

The background is a collage of several images. On the right side, there is a vertical strip showing a woman in profile, looking to the right. The rest of the background is composed of various colored and blurred images, including a car interior, a person in a green shirt, and abstract patterns.

Fear of Crime:

**How safe do Idahoans
feel?**

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Introduction

In the 1960's and the 1970's there was a rapid increase in the crime rate. At the same time, fear of crime rose rapidly. It has been hypothesized that fear of crime can lead citizens to change their behavior. Citizens who fear being victimized may change their normal routines, avoiding certain areas and people, and withdraw from the streets. As a consequence, these fearful citizens no longer help to maintain the social controls that may prevent crime and disorder from occurring ^(4,5). However, the earliest research on fear of crime found that fear levels and crime did not always correlate: in some areas crime rates were low but fear was high and conversely so ^(1,3). As a result, fear of crime emerged as a central consideration in criminology ⁽²⁾.

A great deal of the earlier research on fear of crime assessed how victimization affected one's fear of crime. This research produced mixed conclusions. Some researchers found that victims had higher levels of fear, and yet others found they were unrelated or only slightly ^(1, 8, 10). Further research found that victimization could not account for all fear, since more people were afraid of crime than had actually been victims ⁽⁹⁾. In addition, young males who were most likely to be victimized had relatively low levels of fear, while elderly females who were least likely to be victimized had high levels of fear ^(1, 8, 10).

Later research attempted to solve this puzzle by explaining fear of crime as a consequence of perceived vulnerability to crime. Thus, research finding that minorities, those with lower income, women, and the elderly have higher levels of fear of crime was explained through their vulnerability to crime ^(9,10). For example, this model would explain that women and the elderly are more fearful due to the likelihood that they will suffer more injuries if victimized. Further research focused on the effect perceived social and physical disorder and social control in neighborhoods had on levels of fear of crime ^(6, 7, 9).

Methodology

The data used in this research comes from the fifth Idaho Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS), conducted in June and July of 2003. The survey was administered to 1,265 Idaho households as a

means of enhancing our knowledge and understanding of crime and victimization in Idaho, as well as Idahoan's perceptions of crime and police services. Out of a random sample of 3,000 Idaho households, one member of 1,265 households completed the survey. Six hundred-sixteen households were ineligible to participate because of disconnected telephone numbers, non-Idaho residency, illness, or were non-English speaking. Five hundred forty-four households were not contacted within the allotted time frame and 575 declined to participate in the study, resulting in a participation rate of 69.9%. The sample size represents general views or opinions of adult residents within a +/- 2.75 margin of error at the 95% confidence level ⁽¹¹⁾.

As part of the Idaho Crime Victimization Survey, respondents were asked five questions concerning their perceptions of crime and safety. Respondents were asked to indicate how safe they felt walking alone in their neighborhood during the day and during the night. Further, respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought crime in Idaho, and crime in their neighborhood or community, had increased, decreased, or stayed the same during the last 12 months ⁽¹¹⁾.

A response to how safe survey participants felt on Idaho's highways was also solicited. However, this last question is not considered in the following analysis because it appears respondents may have interpreted this question as referring to safety from traffic accidents (a reasonable interpretation). Many survey participants indicated feeling less safe on Idaho's highways than walking alone in their neighborhood at night. Since the purpose of this paper is to describe respondents' fear of crime, not fear of traffic accidents, this question is excluded from the following analysis.

Who Feels Crime?

Many researchers studying fear of crime have discovered that people with certain characteristics have higher levels of fear. Some researchers have found race, education, income, gender, crime rate perceptions, and victimization to be associated with fear of crime^(1, 3, 6, 8, 10).

Thomas and Hyman (1977) found that blacks, females, the elderly, those with a low socioeconomic status (income, education and occupational prestige) and those who were residents of the inner city were more concerned with the crime problem and more fearful of being victimized. McGarrell and his colleagues (1997) also found that lower income respondents had higher levels of fear. In

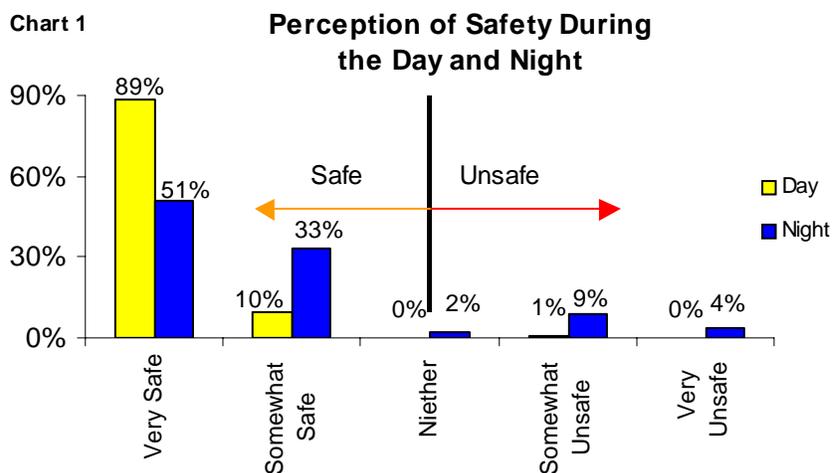
addition, Baker and her co-authors (1983) found that non-whites and the less educated were more likely to be afraid.

Several studies have established an association between previous victimization and fear of crime levels. In his study, Skogan (1987) established that recent victimization was consistently associated to measures of worry and concern about crime. Further, recent victims were more worried about being victims, concerned about the crime levels, and thought there was more crime around them ⁽⁸⁾. Roundtree and Land (1996) found that burglary victim’s perception of risk of further victimization was predicted by their previous victimization. However, other researchers have found that victimization has little effect, if any, on fear of crime^(6, 10).

Findings

Perception of Safety

The majority of Idahoans feel safe walking alone in their neighborhoods. However, a much larger percentage of respondents feel safe walking in their neighborhoods during the day (98.4%) than at night (84.4%). Referring to Chart 1, respondents are also more likely to indicate feeling “very safe” walking alone in their neighborhoods during the day (88.7%) than at night (51.3%).



Looking at Table 1, one can see that this trend is consistent for every survey these questions have been asked. There is one distinct difference in responses between the years. Respondents in 2003 indicated feeling much safer at night than respondents from previous years. In 2003, 84% of the respondents felt somewhat safe or very safe walking in their neighborhood/community alone during the night. In 2000 and 2001, only 58-60% of respondents indicated feeling somewhat safe to very safe under these same circumstances.

Table 1

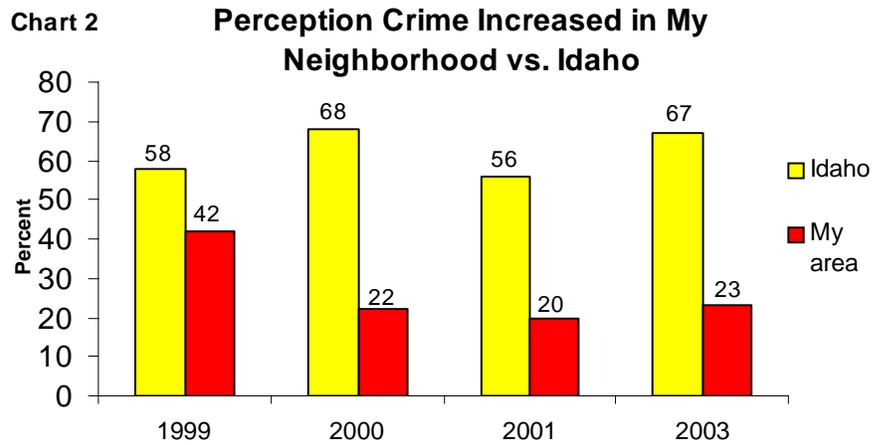
Perception of Safety During the Day and Night						
How safe do you feel walking alone in your neighborhood during the ...	2003		2001		2000	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Day						
Very Safe	1120	88.7	2017	85.3	2162	87.1
Somewhat Safe	123	9.7	264	11.2	294	11.9
Neither	3	0.2	57	2.4	5	0.2
Somewhat Unsafe	13	1.0	22	0.9	13	0.5
Very Unsafe	4	0.3	4	0.2	7	0.3
Night						
Very Safe	634	51.3	1062	46.4	1196	48.7
Somewhat Safe	410	33.1	264	11.2	294	11.9
Neither	30	2.4	57	2.5	53	2.2
Somewhat Unsafe	114	9.2	244	10.7	247	10
Very Unsafe	49	4.0	111	4.8	123	5

Factors Affecting Fear of Crime

Crime Perceptions

Most respondents perceive crime in Idaho as having increased within the last twelve months. This response is similar to responses from Idaho citizens surveyed in 2000, in which 68% believed that crime had increased in Idaho over the last 12 months, compared to 67% in 2003.

Idahoans are also more likely to view crime in the state as having increased over the last twelve months than crime in their neighborhood. While most respondents perceive crime in the state as having increased (67%), the majority also believe that crime in their neighborhood has stayed the same (78%). Chart 2 shows that previous victimization surveys from 1999-2001 have established a similar pattern.



The perception of crime in one’s neighborhood influences respondents’ feelings of safety (see Table 2). Respondents’ perceptions of safety are significantly different based on their perception of the crime rate in their neighborhood (Kruskal-Wallis H, $p < .05$), as respondents believe crime in their neighborhood has gone down in the last 12 months, the safer they feel walking alone in their neighborhood during the day ($r_s = -.194$; $p < .01$). In addition, respondents who believe crime in their neighborhood has decreased, feel safer walking alone in their neighborhood at night ($r_s = -.204$; $p < .01$). However, the association between perceptions of crime and safety is weak.

Table 2

How safe do you feel walking alone in your neighborhood during the ...	Think Crime in Neighborhood Has ...					
	Decreased		Stayed the same		Increased	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Day						
Very unsafe	-	-	2	0.3	2	0.8
Somewhat unsafe	-	-	2	0.3	10	4.1
Neither safe nor unsafe	-	-	2	0.3	1	0.4
Somewhat safe	2	3.8	56	7.1	41	16.8
Very safe	51	96.2	725	92.1	190	77.9
Night						
Very unsafe	-	-	19	2.4	23	9.7
Somewhat unsafe	4	7.5	56	7.2	32	13.6
Neither safe nor unsafe	2	3.8	10	1.3	11	4.7
Somewhat safe	19	35.8	243	31.3	90	38.1
Very safe	28	52.8	449	57.8	80	33.9

Gender

Men and women feel significantly different about their safety during the day (Mann-Whitney U, $p < .001$) and night (Mann-Whitney U, $p < .000$). Although a similar percentage of men (99%) and women (98%) feel safe walking alone in their neighborhood during the day, women are almost 5 times more likely to feel unsafe compared to men. The biggest difference between genders occurs on their perception of safety at night (see Table 3). Women are almost 7 times more likely to feel unsafe walking alone in their neighborhood at night than men. In addition, men are more likely to feel “very safe” walking alone in their neighborhoods at night and during the day. These findings suggest that men feel more certain of their safety than women.

Table 3

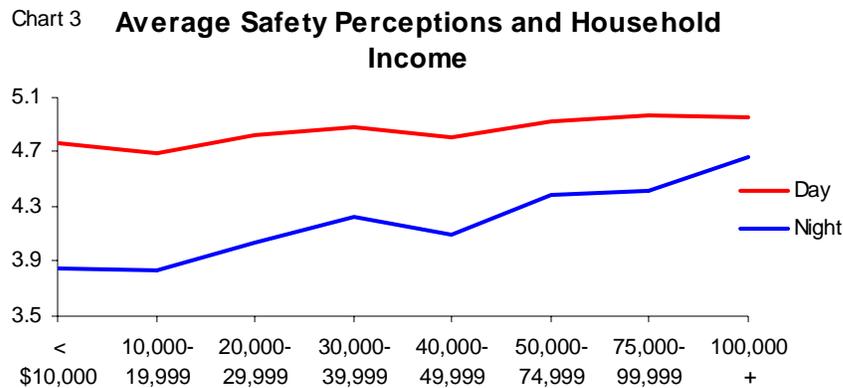
How safe do you feel walking alone in your neighborhood during the . . .	Gender			
	Male		Female	
	n	%	n	%
Day				
Very unsafe	-	-	4	0.5
Somewhat unsafe	2	0.4	11	1.5
Neither safe nor unsafe	2	0.4	1	0.1
Somewhat safe	36	7.1	87	11.6
Very safe	467	92.1	648	86.3
Night				
Very unsafe	4	0.8	45	6.2
Somewhat unsafe	11	2.2	103	14.1
Neither safe nor unsafe	8	1.6	22	3.0
Somewhat safe	125	24.9	283	38.8
Very safe	355	70.6	277	37.9

Education

Respondents who have different levels of educational attainment respond significantly different on their safety perceptions (Kruskall-Wallis H, $p < .01$). As respondent’s educational attainment increased, so did their feelings of being very safe walking alone in their neighborhood during the day and night. Further analysis reveals, however, that the association between education and safety perceptions is not significant when controlling for household income. Thus, respondents with higher educational attainment tend to have larger incomes, and those with larger household incomes tend to feel safer in their neighborhoods.

Household Income

There is a significant difference in safety perceptions between respondents based on their household income earned in 2002 (Kruskall-Wallis H, $p < .01$). Safety perceptions and income are positively associated, as one goes up, so does the other (day $r_s = .191$, $p < .001$; night $r_s = .186$; $p < .01$). Chart 3 illustrates this association between respondents' household income and safety perceptions.



Criminal Victimization

As previously noted, there are inconsistent findings in prior research concerning the effects of victimization on fear of crime. Criminal victimization in our current analysis is based on whether the respondent indicated being a victim of one of the following types of crime within the past 12 months: the violent crimes of assault and battery; and, the property crimes of breaking and entering or theft from inside/outside their home, vehicle, or motel/hotel room or vacation home where they were staying. In addition, some behaviors involving sexual harassment, hate crime, or intimate partner violence are included if they involve an assault, battery, or stalking. Take the following question as an example, “in the past year were you subjected to unwelcome touching such as hugs, arms around the shoulder, kissing, etc., by someone at your workplace?” Statute 18-903 of the Idaho Criminal Code states that one aspect of battery is “an actual, intentional and unlawful touching or striking of another person against the will of the other.” Thus, a respondent giving an affirmative answer to this question would be considered as having been criminally victimized.

Victims of crime accounted for 27% of the respondents. Out of all respondents, 18% were victims of only a property crime, 3% were victims of only a violent crime, less than 1% were victims of only a hate related crime, a crime involving sexual harassment, or only an intimate partner violence related

crime. The remaining 5% of the respondents were victims of more than one crime (although not necessarily involving more than one incidence).

Respondents who were criminally victimized in the last 12 months had significantly different safety perceptions than non-victims (Mann-Whitney U, $p < .001$). As Table 4 shows, crime victims do not feel as safe as non-victims walking alone in their neighborhoods. Although 98.2% of victims and 98.5% of non-victims feel safe during the day, a greater proportion of non-victims responded feeling “very safe” during the day (90.4% compared to 84.0%).

The difference between victims and non-victims is more evident in their perceptions of safety at night. Only 76.6% of victims feel safe walking alone in their neighborhood at night, while 87.4% of non-victims feel safe under these same circumstances.

Table 4

How safe do you feel walking alone in your neighborhood during the ...	A Crime Victim			
	No		Yes	
	n	%	n	%
Day				
Very unsafe	2	0.2	2	0.6
Somewhat unsafe	10	1.1	3	0.9
Neither safe nor unsafe	2	0.2	1	0.3
Somewhat safe	75	8.1	48	14.2
Very safe	836	90.4	284	84.0
Night				
Very unsafe	29	3.2	20	6.0
Somewhat unsafe	67	7.4	47	14.1
Neither safe nor unsafe	19	2.1	11	3.3
Somewhat safe	287	31.8	123	36.8
Very safe	501	55.6	133	39.8

Proportion of Neighbors That Would Be Recognized

There is a significant difference in respondents’ safety perceptions based on the proportion of neighbors they would recognize by sight (Kruskall-Wallis H, $p < .01$). As displayed in Table 5, the more neighbors respondents indicate they would recognize by sight, the safer respondents feel walking in their neighborhood during the day or night. However, the association between perceptions of safety and the proportion of neighbors that they would recognize by sight is weak (day $r_s = .090$ and night $r_s = .169$; $p < .01$).

Table 5

How safe do you feel walking alone in your neighborhood during the ...	Proportion of neighbors would recognize by sight							
	None		Some		Most		All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Day								
Very unsafe	1	4.8	1	0.3	2	0.4	-	-
Somewhat unsafe	2	9.5	6	1.5	5	1.0	-	-
Neither safe nor unsafe	-	-	1	0.3	2	0.4	-	-
Somewhat safe	3	14.3	47	11.9	46	8.9	26	7.9
Very safe	15	71.4	339	86.0	462	89.4	303	92.1
Night								
Very unsafe	3	15.0	23	6.0	15	2.9	7	2.2
Somewhat unsafe	3	15.0	50	13.0	44	8.6	17	5.3
Neither safe nor unsafe	-	-	14	3.6	10	2.0	6	1.9
Somewhat safe	5	25.0	134	34.9	179	35.1	92	28.7
Very safe	9	45.0	163	42.4	262	51.4	199	62.0

Discussion/Conclusion

Results from the Idaho Crime Victimization Survey (2003) reveal that Idahoans feel safe walking alone in their neighborhood, more so during the day than at night. Survey results also illustrate that a majority of respondents perceive crime in Idaho as having increased in the last twelve months. The majority of respondents further perceive crime in their neighborhood as having stayed the same within the same time period. This pattern was shown to be fairly consistent across all survey years.

Several attributes were discovered to be associated with respondents' safety perceptions.

Respondents who perceive crime in their neighborhood as having increased over the last twelve months, who are female, who have a low household income, have been a victim of a criminal offense in the last twelve months, and who don't recognize most or all of their neighbors by sight are more likely to feel unsafe walking alone in their neighborhoods (see Appendix A). All of these variables were entered into a regression equation.

Results of regression analysis indicate that the proportion of recognizable neighbors, perceptions of crime in the neighborhood, household income, and gender are the best predictors of safety perceptions during the day. That is, by knowing how respondents would reply to these questions, we

could better predict how safe they feel walking alone in their neighborhoods during the day. However, these variables explain very little, only 5.8%, of the variance in safety perceptions during the day (adjusted $R^2 = .058$, as shown in Appendix A).

Predictors for safety perceptions at night do not account for much more variance. The predictors for safety perceptions during the day are also predictors of safety perceptions at night. By adding the variable property crime victimization, the combined variables explain 19.7% of the variance in safety perceptions at night (adjusted $R^2 = .197$, as shown in Appendix A).

These findings suggest the need to include other factors that may affect safety perceptions. For example, McGarrell and his colleagues (1997) found that neighborhood characteristics like perceptions of neighborhood disorder, type of neighborhood (residential vs. commercial), informal neighborhood integration, and the presence of informal social controls helped explain respondents' fear levels. By accounting for these variables along with age, gender, income, and home ownership, McGarrell and his colleagues (1997) were able to explain 43% of the variance in fear.

Fear of crime can be difficult to define, measure, and explain. As shown here, there are many factors that influence safety perceptions. In this study, we were only able to measure a few of these factors. Perhaps if we could have accounted for other things like neighborhood disorder and social environment, we may have explained safety perceptions better. However, there appears to be very little variation in safety perceptions that can be explained, especially for daytime hours. With 98% of the respondents indicating they feel safe walking in their neighborhoods during the day, the only sizable variation in responses are those who feel "very safe" and those that just feel "safe." Concerning nighttime safety perceptions, there is a little more variation that could further be explained by neighborhood conditions.

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Appendix A

Correlations: Spearman's rho

	Personal crime victim	Property crime victim	Victim of all measured crime	Recognize neighbors	Perception of crime in neighbor- hood	House- hold income	Gender	Level of education	Safety day	Safety night
Victim of a personal crime	1									
Victim of property crime	0.16**	1								
Victim of all measured crime	0.42**	0.90**	1							
Recognize neighbors	-0.03	-0.07*	-0.06*	1						
Perception of crime in neighborhood	0.13**	0.18**	0.17**	-0.06*	1					
Household income	0.00	0.03	0.03	0.07*	-0.03	1				
Gender	0.07*	0.09**	0.09**	-0.03	0.06*	-0.13**	1			
Level of education	-0.05	-0.02	-0.02	0.02	-0.04	0.40**	0.10**	1		
Safety day	-0.09**	-0.10**	-0.09**	0.09**	-0.19**	0.19**	0.09**	0.16**	1	
Safety night	-0.09*	-0.15**	0.16**	0.17**	-0.20**	0.19**	-0.35**	0.11**	0.46**	1

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Multiple Regression Perceptions of Safety at Day

Variables	B	SE	Beta	t - value	Significance
(Constant)	4.90	0.10		48.11	0.00
Recognize neighbors	0.05	0.02	0.09	2.76	0.01
Perception of crime in neighborhood	-0.14	0.03	-0.15	-4.56	0.00
Household income	0.03	0.01	0.14	4.16	0.00
Gender (female = 1)	-0.06	0.03	-0.06	-1.96	0.05

Multiple R = .249; Adjusted R² = .058; F = 14.44; Significance = .000

Multiple Regression of Perceptions of Safety at Night

Variables	B	SE	Beta	t - value	Significance
(Constant)	4.57	0.22		20.89	0.00
Victim of property crime (yes = 1)	-0.19	0.08	-0.08	-2.43	0.02
Recognize neighbors	0.23	0.04	0.16	5.38	0.00
Perception of crime in neighborhood	-0.34	0.07	-0.16	-5.11	0.00
Household income	0.08	0.02	0.14	4.65	0.00
Gender (female = 1)	-0.59	0.07	-0.27	-8.83	0.00

Multiple R = .450; Adjusted R² = .197; F = 44.01; Significance = .000