



The Fear of Victimization-Paradox: Disproportional fear of women and the elderly - rational or irrational?

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Seminar paper from the year 2006 in the subject Law - Criminal process, Criminology, Law Enforcement, grade: 17 Punkte (sehr gut), University of Tübingen (Institut für Kriminologie), course: XII. Post Graduate Course of Victimology, Victim Assistance and Criminal Justice, May 2006, Inter University Centre Dubrovnik, Croatia, 42 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: I. Introduction

Regarding the fear of victimization, researchers soon found a disproportional high fear among women and elderly people. In this paper I do not only want to describe the different attempts of explanations dealing with these findings. I also want to test if and to what extend the single explanations fit to the fear of victimization among young German law students...

II. Description of the Paradox

First of all, the Fear of Victimization - Paradox is in the literature more commonly known as the Fear of Crime - Paradox. But this is inexact: Speaking about the fear of crime, you have to distinguish between a person's perception of his own chances of victimization and the individual estimation of the seriousness of criminal activity in society. In this context the fear of crime is viewed just as fear of victimization. This is the cognitive dimension of fear of crime, the perception that one is vulnerable and exposed to victimization, and that victimization has serious consequences for oneself. That's why I prefer the term "Fear of Victimization – Paradox".

Such fear is usually measured by the so called standard term. That is – with some formulation variants: "How safe do you feel when you walk alone in your community at night?" This question asks if the person is personally fearful of crime, and less if he or she is concerned about rising crime as a social issue. But the validity of this standard term is not undisputed: On the one hand, it does not contain the victimization as reference point of fear at all, on the other hand it is not able to cover public crime inside buildings. Nevertheless it certainly contains aspects of fear of victimization and it enables former investigations to remain comparable to recent ones...

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