



Fear of crime among university students: A research in Namik Kemal University

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ABSTRACT

As independent from crime, fear of crime has become a major social and political problem. In this respect, fear of crime has been one of the crucial research topics both in academic researches and political initiatives since the 1960s. Since female university students are at an increased risk of sexual victimization, many studies on fear of crime were carried out with a sample of university students. The prevalence rates of female-college aged victimization are four times higher than other age groups of female. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to address fear of crime among university students and students' fear of crime were examined in terms of gender and past victimization exposure variables. The study was carried out at Namik Kemal University in Tekirdag province. Face-to-face survey with students randomly and equally chosen from seven universities, three institutions and five vocational schools in the centre campus was conducted. The survey data was analyzed through SPSS program. Categorical variables were coded as frequency and percentage. The Chi square (χ^2) statistic was used for testing the relationships between categorical variables. The level of significance was taken as $p < 0.05$.

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INTRODUCTION

The fear of crime is independent from crime even though they are closely related concepts (Dolu et al., 2009) and many researches assert that the fear of crime has become a major social and political problem, perhaps bigger than crime itself (Liska et al., 1982; Gilchrist et al., 1998). Sacco (1993) defined fear of crime as a form of psychological distress reducing the quality of life, restricting access to social and cultural activities, impairing social interaction within community. With devastating impact on life quality of an individual, fear of crime, as a social problem, can have many adverse effects on individual, society, economy and social cohesion. Negative impacts on individuals such as withdrawing, being introverted and social alienation are observed (Dolu et al., 2009). It also has negative

influences on individuals such as anxiety, stress, insecurity, incompatibility, alienation and even psychological disorders (Stafford et al., 2007). Damaging social peace and shared sense of trust within community, the fear of crime reduces human inter-relationships, weakens and may sever ties (Dolu et al., 2009).

Fear of crime can be defined as "an emotional response of dread or anxiety to crime or symbols that a person associates with crime" (Ferraro, 1995), or "a sense of security and/or feelings of vulnerability (Ward et al., 1990).

There are four main theoretical perspectives on fear of crime: the victimization and vulnerability perspectives at the individual level, and the social control and social problem perspectives at the social level (Boers, 2003). The victimization perspective suggests that personal as well as vicarious experiences with crime influence fear (Fattah, 1993; Winkel, 1998). According to vulnerability perspective, physically weaker groups of people such as

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women, the elderly and children experience fear of crime more intensely than the young ones and men (Stanko, 1992; Chadee and Ditton, 2003; Sutton and Farral, 2005). According to social control perspective, individuals perceive certain characteristics in the immediate environment as signs of social disorganization and instability indicating that there is something wrong with the neighbourhood and that the community's capacity to regulate people's behavior is impaired (Boers, 2003). The social problem perspective argues that the presentation of abundance of crime news and versus stories with the advanced communication can lead to an increased level of fear by the individuals (Heath, 1984; Eschholz, 2002).

Fear of crime victimization is a result of many factors including age, gender, race, income, neighborhood variables, time of day and prior victimization and so on (Chockalingam and Srinivasan, 2009; Lee and Hilinski-Rosick, 2012). Gender is the most significant indicator of the fear of crime (Ferraro, 1995; Reid and Konrad, 2004) and has a more powerful effect on the contrary to other variables such as age and socio-economic status (Ferraro, 1996). Women consistently report, on average, fear of crime that is two to three times higher than males (Reid and Konrad, 2004). However, numerous studies have shown a negative correlation between the fear of crime and crime victimization and women are less likely to be victim of crime in comparison to men and elderly people are less likely to be victim of crime than young people (Hale, 1993; Gilchrist et al., 1998). Due to their fears and safety anxiety, women and elderly take more precautionary behaviors and spend more time in safer places rather than public spaces and in return, they have less chance of being victimized (Brillon, 1987; Fattah, 1993; Gilchrist et al., 1998).

Types of crimes that women are more likely to be victimized in comparison to men are rape and sexual assault (Reid and Konrad, 2004; Hilinski et al., 2011). Female victims are more than ten times likely than males to experience rape and sexual abuse (Ferraro, 1995, 1996). Several studies have demonstrated that women are more fearful of crimes such as rape and assault, and correspondingly this elevates their fear of other victimizations as well (Ferraro, 1995, 1996; Fisher and Sloan, 2003). Women are more afraid than men of other crimes (for example, burglary or assault) because these crimes may lead to rape or sexual assault (Ferraro, 1995). In brief, women fear the act of sexual assessment most.

Dark subways, long alleyways, deserted areas, poorly-lit streets, empty parks and dense woodland (Hutchings, 1994), along with silent-isolated streets, subways and park areas (Colquhoun, 2004) are the urban spaces where women feel more afraid of crime. The results also reveal that females feel fear of crime in urban space when they are dressed in mini-skirt and decollete and go

outside alone (Tandogan and İlhan, 2016).

Numerous studies on fear of crime have been conducted especially including college students (Bedenbaugh, 2003; Hilinski, 2008; Chockalingam and Srinivasan, 2009; Fisher and May, 2009; Fox et al., 2009; Hilinski et al., 2011; Shi, 2018; etc.). The most significant cause of it is because the female university students are at higher risk of being raped and assaulted. Thus, females ages 16-19 are most likely to be victims of rape and sexual assault. It is followed by women aged 20-24 years. Such age groups are therefore four times more likely to be the victims of sexual assault or rape than among the general population (Koss et al., 1987).

Previous studies with a sample of university students posit that university students are more likely to become victims due to their lifestyles (going out at night, consuming alcohol, using illegal drugs, frequently partying and etc.) (Schwartz and Pitts, 1995; Fisher et al., 1998; Mustain and Tewksbury, 2002; Lee and Hilinski-Rosick, 2012). On the other hand, female university students are more vulnerable to sexual victimization compared to men (Koss et al., 1987; Fox et al., 2009; Fisher and Smith, 2009). Moreover, certain activities such as hanging out with friends and going out at night and frequent and close interaction among students are often linked with increased stalking victimization risk against female college students (Mustain and Tewksbury, 2002; Fisher et al., 1998). A number of studies also revealed that female students are more fearful of crime; believe they are more likely to be victimized, and more likely to engage in self-protective behaviors than male students (Woolnough, 2009; Pryce et al., 2018).

Therefore, this study attempts to examine the fear of crime among university students. University students' fear of crime was analyzed in terms of gender and past victimization exposure variables. The research was carried out at Namik Kemal University in Tekirdag province. In this respect, a questionnaire survey with Namik Kemal University students studying at centre campus was conducted and survey data was analyzed using SPSS program.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study took place in the Namik Kemal University, located in the neighborhood of Namik Kemal, the district of Süleymaniye, Tekirdag province. The university has seven faculties, three institutes and five vocational schools, with a total enrollment of 22,630 students. The face-to-face questionnaire survey with randomly chosen students was performed in May 2018, 2017-2018 Spring Semester. In this study, it was intended to conduct a questionnaire study with students chosen equally from each seven universities, three institutions and five vocational schools located on the Centre Campus.

Table 1. Past victimization exposure.

	Female		Male		Total		p
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
I had been the victim of a crime in urban area	159	69.7	69	30.3	228	55.2	<0.001
I had not been the victim of a crime in urban area	97	52.4	88	47.6	185	44.8	
Total	256	62	157	38	413	100	

The sample of the questionnaire study was set at 95% confidence level and a minimum of 377 questionnaires was planned to be administrated and a questionnaire study with 413 students was carried out.

Since the majority of the students in the Namik Kemal University live in the neighborhood of Degirmenalti and there are lots of cafes, restaurants, stationary shops in the neighborhood, the face-to-face survey was conducted in Degirmenalti.

The data collected through the survey questionnaire was transformed into SPSS statistical package program and analyzed through using this program. Categorical variables were coded as frequency and percentage. The Chi square (χ^2) statistic was used for testing the relationships between categorical variables. The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$ for statistical analysis.

Specifically, following hypotheses were tested in the study:

H₁: There is a relationship between the gender and crime victimization exposure in the urban environment.

H₂: There is a relationship between the gender and past victimization in the urban environment.

H₃: There is a relationship between the gender and the spaces that evoke more fear of crime in the urban environment.

H₄: There is a relationship between gender and fear of crime (during daytime and after dark).

H₅: There is a relationship between past victimization and fear of crime (during daytime and after dark).

The survey questions were prepared basing on the previous studies in the field. The first two questions refer to demographic factors, namely, age and gender. Other survey questions are as follow: "Have you ever been victimized?", "If so, what type/types of crime victimization did you experience?", "Under what circumstances or in which places in urban space do you often feel fear of crime?", "Do you often feel safe walking by yourself in public spaces of Degirmenalti neighborhood in the daylight", "Do you often feel safe walking by yourself in public spaces of Degirmenalti neighborhood after dark?". All questions except than the last two questions were structured as multiple-choice questions and the participants were asked to answer these questions. Two independent variables, namely, gender and the question

concerning whether being victimized in urban space before, were determined and the hypotheses of the study were tested.

RESULTS

79(19,1%) respondents are in the 17-19 year age, 236(57,1%) respondents are in the 20-22 year range, 87(21,1%) respondents are in the 23-25 age range and 11 respondents (2,7%) are in the 26-28 age range. 256(62%) of the participants are female and 157(38%) of them are male.

228 respondents (55, 2%) reported that they had been the victim of a crime in urban area. The number of female respondents is 159(69, 7%) and 97 of the respondents (30, 3%) are male. According the students' responses in the survey, it is found that there is a relationship between gender and crime victimization exposure in the urban environment ($p < 0.001$). Therefore, H₁ hypothesis were confirmed. As tabulated in Table 1, the likelihood of females being a victim of crime in urban space is more than double the likelihood of males. This result is inconsistent with the previous finding (Reid and Konrad, 2004) in the literature arguing that compared to females, males tend to be exposed to higher rates of violence. According to the result of the current study, females are more likely to report being victimized than males (Table 1).

Considering the relationship between gender and types of crime victimization in urban spaces, significant differences ($p < 0.001$) were found between gender and the following items: "My house was broken into", "I was exposed to verbal abuse by a stranger", "I was exposed to physical abuse by a stranger", "I was followed in the street", "I was exposed to disturbing attention of a stranger" and "I was harassed on social media" and no significant difference ($p > 0.05$) was detected between gender and "I was exposed to theft from the person in urban space" and "I had a sexual abuse/rape attempt". Accordingly, H₂ hypothesis were confirmed for the following items "My house was broken into", "I was exposed to verbal abuse by a stranger", "I was exposed to physical abuse by a stranger", "I was followed in the street", "I was exposed to disturbing attention of a stranger", whereas H₂ hypothesis were not confirmed for

Table 2. Respondents by types of past victimization.

	Female		Male		Total		p
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
My house was broken into	32	44.4	40	55.6	72	17.4	<0.001
I was exposed to theft from the person in urban space	7	50	7	50	14	3.4	>0.05
I was exposed to verbal abuse by a stranger	93	87.7	13	12.3	106	25.7	<0.001
I was exposed to physical abuse by a stranger	26	92.9	2	7.1	28	6.8	<0.001
I had a sexual abuse/rape attempt	10	90.9	1	9.1	11	2.7	>0.05
I was exposed to obscene/frightening telephone conversations	30	75	10	25	40	9.7	>0.05
I was followed in the street	81	84.4	15	15.6	96	23.2	<0.001
I was exposed to disturbing attention of a stranger	93	83	19	17	112	27.1	<0.001
I was harassed on social media	107	87	16	13	123	29.8	<0.001
Other	3	33.3	6	66.7	9	2.2	>0.05

the following items “I was exposed to theft from the person in urban space” and “I had a sexual abuse/rape attempt”.

Given the data stated in Table 2, overwhelmingly, those who report that their house was broken into are males. Yet, the higher percentage of the participants who report that they exposed to verbal abuse and physical abuse by a stranger, followed in the street, exposed to disturbing attention of a stranger” and harassed on social media” are female. When the previous question was evaluated, it was understood that females are more exposed to crime in urban environment than males. As for the types of crime victimization, it is seen that the majority of the crimes involves sexual victimization such as verbal abuse and physical abuse. This finding is consistent with the result suggesting that females are more likely to be exposed to sexual assault such as rape and abuse (Reid and Konrad, 2004; Hilinski et al., 2011; Ferraro, 1995, 1996).

After further analysis of the relationship between gender and the spaces that evoke more fear of crime in the urban environment, significant differences ($p < 0.01$) were found between gender and the following items “While walking alone in deserted street and roads in the daytime” and “In overcrowded places during morning rush hours” and there is a significant relationship between gender and following items “While walking alone in deserted/quiet street and roads during late night hours, “In abandoned/ruined/poor buildings in urban space”, “In poorly-lit streets and places after dark”, “In places where no mixed used are available after dark”, “In dark subways”, “In empty parks and densely wooded areas”, “While I use subway station or public transit during late night hours”, “When dressed in mini-skirt and decollete” ($p < 0.001$). On the other hand, no significant difference ($p > 0.05$) were found between gender and the following items: “In graffiti walls in urban space”, “In vandalized areas” and “Other”.

Accordingly, H_3 hypothesis were not confirmed for the following titles “In graffiti walls in urban space” and “In vandalized areas”, whereas it was confirmed for the other titles mentioned previously (Table 3).

However, although no significant difference was found between gender and following urban spaces “In graffiti walls in urban space” and “In vandalized areas” females in these urban spaces also experience more fear of crime than males. This result is also consistent with the literature that poses dark subways, long alleyways, deserted areas, poorly-lit streets, empty parks and dense woodland (Hutchings, 1994), along with silent-isolated streets, subways and park areas (Colquhoun, 2004), are the urban spaces where women feel more fear of crime and in parallel with the finding regarding the following item “when dressed in mini-skirt and decollete” (Tandogan and İlhan, 2016). The results obtained in the present study reveal that women are more fearful of crimes than men.

Considering the relationship between the fear of crime in Degirmenalti neighborhood and gender, it is seen that there is no significant difference between fear of crime in daytime and gender ($p > 0.05$). On the other hand, significant difference exists between fear of crime after-dark and past victimization exposure ($p < 0.001$). We can thus contend that females feel themselves more unsafe and suffer more fear of crime than males after dark. Correspondingly, H_4 hypothesis was rejected in terms of daytime, whereas it was confirmed in terms of after dark (Table 4).

However, although no significant difference is found between daytime crime and fear of crime, females in Degirmenalti neighborhood also experience more fear of crime than males during daytime. This result is also consistent with the vulnerability perspective which put forwards physically weaker groups of people such as women, the elderly and children experience fear of crime more intensely than the young ones and men (Stanko,

Table 3. Fear of crime in urban space.

	Female		Male		Total		p
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
While walking alone in deserted street and roads in the daytime	17	94.4	1	5.6	18	4.4	<0.01
While walking alone in deserted/quiet street and roads during late night hours	197	85.3	34	14.7	231	55.9	<0.001
In overcrowded places during morning rush hours	23	85.2	4	14.8	27	6.5	<0.01
In abandoned/ruined/poor buildings in urban space	133	72.3	51	27.7	184	44.6	<0.001
In graffiti walls in urban space	22	73.3	8	26.7	30	7.3	>0.05
In vandalized areas	35	57.4	26	42.6	61	14.8	>0.05
In poorly-lit streets and places after dark	137	78.3	38	21.7	175	42.4	<0.001
In places where no mixed used* developments are available after dark	55	80.9	13	19.1	68	16.5	<0.001
In dark subways	163	74.1	57	25.9	220	53.3	<0.001
In empty parks and densely wooded areas	97	75.8	31	24.2	128	31	<0.001
While I use subway station or public transit during late night hours	85	88.5	11	11.5	96	23.2	<0.001
When dressed in mini-skirt and decollete	89	100	0	0	89	21.5	<0.001
Other	3	30	7	70	0	2.4	>0.05

*Mixed-use development is a type of urban development that combines commercial, cultural or entertainment uses rather than residential function.

Table 4. Fear of crime by gender (Daytime-after dark).

		Female		Male		Total		p
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Daytime	I feel safe	205	60.5	134	39.5	339	82.1	>0.05
	I feel unsafe	51	68.9	23	31.1	74	17.9	
	Total	256	62	157	38	413	100	
After-dark	I feel safe	112	45.5	134	54.5	246	59.6	<0.001
	I feel unsafe	144	86.2	23	13.8	167	40.4	
	Total	256	62	157	38	413	100	

1992; Chadee and Ditton, 2003; Sutton and Farral, 2005). According to the results of the present study, females feel more fear of crime than males.

After taking into account the relationship between the fear of crime in Degirmenalti neighborhood and past victimization exposure, no significant difference was found between fear of crime during daytime and past victimization exposure ($p>0.05$). On the other hand, significant difference was detected between fear of crime after dark and past victimization exposure ($p<0.001$). Compared to those with no history of victimization before, those who have experienced victimization feel themselves more unsafe and are more afraid of crime. Correspondingly, H_5 hypothesis was rejected in terms of daytime, whereas it was confirmed in terms of after-dark.

The data shown in Table 5 indicate that even if there is no statistically significant difference between past

victimization exposure in Degirmenalti Neighborhood during the daytime and fear of crime, those who have experienced prior victimization are expected to perceive higher fear compared to those who have not been crime victims. We can thus contend that people who had been the victim of a crime express more fear of crime in urban environment. This finding is consistent with victimization perspective which postulates that individuals with past victimization generate more fear of crime and think they will expose to crime again (Table 5).

Conclusion

The present study has posed similar results with the previous researches on fear of crime. In this respect, gender and the past victimization exposure have a

Table 5. Past victimization exposure and fear of crime in the neighborhood of Degirmenalti.

		Have you ever been victimized?						p
		Yes		No		Total		
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Daytime	I feel safe	192	56.6	147	43.4	339	82.1	>0.05
	I feel unsafe	36	48.6	38	51.4	74	17.9	
	Total	228	55.2	185	44.8	413	100	
After-dark	I feel safe	118	48	128	52	246	59.6	<0.001
	I feel unsafe	110	65.9	57	34.1	167	40.4	
	Total	228	55.2	185	44.8	413	100	

significant effect over the fear of crime. This finding is consistent with the following suggestion "Fear of crime victimization is a result of many factors including age, gender, race, income, neighborhood variables and prior victimization and so on" (Chockalingam and Srinivasan, 2009). We can thus argue that females are more fearful of crime than males in urban spaces.

The study posits no significant difference between the fear of crime during daytime and past victimization exposure, whereas significant difference was found between the fear of crime after dark and past victimization exposure. Accordingly, female students feel themselves more unsafe after dark in comparison to male students and those who suffered from past victimization feel themselves more unsafe than those who have not experienced any past victimization.

Another finding obtained in the study revealed that the majority of the students had been victimized in urban areas. Student who reported past victimization are mostly female and women are more (more than double) victimized than men in urban spaces. As consistent with the literature, the most common forms of violence against women are sexual violence such as sexual or verbal abuse (Reid and Konrad, 2004; Hilinski et al., 2011; Ferraro, 1995, 1996). This result is also consistent with the finding suggesting that female university students are more vulnerable to sexual victimization compared to men (Koss et al., 1987; Fox et al., 2009; Fisher and Smith, 2009).

Places and cases where university students have greater fear of crime were summarized as follows: While walking alone in deserted street and roads in the daytime, In overcrowded places during morning rush hours, In abandoned/ruined/poor buildings in urban space, In poorly-lit streets and places after dark, In places where no mixed used are available after dark, In dark subways, In empty parks and densely wooded areas, While I use subway station or public transit during late night hours, When dressed in mini-skirt and decollete. Women in these urban spaces are more fearful of crime than men. On the whole, the data obtained is consistent with the urban spaces mentioned in the

literature and the spaces that evoke further fear of crime.

Examining the fear of crime in a sample of students of Namik Kemal University, located in Tekirdag Province of Turkey, the aim of current study was to explore the fear of crime in terms of the gender and past victimization exposure variables, thereby gaining more insight in the fear of crime among university-aged students.

The sample of the questionnaire study was set at 95% confidence level and the study reached large number of questionnaire than planned. However, as highlighted by Chockalingam and Srinivasan (2009), fear of crime victimization is a result of many factors including age, gender, race, income, neighborhood variables and prior victimization and so on. Furthermore, the study was carried out in Turkey, where the society has a strongly patriarchal structure, and as a result the perceived fear of crime is more complex (Ozascilar and Ziyalar, 2017). For this reason, the outcomes of the study should be carefully interpreted with caution given generalizability concerns. Yet, it is believed that the results of the present study can be generalized in Turkey. On the whole, the research findings are compatible with the literature on fear of crime.

As a result, with devastating impact on life quality of an individual, fear of crime, as a social problem, have many adverse effects on individual, society, economy and social cohesion. Therefore, further studies relating to fear of crime, the causes of fear of crime and crime prevention measures should be carried out in the future. In this regard, decision-makers and politicians should assume primary responsibility to take steps to reduce fear of crime.

It is thus hoped that this descriptive study into the fear of crime with a sample of university students would be helpful for providing a general framework for other studies in the field.

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