Fear and Perceived Likelihood of Victimization in Traditional and Cyber Settings

Jessica Maddison, Department of Psychology, Northumbria University, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, UK

Debora Jeske, Department of Psychology, Northumbria University, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, UK

ABSTRACT

This study considers the influence of perceived likelihood, demographics (gender and education) and personality on fear of victimization and cyber-victimization using a survey design (N=159). The results suggest that perceived likelihood of victimization predicts fear of victimization in traditional contexts. Women tend to be more fearful of victimization in traditional and cyber contexts, confirming previous research. No group differences emerged in relation to education. Self-esteem and self-efficacy were not significant predictors of fear or perceived likelihood of victimization. However, perceived likelihood was a significant predictor of fear of victimization in traditional settings. This may suggest that different variables (such as awareness of vulnerability) may play a role in fear of victimization in cyber settings. Further group comparisons revealed that fear of victimization and cyber-victimization depended on whether or not participants reported high or low perceived likelihood of victimization and internet use. Higher internet use was associated with greater fear of victimization, especially in combination with greater perceived likelihood of victimization. This may suggest an exposure effect, in that being online more frequently may also increase awareness of cyber incidents.

Keywords: Awareness, Cyber-Victimization, Fear of Victimization, Self-Efficacy, Self-Esteem, Victimization

1. INTRODUCTION

Fear of crime is a significant social and political problem (Jackson, 2009). Fear of crime is also referred to as fear of victimization (Addington, 2011). The term therefore refers to the fear of being a victim of crime but not the actual likelihood of being a victim of crime (Ferraro, 1995; Hale, 1996). Nevertheless, fear of crime is also shaped by the nature, severity and frequency of actual crimes. For example, the more serious a crime, the lower the level of perceived likelihood needed to stimulate some level of fear (Warr, 1984, 1987). These findings follow earlier work that suggested both the seriousness of the offence and the perceived likelihood of victimization were the 'proximate causes' and

DOI: 10.4018/ijcbpl.2014100103
necessary conditions for fear (Warr & Stafford, 1983).

Further evidence suggests that fear is linked to those who perceive themselves as most at risk (Box, Hale, & Andrews, 1988). Perceived risk of vulnerability, also known as perceived likelihood of victimization (Ferraro, 1995), refers to the perceived likelihood or risk an individual has of becoming a victim or having a crime committed against them. In fact, considerably more people experience fear of crime rather than actual criminal victimization (Addington, 2011; Jackson, 2009). One explanation might be that fear includes a sense of vulnerability, both in terms of perceived likelihood of risk and perceived seriousness of the risk (Hale, 1996). Winkel (1998) also referred to perceived likelihood of risk as ‘subjective victimization risk’ and ‘perceived negative impact’, with the latter influencing fear more so than subjective victimization risk. This indirectly supports the link between fear and vulnerability to risk. Perceived likelihood of victimization has become one well-established explanatory variable of fear of crime (Chadee & Ying, 2013) that is supported throughout the literature (Chadee, Austen & Ditton, 2007; Chadee & Ying, 2013; Cook & Fox, 2011; Gainey, Alper & Chappell, 2011; Hale, 1996; Lee & Hilinski-Rosick, 2012; Ozascilar, 2013; Warr & Stafford, 1983).

The advancement of technology has also led to new crime types, such as cyber-crime, and new forms of victimization including cyber bullying (Pederson, 2013) or identity theft (e.g., Roberts, Indermaur, & Spiranovic, 2013). The role of the internet is of particular importance when considering research into fear of cyber-victimization (Henson, Reyns & Fisher, 2013). This is because both perpetrators and victims are generally heavy internet users (Walrave & Heirman, 2011) and a high prevalence of cyber-victimization exists amongst university students (Radda & Ndubueze, 2013). Cyber-crime and victimization have therefore also become important in the discussion on fear of victimization (Radda & Ndubueze, 2013). As a result, the impact of the media has also been considered throughout fear of crime literature, particularly in terms of how this shapes fear of crime. For example, Weitzer and Kubrin (2004) found that those who use the internet were less fearful than those who indicated local news television as their primary news source.

Although fear of victimization in traditional and cyber settings may be predicted by similar variables, the link between perceived likelihood of cyber-victimization and fear of cyber-crime has not been researched as much to date (Henson et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2013). However, some evidence suggests that traditional predictors of fear of crime (gender, age and location) are not necessarily significant predictors of fear of cyber-crime, such as cyber-identity theft and related fraudulent activity (see Roberts et al., 2013). More research is consequently needed to clarify the relationship of online activity and fear of crime (Kohm, Waid-Lindberg, Weinrath, Shelley & Dobbs, 2012). Cyber-victimization will be referred to as victimization in online settings throughout this paper.

The focus of our article is to examine to what extent findings about victimization and fear of victimization hold when we examine these in traditional as well as cyber settings. Only by establishing whether fundamental effects hold true or not in both settings can we try and build a comprehensive research base that considers victimization in both areas. We consider a variety of standard variables such as demographics but also personality characteristics as potential predictors and grouping variables in the next section.

1.1. Differences in Fear of Crime: Role of Demographics

Several researchers have tried to identify the causes of fear of crime (Chadee et al., 2007) and why certain people are more fearful than others (Warr & Stafford, 1983). We want to consider gender, age, education and personality in relation to fear of victimization and fear of cyber-victimization in our paper.

Demographic characteristics have been shown to play an important role. Past research on crime perception suggests that women and
This title is available in InfoSci-Journals, InfoSci-Journal Disciplines Communications and Social Science. Recommend this product to your librarian:

www.igi-global.com/e-resources/library-recommendation/?id=2

Related Content

An Analysis of Prospective Teachers’ Digital Citizenship Behaviour Norms
Mehmet Sincar (2013). Ethical Technology Use, Policy, and Reactions in Educational Settings (pp. 217-233).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/analysis-prospective-teachers-digital-citizenship/67926?camid=4v1a

Competitive and Professional Gaming: Discussing Potential Benefits of Scientific Study
www.igi-global.com/article/competitive-professional-gaming/76277?camid=4v1a

Cyber Behavior in Social Studies Education
www.igi-global.com/chapter/cyber-behavior-social-studies-education/64829?camid=4v1a
Preparing Business and Information Technology Students to Contribute to Organizational Cultures Grounded in Moral Character
www.igi-global.com/article/preparing-business-and-information-technology-students-to-contribute-to-organizational-cultures-grounded-in-moral-character/102590?camid=4v1a