



The Factors that Influence Fear of Crime amongst Female Citizens

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v6i8.1395>

Abstract

There is sometimes a confusion amongst researchers and citizens about crime and fear of crime and how it affects the lives of people. The former concerns people who have experienced victimisation previously and the latter concerns anxiety and perceived risk of future victimisation. People's fear of crime is usually influenced by factors such as demographic characteristics, vulnerability, previous victimisation, environmental characteristics, and social lifestyle. Whilst there is a body of existing literature on Fear of Crime in western developed countries, there is a nascent body of research on the factors that influences fear of crime amongst female citizens in Venezuela. Therefore, this study adds to the emerging scholarship in the country. This study used a qualitative methodology with fifty face to face interviews which were conducted in different geographic location of Venezuela using the snowball sampling technique. The interviews were conducted using a semi structured open-ended style questionnaire which was conducted over two months during 2022. When these factors were evaluated in Venezuela, they showed consistency but also highlighted that citizens socioeconomical status was an influential factor which increased citizen's anxiety and perceived risk thereby contributing to elevated fear of crime.

Keywords: *Fear of Crime; Female Citizens; Venezuela.*

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

The fear of crime [FOC] is often considered to be a social phenomenon with the capabilities of creating a negative impact on the quality and tranquillity of citizens lives by developing levels of paranoia, anxiety, or psychological stress (Jackson & Gray, 2010; Curiel & Bishop, 2018). The fear of crime is often responsible for citizens and communities having to adopt greater levels of security, protection and could result in mental health problems and a displacement of crime and fear unto vulnerable citizens and communities (Rader & Haynes, 2012; Caridade et al., 2022). Regardless of

people's prosperity, the fear of crime and the potential victimisation were more likely to develop elevated levels of anxiety, concern, risk, and discomfort to citizens (Solymos et al., 2020; Caridade et al., 2022).

There is hardly a day that goes by when people do not consider the potential risk to their own lives, their family, friend, and relatives (Jackson & Gray, 2010). Citizens were more likely to consider their safety and security before making a journey to a specific street, area, establishment or when leaving their homes (Solymos et al., 2020; Caridade et al., 2022). Such concerns could be due to personal experience or those from other people [personally or vicariously] or even the media (Ceccato & Mesko, 2021). These experiences could develop uncertainty about citizens safety and security which might influence potential risk of victimisation (Ferraro, 1995, Box et al., 1988; Caridade et al., 2022). As human beings with emotions, people were subject to fear based on factors such as, age, gender, environment, vulnerability, previous victimisation, or social lifestyle (Walklate, 1998; Coccia, 2019).

Whilst the fear of crime does not fully represent actual victimisation, it does highlight citizen's concerns and psychological thoughts about becoming potential victims (Jackson & Gray, 2010; Caridade et al., 2022). According to Cohen (1972) citizens fear of crime falls within the moral panic framework because such fear comes from visible signs of unsociable and unacceptable behaviours such as illegal drugs, alcohol, violence, and delinquency. According to Rohloff & Wright (2010) moral panic was caused by citizens overreaction based on their personal projections towards unacceptable behaviours and potential harm. However, these citizens might not be at any immediate risk of danger, and their personal interpretations might exaggerate victimisation.

“It is commonplace to assert that fear of crime has become a major social and political problem, perhaps bigger than crime itself.”

(Gilchrist et al., 1998: 283)

1.2 Statement of Problem

During the past two decades approximately 94.28% of Venezuela citizens demonstrated heightened concerns and anxiety towards their safety and security within the country (Littman, 2016). These concerns and anxiety synchronised with the country's political and socioeconomical downfall which resulted in widespread unemployment, poverty, and civil unrests (Rotberg, 2003; Littman, 2016). Venezuela's socialist government [*Bolivariana Revolution*] promoted inequalities, authoritarian management, and gang activities (Shifter, 2006; Buxton, 2018). Consequently, young unemployed people joined gangs, the police were unable to solve and prevent crime due to corruption and political influences and criminal activities gained momentum (Littman, 2016; Ausman & Ausman, 2019). Therefore, citizens safety and security became compromised (Carlson, 2013; Littman, 2016).

Previous research used various conceptual frameworks to explain fear of crime and focused primarily on age, vulnerability, and victimisation in developing countries (Alda and Bennett, 2017). However, there was a nascent body of research which attempted to examine these factors and its applicability amongst female citizens in Venezuela. Using a qualitative approach, this study aimed at constructing a foundation of literature and developing a better understanding on this topic in a Venezuelan context. Furthermore, considering the recent socio-political and economical downfall in the country which claimed the lives of innocent citizens including females (Littman, 2016; Ausman & Ausman, 2019), conclusion from this study could be useful for expanding the present literature on fear of crime and gender, but more importantly, improving female safety and security.

1.3 Aim of the Study

This study aimed at examining the key factors that were responsible for influencing fear of crime amongst female citizens in Venezuela. To achieve this task, the following research questions needed to be answer.

1. Does previous victimisation influence fear of crime amongst female citizens?
2. Does fear of crime vary according to the age of female citizens?

The aim of this study is not to portray a general or national picture of the findings and conclusions, but to shine some light on the problem and simultaneously develop a foundation for future research. The aim of this study is intended to serve as an opportunity to develop safer communities for citizens (especially for females) and more importantly reduce fear and increase security and safety in Venezuela.

1.4 Justification for the Study

Previous research on the factors that influence fear of crime often focused on European countries such as United Kingdom (Jackson & Gray, 2010), Portugal (Caridade et al., 2022) and North America (Stanko, 1995; Warr, 2000). However, in Venezuela there is a nascent body of research and literature on the topic of FOC and even less that relates, specifically on females. This study adds to the emerging scholarship on FOC in Venezuela and more specifically, on female citizens. Due to a lack of specific research, this study was aimed at filling such gap in research, literature, and knowledge by eliciting the views, opinions, and feelings of females (adult) participants to develop an understanding of the topic with an intension of developing and expanding knowledge.

2. Previous Research

2.1 Overview

Crime is not a modern phenomenon because it has impacted on people's lives for centuries (Box et al., 1988; Ferraro, 1995). However, the fear of becoming a crime victim has gained momentum in the United States during the 1930s and in Europe during the 1960s (Emsley, 1987; Butler & Cunningham, 2010). The fear of crime could be defined as citizens perceived risk of criminal victimisation (Solymos et al., 2020; Caridade et al., 2022). According to Caridade et al. (2022) the fear of crime is associated with a person's emotional anxiety towards criminal activities and victimisation. This section will explore previous research that were likely to influence the fear of crime.

2.2 Crime in Venezuela

In Venezuela individual levels of violence is not a new phenomenon because the country has been ranked within the top five most violent nations for homicides in the world for many years (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, 2014; Tremaria, 2016; Small Arms Survey, 2017). Between 2015 and 2016 there were approximately seventy violent deaths daily and the government acknowledged the problem (Littman, 2016). Buxton (2018) highlighted that despite a national ban on citizens owning firearms, there were an estimated six million guns in circulation within the country. A major problem with crime in Venezuela is poor investigation and clearance rate due to police corruption and inability to fully investigate and resolve crimes (Zubillaga, 2013).

The cause of police corruption and their inability to resolve crime in Venezuela could be linked to the work of Windsor (2006). According to Singh (2022) police officers are often tasked with a spectrum of duties, but how they perform such duties were more likely to impact on their efficiency and

effectiveness (Mathura, 2022). It was highlighted by Windsor (2006) that in Latin American countries especially those with failed or weak economies such as Venezuela, police officers were more inclined to accept bribes and participate in delinquent behaviour due to financial hardships (Marcy, 2010; Patrick, 2011; Singh, 2022). Police officers in such countries often assisted criminal gangs by facilitating illegal activities such as narcotic and human trafficking (Naim, 2005; Singh, 2022). As a result, police officers were less likely to pursue the crimes committed by these rouge elements within the communities.

According to Littman (2016) police corruption in Venezuela was deep rooted with government mismanagement of public institutions. It was suggested that due to the Hugo Chavez political administration moving away from a democratic style leadership to a socialist style, the political leaders cut all ties with most Western countries such as US and UK and developed closer relationships with socialist administrations such as China, Russia, and Cuba (Tremaria, 2016; Ausman & Ausman, 2019). As a result, western style solutions and assistance to investigate and resolve police corruption were neglected and not given any attention therefore making the problem difficult to resolve locally (Littman, 2016; Ausman & Ausman, 2019).

Within the past two decades serious crimes such as kidnapping and homicides have skyrocketed in Venezuela due to a downfall in the country's economy (Antillano, Arias & Zubillaga, 2020; Nahuel et al., 2022). In 2020 Venezuela was classed as the third most dangerous country in the world due to the volume of crimes such as housebreaking, robberies, prostitution, theft, kidnappings, and homicides (Kruijt, 2020; Nahuel et al., 2022). According to Shahid (2019) during the year 2019 approximately 5.2 million citizens in Venezuela were unemployed and almost 48% of these people participated in criminal activities as a method of survival. Mycoo (2020) highlighted that in Venezuela, unemployment played a significant role in youth's participation in crime and delinquency. A further study by Falco, Zambrano-Verratti & Kleinhans (2020) suggested that youths from disadvantaged communities in the suburban shantytowns [*Barrios*] of Caracas, [capital of Venezuela] relied on crime as a form of employment. It was also suggested that unemployed youths from rural areas often travelled or relocated within urban communities to participate in crime to maintain their families (Nahuel et al., 2022).

The youth and unemployment situation in Venezuela could be aligned with the strain theory which was developed by Merton (1938). It was suggested by Merton (1938) that on one hand people in society should work towards achieving financial success, but on the other hand, this was not always possible (Jang & Agnew, 2015). Merton (1938) stated that people from disadvantaged communities were often unable to achieve financial success for reasons such as poor parental guidance, substandard education, low employment opportunities or lack of financial support. Therefore, these citizens were more likely to experience a strain towards achieving their financial goals legitimately (Jang & Agnew, 2015). Merton (1938) further stated that citizens who experience strain often resort to illegitimate activities such as prostitution, illegal drugs, or violent crimes to achieve their goals but more importantly, to remove themselves from being classed as disadvantaged (Jang & Agnew, 2015).

The work of Merton (1938) was later developed by Cohen (1955) who stated that youths from disadvantaged communities were more likely to be affected by unemployment which led to gang and criminal activities (Jang & Agnew, 2015). Cohen (1955) suggested that youths from disadvantaged communities often aim to develop their own identity and social status which were based on delinquent behaviour, inflicting fear of violence onto others and aggression (Jang & Agnew, 2015). A further development on the strain theory was developed by Cloward & Ohlin (1960) who suggested that youths from disadvantaged communities did experience an economical strain towards achieving conventional goals. However, an abundance of illegitimate opportunities often attracted and influenced youths to get involved in criminal activities (Jang & Agnew, 2015). Cloward & Ohlin (1960) highlighted that disadvantaged youths often become enticed into criminality because others within the criminal enterprise

provide resources, skills, and the belief that crime and delinquency was a rational choice for success (Jang & Agnew, 2015). According to Cloward & Ohlin (1960) significant to the economical strain on citizens, especially youth, was government's inability to provide employment opportunities fuelled the strain and opened a path to crime.

A fundamental problem in Venezuela was domestic violence which was considered an "epidemic" (Buxton, 2018). According to Amnesty International (2008), a woman was assaulted every 15 minutes by a male intimate partner (Buxton, 2018). The "*Soy Mujer*" program initiated new anti-domestic abuse policies to assist women, however, there was a lack of legal, social, and financial support for victims (Ladera, 2017; Zuñiga, 2018). Another problem that hindered the progress of the program was the unsympathetic attitude of the Venezuelan police towards complaints and bias towards political impunity (Ladera, 2017; Zuñiga, 2018; Buxton, 2018).

According to Zubillaga (2013), crime in Venezuela was frequently in urban developments, signified differences between rich and poor citizens and with usually committed with weapons. This was because of the economic wealth and prosperity of citizens from the affluent communities (Zubillaga, 2013). However, it was suggested that crimes were committed by citizens who occupy the shantytowns [*Barrios*] on the suburban developments. Tremaria (2016) argued that the [*Barrios*] were undeveloped and unofficial settlements, and most people were less educated, unemployed and crime was a reoccurring problem. As a result, there were displacements of these incivilities because citizens ventured into the affluent communities in the hope of more lucrative rewards.

An old and thriving problem in Venezuela was Human trafficking (John, 2018; Prather, 2019). However, the country's financial problems have forced people into further desperation and within recent years, human trafficking has gained significant momentum as a way of earning money (John, 2018; Prather, 2019). As a result, many women, men, and children were trafficked to nearby Caribbean and South American countries such as Dominican Republic, Colombia and Trinidad and Tobago (John, 2018). It was suggested that criminal opportunist often promise Venezuelan citizens economic prosperity in different countries. However, upon arrival at the destinations, men were forced and exploited into physical labouring jobs for less than the minimum wage and women and children (especially young females) were forced into sex work (Rosa del Pino, 2018; John, 2018; Prather, 2019). It was highlighted that citizens who objected were physically and emotionally abused and threatened with police and immigration action since they were undocumented immigrants (Rosa del Pino, 2018; Prather, 2019).

2.2 Gender Sensitivity and Fear

Previous research often considered female sensitivity towards fear as an independent study when researching FOC in developed countries such as Europe and North America (Gilchrist et al., 1998; Snedker, 2012; Johansson & Haandrikman, 2021). As a result, this study focused specifically on female citizens in Venezuela. The characteristics of males displaying masculine tendencies such as strength, success, taking risk, dominance, aggression, and fearlessness (Day et al., 2003) and female displaying feminine tendencies such as subordination to men, non-violent, less powerful, fearful, passive, and vulnerable (Donaldson, 1993; Johansson & Haandrikman, 2021) in developed countries has always dominated research but little attention has been given to women from developing countries.

Previous research argued that gender and fear are interchangeable because of social interactions and gender activities. For example, people with greater feminine qualities who enjoy shopping might have higher levels of fear when compared to those with greater masculine qualities who enjoy sports and this was often associated with someone's ability to defend themselves (Magliozzi et al., 2016; Choi & Merlo, 2020). Therefore, regardless of a person gender, their social interaction and activities were more likely to

influence their resistance towards fear (Day et al., 2003; Johansson & Haandrikman, 2021). Kilmartin (2000) found that men were encouraged by their parents from an early age to investigate and explore their environment, whereby females were encouraged to be cautious and defensive. As a result, women often develop a fear towards imaginary threats (Koskela, 1999; Beebejwan, 2017).

According to Clemente & Kleiman (1977), due to gender stereotype, men were more likely to camouflage their fear to maintain a masculine appearance. A study by Stanko (1995) suggested that women were fearful of crime up to three times more than men despite having a lower risk of victimisation. It was suggested that women often become more fearful of crime compared to men because of environmental factors such as poor streetlights, gang activities, delinquency, sexual violence from men and misogyny (Stanko, 1995; Chheetri, 2015; Caridade et al., 2022). Therefore, women became fearful and restricted their public activities more than men (Osmond, 2013).

Overall, previous research on female's fear of crime has often relied on the traditional approach whereby masculinity was associated with being fearless and femininity is associated with vulnerability (Stanko, 1995; Gilchrist et al., 1998; Franklin & Franklin, 2009). However, there is little knowledge or research to validate this notion in a developing country like Venezuela.

2.3 Age and Fear of Crime

According to Hale (1996) the fear of crime is multi-faceted and comprised of emotion, and actual crime which have the potential to impact on behavioural patterns (Gabriel & Greve, 2003; Kober et al., 2020). A previous study by LaGrange & Ferraro (1989) suggested that people of an older age were more likely to have a higher propensity towards the fear of crime. However, later research suggested that older people were not necessarily fearful of crime when compared to younger people but were more likely to take greater precautions when in public space (Greve, 1998; Kappes et al., 2013; Kober et al., 2020). However, Kober & Oberwitter (2019) argued that younger people do experience elevated fear especially females who were more prone to sexual assaults (Young, 1992; Snedker, 2012). Therefore, older people and heightened fear of crime were not always consistent and supported by Kober et al. (2020) who found that younger people were more likely to have a higher risk of victimisation when compared to older people.

A study by Mcara & Mcvie (2005) suggested that younger people were more likely to have elevated contact with the police due to delinquent behaviour and victimisation. These authors suggested that younger people spent more time in public spaces enjoying their independence and freedom whilst ignoring their safety. As a result, they were more likely to encounter conflict which often developed into victimisation. On the other hand, older people valued their safety over independence and was less visible in public spaces and experienced less victimisation (McAra & McVie, 2005; Mathura, 2019).

A debate by Skogan & Maxfield (1981) suggested that older people often felt more fearful towards crime because of lower physical strength when compared to younger people (Kober et al., 2020). As a result, older people could become more vulnerable, easier targets and exposed to physical and emotional stress (Hale, 1996; Kober et al., 2020). The gerontological theory suggested that people's physical capabilities begin to decline around mid-life (Baltes & Smith, 2003; Kober et al., 2020). Therefore, people of that age and older could become less able to defend themselves and could experience higher risk of victimisation (Kober et al., 2020).

Research conducted by Ortega & Myles (1987) and Pain (1995) showed that citizens age was not a single variable capable of predicting fear of crime. These authors argued that age needed a blended approach to notice any impact. For example, Ortega & Myles (1987) argued that age was subjective

because a young male was more likely to defend himself when compared to a young female. Therefore, a combination of age and gender was needed to ascertain fear. On a similar note, Pain (1995) found no evidence to link age as a specific variable to fear of crime. From her study, Pain (1995) suggested that people of different age groups were more likely to develop various levels of fear based on the economical and cultural context of their environment which often varied according to geographic location.

2.4 *Victimisation*

Fear is a psychological process that influences attitude and behaviour whereby citizens take action to protect themselves or minimise victimisation (Fox et al., 2009; Caridade et al., 2022). Researchers have categorised victimisation to be either personal or vicarious and people who experienced previous or multiple criminal victimisations were more likely to have higher levels of fear when compared to non-victims (Skogan, 1987; Fox et al., 2009; Solymos et al., 2020). However, a study by Ferraro (1996) showed that non-victims held greater levels of fear towards crime because of the information they receive from victims which often influenced premature risk. Dull & Wint (1997) highlighted that whilst the fear of crime is associated with victimisation, the type of crime is imperative. According to Bolger & Bolger (2019) the fear of crime often varied in accordance with the type of incivilities, and they argued that personal crime involved direct contact between the victim and the criminal and was more likely to cause higher anxiety and fear. However, property crimes may not always involve the victim being at home so there was less personal contact, anxiety, and fear (Bolger & Bolger, 2019). Another variable that often-influenced victimisation was the time between incidents. Fisher et al. (1995) suggested that victimisation that occurred less than one year were likely to be a major contributor towards fear because of its recent occurrence. However, those that occurred more than a year were less likely to influence fear because the victim might have forgotten about it. However, Gibson et al. (2002) found minimal or non-existent relationship between time of occurrence, fear, and victimisation.

Previous research on victimisation have focused on personal and property FOC but dedicated little attention to sexual assault (Fox et al., 2009; Williams, Norman & Nixon, 2021). This crime often affects women more than men; therefore, women were more likely to have elevated levels of fear (Warr, 1984; Caridade et al., 2022). Recent studies have shown that in the UK approximately 140 women experienced sexually assault and lost their lives at the hands of men in 2021 and these statistics were increasing. This include an innocent female who was kidnap, rape and murdered by a serving male police officer (Office of National Statistics, 2021; Casey, 2023). These authors further argued that women could develop indirect levels of fear from sexual assault which might have affected other women being it a friend, family member or from news. As a result, women could develop fear of sexual assaults and take actions that they would not normally have. However, these findings were disagreed with by Wilcox et al. (2007) who found no link between sexual assaults victimisation and fear of crime.

Although victimisation might have been categorised as personal vs property, recent vs old, victim vs non-victim and personal vs vicarious, there was a nascent body of literature that examined these factors in Venezuela. As a result, study was aim at adding to the emerging scholarship of victimisation in a Venezuelan context.

2.5 *Vulnerability*

Vulnerability refers to people who are less able to protect themselves through economical, physical, or social means and might be expose to elevated levels of fear (Johansson & Haandrikman, 2021). Vulnerability can affect anyone regardless of demographic characteristics such as age, gender, income, ethnicity, education, social class, or marital status and could be either social or physical (Snedker, 2012; Caridade et al., 2022). Research on social vulnerability suggested that women were more likely to be

vulnerable due to gender difference whereby they were subordinate to men, held lower positions in the workplace and earn less than men (Massey, 1984). Physical vulnerability on the other hand relates to people who were unable to avoid the risk of physical harm for reasons such as poor mobility or less strength (Johansson & Haandrikman, 2021). As a result, these people were unable to protect themselves from danger (Maxfield, 1984; Ward et al., 1990).

Women were often perceived as being more vulnerable than men and this might be related to females' prevalence of being sexually harassed or assaulted (Ferraro, 1996; Johansson & Haandrikman, 2021). Women's fear of crime was often visible by the constant threat of sexual violence and attacks against them whilst occupying public space and as such, they developed a habit to minimise use of these spaces or total avoidance (Ferraro, 1996; Johansson & Haandrikman, 2021).

This literature review highlighted a body of knowledge and understanding associated with fear of crime and the main factors responsible for shaping and developing such fear in various geographical areas around the world. Due to a nascent body of literature on FOC in Venezuela, a gap existed, and this study was aimed at filling the gap.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Due to a lack of research on FOC in Venezuela, this study was aimed at exploring the factors that influence the fear of crime amongst female citizens in the country. This study consisted of a qualitative approach which was imperative for open-ended questions and obtaining subjective experiences and feelings from the participants (Bryman, 2008). Such data was best obtained using face to face in-depth interviews which provided participants with an opportunity to fully explain their opinions, views, and experiences. Clark et al. (2021) stated that qualitative data is paramount when undertaking ethnographic studies because it provided a comprehensive platform for evaluation and knowledge about the characteristics and social intricacies of people's lives.

3.2. Research Population and Sample

Venezuela is the most Northern country on the South American continent. The country shares land borders with Guyana to its East, Colombia to its West and Brazil to its South. The Northern area of Venezuela borders the Caribbean Ocean and shares maritime borders with Caribbean countries such as Trinidad and Tobago (Hakkert, 1985). The country is home to approximately thirty-two million people of which 20% represents Europeans.

Adult female citizens were considered to have the most suitable experiences, views, opinions and feelings about victimisation, anxiety, safety, and perceived risk which was valuable to this study. A pool of sixty-five participants was initially selected for interviews, however, only fifty (50) completed the interviews and formed the final sample size. One to one interview was conducted with each being approximately 45 minutes long and the process was completed over a two-month period since the author was not locally based. Semi-structured open-ended questionnaires were used to conduct the interviews which was done in Spanish language. However, the researcher is a fluent Spanish speaker so there were no language barriers. Whilst there were fifteen cancellations which affected the allocated time and cost, the fifty interviews conducted were considered sufficient for a qualitative study and had no negative impact on the overall study.

This method was considered most effective because it allowed participants to express their personal feeling in a controlled environment without fear. This was a timely and costly process and interviews

were recorded using an electronic voice recorder. Participants were selected based on demographic characteristics (see table 1) and geographic diversity representing both urban and non-urban areas to provide a balanced view on the subject. The areas selected for sampling were, Maracaibo in the West, San Cristobal in the Southwest, Caracas in the North, La Gran Sabana in the South, San Fernando de Apure, and Valle de la Pascua in the central and Maturin, Tucupita and Guayana City in the East.

Table 1. Participants.

Sexual Orientation	Quantity
Female	50
LGBT+	3
Other	0
Race/ Ethnicity	Quantity
Aboriginal	9
White	11
Mestizo (Mixed)	20
Black	5
Other	5
Age Group	Quantity
18-30	19
31-50	13
50-65	11
65+	7
Income	Quantity
Unemployed	9
Employed	21
Self Employed	11
Retired	6
In Education	3
Marital Status	Quantity
Single	21
Married	11
In a Relationship	15
Widowed	3
Education	Quantity
No Formal	9
Primary	11
Secondary	17
Tertiary/ University	13
Community	Quantity
Urban	18
Semi-Urban	21
Rural	11

Snowball sampling technique was used to obtain participants for this study due to the author's lack of geographic knowledge and contact in Venezuela. As a result, obtaining samples personally would have been challenging. The author did an internet search and contacted acquaintances in Venezuela and the UK who assisted in making initial contact with other Venezuelan citizens. Snowball sampling had several advantages such as providing linkages between people who were interested in the topic and the research study, the ability to generate a large audience from which the final participants were chosen and the ability to provide diversity (Parker et al., 2019; Clark et al., 2022). Participants were not offered compensation, were informed that their participation was strictly voluntary, and they were free to discontinue at any time without explanation. They were notified prior to the interview that their personal identification was not being recorded and all data would be destroyed after analysis and publication of the results.

3.3 Data Analysis

The procedure used for analysing the data for this study was thematic analysis (TA) which was developed by Braun & Clarke (2006). It was suggested by Maguire & Delahunt (2017) that TA was a useful approach for developing themes and patterns from data that was gathered using a qualitative approach. Thematic analysis uses a proposed six stage analytical process which are, becoming acquainted with the data, generating initial codes, start to chart initial themes from the codes, reviewing the themes generated, define the themes, and begin writing the themes found. Thematic analysis was considered the most useful and applicable method for data analysis because of the nascent body of research on FOC in Venezuela and analysing empirical data. This method of analysis allowed themes to be developed from the raw data which then provided opportunities for variables to be developed.

4. Findings

Research Question 1: Does previous victimisation influence fear of crime amongst female citizens?

Data from the interviews showed that most participants ($n = 47$) were victims of crime. Participants ($n = 36$) explained that they were robbed on the streets by offenders armed with handguns and sometimes with knives. These participants explained that streets crimes were prevalent because criminals used motorcycles to commit their crimes and escape quickly. Other participants who were victimised ($n = 11$) highlighted that they were robbed both on the streets and in their homes with offenders being armed with guns. Collectively, these participants stated that criminals were desperate for anything of value and not afraid to cause harm to victims. As a result, this often created a sense of elevated fear. Some of these participants ($n = 30$) highlighted that their family and friends were not victimised previously but have since developed fearfulness towards victimisation. This group of participants ($n = 47$) explained that due to the political and economic downfall in Venezuela, some citizens have resorted to crime and gangs gained momentum. Two participants stated,

[First Participant]

“Me han robado tantas veces que perdí la cuenta. Entonces, compré un teléfono móvil barato y lo puse en mi bolsillo, y puse mi teléfono inteligente en mi sostén por seguridad. Los delincuentes conocen esta nueva tendencia, por lo que me exigieron que les diera el teléfono inteligente o me dispararían en la calle. No tenía opción, así que les di el teléfono inteligente. Desde que Venezuela entró en esta crisis económica por la mala gestión del gobierno y la corrupción, la gente no puede obtener alimentos ni los suministros básicos. Entonces, el crimen se convirtió en algo normal ahora”

[English translation]

“I have been robbed so many times I lost count. So, I bought a cheap mobile phone and put that in my pocket, and I put my smartphone in my bra for safety. The criminals know this new trend so they demanded I give them the smartphone, or they will shoot me on the street. I had no option, so I gave them the smartphone. Since Venezuela went into this economic crisis because of government mismanagement and corruption, people cannot get food or the basic supplies. So, crime became a normal thing now.”

[Second Participant]

“Afortunadamente, nunca antes me habían robado, pero la mayoría de mi familia y amigos lo han hecho en el pasado. No, me siento segura y siempre tengo miedo cuando salgo. Solo salgo por trabajo, supermercado y medicación. Nunca salgo en la oscuridad, esa no es una opción y podría hacer que te maten, así que siempre le advierto a mi familia porque es un gran riesgo y nunca sabes cuándo los delincuentes deambulan por las calles. La mayoría de las personas aquí tienen un problema similar, especialmente desde que las dificultades comenzaron alrededor de 2015. Desafortunadamente, no mejora e incluso los niños pequeños tienen miedo de salir, incluso en las escuelas hay tiroteos.”

[English translation]

“Luckily, I have never been robbed before, but most of my family and friends have been in the past. I do not feel safe and always scared when going out. I only go out for work, supermarket, and medication. I never go out in the dark, that is not an option and could get you killed so I always warn my family because it is just a significant risk, and you never know when the criminals are roaming the streets. Most people here have a similar problem, especially since the hardship began around 2015. Unfortunately, it not getting better and even the young children scare to go outside, even in schools have shootings.”

The minority group of participants ($n = 3$) stated that they were never victimised and did not feel fearful. These participants stated that they felt safe both at home and in the streets of Venezuela. One participant explained,

“Vivo en un área urbana de Venezuela y la gente dice que hay mucha delincuencia en la ciudad, pero nunca me robaron a mí ni a nadie de mi familia. Sé que Venezuela está pasando por momentos económicos y difíciles en este momento, pero algunas personas salen a la calle a altas horas de la noche sin ningún motivo y se convierten en un objetivo. Como mujer, tomo precauciones y salgo cuando solo lo necesito. Si todas las mujeres hicieran lo mismo, no se verían afectadas por la delincuencia

[English translation]

“I live in an urban area of Venezuela and people say it have a lot of crime in the city, but I never got robbed or any of my family. I know Venezuela is having some economical and challenging times now, but some people out on the street late at night for no reason and they become a target. As a woman, I take precautions and go out when I only need to. If all women do the same, they would not be affected by crime.”

Participants Demographics: participants from the majority group had an equally representation of the demographics described and represented the disadvantaged and middleclass communities (*Table 1*). However, the participants from the minority group were from urban areas, mestizo, and whites, from the

31-65 age groups, married, employed (government jobs) and self-employed (business owner), university educated, owned a personal firearm, and represented the affluent communities.

Research Question 2: Does fear of crime vary according to age?

Most participants ($n = 45$) indicated that regardless of age, everyone had the same probability of becoming victimised. They explained that criminals were less concerned about victims age, and solely about what can be gained from the crime. Some participants explained that it was common for criminals in Venezuela to steal from children and pensioners because they were perceived as physically weak and easy targets. These participants stated that since Venezuela's economic downfall, most citizens were between home, work, and school. As a result, many criminals operated within the peak hours and any age group could be victimised anywhere. Participants stated that citizens have since become fearful of being in public spaces regardless of walking on the streets or using public transport.

Some participants ($n = 39$) highlighted a recent crime trend in Venezuela which caused parents to become fearful for the safety of their young daughters. According to these participants, well equipped and internationally connected criminal gangs often targeted young girls for sex trafficking. It was stated that many young girls were reported missing over the years and have never been found. Participants believed these children were trafficked abroad where foreign traffickers paid Venezuelan gangs a lot of money. Two participants explained,

[First Participant]

“como madre de una niña, siempre tengo miedo de perderla. Estas bandas de traficantes no tienen corazón y harán cualquier cosa por dinero. Mi familia siempre debe estar muy pendiente de ella "como un halcón". Las pandillas extranjeras pagan mucho dinero por estas jóvenes y con la inestabilidad política y económica en Venezuela ahora, es cada uno por su cuenta. Culpo al gobierno por este problema. Cuando empezó todo este sufrimiento y protesta en Venezuela, fue por la mala gestión del gobierno del país y sus vínculos con los delincuentes. Aquí los ministros de gobierno tienen gente cercana en las pandillas y cárteles entonces las pandillas se están aprovechando de la gente y el gobierno no hace nada al respecto”

[English translation]

“As the mother of a young girl I am always fearful of losing her. These trafficking gangs are heartless and will do anything for money. My family always must keep a close eye on her "like a hawk". The foreign gangs pay a lot of money for these young girls and with the political and economic instability in Venezuela now, it is every man for themselves. I blame the government for this problem. When all this suffering and protest started in Venezuela, it was due to government poor management of the country and their links with the criminals. Here, the government ministers have close people in the gangs and cartels, so the gangs are taking advantage of people and the government do nothing about it.”

[Second Participant]

“Tengo 21 años y voy a trabajar todos los días, de domingo a domingo. Debido a la crisis económica, los venezolanos están encontrando la vida muy difícil. Necesitamos trabajar más duro que nunca, el salario es extremadamente bajo y los delincuentes nos están robando y matando. Cuando las cosas iban bien en Venezuela íbamos a fiestas los viernes y sábados por la noche, pero ahora no es seguro salir especialmente de noche porque los delincuentes están en todas partes. Como joven, debería estar en condiciones de disfrutar de mi vida, salir con amigos y familiares, pero no puedo porque tengo miedo y mi seguridad no está garantizada. Esos criminales están

desesperados y matarán a alguien por cualquier cosa de valor. Mis padres solo van a trabajar y una vez que estamos en casa, todas las puertas están cerradas y no salimos después del anochecer. La mayoría de las personas que conozco están en una situación similar, pero no puedo hablar por todos. Si saliste a la calle cuando está oscuro, no hay nadie porque la mayoría de la gente tiene miedo, sin importar si es joven o viejo. Otro problema es que no hay trabajo para los jóvenes, por lo que muchos de ellos recurren a la delincuencia para sobrevivir. La gente pobre está llegando a ciudades como Caracas y delinquiendo para mantener a sus familias. Son despiadados y matarían por cualquier cosa porque están desesperados”

[English translation]

“I am 21 years and goes to work every day, Sunday to Sunday. Because of the economic crisis Venezuelans people are finding life exceedingly difficult. We need to work harder than ever, the salary is extremely low, and we are getting robbed and killed by criminals. When things were good in Venezuela we went to parties on Friday and Saturday nights, but now it not safe to go out especially at night because the criminals are everywhere. As a young person, I should be in a position to enjoy my life, go out with friend and family but I cannot because I am afraid, and my safety is not guaranteed. Those criminals are desperate, and they will kill someone for anything of value. My parents only go to work and once we are home, all doors are locked, and we do not venture out after dark. Most of the people I know are in a comparable situation, but I cannot speak for everyone. If you went out on the streets when its dark, there is nobody because most people are afraid, regardless of old or young. Another problem is there are no jobs for young people so many of them are turning to crime to survive. The poor people are coming into the cities like Caracas and committing crime to support their families. They are ruthless and would kill for anything because they are desperate.”

The minority group of participants ($n = 5$) stated that age was an influential factor toward victimisation. These participants explained that younger people were more likely to be on the streets late at night, they took more risk, were more careless, and often used drugs and alcohol making them more vulnerable. However, older people were more likely to be at home earlier, took less risk, were more careful and therefore less vulnerable. One participant explained,

“En Venezuela estos jóvenes siempre en las calles sin ningún motivo importante. Por la noche están de fiesta y bebiendo, por lo que tienen menos control de sí mismos. Algunos de ellos involucrados en crímenes y solo están aquí para robar a personas inocentes. Estamos experimentando algunos desafíos con la economía en este momento, pero las fiestas y emborracharse no ayudan. Estos jóvenes necesitan ponerse serios y comprender que deben asumir cierta responsabilidad por sí mismos y por sus acciones. A las personas mayores no les roban ni les afecta el crimen porque son más responsables. Creo que necesitamos un toque de queda aquí”

[English translation]

“In Venezuela, these young people always on the streets for no important reason. At night they are partying and drinking so they have less control of themselves. Some of them involved in crimes and just out here to rob innocent people. We are experiencing some challenges with the economy now, but parties and getting drunk do not help. These young people need to get serious and understand that they need to take some responsibility for themselves and their actions. Older people do not get robbed or affected by crime because they are more responsible. We need a curfew here.”

Participants Demographics: participants from the majority group had an equally representation of the demographics described (*Table 1*). However, the participants from the minority group were from urban areas, mestizo, and whites, from the 50+ age groups, married, employed in the public sector and self-employed (business owner), university educated and owned a personal firearm.

5. Discussion

The fear of crime has the propensity to obstruct the lives of citizens from undertaking normal activities. Such obstruction could lead to citizens taking greater security measures both at home and in public spaces, minimising their outdoor activities, developing greater levels of uncertainty towards their safety, causing unwanted anxiety and stress, and having increased awareness towards becoming victimised (Box et al., 1998; Coccia, 2019; Solymos et al., 2020; Caridade et al., 2022). Whilst it is important to develop an understanding and body of knowledge on the factors that influence fear of crime amongst female citizens from an international perspective or from other genders, it was considered imperative to conduct this research in a Venezuela context. The main reason for selecting Venezuela was based on the country's recent downfalls and in more recent times, public unrest, and violence whereby citizens could not access the most necessities and their security and safety were often threatened (Littman, 2016; Ausman & Ausman, 2019). Such characteristics presented the country with extreme changes over a brief time which came with many challenges especially the security of women (Rotberg, 2003; Littman, 2016; Ausman & Ausman, 2019). By developing an understanding of the factors associated with the fear of crime amongst female citizens in Venezuela, it is more likely that this will highlight the problems to practitioners which might encourage the relevant authorities and institutions to develop solutions and eventually create safer communities and outdoor space for female citizens. Furthermore, this study could inspire academics to consider research on other genders within Venezuela or in societies with such rapid and economical changes.

The results from this study suggested that most participants were fearful of using public spaces due to being previously victimised or feeling vulnerable towards future victimisation. The data obtained demonstrated that most participants who experienced previous victimisation felt greater fear towards crime and further victimisation. It was highlighted that non-victims did have elevated levels of fear because most crime was committed with firearms and knives to a lesser extent. These findings were consistent with the theoretical framework from Skogan (1987) which suggested that people's previous experience of victimisation was likely to generate greater levels of fear when compared to non-victims. These finding were also comparable to more recent literature produced by Fox et al. (2009) and Caridade et al. (2022). The data from this study highlighted that participants demographic played a key role on how fear of crime was developed. For example, the majority group of participants had an equal demographic representation and represented the disadvantaged and middleclass communities whilst those from the minority group were white, mestizo, mature adults, married, had government jobs or business owners, owned firearms and from the affluent communities. This demographic observation from the data could be aligned with the literature from Aldrich & Reiss (1976) which suggested that group dynamics played a key role on how people and communities develop fear of crime. According to these authors, citizens from the affluent communities were more financially able to protect themselves compared to citizens from the disadvantaged and middleclass communities.

According to the results from this study it could be suggested that people of any age had the propensity of becoming a victim of crime in Venezuela. The results showed that most participants regardless of their age felt fearful of crime and victimisation. The data obtained highlighted that there were no specific age group that could be aligned to having a higher or lower risk of victimisation and fear. However, the data showed that younger females had a higher propensity of being kidnapped for the human trafficking trade and this caused greater level of fear amongst parents. The data indicated that

since the economic hardship in Venezuela, criminal was armed with weapons and victimised anyone regardless of age since economical gain was the main objective. These findings were contrary to the literature from LaGrange & Ferraro (1989) which suggested that older people were more fearful of crime. On the other hand, the results supported literature from Ortega & Myles (1987) and Pain (1995) who found that people's age was not solely responsible for elevated level of fear towards crime.

According to McAra & McVie (2005) younger people were more likely to occupy public space and enjoy their independence and freedom more than their safety. As a result, they often experienced elevated victimisation and fear of crime. Whilst a small amount of the data supported this literature, the greater amount rejected it. From the smaller amount of data, it could be argued that this was the views and opinions of participants from the affluent communities who were over 50 years old, financially stable and owned a firearm. Therefore, they were more capable of protecting their families and themselves and likely to have a lower level of fear. Whilst the gerontological theory suggested that people at the mid-life age or older were less physically capable of defending themselves, this theory did not consider the resources that these citizens might possess rendering them capable of defending themselves and having lower levels of fear. On the other hand, the greater amount of data represented participants from the disadvantaged and middle-class communities. This data suggested that younger people were fearful of crime and often minimise their presence in public spaces. A significant finding from this study could be aligned to Ortega & Myles (1987) and Pain (1995) which demonstrated that age was not a single variable and as such, needed to be coupled with other variables. In a Venezuela setting, age could be blended with socioeconomic status when researching the fear of crime.

The data obtained further suggested that the fear of crime was often developed by displacement. It was indicated that young people from the disadvantaged communities [*Barrios*] in the suburban areas often ventured into the urban cities in search of criminal opportunities to earn money. It could therefore be argued that citizens from these communities do experience greater financial strain and turn to a life of crime and delinquency to achieve financial satisfaction. As a result, the strain theory by Merton (1938) is applicable and may assist in explaining probable reason for increased youth involvement in criminal activities in Venezuela as highlighted by Mycoo (2020). Since Venezuela's economical downfall, there has been an increase in crime and delinquency in the country. The literature demonstrated that young people were being recruited into gangs which gained momentum due to political mismanagement and corruption (Nahuel et al., 2022) and availability of firearms (Buxton, 2018). As a result, young people might have perceived crime and criminality as a rational choice for survival (Jang & Agnew, 2015). This could therefore explain the increase of crime in Venezuela and the elevated fear amongst female citizens.

Conclusion

5.1. Summary of Discussion

The aim of this research was to explore the factors that influenced the fear of crime amongst female citizens in Venezuela. To accomplish this, three research questions were used.

1. *Does previous victimisation influence fear of crime amongst female citizens?*
2. *Does fear of crime vary according to age?*

The results of this study demonstrated that female citizens in Venezuela who were previously victimised felt very fearful of public spaces and becoming future victims and this was consistent amongst all age groups. However, the evidence showed that young females had a higher propensity of being kidnapped for human trafficking and parent and families developed elevated level of fear towards crime.

According to the findings of this study, it could be suggested that the fear of crime was consistent across all communities because female citizens expressed elevated level of fear towards being victimised.

6.2. Theoretical Implications

When conducting future research on the factors that influence the fear of crime amongst female citizens in any society, it is imperative to consider the socioeconomic status of citizens. This variable was highlighted as being significant throughout this study and have the potential to fluctuate in different societies. Because this study was specifically based on female citizens, it will become beneficial for future research to examine the fear of crime based on other genders and sexual orientation to develop a comparative analysis and the fear varies according to these factors.

Author Contributions: The sole author of this study was M.M who conducted the literature research, interviews in Venezuela, transcribed the findings, write the draft manuscript and the last version for publication.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Informed Consent Statement: Informant consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Acknowledgements: Thank you to all participants for their time, honest and contributions.

Conflict of Interest: The author declared no conflict of interest.

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