Wellbeing, Feelings of Personal Safety, and Fear of Crime: Towards a Conceptual Integration

Wolfgang Bilsky and Peter Wetzel

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Abstract: In spring 1992 the KFN conducted a victim survey entitled "Feelings of personal safety, fear of crime and violence, victimization of the elderly", using a nationwide representative sample (N=15771). In this paper the facet-approach used for specifying the lay concept of personal safety and for defining fear of crime is sketched out and results from a structural analysis of stressors, including crime, are reported.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past, criminological research has mostly failed to define fear of crime in an unambiguous and comprehensive way. Furthermore, findings have not been related systematically to psychological theory and research. Consequently, former analyses often did not go beyond mere description of the investigated phenomena, and attempts to explain research findings are rare and mostly remained vague.

In spring 1992 the KFN conducted a victim survey entitled "Feelings of Personal Safety, Fear of Crime and Violence, Victimization of the Elderly", using a nationwide representative sample (see Bilsky, Pfeiffer & Wetzels, 1993a). On the whole, 15771 interviewees participated in this study. Aside from variables focusing on extra- and intrafamily violence and criminal victimization, elaborated item batteries on fear of crime and feelings of personal safety were applied to several subsamples of this survey, as were additional psychological and sociological measures to be used for linking victimization and fear variables to theoretically established constructs.

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1 This research project was funded by the Ministry of Family Affairs and the Elderly (BMFuS).

2 For a more comprehensive description of the design and the questionnaire used see Bilsky, Pfeiffer and Wetzels (1993b).
In this paper the facet approach used for specifying the lay concept of personal safety and for defining fear of crime is sketched out. In addition, results from a structural analysis of stressors, including crime, are reported. This analysis was carried out in order to test the adequacy of our theoretical approach.

2. Personal Safety and Fear of Crime

The term *personal safety* is derived from everyday language and does not have any clear equivalent in psychological or sociological theory. As used in the title of the KFN survey, however, feelings of personal safety are supposed to be threatened by different factors, including crime. Consequently, these factors can be conceived as stressors causing strain in the individual because of the perceived discrepancy between the desired and the real status of personal safety. From psychological research we know that the absence of strain is a central and defining feature of subjective *wellbeing* (Mayring, 1991). Therefore, we drew on these research findings (e.g., Andrews, 1986; Levy & Guttman, 1989) and on victimological studies (e.g., Young, 1991) in order to specify dimensions which are supposed to be helpful in systematically distinguishing stressors of personal safety.

\[
\text{Person} (x) \text{ feels strained by potential} \\
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{injury} & \text{life area} \\
(\text{material}) & (\text{health}) \\
(\text{physical}) & (\text{work}) \\
(\text{psychological}) & (\text{economy}) \\
\end{array} \\
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{environment} & \text{social environment in life area} \\
(\text{primary}) & (\text{social}) \\
(\text{secondary}) & (\text{residence}) \\
\end{array} \\
R_{\text{strain}} \begin{array}{c}
(\text{high}) \\
(\text{low}) \\
\end{array} \\
\Rightarrow \begin{array}{c}
(\ldots) \\
\text{strain.} \\
\end{array}
\]

*Figure 1: Mapping Sentence of Feelings of Personal Safety*
These dimensions were integrated into one general mapping sentence of feelings of personal safety (strain) (see figure 1). Next this general mapping sentence was specified and expanded to facilitate the distinction between different forms of fear of crime. This was accomplished by borrowing from value-expectancy theories of motivation, psychological analyses of stress and anxiety, and criminological research (figure 2; for more details see Bilsky & Wetzels, 1994a; Bilsky & Wetzels, 1994b; Bilsky, Pfeiffer & Wetzels, 1993a).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>modality</th>
<th>criminal act</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person (x)</td>
<td>evaluates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(cognitively)</td>
<td>(personal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(personal and property)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(property)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>offender</th>
<th>place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>committed by one or more</td>
<td>(at home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(stranger/s)</td>
<td>(at work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(acquaintance/s)</td>
<td>(outside)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(relative/s)</td>
<td>(anywhere)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>time</th>
<th>injury</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(during the day)</td>
<td>(material)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(in the evening)</td>
<td>(physical)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(at night)</td>
<td>(psychological)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(at any time)</td>
<td>injury to self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ R_{\text{fear}} \]
\[ \begin{align*} 
\text{high} & \implies \text{fear.} \\
\text{low} & \end{align*} \]

*Figure 2: Expanded Mapping Sentence of Fear of Crime*

Both mapping sentences served as frames of reference for selecting and constructing items for the survey instrument and for the analysis of survey data.
3. **Structural Analysis of Stressors**

A first empirical test of our conceptual approach to feelings of personal safety and fear of crime was based on data from a pilot study which had been conducted in 1991 (N=213; cf., Bilsky & Wetzels, 1994a). The items used in that study are the respective structuples (specified according to the general mapping sentence of Feelings of Personal Safety; figure 1), are summarized in table 1.

**Table 1:** Item list A9 (Pilot Study)

"To what extent do you feel your personal safety to be threatened by the following events and dangers?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Revised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A9A</td>
<td>Loss of job</td>
<td>c1 d1 e2</td>
<td>c1 d2 e2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9B</td>
<td>Inflation and economic crisis</td>
<td>c1 d2 e3</td>
<td>c1 d2 e3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9C</td>
<td>Uncertainty of life annuity (pension)</td>
<td>c1 d2 e3</td>
<td>c1 d2 e3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9D</td>
<td>Severe illness</td>
<td>c2 d1 e1</td>
<td>c2 d1 e1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9E</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>c4 d2 e4</td>
<td>c2 d2 e1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9F</td>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>c4 d3 e6</td>
<td>c4 d3 e6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9G</td>
<td>Natural disaster</td>
<td>c4 d2 e6</td>
<td>c2 d2 e1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9H</td>
<td>Crisis in the health service</td>
<td>c2 d2 e4</td>
<td>c2 d2 e1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9J</td>
<td>Separation or loss of someone close</td>
<td>c3 d1 e4</td>
<td>c3 d1 e4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9K</td>
<td>Environmental damage</td>
<td>c4 d2 e6</td>
<td>c2 d2 e3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9L</td>
<td>To become dependent on someone</td>
<td>c3 d3 e4</td>
<td>c3 d1 e4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9M</td>
<td>Accident</td>
<td>c2 d3 e6</td>
<td>c2 d1 e1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9P</td>
<td>Loss of apartment</td>
<td>c1 d1 e5</td>
<td>c1 d1 e5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9R</td>
<td>Chance</td>
<td>c4 d3 e6</td>
<td>c4 d3 e6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9S</td>
<td>Family fights and anger</td>
<td>c3 d1 e4</td>
<td>c3 d1 e4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$c1 = \text{material}$  
$c2 = \text{physical}$  
$c3 = \text{psychological}$  
$c4 = \text{unspecified}$  
$d1 = \text{primary}$  
$d2 = \text{secondary}$  
$d3 = \text{unspecified}$  
$e1 = \text{health}$  
$e2 = \text{work}$  
$e3 = \text{economy}$  
$e4 = \text{social}$  
$e5 = \text{residence}$  
$e6 = \text{unspecified}$
Similarity structure analysis of item intercorrelations (Borg & Lingoes, 1987) resulted in a three-dimensional solution which seemed adequate for interpreting our data (coefficient of alienation = .12). As can be seen from the projection of items on dimensions 1 X 2 (figure 3), the injury and the social environment facet form a duplex, separating the respective elements as predicted.

Figure 3: Three-dimensional SSA of Threats to Personal Safety, Pilot Study: Duplex of Environment and Injury

In addition, the life area facet plays a polar role on dimensions 1 X 3, partitioning the projection of items into wedgelike regions (see figure 4). However, one peculiarity of this latter partitioning needs mentioning: Items classified social split into two distinct sectors, separated by another one which includes highly unpredictable and uncontrollable events, i.e., environmental damage, natural disaster, accident, chance.
Although these results largely conform to our expectations (Bilsky & Wetzels, 1994a), we looked for alternative interpretations of our data which should be theoretically equivalent but more parsimonious. Reinspecting the semantics of our items revealed that some minor revisions of facetting (underlined elements in table 1) in fact result in a perfect two-dimensional solution (see figure 5). These revisions refer to a systemic interpretation of loss of job (secondary environment), and to the dominant impact on health of both war and crisis in the health services (life areas). As can be seen from figure 5, social environment now plays a modular role, forming a radex with the remaining facets injury and life areas (Levy, 1985).

This radex served as the hypothetical structure to be identified in analyzing the data of the representative sample (N=15771). Items used in the national survey correspond to those used in
the pilot study, apart from one exception: the crime item of the pilot study was split into (1) assault and (2) theft, robbery or fraud (cf., Bilsky, Pfeiffer & Wetzels, 1993b).

Figure 5: Three-dimensional SSA of Threats to Personal Safety, Pilot Study: Radex of Social Environment, Injury, and Life Areas

Figure 6 gives the result of the two-dimensional SSA of survey items. As can be seen, data perfectly fit our expectation since partitioning of items could be accomplished according to the revised facetting of potential stressors of personal safety (see table 1). It should be noted that crime as a whole, as investigated in the pilot study, is located in the secondary environment (figure 5), thus suggesting a systemic interpretation of this stressor. Concrete criminal acts against individuals, in contrast, are probably best understood as threats to one's own primary environment (figure 6).
4. Research perspectives

Analyses presented thus far are only a first step in evaluating the survey data on feelings of personal safety and fear of crime (for more details see Wetzels, Greve, Mecklenburg, Bilsky & Pfeiffer, 1994). Next specific criminal stressors (theft, assault, robbery, sexual molestation, and rape) as defined by the expanded mapping sentence of fear of crime (figure 2) will be analyzed together with general non-criminal stressors. These analyses are expected to result in a common structure of stressors which is a necessary prerequisite for answering the following questions:
(1) Where is the position of crime within the structure of stressors both, when used as a fuzzy concept, or when differentiated into specific forms of delinquent acts?

(2) What is the rank of importance of crime as a whole or of different forms of crime when compared to other stressors of personal safety?

Answering these questions is not only of scientific interest - whether criminological, psychological, or sociological - but also of political interest.

5. REFERENCES


Liste der KFN Forschungsberichte seit 1990 (Stand 12.12.94)

Bestellungen sind zu richten an: Kriminologisches Forschungsinstitut Niedersachsen (KFN)
Lützerodestr. 9
D-30161 Hannover

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