



# The impact of parental control and responsiveness on adolescents' fear of crime.

Indications of the existence of an intergenerational transition of fear of crime?

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Dr. Diederik Cops  
Leuven Institute of Criminology  
University of Leuven, Belgium



# Introduction

- Changes in parenting and parenting styles
- ‘Safety’ and ‘caution’ as the intrinsic values of contemporary parenting
- Steady erosion of children’s freedom, as a result of the perceived omnipresence and unpredictability of dangers and risks in public space (‘the vulnerable child’)
- Avoiding risks that are well worth taking because of their stimulating effect on a child’s development
- Parenting culture: driven by the precautionary approach  
~ ‘paranoid parenting’ (Furedi, 2008)



# Family and fear of crime: reducing risks and fear?

- Centrality of the family in the social worlds of children and adolescents
  - ⇒ Impact on fear of crime to be expected, but what kind of influence?
- (Objective) risk – fear approach: stronger parental control may reduce risk of victimization and a stronger parent-child bond may mitigate the negative effects of victimization
- Results of studies conducted: in contrast to these expectations
  - Small samples
  - Relative specific groups of adolescents



# Adding the social significance of fear of crime...

- Fear of crime research: general neglect of the cultural relevance of risk and fear  
“Where do images of risk come from?” “How do representations, imagery and symbols of crime circulate in society?”

How do people learn about risk?

- ‘little work has been done into how representations, imagery and symbols of crime are transmitted and transformed’ (Jackson, 2006: 259)
- ‘how do representations of the criminal event get picked up by individuals and transformed into personally held images of risk?’

- Social Amplification of Risk Framework (SARF): pivotal role of (1) day-to-day interactions and (2) social and cultural contexts
  - Importance of processes of communication: risk signals are received, interpreted and passed on by a series of ‘amplifier’ stations and diffused through different channels
  - Understanding the ‘learning about risk’: to take into account the mechanisms through which representations, beliefs and attitudes towards risks are transmitted



# Adding the social significance of fear of crime...(2)

- Social-cultural context: 'culture of fear' (Furedi, 2001) and the 'principle of precaution' as important guiding principles in today's parenting
- Using SARF: parents to be seen as one of the 'stations' by which communication of risks, threats and dangers occurs towards their children
- The better the parent-child relationship and the stronger the perceived parental control, the greater the possibility that social and cultural representations of risk are being internalized by children

... and adding a gender perspective: differences between boys and girls

➔ The effect of parental monitoring and responsiveness may be dependent on the children's sex



# The study

## Data: Youth Monitor

- ❖ Postal survey sent to a representative sample of Flemish youth
- ❖ between the ages of 14 and 19
- ❖ conducted in 2005-2006
- ❖ with a final sample of 1.299 respondents

‘Fear of crime’: measured in terms of a more stable emotional attitude towards crime and insecurity (containing cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects)  
~ expressive component (v. experiential component)

## Method: linear regression analysis with

- ❖ Control variables
  - ❖ Age and gender
  - ❖ Family factors: indicators of SES (parental educational level, employment status and degree of deprivation)
- ❖ Perceptions of parent child relations
  - ❖ Responsiveness of mother and of father (eight items each)
  - ❖ Perceived parental control (six items)
- ❖ Interaction effect between gender and subjective interpretations of the parent-child bond



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
<b>Cronbach <math>\alpha</math></b>	<b>.81</b>



	Model 1		Model 2	
	b	$\beta$	B	$\beta$
Gender (ref. cat. male)	11.31	.330***	7.85	.229*
Age	-.258	-.025	-.290	-.028
Parental educational level	1.18	.028	1.08	.025
Parental employment status	-2.97	-.085**	-2.95	-.084**
Degree of deprivation	3.15	.147***	3.12	.146***
Victimization	.080	.005	.092	.06
Responsiveness father	.029	.041	.074	.103*
Responsiveness mother	.104	.118***	.052	.059
Parental control	.027	.032	.025	.028
Parental control * gender			.021	.046
Responsiveness mother * gender			.101	.231*
Responsiveness father * gender			-.098	-.179*
R <sup>2</sup>	.168		.171	





# Parental influences on adolescents' fear of crime. The results

- ❖ Some sociodemographic characteristics of the family are related to fear of crime among adolescents
  - ❖ Parental employment status and degree of family deprivation are significantly related to levels of fear of crime among adolescents
  
- ❖ More importantly: a better emotional bond with mother is related to a higher level of fear of crime among adolescents
  
- ❖ Indications for qualitative differences between boys and girls in the effect of parental supervision on fear of crime
  - ❖ Importance of mothers' responsiveness for fear of crime among girls
  - ❖ Importance of fathers' responsiveness for fear of crime among boys



## Conclusion: socializing into a culture of fear?

- Omnipresence of societal concerns on the safety of children and youth
- Need to incorporate the socio-cultural significance and relevance of the fear of crime (cf. Farrall et al., 2009); fear of crime more than merely the product of concrete confrontations with risk
- The family (parents) as one of the potential amplification stations in the social worlds of young people through which circulating images of risk are being communicated, amplified, passed through and internalized
- Youth remain active individuals in the process of evaluating and internalizing the warnings and concerns communicated by their parents
- However:
  - specificity of the measure of 'fear of crime' used in this study: 'trait' v. 'state'
  - combining both adolescent and parental data may result in more direct proof