Crime Prevention and Active Living

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Is crime a barrier to active living and what can be done about it?

Contribution and relevance of:

- environmental criminology
- urban planning
How crime might influence physical activity

- Situational Characteristics
- Psychological, Demographic, Environmental & Other factors

Relationships of primary interest

Other relationships, some of which may interact with primary interest relationships
Research Questions

• Which factors influence fear of crime and disorder among different groups?

• What are the fear-producing physical characteristics of places and how they create opportunities for crime?

• How is crime and fear of crime distributed among sets of similar places of interest to active living research?

• What works to reduce fear and crime?
Factors influencing fear of crime

• Psychological factors
• Socio-demographic factors
• Physical characteristics of places
Socio-demographic characteristics influencing fear of crime

- **Gender**

  - Women are found to be typically more fearful than men.

  - Research has shown that fear often prompts women to avoid walking or using public transit, and avoid certain public settings.

  - Safety is a particular concern for minority women
Socio-demographic characteristics influencing fear of crime

- **Race/ethnicity**

Studies have found:
- Higher fear of crime and more barriers to walking in ethnic and immigrant neighborhoods (Seefeldt 2002)
- Higher levels of inactivity (Amesty 2003)
Socio-demographic characteristics influencing fear of crime

Age

- Older people are more fearful even though young adults are statistically more at risk.
- Studies have found a strong association between physical inactivity in older adults and safety concerns (CDC 1999; Brownson et al. 2000, Booth et al. 2000)
- Parental concerns about safety affect children walking and biking to school and their propensity to play in public outdoor settings (TRB 2002).
Socio-demographic characteristics influencing fear of crime

Income

• Lower socio-economic status is typically associated with unsafe neighborhoods (Seefeldt et al. 2002).

• Residents of poor neighborhoods have higher levels of fear of being victimized in public settings (Ross 2000).

• Perceived lack of safety is a barrier to recreational walking for low-income adults (Craig et al. 2002).
Fear-producing physical characteristics of places

**Physical incivilities**

Lack of maintenance, graffiti, litter, unkempt and abandoned buildings, poor environmental quality

**Social incivilities**

Drunkenness, prostitution, homelessness
Fear-producing physical characteristics of places

Enclosed spaces with limited exit opportunities

Anonymous and deserted open spaces
Fear-producing physical characteristics of places

- Darkness
- Desolation
- Lack of surveillance opportunities from surrounding establishments
## Modifiers of fear and perceptions of risk

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<tr>
<th>Socio-psychological</th>
<th>Socio-demographic</th>
<th>Environmental</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Experiences and Memories</td>
<td>• Gender</td>
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<td>• Lighting Level</td>
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Crime and the Built Environment

Crime and the built environment are related in a systematic manner.

Different types of crime occur under different environmental conditions.

Certain features of place can affect crime: multiple escape routes, crime generating land uses physical disorder/ ‘broken windows’
Distribution of crime and fear of crime

• Distribution of crime is highly skewed
• Concentration of crime events at ‘hot spots’
Skewed crime risk at Los Angeles bus stops
Skewed crime risk at Chula Vista parks

Parks (ranked from highest to lowest)

Adapted from Stedman, 2005
What works to reduce fear and crime?

Criminal Justice Systems

CRIMINAL JUSTICE OFFENDER PROCESSING

POLICE

CORRECTIONS

Other agencies

high crime location

COMMUNITIES
Criminal Justice Systems

- The contribution of CJ to the reduction of crime is chiefly through incapacitation, deterrence, or rehabilitation. Each of these strategies is somewhat effective but costly.

- Most offenders are not touched by CJ systems and those who are do not penetrate the system very far. Earlier stages of CJ systems are more important for active living.

- The utility of relying exclusively on CJ systems to produce safety is questionable.

- The only parts of the CJ system that routinely addresses crime opportunities are the police.
Problem-oriented policing promotes the systematic analysis of problems to identify potential solutions and partnerships with organizations and communities to reduce crime.

The more focused and the greater the range of actions available, the greater the likelihood that a police strategy reduces crime (Weisburd and Eck 2004).
Environmental Criminology

Environmental criminology explains crime patterns and develops methods for reducing opportunities for committing crimes.

Three theoretical perspectives:

• Rational Choice Theory
• Routine Activity Theory
• Crime Pattern Theory
Situational Crime Prevention

• The physical and social characteristics of places and spaces determine offenders’ decisions.
• Places can be modified to reduce opportunities for crime
• Compatibility with defensible space strategies and crime prevention through environmental design strategies (CPTED).
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<th>Intervention at Parks</th>
<th>How it works</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reducing Rewards</td>
<td>Banning alcohol</td>
<td>Removes important reason for hanging out – ability to drink with others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remove Excuses</td>
<td>Posting signs</td>
<td>Legitimacy of public drinking is removed and removal is clearly communicated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increasing Risk</td>
<td>Enforcing alcohol ban</td>
<td>Offenders face substantially increased chance of arrest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing Effort</td>
<td>Removing cover, changing lighting &amp; other physical changes</td>
<td>Makes it harder to hide and reduces places suitable for hanging out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Removing Provocations</td>
<td>Enforced ban on alcohol</td>
<td>Removes stimulus for violence among drinkers and reason to litter parks with cans and bottles</td>
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Suggestions for effective place interventions

• Tailor interventions to the characteristics of the population, the setting, and the desired type of activity.

• Focus on the worst first

• Locate environmental features that have a large influence on crime

• Apply interventions with evidence of effectiveness

• Reduce fear and perceptions of risk by tackling crime and disorder.
Suggestions for future research

Situational Characteristics and Crime/Disorder

How environments important to active living influence concentration of crime?

How psychological and demographic characteristics of users influence crime and disorder?

How crime and disorder influence situational characteristics?

Crime/Disorder and Fear

How much and what types of crime have the greatest impact on fear?

How rapidly does fear increase with increases in crime and disorder?
Suggestions for future research

Fear and Physical Activity
How much fear is required to limit physical activity?
How fast fear alters physical activity?
How rapidly physical activity recovers following fear reduction?

Physical Activity and Situational Characteristics