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Chapter 1

ON ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

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This chapter examines what people think about crime and what they do in response to it. It is easy to assume there is a simple relationship between the two, and that those perceiving more crime or experiencing more fear are the most likely to respond to the problem. However, research indicates there is not a simple one-to-one relationship between perception and action, even when the fear component of those perceptions is involved.

In an attempt to clarify this apparent paradox, the chapter first examines what people think about crime. Popular perceptions of crime can be classified as “beliefs about crime,” “assessments of risk,” and “fear of victimization.” These perceptual dimensions are related in different ways to people’s experiences and neighborhood conditions. The next section enumerates things individuals can do to protect themselves from victimization and to reduce crime. These include precautions against personal crime, household protection, participation in community organizations, and flight to the suburbs. The last section of this chapter summarizes several theories which link perceptions and behavior. None assume that perceptions alone trigger responses to crime. One sociological theory emphasizes how crime itself may suppress rather than encourage most reactions. Utilitarian theory points to the costs as well as the benefits of responding to crime, and suggests it may be rational to choose to do nothing. Psychologists stress that people’s beliefs about the usefulness of various crime-avoidance strategies—whether or not they seem to work well—must be taken into account as well. Finally, not everyone has the opportunity to act on their desires, and it is sometimes necessary to look at factors outside of the individual which constrain or

encourage various reactions to crime. Each of these theories is consistent in certain ways with the findings of research on the issue. They provide different explanations for the frequent gulf between belief and action, or even intended and actual behavior.

PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME

Opinion surveys constantly ask about the issue of crime. The Harris Poll routinely inquires if the crime rate in your area has been increasing, decreasing, or has it remained the same as it was before?" The Gallup Poll asks if there is any area right around here . . . where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?" The U.S. Census Bureau has questioned people if "crime is more serious than newspapers and TV say?" Americans are also routinely quizzed about their "community's worst problem," and if more money should be spent on crime, or less. Answers to these questions are used to conduct research on public opinion, to evaluate the consequences of crime prevention programs, and—perhaps—to make public policy.

While opinion polls present us with a seeming jumble of data about popular perceptions of crime, those perceptions can be usefully divided into three categories: beliefs about the facts of crime, people's perceptions of how likely they are to fall victim, and indirect but revealing measures of the fear of crime.

Beliefs About Crime

On the basis of direct and indirect experience, people develop images of the world around them. These fact-images—which psychologists would describe as the "cognitive" component of their world view—play an important role in shaping how they react to events and actors. Such beliefs are judgmental as well as "empirical," if only because people's attitudes and values shape how they view their environment, and help them develop beliefs about things with which they have no real experience.

These fact-images can be many and complex. They include ideas about how much crime there is, and whether it is going up or down. Individuals also hold beliefs about the nature of crime (for example, how violent it is) and criminals (why they do it), as well as general judgments about crime, including where it should stand on the public agenda and how much money we should spend to deal with it.

Perhaps the most consistent belief revealed by public opinion polls is that crime is increasing. Polling organizations have been asking about crime since the mid-1960s, and since then close to a majority or more of Americans have reported they think crime rates are on the upswing. In 1967 the Harris Poll found 46% of the population thought crime had increased "in their area." By 1975 that figure hit 75%. Further, asking about specific offenses, Harris found people were most likely to believe it was serious crimes—"robberies and house-breakings"—which were on the rise. This of course matches news accounts of official crime statistics. The FBI's "crime clock" has ticked off an increasing number of "robberies every minute" for the past 20 years.

Research indicates people tend to overestimate the amount of crime around them. When asked about the number of burglaries or robberies which occur, most give figures which are much higher than the actual rate. They also overestimate the amount of violence relative to other kinds of crime. While most people realistically perceive that there is more property crime than personal crime, they grant the former too small a share of the total.

One very important feature of popular beliefs about the distribution of crime is the tendency to see it as a problem which occurs somewhere else, largely involving others. For example, in surveys conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau in the nation's five largest cities, respondents were asked if they thought crime was increasing or decreasing in two different contexts—their neighborhood, and the nation as a whole (Gaquin, 1978). It was revealed that 86% thought crime in the United States was increasing, but only 47% thought crime was on the upswing in their area. Violent crime in particular was seen as increasing elsewhere, while local increases were believed to be more confined to property crime. When asked to compare their neighborhood with others in the same city, only 6.1% thought their community was above average in terms of danger. Across the 26 big cities surveyed by the Census Bureau, the largest proportion who thought their own neighborhood was more dangerous than most was in Newark; there, 11% shared that pessimistic view.

The tendency of individuals to "distance" themselves from crime can be seen more dramatically in their views about the effects of crime. In the Census Bureau's big-city surveys, respondents were asked about "limiting or changing activities because of fear of crime." Fully 87% of those in the largest cities thought "people in general" did this, but the figure for "people in their neighborhood" was 67%. When they were asked about themselves, only 48% indicated they limited their activities because of crime (author's

computations). These perceptions are so widespread that Hindelang et al. (1978) concluded even urban dwellers see crime as a "non-personal, non-local" problem. In their view, people are not incapacitated by concern about nearby crime, and see the problem as a manageable one.

Popular beliefs about the causes of crime are more difficult to summarize. Surveys differ by methodology and over time. When people are asked sequentially about a number of potential causes of crime, they tend to give many of them high ratings; when asked to volunteer causes on their own, many fewer are mentioned. Three factors seem to be prominent when the latter approach is employed: drugs, law enforcement, and the breakdown of families. In more recent surveys, drug use is a frequently volunteered cause of crime or delinquency. There has also been a mild increase in the tendency of people to point a finger at the courts, a lack of severity in penalties, and the leniency in laws. In earlier surveys, neglect and the inability of families to exert control over children were frequently mentioned, but that perceived source of delinquency has declined somewhat in popularity.

At a general level people's judgments about what society should do about crime show more consistency. Surveys indicate crime is a local rather than national problem. The Gallup Poll frequently asks, "What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?" Through the 1970s between 2 and 3% of the population put crime at the head of the list. It was bested by the cost of living, energy, unemployment, international affairs, and several other issues (Gallup Organization). On the other hand, many more people put crime near the top of their local community's problems, accurately reflecting the balance of local and federal contributions to law enforcement.

Whatever can be done, there is immense public support for government activity against crime. Since 1971, the Gallup Organization and the National Opinion Research Center (1980) have monitored people's opinions about government spending in ten major areas, including cities, education, health, defense, space, foreign aid, and crime. They have been asked if "too much" or "too little" has been spent on those, or if spending has been "just about right." Over that decade, crime has had the most support for more spending. It has consistently been "number one" on the list of issues on which it is thought the government (presumably local) spends too little. Support for spending on crime has also been the most unwavering of the list; while public enthusiasm for other issues has waxed and waned (defense is now waxing, and the environment is waning), the proportion thinking that

government does not spend enough on crime has remained constant at about 70%.

While most Americans say they want government to do more about crime, it is not clear that their beliefs about the problem have many implications for their own lives. Research on general beliefs about crime indicates by and large that they have few roots in experience, and are not related to individual behavior. Beliefs about crime are not related in any impressive way to the victimization experiences of individuals; at most, they vary a few percentage points between victims and nonvictims (Hindelang et al., 1978). Nor are general beliefs strongly linked to indicators of how vulnerable people are to attack, or to other attitudes they hold (Tyler, 1980). In fact, it is residents of low-crime neighborhoods who are most likely to place crime high on their agenda for public action (Furstenberg, 1971). As a rule, people overestimate its frequency and overvalue its seriousness.

Most general beliefs about crime are related to media exposure. Research in other areas indicate print and electronic media play an important role in shaping popular beliefs about the nature of social problems and the possibilities for public policy. Several studies indicate the media, but not personal experience or vulnerability, shape beliefs about the volume of crime in America. Yet such beliefs seem to be unrelated to what people do about crime. Behavior is more rooted in experience and assessments of one's personal risk of victimization, which also are unrelated to general beliefs about crime (Tyler, 1980).

Assessments of Risk

Unlike many beliefs about crime, assessments of risk are personal and concrete, and related to behavior. They are judgments people make about how much crime-problems threaten them. While beliefs about crime trends and their causes can be abstract and are often unrelated to experience, assessments of risk are evaluations of the reality of the threat of crime. They may not be entirely accurate, but they are how people read their immediate environment.

Most evaluations of how people perceive risk gauge "how likely" they think it is a particular crime will strike them or their household. Alternately, people can be quizzed about the likelihood some particular consequence of crime will occur, such as being killed or injured. Studies indicate these

TABLE 1.1 Assessments of Risk and Official Police Reports of Crime

<i>Perceived Risk of Victimization</i>	<i>Official Crime Rate per 100,000</i>		
	<i>Robbery</i>	<i>Assault</i>	<i>Burglary</i>
very likely	582	350	1136
somewhat likely	337	264	1032
somewhat unlikely	220	180	1014
very unlikely	180	118	998

Note: Based on random-digit dialing telephone survey of the Chicago metropolitan area, 1979. For further information, see Lavrakas, 1980.

Source: Author's computations.

estimates are relatively accurate when risks of various sorts are evaluated comparatively (Green, 1980).

Research on assessments of risk also indicates those judgments are related to—although not completely determined by—the “objective” threat of crime and people’s perceptions of how much crime there is around them.

One study of the relationship between perceived risk and official rates of crime is summarized in Table 1.1. In a recent survey of the Chicago metropolitan area (Lavrakas, 1980), respondents were asked how likely it was they would be victimized by three types of crime “in the next couple of years.” Table 1.1 links their responses for each type of crime to comparable official crime rates (per 100,000 residents) for their suburban municipality or city community area. Perceptions of the risk of personal crime are particularly strongly linked to police figures on the incidence of crime in each area. “Objective” (officially announced) risk of burglary is less closely linked to declining perceived risk.

The relationship between perceived and officially recognized risk of victimization is independent of such individual-level factors as sex, age, race, or income. Official crime rates for areas were related to personal estimates of risk in quite consistent fashion, even when those individual attributes were taken into account. The latter may be rooted in the reality of community conditions.

Other studies confirm that individual estimates of the probability of being victimized are linked to local crime rates and to victimization rates measured independently, via surveys. Perceived risks are higher among blacks and latins, the poor, and center-city residents (Lavrakas, 1980). They are also higher among people who have had direct personal experience with crime—victims—and those who have reported personal contact with others who

have been victimized. The latter is a form of indirect or vicarious experience with crime, with many significant consequences for perceptions of crime. Further, people who are more vulnerable to crime rate their risks of falling victim as higher than do others. Two strong correlates of perceived risk are sex and age, with women and the elderly (but see Lavrakas, 1980) being more likely to report high levels of risk, even when controlling for many other factors (Tyler, 1980). Both groups are (comparatively) vulnerable to physical attack, more powerless to resist if they are assaulted, and are exposed to more traumatic physical and emotional consequences when they are attacked (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981).

One reason beliefs about how much crime there is are unrelated to assessments of risk is that perceptions of the amount of crime are unrelated to all of these factors. As indicated above, general beliefs about crime seem to be shaped by the media, and not by personal or indirect experience with crime, or even vulnerability to attack. On the other hand, perceived risk is strongly related to these aspects of people’s lives, as well as to community crime and victimization rates. All of this indicates assessments of risk of victimization reflect a much more realistic reading of one’s environment, which may explain why perceptions of risk—but not beliefs about crime—are related to individual behavior.

Fear of Victimization

If popular beliefs about crime and people’s assessments of their risk of falling victim are cognitive and evaluative components of their perceptions of victimization, then fear of victimization is the affective or emotional dimension. It is both an expressed attitude and a psychological state provoked by an immediate sense of personal risk. While individuals *hold* beliefs about crime, they *feel* danger.

The physiological state of fear is triggered when we encounter fear-provoking stimuli—perhaps a band of youths, or a dilapidated street. These are learned associations with danger (Stinchcombe et al., 1978). The physical manifestations of fear include a rapid heart rate, narrowed field of vision, high blood pressure, enhanced reaction time, an increased flow of blood to the large muscles, and endocrinal changes such as the release of adrenalin into the blood stream. These all prepare us for “fight or flight.” They are autonomic, visceral reactions over which we have little direct control (Baumer and Rosenbaum, 1980).

Survey measures of the fear of crime stand at a considerable distance from these reactions. Public opinion polls ask people "how afraid" they feel under certain conditions (like "walking in your neighborhood at night"), or how worried they are about being victimized. They obviously do not measure fear when it occurs, but ask people to recall episodes of fear they have experienced, or which they anticipate they would feel under selected conditions (Garofalo, 1980).

The rather general way in which opinion polls measure fear, and the great distance between verbal responses to those questions and the immediate and acute emotional state they represent, have led critics to challenge the validity of research on the fear of crime. The criticism has been cast in two ways. First, it is argued that popular measures of the fear of crime in fact measure many things besides people's reactions to the risk of crime itself. Second, critics contend that the emotionalism of the issue clouds responses to the questions, and that the fear of crime is an irrational attitude unrelated to the reality of crime.

People's expressions of fear have been attributed to a number of conditions other than the direct and immediate threat of crime. The concern about crime registered in opinion polls may be a manifestation of other problems, including mounting interpersonal distrust and suspicion, cynicism about the efficacy of authorities, unhappiness about changing values, and anxiety about the future and the course of social evolution. Fear may have as much to do with anxiety about neighborhood change and the disruption of normal routines there as it does with crime (Garofalo and Laub, 1978). Fear levels mount with city size, as do crime rates. However, because urban dwellers have many other good reasons to evidence these concerns, they may as a result register high on measures of worry or unease about crime. Finally, any discussion of the validity of fear-of-crime measures must confront the issue of race. It is widely argued that among whites discussions of crime are in fact covert conversations about their fear of black Americans, and that fear of crime in these instances reflects racial intolerance.

Recent research has challenged these criticisms, however. It indicates that expressions of fear are largely independent of most of those alternative interpretations of their meaning. In a national survey, reports of fear were not linked to other forms of mistrust, suspicion, and concern about change, and they were uncorrelated with expressions of racial intolerance by whites. Instead, fear was related to the threat of crime and of becoming a victim. People who live in neighborhoods with crime and disorder problems are

more fearful than those from more placid communities. Those who are victimized by personal crime are more fearful than others, controlling for a host of alternative causes of fear, and the more serious the victimization the greater the fear (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981). A number of studies also indicate that fear levels are higher in cities and in neighborhoods with higher official crime rates (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981; Skogan, 1977; Fowler and Mangione, 1974; Furstenberg, 1971; Biderman et al., 1967), as are assessments of risk.

Others have questioned the validity of expressions of fear because they do not seem to square with the social distribution of victimization. One of the most significant findings of crime-related surveys has been the relatively low levels of victimization reported by women and the elderly, two groups which seemed to suffer from severe crime problems (Antunes et al., 1977). They both report fairly low rates of victimization, but at the same time express high levels of fear (Riger, 1981). This seeming paradox led some to question whether fear of crime is indeed a rational response to crime at all.

Again, recent research has pointed to many sources of fear among less victimized groups which seem "rational" indeed. Frequently they fear the potential consequences of victimization rather than its sheer frequency, and for women and the elderly those consequences *are* likely to be more severe. Elderly victims face the possibility of never recovering from physical injuries in their lifetime, while women face the implicit threat of sexual assault in nearly every criminal encounter. Those groups are also physically more vulnerable to attack, less able to resist young males who constitute the bulk of offenders. Stories about crimes against the elderly and women are also prominent in the media, and are widely discussed by neighbors when they take place nearby. Those stories generate even more fear when they reach people who are similar to the featured victims (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981). Many criticisms which presume the irrationality of many expressions of fear have been too narrowly focused on the relationship between direct personal victimization and fear, and have not paid attention to other sources of information and cues for concern which provoke heightened levels of perceived risk.

All of this suggests that the concern about crime registered in public opinion polls can be taken at some degree of face value. When people say they are fearful, it reflects their experiences, vulnerability, conditions around them, and information which comes to them about crimes and victims.

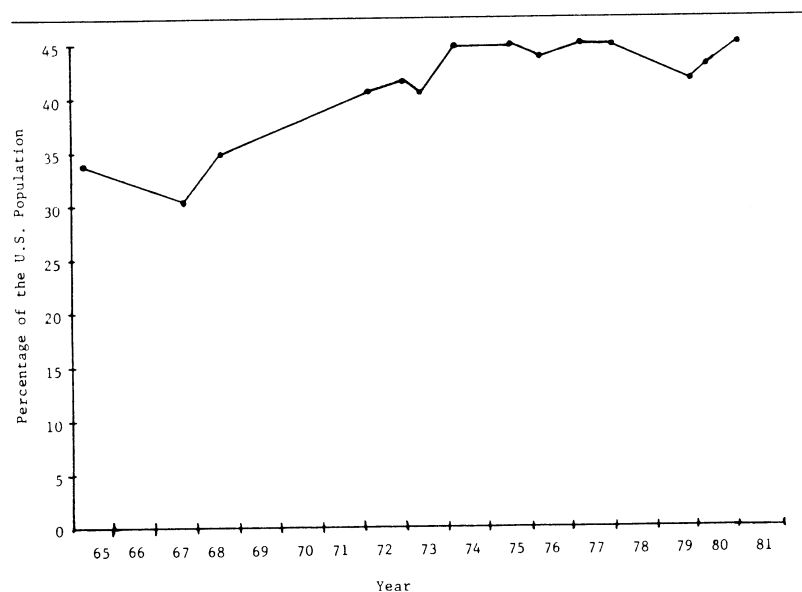


FIGURE 1.1 Trends in fear of crime 1965-1981.

Significantly, those same polls indicate that the fear of crime is not currently on the increase. Levels of fear are certainly higher than they were 15 years ago, but most of the increase in fear which has taken place since the mid-1960s was almost a decade ago. Figure 1.1 charts national opinion poll data over time, using the most frequently used measure of fear from those surveys (Gallup Organization; National Opinion Research Center, 1980). There are some gaps in the data, and no questions before 1965, but they point to a large increase in levels of fear during the period 1965-1973. Since then, fear has been remarkably stable. After 1974, about 45% of the population has felt concerned about crime in some nearby area.

It is interesting to note that the general course of fear of crime parallels that of crime itself, especially as measured by victimization surveys. Crime rates rose sharply between 1965 and 1974, and then leveled off. During the remainder of the 1970s it was up in some cities and down in others, and both police and victimization survey figures agreed the sum of those fluctuations was a fairly stable national crime rate (Skogan, 1979). This was also true of fear of crime.

REACTIONS TO CRIME

What people do about crime is a question of considerable significance. At one extreme, individuals may be "prisoners of fear," locking themselves away behind steel doors and barred windows. At the other they may become activists, banding together with neighbors to prevent crime by taking aggressive steps to challenge strangers, intervene when they observe suspicious circumstances, and act to reduce opportunities for crime. Some research has been conducted and a great deal of money has been spent by the government in an effort to encourage the latter, which some would characterize as "public minded" rather than "private minded" behavior (Lavrakas, 1980).

Large numbers of people find their lives touched by crime in some noticeable way. The Census Bureau's surveys in the mid-1970s found between 35% and 56% of adults "limited or changed activities" because of crime, depending upon the city involved (Garofalo, 1977). A recent national survey found more than two-thirds of Americans reported doing something to prevent crime (Mendelsohn et al., 1981). More detailed studies find the majority of big-city residents do a few things in response to crime—usually taking the simplest, cheapest, and most habitual measures—but few report adopting a broad range of tactics (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981). In Washington, D.C., an open-ended question asking people if they did "anything to protect against the dangers of crime" found "staying off the streets at night" was the most frequently volunteered tactic, while "improving locks" ran a close second. The next most commonly mentioned actions were avoiding being alone at night, and avoiding talking to strangers (Biderman et al., 1967).

This section briefly reviews the principal things people do in response to crime. These can usefully be divided into four general categories: personal precautions, household protection, collective participation, and suburban flight. Between them they encompass most of the overt victimization avoidance and crime prevention activities which have been examined by researchers and encouraged by the government.

Personal Precautions

These are tactics individuals employ to distance themselves in space and time from people or circumstances which they perceive to be dangerous. There seem to be two types of precautionary tactics: limiting one's exposure

to risk, and acting to manage those risks when exposure is unavoidable. The principal way in which people attempt to reduce their exposure to risk is by staying at home, particularly after dark. Home is where they feel safest from risks of all kinds. Relatively few personal victimizations occur there. Empirically, crime is much less concentrated in the after-dark hours than people commonly believe, but every measure of fear and personal precaution indicates crime-related behavioral restrictions are by far more common than.

When people are exposed to risk, there are a number of tactics they commonly employ to attempt to keep those risks within manageable bounds. They can travel by auto rather than walk, avoid walking near suspicious persons, travel with someone rather than alone, avoid specific places which are thought to be dangerous, and even carry a gun. Some of these precautions become so routine that they are habitual parts of the behavioral repertoire of city dwellers.

One study conducted in large cities indicates even these simple actions to be less widespread than many would believe. Presented with a list of precautionary tactics, many respondents in a survey conducted in Chicago, Philadelphia, and San Francisco indicated that they had adopted one of them. However, few reported doing more than one thing on the list to reduce their risk of personal attack, and 40% indicated that they did none of them at all. Across all of the measures, they reported doing them, on the average, somewhat less frequently than "sometimes." Women, the elderly, blacks, and poor people are consistently the most likely to report restricting their activities or restructuring them to some degree in order to protect themselves from crime. Precautions are also more frequent among city dwellers than suburbanites, in neighborhoods plagued by crime, and by recent victims of crime (Lavrakas et al., 1981).

The consequences for individuals and communities of adopting these tactics are difficult to gauge. Precautionary tactics may be related to lower rates of victimization for individuals. Women and the elderly are two groups which report high levels of risk avoidance, along with low levels of victimization. Research now underway indicates exposure to risk explains most of the variation in victimization rates across the life-cycle (Cook et al., 1981). On the other hand, the restrictions in behavior described above can also be counted as lost opportunities: chances to visit friends, travel conveniently and inexpensively, go shopping in the center city, and the like, which were passed up because of concern about crime. The quality of people's lives declines in return for safety from crime. At the community level, crime-in-

duced immobility and avoidance of risk may undermine the social and economic vitality of an area. Shops close early, community and religious organizations flounder for lack of participation, and people refuse to invest in or move into such areas because they are not desirable places to live. At the same time, it is not clear that individual victimization-avoidance can be equated with true community crime prevention. Precautionary tactics are passive rather than aggressive responses to crime. They leave potential offenders at large, with no reason not to turn their attentions to others. Rather than reduce crime, avoidance tactics may simply displace it to other persons, times, and places. They may be signs of helplessness rather than positive actions.

Household Protection

These are efforts to protect households from burglary and property crime. Surveys indicate simple household protective efforts are more widespread than personal precautions. The same study which found that 40% of big-city dwellers took no explicit precautions against personal crime found only 5% had taken no particular steps to protect themselves from burglary. The most frequent tactic on the list was leaving on a light, which was employed when they were away from home after dark by 82% of those surveyed (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981). On the whole, easier and cheaper measures are taken more frequently than difficult or costly ones.

One general class of household protective measures involves "target hardening." This includes installing locks, window bars, exterior lights, and other hardware. While none of these gadgets will keep out a skilled burglar, they may prevent opportunistic youths from breaking in, and encourage professionals to go elsewhere. Thorough target hardening is expensive, and may require some skill. Generally, only homeowners report extensive efforts of this type.

"Surveillance" efforts can be cheaper and much more social. Surveillance implies watchfulness, or the appearance of it, by households and neighbors. Having one's neighbor watch the house is a common surveillance tactic. Because burglars are loathe to enter occupied dwellings, maintaining the appearance that one is home is also an effective tactic. Unlike target hardening, these tactics are repetitive—they must be reinstituted from time to time. However, they are inexpensive and easy to initiate.

"Loss reduction" tactics are different. These are measures to reduce the impact of crime when it occurs. The principal loss—reduction tactic is buying insurance. This is a repetitive and expensive move highly related to family income and home ownership. A second loss-reduction measure is property marking. Police departments all over the country encourage people to mark their valuables, so that if they are recovered after being stolen they can be used as evidence and eventually returned to their owners.

There is some evidence that household protective measures can effectively prevent victimization. (For a review, see Lavrakas, 1981). Households which are better protected seem to be less frequently burglarized than "matched" pairs, and evaluations using target and control neighborhoods indicate widespread prevention efforts can reduce area burglary rates. On the other hand, it is not clear whether those crimes are permanently prevented, or simply displaced somewhere else, only to reappear as different types of incidents.

To the extent that they do work, the benefits of household protective measures accrue largely to those who are financially better off. With few exceptions, actions in this category are reported most frequently by upper-income, homeowners whites and people who live in lower-crime, stable, and cohesive areas of the city. Thus, household protection seems to be an economic act unrelated to the direct threat of crime.

Community Involvement

Until now, we have examined only actions which individuals and households take to reduce their own chances of being victimized. Crime prevention efforts ideally would have the effect of stopping crime from occurring, or of apprehending and incapacitating offenders, for this would serve to reduce the overall crime rate. The principal mechanism for prevention is group action. Regardless of their level of formal organization, groups can mount efforts which have positive consequences for a community.

Many group efforts emphasize surveillance and intervention strategies. Groups encourage neighbors to watch nearby houses, or even organize citizen patrols to take up blockwatch activities on a regular basis. These actions often are reinforced by a "Whistle Stop" program which emphasizes rapid reporting of incidents to the police, and citizen intervention when crimes are seen occurring. Community organizations also sponsor escort programs for vulnerable residents like the elderly. Some group-based efforts

have protective outcomes for individual participants, of course. Neighborhood groups often promote property marking, sponsor household security surveys, and even vend security devices. However, they do so intensively and on an areawide basis, with the hope of reducing opportunities for crime enough to discourage crime in general. Groups often serve to link citizens and the police. Beat-representative programs, for example, are designed to regularize meetings and the flow of information and complaints between the two. Finally, perhaps most fundamental to the reduction of crime are programs aimed at properly socializing youths and channeling their energy into productive (or at least harmless) activities. Because crime is spatially concentrated and people are most easily mobilized as citizens in a residential context, most of these collective efforts are neighborhood-based.

Only recently has there been extensive research on patterns of participation in such collective efforts. Two recent surveys in Chicago both indicated that 17% of the adult population was "involved" in a group which was "doing something about crime," while the similar figure for Philadelphia was 12%, and 11% for San Francisco (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981). Lavrakas (1980) found one-quarter of the population of metropolitan Chicago (and one-third of those in the center city) were aware that crime prevention activities were going on in their neighborhood, but only 6% (13% in the city) were themselves involved. In general, those active in such groups are males, blacks, and higher income, middle-aged people who are homeowners in more cohesive neighborhoods, all of whom believe citizens should play a major role in crime prevention. Like many forms of household protection, collective involvement seems to be stimulated most by a vested interest in the community.

As yet, little is known of the effectiveness of such groups. For individuals, joining in collective efforts may increase morale, enhance their sense of control over neighborhood conditions, and reduce fear of crime. Group participants may gain some concrete benefits from their activity in the form of increased security, and in getting to know more of their neighbors. On the other hand, people who attend community meetings about crime are also much more likely than nonattenders to know about nearby crimes. This indirect experience with victimization is an important source of fear of crime.

A neighborhood may be better off as a result of collective activities, because home security is generally tighter and less conducive to burglary, and the police may come faster because citizens are aware of their crime-reporting responsibilities. But at the extreme, community activities of this sort

can take on a vigilante tone, and may have racist connotations. The aggressive surveillance of strangers and efforts to keep out “outsiders” may—under the guise of “social control”—conceal efforts at racial exclusion. In the most tightly knit of the neighborhoods Skogan and Maxfield (1981) studied, racial paranoia was rampant among whites, and boundaries between black and white enclaves were patrolled by white youth gangs which maintained a close eye on anyone crossing racial lines. Actions like these reduce the heterogeneity of peoples and values within urban neighborhoods, and hardly augur well for the tolerance of diversity which tends to characterize great cities.

Suburban Flight

To this point we have only considered actions people take to protect their person and property in the face of neighborhood crime. There is another way in which urban dwellers can deal with crime, however—flee the city. A variety of “push” and “pull” factors and economic and racial constraints are involved in such relocation decisions, only some of which directly involve crime. But high rates of victimization may induce people to leave city neighborhoods, and low suburban rates may influence where those who are moving decide to settle.

Surveys indicate many Americans move each year, and many more would if they could. Interviews with city residents document that residents of higher-crime areas are the most desirous of moving. The difficulty is that blacks and the poor are generally the ones most dissatisfied with their neighborhood and who want to move because of crime. The choices open to them are very constrained, however. It is higher-income whites who are most likely to move when they are dissatisfied with their neighborhood or fear crime there, and very often they end up in the suburbs. Suburban relocation is a “white flight” problem. In a recent study of residential relocation in and around Chicago, 26% of all “movers” left for the suburbs but 94% of them were white. When movers were asked how important things on a list of factors were in choosing their new neighborhood, “crime and safety” was the most highly rated factor; 64% reported it was “very important,” in contrast to 49% for the next most important factor in deciding where to move to, namely, convenience to work.

Moving to the suburbs makes a tremendous difference. Skogan and Maxfield contrasted white “fleers” and white “stayers” in terms of neighborhood

conditions around them. Those who stayed suffered many more indignities and higher rates of crime. For example, 45% of those who stayed in the city, but only 10% of those who left for the suburbs, thought street robbery was a problem in their community. Of those who moved, 63% thought their neighborhood was “very safe,” as against 28% of those who stayed. The benefits of moving to the suburbs were independent of income. People of all income classes reported about the same degree of difference (all in the positive direction) between their old and new neighborhoods when they fled the city. Those who moved but stayed in the city did not improve their position by much at all. Flight was encouraged by being able to afford the move, but anyone who moved out was much more likely to achieve greater security as a result.

For communities, suburban flight also may be the most dramatic and consequential reaction to crime. Since World War II, population growth on the fringes of our greatest cities has been phenomenal. There is considerable evidence that the growth of suburbia has had deleterious consequences for the cities they surround. Housing investment has followed the movement of people, and both white-collar and higher paying blue-collar occupations have begun to concentrate on the fringes of metropolitan areas. With industrial and commercial investment following the construction of new housing, the center-city tax base has begun to decline both proportionally and absolutely. At the same time, the proportion of service-receiving residents in inner-city populations has increased. This has further accelerated a trend toward even greater center-city/suburban differentiation with respect to social problems.

MODELS LINKING PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIOR

We have seen there are a variety of things individuals can do in response to crime, ranging from passive withdrawal through aggressive communal action to flight from threatening areas. People also hold a variety of beliefs about the nature of the crime problem and the threat it poses, and they may feel the emotional and physiological impact of crime. However, research on perceptions and behavior indicates there is not a simple one-to-one relationship between the two. We cannot assume that beliefs, perceived risk, or fear propel people to action in some mechanical and predictable fashion. As indicated above, many forms of household protection are adopted more frequently by those who enjoy low rates of victimization. Community orga-

nizers frequently find it is most difficult to mobilize the poor living in high-crime areas. Whites and the well-to-do in cities generally report the fewest problems with crime and fear, but they are still the mostly likely to move out.

In the face of these paradoxes, researchers have advanced a number of explanations of individual reactions to crime which seem "closer to the data." These explanations can be thought of as "models" of behavior, because they take the form of simplified sketches of theories about the relation between perceptions and action. This section reviews four models of crime-related behavior which do not assume a simple relation between perception and action.

Conflicting Sociological Models

Sociologists have advanced two prominent theories of the relationship between the threat of crime (in the language used here, risk and fear) and what people do in response. One theory emphasizes the positive effects of crime, the other its negative consequences.

The first theory, that of the French Sociologist Emile Durkheim, argues that crime has an integrative function. In this view, crime shocks the sentiments of ordinary people by threatening their life, property, and views of appropriate behavior. The affront causes them to act individually—and, more important, collectively—to "do something." This effort increases community solidarity and morale, and strengthens the informal social control exercised (in part through crime prevention) by the collectivity (Conklin, 1975).

Another view, in opposition to Durkheim (see Lewis, 1979), is that crime erodes the capacity of communities to exercise social control. According to Conklin (1975), the key is that fear of crime generates insecurity, suspicion, and withdrawal from community affairs. In high-crime areas, residents lose confidence in the capacity of formal authorities to assist them, and develop a negative view of their own neighborhood. Interaction with their neighbors drops off, as does participation in the collective life of the area. Community facilities stand empty. As a result, the community is even less capable than before of exercising control over juveniles and strangers there. Unlike Durkheim, Conklin emphasizes the negative consequences of crime. In his view, personal precautions (and if possible, flight) will be the predominant

reaction to crime in high-fear communities, while household and collective efforts will dwindle in the face of increasing disorder.

Of the two models, empirical research seems to favor Conklin. Precautions such as staying home, exercising great caution on the street, and avoiding strangers predominate in higher-crime urban areas. Participants in community organizations and anti-crime programs are less fearful than non-participants. Household crime-prevention efforts and community participation are greatly encouraged by having substantial economic stakes in the community, and both are more frequent in cohesive, low-crime areas. These data all seem most consistent with the view that crime is incapacitating, not a motivating force behind positive responses to the problem.

The Utilitarian Model

Utilitarian models of behavior of all kinds stress that actions have costs as well as potential benefits. Thus, there is no such thing as cost-free crime avoidance. As Green (1980: 277) put it:

Pragmatically, what is really of interest is how people will behave in relation to some level of risk. We may want to know, for example, how much people would be willing to pay for some decrease in risk.

From this point of view, people strike an optimum balance between the risks they face and the cost of reducing them any further. That point is their level of "acceptable risk." This model of behavior also is "economic" because it assumes a more-or-less rational cost-benefit analysis on the part of individuals.

Of course, the cost side of this analysis of behavior should take a broad view as to how those costs are measured, but some of the costs of avoiding crime are direct and financial. Furstenberg's (1972) original typology of crime-prevention behavior categorized together tactics that needed money to be carried out, and he found higher-income people were more likely to adopt them. For this chapter, I priced a full "security package" of hardware items in the 1981 Sears and Roebuck Spring/Summer Catalog, including front and back steel security doors, a burglar alarm, good quality door locks, and other interior and exterior equipment. Together with shipping, but exclusive of tax and installation charges, this order would cost almost \$900.00. Householders who are not particularly handy would find the one-time cost of a full

security package a very substantial investment. And if they desired to purchase special household theft insurance, it would set them back about an additional \$100.00 every year. A handgun for the home would be extra.

In addition, there may be other direct costs attendant to risk reduction. For example, people may be driven to give up jobs or abandon investments in higher-crime areas, or to pay more in travel costs to go shopping in the suburbs, because they are unwilling to bear the level of risk they see attached to lower-cost options.

What economists label opportunity costs for feeling safe probably are far greater economic burdens of crime for these citizens than the direct costs of victimization [Biderman et al., 1967].

There are a host of nondollar costs that people may be forced to pay in order to reduce their risk of victimization. Economists would label them the "externalities" of crime prevention. Some of these are social. In high-risk areas, isolation and withdrawal may be the most effective way to avoid personal victimization. People may avoid parks, playgrounds, the downtown, and community facilities because they perceive the risks of crime there to be too high. Young singles may fear to visit the nightclub district, while the elderly may avoid public transit even if it is their only transportation option. There are also psychological costs to be paid for acting to forestall victimization. Staying at home, installing steel doors, avoiding the neighbors, and other behavioral restrictions may impose undue restrictions on our freedom of movement. Buying a gun may be an affront to other values. In the end,

There will come a point where any further increase in the safety of a situation means going without so many other things that an increase in safety is not worth having. Ultimately the value of any increase in safety is a value judgment . . ." [Green, 1980: 284].

However we account for the costs, the utilitarian model has people choosing one position or another on a curve like that depicted in Figure 1.2. It charts a hypothetical relationship between cost and risk. Those without much money, or with a taste for higher levels of risk—such as young people—might position themselves on the higher-risk, lower-cost end of the curve linking the two. People with vested interests to protect, whose social lives are not severely impacted by staying close to home, or

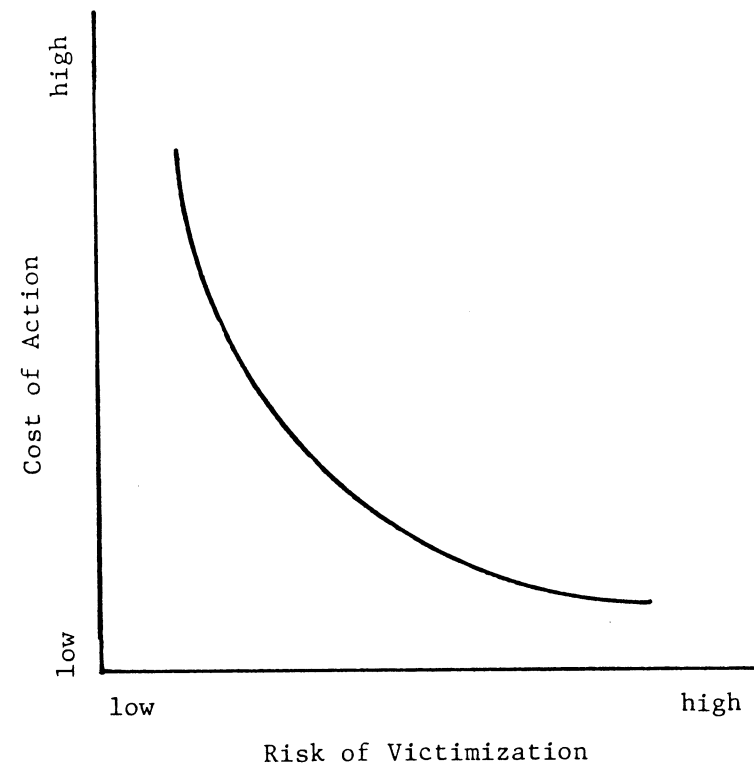


FIGURE 1.2 Trade-off between risk and cost.

who have the wherewithal to move to the suburbs, might locate themselves at a higher-cost, lower-risk position. Living in a city as opposed to rural areas would have the effect of shifting the entire curve to the right; in cities, higher levels of risk go with similar investments in security.

There is evidence supporting this view of crime-related behavior. For example, fewer people install burglar alarms, window bars, or outdoor lights (high-cost items) than routinely ask their neighbors to watch their home when it is empty. The most frequently purchased piece of household anti-crime hardware is the indoor light timer, which can be purchased for under \$5.00 (Lavrakas, 1980). Furstenberg's (1972) finding that higher-income households are more likely to undertake higher-cost tactics is consistent with the economic argument. So is the higher frequency of household

protection efforts by homeownership, upper-income whites who face lower objective and self-assessed risks of victimization (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981). Perhaps the greatest contribution of this mode of thinking is its message that researchers should examine more carefully the behavior side of the perception-and-behavior linkage, and consider both their potential benefits and tangential, "external" effects in light of their costs.

A Psychological Model

"Rational-cognitive" psychological theories about human behavior emphasize people's experience, information-processing capacities, views of causation, and beliefs about responsibility for conditions and events. In this tradition, perhaps the predominant model of individual "prevention" behavior is that advanced by Irwin Rosenstock (1966), the "Health-Belief Model" (HBM). The HBM stresses the importance of three factors in explaining why people act to protect themselves, in predicting who will and will not do so, and in designing interventions to encourage them to do so more frequently. Those factors are risk, seriousness, and efficacy (Lavrakas, 1980). Being psychologists, advocates of the HBM focus upon perceptions of those elements of one's environment and alternatives, but others have found those perceptions to be rooted in reality (Green, 1980).

The first component of the HBM is one's perceived probability of being struck, infected, or visited by some threatening condition or event. In disease studies, this likelihood of infection is labeled "susceptibility," while for our purposes it is the perceived risk of victimization.

The second component of the HBM is the perceived severity of a threatening condition or event. The common cold and umbrella theft differ in anticipated impact from heart disease and armed robbery, and this makes a difference in how stimulating they are.

Together, the probability of the threat and its potential seriousness constitute "readiness to take action" in the HBM (Mendelsohn et al., 1981). Actions themselves are evaluated in terms of their efficacy. Not surprisingly, the HBM postulates that people will be more likely to take an action if they think it has a high likelihood of actually preventing or reducing a problem, and if it seems at all feasible to take it.

In sum, the HBM is a rational cognitive model of individual decision-making about behavior. It hypothesizes that people are motivated to act by a desire to lower their risk in the face of potentially severe consequences, especially when it is likely to work.

The HBM is a powerful model of prevention behavior. In a national survey, Mendelsohn et al. (1981) found a component of the model—perceived vulnerability—was the "one factor above all others" explaining the number and frequency of individual crime-prevention actions. It was a particularly strong predictor of taking precautions against personal crime. Lavrakas (1980) also found both risk, seriousness, and efficacy to be related to individual behavioral restrictions. Both studies revealed that beliefs about the efficacy of proposed actions were good predictors of their being taken and repeated frequently. In Mendelsohn's survey, efficacy beliefs ("how likely is it to work") were particularly strong correlates of individual precautions, while Lavrakas found efficacy beliefs (but not risk and seriousness) were very strongly linked to household protection.

There are a number of variations on the basic HBM. For example, evaluations of prevention campaigns usually investigate the effect of "cues to action" as well. These include the messages, treatments, or shocks which were intended to trigger particular prevention efforts. Mendelsohn's survey was undertaken to evaluate a federally financed media campaign encouraging people to "Take a Bite Out of Crime." Other studies may take into account "barriers to action." These are constraints or limitations which affect the feasibility of particular tactics, or which bar them completely. In the case of crime prevention, these might include renting rather than owning one's residence, limits on what can be spent for risk reduction, or role demands—such as having a night-shift job—which force people to expose themselves to what even they feel to be high-risk situations.

A great theoretical contribution of the HBM is its emphasis on the efficacy of anti-crime efforts. This is particularly important in light of our very limited knowledge of what actually works in the area of crime prevention. Mendelsohn and his colleagues emphasize the responsibility crime-prevention specialists have for not overselling their recommendations. People seemingly will not act unless they believe there will be concrete benefits to be gained, but they also will not be fooled for long if those benefits are not forthcoming.

Opportunity Theory

The problematic relationship between what people think and feel about crime and what they do about the issue can also be seen as a political problem. In this view, what people can do about crime is shaped in considerable degree by the structure of opportunity which confronts them. This

constitutes a framework which opens or forecloses various possibilities for action. Opportunities for action are shaped by the options made available to people in the form of proximity to services, their physical surroundings, employment possibilities, school quality, access to transportation, and capacity to pay for private-market products as well as to qualify for public sector goods and services. The distribution of these opportunities in society is determined in the largest sense by politics.

Where the structure of opportunity confronting them is limited, people have more difficulty acting on the basis of their values. No one wants to face a crime problem in their neighborhood, but some are more successful than others in getting their wishes. The poor living in high-crime areas value their safety, hope neighborhood toughs will not harass them, want safe public transit, and need better police protection. Their problem, from this point of view, is that they often do not have the political, economic, and institutional capacity to achieve their goals.

City dwellers also want safer homes. They want stronger doors, working security arrangements, and most of the hardware package detailed above. But those with the greatest crime problems are very frequently renters rather than homeowners. Control of one's living space is an important prerequisite for making such improvements, in the absence of strong building codes specifying security standards for rental housing.

People in problem-plagued neighborhoods find it difficult to band together in common action against their problems. Frequently those neighborhoods experience tremendous residential turnover each year, those who live there are poor, and many families are headed by only one adult. In the absence of professional leadership it is very hard to sustain community organizations in such an environment. However, it is neighborhoods like these which also cannot afford to support on their own a paid organizational infrastructure to guide the attack on local problems.

The opportunities—options, environment, and resources—that people have are thus an important force in shaping individual and household reactions to crime. Some seemingly blocked opportunities can be reopened by industry, intelligence, political action, and luck, but others can seem insurmountable when viewed as a practical problem. The reactions to crime which are most frequently reported by the poor are the cheapest and most individualized—staying at home, closely restricting their behavior, and avoiding victimization. These also may be the most costly options in terms of their impact on individual morale and neighborhood cohesion. An impor-

tant message of the opportunity model of behavior is that social-structural factors surrounding individuals affect the relationship between what they want and what they get, since what they get may not always be what they need.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I argued that there is a problematic relationship between how people perceive crime and their reactions to it. This seeming paradox hinges in part on how those perceptions of crime are conceptualized. Many of the beliefs individuals hold about crime appear unrelated to their behavior. The more general and impersonal those beliefs, the less rooted they are in experience and the conditions which surround people. General beliefs about crime are shaped by the media and the value-and-belief "filters" which organize our thoughts about those things for which we have little personal "data." On the other hand, assessments of their risk of victimization are more strongly linked to people's reports of what they do about crime. There is some evidence that those estimates are rooted in neighborhood conditions as well as the personal vulnerability of individuals to attack. Most surveys indicate that measures of fear of crime are particularly strong correlates of things people do to protect themselves from personal victimization.

The relationship between perception and behavior also becomes clearer when we examine alternative models of how the two might be linked. Except for Durkheim's "naive sociological model," none of them assumed a simple fit between perception and action. Conklin's alternative to Durkheim stressed how perceived risk and fear make it more difficult for people to do much beyond withdraw from the community. Of the four categories of reactions to crime that we have reviewed here, only individual precautionary tactics seem to be directly encouraged by fear. The utilitarian model of behavior stresses their costs, and points out that individuals endure risks at some acceptable level which take those costs into account. We should not assume that people are always trying to reduce their risks, even if they perceive them to be relatively high. The health belief model also emphasized how features of possible countermeasures shape how frequently those who are exposed to risk adopt them. The perceived efficacy and feasibility of various tactics are part of the perception-behavior calculus. Finally, the opportunity model pointed out that fear and perceived risk may shape what psychologists would call *behavior intentions*, but that a number of real-

world constraints inhibit the capacity of individuals to act on their predispositions. People may not get what they want, especially in high-crime neighborhoods.

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