

APPENDIX A

Fear of crime

Literature review for the Queensland Government Seniors Task Force

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Introduction

Australia is an ageing nation, and so governments will increasingly be called upon to ensure that social policy is developed and implemented to provide seniors in our community with the level of assistance and security they require. In Queensland, as in other states, it is important to know how prevalent the fear of crime is among seniors, and to understand its impact. Only then can effective intervention programs be formulated and public policy shaped.

Crime victimisation can have a significant and often lasting impact on seniors; but the fear that it might happen is also an important issue with potentially serious consequences. The consequences of fear are real, measurable, and potentially severe both for the individual and for society. Fearful individuals most often attempt to lessen their concern by constraining their behaviour. They may, for example, avoid going out at night, or do so very sparingly; or they may alter their routine activities to decrease their perceived risk of victimisation. While these constraints are intended to alleviate fear, they frequently increase it (Ferraro 1995). Fear of crime may also lead to decreased social integration, out-migration, and added security costs (Warr 1985, cited in Ferraro 1995), with older citizens particularly vulnerable to social isolation and a lack of engagement with the community (James & Graycar 2000). In other words, the fear of crime often has more adverse effects on the quality of life of seniors than on that of other sections of the community.

Despite these negative consequences, there has been some controversy about whether fear of crime should be addressed as a social problem, or whether all efforts would be better directed to preventing actual victimisation (Ferraro 1995). However, people do experience fear without having ever been victims of crime, and fear is a significant problem which can curtail citizens' activities and limit their enjoyment of daily life.

Fear of crime is independent of actual victimisation, and is a more common experience (Warr 2000). Consequently, several investigators have argued that fear of crime is a significant social problem in its own right, which requires social policy intervention (e.g. Hough & Mayhew 1983, cited in James & Graycar 2000; Warr 2000). It is not a case of whether intervention efforts should be directed at either preventing crime victimisation or addressing the fear of crime; the question is

whether both crime prevention and fear of crime should be targeted. Both actual victimisation and the fear of it as a possibility are significant social issues.

Currently, most intervention programs in Australia address only crime prevention. Usually, reducing fear of crime is not a specific goal of such programs, and it is assumed that crime prevention initiatives will also have this effect (Attorney-General's Department 1998). However, this is not always so (Ranzijn, Howells & Wagstaff 2002), and in some instances they have even increased program participants' fear (Tennyson-Mason 2002). For example, crime prevention programs have at times led participants to conclude that the intervention (e.g. increased police patrols, improved lighting) was initiated because their neighbourhood was actually a high crime area. 'Fortress' crime prevention programs signal that an area is particularly unsafe, and may be interpreted as a sign of a previously unrecognised high risk of victimisation, thus increasing participants' fear of crime (Tennyson-Mason 2002). Programs need, therefore, to incorporate the specific goal of reducing fear of crime, and it must not be assumed that crime prevention interventions will necessarily have this effect (Attorney-General's Department 1998).

Fear of crime is a potentially significant social problem. It is important to understand its nature, extent and impact, and how to provide appropriate and effective interventions that prevent it from restricting community members' enjoyment of life.

What is fear of crime?

Although fear of crime is a frequently investigated topic, there is disagreement about its definition, how it should be measured, and its prevalence, particularly among the elderly.

The ongoing difficulty in settling on an agreed definition of exactly what fear of crime is centres around the fact that fear is equated with a variety of emotional states, attitudes or perceptions (Warr 2000). In keeping with psychological theories, Warr argues that fear is not a cognitive or behavioural process; rather, 'fear is an emotion, a feeling of alarm or dread caused by an awareness or expectation of danger' (Warr 2000, p. 453). Fear of crime, therefore, is not actually a belief, attitude or evaluation. It is like other commonplace fears, but in this instance the stimulus that elicits the fear is crime. In reality, the term 'fear of crime' is an inaccurate description. Fear generally is seen as an immediate response to a current threat; but fear of crime can occur in the absence of an actual threat. Anxiety, on the other hand, occurs in the absence of any obvious threat; hence the phenomenon 'fear of crime' could be more accurately described as anxiety or worry about crime (Warr 2000).

Given that the stimulus for this anxiety or fear is crime, it seems logical to assume that fear of crime would be a direct function of the risk of victimisation. However, the relationship between people's actual or objective risk of victimisation and their fear of crime is not straightforward. In some circumstances, the fear may represent a realistic appraisal of actual risk, with certain social categories and ethnic groups being more accurate than others in judging the prevalence of crime (Janson & Ryder 1983, cited in Ferraro 1995). For example, people living in high crime areas are usually more fearful of crime (James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). In contrast, the actual risk of victimisation may be a poorer predictor of fear for other groups, with official crime rates often having only a moderate or minimal relationship to fear (e.g. Ferraro 1995). For example, although women are generally less likely to be victims of crime, they are consistently more fearful than men, who actually have the higher objective risk of crime victimisation (Ferraro 1995; Warr 2000).

When people are fearful of crime they often exaggerate the risk of being a victim of infrequent crimes, while underestimating the likelihood of more common ones. They may know, for example, that they are less likely to be victims of homicide than of burglary, but they still overestimate their risk of homicide. Typically, people are not very accurate about the absolute frequencies of particular types of crimes, and they most often overestimate their risk of becoming victims of personal crimes such as assault, homicide and street crime (Warr 2000). Personal crimes are more

fear-inducing because they involve a violation of the victim's sense of self (Attorney-General's Department 1998).

So, while official crime statistics can highlight areas that need crime prevention initiatives, they are of less value in explaining fear of crime. Individuals' own perceptions of their risk of victimisation, on the other hand, make an important contribution to providing an explanation. Although some researchers have used fear of crime and perceived risk as interchangeable concepts, perceived risk does not necessarily equate to fear (Ferraro 1995; Roundtree & Land 1996, cited in Chiricos, Padgett & Gertz 2000; Warr 2000). For example, although some individuals may accurately rate their risk of actual victimisation, they may still experience high levels of fear. Fear of crime and perceived risk need to be treated as independent entities and included as separate measures in any investigation (Attorney-General's Department 1998; Ferraro 1995; Warr 2000). Perceived risk of victimisation is reliably related to fear of crime, though the perceived risk will vary with the actual crime (Ferraro 1995; Warr 2000). So it is important to know people's personal evaluation of their perceived risk of victimisation for various crimes to understand their fear of crime. Warr (2000) argues that fear of crime is a function of both the perceived risk of victimisation and the seriousness of the crime. Therefore crimes that are believed to have more serious consequences, and to be more likely to occur, are likely to provoke the most fear.

This is not to suggest that objective risk is necessarily irrelevant in explaining fear of crime; but its contribution does not appear to be a direct one. Instead, it is one of various factors that influence perceptions of risk, which in turn directly contribute to fear of crime. The other influences on perceptions of risk include ecological and neighbourhood factors, as well as personal characteristics (Ferraro 1995). Objective risk is just one of a range of factors that contribute to fear of crime.

Prevalence of fear of crime

There are two opposing views about the pervasiveness of fear of crime. The first is that fear of crime is 'rampant' within the community, with elderly citizens being particularly fearful. Proponents of this view maintain that fear of crime results from people's inaccurate belief that their likelihood of victimisation is far greater than it actually is (e.g. Clemente & Kleiman 1976, National Institute of Justice 1992, and Ollenburger 1981, all cited in Ferraro 1995). In other words, fear of crime is seen as largely irrational (Ferraro 1995).

The opposing view is that, while fear of crime does have serious consequences for some citizens, it is not as pervasive within the community as suggested (e.g. Ferraro 1995; Warr 1984 and Yin 1982, both cited in Ferraro 1995). These researchers make two main points:

- ▶ While fear of crime is not simply a reflection of the actual risk of victimisation, actual risk may make an important contribution to the fear. Although many people do overestimate their likelihood of victimisation, actual risk does contribute to the perceived risk.
- ▶ There are other factors, apart from the actual risk of victimisation, that may logically make people more fearful of crime (e.g. exposure to incivilities and harassment).

Consequently, these investigators maintain that fear of crime may not necessarily be as irrational as proponents of the 'fear is pervasive' view suggest.

Hence, the difference between the perceived level of risk and the objective reality of possible victimisation provides insight into the rationality of fear of crime. When the level of perceived risk of crime victimisation is high and the objective reality of crime is low, an elevated level of fear of crime is indeed a problem that would benefit from effective interventions. If, however, both the level of perceived risk and the objective reality of crime victimisation are high, the fear of crime is rational and may serve an important protective function if it encourages community members to take appropriate measures to decrease their risk of victimisation.

In the latter situation, any reduction in the level of fear of crime has the potential to promote an increase in the vulnerability to victimisation. Here, it would be more appropriate to intervene first with crime prevention measures to decrease the objective risk of victimisation. After this intervention, if fear remained high, despite a lower objective risk, it would then be beneficial to use interventions to reduce fear of crime. Efforts to reduce fear of crime should thus be made only in areas where fear is disproportionate to risk (Ferraro 1995; Tennyson-Mason 2002).

To understand whether fear of crime is rational it is necessary to use methodologically sound instruments to obtain valid measures of this fear. The measures can then be compared with official estimates of the actual risk of victimisation across various regions. It is important to emphasise that fear of crime is unlikely to be a static phenomenon and will probably differ over time (Warr 2000). Before any intervention is attempted, therefore, it is necessary to obtain current estimates of the prevalence of fear of crime within the community. Without this information, there is every likelihood of investing in interventions where they are not needed, by giving them to the wrong people, or using them under the wrong circumstances. People in particular areas could then be given inappropriate interventions which do not address the actual level of fear within their community or region, or interventions could actually create fear of crime rather than reducing it (Ferraro 1995).

Related factors

Age

There is a widespread belief that the elderly are particularly fearful of crime, and their fear may make them captives in their own homes (Clemente & Kleiman 1976, and Cook & Cook 1976, both cited in Ferraro 1995). This elevated fear creates a victimisation–fear paradox because, although the elderly are believed to be more fearful of crime victimisation than members of other age groups, they are statistically less likely to be victimised (Bachman 1992, cited in Ferraro 1995). Across all Western countries, using either official police figures or survey data that also include unreported crimes, the elderly are consistently found to be less likely to be crime victims (Grabosky 1995) — although their patterns of victimisation for various crimes do differ from those of other age groups (James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). It is younger people, and specifically young males, who typically suffer the highest overall rates of victimisation, because there are more risks inherent in their lifestyle and they are less likely to constrain their behaviour to avoid possible victimisation (Ferraro 1995; Grabosky 1995).

Although some previous research has found that the elderly are most fearful of crime (e.g. Clemente & Kleiman 1976, cited in Ferraro 1995), the relationship between fear and age is not consistent; and, when a relationship exists, it is not always the elderly who are most afraid. Typically, studies that use better research methods do not show the elderly as being more afraid of crime (Chivite-Matthews & Maggs 2002; Ferraro 1995). On the contrary, some recent studies found that it was the younger people who were the most likely age group to be victimised; they were also most likely to report the highest rates of fear, particularly when they were questioned about their fear of violent, personal crimes (Ferraro 1995; Grabosky 1995). From the evidence, it is clearly not the case that the elderly are consistently the most fearful of crime.

This inconsistency across studies may largely be accounted for by the poorer methodology frequently used in the research that finds the elderly to be the most fearful of crime. Often these studies use surveys in which the questions are vague (Attorney-General's Department 1998). Respondents may be asked about their general feelings of safety in certain locations and at specific times (e.g. at home during the day and at night). Clearly there are problems in using such measures as indicators of fear of crime (Ferraro 1995). Questions that do not mention crime have been found to overestimate fear of crime in the elderly, who are strongly influenced by more general anxieties about the potential mishaps associated with ageing, such as fear of falling, or not being able to use public transport because, for example, bus stairs are too high (Attorney-General's

Department 1998; James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). Respondents may indeed report being more concerned or fearful in certain circumstances (e.g. walking at night outside their home), but this fear may not necessarily be generated by fear of crime (Attorney-General's Department 1998).

A further problem is that many studies on fear of crime do not question respondents separately about their perceived risk of victimisation and their fear of crime, and about how these risks and fears relate to specific crimes (Ferraro 1995; Warr 2000). Even when these studies do use surveys that question participants about 'crime', most often they do not designate the actual type of crime. Ferraro (1995) suggests that in these situations respondents may be most likely to focus on personal crime, which would generally result in elevated fear responses. The major problem with asking questions about only a generic crime category is that we cannot be sure what type of crime the participants have in mind when they answer the questions. Consequently, different respondents may be thinking about different types of crime, and this will lead to unreliable estimates of fear levels. It is therefore necessary to ask questions about specific types of crime, in order to ensure that all respondents are considering the same crime.

When seniors are asked questions about their fear of specific crimes, it appears that they are no more fearful of crime than other age groups, although they may be more concerned about specific types of crimes than about others (Ferraro 1995; Government Statistician's Office 1992; Ranzijn, Howells & Wagstaff 2002). Fear of specific crimes does vary in different studies (e.g. Attorney-General's Department 1998; James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003; Ranzijn, Howells & Wagstaff 2002), so it seems that seniors are not consistently fearful of the same types of crimes. This variation is not surprising, as fear of crime for specific crimes differs geographically and by neighbourhood (Ferraro 1995; James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003); also, fears may change over time (Warr 2000).

In summary, there is no consistent evidence that seniors are more fearful of crime than anyone else. Indeed, on the rare occasions when respondents were questioned about their altruistic fear of crime (i.e. their concern for their family members), seniors were found to be more fearful for their grandchildren than for themselves (Attorney-General's Department 1998). Generally, older citizens are not particularly inaccurate about their risk of victimisation (Warr 1982, cited in Ferraro 1995) and '... overwhelming evidence to date shows convincingly that age differences in fear of crime in adulthood are modest to trivial ... There really is no victimisation/fear paradox by age as described in the literature' (Ferraro 1995, p. 82).

Although most methodologically sound studies show that seniors' fear of crime levels are similar to those of other age groups, it is still important to regard seniors' fears as an important social problem that should be addressed — both because of the more serious consequences these fears may have, and because of the persistent discrepancy between reported fear of crime and their actual risk of victimisation.

The elderly, to a greater extent than other age groups, report that fear adversely affects their quality of life (James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). Seniors engage in more constrained behaviour as a method of protecting themselves from crime, so they are more likely to avoid fear-inducing situations; and this makes them particularly vulnerable to increasing levels of withdrawal and social isolation (Ferraro 1995; James & Graycar 2000). The physical and economic vulnerabilities associated with ageing also appear to make the emotive impact of fear of crime for seniors more acute (James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). The elderly feel more vulnerable to victimisation because any loss of economic resources is more serious, their decreasing physical strength makes it less likely that they could fend off an attacker, and the consequences of any injuries they sustain are likely to be more serious (Carcach, Graycar & Muscat 2001; James & Graycar 2000; Muscat, James & Graycar 2002). Therefore, even if seniors report levels of fear that are similar to those of other age groups, the impact and consequences of their fear may be greater and potentially more debilitating. In contrast, even when young people are more fearful of crime they are less likely to restrict their behaviour, and most often maintain their socially integrated lifestyle (Ferraro 1995). For young people, fear does not usually appear to result in the negative behavioural changes that are often found among seniors.

Secondly, as seniors are significantly less likely to be victims of crime, it could be argued that their level of fear should be lower than that of other age groups (Attorney-General's Department 1998). So a similar level of fear of crime in seniors should be regarded as an exaggerated fear, given the actual risk, and it therefore requires appropriate social intervention.

It is important, however, not to focus exclusively on age differences, as this may mask the importance of other factors that co-occur with higher levels of fear of crime in the seniors age group. It may be these factors that are more strongly related to greater fear of crime in the seniors group (James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). For example, seniors are more likely to suffer from ill health, live alone, have lower incomes through reliance on government benefits as their main source of income, and suffer from social isolation (Carcach, Graycar & Muscat 2001; Chivite-Matthews & Maggs 2002; James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). Each of these risk factors is associated with higher levels of fear of crime (Attorney-General's Department 1998; Chivite-Matthews & Maggs 2002; Grabosky 1995), and may be more important than age in explaining fear of crime in seniors (James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003).

Indeed, researchers investigating differences in fear levels within the seniors age group have found that living in areas that lack social cohesion and being socially isolated were both major contributors to fear of crime in this age group (James & Graycar 2000). In contrast, seniors who are more involved in their community, and those who have greater self-confidence, are less fearful of crime (James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). Therefore it is important to continue investigating differences between seniors, rather than focusing only on comparisons between seniors and other age groups. Age is not a particularly consistent predictor of fear of crime, so high-fear groups are not particularly characterised by age (James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). It may be most beneficial to provide interventions for the specific subgroups of seniors who are most fearful of crime.

Gender

While findings on the relationship between fear of crime and age are inconsistent, there is a consistent relationship with gender (e.g. Ferraro 1995; Government Statistician's Office 1992; James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). Paradoxically, although males are generally more likely to be victims of crime, females are more fearful of possible victimisation (Grabosky 1995). There are several explanations for this paradox.

- ▶ Recent evidence has shown that, because of traditional gender roles, males are likely to under-report their actual fear of crime. Consequently, the discrepancy between men's and women's levels of fear may have been overestimated in studies that have not investigated this possibility (Sutton & Farrall 2005).
- ▶ Traditional gender roles may also induce lower self-confidence and less perceived autonomy for females than for males, which may in turn lead women to believe they are more vulnerable to victimisation.
- ▶ Females may be more fearful of crime because the typical crimes of violence committed against them, such as sexual assault or family violence, frequently involve intimidation and may be particularly fear-inducing (Government Statistician's Office 1992).
- ▶ Females have more frequent experiences of social incivilities and sexual harassment, which contribute to increased fear (Grabosky 1995). For example, women are more likely to have received harassing, obscene or threatening phone calls, which are strongly associated with being more fearful of crime (Grabosky 1995). Women are also more worried about being pestered or insulted than are men (Chivite-Matthews & Maggs 2002), and they are more fearful of public spaces where they may be subjected to sexual harassment (Government Statistician's Office 1992).

Women take greater precautions against victimisation than men do. As women are more fearful of being home alone, they are more likely to secure their home against intruders. Similarly, women are also more likely to restrict their behaviour to avoid potential danger. They are less likely to go out walking alone at night, as they believe this places them at increased risk of potential

victimisation. Women are particularly concerned about attack by strangers, despite the fact that known attackers represent a greater actual risk (Government Statistician's Office 1992).

However, women are not universally more fearful of *all* crimes. They are generally more fearful of *personal* crimes, where there is likely to be face-to-face contact with the perpetrator. This heightened fear is thought to result from women's overarching fear of sexual assault, and particularly of rape (Ferraro 1995). Any crime involving personal contact could potentially also become a sexual assault (Ferraro 1995). Some researchers have suggested, therefore, that women's higher levels of fear for non-sexual crimes also can be largely accounted for by their perceived vulnerability to, and fear of, sexual assault (Attorney-General's Department 1998; Ferraro 1995). Certainly women's common experiences of harassment and social incivilities play an important role in reinforcing this vulnerability to possible victimisation (Attorney-General's Department 1998; Grabosky 1995).

These gender differences in fear of crime clearly demonstrate the hazards of assuming that objective risk of victimisation is the only factor that brings about a rational fear of crime — and of using this assumption to conclude that, when the fear is greater than the objective risk, the fear is irrational. There are factors, apart from objective risk, that will influence how individuals perceive their likelihood of becoming a victim of crime.

Other factors

There are other factors that can be linked with fear of crime. People who are poorly educated, from ethnic minorities, or economically disadvantaged, and those who are in poor health, or who also worry about non-crime misfortunes, are more likely to have higher levels of fear of crime (Attorney-General's Department 1998; Carcach, Graycar & Muscat 2001; Ferraro 1995; James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). Possibly those on lower incomes may be more fearful because they are less able to afford adequate security measures, and they may be more likely to live in more disadvantaged, higher-crime neighbourhoods (Carcach, Graycar & Muscat 2001; Grabosky 1995). Individuals with poorer health are more likely to be fearful because they see themselves as having an increased vulnerability to victimisation, through inability to defend themselves from attack and potentially more serious consequences from victimisation. Not surprisingly, those suffering from ill health are more likely to be fearful of personal, rather than household, crime (Ferraro 1995).

Contributors to fear of crime

Researchers have sought to identify, in addition to the underlying factors discussed above, particular experiences that contribute to people's fear of crime. Among the most important are:

- ▶ exposure to the media
- ▶ exposure to law and order campaigns
- ▶ previous crime victimisation
- ▶ aspects of the social and physical environment — in particular, exposure to incivilities.

Media

Members of the public usually have to rely on limited sources of information when they are assessing their risk of crime victimisation. Information from friends, neighbours and community groups are important, as is first-hand experience; but the media — print, radio and television — are believed to provide the most pervasive and important source of crime information for the majority of the public (Attorney-General's Department 1998; Warr 2000). Not surprisingly, the media are interested in reporting the most newsworthy stories, so the focus is often on stories of sensational crimes that have the most serious consequences for the victims (e.g. severe physical injuries, death, loss of life savings). Yet these crimes are newsworthy precisely because they are

rare events. Consequently the media tend to provide disproportionately more information about the most violent and sporadic crimes, leading to the belief that these crimes are more common than they really are. In reality, such reports are about crimes of which community members are the least likely to be the victims. Media outlets may be particularly likely to use this sensationalist coverage of crimes as a way of attracting a larger audience, or using crime news as fillers when there is a shortage of other stories (Warr 2000).

Sometimes the media may run campaigns that focus on, and exaggerate the frequency of, particular types of crimes. This type of selective reporting can create the impression of a crime wave. Not surprisingly, many people will now perceive they are at increased risk of being a victim of these types of crimes. This heightens fear, both by distorting people's perceived risk of victimisation and by emphasising the serious consequences of the experience (Warr 2000).

Fear of crime is also increased when the media run campaigns that focus on the victimisation of specific groups, such as the elderly. People then tend to assume that members of this group are at increased risk of victimisation and are very likely to be attacked (Ferraro 1995). Perpetrators see them as easy prey because of their physical inability to stop attacks. Such media campaigns are thought to be responsible for creating the commonly held but inaccurate belief that it is the elderly who are most likely to be victims of crime (Bell, Chessman Architects & Davis 1993; James & Graycar 2000).

Not surprisingly, researchers have found a relationship between greater exposure to media crime reporting and fear of crime. Specifically:

- ▶ There is a relationship between high levels of exposure to media crime reporting and an overestimation of the risk of personal victimisation (Grabosky 1995).
- ▶ In the United Kingdom, readers of tabloid newspapers have been found to be more fearful of crime than readers of broadsheets. This difference has been attributed to sensationalist news coverage of crime in the tabloid newspapers, in contrast to more factual, less dramatic and less predominant coverage of crime in broadsheet newspapers (Grabosky 1995).
- ▶ Research in the United States shows a striking correlation between media reporting and public perceptions of crime and perceived likelihood of victimisation, so that an increase in exposure to crime reporting is mirrored in an increase in the level of fear of crime (Warr 2000).
- ▶ Even when individuals report being cynical about sensationalism in media reports, and question the accuracy of these stories, media reports have still been found to increase fear about crime (Attorney-General's Department 1998).

Consequently, media reporting of crime is believed to play a disproportionate role in eliciting fear of crime within the community.

Taken together, this evidence is seen as support for the media distortion hypothesis, which suggests that there is a straightforward relationship between sensationalist media reporting of crime and increases in fear of crime. However, although sensationalism by the media undoubtedly contributes to fear, the media distortion hypothesis is an oversimplification (Chiricos, Padgett & Gertz 2000; Eschholz 1997, and Heath & Gilbert 1996, both cited in Chiricos, Padgett & Gertz 2000). The extent of media influence depends on the type of media, and is greatest when the information presented resonates with the personal experiences and individual characteristics of its recipients.

Type of media

Efforts have been made to identify whether all media sources (e.g. television, radio, newspapers) are equally likely to elicit fear of crime in the public. Studies that examine only the effect of newspaper reporting on fear of crime find that these reports contribute significantly to fear of crime (e.g. Liska & Baccaglioni 1990 and Perkins & Taylor 1996, both cited in Chiricos, Padgett & Gertz 2000). However, other studies comparing the effects of newspaper and television reports contradicted this, finding that newspaper reading was unrelated to fear of crime (Barzagan 1994, Chiricos, Eschholz & Gertz 1997, Chiricos, Eschholz & Padgett 1998, and O'Keefe & Reid-Nash

1987, all cited in Chiricos, Padgett & Gertz 2000). Television reports, it seems, are more likely than newspaper stories to induce fear in the public.

Other researchers sought to identify the important features of television viewing that may make viewers more fearful, by examining the total amount of time spent watching television, the influence of watching television drama (e.g. crime drama), and the effect of news reporting of local and national crimes. While there is no relationship between fear of crime and the total amount of time spent viewing either television in general or crime drama in particular, studies have consistently shown a relationship between fear of crime and viewing television news (Barzagan 1994, Chiricos, Eschholz & Gertz 1997, Chiricos, Eschholz & Padgett 1998, O'Keefe 1984, and O'Keefe & Reid-Nash 1987, all cited in Chiricos, Padgett & Gertz 2000).

Specific characteristics of the message conveyed in these news reports were related to increased fears. Sensational reports of apparently random crimes occurring in the local region were more fear-inducing than reports of non-random crimes or those that occurred further away (Chiricos, Padgett & Gertz 2000; Heath & Gilbert 1996, cited in Chiricos, Padgett & Gertz 2000). It is suggested that reports of local crimes are particularly likely to heighten fears, because they challenge people's belief in the 'crime-is-rising-at-a-distance' phenomenon. This phenomenon is a natural tendency for people to believe that crime rates are rising rapidly in the nation as a whole, are rising less rapidly in their own city, but are stable in their own neighbourhood (Ditton et al. 2004; Heath & Gilbert 1996, cited in Ditton et al. 2004; Hindelang, Gottfredson & Garofalo 1978, cited in Ferraro 1995). Evidence that contradicts their belief in the relative safety of their own area is therefore likely to induce fear. It is not surprising that national news reports of crimes that occur outside people's own city have been found to be associated with lower levels of fear of crime, because this reinforces the notion that while crime is a problem elsewhere it is not increasing in their own area (Chiricos, Padgett & Gertz 2000).

Individual characteristics of recipients

There are also individual differences in the way people interpret media reports of crime, and the degree to which they are influenced by them. Research has been conducted to investigate whether the relationship between viewing television news and fear of crime is simply a matter of pre-existing psychological differences between individuals, leading some people to view more of these reports, or be more influenced by crime news. Those who are already fearful, it was suggested, may actually watch more crime news, or pay more attention to it, than those who are less fearful (Sparks 1992, cited in Chiricos, Padgett & Gertz 2000). However, O'Keefe and Reid-Nash (1987, cited in Chiricos, Padgett & Gertz 2000) found that attention to televised crime news *preceded* increased fear, rather than resulting from it.

There are other psychological and experiential differences that influence how people will interpret crime information from the media. Ditton et al. (2004), for example, classified respondents as 'low', 'medium' and 'high' worriers about crime, and found that media reports had differing impact on the three groups. 'Low worriers' were found to rely chiefly on their own local experience to decide their risk of crime victimisation; these individuals therefore did not believe that media reports had any relevance to their own lives. In contrast, when 'medium worriers' evaluated their risk of crime victimisation they tended to rate the media portrayal of crime as more important than their own local experience. 'High worriers', in contrast to the low and medium worriers, felt surrounded by escalating crime and nastiness. For this third group, the location of a crime was irrelevant; all crime reports contributed to increasing their fear, so they responded to this information rather than to their own real-life experiences of crime (Ditton et al. 2004).

There were other specific types of individuals, too, who were found to be more likely to be influenced by crime reports. Television news viewers who viewed the stories as more credible, those who had suffered a recent victimisation experience themselves or had witnessed a victimisation, and those who were more socially isolated, or who lived in high crime areas, reported greater fear of crime, particularly after viewing local news programs (Chiricos, Eschholz & Gertz 1997, Chiricos, Eschholz & Padgett 1998, and O'Keefe 1984, all cited in Chiricos, Padgett &

Gertz 2000). Therefore when media reports of crimes resonate with the individual's own beliefs or their personal experiences of crime these reports are seen as more credible and are more likely to increase the individual's fear of crime (Chiricos, Padgett & Gertz 2000).

Law and order campaigns

Specifically targeted law and order campaigns may also engender increasing levels of fear of crime in some circumstances (Warr 2000). Just as media organisations sometimes embark on these types of campaigns (e.g. on talkback radio), politicians often highlight law and order issues with the electorate. Although these campaigns may be mounted because of a genuine desire to address crime and encourage community members to take appropriate protective behaviours to decrease their risk of victimisation, they may have unintended effects. Any concentration on, or magnification of, levels of crime can engender an increase in anxiety or worry in vulnerable groups within the community.

If it is necessary to embark on a law and order campaign, the information provided should not sensationalise the crimes it is highlighting, but must accurately present the actual risk of victimisation for community members. For example, although a case of homicide is horrific, it is extremely unlikely that others in the community will be victims too. Ideally, before embarking on such campaigns, media workers or politicians should weigh up the benefits for community members against the possible psychological and social costs. While these campaigns can have positive benefits, by encouraging people to engage in more protective behaviours to decrease their likelihood of crime victimisation, it is important to ensure that the cost of increasing the fears of a minority of the community is clearly outweighed by the benefits that will accrue to the majority. If the risk of victimisation to community members is such that a campaign is necessary, it should avoid sensationalising crime, present a realistic picture of current crime trends and the actual risk of victimisation, and avoid unnecessarily exacerbating fears (Warr 2000).

Any situation where people exaggerate or dramatise the likelihood of crime victimisation is likely to be associated with an increase in people's fear of crime. This may happen, for example, if a security company is trying to convince potential customers that they need to purchase its products. The available research suggests that, although installing security systems does help prevent crime, it generally does not reduce fear of crime, and in some circumstances may actually increase fear levels (Attorney-General's Department 1998; Government Statistician's Office 1992; Ranzijn, Howells & Wagstaff 2002).

Previous crime victimisation

Crime victimisation may be direct (i.e. the individual experiences it first-hand) or vicarious (i.e. a friend or relative has been victimised, or the individual is witness to the victimisation of another person). Although there is some evidence that both types of victimisation can increase fear of crime (e.g. Ranzijn, Howells & Wagstaff 2002), it is not clear exactly what contribution previous victimisation makes to subsequent fear, because victim experience is not consistently related to fear of crime (Attorney-General's Department 1998; Ferraro 1995). Although some researchers find that victimisation is related to high levels of fear of crime (e.g. Grabosky 1995; Ranzijn, Howells & Wagstaff 2002), others find negligible or no effects, and have questioned whether the impact of victimisation may have been overestimated in other studies (Attorney-General's Department 1998; Borooah & Carcach 1997; Government Statistician's Office 1992).

This inconsistency may be partly explained by the difficulties of accurately measuring the impact of previous victimisation. Many studies do not examine the link between the type of victimisation and the fear of specific types of crime. Instead, respondents are just asked about any previous victimisation within a specified time period, and the researchers then seek to link this to a generalised measure of respondents' current fear levels. Even when studies do ask about the type of crime victimisation and examine whether particular types of crimes are related to fear, the fear itself is often measured as a global index.

This is problematic, because there is clear evidence of specificity in the relationship between victimisation and fear of crime: the type of crime victimisation is related to subsequent fear of particular types of crime, and to feeling unsafe in particular locations. For example, respondents who had been victims of crimes such as burglary or obscene telephone calls have been found to report feeling unsafe when they were home alone; whereas victims of assault, which typically occurred outside the home, were no more fearful when they were home alone (Grabosky 1995). Similarly, Borooah & Carcach (1997) found a specific relationship between being the victim of a certain type of crime and being more fearful of similar crimes. Someone who had been the victim of a personal crime was more likely to be fearful of possible future personal victimisation, and a victim of household crime subsequently had an increased fear of household crime.

Effect on specific groups

Particular groups seem to be more adversely affected by being the victims of specific crimes. Borooah & Carcach (1997) found, when examining fear in victims of household crime, that women, younger participants under 35 years of age, the less educated, those renting government accommodation, people living in a high crime area (or perceiving they did), those living in rural areas or areas of low socioeconomic status, and students living in single-person households were all more fearful of crime. Most of these groups (i.e. women, the less educated, those renting government accommodation, those living in high-crime or lower socioeconomic status areas, and single-person households) are frequently found to be more fearful of crime even when they have not been victimised, so victimisation may reinforce their pre-existing sense of vulnerability. This would not be surprising, because the experience of victimisation would confirm their pre-existing fears and further heighten them.

In contrast, other groups who had lower levels of fear before victimisation may react differently after the crime. There is evidence of individual differences in reaction to crime victimisation. Borooah & Carcach (1997) found that some victims of personal crime became more fearful of further victimisation, while many of the victims simply put their experience down to 'bad luck', or an experience that was unlikely to recur because they could learn appropriate prevention techniques to avoid such victimisation in the future. This resilient reaction to victimisation may have occurred because these individuals had lower levels of fear before their victimisation, leading them to see this experience as an unusual occurrence that was not a predictor of future events. Being a victim of crime did not resonate with their perceptions of the world, because they did not have any pre-existing sense of heightened personal vulnerability to crime victimisation.

Social and environmental characteristics that are associated with lower levels of fear of crime when individuals have not been victimised also serve a protective function for victims. For example, when individuals live in areas where there is a pleasant physical and social environment, or strong social cohesion, or regard themselves as having supportive neighbours, previous victimisation is less likely to be related to heightened fears. Possibly, these were again people who were less fearful of crime before they were victimised, so they may be less likely to become more fearful after the event. However, no study has yet investigated pre-existing fear of crime in people who were later victimised, so it is not possible to know what effect this might have.

This is an important issue that needs to be investigated, because people who are already fearful of crime before being victimised may be particularly vulnerable to the debilitating consequences of even higher subsequent levels of fear. If this turns out to be the case, such people clearly require adequate victim support to help them re-establish their lives and overcome the potentially disabling consequences of their crime victimisation. Clearly, victimisation has the potential to increase some people's subsequent fear of specific types of crime, though further research is required before the actual contribution of pre-existing fear is known.

Severity of victimisation

Much of the research has also failed to consider the impact of the seriousness of the victimisation on subsequent fear (Attorney-General's Department 1998), and this requires investigation. It is

known that a relationship between the two does exist (Warr 2000), and it may be a particularly important consideration when examining the consequences of victimisation for seniors — for, although seniors generally have lower victimisation rates for most crimes, the physical, social and financial consequences are likely to be more serious for this group (James & Graycar 2000; Muscat, James & Graycar 2002). Because of the decline in physical strength and fitness that accompanies ageing, seniors may be seen as easier targets by perpetrators. Seniors often report feeling more anxious and physically vulnerable because they are less able to resist attack or fight back effectively, and will take longer to recover from any injuries they may sustain (Attorney-General's Department 1998; James & Graycar 2000). Physical vulnerability is a major contributor to fear of crime in the elderly (Hale 1996, cited in James & Graycar 2000). Similarly, as the majority of seniors rely on government benefits as their main source of income, any financial losses are likely to have more serious consequences for them than for individuals on higher incomes (Carcach, Graycar & Muscat 2001).

Although research has not directly assessed the contribution that the severity of the victimisation makes to subsequent fear, it would be expected that more serious victimisation would tend to result in increased levels of fear. Also, individuals who suffer multiple victimisations are particularly vulnerable to increased levels of fear (e.g. Grabosky 1995), though seniors are less likely than other age groups to suffer from multiple victimisations (James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003).

Clearly, there are individual reactions in people's responses to victimisation. Adequate victim support would be particularly important for those individuals who become significantly more fearful after victimisation. On the other hand, those who do not feel an increased sense of vulnerability after victimisation, but instead maintain a sense of control over their ability to avoid further victimisations, might not receive the same benefit from victim support. For people in this category, crime prevention initiatives to help reduce their risk of further victimisation might be more beneficial.

Physical and social environment

Certain features of the physical and social environment are associated with fear of crime. For example, those living in rural areas report significantly lower levels of fear than those living in urban environments (Grabosky 1995). Fear of crime is also greater for socially isolated people, or those living in neighbourhoods with low social cohesion where neighbours are not seen as supportive, in areas with high levels of actual or perceived crime, or in areas that are undergoing change (Grabosky 1995; James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). Similarly, people who rent their accommodation or live alone, and those who have lived in their homes for shorter periods of time and are therefore less familiar with their local area, are often found to be more fearful of crime (Attorney-General's Department 1998; Ferraro 1995; Ranzijn, Howells & Wagstaff 2002).

The role of incivilities

There is a strong association between incivilities and fear of crime. Incivilities have been defined as 'low-level breaches of community standards that signal an erosion of conventionally accepted norms and values' (LaGrange, Ferraro & Supancic 1992, p. 312: cited by Ferraro 1995, p. 15). Areas characterised by **physical incivilities** have disorderly physical surroundings, which may include litter lying around, abandoned buildings and cars, graffiti, and properties with broken or barricaded windows, or with untidy yards. **Social incivilities** may involve signs of social unrest within the location, such as homeless people, gangs or groups of rowdy youth (particularly males), or disorderly or inconsiderate neighbours, or may involve exposure to disruptive social behaviour (Ferraro 1995; Grabosky 1995). High levels of either physical or social incivilities within a neighbourhood lead to a perception that the area is 'out of control'. These incivilities influence community members' perceptions of their risk of victimisation, making them more likely to believe they are at risk, and resulting in increased fear of crime (Ferraro 1995).

While incivilities clearly make an important contribution to fear of crime, they are not always included in the research. Frequently, survey respondents are not questioned about their exposure to social and physical incivilities. This is a serious limitation because, while many people are not victims of crime, everyone is exposed to incivilities during their life. Even if people rarely experience incivilities themselves, they are likely to have indirect exposure through witnessing other people who are victims of incivilities (e.g. seeing youths harassing individuals, or witnessing sexually suggestive comments made to women). It has been suggested that recurring exposure to a lifetime of incivilities, and being the victim of low-level assaults such as being intentionally bumped or pinched, may both play important roles in eliciting and maintaining an individual's fear (Attorney-General's Department 1998).

Ongoing exposure to incivilities may also provide some explanation for situations where people's own assessment is that their risk of victimisation is high whereas official crime figures suggest a lower objective risk. As has already been discussed, official crime figures have limitations as an explanation for fear of crime. They underestimate the actual prevalence of crime, because they omit unreported crimes, which will include the majority of lower-level assaults, many experiences of harassment, and exposure to physical and social incivilities. Typically, these are the types of interpersonal crimes that people are most unlikely to report (James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). For example, when residents in the United Kingdom were surveyed about their experiences of crime, 20 per cent of the elderly respondents reported that they had been verbally abused or harassed but had not reported it (Home Office 2005; James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003).

These types of frequently unreported crimes and incivilities do contribute to increases in fear, so they should be included in any investigation of fear of crime. Excluding them may lead to inaccurate conclusions about the factors underlying this fear, and about the rationality of people's fear of crime; hence this may limit the appropriateness of any interventions designed to decrease people's fear. For example, it has been suggested that women's greater exposure to social incivilities such as harassment may be part of the explanation for their higher levels of fear of crime, which occur despite their overall lower rates of victimisation as measured in official crime statistics. Therefore, it would be unwise to use official crime rates to conclude that any group's higher level of fear of crime was 'irrational' without also considering the role that incivilities may play in contributing to their fear (Ferraro 1995).

Reducing fear of crime

Designing and implementing fear reduction programs

Although fear of crime is recognised as a potentially important social problem, there has been little effort to link the research with appropriate interventions, and there is no clear systemic approach to the problem. It is rarely targeted in intervention programs, and is often merely an afterthought, or an objective within a generalised crime reduction program (Attorney-General's Department 1998). While, under some circumstances, there may be benefit in using crime prevention programs to reduce fear of crime, in other situations crime prevention programs may be an inappropriate strategy, and may even increase fear rather than alleviate it (Tennyson-Mason 2002). Interventions must therefore be specifically designed to address fear of crime, rather than following the more common current practice of using crime prevention strategies and assuming these will also reduce fear (Attorney-General's Department 1998; James & Graycar 2000; James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). In circumstances where it is important to reduce fear of crime, this needs to be made an explicit and evaluated goal of any such program (Attorney-General's Department 1998).

When the Attorney-General's Department (1998) carried out an audit of fear reduction programs, they found that virtually none included an evaluation of the outcomes of their interventions. Most were implemented in an ad hoc manner, and many simply used client satisfaction as a measure of outcome, rather than using any measures of improved safety and security (Attorney-General's

Department 1998; James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). Nevertheless, several authors have argued that it is possible to identify factors that appear to be associated with success in reducing fear of crime (Attorney-General's Department 1998; Ferraro 1995, James and Graycar 2000; James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003).

Strategies for reducing fear of crime

Target the sources of anxiety

It is important to develop a clear understanding of the aetiology and distribution of fear of crime in the target groups. Interventions should pay particular attention to people's concerns about public transport, as this is a common source of anxiety, particularly among the elderly, with travelling by train typically the most fear-inducing (Attorney-General's Department 1998). While teenagers and younger people often report the greatest concern about using public transport, seniors often indicate that they do not use public transport at night; but it is not always clear whether this is because of fear of crime or for other reasons, such as a general reluctance to go out at night, or fears about physical frailties (Attorney-General's Department 1998). However, when the Attorney-General's Department questioned seniors about their use of public transport a minority did indicate that they would use public transport if they believed it was safer.

A Queensland Rail Citytrain Customer Security Survey, conducted in Brisbane in 2004, indicates that public transport represents a particular concern for a minority of older citizens. Members of the general public were questioned about their perceptions of safety and security while travelling on the local train network, and the survey found that those in the 50-and-over age group were slightly less likely than other age groups to rate the safety and security of the rail network positively. The number of people in this older age group with positive perceptions of the rail network had steadily declined since the first annual survey in 2002. However, this dissatisfied group still represented only a minority of older respondents, with the vast majority of people in this age group rating the network as at least reasonably safe (63% 'reasonably safe', 19% 'very safe' and 3% 'completely safe'). Clearly there is a need for further research to investigate the reasons for some seniors' reluctance to use public transport, with a view to accurately identifying the contribution of fear of crime and providing appropriate interventions to increase seniors' confidence in travelling on public transport (Attorney-General's Department 1998).

Any analysis of fear of crime also needs to recognise the important role that exposure to low-level harassment and incivilities may play in increasing individuals' fears and leading them to feel unsafe in particular situations (Ferraro 1995).

Compare fear with objective risk

The choice of intervention strategy will depend on both the level of fear and the actual likelihood of victimisation. Also, when deciding on particular intervention strategies, it is important to distinguish between measures that are aimed at reducing fear and those that target crime reduction. Whenever fear of crime is high, it is appropriate to make fear reduction an explicit objective of any intervention, rather than assume that crime prevention strategies will decrease fear.

There are three main scenarios to consider:

- ▶ **Both objective risk of victimisation and fear of crime are high.** In this case, both crime prevention and fear reduction programs would be beneficial.
- ▶ **Objective risk of victimisation is low but fear is high.** Here, it would be more appropriate to concentrate on fear of crime interventions. It would be particularly important to educate the public about their actual risk of victimisation, and use confidence-building initiatives to decrease fear (James & Graycar 2000; Tennyson-Mason 2002).
- ▶ **Fear is low, but the objective risk of victimisation is high.** If this was the case, fear reduction interventions would be inappropriate, because they might increase the risk of victimisation for community members who already had a false sense of security. Instead, it would be necessary to educate people about the risks they faced, and provide them with appropriate crime

prevention information to encourage them to adopt protective strategies to decrease their risk of victimisation (Tennyson-Mason 2002).

Tailor programs to local needs

Because of regional variations in levels of fear of crime, it is critical that programs are developed with a thorough understanding of the local community and tailored to meet local needs (James & Graycar 2000). To achieve this understanding it is essential to involve and consult with members of the local community, including all key stakeholders, to determine the community's problems and obtain their perspective on possible solutions. This community involvement is crucial, as it may generate community spirit and increase social cohesion, both of which are likely to decrease fear. Localised solutions are most likely to be effective, and they may be more effective if they are implemented under the auspices of local government (James & Graycar 2000; James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003).

Use a holistic approach

Fear of crime is a complex phenomenon, with no single cause, so effective interventions need to target the complexity of issues that contribute to it. Single interventions or strategies are unlikely to work. Long-term results require a holistic approach, involving combinations of different strategies that are integrated into mainstream services and linked to other initiatives such as reducing antisocial behaviour, improving social cohesion and regenerating neighbourhoods (James & Graycar 2000; Tennyson-Mason 2002). Initiatives should use the community's social capital, so it is important that seniors are involved in interventions (James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). Older people represent an important community resource, and efforts should be made to promote a more positive image of ageing and highlight the value of seniors to the community (James & Graycar 2000).

Tidy up the neighbourhood

Because of the important role that physical and social incivilities play in contributing to fear of crime, measures that address these incivilities in the neighbourhood are likely to be beneficial in reducing fear, particularly if they have been suggested by the community itself (Ferraro 1995). For example, simple measures such as cleaning up litter and graffiti can engender a feeling of community order, which will contribute to greater feelings of security. Clean, tidy and orderly areas can raise morale and contribute to reducing fear. It is also important that careful consideration is given to situating facilities for senior citizens in locations that they see as safe (James & Graycar 2000). However, it is important to sound a note of caution here. While these strategies are likely to contribute to a decline in fear, they should not be seen as a total solution. Efforts to reduce incivilities should be one important component in a comprehensive intervention (Ferraro 1995).

Reduce opportunities for victimisation

Opportunities for victimisation to occur can be reduced through careful environmental design, and attention to immediate, visible sources of fear. People are often particularly fearful of areas that provide hiding places for offenders and make it difficult for victims to escape. Prompt action to simpler problems, such as improving lighting or removing shrubbery, may help to instil community confidence. More complex problems that generate fear can then be dealt with over the longer term (Attorney-General's Department 1998).

Deal with underlying social problems

Underlying social factors, such as a lack of local cohesion or social isolation, may contribute to fear. With specific regard to seniors, a holistic approach that seeks to reintegrate them into their communities and deal with the anxieties associated with ageing is most likely to be effective

(James & Graycar 2000). Seniors who are most active and involved in their communities are less anxious about crime; and those programs that emphasise confident living, incorporate physical activity, and increase self-esteem, independence and social connection are most likely to be effective in reducing fear of crime (James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003).

One such program in Queensland is the Safe and Confident Living program, which was established in 1995 to enhance the social participation of seniors by increasing their sense of safety and security in their communities. The Department of Communities provides triennial funds to seven non-government organisations across various locations in the state, including Cairns, Rockhampton, Maroochydore, Ipswich, Brisbane City, the Gold Coast and Logan City. These organisations employ community safety link advisers to undertake a range of activities designed to increase confidence among vulnerable seniors, including:

- ▶ the provision of accurate information on crime and crime prevention strategies
- ▶ social and personal development activities that enhance life skills, participation and confidence in community living
- ▶ referring and linking seniors to services and supports available within their local communities
- ▶ community education
- ▶ network development.

Projects use a community development approach and work in close partnership with local organisations and seniors themselves to respond to local needs.

Build intergenerational connections

Many seniors report being particularly fearful of young people, so programs that seek to encourage constructive communication and increase interactions between the older and younger members of the community are likely to improve understanding for both age groups and decrease fear of crime (James & Graycar 2000).

Provide victim support

The provision of victim support may be particularly important for the elderly, for those who have high fear levels either before or after victimisation, and for those who suffer from multiple victimisations. Used appropriately, this support can make an important contribution to preventing an increase of fear in victims of crime.

Mitigate any fear of crime that media reports may engender

The media play an important role in providing crime information to the public. However, if the reporting is sensationalist or selective, it can lead people to seriously over-estimate their risk of victimisation and result in heightened levels of fear. It is important, therefore, to monitor crime reporting in the mass media, encourage media to portray a more accurate and realistic picture of crime within the community, and use the local media to promote community awareness programs and the availability of local services (James & Graycar 2000). Any intervention should have a specific communication strategy, involving the media in publishing what is being done and celebrating the successes of the program to help build community confidence (Tennyson-Mason 2002).

Information about crime needs to be presented in a manner that discourages community members from adopting a 'helpless victim' mentality. Ideally, crime should be portrayed as controllable, and media reports should empower community members to avoid victimisation (Ranzijn, Howells & Wagstaff 2002). Particular care needs to be taken when reporting on crimes in the local area, as these are potentially the most fear-inducing for the public (Ditton et al. 2004; Warr 2000).

Warr (2000) suggests two methods for providing crime information in a way that may help to avoid increasing fear levels within the community by altering either the public's perceived risk of victimisation or their beliefs about the seriousness of particular crimes.

The first of these is the self-corrective approach, where the mass media are encouraged to present crime information in its proper context, so that it accurately represents the risk to community members. The risk of crime victimisation is presented relative to other aversive life events, and information is given on how factors such as age, gender, racial or ethnic identity, and location affect the chances of victimisation.

The second approach is to use proactive measures to counteract sensationalist crime reporting in the mass media, by providing accurate crime information through alternative channels such as police and civic organisations (e.g. seniors' organisations). For example, accurate information could be provided about the co-occurrence of crimes and the actions that victims could take, in the event of victimisation, to influence the outcome. Many people believe that certain crimes, such as rape and homicide, are likely to co-occur, and they are often unaware that their actions could influence the outcome of victimisation. It might be beneficial, in this case, to educate the public about the most likely course and consequences of victimisation (Warr 2000).

However, with any intervention that provides crime information it is important to be aware that the actual provision of such information may engender greater fear in some people. For example, Bell, Chessman Architects and Davis (1993) sought to decrease fear of crime in residents of a South Australian retirement village by giving them accurate crime information; but they found after the intervention that slightly more of the residents than before believed the elderly were likely to be targeted by perpetrators. Nevertheless, the information provided in the intervention did increase their confidence in dealing with crime. Before the intervention, 44 per cent of participants thought there were some actions they could take that would discourage intruders; afterwards, 72 per cent believed there was a lot they could do to deter an intruder. So it seems that altering the method of communicating the risk can have unforeseen consequences. It is necessary, therefore, to:

- ▶ understand what the public already know about crime, and aspects on which they are misinformed; and counteract misconceptions by giving community members accurate information (James & Graycar 2000; Warr 2000)
- ▶ avoid using complex terminology, and instead present information in everyday terms that are relevant to the target audience
- ▶ use cross-hazard comparisons to help the public understand their true risk of victimisation
- ▶ present information about risks or crimes in such a way that will be understood equally by recipients and by program designers
- ▶ be honest about any limitations in the information that is provided, to avoid public mistrust (Warr 2000)
- ▶ use seminars, given by trained presenters, to provide any associated publications (e.g. police); simply giving community members a document to view in their own home may reinforce and increase their pre-existing fears (James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003)
- ▶ develop constructive ways of using the media to allay fears about crime; use the local press to promote community awareness programs and the availability of local services (James & Graycar 2000)
- ▶ pre-test interventions to avoid any unforeseen consequences such as increasing, rather than decreasing, the public's fear of crime (Warr 2000).

Meet the needs of specific groups

Some groups are harder to target than others. For example, there may be difficulties in providing information to non-English-speaking and Indigenous people, and those who are isolated. Particular efforts are necessary to target these groups and provide appropriate interventions to meet their particular needs (James, Graycar & Mayhew 2003). In the case of seniors, those who are

involved in their community are the easiest to reach with interventions, but these are not the people who are most likely to suffer from the greatest fear of crime. Community-based programs are attended by those who are involved in their communities, and efforts need to be made to organise programs (e.g. social outings) that will reach socially isolated individuals (James & Graycar 2000).

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