

Fear of crime or anxiety about a rapidly changing society?

Do we really fear crime or are we just anxious about neighbourhood breakdown and the speed of change in society?

Research, funded by the Economic & Social Research Council, shows that our everyday concerns about crime in England & Wales are much less frequent than previously thought. For people who live in high crime areas, the fear of crime tends to be an everyday experience that reduces their quality of life. Yet for those people who live more protected lives, the fear of crime tends to be a more diffuse feeling that reflects a broader expression of concerns about social change.

Dr Stephen Farrall from Sheffield University and Dr Jonathan Jackson of the London School of Economics found that people did not neatly separate out the issue of crime from general unease towards social stability and the pace and direction of our changing society. Rather than being about an irrational sense of crime, both fear of crime and anxiety about crime distilled popular concerns about neighbourhood breakdown.

Dr Stephen Farrall said “the fear of crime is an important social indicator of any societies’ well-being. Our research suggests however that real, immediate threats to people are, thankfully, rarely encountered.”

Dr Jonathan Jackson added “fear of crime is more often a broader anxiety than a concrete worry about the threat of victimisation – but in any case, these emotions are all bound up in public concerns about social change and the health of the norms and values that underpin our society”.

Source: Economic & Social Research Council

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