

**Work Session on Gender Statistics
(Orvieto, Italy, 11-13 October 2000)**

AGE AND GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SECURITY PERCEPTION

Paper submitted by Italy¹

Summary

In 1997-1998 and in 1999 two Italian surveys, the Citizen's Safety Survey and the Aspects of Daily Life Survey, collected data for the first time about safety perception.

The analysis about the sense of insecurity can be interesting from a gender point of view.

The determinants of the difference between their fear's level are considered in a descriptive form and through an explicative logistic model.

It's possible to understand in this way a very complex situation that is differently related to:

- the individual conditions, determined by sex, age, civil status and social class;
- the territorial context (region, type of municipality of residence);
- the crime occurrence and especially for women sexual harassment and violence;
- the fear about the probability of crime occurring;
- the social disorder, expressed in an area by the appearance of some incivilities and soft crimes.

All these variables give a different contribute to understand fear of women and men. In fact male and female have not only a different level of safety, but their sense of insecurity is due to different causes.

One of these concerns the female awareness of being a sexual target and a potential victim. Above all, women are scared from sexual violence. So, the consequence is fear and a continuous alert, that is shown in the use of a lot of protection's strategies (for instance avoiding places and persons) and in the assumption of a restricted life style.

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1. Introduction

The situation of safety is an essential component in the definition of the quality of life, since it has a particularly important impact on the personal sphere, both from the behavioural standpoint and on the emotional and opinion level.

For this reason it is extremely important to study it, precisely because it focuses on the different ways of living, the different structure of the opportunities and restrictions and obligations possessed by men and women.

In fact, their levels of safety are so different that it seems that they live in profoundly different universes. On the other hand, the very definition of the spaces and times, traditionally so different for the two sexes, is an integral part of the interpretation of their safety's differential. Indeed, it might be said, with Valentine (1989), that this space-time organisation serves for the preservation of several roles and for maintaining the submission of females to males, precisely through the action of the fear mechanisms to which women are socialised from childhood within their own families.

The traditional division between the public and private spheres, domains of men and women, respectively, and the different use of public places, at night for the former and during the day for the latter, have created borders which still appear very clear. And if women pass them, this action is marked by the fear and awareness of risk and, consequently, of their own guilt for having transgressed.

But women's fear is not an irrational feeling, as will be seen in the results of the analyses carried out on Multiscopo" Surveys – Aspects of Everyday Life (1999) and Citizens' Safety (1997-1998), since they appear to behave being aware of a reality that presents problems on two levels: on the one hand they are exposed to the risk of sexual crimes, and on the other they belong to the most vulnerable groups from the physical and economic standpoints.

If we consider as an indicator of insecurity the fact of going out alone on the street when it is dark, it is immediately possible to see the difference that exists in the perception of the two sexes². 45.5% of women state that they feel unsafe or very unsafe, compared to 30.3% of men (Table 1), and 57.2% of women feel not very safe or not safe at all when they go to get their cars which are parked in the street when it is dark, compared to 20.1% of men.

Table 1. Perception of safety when alone in the street when it is dark, by sex.

SENSE OF SAFENESS	Males	Females
Safe/very safe	63.3	42.2
Unsafe/very unsafe	30.3	45.5
Never go out	3.2	9.4

Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of Everyday Life – Year 1999

² This greater insecurity of women is characteristic of them regardless of social class or place of residence.

In particular, very young girls between 14 and 24 years of age and more elderly women feel less safe, while women between 25 and 39 years of age feel safer.

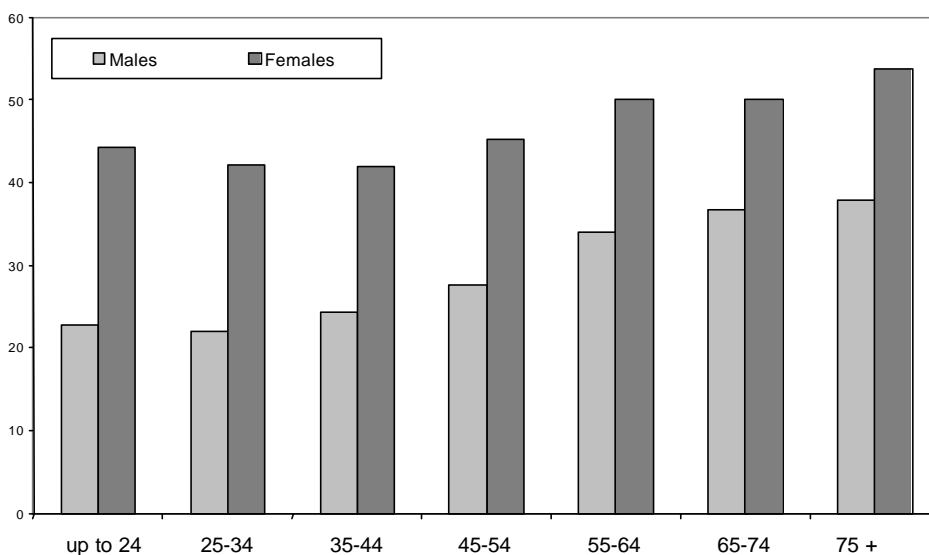
These aspects, which will be studied in depth in the logistic model on the determining factors of fear, may be connected with the greater exposure of young girls to the risk of sexual crimes and in particular sexual harassment, which can be considered according to Pain (1991) as one of the male instruments used to cause the fear in women of an even greater danger, thus reinforcing their submission to men, leading them to stay more at home and seek the protection of a man. However, on the other hand, both young girls and elderly women are more vulnerable for different reasons, the former because they are not yet completely autonomous in the construction of their identities, and the latter because of their greater weakness and fear about the possible physical, social or economic consequences of crimes.

As has already been said, the feeling of a lack of safety decreases for young adult women (25-39 years), reaching the minimum for those aged 30-34. These are women who have more tools for defence, not so much from the physical standpoint, as in their capacity to cope in the external environment and to deal with men on a more equal basis.

Males, on the other hand, are bolder, they go out more at night and, especially young ones, they have a higher sense of safety. Only with the passing of time do they take greater precautions when they go out at night; in fact, their fear increases with the acquisition of family responsibilities and the awareness that, as they grow older, the consequences of a possible victimisation could be more serious and injurious (because of their lower physical resources to defend themselves).

In any case, the differences between men and women tend to decrease as they grow older, gaining the minimum for people being 65-74 years old.

Figure 1.1. Proportion of persons who state that they feel unsafe going out on the street alone in the dark, according to sex and age brackets (Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of Everyday Life – Year 1999)



Consistent with the preceding datum, when women go out at night (a behaviour which is not frequent, compared to the male lifestyle), they take many more precautions than the other sex, for example avoiding isolated streets or persons. 49.2% of women were careful the last time they went out in these situations, compared to 29.4% of men. Similarly, the former more frequently lock their car doors when they are alone (32.8% vs 17.6%), or are afraid to park in a parking lot or covered garage (19.6% vs 4.9%).

The feeling of a lack of safety is also strong inside the home: 17.6% of women feel not very safe or not safe at all when they are alone at home at night, compared to 5.5% of men. Furthermore, in the daytime, 49.5% of the former lock their doors, compared to 31.4% of the latter. The consideration of age shows a trend of a growing perception of lack of safety with the increase in age, except for young women 14-24 years of age (no peak is found in the 14-to-24-year age group only for locking themselves in the house).

2. An analysis of the gender differences in the perception of insecurity

2.1. Hypothesis and construction of the model

Using the data of the Multipurpose Survey on Families, “Aspects of Everyday Life”, conducted in 1999, an exploratory type analysis has been carried out, using a logistic regression model on data with multilevel structure³, aiming to study the relationship between gender and perception of insecurity and evaluate how this relationship interacts with socio-demographic, economic, individual and contextual characteristics, also taking into account the correlation among the individuals belonging to the same family.

The dependent variable is constructed starting from the question: “How safe do you feel walking along the street at night when it is dark and you are alone in the area where you live?” The response was reclassified as a dichotomic variable with the value 1 for those who answered “Unsafe” or “Very unsafe”, and 0 for those who answered “Safe” or “Very safe”; those who answered that they never go out were excluded from the population studied. The analysis was also limited to individuals aged 14 or older.

The variables included in the model as explanatory, in addition to sex, concern “structural” individual (age, marital status) and socioeconomic (level of education, professional condition, family economic resources, condition of dwelling) characteristics, territorial level (size of municipality, region), perception of the social degeneration of the area (criminality, drugs, vandalism, prostitution, dirtiness

³ The model was estimated using the *Genmod* procedure of the *SAS System*, which for correlated observations resorts to the GEE (*Generalized Estimating Equations*) method described in detail in Diggle, Liang, Zeger (1994). It is important to take explicitly into account the correlation among the answers given within the same family from both the statistic and the substantial standpoint: from the statistic standpoint because the non-consideration of the correlation may entail a non-correct inference and inefficient estimate on the parameters; from the substantial standpoint because it permits, in general, to evaluate whether and how much the attitudes and behaviours of the members of a family are influenced by common factors not observed and/or by reciprocal influences.

of streets), the concern for the presence of immigrants, the visibility and access to police forces and, lastly, an experience of victimisation, particularly that of having suffered a bag-snatching⁴.

The perception of risk by an individual is formed as the result of a complex interweaving of mechanisms, connected with the presence of objective risks and the subjective evaluation of one's own exposure to such risks. In substance, for the sake of simplicity, we may refer to the following four aspects at the basis of not feeling safe while walking alone in the dark in the neighbourhood where one lives:

- a) the presence of potential aggressors in the zone and the lack of control by police forces (dangerousness of the neighbourhood)
- b) the possession and value of the assets, in the broad sense, which may attract the potential aggressor (appeal of the individual's possessions)
- c) the capacity to deal with and defend oneself from possible attacks (individual's vulnerability⁵)
- d) the subjective perception of the first three points

Point a) is registered in our analysis by the variables on the decay of the neighbourhood and the presence and accessibility of the police forces, point b) by the socioeconomic variables, and point c) by the structural and socioeconomic variables; point d) is part of the unobserved individual heterogeneity, concerning the individual's personal and subjective view of the external world and own capacity for handling and dealing with risks, and it's possible to register it in this analysis only to the extent that this perception is common to the individuals belonging to one family, as the result of similarities and reciprocal conditioning.

The structural variables are connected mainly with point c). Indeed, we expect that the fact of being a woman and/or being very young or very old entails a considerable increase in the perception of the risk of being a potential crime victim, compared to other categories of individuals. On the other hand, a higher socioeconomic status could be connected to a lower feeling of insecurity through point c), and vice versa to a higher risk through point b). To the fact of being a woman, especially if a young one, and to the greater vulnerability with regard to crimes such as bag-snatching and robbery, must be added the more serious risk of suffering sexual harassment and violence.

The following analysis strategy was adopted. An initial model with only the main effects of the explanatory variables was applied. Then terms of interaction of the sex variable with all the other explanatory variables were added. Next, a parsimonious model containing only the interaction parameters with significance level lower than 10% was used. Lastly (Table 2.1), the significant interactions with the sex were differentiated according to three large age groups (14-24, 25-54, 55 and over), so as to evaluate whether the risk surplus (or reduction) of the women connected with a specific variable may be more likely attributed to aspects having to do with vulnerability, or vice versa to the

⁴ Bag-snatching is the experience of victimisation which most increases the feeling of insecurity in those who suffer it (Barbagli, 1998).

⁵ For a detailed definition of the concept of "vulnerability", see Barbagli (1998).

risk of sexual crimes. In the first case the interaction is expected to be stronger at the older ages, and in the second case it should be stronger at the younger ages.

2.2. The common determining factors of insecurity

Table 2.1 shows the results obtained by the final model. As expected, it is mainly women who feel not very safe or not safe at all when they go out in the dark alone. Furthermore, the sense of insecurity increases with age and with the demographic size of the municipality. It should be noted that the effect of age is monotonic increasing, especially starting at the age of 45, and not curvilinear as seen in the descriptive tables (see also Barbagli, 1998). While the estimates of the model confirm that the age bracket with the lowest perception of risk is the 25-34 age group, the very young group (14-24) does not, however, differ significantly. This is due to the fact that much of the feeling of insecurity is to be attributed to single women, an aspect to which we will return later.

In addition to the size of the municipality, the regional geography of the fear is significant. Campania is by far the region, also net of all other variables included in the model, where the perceived risk of falling victim to crimes is the highest, followed by Apulia, the large regions of the north except for Liguria (where the perception is particularly low), and Calabria. On the other hand, in an intermediate position is Sicily, where the presence of the organised criminality does not seem to cause in common citizens any extra sense of insecurity compared to the average of the other regions. A possible explanation could be that Mafia crimes do not involve, or at least to a negligible extent, common citizens, and that it is above all microcriminality that influences the perception of risk when going out in the dark. It should also be kept in mind that in Lazio the perception is low, because the effect of Rome is largely registered by the covariate size of the municipality (in particular the category “metropolitan

The socioeconomic variables all show a ratio of limitation of the sense of insecurity to the increase in the individual's status. Perceiving a lower risk are those who have a higher level of education compared to those who had only the minimum schooling; executives, entrepreneurs, managers, middle managers, white-collar workers, free-lance professionals, and self-employed persons, compared to blue-collar workers, housewives, the disabled, and pensioners; those who live in dwellings in good condition compared to those who live in dilapidating housing. All these indicators agree in stating that the possession of greater socio-cultural and economic resources considerably reduce the perception of insecurity with regard to external risks.

All the other indicators on the social decay of the zone of residence also act in the same sense. As it was obviously expectable, the higher the perceived risk of criminality, the higher is the fear of going out alone in the dark. Net of this variable, all the other indicators of the disorder, such as drugs, prostitution, vandalism and dirty streets, remain in any case significant.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that, also net of all the other variables considered, the assertion that immigration is a top-priority for the country does not seem to be connected in any significant way with the fear of falling victim to crimes.

As expected, those who have already suffered a bag-snatching in their lives tend to develop a greater sense of insecurity compared to those who have never had this negative experience, but this effect is significant only at the level of 10%.

Lastly, the intra-family correlation is significant (equal to 0.277): this means that individuals belonging to the same family show strong similarities and/or reciprocal conditioning on the fear's perception.

2.3. *Gender differences*

The interaction between sex and the explanatory variables considered makes it possible to evaluate whether and how the effect of the factors connected with insecurity vary with gender.

In the model with only main effects (without interactions) it is hypothesised that males and females have different levels of insecurity perception (the parameter of the sex variable indicates how much higher female fear is than male fear), but that the effect of the other explanatory variables does not depend on sex, i.e. that the belonging to a given category B, compared to A taken as reference, entails the same increase (if positive effect) or decrease (if negative effect) in perception of insecurity for both sexes. Inserting terms of interaction with the sex means allowing the model to differentiate the effect of the explanatory variables according to gender. If an interaction effect between sex and a given explanatory variable proves significant, then that variable will have an effect on the perception of insecurity different for males and females.

Going on to the actual results of the model, significant interactions are obtained for the marital status, territorial variables, and the perception of criminality in the zone.

In particular, while for males the perception of risk increases as they change from single to married status (and goes back to decreasing once they are legally separated and divorced), the opposite is true for women, whose fear decreases as they change from single to married. This may be due to the fact that the undertaking of a family responsibility leads men to be more mindful of the risks in the neighbourhood where they live, while married women may feel more protected and less vulnerable.

With regard to the territorial level, it turns out that in municipalities of fewer than 2,000 inhabitants, compared to bigger ones, the lesser fear is more marked for females than for males, and this is the case especially for elderly women. In practice, this means that in smaller towns the difference in perception of insecurity between males and females of an elderly age is considerably more limited than that seen in larger towns. This could be a sign of the fact that it is mainly the sense of vulnerability that is less accentuated in these towns compared to larger ones.

In large non-metropolitan municipalities, on the other hand, the gap between the sexes is more accentuated, and to a greater extent at the younger ages, a fact which seems to indicate a greater fear of sexual assaults.

The effect of the geographical distribution also depends on sex. Compared to Lombardy and the north-east, the remaining northern regions show a more positive situation for women, and in particular for younger ones. In the south, the gap in the perception of insecurity between males and females is further reduced, in particular for the most disadvantaged ages (very young and elderly). It is difficult to

say whether this lesser sense of vulnerability and perception of the risk of sexual assault is connected to aspects of the southern culture or lifestyle which contribute to a women's greater sense of protection or trust in the external environment, or, more specifically, to a greater presence of southern women outside the home in the evening. The relationship between going out in the evening and the sense of insecurity may be ambiguous. A context where the female presence is more widespread makes the "outside evening space" less alien, more familiar, and thus with a greater awareness of the actual risks and how to avoid, and if necessary, handle them. In this case the lesser sense of insecurity is the effect of a being used to go out in the evening. The opposite may also be true, i.e. a context that presents lesser risks and in which persons feel less unsafe may encourage going out more in the evening.

The fact remains, however, that another logistic regression model (results not shown here), only for the female population, in which the dependent variable to the question on the insecurity of going out along in the dark is the response "I never go out", shows that in the contexts where the gap in the perception of insecurity between the two sexes is narrower (south, small towns) the proportion of women who never go out is also smaller; whereas where the gap is wider (inhabitants of large non-metropolitan towns, Veneto and Lombardy), the proportion of women who always remain within the protection of their homes is also greater.

Lastly, among the variables indicating the decay of the zone of residence, the only significant interaction exists with the perception of criminality. The connection between perception of criminality and perception of insecurity is very strong for both sexes and all ages, but is accentuated for elderly women.

Table 2.1. Results of the logistic model on perception of insecurity and walking alone in the street in the dark

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Parameter</i>
Intercept	-3.387 ***
Sex	
Male	0
Female	1.0741 ***
Marital status	
Single	-0.3472 ***
Married	0
Separated in fact	0.1259
Legally separated	-0.3995 **
Divorced	-0.2538
Widowed	-0.1042
Marital status: additional effect for women (interaction)	
Single	0.4203 ***
Married	0
Separated in fact	-0.305
Legally separated	0.3333
Divorced	0.3219
Widowed	0.1297

Age	
18-24	0.0789
25-34	-0.0168
35-44	0
45-54	0.1074 ***
55-64	0.3916 ***
65-74	0.5027 ***
75 and over	0.7817 ***
Size of municipality	
Metropolitan area centres	0.9447 ***
Metropolitan area suburbs	0.6471 ***
Up to 2,000 inhabitants	-0.1792 **
From 2,000 to 10,000 inhabitants	0
From 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants	0.2275 ***
Over 50,000 inhabitants	0.3046 ***
Municipalities of up to 2,000 inhab.; additional effect for women, according to age group (interaction)	
14-24	0.1408
25-54	0.0067
55 and over	-0.4693 ***
Municipalities of over 50,000 inhab.; additional effect for women, according to age group (interaction)	
14-24	0.1989 *
25-54	0.1772 ***
55 and over	0.1568 **
Region	
Piedmont	0.054
Valle D'Aosta	-0.3648 ***
Lombardia	0
Trentino-Alto Adige	-0.3429 ***
Veneto	0.0971
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	-0.2165 **
Liguria	-0.5798 ***
Emilia-Romagna	-0.3855 ***
Tuscany	-0.5426 ***
Umbria	-0.2804 ***
Marches	-0.2175 **
Lazio	-0.1474
Abruzzi	-0.0375
Molise	-0.1206
Campania	0.8377 ***
Apulia	0.1331
Basilicata	-0.4116 ***
Calabria	0.0183
Sicily	-0.0725
Sardinia	-0.2019 **
North-western zone (except Lombardy): additional effect for women, according to age group (interaction)	
14-24	-0.389 **
25-54	-0.2251 **
55 and over	-0.2538 **

**Southern zone: additional effect for women, according to age group
(interaction)**

14-24	-0.4842 ***
25-54	-0.4073 ***
55 and over	-0.6009 ***

**Islands: additional effect for women, according to age group
(interaction)**

14-24	-0.3049 **
25-54	-0.1724
55 and over	-0.3268 ***

Level of education

University degree	0
High school diploma	0.0578
Less than high school diploma	0.1099 *

Professional status

Executives, Entrepreneurs, Free-lance professionals	-0.1406 **
Managers, Middle Managers, White-collar Workers, Intermediates	-0.0929 **
Blue-collar Workers, Apprentices	0
Self-employed Workers and Collaborators	-0.1254 **
Seeking new job	-0.058
Seeking first job	0.0818
Housewives	0.1467 ***
Students	-0.0695
Pensioners	0.1266 **
Military or civil service	-0.1614
Disabled	0.4432 ***
Other condition	0.2706 ***

Family economic resources

Excellent	0
Adequate	0.102
Poor or insufficient	0.1752

Dwelling in bad condition

No	0
Yes	0.1271 *

The police forces succeed in controlling the territory of residence

Well	0
Fairly well	0.4559 ***
Not very well	1.3759 ***
Not at all	1.4378 ***

Difficulty in reaching the police and Carabinieri stations

None	0
Little	0.1264 ***
Very much	0.2354 ***

Non-EEC immigration is a top-priority problem for the country

No	0
Yes	0.0397

The zone of residence has a risk of criminality

High	0.9303 ***
Fairly high	0.7185 ***
Low	0.2392 ***
Not at all	0
Don't know	0.5012 ***

Additional effect for women, according to age group, for those stating that the zone has a high risk of criminality (interaction)

14-24	0.1743
25-54	0.1496
55 and over	0.3025 **
Criminality has increased in the zone of residence	
No	0
Yes	0.7274 ***
In your zone of residence how often do you see people taking drugs	
Often	0.3308 ***
Sometimes/rarely	0.1937 ***
Never	0
In your zone of residence how often do you see used syringes on the ground	
Often	0.5369 ***
Sometimes/rarely	0.3391 ***
Never	0
In your zone of residence how often do you see acts of vandalism	
Often	0.4307 ***
Sometimes/rarely	0.124 ***
Never	0
In your zone of residence how often do you see prostitutes seeking clients	
Often	0.2479 ***
Sometimes/rarely	0.1724 ***
Never	0
The streets in the zone of residence are dirty	
Very	0.1951 ***
Fairly	0.1938 ***
Not very or not at all	0
In the past two months have you had your purse snatched	
No	0
Yes, but not reported	-0.0062
Yes, reported	0.2638 *

Significance: *** level 0.001; ** level 0.05; * level 0.1.

Source: *Istat, Survey on Aspects of Everyday Life – Year 1999*

3. The relationship between insecurity's perception and victimisation experience

As has been seen in the preceding application, the feelings of unsafety and safety are strongly influenced by the environment in which one lives. In addition to the weight of the individual and family characteristics, on the one hand the risk of criminality in the zone of residence, and on the other the level of socio-environmental degeneration characterising it, are of extreme importance. The latter, in particular, registers many aspects connected with fear, since a degenerated environment, in which acts of incivility are legitimate, i.e. soft crimes (characterised, for example, by the presence of people taking drugs, drug pushers, acts of vandalism, prostitutes seeking clients), attracts more criminality and denotes both an absence of control over the territory by the police forces and a lack of interest of those

living there. Thus results in a fertile ground for further criminality and social decay and consequently in an increase of fear.

Nevertheless, in addition to the surrounding environment, the relationship with the direct victimisation experience appears to be fundamental.

Taking into consideration as an indicator of insecurity the declared fear of walking alone in one's neighbourhood when it is dark, it can be seen how one's sense of insecurity is increased by previous experiences of victimisation, and this is true for both males and females, without considerable differences. The percentage of those who feel not very or not at all safe going out in the evening is 28.2% among those who have not suffered crimes against the individual (Table 3.1), 37.5% among bag-snatching and pickpocketing victims, and 39.3% among those who have been robbed and assaulted.

Table 3.1 – Persons 14 years of age and older, by type of crime against the individual suffered in the past 12 months and perception of safeness when going out in the evening (*per 100 persons*)

SENSE OF SAFETY	At least one crime against property (a)		At least one violent crime (b)		At least one crime against the individual (c)	
	Has not suffered	Has suffered	Has not suffered	Has suffered	Has not suffered	Has suffered
Very safe	24.5	19.6	24.3	24.5	24.6	20.6
Fairly safe	38.4	38.8	38.5	33.8	38.5	37.9
Not very or not at all safe	28.5	37.5	28.7	39.3	28.2	37.7
Never goes out	8.6	4.1	8.5	2.4	8.7	3.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Istat, Survey on Citizens' Safety – Year 1997-1998

(a) bag-snatching and attempted bag-snatching, pickpocketing and attempted pickpocketing, theft and attempted theft of personal possessions;

(b) robbery and attempted robbery, assault;

(c) bag-snatching and attempted bag-snatching, pickpocketing and attempted pickpocketing, theft and attempted theft of personal possessions, robbery and attempted robbery, assault.

But these percentages grow even more for the victims of metropolitan centres, in particular for those of the south. The escalation of the lack of safety in large towns, like the necessity to take precautions when going out in the evening, is connected to the increase in crimes in these towns. Nevertheless, the increase in the fear of criminality in crime victims in small and medium-sized centres is stronger, and the impact of the crimes among the latter is decisive for their fear, while in the large centres the starting level of fear is generally higher and there is a generalised habit to criminality, which somehow represents a saturation threshold.

Along the line of these considerations, it is possible to focus on the crimes, considered in the Survey on Citizens' Safety, which have the greatest influence on the feeling of safety and which make it possible to point out not only how the seriousness of a crime, but also the concrete possibility that it may occur, can concern citizens⁶.

The analysis of the regression applied to the insecurity indicators has showed that the most influential crimes for determining fear when going out alone in the dark in one's neighbourhood are, in order of importance, bag-snatching, robbery, assault, and apartment theft (Barbagli, 1998), while other crimes such as car and car part thefts and thefts of objects outside the home are correlated very little.

The fear thus appears to be closely connected to those crimes which occur most frequently and which most entail a direct involvement of the victim or his main extension, his home. On the contrary, crimes which are frequent and at the same time may also be economically damaging, such as car theft, are less influential on the feeling of insecurity, precisely because of the different ways they occur.

When at home alone, the fear is, of course, more correlated to the fact of already having had a theft in the home, and more weakly to the fear of personal assault, while it does not depend at all on the thefts that take place in the street.

While these considerations are true for both men and women, it nevertheless seems necessary to consider where the gender difference stands.

In the first place, the crimes which most influence the perception of safety have specific peculiarities depending on whether they are committed against women or men. In the second place, for women alone it is necessary to consider the contribution of sexual crimes in determining their fear, as will be analysed in the next paragraph.

In fact, without considering sexual crimes, which have almost exclusively women as victims, the males and females would suffer approximately the same number of crimes; thus the difference by gender is to be attributed to the type of crime suffered and its particular dynamics.

Males are more subject to suffer violent crimes such as robberies and assaults, and thefts without personal contact (which, however, don't seem connected to the safety's feeling, since victim's absence is necessary for them to take place), while it is females who suffer the most thefts with personal

⁶ In fact, Warr and Stafford (1983) maintain that fear depends on both the fear of certain serious but not very frequent crimes, such as murder, and the frequency of certain crimes which are more likely to occur, and thus more dreaded (for example, theft in an apartment).

contact, such as bag-snatchings and pickpocketing (in both cases facilitated by an interesting target – the purse – which is easily seen and accessible).

Furthermore, men and women are victimised in different ways and at different hours for the same crimes; for example, attacks against women occur more frequently at home, by attackers who are known to the victim, as is also the case for sexual violence, while those against men take place mainly in the street or places of recreation, such as the discothèque or gymnasium, and are committed by strangers. Lastly, women are more often victims of crimes in the daytime, and the men at night. This may be due, on the one hand, to the type of crime suffered (bag-snatchings and pickpocketing take place more during the daytime, while robberies and assaults take place more at night), and on the other on the different lifestyles of men and women, which exposes them more to one type of crime rather than another.

4. The contribution of sexual crimes in the explanation of women's fear

The introduction of sexual crimes into the model just described complicates the analysis, at least as far as the population of women is concerned⁷.

Sexual harassment (physical harassment, exhibitionism and obscene phone calls) contributes to explaining part of the perception of insecurity in addition to the contribution of other crimes. On the other hand, the ways in which unwanted sexual touching occur, make it possible to associate them with bag-snatching and robberies: they are committed by strangers in 67.2% of the cases and the majority take place in the street (20.6%) or on a means of public transport (34.8%).

However, some authors (Pain 1991, Hanmer 1978, Matrix 1984, Mazey and Lee 1983) maintain that the role of sexual harassment is precisely that of being an integral part of a male strategy, more or less explicit and conscious, to keep women in a sort of state of psychological terror of the greater evil, rape. This allegedly makes them become totally submissive, not very competitive in the job world, and would force them to seek shelter in the only “safe place”, the home, in order to avoid danger; lastly, it allegedly makes them feel guilty if something happens, because they have been forewarned.

On the other hand, rapes do not give a significant contribution to the explanation of the dependent variable, especially if we consider the correlation with the precautions women take at night when they go out alone, such as avoiding certain places and persons. This aspect seems completely absurd unless the very characteristics of rapes and their sad realities are considered. Unlike sexual harassment and contrary to all clichés spread and supported by the media, the most unsafe place is precisely the home where women live every day. And the perpetrator is often none other than the loved one.

In reality, only 21.9% of these crimes are committed by strangers, 24.5% are committed by friends, 18.7% by acquaintances, 6.5% by fiancés, 8% by colleagues or employers, 4.6% by a person well known, 4.3% by a relative, and 2.5% by a husband or live-in partner. Furthermore, in the rapes which

⁷ In the Survey on Citizens' Safety, a section of the questionnaire concerning sexual harassment (physical harassment, exhibitionism and obscene phone calls), sexual blackmail on the job and rape was addressed to a sample group of 20,064 women between the ages of 14 and 59. The questions referred to their entire lifetime and to the past three years.

have been committed in the past three years, the percentage of strangers has decreased further to 11.6%, in favour of the other categories.

The most risky places are the most familiar ones; the street is present only in 19.5% of the cases. Among the “safe” places are the houses of friends and relatives, one’s own home, the car, the workplace, the offender’s home, the hotel, and the camping site.

The consideration of these elements leads us to reflect on the rationality of these women and their full awareness. In fact, introducing as a new category the type of violence suffered, it is possible to observe how the distinct analysis of the feeling of fear in women who have been raped by strangers and by persons they know leads to extremely different results.

Women who have been victims of “street” rapes by strangers have a much higher sense of insecurity about going out in the dark than all the other women (54%), they fear places and situations where they were victimised (table 4.1); while those who suffered rape or a rape attempt by known persons (friends, fiancés, relatives, etc.) and for whom the places most at risk consist of their own homes, those of their friends, the car or the workplace, have a fear level that is not only much lower (39.5%), but almost similar to that of women who have not been sexually assaulted at all (37.8%).

Table 4.1 - Women from 14 to 59 years of age who have suffered a rape or attempted rape by strangers, by perception of safeness when they go out at night in the dark (per 100 women with the same characteristics)

SENSE OF INSECURITY	Rape by strangers	Rape by non-strangers	Neither molesting nor rape
Very safe	11.9	15.9	16.0
Fairly safe	31.5	40.8	40.0
Not very safe	33.2	24.1	26.1
Not at all safe	20.8	15.4	11.7
Never goes out	2.6	3.8	6.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Istat, Survey on Citizens’ Safety – Year 1997-1998

Even without the effect of sexual crimes, women’s fear remains, in any case, much higher than that of men. This reality belongs to the awareness of women of being sexual targets and potential victims (Sabbadini, 1998). In fact sexual harassment, but also verbal harassment, sexual looks, stalking, “wisecracks” (not easy to measure) help to create the cultural context in which every women grow up and that differently influence their behaviours and lives.

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