



Routine activities and fear of crime.

The impact of autonomous presence in public space on fear of crime among young people.

Paper presented at the 12th conference of the European Society of Criminology,
12-15 September, Bilbao, Spain

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Introduction

Fear of crime and behaviour: conceptually distinct 'consequence' of feelings of fear vs. an inseparable aspect of a global 'fear of crime' concept (cf. Gabriel & Greve, 2003)

Fear of crime research revitalized in recent years

>< traditional focus on sociodemographic attributes and ad hoc explanations + little attention for the conceptualization and measurement of 'fear of crime'

Fear of crime as "located within the actor's definition of the situation, their subjective experience or interpretation placed in its social context" (Jackson, 2004: 949)

Broadening of the perspective: traditional focus on the link between (dimensions of) fear and the enactment of discrete preventative or avoidant measures by individuals

>< routine activity perspective in fear of crime research



Theoretical framework: the relevance of adolescence

Adolescence as life stage in which the autonomous presence in public space drastically increases: routine activity patterns strongly differ between childhood and adolescence

≈ unstructured socializing: “activities (...) with peers in the absence of responsible authority figures (Osgood e.a., 1996) becomes more important

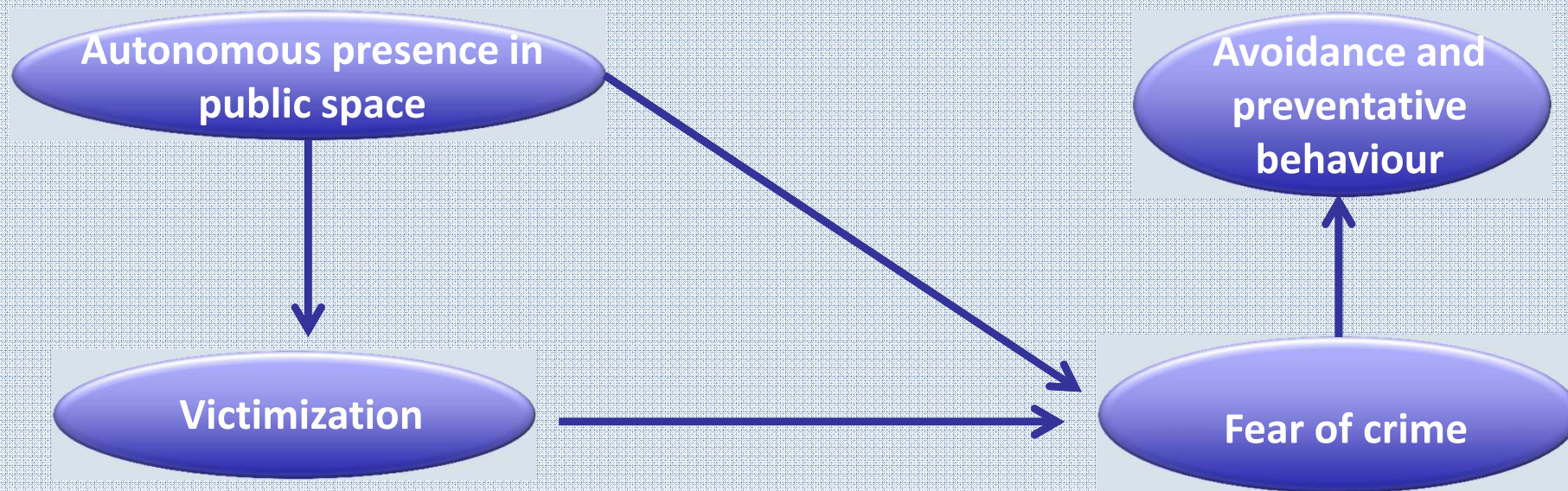
Theoretical cues from social psychology:

- Differential emotions theory (Abe & Izard, 1999) and the functionality of emotions: emotions are developed and are more prominent in certain life stages when they are felt to be most needed
- Social learning theory: fear of crime is learned “through the interaction with others both directly through socialization agents and indirectly, through the observations of others behaviour and its consequences” (Rader & Haynes, 2011)
- Mental mapping and cognitive schemas (mental constructs used to understand, interpret and evaluate the environment) in a developmental perspective
 - ❖ Dissemination of ‘rules’ (Cahill, 2000) or ‘cautionary tales’ (Anderson e.a., 1994)



Implications of these theoretical perspectives

- Routine behaviour as a cause of fear of crime, not merely as a consequence
“the more respondents engaged in voluntary and compulsory activities, the lower their levels of worry of crime” (Rengifo & Bolton, 2012: 11)



- Need for an integrative perspective to fully understand this process: taking the social world into account



The data

- Flemish Youth Monitor (repeated cross-sectional design), developed by the Youth Research Platform

Youth monitor 1 (2005-06):

- Mail survey in a representative sample of
- 14- to 25 year old respondents in the Flemish Region
- Response rate: 58%
- N=2503
- Adolescents (14-19 years): N = 1287



Measuring the ‘fear of crime’. No one ‘fear’

Fear of crime as a multidimensional umbrella concept (cf. Vanderveen, 2006): consists of different subconcepts and –dimensions

- ➔ no ‘one’ measurement instrument
- ➔ need to critically assess the statistical validity of the instrument and to determine the specific aspects of the global concept that are questioned

Items	Factor loadings
Nowadays it is too unsafe to let children be unsupervised on the streets	.750
Out of fear of something happening to me, I do not dare to go out alone at night	.742
In the evenings you have to be very careful walking down the streets	.722
During the last 10 years the streets have become less safe	.701
The police aren’t capable of protecting us against criminals anymore	.659
Out of fear of assault, I do not dare to go to some neighbourhoods	.642
A burglar alarm is not superfluous luxury nowadays	.639
I do not dare to stay home alone during the evenings and nights	.577
Cronbach α	.81



'Autonomous presence in public space'. How to measure?

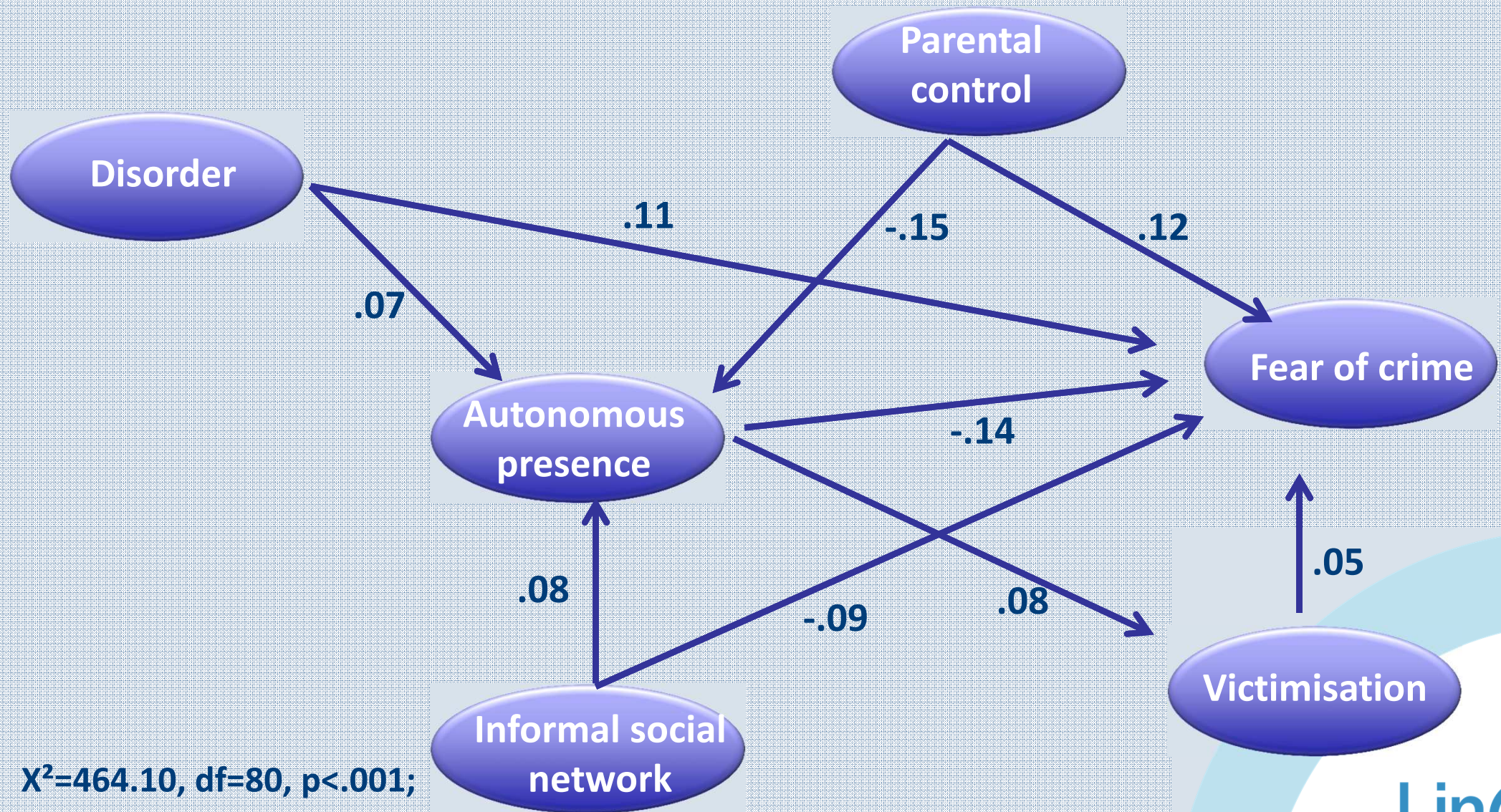
Exploratory factor analysis on list of 30 possible leisure activities on which respondents could indicate how frequently (from 'never' (1) to 'every day (6)) they did these activities

→ several leisure patterns were discovered, with the pattern 'informal, external leisure pattern' as the most relevant

Items	Factor loadings
'going to a pub'	.72
'going to a party',	.66
'going to a dancing	.57
'hanging around with my friends',	.55
'going to a music festival'	.44
Cronbach α	.72



Autonomous presence and fear of crime (simplified model)



$X^2=464.10$, $df=80$, $p<.001$;
RMSEA=.054



Discussion of the findings

- The extent of autonomous presence in public space predicts individual differences in fear of crime: the more young people spend time unsupervised with peers in public space, the lower their level of fear of crime is
- Indirect impact on victimisation: more frequent presence in public space is related to a higher risk of victimisation which in turn is slightly related to fear of crime
 - >< but... these effects are minor and do not influence the direct effect of autonomous presence on fear of crime
- Traditional focus on the link between (objective risk of) being victimized and fear of crime has little meaning when studied in isolation
- The frequency of autonomous presence: in itself equally influenced by other factors
 - => integrative perspective useful to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the (causal) processes leading to individual differences in fear of crime



Concluding remarks

- Behaviour as cause or consequence of fear of crime?
 - Social learning as the reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural and environmental determinants (Bandura, 1977)
 - Need to acknowledge the existence of a feedback loop and reciprocal linkages between these variables
- Potential of (social)psychological knowledge in the explanation of fear of crime
 - Offers insights and theoretical concepts helpful to disentangle the existing mechanisms between fear of crime and its known determinants
- Potential of insights on the social-cognitive and emotional development processes to explain fear of crime
- Need for an integrative perspective and the integration of (perceptual) variables at the micro, meso and macro level