

FEAR OF CRIME IN VIRGINIA

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(ABSTRACT)

Fear of crime is as much a reality as crime itself. Our reactions to the problem of crime may influence or interfere with our day-to-day activities. Yet not everyone is a victim of crime, nor does everyone perceive crime as being a serious problem.

The author tests hypotheses about the relationships between the fear of crime and, (1) prior victimization, (2) perceived seriousness of crimes and (3) size of the community (population size); suggesting that all of these relationships will be positive--the higher the score for these three variables the higher the score for fear. Also, it was hypothesized that these relationships would be greater (a) for women than for men, and (b) for personal crimes than for property crimes. The survey was sent to a sample of registered motor vehicle owners in the state of Virginia; a sample of 952 was used in this study.

All of the relationships were positive. Only two of the sub-hypotheses were supported: that the relationship between perceived seriousness and fear of crime was greater for women than for men, and that the relationship between population size and fear of crime was greater for women than for men.

Implications of the results and the limitations of the study are discussed. Suggestions are made for future research.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### -Trends in crime-

Fear of crime is as much a reality as crime itself. Our reactions to the problem of crime may influence or interfere with our day-to-day activities. Some people may own guns because of their perception of the crime problem. Others may avoid certain areas where they feel they would be more vulnerable to crime. Yet not everyone is a victim of crime, nor does everyone perceive crime as being a serious problem.

According to the United States Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Twenty-nine percent (24.8 million) of the Nation's households were touched by a crime of violence or theft in 1982" (1983:1). With nearly a fourth of all households having experienced some crime, it is probably safe to assume that everyone has either been a victim of crime, or knows someone who has been victimized. Nevertheless, the number of households hit by crime has declined slowly since 1975. Crime is still a major concern for most Americans:

Crime is a social problem for two distinct groups; the citizenry who are its potential victims and the criminal justice system which has the formal responsibility of controlling it. While the relevance of the calibration of crime is different for the two groups, measures of crime



have mainly developed around the interests of the criminal justice system which is mainly interested in workload and allocation of its resources. People in the system are concerned with absolute numbers of reported crime incidents and with their consequences: arrests, court cases, convictions, commitments and paroles. Crime rate (absolute number of reported crimes per population) is used only as a very rough measure of performance to demonstrate to the outside public how well the criminal justice system is doing its job.

(Balkin, 1979:343)

Whether the concern with crime is from a professional perspective (as a measurement of job effectiveness) or from a personal perspective (the assessment of risk or vulnerability, or a history of victimization) crime is a problem that every individual must confront.

For the years 1976 to 1980 the crime rate in Virginia was similar to that of the nation at large in terms of incidence ranking. Data in Table I show that for the index

Insert Table I about here

offenses measured, there were some rates in Virginia that paralleled those for the United States--although the mean crime rates in Virginia were smaller (Department of Criminal Justice Services, 1982). Specifically, the rates were most similar for murder/non-negligent manslaughter and forcible rape, which is indicative of the low incidence of these crimes in both Virginia and in the United States at large. However, robbery and aggravated assault showed less

similarity when comparing the mean crime rates nationwide and for Virginia--the rate for robbery in Virginia was only about half of the rate for robbery nationwide. The rate for aggravated assault was also much smaller for Virginia. The mean rate for burglary in the state was only about two thirds of the national figure. And finally, the rates for larceny were similar, while the rate for motor vehicle theft for the U.S. at large was nearly twice the rate for that category in Virginia.

Perhaps there are cultural conditions that would predicate different types of crime in the local area than what is predominant on a national level. For example, the rate of motor vehicle theft may be smaller in Virginia because of an economic reason: there may not be as many cars per capita in Virginia as there are nationwide, and therefore not as many motor vehicle thefts. Perhaps there is a lower rate of crime in the state because Virginians (a) have less property to be stolen than the nation at large, (b) come from a culture that favors protection of property and thus they are less likely to be victimized, or (c) are less likely to report instances of victimization than are U.S. citizens in general and opt instead to handle matters themselves. Any of these explanations is possible, although each is offered only as a possible explanation for the differences between the mean crime rates for the state and for the country.

The differences mentioned above are not an indication that crime is less of a problem in this state than it is in other parts of the nation. Although the rates may be lower in Virginia, they still suggest that criminal activity is occurring in the state, which presents law enforcement officials with the need to "control" crime, and which confronts the populace with questions about their personal safety. For Virginians, as for everyone, crime is a very real issue. Not only does the crime "industry" provide jobs (both legitimate and illegitimate), but it threatens to affect the lives of the population in general. Anyone could be a victim of crime.

-Victims of crime-

Who are the victims of crime? The U.S. Department of Justice has indicated the following trends:

As in previous years, chances of victimization were related to a household's family income, race, and place of residence.

- \* Black households were more likely than white households to have had members who were victims of robbery or aggravated assault in 1982.
- \* 10% of all black households and 6% of all white households were victims of at least one burglary or attempted burglary in 1982.
- \* About the same proportions of white and black households were victims of theft.
- \* In general, the higher the income the more likely a family was to be a victim of theft.
- \* Families with low incomes were the most likely to be the victims of burglary.
- \* At least a third of all urban households were touched by crime.
- \* The greater vulnerability of urban than suburban households was due primarily to higher urban rates for burglary and violent crime.
- \* Households in rural areas were less likely than

those in urban or suburban areas to be victims of any crime.

- \* Urban households were only a bit more likely than suburban households to be victims of larcenies.
- \* 13% of urban (but only 10% of suburban and 8% of rural households) were victims of crimes of high concern (violent crimes by strangers and burglaries).

(1983:1-2)

Beyond this, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reveals that men more than women are victims (except for rape); younger people are more likely to be victimized than are older people (except for pickpocketing and purse snatching); the divorced and the never-married are more often the victims of personal crimes than are the married or widowed; blacks are more often victimized than are whites (except for cases of theft); and the rate of victimization is higher for Hispanics than it is for non-Hispanics (1981c).

Of course, just being young, black, or an urbanite is not in itself a prescription for crime vulnerability. Often one's chance of becoming a victim is modified by certain social factors--such as the time at which one is out on the streets, or in which area of a city one lives or works.

When considering crime rates one must remember that these rates are not static:

Examination of the relationship by age, race, and sex of victims reveals that for all but one population subgroup (black females 12-20), rates of both robbery and assault victimization increase monotonically as neighborhood structural density increases....

(Sampson, 1983:276)

The crime rates for any given offense are in a constant state of flux. These year-to-year changes may correlate with changes in other social realms, such as migration toward urban areas. Or advances in technology may create a new category of crime--computer "hacking" for example. In a case such as the latter it may be difficult for any one individual to perceive of himself or herself as being a victim; yet there are many "white collar" crimes that would fit this pattern which affect all of society. In this sense, everyone is a victim of crime, but most people do not realize this nor do they perceive criminal activity as a threat.

Thus crime affects the lives of every person, whether one is a criminal, a direct victim (as in a robbery or assault), an indirect victim (as in tax fraud), a relative, friend, or acquaintance of someone who has been victimized, or a law enforcement agent. And the effects of crime on the lives of individual citizens can take many forms. Some people may suffer personal injury or physical impairment as the result of a crime. Some people may be deprived of personal property. Others may suffer psychological trauma during the process of victimization. (This may be particularly true for rape victims.) Yet others may alter the routine of their daily lives to compensate for what they perceive as unnecessary exposure to crime. (This is true not

only of the people who avoid walking alone at night, but of the the people who refrain from talking to strangers in the streets, or those who feel the need to carry weapons.)

The perceived vulnerability to crime, as well as the fear of crime, varies from person to person. And the opportunity for becoming the victim of a crime varies as well. Still, everyone is potentially a victim, and similarly, that potentiality imposes upon the lives and lifestyles of everyone.

The answer to "Who is a victim of crime?" may seem obvious. But it often isn't as easy to describe victims as one might suppose. For some crimes, such as rape or murder, of course, it is quite clear who has been victimized. But for other crimes, such as welfare or insurance fraud, embezzlement, public corruption, or vagrancy, the victim is less clearly defined. A crime in which corporate funds are taken may ultimately be paid for by shareholders. Welfare fraud is absorbed by taxpayers. Public corruption may affect the trust of the general public toward officeholders. For the crime of arson, the only official victim may be the owner of the building--for whom destruction may even be financially advantageous. If only the building is destroyed, perhaps the real victim is the insurance company that covers the loss (and ultimately all the policyholders whose premiums provided the funds). But in other cases, the lives or property of the building's tenants may be lost. For crimes of property, in general, the economic loss may be absorbed by the crime victim or may be covered partially or entirely by insurance. Defining the victims of crime can be more difficult than one might assume.

(U.S. Department of Justice, 1981a:1)

## CHAPTER II

### VICTIMIZATION SURVEYS

When one hears about the "official crime rates," usually this refers to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report (UCR). The UCR is a compilation of crime statistics from national, state, and local agencies or police precincts, who voluntarily contribute information to the FBI (U.S. Department of Justice, 1981). The FBI has defined several categories of crimes; and crime rates are established by using the information from the different supplying agencies and comparing it to Bureau of the Census information on population. The UCR measures the following crimes: murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault (including attempted assault and attempted murder), burglary (including forced-entry, attempted forced-entry, and unlawful entry), larceny theft (including shoplifting, and theft from or theft of motor vehicle parts), and motor vehicle theft.

The UCR has been widely criticized (Kitsuse and Cicourel, 1963; Price, 1966; Biderman and Reiss, 1967; Black, 1970; Chilton and Spielberger, 1972; Hindelang, 1974; Howard, 1975; Skogan, 1975; Booth et al., 1977; Eck and Riccio, 1979; and Cohen and Lichbach, 1982). These authors concur that a central problem with the official crime

statistics (the UCR) is that they can only account for the crimes that are reported to the police; and since most crimes are not reported to the police (Black, 1970; Hindelang, 1974; and Skogan, 1974) our official records may be a gross underestimation of the extent of crime in this country. Another problem that exists with the UCR is that it generally does not account for social structures and their effects on crime rates. While the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) admits quite openly that its data are concerned with the population variables, other variables may be significant to the study of crime. For example, Cohen et al. (1981) note how social inequality may be a factor in crime.

In 1963 the President's Commission of Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (the "Crime Commission") funded the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) to conduct research designed to estimate the "true" figure of crime (in a study referred to as a victimization survey). The data revealed that the "official" crime rates were less than the "actual" crime rates (Ennis, 1967). Crime rates computed from the victimization data were much higher than those rates from the UCR. This led many researchers to believe that they had found a new tool to provide more accurate information on the total incidence of crime in the United States (Skogan, 1977).



In 1967 and 1968 conferences were held by the Census Bureau to discuss research needs for criminal justice, identifying, among others, a need for victimization surveys. Later that year Congress established the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), which developed the National Crime Survey (NCS) (U.S. Department of Justice, 1981b). Data contained in the NCS are the results of an interviewing process that goes on for a two- to three-month period, investigating victimization of those persons aged twelve or older (ibid.). The NCS measures the crimes of rape, assault, robbery, larceny (both household and personal), burglary, and motor vehicle theft. In its measuring of victimization, the NCS considers the social circumstances surrounding the criminal event including: the frequency of these incidents; characteristics of both the victims and the offenders; whether or not the crimes were reported to the police; and the social impact of the crimes. Since the first pre-test of the NCS was conducted in 1970, the LEAA has continued to make efforts to improve and refine this survey.

The NCS has demonstrated that the more serious crimes happen less frequently than do the less serious crimes (U.S. Department of Justice, 1981a). Serious crimes are the personal crimes of rape, personal robbery, and assault. Property crimes such as household thefts, larcenies, motor

vehicle theft, and burglary, are considered less serious, as they do not involve violence or the threat of violence. According to the 1981 data 63 percent of victimizations were household thefts and larcenies; 21 percent were motor vehicle theft and burglary; and 16 percent were rape, personal robbery and assault (note that murder was not included in these surveys).

Like the UCR and other victimization surveys, the NCS has been criticized (Booth et al., 1977; Decker, 1977; Kitsuse and Cicourel, 1963; Levine, 1976; Reiss, 1967; and Skogan, 1974). The problems that have been identified include forgetfulness of the respondents (Can people really remember if they were victimized?); lack of uniform definitions from one respondent to the next; and the possibility that some respondents to such surveys may "make up" accounts of victimization (because they may believe that this is what the researcher wants to hear), or may deny that they have been victimized.

Yet, victimization surveys such as the NCS may be able to generate information on certain variables of the crime equation which cannot be accounted for by the official statistics. Questions about social structure, activity patterns, and other such variables can be addressed in the context of a victimization survey, whereas in the official reports this kind of information is not available. For

instance, Cohen and Land (1984) found many different structural control variables that acted as suppressor variables. (Their influence was positively related to some measures of crime and negatively related to others.)

There is also a possibility that in some areas a subculture exists that may affect a predisposition to some kinds of crime (Cohen and Land, 1984; Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967). Stafford and Galle (1984) point out as well that different lifestyles may lead to different exposure to risk, which could also be an important factor. Again, these issues can be addressed more easily in victimization surveys than in the official statistics.

Thus the victimization surveys, while having some limitations, also have some advantages over the official reports of crime. First, these interviews can measure some of what has been called the "dark figure of crime" (Skogan, 1977). In other words, they may indicate the degree to which crimes are not reported to the police, and never make it into the official statistics (or the UCR figures). Table II shows the different crime rates for 1982 as reported by the UCR and the NCS data.

Insert Table II about here

Second, the NCS could be used to measure the nature and extent of some activities that do not appear in the official crime statistics because they are not legally defined as

crimes; the borderline legal activities which may be of interest to criminologists, particularly those criminologists who are interested in studying how some acts are defined as criminal and others are not. Thus the victimization data could provide some information on those acts which at one point in time are not criminally defined, but which later are so defined, or are the subjects of legislation to define them as illicit. Researchers could thereby check to see if the labelling of an act as criminal reduces the incidence of that act, or conversely, if decriminalization has a significant impact on the occurrence of the act.

Third, the NCS provides data which allow social investigators to examine more closely the social implications of crime--such as the personal characteristics of victims--which are largely ignored in the official crime reports. The data from victimization surveys have even given us a profile of the typical victim--a young, single, black man, who is out on the streets at night (U.S. Department of Justice, 1981c). We can also get a closer look at the relationship between the victim and the offender, although in assault and rape cases where the offender is known intimately by the victim, the victims are often reluctant to report these incidents to either the police or social research surveys (Dukes and Mattley, 1977).

Fourth, victimization surveys can be used to measure the social impact of crime on victims and non-victims (society). By using these surveys we can tap into the attitudes, opinions, and fears of the public about crime (U.S. Department of Justice, 1977) in conjunction with the data on victimization, which is helpful when trying to assess the impact of being victimized. (That is, such a study would not suffer the ecological fallacy of looking at "official crime rates" on the one hand and comparing them to the attitudes of a different population.)

Fifth, as Decker et al. (1982) note, the NCS has uniform definitions, while the UCR data are subject to varying interpretations from precinct to precinct. The same study noted as well that victimization studies may be more accurate than official statistics, as only the criminal would be a better source of information about crime than the victim.

Sixth, if longitudinal surveys are used in victimization studies, the data from these surveys can be used as comparative indications of the trends of criminal activity relative to official records. This type of comparison yields a method of triangulation. If social scientists wish to gain an insight into the nature of crime, official reports are certainly one means to that end. Another means is to use the trend reports from victimization

surveys to look at the nature of crime. This one method should not be used in any attempt to validate the other. Rather, the different methods will provide different pictures, and this situation can be useful in research.

Neither the NCS nor the UCR is the ultimate measure of crime; both are potentially useful instruments. However, it may not be appropriate to use the NCS data in an attempt to validate the UCR, although many studies seem to have lamented this apparently obvious fact (Cohen and Lichbach, 1982; Cohen and Land, 1984; Booth et al., 1977). According to Booth et al., "...the two indices of crime are tapping quite different phenomena.... Lacking evidence showing one measure as the more valid indicator of crime, we conclude that neither is a satisfactory index of crime for purposes of explaining the causes of crime" (1977:196)

There are several fallacies in this argument. First the existence of two separate measures of crime does not imply a "race" in which one should necessarily prove to be "more valid" than the other. Second, no one was claiming the power to explain anything; neither the UCR nor the NCS can be expected to provide the etiology of criminal activity. These measures merely reflect (to some extent) the quantity of criminal activity. Finally, to assume that if neither measure is superior then both are worthless is fallacious.

One of the strongest criticisms of the UCR is that there is apparently a large number of crimes that go unreported in the official statistics. In that respect, it is important to consider why crimes are not reported to the police or to the people who conduct victimization surveys. It is possible that for the same reasons a person would not report crime to the police he or she would also refrain from reporting crime to a survey researcher. A study by Dukes and Mattley (1977) listed some of the reasons why rape is not reported. Among these are the notions: that the police would not believe the victim; that the rapist would not be put away; that the victim was in some way responsible for what had happened; that the victim was confused, scared, or embarrassed; or that someone had advised the victim not to report. Skogan and Maxfield (1981) have noted that for data on rape or assault, the self-report instruments may not be reliable because of the nature of the victim/offender relationship. This would, however, be just as true for data from the official reports.

Decker et al. (1982) have noted the following reasons why victims may not want to report crimes to the police: the victim may not be aware that a crime has been committed against him or her; there may be a fear of reprisal, or a fear of self-incrimination; there may be a loss of work time involved in making an official complaint; the victim may

fear publicity or cross-examination (public condemnation); the offense is not perceived as being serious enough to warrant police intervention; the victim may feel that the offender will not be apprehended or that the police are inefficient; he or she may not be able to identify the offender; or being unaware of victims' compensation programs. Kidd and Chayet (1984) also noted that insurance claims may have an impact on whether or not a person reports the crime. Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1980) claim that the most frequent reason that crimes go unreported is that the victim does not feel that the crime was serious enough to warrant a police report. Another reason crimes may go unreported is that the victim fears further victimizations. According to the LEAA (1974), only 74 percent of known victims reported the incidence of victimization to the survey researchers. Can we really see with one measure what the other is not telling us? Probably not. Although some crimes will be revealed in victimization surveys which will not be reported to the police (Skogan, 1977) it is not the case that the surveys guarantee a complete picture.

A major problem with official statistics that I have previously left unmentioned is the problem of political manipulations and how they can affect crime reporting. Consider this statement by Seidman and Couzens:

Crime statistics, the index of crimes especially, are commonly used for several



purposes. Crime became a significant concern of politicians and voters, and the statistics were widely used to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies of crime control. As the role of the police in the society became a matter of increased interest, crime statistics were used to evaluate the performance of police departments. Vast amounts of money are currently being made available for crime control programs, and crime statistics are used in some places to determine the allocation of these funds. The data generating system and the data generated are badly suited to these uses. Each of these uses of crime statistics creates pressures to have the statistics show certain things. Sometimes the pressure is to show that crime is being reduced. Sometimes the pressure is to increase the number of crimes. These pressures impinge upon the data generating system, the police departments, and in some cases affect the statistics entirely apart from the effects of the number of crimes which are actually committed. Consequently, those indicators almost invariably used for these purposes--the Index Crimes of the Uniform Crime Reporting System--are highly misleading for what they are said to measure, in part simply because they are used as measures.

(1974:484)

These pressures on the mechanism for generating crime rates would not necessarily exist with self-report studies such as the NCS.

The NCS is not the only victimization survey that exists.<sup>1</sup> There are an infinite number of "local" victimization surveys administered by universities and research agencies as well. Some of the problems with the NCS may or may not exist with the "local" surveys--which may

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<sup>1</sup> The author knows of no other regularly administered national crime victimization survey.

be very beneficial for those who desire to conduct social research. For example, the NCS may have a problem with its sampling procedure, considering that it is administered during working hours when many people may not be at home. One way to avoid this problem is to use a "mail in" survey.<sup>2</sup> Also, we can choose different sampling procedures to fit the needs of different types of research. If we are interested in victims' attitudes toward crime we can select a sample of known victims; or if we want to study the victims of crime in a specific part of a community (the victims on the outskirts of the city, for example), we can derive a sample of just that population. The official data are not as easily flexible in this sense. Also, knowing that many crimes are unreported to the police and that even of those crimes which are reported not all of the offenders are arrested, the victims can be surveyed to get a better understanding of the criminal than that which could be provided by the official statistics (What was the demeanor of the offender? What was he doing before he or she attacked you? How did you happen to be in the vicinity of the offender?).

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, even this method has its drawbacks--the response rate will be less for this type of survey. (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 1981b)

Social scientists can examine what is already known about self-report studies and how they compare to official records of crime, and use that information in an attempt to improve the questionnaires, and to design instruments that will provide more information on those things that need to be studied. However, any attempt to modify or improve the victimization surveys or any such instrument, has to take into account the goals of the research projects at hand. It is not sufficient to pick a methodological device at random to conduct any study. The measures used should be valid measures, relevant to the topic of the research. If one wishes to study recorded crimes then obviously the UCR data are more appropriate than a self-report instrument. If one wishes to study the victims of crime, then the NCS or a similar questionnaire would be better suited to that purpose. Again, if one wants to study the attitudes of victims or non-victims (to measure abstract reality such as the fear of crime) then a self-report technique is the more appropriate method of investigation. Both victimization studies and official records are valid and appropriate measures of the incidence of criminal activity for those aspects of the criminal event that they purport to examine. A critical consideration, however, is that these instruments were only designed for a limited number of uses. Neither the UCR nor the NCS was originally intended to evaluate the

efficiency of police precincts, or to cross-validate other measures of crime. In social science research it is important to be aware of the limitations of our methodological procedures. These limitations aside, these two types of devices for assessing the extent and nature of crime can provide researchers with a multitude of information.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FEAR OF CRIME

Why should sociologists research the fear of crime? One reason is that the fear of crime may be indicative of other social problems. Miethe and Lee (1984) have noted:

As a measure of anxiety and worry about criminal victimization, fear of crime and its consequences are also symptomatic of larger sociological concerns, such as alienation, anomie, and powerlessness.<sup>3</sup>

(Miethe and Lee, 1984:401)

The fear of crime is also an important social phenomenon to study when one considers the effect it can have on behavior. It may be that the fear of crime influences decisions such as where we live or work, or how many locks we have on our doors (U.S. Department of Justice, 1981d). Yet, letting the fear of crime affect our lives in such a manner is not without a cost:

Individuals pay the price of fear when they pass up chances to employ and enjoy the opportunities created by urban life because of crime: when they stay at home or out of parks, when they avoid public transportation or the use of public facilities, and when they invest large sums (both financial and psychological) in fortifying their homes and places of work.

(Skogan and Maxfield, 1981:48)

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<sup>3</sup> See also Goldsmith and Goldsmith, 1976.

But the fear of crime itself can be affected by social factors. Balkin (1979) suggests that these factors include wealth (what a person stands to lose); health (whether a person will be able to survive an attack); and the past victimization experiences of both the individual and the people in his or her life. With these as contributing factors to the fear of crime, the possibility becomes evident that perhaps there are different degrees of the fear of crime for different people, and that perhaps not all crimes are feared equally. Some crimes, such as white collar crime, may not be "feared" in the sense that other crimes, such as those that affect the victim directly, may be feared. It is ironic, however, that the people who have the highest chance of being victimized (according to the profile described earlier) are not necessarily the ones who are the most afraid of crime (Maxfield, 1984; Stafford and Galle, 1984; and the U.S. Department of Justice, 1981c). The people who are the most likely candidates for victimization are not necessarily the people most likely to perceive victimization as being a serious problem. There are many factors that affect perceived risk and the fear of crime, both positively and negatively. Factors such as age, sex, and income have been shown to have a major impact; while whether or not the person has been victimized in the past was not significantly related (U.S. Dept. of Justice,

1977). Isolation may be an issue as well, as people who live alone exhibit a greater fear of crime (Braungart et al., 1980).

The literature indicates that as one perceives an increasing risk to a serious crime his or her reaction may become one of increased fear.

When the elderly are touched by crime they appear to be relatively more susceptible to crime that is motivated by economic gain. Although these crimes are not violent, they may cause considerable fear in victims. For example, when a purse is snatched or a pocket is picked, the direct contact with the offender may be very frightening even though it results in no injury. And the economic loss involved may be particularly upsetting to a person who is living on a fixed income.

(U.S. Department of Justice, 1981d:1).

This statement indicates that part of the "fear" may be a fear of the result of the crime and not necessarily of the criminal act itself. In this context, sex has been found to be a strong predictor of fear (Clemente and Kleiman, 1977). When age and sex are considered together, there are further discrepancies between risk and fear. "Older females are the least victimized but the most fearful, while young males are the most victimized but the least fearful...."(Stafford and Galle, 1984:175). Furthermore, Braungart et al. (1980) found that for any age group women report a greater fear of crime than do men.

This seemingly paradoxical situation may reflect a misconception on the part of these individuals as to how much of a risk of being victimized exists for them. Again, this could be an indication that the fear is of the result of crime more than the crime itself. Part of the differences in the fear of crime between men and women may be due to a difference in socialization. Men (young men in particular) may have been brought up to be "fearless" and this could be reflected in the fear scores for men. Women, on the other hand, who have been led to believe that they should be dependent and passive, may therefore succumb to a greater fear of crime.<sup>4</sup>

A similar situation exists for members of the rural population. Lee (1982) notes that while crime rates are higher in urban areas, fear of crime is equally high in both rural and urban locations. The migration into small towns may have resulted in fewer people choosing to have social interaction with their neighbors, and this breakdown of the traditional social bond may in turn lead to an increase in the fear of crime (Greider and Krannich, 1985). This is not consistent with the image of the crime-free rural community

Over time, the city has had the reputation of being the "breeding ground" for crime. The rural community, by contrast, is viewed as one of the

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<sup>4</sup> In a textbook on deviant behavior, McCaghy (1985) discusses the "images of men and women" as possible factors in "instances of unwanted sexual aggressiveness" (p. 129).



last remaining bastions of law and order. The informal social relationships among neighbors in rural areas are thought to generate a recognition for the rights and property of others, and for conformity to the law. As a result, the image of rural life is one relatively free from the human traumas of crime, or at least, free from any "serious" crime problem. This view is perpetuated by criminologists who, in the past, have almost exclusively directed their investigations toward urban populations, for both theoretical and practical considerations.

(Carter, 1982:20)

Still the thought of rural crime may produce mental images of stolen tractors, or barns deliberately set on fire. This is as much of a misconception as the image of a "haven" from crime (Sagarin et al., 1982). Not all crime in rural areas is farm-related. And not all farm related crime involves expensive equipment. Vandalism is the most frequent crime on farms (ibid.). And most farm-thefts are of inexpensive tools. "However, total dollar losses from these so-called 'petty' crimes may exceed losses from all heavy equipment thefts" (Sagarin et al., 1982:12). The same authors also noted that part of the rural crime problem is a matter of attitude:

Although rural crime has markedly increased, public perception and awareness has not. This is reflected in the fact that rural residents have not adopted home and farm security measures to the same degree as their urban cousins.

(ibid.:16)

According to Warr and Stafford (1983) the fear of victimization is a function of both the perceived risk and the perceived seriousness of a given crime, while neither of these by itself is a strong predictor of fear. "Fear of crime is at least partly independent of crime itself" (Maxfield, 1984:234). On the other hand, one of the factors that may be related to the perceived seriousness of crime is the nature of the crime itself. As was demonstrated in Table I, property crimes occur at much greater rates than do crimes against the person. "Not only do property crimes substantially outnumber more serious personal offenses...but in general the gravity of an offense is inversely proportional to its frequency" (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981:32). It may also be the case that personal crimes are considered to be more serious, and are therefore more feared than are property crimes. Miethe and Lee have noted that one of the problems in creating an instrument to measure fear of crime is this distinction between personal and property crimes:

First, combining items that tap anxiety about violent crime and property loss in the same index may be problematic if various social groups use different criteria and/or experience different anxieties for the two types of fear. For example, fear of personal harm may elicit the most anxiety in all individuals, but anxiety about property loss is more likely to vary according to one's perceived vulnerability and ability to recuperate from such acts, with the loss of property being more serious and threatening to lower class members. Although a specific type of

victimization may lead to a general rise in fear of all crimes, uniting crime-specific fears with particular types of victimization is also a more credible strategy for assessing the relationship between these variables.

(1984:399)

Balkin (1979) concluded that the inverse relationship between fear of crime and past victimization may be due to differences in the exposure to crime that different people face. Thus the inverse relationship mentioned does not indicate that fear of crime is a purely irrational reaction. In other words, one of the elements in an equation of the fear of crime would have to be a rational assessment of risk, considering how often a person is in a situation that would be conducive to that person's being victimized. Even if a person has been victimized in the past, his or her present set of circumstances may be such that he or she is no longer at risk and if he or she is aware that he or she is not in a situation that is "ripe" for victimization, then he or she may not be afraid. To extend Balkin's line of reasoning, a person who was victimized in the past may become more aware of his or her vulnerability and may therefore take extra precautions against crime--which could result in a reduced fear of crime.

But what is the fear of crime? In a paper presented at the 1985 annual meetings of the Southern Sociological Society, Ferraro and LaGrange contend that studies on the

fear of crime suffer from problems of conceptualization. Many studies, they say, measure fear in terms of how safe one feels being alone in his or her neighborhood, or walking in his or her neighborhood after dark. And in fact many studies have used such questions as a measure of fear (Clemente and Kleiman, 1977; Balkin, 1979; Hartnagel, 1979; Braungart et al., 1980; U.S. Department of Justice, 1981b; and Kennedy and Krahn, 1984). Ferraro and LaGrange (1985) argue that such a measure may be tapping into a rationally based assessment of risk or vulnerability to crime rather than an emotional reaction such as fear. This implies the suggestion of an alternate strategy for measuring fear.

But even to ask a person something so blunt as "Are you afraid of crime?" would be problematic. It is possible that a person could be afraid of one crime but not another (rape, but not murder, for example). To avoid this dilemma, one could ask "How afraid are you of the following?" and then provide a list of crimes--but there is still a problem with this type of strategy. Should crimes such as prostitution, fraud, and moonshining be included or would they obscure the nature of the response? Although it is not a perfect measure (very few of our instruments are perfect or ideal) a question such as "Do you feel safe..." appears to be a plausible one. In fact, according to Clemente and Kleiman, such a measure

has face validity in that it assesses fear of crime rather than concern over the crime rate.... If members of major segments of the population are afraid to walk within a mile of their homes it is not being overly dramatic to conclude that such people have a significant fear of crime.  
(1977:525)

Skogan and Maxfield (1981) have argued that while such a measure would not be able to account for the fear of a crime such as burglary, it does emphasize those crimes such as assault, which are labelled as most serious, and which may be most feared. They further argue that it is just that situation of walking alone at night where there is the greatest risk of assault, and that the measure can appropriately assess the fear of crime in this situation.

## CHAPTER IV

### METHODS AND ANALYSIS

The data in this thesis are part of the Crime in Virginia Survey.<sup>5</sup> This survey consists of an extensive questionnaire that was sent randomly to over 4000 registered motor vehicle owners in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The sample population was drawn from a list of motor vehicle owners with a standard six-digit license plate. For this study, the sample will consist of all of the surveys returned on or before December 31, 1984. The surveys were mailed out in mid-October, and by December 31, 1984, 952 surveys were returned.

#### -Statement of the problem-

Considering the previous research, this study was an investigation of some of the relevant factors of the fear of crime. Specifically, this study presents an examination of the relationship between the fear of victimization and (a) prior victimization; (b) the perceived seriousness of crime; and (c) the size of the community--controlling for both gender differences and differences between personal and property crimes (when measuring the effects of the perceived seriousness of crime and past victimization).

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<sup>5</sup> The CRIME IN VIRGINIA Survey was conducted by the Department of Sociology and the Agricultural Experiment Station at Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University.

-Hypotheses-

Based on a review of the literature, the following hypotheses were formed:

H(1)--the greater the prior victimization<sup>6</sup>, the greater the fear of crime.

H(1a)--the relationship between prior victimization and the fear of crime will be greater for women than for men.

H(1b)--the relationship between prior victimization and fear of crime will be greater for the victims of personal crimes than for the victims of property crimes.

H(2)--the greater the perceived seriousness of crime in the community, the greater the fear of crime.

H(2a)--the relationship between perceived seriousness and fear of crime will be greater for women than for men.

H(2b)--the relationship between perceived seriousness and fear of crime will be greater for

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<sup>6</sup> Although some of the literature indicated that past victimization had no effect on fear of crime, for this study, the relationship will be hypothesized as being positive in order to be consistent with the other hypotheses.

personal crimes than for property crimes.

H(3)--the larger the population of the community in which one lives, the greater the fear of crime will be.

H(3a)--the relationship between the population of the community and fear of crime will be greater for women than for men.

-Data-

The dependent variable FEAR was measured by responses to the statement, "I FEEL SAFE GOING ANYWHERE IN MY COMMUNITY AFTER DARK,"<sup>7</sup> where the following scale was coded as shown:

|                      |                |
|----------------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree... | 3              |
| Disagree.....        | 2              |
| Agree.....           | 1              |
| Strongly agree.....  | 0 <sup>8</sup> |

PAST VICTIMIZATION<sup>9</sup> was measured by responses to the following questions:

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<sup>7</sup> Although as mentioned, there may be different ways of conceptualizing the fear of crime, there is an established precedent for using a measure like the one employed in this study.

<sup>8</sup> This coding strategy was intentionally reversed from the original so that a strong disagreement to the statement about feeling safe would reflect a high expression of fear, and a strong agreement to the statement would reflect a low fear score.

<sup>9</sup> Although the questionnaire included items concerning victimization around second homes, summer camps, and business or rental property, that information was not used in this thesis.



During the past 12 months, did anyone damage, destroy, or attempt to destroy your home or any property around your home?

During the past 12 months, did anyone steal or try to steal a car, truck, motorcycle, or farm machinery owned by YOU OR OTHER MEMBERS OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD?

During the past 12 months, did anyone steal:

- a. Anything from inside your home, such as a stereo, T.V., jewelry, gun, or purse, etc.?
- b. Anything that is kept outside your home such as a bicycle, a garden hose, farm tools, or livestock?
- c. Parts attached to a car, truck, or farm machinery owned by any members of your household, such as a battery, hub-caps, or tapedeck?

During the past 12 months:

- a. Did anyone break into or somehow illegally get into your home, apartment, garage, or another building on your property?
- b. Did you find a door jimmied, a lock forced, or any other signs of an attempted break in?

During the past 12 months, were YOU OR ANY MEMBERS OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD a victim of any of the following violent crimes:

- a. Did anyone take something or attempt to take something directly from you or any member of your household by using force, such as by stick-up, mugging, or threat?
- b. Did anyone beat-up, attack, or hit you or any member of your household?
- c. Were you or any member of your household knifed, shot, shot at, or attacked with some other weapon by anyone?
- d. Did anyone threaten to beat-up or threaten you or any member of your household with a knife, gun, or some other weapon?
- e. Did anyone rape or attempt to rape you or any member of your household?
- f. Were any members of your household murdered?

If any of these questions was answered affirmatively, this counted as an instance of victimization.

The PERCEIVED SERIOUSNESS OF CRIMES was measured by having the respondent indicate whether the following crimes were serious problems in his/her community: burglary,

illegal drugs, drunk driving, embezzlement, forgery/counterfeiting, fraud, gambling, prostitution, rape, assault, robbery, traffic violations, motor vehicle theft, livestock theft, larceny, obscene phone calls, vandalism, unlawful use or possession of weapons, murder, arson, trespassing, and poaching.

The responses were coded as:

Not a problem.....0  
Somewhat a problem...1  
A serious problem....2

Size of community population was measured by the response to the statement, "Where do you live?", where the following options were provided:

Rural=1  
Less than 2,500=2  
2,500 to 9,999=3  
10,000 to 24,999=4  
25,000 to 49,999=5  
Over 50,000=6

For the first control variable, the distinction between personal and property crimes, the categories were: personal crimes (murder/ non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault) and property crimes (burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft). For the first independent variable (past victimization) the category of personal crimes included only those instances of victimization from the series of questions about violent

crime; all other instances of victimization were considered as property offenses. For the second independent variable (perceived seriousness) all crimes except the following were considered property offenses: rape, assault, robbery, obscene phone calls, and murder (these were all considered personal crimes). The distinction between personal and property crimes in the Crime in Virginia Survey involved the word violent. In other words, personal crimes are violent crimes as measured in this study.<sup>10</sup>

The crime of vandalism has been grouped with the crimes that have been defined as property crimes because vandalism is a crime involving property and is not directly threatening a person.

The other control variable was measured by the response to the following: SEX (male=1, female=2).

-Sample-

Of the 952 respondents that returned the questionnaires on or before December 31, 1984, 566 (59.5%) were male and 361 (37.9%) were female, and in 25 cases the data for this question were missing. Whites numbered 871 (91.5%), while blacks were only 55 (5.8%). Only nine respondents were classified as "other races" and there were 17 cases where

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<sup>10</sup> "Violent crime refers to events such as homicide, rape, and assault that may result in injury to a person. Robbery is also considered a violent crime because it involves the use or threat of force against a person." (U.S. Department of Justice, 1983:2)

the data for race were missing.

The ages of the sample members ranged from 14 to 82 years. The income distribution for the sample indicated that 33% earned less than \$25,000 while 35% earned \$40,000 or more,<sup>11</sup> and there were 63 missing cases. Three hundred thirty-nine members of the survey sample live in rural areas (35.6%), while 314 members (32.9%) reported living in non-rural areas with populations up to 49,999, and 257 members (27.0%) lived in an area with a population of at least 50,000.

It is interesting to compare the demographic characteristics of this sample with the available information from the Census on the state of Virginia. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census (1983), there were 5,364,818 persons in the state in 1980. Table III shows the comparisons between the

Insert Table III about here

sample and the state population for sex, race, and residence. The sample is comprised of a higher percentage of males than would be expected from the state population: 59.5 percent of the sample were males, while males comprised only 48.2 percent of the state population. This may be

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<sup>11</sup> Although this may seem to be skewed in favor of the higher income brackets, one must remember that the respondents were asked to report total family income, which will make the figures appear to be inflated.

because more men than women in this state are registered motor vehicle owners. The percentage of blacks in the sample (5.8 percent) is only a third of the percentage for the state population (17.6 percent). This may be indicative that blacks in Virginia are less likely than whites to be motor vehicle owners, or that blacks are less likely than whites to return survey questionnaires. The figures for residence are similar, with 35.6 percent of the sample population and 33.1 percent of the state population living in rural areas.

Table IV lists the percentages for both the sample

Insert Table IV about here

and the state regarding age and income. In the 40- to 59-year-old age group there is a large difference. In the sample 40.8 percent fell into this category; for the state of Virginia only 20.7 percent are in this age group. This may be because this age group is at a financial advantage over other such groups, and is therefore more likely to own one or more cars. Thus this group would be more likely to be included on a list of registered motor vehicle owners.

I have already discussed that the income figures for this sample may be inflated since they represent total household incomes. The median income for the sample fell between \$30,000 and \$39,999; the median income for the state

population was under \$20,000. Again, it is also possible that people with higher incomes are more likely to be motor vehicle owners.

The figures for education in the state and in the sample are presented in Table V. The sample appears to be

Insert Table V about here

comprised of more highly educated people than does the state population. The percentage of college graduates, for example, was twice as high for the sample (18.3 percent) than for the state (9.2 percent). This may be an indication that people with higher educational attainment are more likely to return survey questionnaires than are their less educated counterparts. This may also be an indication that the less educated are less likely to be registered motor vehicle owners in the state of Virginia.

The demographics of this sample are not consistent with the census information for the state of Virginia. One reason suggested for the fact that there are many more men than women in the sample, is that the sample was drawn from registered motor vehicle owners in the state, and it is possible that more men than women in the state of Virginia fall into that category. The figures for racial breakdowns also were inconsistent with the state census, which may reflect a bias of whites being more likely to return the

surveys than are non-whites. As mentioned, the high figure for income reflects total family income. Yet the Virginia census reports for total household income are still lower than figures for the present sample. This discrepancy may be an indication either that families with lower incomes are less likely to return the survey, or that families with lower incomes are less likely to have a registered motor vehicle.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> It is also possible that some of the household income figures in the survey were intentionally inflated by the respondents. It has been my experience in coding such surveys that there is often a negative reaction to questions concerning income: some respondents give a broad range so as to disguise the actual figure, and some simply refuse to answer the question, while others are openly hostile (even in their verbal responses) in indicating that such a matter is no one's business but their own.

-Analysis-

The analysis for this study consisted of running correlations (Pearson's  $r$  ) for each variable against the fear of crime. The sub-hypotheses were tested by selecting out for each category and running two separate correlations. That is, in the case of testing the sub-hypothesis that the relationship between past victimization and fear of crime would be greater for women than for men, after running the correlation for the main hypothesis (that past victimization and fear of crime would have a positive relationship) two further correlations were run: one for men and one for women. Thus, to test the hypotheses, a total of 13 correlations were run between:

past victimization and fear of crime for the sample;

past victimization and fear of crime for men only;

past victimization and fear of crime for women only;

past victimization of personal crime and fear of crime  
for the sample;

past victimization of property crime and fear of crime  
for the sample;

perceived seriousness of crime and fear of crime for the  
sample;

perceived seriousness of crime and fear of crime for men  
only;

perceived seriousness of crime and fear of crime for  
women only;



perceived seriousness of personal crime and fear of crime  
for the sample;  
perceived seriousness of property crime and fear of crime  
for the sample;  
population size of the community and fear of crime for  
the sample;  
population size of the community and fear of crime for  
men only; and,  
population size of the community and fear of crime for  
women only.

Separate correlations were used to test the sub-hypotheses rather than using sex or type of crime (personal versus property) in a three-way correlation equation, because these sub-hypotheses were posited in such a way that looking at the separate correlations would be more meaningful. What is being addressed is whether the correlation between fear of crime and perceived seriousness of crime was greater for women than for men (for example), rather than the generic relation between the fear of crime, perceived seriousness and sex.

Many of the variables in this study had to be computed from more than one question in the survey. For any variable that was computed, only the non-missing cases were used.

For the variable PAST VICTIMIZATION, as mentioned, there was a series of questions on victimization. All of

the questions about victimization of a violent or personal crime were added together to make a variable for personal victimization. (This was used when making the comparison between personal and property crime.) Then all of the questions pertaining to property crimes were added together. Finally these two computed scores were added together to form the victimization score. The procedure was the same for computing the variable PERCEIVED SERIOUSNESS.

## CHAPTER V

### RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### -Results-

As mentioned earlier, the fear of crime is an important social phenomenon insofar as it influences social behavior. In order to understand the fear of crime it is necessary to consider what factors may contribute to or effect the fear of crime. This research has focused on four variables in this regard: past victimization, perceived seriousness, sex, and the size of the community where the respondent lives.

The first hypothesis [H(1)] was that prior victimization would be positively correlated with fear of crime. In Table VI the correlation for the two variables

Insert Table VI about here

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<sup>13</sup> Significance acceptable for this study is 0.001.

is + 0.1266 (which was significant<sup>13</sup>). As hypothesized, the correlation is positive, indicating that past victimization is related to a higher fear of crime.<sup>14</sup>

The correlation between victimization and fear of crime is higher for men than it is for women ( $r$  equal to + 0.1686 and + 0.0504 respectively). It was suggested in the literature that women exhibit a greater fear of crime than do men. A correlation between sex and the fear variable yielded an  $r$  of + 0.2420 (which was significant). This correlation supports the assertion from the earlier studies that the fear of crime is greater for women than for men. Since women are more fearful of crime than are men, it at first appears to be inconsistent that the separate correlations for the fear of crime and past victimization are greater for males than for females. Instead the table shows a higher  $r$  for men than for women. But the correlation for women was not at all significant. So although there is a failure to support the first sub-hypothesis [H(1a)] we cannot assume that the relationship between the fear of crime and past victimization is stronger for men than for women.

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<sup>14</sup> Considering the low magnitude of the coefficient it should not be implied that the relationship here is a strong one.

The second sub-hypothesis [H(1b)], that the relationship between the fear of crime and past victimization would be stronger for the victims of personal crimes than for the victims of property crimes, was not supported. The  $r$  values for this relationship were + 0.0537 and + 0.1282 respectively; however, only the second figure was found to be significant. The correlation between the fear of crime and victimization of personal crimes was not significant.

Table VII displays the correlation coefficients

Insert Table VII about here

relating to the second major hypothesis [H(2)]: the greater the perceived seriousness of crime, the higher the fear of crime. The  $r$  for the second hypothesis [H(2)] is + 0.3637, showing this to be one of the stronger relationships found in this study.

The first sub-hypothesis for the second major hypothesis [H(2a)], yielded an  $r$  equal to + 0.3532 for men and + 0.3527 for women. Thus the hypothesis that the relationship between the fear of crime and the perceived seriousness of crime would be greater for women than for men, was not supported. However, the difference between these two figures is so slight that to claim that the relationship was really stronger for men (the opposite of the first sub-hypothesis) would be incorrect.

The second sub-hypothesis [H(2b)] in this case was supported. The relationship between fear of crime and perceived seriousness of crime was stronger when personal crimes were considered alone than when property crimes were considered (where  $r$  was equal to + 0.4013 and + 0.3100 respectively).

The data in Table VIII shows the relationship between

Insert Table VIII about here

the fear of crime and population size of the community. The figures indicate support for the third major hypothesis [H(3)], which predicts that fear of crime is variable according to the size of the community. In this instance the sub-hypothesis [H(3a)] that this relationship would be stronger for women than for men, is also supported. The  $r$  for women was found to be + 0.2162, while the  $r$  for men was + 0.1838. Each of these relationships was significant, although there was no significant difference between the correlations for men and women.

-Discussion-

The correlations in this study have all been positive, as hypothesized. Most interesting were the correlations associated with the second major hypothesis concerning the relationship between perceived seriousness and fear of crime, which were all equal to + 0.3100 or higher, and which were all significant. This hypothesis [H(2)] and the associated sub-hypotheses were the most strongly supported in this study. <sup>15</sup>

It is important to recognize that all of the major hypotheses were supported. It is also interesting to note that of the five sub-hypotheses in this study two were supported; and in two of the three cases which were not supported the relationships simply were not significant.

The first major hypothesis [H(1)], that there would be a positive relationship between past victimization and the fear of crime, was supported, but the correlation coefficient was low. This is not inconsistent with the research by Balkin (1979) who did not find a positive correlation between the two variables. Yet the current

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<sup>15</sup> Although all the figures were positive and significant, one of the sub-hypotheses failed to be supported--that the relationship between the fear of crime and perceived seriousness would be higher for women than for men. We found the opposite, but the difference in  $r$  values was too small to imply the inverse of that hypothesis.

study did not reveal an "inverse" relationship. It was suggested in the literature (Balkin, 1979; Stafford and Galle, 1984; Braungart et al., 1980) that past victimization experiences do not have a strong affect on the fear of crime.

For the second major hypothesis [H(2)], the fear of crime was found to be more strongly related to perceived seriousness than it had been to past victimization. All of these correlations were significant, as all of the correlation coefficients were + 0.3100 or higher. This again suggests that the problem with the first hypothesis (and the sub-hypotheses associated with it) may have been that the actual number of persons who had been victimized was so small that it affected the correlations. There were not as many missing cases for the data relating to perceived seriousness.

The final major hypothesis and the sub-hypothesis related to it were both supported. In this instance there were 48 cases where the data were missing, and the relationships were all found to be significant. Therefore the most plausible explanation for the small figures would have to be that this is not a direct relationship, and that there are other undetermined psychological, environmental, and sociological variables affecting these relationships. Perhaps population size, when controlling for neighborhood



cohesion<sup>16</sup>, would be more strongly related to the fear of crime. Also, in this instance the length of time that one has lived in his or her community could be a factor.

In evaluating these relationships one should also realize that there are limitations to any research. There may have been biases toward whites and members of the higher income brackets, which may have distorted the relationships. The sample was drawn from a list of registered motor vehicle owners in the state of Virginia. It is quite possible that in Virginia whites and members of the higher income brackets are over-represented in such a sample. Also, it is conceivable that whites and members of the higher income brackets have different access to crime-preventive measures. This could have an impact on the fear of crime for those people.

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<sup>16</sup> See Hartnagel, 1979.

-Conclusions-

For this research it was hypothesized that several variables would be positively related to the fear of crime (past victimization, perceived seriousness of crime, and population size of the community). The correlations were all positive, and most were supported (including all three of the main hypotheses). Of the five sub-hypotheses two were supported (that the relationship between perceived seriousness and fear of crime was greater when considering only personal crimes than when considering only property crimes; and that the relationship between population size and fear of crime was greater for women than for men).

The first hypothesis [H(1)] was supported. Past victimization did have an effect on the fear of crime. Although the previous research was not consistent, there is much literature that suggests that there is no relationship between these two variables (Balkin, 1979; Hartnagel, 1979; Stafford and Galle, 1979; U.S. Department of Justice, 1980). This discrepancy between the results from this study and those from previous research may be an indication that while a relationship exists it may be confounded by other variables, such as sex, race, age, or social cohesion.

The most unexpected result in this report was that the relationship between the fear of crime and past

victimization was stronger for men than for women. Although, as stated, fear of crime is not strongly related to past victimization (Lee, 1982; Stafford and Galle, 1984), it is still assumed that this relationship would be stronger for women than for men. Historically women have been socialized to be passive and dependent. Therefore one would expect them to feel less independent and less able to protect themselves and, thus, more fearful of crime in any situation. One possible explanation for the correlation between past victimization and fear of crime for men is the popular conception that a "real" man would not be so weak as to allow himself to be victimized. Thus when a man is victimized it may shatter his self-image, making him experience feelings of inadequacy. This could lead to increased fear of crime as he may feel that he is not capable of fending off an attack as he should be. A recent example of this effect of past victimization possibly exists in the case of Bernard Goetz. It is not clear whether this "subway vigilante" shot at four youths (who approached him and asked for money) because he believed himself to be in immediate danger, or because he had been victimized prior to this subway incident (Macleans, 1986:5).

On the other hand, since women have traditionally been socialized to be passive and dependent, it may be true that a victimization experience for women does not result in as

dramatic a distortion of self-image as it would for men. It is also quite possible that when a woman is a victim the men in her life may act more protective of her (for the same reasons mentioned above that women are socialized to be dependent, and men are socialized to be responsible and to protect women). This may have an effect on the relationship between fear of crime and past victimization for women.

It was also surprising that the relationship between past victimization and the fear of crime was not greater for those victims of personal crimes than for the victims of property crimes. This may reflect the low incidence of actual victimization found in this study.<sup>17</sup> Also as Skogan and Maxfield (1981) have pointed out, past victimization may have limited influence on the fear of crime, as most victimization incidents involve the less serious crimes. "In truth, many victimization experiences are not very traumatic" (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981:59). This is particularly true of those crimes in which the victim does not come into direct contact with the offender.

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<sup>17</sup> This study employed a measure of the incidence of crime by household. Thus the respondent (who was not necessarily the victim) may not personally have been affected by the criminal act. However, it is important to note that just because the respondent may not have been the actual victim this does not mean that the victimization of a household member would not have any effect at all on the respondent. Still it probably would not have as strong an impact as it would if the respondent were the actual victim. Skogan and Maxfield (1981) have also suggested that the fear of crime is based in part on the vicarious experience of crime.

Alternatively, if the fear of crime is so great as to alter a person's lifestyle and daily routine, then perhaps those individuals with the highest fear of crime have adjusted their behavior accordingly, and therefore would avoid those situations that would put them at risk of being victimized. Thus, those individuals with the highest fear of crime may actually be victimized less than other individuals (ibid.).

The most interesting finding of this study was that the perceived seriousness of crime was much more strongly related to the fear of crime than were past victimizations or size of community. Although this result may in part reflect a low incidence of actual victimization, it still suggests that the way people perceive crime may be a stronger determinant of their attitudes than the actual occurrence of crime. Warr and Stafford (1983) suggested that the fear of crime is a function of both the perceived seriousness of crime and its perceived risk, but that neither alone is a strong predictor of the fear of crime. The single highest correlation in this study,  $r = + 0.4013$ , was for the relationship between the perceived seriousness of personal crimes and the fear of crime. Again, this relationship may be so strong because when people talk about being afraid of crime they are fearing the result of the crime more than the crime itself (U.S. Department of Justice, 1981d). In other words, people fear the injury

from an assault more than the assault. This would be particularly true if it is the result of the criminal act rather than the act itself that determines the perceived seriousness of the crime.

It was hypothesized that the relationship between the fear of crime and the perceived seriousness of crime would be greater for women than for men [H(2a)]. The data did not support this hypothesis. In fact, the correlations between the fear of crime and the perceived seriousness of crime were basically the same for men and women. This may be due to the nature of "perceived seriousness," which is not an assessment of risk or vulnerability but an indication of societal values, which would be similar for men and women. In looking at the relationship between the perceived seriousness of personal crimes and the fear of crime, it is clearly found to be greater than the relationship between the perceived seriousness of property crimes and the fear of crime (as was suggested in hypothesis [H2(b)]). This seems to indicate that, in general, society values personal health and safety more than material possessions--and may feel more threatened (or afraid of) the possible loss of life and limb than by the possibility of economic loss.

The hypotheses concerning the relationships between the fear of crime and the size of the community [H(3)] (and that this relationship would be greater for women than for men),

were supported and were statistically significant, although they were not very strong (as indicated by the correlation coefficients). Although we are influenced by the size of the community in which we live, the impact of this relationship on our fear of crime may be lessened by the fact that our society is becoming increasingly transitory (Greider and Krannich, 1985). Many of us will move in and out of urban, suburban, and rural areas so often that having lived in a rural community where the perception and awareness of crime are lower may actually decrease our fear of crime even though we currently live in a large metropolitan area, and vice versa.

Another possible explanation for the weakness of these relationships could be that people are becoming more aware of the crime that exists in rural areas, and that these locations are no longer considered "havens" from crime. Therefore, the fear of crime would be increasingly similar regardless of the size of the community in which one lives.

As hypothesized, the relationship between the population size of the community and the fear of crime was greater for women than for men. The differences in socialization of men and women have already been mentioned as possible contributing factors to the different scores of fear for men and women, and for how those scores may account for the fact that (in this study) past victimization does

not have a stronger influence on the fear of crime for women than it does for men. In the case of population size and fear of crime being more closely related for women than for men, socialization differences may be a factor as well. Women, being passive and dependent, may rely more heavily on the social bonds (and the type of solidarity that is found in smaller communities) than do men (who are socialized to be independent). It is also possible that the friendship or support networks for women are different in small communities than they are in urban areas.

Further research in this area should include a conceptualization of the fear of crime which distinguishes between violent (or personal) and property crimes. (See Miethe and Lee, 1984.) Perhaps statements such as "I am concerned that I may be injured as the result of a criminal act committed against me;" or "I am concerned that my property may be damaged or stolen as the result of a criminal act;" or "I worry about the possible financial loss I would experience if I were the victim of a crime;" or "My perception of the crime rate in my neighborhood/community/city has led me to increase the number of measures I use to protect my property/personal safety/family's safety;" all of which could be measured on a Likert-type scale should be employed. Or, an alternative strategy for conceptualizing the fear of crime would be to



present a series of statements like, "I am afraid that someday I may be the victim of a:

robbery

assault

rape

burglary

homicide,"

where the respondent could indicate his/her level of fear with a scale such as:

I am very afraid of this.

I am afraid of this.

I am not afraid of this.

Future research should also consider the implications on the fear of crime from vicarious victimization experiences. Although this may not be as strong a factor as actual victimization, it is an important issue to consider when trying to explain the fear of crime.

As mentioned earlier, one also needs to examine the other sociological, environmental, psychological, and economic factors which could mediate the relationships in this study. For example, what is the impact on the fear of having a watch dog? a burglar alarm? a gun? Does interaction with one's neighbors make any difference? Further research should consider these implications.

A final suggestion for future research is that it should look more closely at prior victimization to see what effect a past burglary has on the fear of burglary; what effect a previous assault has on the fear of assault. It may be that these more specific pairings would be more strongly related than would be the generic relationship between past victimization and fear of crime.

The study presented here was far from comprehensive. While no research is likely to uncover all of the variables and factors that relate to the fear of crime, future research could be designed to provide a more holistic explanation of the fear of crime; or at least, future research should attempt to look at some of the different variables that are related to the fear of crime, such as those which were mentioned in this study but were not analyzed. Finally, future research should involve comparing different conceptualizations of the fear of crime--not just to see which is the better measure, but to see which measure is more appropriate for different research needs (such as investigation or program evaluation).

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Table I

MEAN CRIME RATES FOR PART 1 OFFENSES  
 VIRGINIA AND THE UNITED STATES AT LARGE, 1976-80<sup>18</sup>

| OFFENSE CATEGORY                  | VIRGINIA | UNITED STATES |
|-----------------------------------|----------|---------------|
| Murder/Non-Negligent Manslaughter | 8.9      | 9.3           |
| Forcible Rape                     | 24.5     | 31.4          |
| Robbery                           | 105.8    | 206.0         |
| Aggravated Assault                | 159.2    | 259.2         |
| Burglary                          | 1056.3   | 1488.3        |
| Larceny                           | 2670.3   | 2908.0        |
| Motor Vehicle Theft               | 231.3    | 468.3         |

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<sup>18</sup> This information comes from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, 1982, p.1).

Table II

Crime Rates for 1982: Comparing the UCR with the NCS<sup>19</sup>

(Rates per 100,000)

| Offense             | UCR Rate | NCS Rate |
|---------------------|----------|----------|
| Rape                | 33.6     | 80.0     |
| Assault             | 280.8    | 2640.0   |
| Robbery             | 231.9    | 710.0    |
| Larceny-Theft       | 3069.8   | 11390.0  |
| Burglary            | 1475.2   | 7820.0   |
| Motor Vehicle Theft | 452.8    | 1620.0   |

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<sup>19</sup> The NCS data is consistently higher than the UCR, which may be an indication that as Skogan (1975) claims, the victimization surveys are tapping into the crimes that are not reported to the police.

Table III

Sex, Race, and Residence: Comparisons of the Sample  
and the Population of Virginia, 1980 (in percents)

|                  | SAMPLE | VIRGINIA <sup>20</sup> |
|------------------|--------|------------------------|
| <u>Sex</u>       |        |                        |
| Male             | 59.5   | 48.2                   |
| Female           | 37.9   | 51.8                   |
| Missing data     | 2.6    | --                     |
| Total            | 100.0  | 100.0                  |
| <u>Race</u>      |        |                        |
| White            | 91.5   | 81.0                   |
| Black            | 5.8    | 17.6                   |
| Other            | 0.9    | 1.4                    |
| Missing data     | 1.8    | --                     |
| Total            | 100.0  | 100.0                  |
| <u>Residence</u> |        |                        |
| Urban            | 59.9   | 66.9                   |
| Rural            | 35.6   | 33.1                   |
| Missing data     | 4.5    | --                     |
| Total            | 100.0  | 100.0                  |

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<sup>20</sup> The percentages for Virginia include only those persons aged 14 or older.

Table IV

Age<sup>21</sup> and Income<sup>22</sup>: Comparisons of the Sample  
And the Population of Virginia, 1980 (in percents)

|                      | Sample | Virginia |
|----------------------|--------|----------|
| <u>Age</u>           |        |          |
| Under 39             | 39.8   | 45.3     |
| 40-59                | 40.8   | 20.7     |
| 60 and over          | 16.2   | 13.6     |
| Missing data         | 3.2    | --       |
| Total                | 100.0  | ----     |
| <u>Income</u>        |        |          |
| Under \$10,000       | 5.4    | 26.7     |
| \$10,000 to \$19,999 | 13.8   | 30.2     |
| \$20,000 to \$29,999 | 22.2   | 21.8     |
| \$30,000 to \$39,999 | 18.3   | 11.0     |
| \$40,000 and over    | 32.7   | 10.3     |
| Missing data         | 6.6    | --       |
| Total                | 100.0  | 100.0    |

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<sup>21</sup> Only two of the cases for this survey were 18 or younger; the Virginia statistics presented here include only those persons aged 14 or older.

<sup>22</sup> The sample percentages represent total household income.

Table V

Education: Comparisons of the Sample and the  
And the Population of Virginia<sup>23</sup>, 1980 (in percents)

|                               | Sample | Virginia |
|-------------------------------|--------|----------|
| <u>Education<sup>24</sup></u> |        |          |
| None                          | 0.0    | 0.8      |
| 1 to 8 years                  | 4.4    | 17.6     |
| 9 to 11 years                 | 8.4    | 17.0     |
| High school graduate          | 20.0   | 31.3     |
| Post high school              | 35.2   | 16.5     |
| 4 year college degree         | 18.3   | 9.2      |
| Graduate school               | 12.3   | 7.6      |
| Missing data                  | 1.5    | ----     |
| Total                         | 100.1  | 100.0    |

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<sup>23</sup> The percentages for Virginia include only those persons aged 14 or older; the sample includes only 2 persons under the age of 18.

<sup>24</sup> Figures indicate the highest level of education completed.

Table VI

The Relationship Between Past Victimization and Fear of  
Crime

|                    | r        | sig.    | n     |
|--------------------|----------|---------|-------|
| Past Victimization | + 0.1266 | (0.001) | (666) |
| for Males          | + 0.1686 | (0.001) | (400) |
| for Females        | + 0.0504 | (0.435) | (253) |
| for Personal Crime | + 0.0537 | (0.167) | (666) |
| for Property Crime | + 0.1282 | (0.001) | (666) |

Table VII

The Relationship Between Perceived Seriousness and Fear of  
Crime

|                       | r        | sig.    | n     |
|-----------------------|----------|---------|-------|
| Perceived Seriousness | + 0.3637 | (0.000) | (864) |
| for Males             | + 0.3532 | (0.000) | (520) |
| for Females           | + 0.3527 | (0.000) | (326) |
| for Personal Crime    | + 0.4013 | (0.000) | (864) |
| for Property Crime    | + 0.3100 | (0.000) | (864) |



Table VIII

## The Relationship Between Population Size and Fear of Crime

|             | r        | sig.    | n     |
|-------------|----------|---------|-------|
| Size        | + 0.1880 | (0.000) | (904) |
| for Males   | + 0.1838 | (0.000) | (543) |
| for Females | + 0.2162 | (0.000) | (341) |

## APPENDIX

A discussion of the literature revealed a question about the validity of using the response to a statement such as "I feel safe going anywhere in my community after dark" as the operationalization of the fear of crime. Therefore, an attempt was made to find other possible conceptualizations for the variable (the fear of crime) for this study. There were five possible alternatives: 1) a statement about perceived change in the crime rate; 2) a statement about feeling safe going anywhere during the day; 3) a series of questions about the perceived effectiveness of crime-preventive measures; 4) a series of questions about what crime-preventive measures the respondent owns; and 5) a series about how often the respondent takes steps to prevent crime (how often they lock their doors, or notify the police when they will be gone for an extended period of time).

Correlations were made of these measures. The figures in Table IX presents that information. Few significant

Insert Table IX about here

differences in the correlations occurred. Therefore, the original operationalization was used.

The following correlations were not run: effectiveness of crime-preventive measures and what crime-preventive measures the respondent owned; effectiveness of crime-preventive measures and how often the respondent utilized such measures; and, which measures the respondent owned and how often they were used. This was because, as in the case with the independent variables in this study, all missing cases were ignored. When the missing cases were removed for all of these three alternatives on the same program, the resulting sample was so small that the correlations became meaningless. Therefore, these alternatives were run on separate programs and could not be compared with each other.

Table IX

ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTUALIZATIONS FOR  
MEASURING THE FEAR OF CRIME<sup>25</sup>

|                 | r        | sig.    | n     |
|-----------------|----------|---------|-------|
| Original and A1 | + 0.5279 | (0.000) | (919) |
| Original and A2 | + 0.2788 | (0.000) | (918) |
| Original and A3 | + 0.1886 | (0.000) | (863) |
| Original and A4 | + 0.0788 | (0.018) | (896) |
| Original and A5 | + 0.1903 | (0.000) | (848) |
| A1 and A2       | + 0.2735 | (0.000) | (919) |
| A1 and A3       | + 0.1798 | (0.000) | (863) |
| A1 and A4       | + 0.0435 | (0.914) | (895) |
| A1 and A5       | + 0.1753 | (0.000) | (847) |
| A2 and A3       | + 0.1737 | (0.000) | (843) |
| A2 and A4       | + 0.0697 | (0.040) | (872) |
| A2 and A5       | + 0.0902 | (0.000) | (829) |

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<sup>25</sup> Please refer to the next page for an explanation of the symbols A1 through A5.

## Explanation of Symbols Used in Table IX

In Table IX "Original" refers to the fear variable that was used for analysis in this research--"Do you feel safe going alone in your neighborhood after dark". The other symbols represent the following:

- A1 I feel the crime rate has increased.
- A2 I feel safe going anywhere in the daytime.
- A3 I feel crime-preventive measures are not effective.
- A4 I use crime-preventive devices.
- A5 I take steps to prevent crime (eg. locks doors).

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