

## ABSTRACT

### Fear of Crime Among Older Persons: An Exploratory Qualitative Study in Different Environments in Hong Kong

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Fear of crime among various groups has long been studied in Western societies. Many studies have concluded that older persons tend to exhibit higher levels of fear of crime than other age groups even though they are generally at a lower risk of being victims of crime. However, there have been relatively few studies on fear of crime and associated reasons amongst older persons in Asian cities and Chinese societies. Moreover, most existing studies have generally utilized quantitative methods to examine the possibly causal relationships between fear of crime and its underlying factors, and subjective evaluations by older people themselves of factors related to the fear of crime are very few. This study aimed to investigate factors related to fear of crime by exploring older persons' perspectives on their living environments and their own situations.

A qualitative research design was used to explore how and why fear arises in spite of considerable objective evidence that older persons are at relatively low risk of falling victim of crime. The study employed eight focus group discussions (FGDs) and two individual interviews. To provide a range of typical HK residential environment, participants were drawn from two main categories of housing (traditional village housing and purpose-built housing) and four different types of physical living environment in Hong Kong (a village, an island, old-town housing, and new towns).

Environmental factors, individual factors and moderators of fear of crime have been identified in this study. First, the qualitative findings suggest that environmental factors can be categorized as three dimensions, which include vulnerability (defect of the living

environment), defensibility (level of protection that provided by the environment) and supportability (availability of social support that older persons can get when they are at risk). Vulnerability appears to be positive associated with fear of crime, but defensibility and supportability appear to be negatively associated with fear of crime. Second, the findings on individual factors enrich the Vulnerability model proposed by previous researchers, in which physical, psychological and behavioural weakness of older persons can be discussed. Third, moderators of fear of crime (e.g. people who have adjusted to a dangerous place by knowing the latest local crime event or figure.) which concentrate on the cognitive and behavioural adjustment among older persons, have been identified. Finally, policy recommendations for the welfare of older persons in Hong Kong are suggested based on the findings of the research.