

FEAR OF CRIME

Crime levels and victimisation patterns such as those outlined above, provide essential information for policy-makers on how to reduce actual crime levels. However, crime affects people in ways which are more insidious than actual victimisation. Fear of crime – or more accurately, anxiety and worry about crime – has become a familiar part of South African life. Reducing these feelings of anxiety, however, has received little attention from government. Local crime prevention strategies, while limited in their capacity to improve the criminal justice system, can make a contribution in this regard.

People's concern about crime has received increased attention in countries such as the UK over recent years. Fear of crime has become an important issue, largely because of its perceived effects on people's social behaviour. Anxiety about becoming a victim of crime, as well as the impact that crime may have, no matter how small the chances of victimisation, encourage feelings of insecurity, erode people's well-being, restrict freedom of movement and encourage defensive and wary behaviour.³⁵

In South Africa, such social effects have largely gone unnoticed amidst other economic and political effects of the fear of crime. The withdrawal of many businesses and shoppers from city centres, disinvestment from the country by large corporations, and the activities of vigilante groups such as People Against Gansterism and Drugs (PAGAD), are some examples. Others include a hardening of attitudes towards criminal justice and calls for the death penalty to be reinstated. In the context of the forthcoming national elections in 1999, these issues are of critical importance to policy-makers.

Victim surveys provide one of only a few tools for designing interventions to reduce the fear of crime. They are key in measuring the extent and nature of anxiety. Importantly, fear of crime does not affect all sectors of society and parts of the city in the same way. It is necessary to establish what people fear, and where they worry most about crime and its consequences.

This section considers:

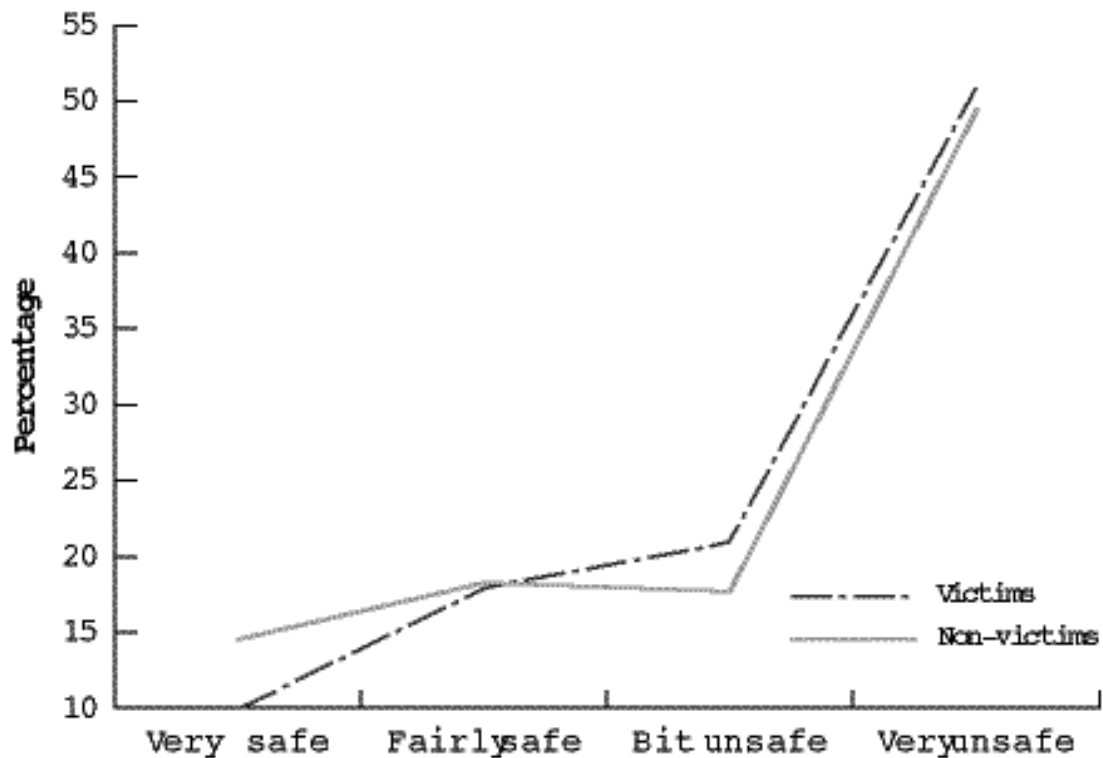
- the extent of fear;
- who is most likely to be anxious;
- which parts of the city are regarded as most unsafe; and
- what people fear.

Extent of anxiety

Fear of crime in Pretoria, as is the case in the other cities, is high. Most people feel very safe (43 per cent) and fairly safe (38 per cent) walking in the areas where they live during the day. But at night, levels of anxiety are much higher: half of Pretoria's population feel very unsafe (50 per cent) and a further 19 per cent feel a bit unsafe.

The views of victims and non-victims on this issue would be expected to diverge: victims should fear crime more than non-victims. However, non-victims feel almost as unsafe as victims at night, which indicates the extent to which fear of crime has permeated society in general (Figure 23).

Figure 23: How safe people feel walking in their area at night



Comparative indicators of insecurity also illustrate how the high fear of crime is in Pretoria. Of the major cities in several developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, Latin America and Asia surveyed by the International Crime Victim Survey in 1994, nowhere were feelings of insecurity at night as high as in Pretoria. Around 30 per cent of those surveyed in cities of sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America said they felt very unsafe in their areas at night – the highest response in this category of all the countries surveyed.³⁶ In the UK in 1996, only 18 per cent of women – who are generally more fearful than men – said they felt very unsafe on the streets where they lived at night.³⁷ In Pretoria, in comparison, 56 per cent of women shared this view.

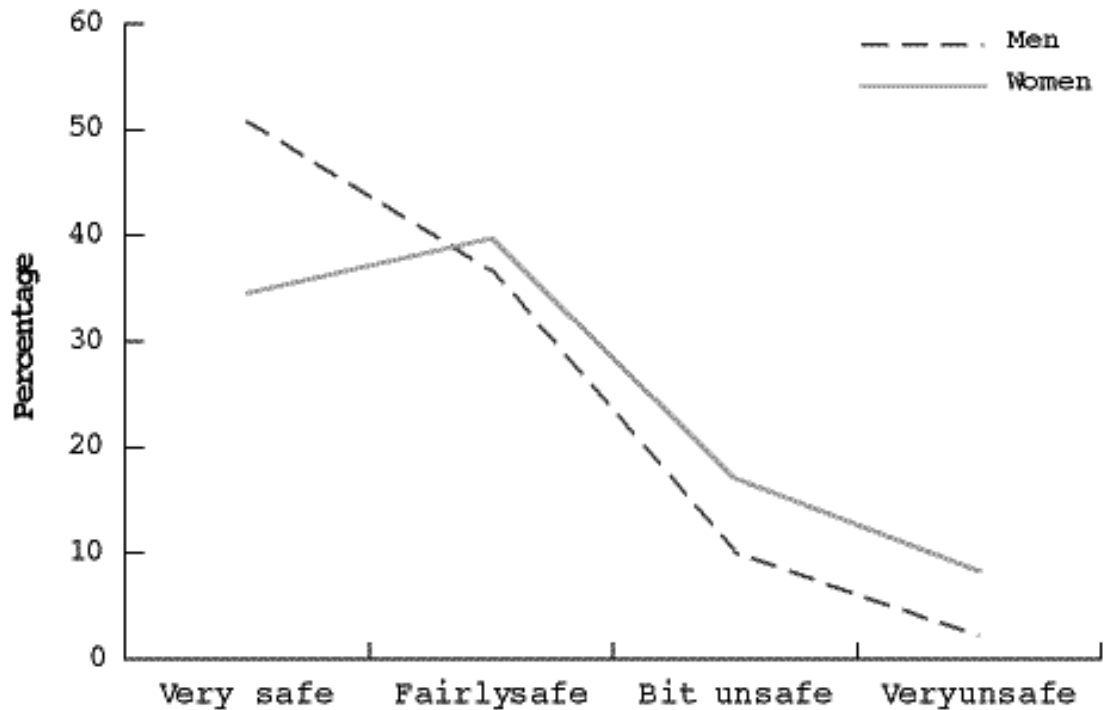
Who fears crime

Fear of crime is likely to be the highest not only among those people who think they have the greatest chance of victimisation, but also those who worry most about the consequences of crime, whether social, physical or economic. These trends have been illustrated by victim surveys both in South Africa and abroad. In Pretoria, those most likely to be anxious about crime were women, the aged, and people living in poorer parts of the city such as townships and informal areas. Each group is considered in turn:

- *Anxiety among women:* In Pretoria, women fear crime more than men, both at night and during the day. Women were less inclined to feel very safe during the day than men, and were more likely to feel very unsafe (Figure 24). At night, women's feelings of insecurity are magnified, and are more distinct from those of men than during the day: 56 per cent of

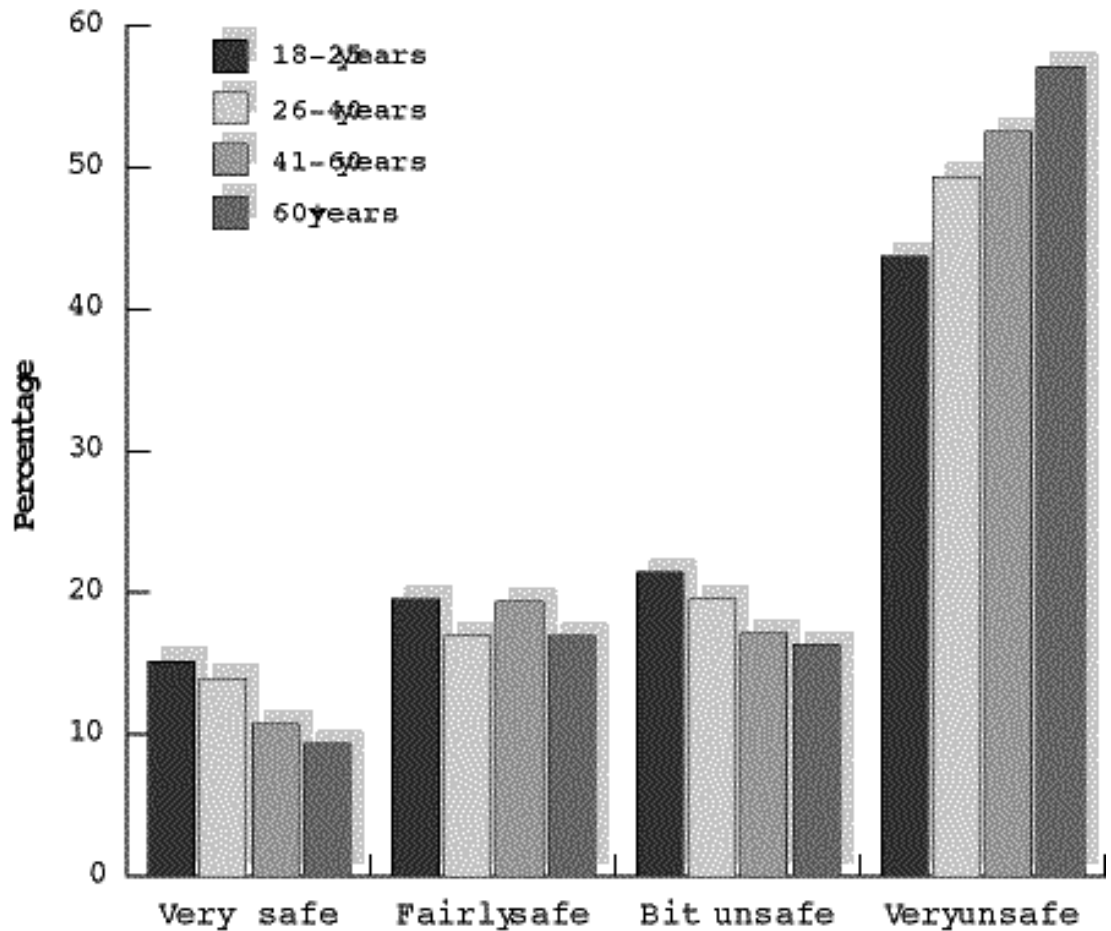
women said they felt very unsafe walking in their areas compared with 45 per cent of men.

Figure 24: How safe people feel walking in their area during the day



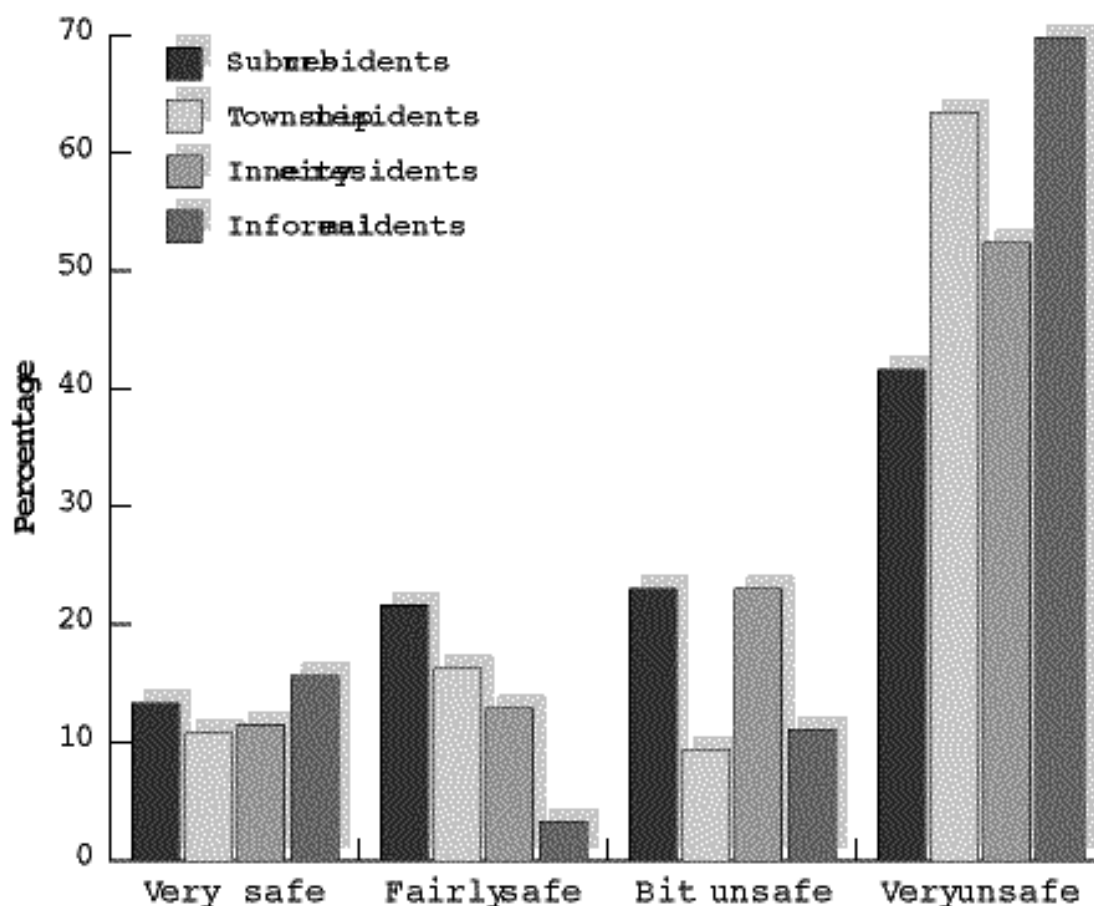
- *Anxiety among the aged:* People over the age of 60 years were more likely to feel very unsafe walking in the areas where they live at night (57 per cent) than those younger than them. In fact, levels of fear decrease with age (Figure 25). Fewer people over 60 years said they felt very safe during the day (31 per cent) than anyone else. Half of those aged 18 to 25 years, in comparison, were very safe during the day in Pretoria.

Figure 25: How safe people feel walking in their area at night



- *Anxiety among people living in townships and informal areas:* Fear of crime does not affect all parts of Pretoria in the same way. People living in townships and informal areas were far more worried about their safety at night than those in suburbs and the inner city: 70 per cent of the residents of informal settlements and 63,5 per cent of township inhabitants said they felt very unsafe at night. Only 42 per cent of those living in the suburbs had similar fears (Figure 26). These levels of fear are higher than those recorded in the Durban and Cape Town city victim surveys, but lower than in the Johannesburg survey. In Durban, for example, 34 per cent of people living in suburbs, 48 per cent of those in townships, 53 per cent of inner city residents and 57 per cent of people in informal settlements felt very unsafe at night.³⁸

Figure 26: How safe people feel walking in their area during the day



The picture improves during the day, however. People felt much safer in Pretoria's townships and informal settlements than they did at night. More people in these parts felt very safe (56 per cent and 52 per cent, respectively, for those in townships and informal settlements) during the day than did those in suburbs (38 per cent) and the inner city (39 per cent) of Pretoria. People tended to feel more anxious about particular parts of the city and particular crime types, which may explain this divergence.

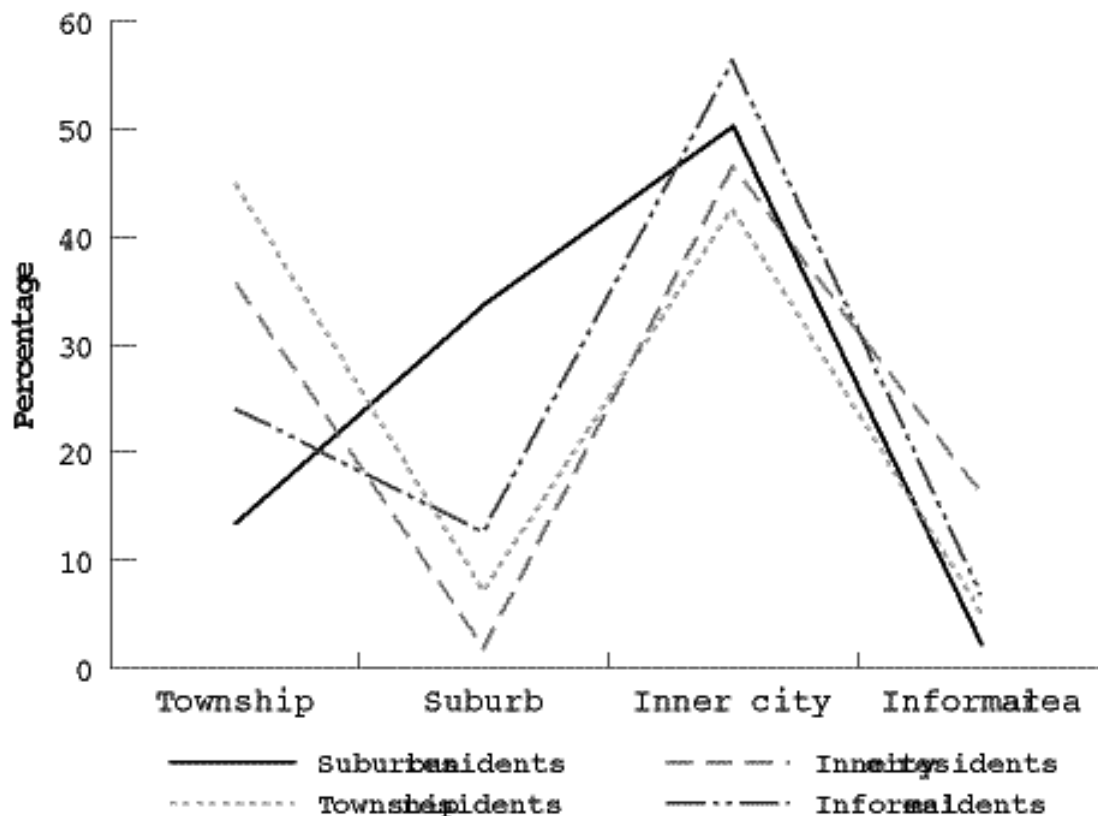
Parts of the city regarded as unsafe

People in Pretoria were asked to name places in the metropolitan area which they regarded as the most unsafe. These places – listed in Appendix 1 – were then grouped and reclassified into suburb, township, inner city and informal settlement categories. These views suggest not only which parts of the city induce the greatest fear of crime, but also what it is that people fear.

Nearly half of people in Pretoria named the inner city as the most unsafe place in Pretoria (49 per cent). After the inner city, more people (27 per cent) identified places in the suburbs as most unsafe than in the townships (20 per cent). Those people living in the inner city were more likely than any others to feel insecure in the city centre: 56 per cent said the inner city was the most unsafe, compared to 50 per cent of suburban residents and 46 per cent of people from informal settlements in Pretoria. Those living in townships were the only ones who did not regard the inner city as the most dangerous. For

these people, the townships in Pretoria where they reside, were regarded as slightly more unsafe (45 per cent) than the inner city (43 per cent) (Figure 27).

Figure 27: Parts of Pretoria considered most unsafe by residents from different areas



Although fear of crime is high in Pretoria’s inner city, higher levels of anxiety were recorded in Durban among white and Asian people, more than 70 per cent of whom regarded the inner city as most unsafe.³⁹ Cape Town’s city centre is believed to be the safest, if the views of residents of the Cape metropolitan area are considered. Here, only 27 per cent of white people – who generally fear crime in the inner city more than any other group – said they felt most vulnerable in the city centre.⁴⁰

Fear of crime in the inner city is probably the result of victimisation experience, as well as other fears. The Pretoria survey data show that people are more at risk of most types of crime in townships and suburbs than they are in the inner city, suggesting that these high levels of fear could be misplaced. More violent crimes such as murder, car hijacking and assault – which people are most afraid of – occurred outside the inner city.

Mugging and robbery are the crime types in Pretoria that occurred with equal frequency in the inner city and in the suburbs, and could thus be the source of some of this anxiety. However, comparative studies have concluded that fear about mugging was not related to having been a victim of this crime, although knowing a victim made people more anxious. What is more likely is that other characteristics of the inner city cause people to feel unsafe, such as overcrowding, the presence of large numbers of street hawkers, and litter. The British Crime Survey led analysts to conclude that local disorder, such as

noisy neighbourhoods, poor street lighting and teenagers hanging around, was predictive of nearly all measures of fear.⁴¹

Similar disjunctures between anxiety and the likelihood of victimisation have been noted with regard to what people fear most about crime in Pretoria.

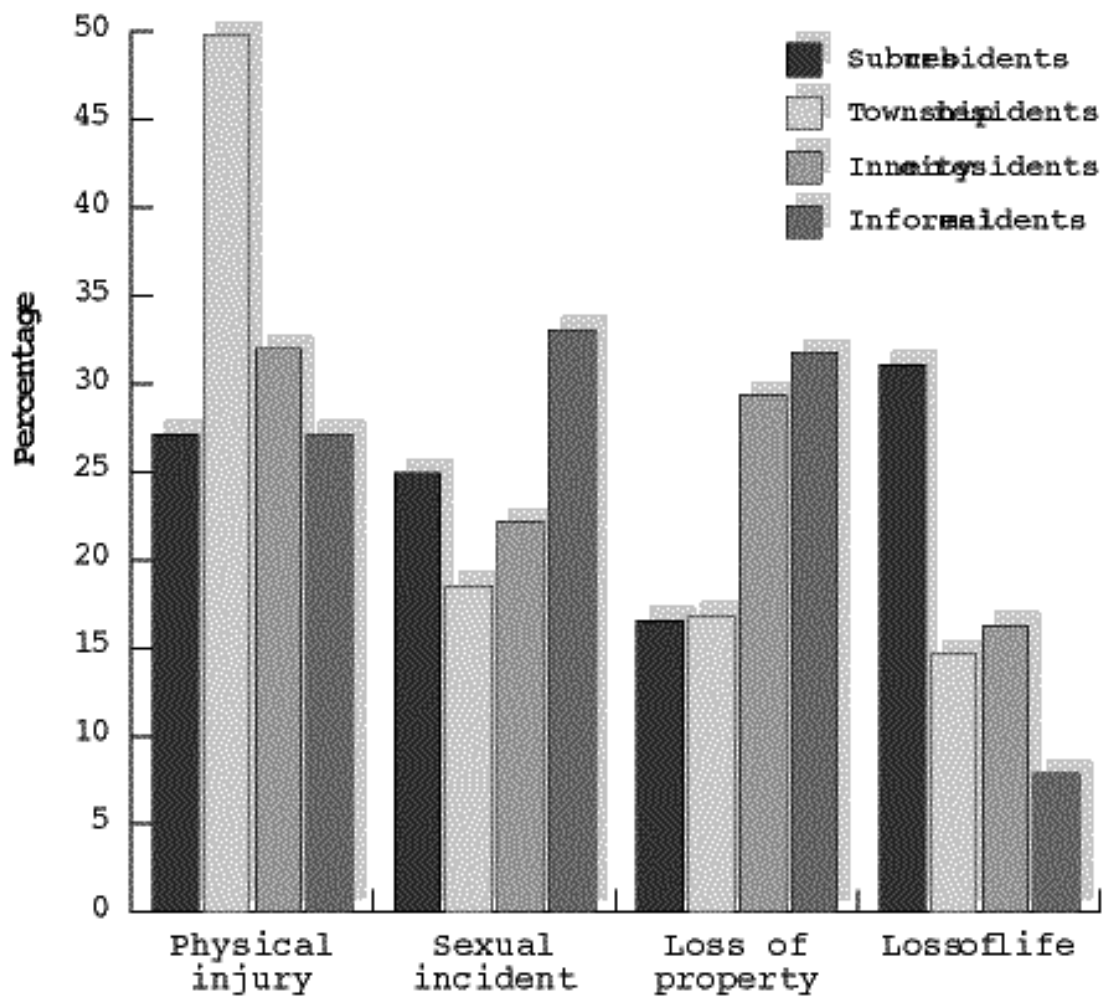
What people fear

The influence of the anticipated risk of victimisation, as opposed to the impact of crime – even when the chances of becoming a victim are remote – is well illustrated by survey questions which asked people what they fear most about crime, and what specific crime type they are most afraid of.

On the whole, people in Pretoria fear physical consequences of crime more than economic ones. One-third said they fear physical injury, a quarter were afraid of losing their life and 20,5 per cent feared sexual violence. Only 19 per cent reported fearing loss of property. These fears, however, do not apply equally to all people in Pretoria.

People living in suburbs were more likely to fear loss of life (31 per cent) than those living in any other parts of the city. Indeed, while the survey shows that people living in townships are far more likely to experience violence than those in the suburbs, only 15 per cent of township residents said they fear loss of life. A lower proportion of those living in townships also fear sexual incidents than do those in the suburbs. Physical injury, which is most likely to affect township residents, was identified by half of these people as the greatest source of concern. For the residents of informal settlements, in contrast, loss of property was regarded as the most serious (Figure 28).

Figure 28: What people fear most about crime

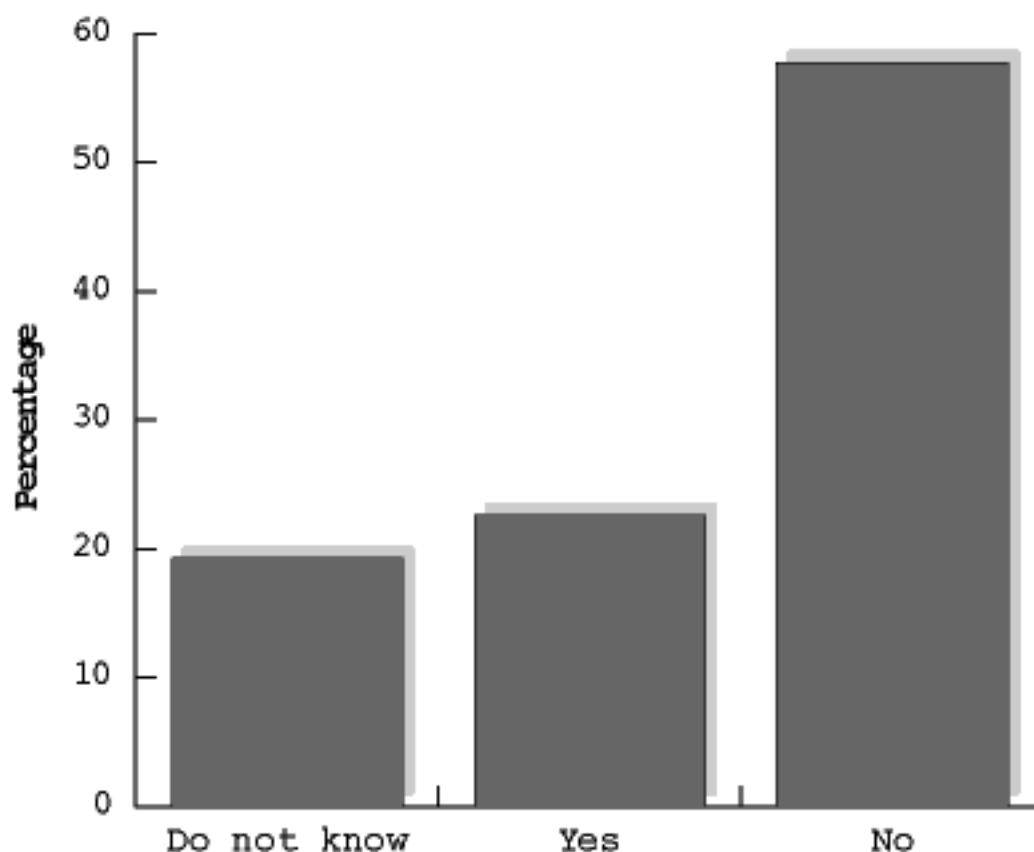


The particular crimes that people fear most are housebreaking (24,5 per cent) and murder (23 per cent). Unlike the responses above, people living in townships were more likely to fear murder (30,5 per cent) than those in the suburbs (20,5 per cent). For the latter respondents, burglary was feared more (28 per cent) than was the case for township residents (17,5 per cent), even though people in townships were more likely to be affected by this crime. These fears reflect concerns about crimes which have the most serious impact on people's lives (such as murder), as well as those perceived as the most likely to happen (such as burglary). In the case of women for example, their fears centred around housebreaking (28 per cent) and rape (26 per cent), while men were most worried about murder (30 per cent).

Although anxiety about crime does not always match actual risk, fears should not be regarded as irrational. In the UK, where crime levels (and particularly violent crime levels) are far lower than in South Africa, the Home Office has concluded that fears are usually the highest in areas where the chances of victimisation are the greatest, and among those with the most direct and indirect experience of crime. Rather than accusing people of 'worrying too much', fears should be addressed where they occur.

Interventions to reduce fear of crime, however, are not straightforward. Certainly, the victim survey has shown that government cannot hope to make people feel safer through publicising reductions in crime levels. When asked whether they believed what government or police statistics say about changing crime levels, most people (58 per cent) in Pretoria said they did not, and a significant proportion were undecided (Figure 29). Those most sceptical of official statistics were white people, women and the youth. Not surprisingly, people who had not been victims of crime were more likely to believe the figures than victims, which illustrates the kind of impact that victimisation can have on perceptions of crime.

Figure 29: Whether people believe government statistics about crime levels



Perceptions of crime clearly depend on more than information about the situation: 76 per cent of people in Pretoria thought that crime had increased compared to previous years, despite the fact that the government has recently made several announcements to the contrary. Those most likely to think this were women, and people living in townships and informal settlements (Figure 30). While more crimes have indeed happened to many of the victims surveyed during 1997 than during 1996, these views are more likely to be based on a subjective judgement than on publicised facts about changing crime levels. In any event, the difference between victims and non-victims on the issue was not dramatic: 74 per cent of non-victims thought crime had increased compared with 79,5 per cent of victims. Comparative studies of anxiety about crime over several years have also recorded majority perceptions that crime has increased, despite declines in statistics.⁴²

Figure 30: Views on changing crime levels in area of residence compared to previous years

