



Review of international studies on perception of safety and human security

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ABSTRACT

We present a comprehensive review of the evaluation of safety and human security perceptions from various countries. We highlight important aspects used to measure safety and human security perceptions in these international studies and some of their findings. Measuring perceptions of safety and human security in a certain location is crucial as better safety perceptions can enhance the well-being of the people residing in the place of investigation. By presenting the diverse measures of safety and human security perceptions, we hope to elicit more innovative ideas on these measures from policy makers.

Key Words Safety; human security.

INTRODUCTION

Improving the sense of human security from the threat of crime among members of society can have a positive impact on the well-being of the people of a country. It requires coherent policies along with sound and structured actions. Crime reduction, including reducing the fear of crime, should be an important part of a country's goals in maintaining peace and well-being of the people. Reducing crime anxiety and strengthening the sense of human security can help society in a variety of ways. According to Moore (2006), studies in Europe show that the reduction of crime anxiety potentially increases the level of happiness and well-being in society and can lead to improved economic performance. Professor John Helliwell, the so-called happiness expert, indicates that perceptions of trust and safety in a neighbourhood are inversely correlated to the frequency of crime incidents. He states that the general mistrust of humanity's benevolence leads to unhappiness (Helliwell, 2014). Another study by McPhail et al. (2017) found that inaccurate beliefs about crime rates led to an increase in punishment-based crime-reduction strategies. Managing perceptions of safety and human security not only is important to improve the well-being of the community but leads to better crime-reduction strategies.

Forming policy and evaluating its implementation are critical in criminal justice. To address the root causes of crime, accurate data is needed in order to propose effective policies and programs. Policies and programs designed to reduce crime include reducing fear or anxiety of crime (Hale, 1996). It is good government practice to constantly evaluate

and measure the effectiveness of policy implementation and make improvements. This practice includes identifying the factors that influence opinions and perceptions pertaining to the crime situation in the country. It also allows for more effective crime control and preventive actions in line with society's views. The impact or effectiveness of government efforts related to crime prevention and control must be measured based on information and data. One of the ways to do this is to measure citizens' perceptions of safety and human security. Many countries have conducted these studies and highlighted the various ways that safety and human security can be measured.

International Safety Perception Studies

Research on the perception of human security from the threat of crime is closely related to research on perceptions of crime. Historically, the research on crime perceptions has come from studies that aimed to find out the true state of crime. Two well-known surveys are the National Crime Survey in the United States and the British Crime Survey in Britain (Skogan, 1990; Lynn & Elliot, 2000; Tseloni & Tilley, 2016). These surveys were followed in 1987 by the International Crime Victims Survey (van Dijk et al., 2014). Several countries have also implemented crime perception surveys, including New Zealand (Colmar Brunton Social Research Agency, 2016), Australia (Weatherburn & Indermaur, 2004), and Canada (Besserer & Trainor, 2000). However, these surveys are not periodic.

Recently, the UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) underlined the necessity for countries to undertake surveys on crime predation in order to meet the United Nations'

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16th SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) on peace, justice, and institutional resilience (Jandl, n.d.). The UNODC focussed on surveys about crime predation that cover issues related to fear of crime, safety from the threat of crime and high crime rates.

The National Crime Survey, which began in 1973, aimed to measure the actual level of criminal predation against an individual and a household for a number of selected crimes (Skogan, 1990). This survey compared reported and unreported crimes to the police. In 1982, the United Kingdom Home Office initiated the British Crime Survey intended to identify the actual crime situation based on a public survey of criminal predation (Tseloni & Tilley, 2016). The British government claims that police crime statistics do not provide a complete picture of the country's crime situation since many victims of crime do not report the crimes (Tseloni & Tilley, 2016).

The British Crime Survey was subsequently expanded to cover a wide range of questions on crime perceptions (Lynn & Elliot, 2000). Since crime predation was also surveyed, data on the sense of exposure to crime was also collected. Respondents were asked about the likelihood of becoming future crime victims. According to Hough (2017), the British Crime Survey has become the first large-scale survey to measure the level of crime fear in the United Kingdom. The British Crime Survey questionnaire included whether respondents felt safe at night and whether they were concerned about becoming victims of certain crimes. Findings and analysis by the British Crime Survey have led to the realization that anxiety of being a crime victim not only influences perceptions of crime but can also impact well-being. The Survey found that women, the elderly, and non-white ethnic groups showed a relatively significant concern of becoming crime victims. As a result, the British Crime Survey has become a focal point for initiatives to reduce crime-related fear through research-based policies and structured efforts.

Following the studies mentioned above, an increasing number of research studies and surveys have been conducted in order to better understand and quantify the fear of crime, clearly indicating that safety perception studies are becoming increasingly important. Hale (1996), for example, found that addressing the fear of crime is important because this has a large influence on perceptions of the criminal situation. These safety perception studies show that safety perceptions are multidimensional, and the focus of each survey is determined by the issues that are deemed important in that local area. In addition to this, past studies such as McPhail et al. (2017) and Tseloni & Tilley (2016) have shown that there is not necessarily a correlation between actual crime rates and perceptions of safety, but the latter still influences the well-being of a community. This adds another layer of complexity in understanding how safety perception studies could be used to improve the well-being of communities. In the next section, we illustrate that the study of safety perceptions has expanded to include perceptions of well-being.

Widening the Lens on Human Security

Existing studies on crime perceptions that focused on determining the level of fear of crime subsequently incorporated questions concerning the perception of safety from the threat of crime. In addition to analyzing crime predation, the European Survey on Crime and Safety looked at elements of safety (van Dijk et al., 2007). However, statistics

on human security perceptions are not derived from crime fear studies alone. Studies on safety perceptions are closely related to studies on well-being and sustainability of life. Low perception of human security indicates that people's well-being has deteriorated.

There are several international studies and indices that focus on, or are related to, safety and human security. First, the Global Peace Index (GPI), launched in 2009, is a report published by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) that measures the peace position of countries in the world (Global Peace Index, 2021). The index started with 10 indicators and then grew to 23 indicators measuring aspects of public safety in selected countries. Measures include homicide rates, terrorism, violent demonstrations, good relations with neighbouring countries, and internal displacement due to conflict. The Global Peace Index uses data collected by various research bodies on national peace and human security. Homicide rates were obtained from UNODC Surveys on Crime Trends and the operations of Criminal Justice Systems (CTS). The violent crime levels were obtained from The Economist Intelligence Unit and military statistics from the International Institute for Strategic Studies. The studies are crucial in assisting governments in preventing and reducing crime. However, the contribution of these studies is not being fully maximized, as governments are currently more engaged in costly actions that react to crime and violate the rights of victims or disadvantage groups (Waller, 2020).

Second, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Better Life Index, which started in 2011, also touches on human security (OECD, 2020). Human security is one of the 11 dimensions studied, which also include housing, income, health education, and life satisfaction. In this index, the measurement of human security is very limited since it refers to the crime rate related to murder and assault.

Third, the Safe Cities Index by The Economist Intelligence Unit (2015) is one of the most important international studies on human security. This index measures the level of safety in selected capitals of the world. The index consists of 40 indicators subdivided into four categories: digital security, health security, infrastructure security, and personal security. Clearly, safety in this index is seen as a composite of various aspects and not only aspects of human security from the threat of crime.

Fourth, as referred to above, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals set forth in 2015 also focus on aspects of safety, including peace, human rights, and justice. The major issues of human security are related to murder threat, terrorism, human trafficking, sexual crimes, and crimes against children. Thus, human security from the threat of crime here is seen from the point of view of sustainable peace.

The approaches taken in the measurement of safety-related indices above clearly show that the concept of safety used is broad and often combined with other indicators of well-being and human security. These indices are not solely focused on feeling safe from the threat of crime. There are also surveys developed by several countries that measure fear of crime along with perceptions of safety from crime. Some of these are presented below. From this selection of surveys, we highlight that the measurement of the perception of safety and human security is diversified in terms of situational context, such as safety at home and safety using the internet.

Examples of a Community Safety and Well-Being Approach to Measuring Human Security

First, the study conducted by the University of Saskatchewan (Jewell, 2014) is a good example because it incorporates assessments of the sense of human security and perceptions of crime. The survey combines three aspects, namely (i) perception of crime, (ii) sense of security, and (iii) experience of the crime victim. This study addressed the question of whether crime prevention and reduction measures implemented by the police have impacted the perceptions of the population regarding these three aspects of safety and security. According to Jewell, the survey referred to and used questions from previous surveys, including the British Crime Survey 2010 (Office of National Statistics, 2010) and the Public perceptions of safety from crime in the Auckland region report (Community Safety—Auckland Council, 2012). The survey by Jewell did not aim to develop any index on perceptions of human security from the threat of crime. Feeling safe according to this survey includes (i) safety within in the community, (ii) safety within the home, (iii) safety while walking alone in the dark, (iv) overall satisfaction about safety, and (v) the influence of safety perceptions in daily activities.

Second, the report on Public perceptions of safety from crime in the Auckland region in 2012 was more concise than the study by Jewell with a greater focus on safety issues than crime. The purpose of the survey was to assess residents' feelings about the human security situation in Auckland. Local councils in Auckland are focussing their efforts on improving the region's sense of human security, including crime prevention strategies implemented through town and environmental planning. This study focuses on the perception of safety from a series of crimes, including burglary, physical assault, drug- and alcohol-related crime, and gang-related crime. This survey did not develop an index of human security perceptions but rather contained more specific data and findings categorized as (i) common perceptions of crime, (ii) criminal experiences by different people and in different places, (iii) the impact of crime on everyday life, and (iv) common perceptions of safety in locations such as neighbourhoods, local shopping malls, and city centres. A total of 2,211 respondents provided insights on the extent to which they felt safe in various locations in the province. While generally over 80 percent feel safe in the region, women, non-European ethnicities, and those who have been victims of crime reported feeling insecure (Community Safety—Auckland Council, 2012).

Third, the Malaysian government, in collaboration with public institutions of higher education, has conducted studies based on three indices that have been developed, namely the Perception of Crime Index (PCI) in 2015 (PEMANDU, 2015), the Perception of Security Index (PSI) in 2019 (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2019), and the Perception of Safety in 2021 (UPUM, 2021). The PCI focuses on measuring criminal fear and the PSI develops measurements based on the six core aspects of the Public Safety and Order Policy. The Perception of Safety conducted in 2021 examines six aspects of the sense of security from the threat of crime.

CONCLUSION

The perception of safety has become more important in recent years, especially since this perception has an effect

on well-being. Safety perception studies have evolved by incorporating different measurements and areas of study. The studies initially focused on capturing respondents' feelings towards crime and have since expanded to include characteristics of well-being. The multidimensional features of studies on the perception of safety and human security show that the aspects measured may differ based on the needs of the local community and the authority that is conducting the study. In widening the lens of how safety perceptions are measured, aspects of well-being have been incorporated and studies on the perceptions of safety and human security are currently focusing on situational context, such as fear while walking alone or staying at home. Despite this positive development in studies on the perception of safety and human security, discrepancies remain between these studies and actual crime rates. Therefore, authorities such as the police must interpret the studies with care. There are aspects of the safety and perception studies that are beyond the responsibility of local authorities such as the police. Citizens have some responsibility to improve their own well-being. The challenging part of perception studies is to discern the findings that are attributable to the government or the police. Reading the findings of safety and human security perception studies alongside actual crime data may provide authorities with a more holistic view of where they need to focus to improve the perceptions of safety and human security in the local community.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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