. Victim surveys ask a sample of the population about their experiences and, if well designed, this sample should be representative of the population as a whole. As will be explained below, Afrobarometer surveys follow the same path as victim surveys, but include a range of questions that are not available in either police reports or victim surveys. In terms of the police, these include trust in the police, the visibility of the police, whether a police station is in the area, payment of bribes to the police, whether crimes were reported to the police, and if not, why not? More than that, the Afrobarometer files allow for the use of multivariate statistical techniques which provide the means to identify the factors that predict the dependent variable, in this study trust of the police.

## **The Study**

### **Data Source**

Afrobarometer is a collaborative research effort produced by social scientists from 20 African countries. The Project's objectives are as follows; 1) to produce scientifically reliable data on public opinion in sub-Saharan Africa; 2) to strengthen institutional capacity to conduct survey research in Africa; and 3) to broadly disseminate and apply survey results. Begun in 1999, six rounds of the survey have been completed; South Africa has been included in all of these rounds, and Round 6 data provides the basis for this paper

### **The Survey**

Interviews were completed with 2,400 citizens of South Africa, 18 years of age or older. These are face-to-face interviews and were conducted in five different languages. The sampling frame included all nine South African provinces, and the final sample supports estimates to the national population of all adults in South Africa that is accurate to within a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points at a confidence level of 95percent.

### **The measures**

#### **The Dependent Variable:**

The study's dependent variable was created by combining two standard fear of crime indicators: Over the last year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family felt unsafe walking in your neighborhood and over the past year, how often, if ever have you or anyone in your family feared crime in your home? Fixed responses for both items were 0=never; 1=just once or twice; 2= several times; 3=many times; 4=always. The summed index created from these two measures was recoded into never = 1, once, twice and several =2 and many/always=3. This measure provides the basis for the study's ordered logistical regression.

### **Independent Variables**

The study's crime victim indicator is also a combined measure based on two standard victimization questions. The first was "during the last year have you or anyone in your family had anything stolen from your house?" The second was "during the last year have you or anyone in your family been physically attacked?" Fixed responses were provided for both questions, no, once, twice three or more times.

Also included in the questionnaire was a poverty index, which has been extensively used in the Afrobarometer studies, which was adopted from Mattes et al. (2003). The question which generated poverty related responses was “over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without the following: enough food to eat, enough clean water for home use, without medical care, enough fuel to cook your food and a cash income.” The reliability coefficient for this index in this was study was .76 (Chonback’s alpha).

A series of other independent variables were generated by single items. These included the standard demographic measures like age, gender, race, education, religion, residence (rural-urban) and employment status. Answers for some other questions were recorded by the interviewer, and then verified by the field supervisor ,items like whether the police were visible in the survey area, and whether there was a police station in the area. Others were generated by respondent’s perceptions of the police, namely did the respondent trust them and whether they were corrupt.

### Sample Characteristics

The first task in the analysis was to determine the characteristics of the respondents who completed the Afrobarometer survey. The breakdown of the study’s sample appears in Table 1

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the South African Sample (N=2,400)**

Variable	N (%)
<b>Age</b>	
18 through 29	848 (36)
30 thru 49	798 (34)
50 and over	736 (31)
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	1 184(50).
Female	1 206(50)
<b>Race</b>	
Black/African	1 665(74)
White/European	289 (12)
Coloured/other	332 (15.)
<b>Education</b>	
None/informal/only	69 (3)

primary school completed	289 (12)
Some secondary/high school	1,399(59)
Post secondary	632 (27)
<b>Religion</b>	
Christian	1,968 (84)
Muslim	64 (3)
Other	149 (6)
None	172 (7)
<b>Residence</b>	
Urban	1,627(68)
Rural	763 (32)
<b>Employment</b>	
Unemployed	1 274(53)
Employed part-time	289(12)
Employed full-time	823 (35)

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Table 1 reveals that about 70 percent of the sample was less than 50 years of age; more than one-third are more than 30 years of age, 36 percent. The gender breakdown is fifty-fifty. Almost three-fourths, 74 percent of the sample, were Black Africans, 12 percent were

White Europeans, and 15 percent were others, primarily Southeast Asians. There was a range of educational levels in the sample, with those who attended or completed high school the largest group, 59 percent. Only 3 percent of the sample had no formal education, while 27 percent had acquired some level of post-secondary education. The majority of the respondents were Christians, 84 percent, and 68 percent were urban as opposed to rural residents. Over half of the sample, 53 percent, were unemployed and 35 percent had full-time jobs.

## The Results

The second task in the analysis was to look at responses provided regarding levels of fear of crime, and to examine the breakdowns of some of the important independent variables included in the study. These results are revealed in Table 2.

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**Table 2. Fear of crime indicator responses and breakdown of selected independent variables.**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N (%)</b>
<b>Fear of crime</b>	
Never	850 (36)
Once, twice/ several times	942 (39)
Many/always	595 (25)
<b>Victim of property crime</b>	
Yes	672 (28)
No	1,717 (72)
<b>Violent crime victim</b>	
<b>Yes</b>	299 (13)
No	2,090(87)
<b>Victim of property or violent crime</b>	
Neither	1,610 (67)
One	587 (25)
Both	192 (8)
<b>Trust Police</b>	
Not at all	681 (29)
Some	1,307 (55)
A lot	385 (16)
<b>Police Corrupt</b>	
None of them	91 (4)
Some of them	1,115(47)
Most/all of them	1,164(49)
<b>Police Visible</b>	
Yes	1,105 (46)
No	1,281(54)
<b>Police Station</b>	
Yes	609 (26)
No	1,777 (74)

Table 2. shows that 64 percent of these South African respondents indicated they or someone in their family felt some degree of fear of crime. One fourth, 25 percent, indicated they reported fear many times or always. Twenty eight percent of them reported being a property crime victim and 13 percent reported being violent crime victims. The combined victimization index revealed that two thirds of the sample, 67 percent, indicated that they were not crime victims. One fourth, 25 percent reported being the victim of one type of crime and 8 percent revealed that they had been the victim of both types of crime, property and violent, within the last year. In terms of trusting the police, 29 percent indicated they did not trust the police at all, 55 percent revealed they had some trust, and 16 percent indicated they trusted police a lot. When it came to corruption, 96 percent of these respondents indicated they perceived the police to be corrupt, with about half, 49 percent, suggesting that most or all of the police were corrupt. The police were visible in about half of the respondent's residential areas, 46 percent, and there was no police station in about three fourths of the respondents areas, 74 percent.

The fear of crime measure shown in Table 2. is the study's dependent variable and Table 3. Cross-tabulates that measure by the study's demographic variables.

**Table 3. Cross-tabs of study Demographic Variables by level of Fear of Crime (N=2,400). Fear of Crime**

Variable	None N (%)	Some N (%)	A lot N (%)	P.
<b>Age</b>				
18-29	283 (33)	379 (45)	185 (22)	.00
30-49	293 (37)	292 (36)	211 (27)	
50 and over	270 (37)	268 (37)	198 (27)	
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	437 (37)	463 (39)	282 (24)	.31
Female	413 (34)	479 (40)	313 (26)	
<b>Race</b>				
Black African	616 (37)	663 (40)	383 (23)	.08
Coloured/mixed race	77 (31)	99 (39)	75 (30)	
Other	119 (36)	1233 (37)	90 (27)	
<b>Education</b>				
None	25 (36)	27 (39)	17 (25)	.24
Primary	122 (42)	99 (34)	68 (24)	
High School	491 (35)	550 (39)	355 (25)	

Post-secondary	211 (33)	266 (42)	155 (25)	
<b>Religion</b>				
None	87 (51)	45 (26)	39 (23)	.00
Christian	679 (35)	808 (41)	479 (24)	
Muslim	18 (28)	20 (31)	26 (41)	
All others	46 (31)	58 (39)	45 (30)	
<b>Residence</b>				
Urban	499 (31)	673 (41)	454 (28)	.00
Rural	351 (46)	269 (35)	141 (20)	
<b>Work Status</b>				
Unemployed	474 (37)	494 (39)	305 (24)	.15
Work part time	87 (30)	129 (45)	73 (25)	
Work full time	287 (35)	318 (39)	216 (26)	

Table 3 shows that three of the variables included in the table reach statistical significance. These were age, religion and residence; race fell short at  $P=.08$ . Older respondents were more likely to experience higher levels of fear of crime, as were muslims. Urban residents reported higher levels of fear than their rural counterparts. As for race, mixed race persons reported the highest levels of fear of crime and gender; education and work status did not approach statistical significance in Table 3.

The next task in the analysis was to crosstab the fear of crime measure by the police related measures. These results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Cross-tabs Victimization and Police Measures by level of Fear of Crime (N=2,400).**

<b>Fear of Crime</b>				
<b>Variable</b>	<b>None N (%)</b>	<b>Some N (%)</b>	<b>A lot N (%)</b>	<b>P.</b>
<b>Property Crime victim</b>				
No	752 (44)	636 (37)	327 (19)	.00
Yes	97 (15)	306 (46)	268 (40)	
<b>Violent Crime Victim</b>				
No	811 (39)	808 (39)	468 (22)	.00
Yes	38 (13)	134 (45)	127 (43)	
<b>Crime Victim, property or Violent Crime</b>				
Neither	728 (45)	587 (37)	293 (18)	.00
One type	107 (18)	270 (46)	209 (36)	
Both	14 (8)	85 (44)	93 (48)	
<b>Trust the Police</b>				
Not at all	233 (34)	259 (38)	188 (23)	.11

Some	457 (35)	536 (41)	313 (24)	
A lot	154 (40)	141 (37)	89 (23)	
<b>Police corrupt</b>				
None of them	46 (51)	27 (30)	18 (20)	.00
Some of them	457 (41)	443 (40)	214 (19)	
Most/all of them	339 (29)	464 (40)	214 (19)	
<b>Police Visible</b>				
No	480 (38)	497 (39)	303 (24)	.09
Yes	369 (33)	443 (40)	291 (26)	
<b>Police Station</b>				
No	634 (36)	700 (40)	441 (25)	.97
Yes	214 (35)	242 (40)	152 (25)	

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Table 4 displays the property and violent crime measures which were combined to create the crime victim measure. These measures were displayed in order to reveal the extent of respondent victimization for each type of crime. Both of these measures were statistically significant, as were the combined victim measure and police corruption indicator. The final task in the analysis was to conduct an ordered logistical regression with the independent variables included in Tables 3 and 4. The results from that procedure appear in table

**Table 5. Logistic regression with Management of the Economy as the Dependent Variable**

Variable	Coefficient	Standard deviation	Z score	P.
Crime victim	.88	.07	12.83	.000
Urban-rural	- .67	-.10	-6.41	.000
Police corrupt	.41	.08	5.32	.000
Lived poverty	.05	.01	4.00	.000
Gender	.16	.08	1.90	.06
Religion	.12	.08	1.44	.15
Age	.06	.05	1.16	.24
Race	-.06	.06	-0.99	.32
Trust the police	.06	.07	.86	.39
Education	- .05	.09	-.55	.58
Police visible	-.04	.09	-.42	.67
Employment status	.02	.05	.39	.70
Police station	-.02	.10	-.20	.84

Number of observations = 2,151

Chi square = 294.66

Probability = .000

Pseudo  $R^2$  = .06

Table 5 shows that four variables were significant in the ordered logistical regression. In descending order of their magnitude these were being a crime victim, the rural-urban dimension perception that the police are corrupt, and the Lived poverty Index. Gender just fell short at  $P=.06$ .

## Discussion

After looking at the results of this study the temptation was to change the title of the paper to "you are not paranoid, they are after you." The extent of victimization experienced by this South African sample is amazing. Remember, that the time frame for the property and violent crime measures was one year, the previous year. It appears incredible that so many respondents had been victimized within a one year period and that alone appears provide to be a solid reason that crime victimization should be the most powerful predictor of fear of crime. Having said that, there were no major surprises forthcoming from this study. The usual suspects appeared in the analysis. Simply, the findings presented here are consistent with literature and the author's previous research.

To begin, crime has been identified as an urban phenomenon in South Africa (Breetzke, and Pearson (2014) and it is clear that poverty has a role in crime in South Africa (Seedat, et al,2009). Some earlier research also pointed to some important issues that needed to be considered. One was that it is also reasonable to think the police are corrupt. In the South African Round 5 survey, victims were asked if they reported the crime to the police. Of those who reported being victimized over 60 percent indicated they had reported the crime to the police. When asked what the main reason was that crimes were not reported to the police, respondents indicated that the police do not listen or care. Others said the police would not have been able to do something, that the police would have wanted bribes and even that the police may have been involved in the crime. Two scenarios identified in earlier research are pertinent here. Police routinely put up road blocks and demand payment from motorists in order to let them pass. The other situation is that identifying the victim or the perpetrator of a crime in some instances is murky.

When investigating personal disputes, especially those that involve violence, the victim may be the person who is willing to pay the police the largest bribe; that person may become the victim the other may become the perpetrator

One issue that has plagued this series of research papers is the revictimization issue; this question speaks to a weakness in the questionnaire. Because of the way the victim questions were asked, with a one year time frame, it is not possible to identify the time frame for the actual victimizations. Did they happen at the same time or were they separate events? This raises the correlation does not necessarily imply causation issue. The reason this is important is because of need to interpret the policy issues inherent in the findings that are generated by research using these measures. What past papers have done has been to advocate for a CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) approach. (Rapoport. 1982).

In this approach, officers would investigate the crime, and to the extent possible harden the target, install locks, clear bushes from the windows so that the exterior of the dwelling can be observed and assisting local citizens to form crime watch groups. As Sibusiso.(2016) has suggested crime prevention is better than trying to cure it.

## Conclusion

This paper has examined fear of crime in South Africa and the conclusion was that citizens of South Africa should be afraid of crime. Sixty four percent of these respondents revealed some level of fear of crime and 33 percent had actually been crime victims in the preceding year. Being the victim of a crime was the primary predictor of fear of crime, followed by the rural-urban dimension, the perception that the police are corrupt, and finally poverty. These findings are consistent with the literature on crime and fear of crime in South Africa. A critical issue is revictimization and the identified need for future research is to specify when victimization actually occurred, the date..

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