

Do You Feel Safe?

FEAR OF CRIME AND VICTIMIZATION ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

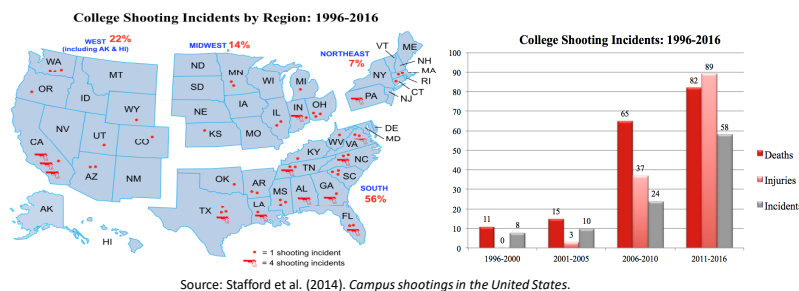


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INTRODUCTION

College campuses have comparatively lower crime rates and safer environmental designs than society as a whole. However, perceptions of the prevalence of crime on college campuses and concerns for student safety have increased in the past two decades.¹ These fears developed after the 1999 Columbine High School shooting and amplified in 2007 and 2008 after the violent attacks at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University, respectively. Widespread media coverage underlines the concern of campus safety with respect to fear of crime and victimization.



Source: Stafford et al. (2014). *Campus shootings in the United States*.

The significant increase in school shootings and violent attacks on campuses has led to an array of research on the nature of campus crime and victimization² and the relationship with student's quality of life, emotional security, and individual safety. Prior studies have consistently found a direct relationship between gender and fear of crime. For instance, female college students express higher levels of fear of crime, even though they are less likely to be the victims of both violent and property crimes on campus than their male counterparts.³ Nevertheless, very little research has focused on the impact of students' major, access to media, weapon possession on college campuses, and victimization on these perceptions.

Hence, the purpose of this study is to explore students' perceptions of campus safety and identify factors that may affect their attitudes toward these issues by reviewing current literature systematically. This review aims to understand how different majors and other personal demographics, such as gender, race, age, access to media, and possession of weapons on campus affect fear of crime and perceived victimization among college students. Additionally, one could seek to understand what impact previous direct victimization and vicarious victimization have on these conceptions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Does demographic background impact fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization among students?
2. Do direct victimization and vicarious victimization impact fear of crime on college campuses?
3. Do criminal justice students' perception on fear of crime and risk of victimization differ from their non-criminal justice major counterparts?

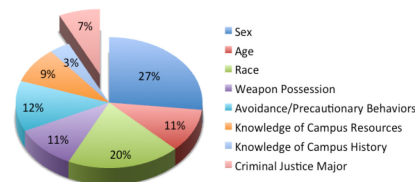
METHODS

The current study systematically examined 20 peer-reviewed journal articles⁴ published between 1996 and 2016. Keywords such as previous victimization, witness, gender, race/ethnicity, media, weapon, and knowledge of both campus history and legislation were used to identify potential eligible studies to answer three research questions. After an initial review of each article was conducted, another two researchers re-evaluated the quality of the work to increase inter-rater reliability. Overall, the observations made are from a total of 233,889 subjects and 347 institutions in the United States by using the systematic review approach.

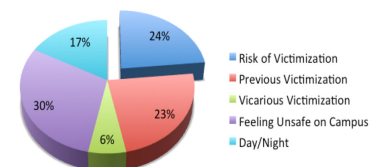
FINDINGS

- Students who were female, younger, non-white, prior victims, familiar with vicarious victimization experience(s), had little-to-no knowledge about campus safety legislation, or were unaware of campus resources, reported higher levels of fear or perceived higher risks of being victimized on campus.
- Students who were male, white, and older were more likely carry an assault weapon and to be victimized; however, they were less likely to use precautionary behaviors to avoid victimization.
- Students' fear of crime at night was almost double students' fear of crime during the day.
- More than two thirds of respondents indicated their concern for being a victim of violent crime even though the majority of them had not experienced any type of victimization.
- Those students who majored in criminal justice were less likely to engage in constrained behavior and less likely to be the victim of crime on campus.
- Unlike the majority of non-criminal justice students, sex did not affect perceptions of fear of crime among criminal justice students.

Impact Factors on Fear of Crime: Demographics



Impact Factors on Fear of Crime: Victimization



DISCUSSION

Even though the current study limited its scope to examine prior research, this study concluded that demographic characteristics such as gender, age, race, and weapon possession are associated with students' fear of crime and perceived victimization. Moreover, those students who experienced direct or vicarious victimization perceived a higher risk of victimization and expressed a higher level of feeling unsafe. Interestingly, students' perception regarding campus safety and the degree of risk of being victimized was significantly affected by major and fear of crime at night as well. In fact, the gap between victimization experiences and perceived risk of victimization highlights the importance of educating students on their actual group-specific rates of victimization.

Given media coverage of mass shootings could contribute to a climate of fear among students and university officials, future research should further examine how media consumption and exposure to news or information about crime affects fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization. More studies should also explore additional factors such as how involvement in campus activities, administration differences, local crime rates, and victimization experiences prior to college admission shape these attitudes.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Patton & Gregory (2015)
- ² Lane, Gover, & Dahod (2009)
- ³ Jennings, Gover, & Pudrzynska (2007); Kaminski, Koons-Witt, Thompson, & Weiss (2010); Fisher & May (2009); Lane et al. (2009); Hibdon, Schafer, Lee, & Summers (2016).
- ⁴ Upon request