

# Gendered perception of crime and safety: Insights from different socio-economic urban neighbourhoods in Ghana

Charlotte Wrigley-Asante<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*Using findings from a household survey and qualitative interviews, this paper explores the gender differences in the level of crime in three different socio-economic neighbourhoods and about the ways in which violence and security issues affect women and men's mobility in urban spaces. Generally, crime levels were considered low in all three socio-economic neighbourhoods, but there are issues of insecurity and safety. Males considered their communities to be safer than females, as a higher proportion of females than males felt unsafe walking alone, particularly at night, in their neighbourhoods. The fear of victimization among women was particularly felt in the low and middle-class neighbourhoods, and this was due to the absence of basic infrastructure such as proper lighting systems; the presence of gangsters and drug addicts; as well as limited police presence. In effect, poor urban infrastructure and services contributed to feelings of insecurity in such communities. It is therefore important to improve safety and security measures in all types of neighbourhoods, with particular attention paid to middle and low-class neighbourhoods.*

**Key words:** Gender; crime; safety; urban neighbourhoods; Ghana

<sup>1</sup>Charlotte Wrigley-Asante, Department of Geography & Resource Development, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana. Email: [cwrigley-asante@ug.edu.gh](mailto:cwrigley-asante@ug.edu.gh)

## **Introduction**

With increasing urbanization and its associated poverty and unemployment in many developing countries, there are also increasing concerns about neighbourhood safety and security issues. As a result, the issue of fear of crime or fear of being a victim of crime has similarly received attention within the urban crime discourse. It has been argued that poor urban infrastructure and services as well as poor planning of urban spaces are contributory factors to feelings of insecurity among urban residents, particularly women and girls (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996; Cossman & Rader, 2011). Thus, some studies in the developed world have shown that females are more vulnerable and more fearful of crime than males (Ferraro 1995; Fisher & Sloan 2003; Wilcox et al., 2006). They are therefore more likely to show concerns about their ability to move freely and safely in their communities than males are (Warr, 2000; Jennings et al., 2007). There have also been arguments that women commit fewer and different crimes than men because of the different nature of their lives and their prescribed gender roles, in the sense that women are more confined to the domestic sphere and therefore expected to be less criminal, while men have more freedom to engage in public and criminal activity (Palk, 2006; King, 2009).

However, most of these arguments and discussions have focused primarily on the Western world, with limited focus on Sub-Saharan Africa and specifically Ghana. The unknown, therefore, is the extent to which Western notions of gendered crime explain the Ghanaian situation. This research, which focuses on four cities with various socio-economic neighbourhoods in Ghana, is thus a contribution to the global discussion on gender and crime. The extent to which these Western notions of gendered crime explain the Ghanaian case is being examined. Specifically, the paper highlights the gender differences in the level of crime and victimization and the implications for men and women's safety in the different socio-economic urban neighbourhoods within cities. Three key research questions that guide the paper are the following:

1. Are there different gendered perceptions of crime levels in the different socio-economic neighbourhoods?
2. Are males more likely to be perpetrators of crime?
3. Are females more likely to fear crime than males?

The paper is structured into five parts. After this introduction, the next section presents the theoretical background, highlighting some of the key arguments in the gender and crime literature. This is followed by the study methodology. Subsequently, data analyses are presented, and finally provide conclusions and policy implications.

## **Theoretical approaches to the study of gender and crime**

The concept of gender is very important because it reveals how the different roles of males and females are socially constructed through systems of social differentiation such as educational systems, political and economic systems, legislation, culture, and traditions (Williams et al., 1998). It also reflects in the relations between women and men—whether in the family, the marketplace, or the community. Thus, being a man or a woman means facing different and well-defined social expectations about appearance, qualities, behaviour, and work. Gender systems are established in different socio-cultural contexts, which determine what is expected, allowed, and valued in a woman or man or girl or boy in specific contexts. Consequently, gender roles are often learned through socialization processes; they are not fixed but are changeable over time (ibid.).

In the gender and crime discourse as analysed in the Western world, there have been different approaches to unravelling the relationship between gender and crime among many disciplines. For instance, criminologists agree that there are differences among males and females when it comes to crime. They argue that females commit less crime than men do and this is due to women's having less access to power, in addition to other factors such as opportunity to commit crime and social controls (Silvestri & Crowther-Dowey, 2008). Psychologists have also tried to highlight the gender differences in perpetration of crime. For instance, Kanazawa (2009) argues that in natural evolution, men who are wealthy, strong, and capable are more likely to have greater access to women, and this creates competition with men who do not possess such qualities and subsequently leads to violence.

The feminist theory, however, contends that gender roles and the expectations associated with each role affect the crime rates of males and females and that females are less likely to engage in criminal offences than males owing to their private lives. In effect, gender roles are used as a system of control, and societies have tended to accept the inherently different nature of the two sexes (Heimer & De Coster, 1999). Some of these differences are more closely associated with violent behaviour than others. For instance, traditional male roles are associated with aggressiveness, physical strength, and competitiveness, which are also aligned with masculinity and criminal behaviour (Shover et al., 1979), while traditional female roles are associated with submissiveness, weakness, and passivity (Heimer & De Coster, 1999), which are viewed as incompatible with criminality. As such, it is more difficult for women to engage in criminal behaviour (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996; Heidensohn, 2012), as they are often confined to the home. Since the home is perceived as the domain of women, with less mobility into public spaces, they tend to have less inclination, less time, and fewer opportunities to commit crime (Shover et al., 1979; Heidensohn, 2012). The socialization process further causes females more than males to feel vulnerable, as the former are socialized to fear strangers particularly at night and often not taught how to ward off attacks (Warr, 2000; Jennings et al., 2007; Cossman & Rader, 2011).

## *Gendered perception of crime and safety*

A key theory that explains the greater vulnerability of women than men to all forms of crime is the vulnerability hypothesis theory (McCrea et al., 2005). This theory proposes that females feel more vulnerable than males because they are less able to physically defend themselves and feel less in control over crime occurrence. They are therefore more sensitive to the consequences of victimization (Jackson, 2009). The vulnerability perspective further suggests that individuals who believe they possess a physical or social disadvantage, regardless of their actual chances of victimization, will feel more vulnerable to potential victimization (Ferraro, 1995; Wyant, 2008). Thus there are two forms of vulnerability: physical and social vulnerability (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981). Physical vulnerability includes physical characteristics that may make an individual feel more vulnerable to victimization, and two key characteristics are gender and age. In effect, it has been argued that females are more vulnerable to all forms of crime and that their vulnerability includes both risk and fear (Jennings et al. 2007; Cossman & Rader, 2011). With regard to age, the aged and children feel more vulnerable to criminal victimization, regardless of their chances of actual victimization (Killias, 1990). Both women and the elderly therefore feel an increased fear of crime owing to the perception that being a female or an older individual will lessen their ability to protect themselves during a physical attack (Smith & Torstensson, 1997; Killias & Clerici, 2000).

On the other hand, social vulnerability includes the social characteristics that may make an individual feel more vulnerable to victimization. At the individual level, race, class, and/or socio-economic status are the key characteristics associated with the social vulnerability hypothesis (McCrea et al., 2005; Scarborough et al., 2010). Some studies have argued that individuals from low socio-economic classes are more afraid of crime than those in middle and high classes (McKee & Milner, 2000; Pantazis, 2000). Likewise, low-class individuals feel they are more vulnerable to victimization because they have the potential to be in more dangerous situations and also because they may be unable to afford crime-reducing devices such as locks and/or security systems (Pantazis, 2000).

The masculine theory also suggests that there is a direct link between gender and crime and that even though the gap between female crime and male crime is getting closer, females still commit less crime in all areas besides prostitution (Steffensmier & Allan, 1996). The masculine theorists, however, believe that as females gain more equality within society, they become more violent and increasingly involve themselves in criminal activities. Adler (1975), for instance, argues that as women imitate men, they become aggressive, and this could contribute to the faster rise in crime rates for women. In effect, masculine theorists propose that structural changes following the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s produced an increase in women's crime rates because women began to be exposed to potential crime targets. These changes may be attributed to females becoming more masculine in their psychological make-up (Shover et al., 1979).

These different perspectives in the gender and crime discourse in the Western world provide the basis for explaining the gendered perceptions of crime and safety issues in the different socio-

economic neighbourhoods in urban Ghana. The findings are discussed in the subsequent sections.

## **Study sites and research methodology**

This paper is part of a broader national study entitled ‘Exploring poverty and crime nexus in urban Ghana’. It is jointly funded by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) as part of a global research programme entitled ‘Safe and Inclusive Cities’ (SAIC). In Ghana, the study is being carried out in four major cities: Accra, Sekondi-Takoradi, Kumasi, and Tamale. To a large extent, these cities reflect the different ecological zones (coastal, forest, and savannah) in the country. They also represent the key metropolitan cities in Ghana, and in 2010 they accounted for about 40% of the total urban population of the country (Owusu et al., 2015). In each city, the study focused on three neighbourhoods with different socio-economic characteristics: low-, middle-, and high-class residential neighbourhoods (see Table 1), to enable comparative analysis of the nexus between crime and poverty.

**Table 1: Selected communities, Enumeration Areas (EAs), and household sample allocation**

<b>City</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Community socio-economic status</b>	<b>No. of selected EAs</b>	<b>Sample allocation of households</b>
Accra	Airport Residential Area	High-class	2	30
	Dansoman	Middle-class	20	300
	Glefee-Dansoman	Low-class	4	60
	Nima	Low-class	34	510
Kumasi	Ahodwo/Nhyiraso	High-class	4	60
	Oforikrom	Middle-class	31	465
	Aboabo	Low-class	24	360
Sekondi-Takoradi	Chapel Hill	High-class	11	165
	Anaji Estate	Middle-class	9	135
	New Takoradi	Low-class	14	210
Tamale	Russian Bungalow	High-class	3	45
	Zogbeli	Middle-class	15	225
	Aboabo-Tamale	Low-class	12	180
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>183</b>	<b>2,745</b>

The selection of these neighbourhoods was based on the previous knowledge of the researchers as well as initial discussions and guidance provided by officials of the city/regional police units and city planners/administrators. Data for this paper is based on both secondary and primary

## *Gendered perception of crime and safety*

sources (both quantitative and qualitative data) from a household survey, key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). Ethical clearance for the project was received from the University of Ghana's Ethics Committee. The initial consultation with key stakeholders facilitated easy access to community members and was guided by the project's security and ethical protocols, which contain details regarding the procedures for making contact with, meeting with, and interviewing respondents, among others. Three FGDs were carried out in each of the four low-income communities, and these were male only, female only, as well as mixed groups. Participants were drawn from the local women, men, and youth groups in these neighbourhoods. Fifty KIIs that focused on crime and security-related issues were also held with the police, including officials from the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVSSU), local government representatives (assemblymen and -women), city planning officers, leaders of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), youth leaders, and traditional and religious leaders.

Based on insights from the qualitative interviews, a household questionnaire was developed and a survey was conducted. A total of 2,745 households were sampled in the selected neighbourhoods. The sample design was a clustered, multi-stage probability sample based on a list of Enumeration Areas (EAs) that were used for Ghana's 2010 Housing and Population census. This was done with the assistance from the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), the official institution in charge of census and other public surveys in Ghana. The list of EAs constituted the sampling frame for all the communities selected. The EAs are defined as the primary sampling units (PSUs), as they are the smallest well-defined units for which population and household data are available; and households within the selected EAs constitute the secondary sampling units (SSUs). Household heads in each household were targeted, but in the absence of the head any available adult member was interviewed. For this paper, both the survey and interviews covered the perceptions by males and females of issues related to the incidence of crime in the various neighbourhoods, the type(s) of crime experienced by individuals and households, the perpetrators and victims of crime, and issues of safety in the neighbourhoods. These major themes guided the analysis in this paper. Most of the in-depth interviews were conducted in English, except in a few instances with community traditional and religious leaders, which were conducted in the local languages and later transcribed. All the FGDs, however, were conducted in the local languages and transcribed.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents as shown in Table 2 reveal that the majority of both males (56.9%) and females (58.9%) were married. Also more males had attained higher formal education than females, and this is reflected in their occupation status, with more male respondents employed as professional, technical, or managerial workers. On the other hand, the majority of females (53.9%) compared with males (26.7%) were in sales or services occupations, working mainly as petty traders. As regards ethnicity, the majority of the respondents were Akans, with Guans as the least represented ethnic group.

**Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the respondents**

		Male (%)	Female (%)	Total
<b>Age</b>	Below 24 years	16.0	14.0	15.0
	25-34	25.2	26.6	25.9
	35-44	20.1	24.2	22.4
	45-54	17.3	17.8	17.5
	55-64	11.3	10.1	10.6
	65+	10.4	7.3	8.7
<b>Marital Status</b>	Never married	35.5	21.2	27.8
	Consensual cohabitation	1.7	2.7	2.2
	Married	56.9	58.9	57.8
	Divorced/Separated/Widowed	6.8	17.3	12.2
<b>Education</b>	No formal education	10.1	23.5	17.4
	Primary	7.2	12.6	10.1
	Junior high school/ Middle school	31.8	31.6	31.7
	Senior high school	30.0	20.9	25.0
	Diploma/ Higher national diploma	8.0	4.9	6.3
	Graduate/post-graduate	12.8	6.6	9.4
	Sales and services	26.7	53.9	42.0
	Skilled	23.9	7.8	14.8
	Unskilled manual workers	8.9	8.9	8.9
	Clerical	1.0	0.7	0.8
	Agriculture	2.1	0.7	1.3
	Pensioners/Unemployed	16.6	19.5	18.4
	Nzema/Ahantas	5.6	6.6	6.1
	Ga-adangmes	6.6	6.7	6.7
	Ewes	12.4	13.2	12.8
	Guans	2.2	1.9	2.1
	Northern extraction	31.9	25.5	28.7

**Source: Fieldwork, 2014**

## Assessment of crime in communities

Crime is generally seen as a form of deviance that involves the infringement of rules or laws that a specific society has created; thus, both the act of a crime and the behaviour of the criminal are socially defined (De Coster & Heimer, 2006). In effect, crime can be described simply as the breaking of rules or regulations or a deviant behaviour that violates prescribed norms or values, and as something that is frowned upon by a particular society. In Ghana, the Criminal Code (Act 29) broadly defines crime to include both the act and the intent to commit the act. Crime as conceived in this paper (and indeed the whole urban crime and poverty project) is in line with the legal description which defines crime as acts or omissions forbidden by law and that can be punished by imprisonment and/or fine.

**Table 3: Respondents' assessment of levels of crime in their respective communities**

Level of crime	Neighbourhood type							
	Low		Middle		High		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Very high	9.0	7.4	5.4	7.5	1.3	2.1	6.6	6.9
High	16.1	19.5	13.0	16.3	4.5	7.1	13.4	17.0
Moderate	24.5	23.9	33.5	30.2	15.6	17.9	27.1	26.0
Low	34.5	32.5	29.7	26.6	36.4	29.3	32.8	29.7
Very low	15.9	16.7	18.4	19.4	42.2	43.6	20.1	20.4
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

$X^2=0.000$

Male=1234 (45.4)

Female=1486 (54.6)

Source: Household Survey, 2014

This paper sought to highlight the gender differences in the perception of crime incidences in various socio-economic neighbourhoods within cities. In general, crime levels were perceived to be low or very low in the different neighbourhoods (low-, middle-, and high-class). The findings, however, suggest that the majority of both male (78.6%) and female (72.9%) respondents in high-class neighbourhoods considered crime levels to be lower than their counterparts in middle-



and low-class neighbourhoods (see Table 3). This could be due to the use of target hardening measures such as security/special doors and locks, installed burglar alarms, electronic fencing, and the use of dogs in such high-class neighbourhoods (Owusu et al., 2015). In addition, high-class neighbourhoods are likely to have the presence of guardians (public police and private security guards) to deter criminal activities.

When one compares male and female among the different classes of neighbourhoods, more females (23.9%) than males (20.0%) in the low-, middle-, and high-class neighbourhoods perceived crime levels to be high or very high. But more women in the low- and middle-income neighbourhoods expressed this concern than in the high-income ones. This may be due to the presence of guardians and the use of security measures in high-income neighbourhoods, as noted earlier. Nevertheless, the fact that more females than males reported that crime levels were higher in their communities certainly has implications for safety and feelings of insecurity among females in general, and particularly among those in low- and middle-class neighbourhoods. These issues are discussed in detail in the next section.

**Table 4: Perception of perpetrators of crimes in different socio-economic communities**

	Neighbourhood type							
	Low		Middle		High		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Juveniles (below 18): male	21.8	20.2	15.3	20.6	14.3	16.2	18.4	20.0
Juveniles (below 18): female	7.3	6.4	2.3	5.4	3.4	6.0	4.9	6.0
Youth (18–35): male	54.6	56.8	65.3	62.3	65.5	63.5	60.0	59.6
Youth (18–35): female	11.8	11.1	11.3	7.8	11.3	13.2	11.5	9.9
Adults (above 35): male	4.0	5.1	5.3	3.3	4.9	1.2	4.6	4.0
Adults (above 35): female	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.0	0.5	0.5

Multiple responses: Male=1742; Female=2062

Source: Household Survey, 2014

Studies in the USA have shown that women commit fewer and different crimes than men because of the different nature of their lives (Palk, 2006; King, 2009). In accordance with their gender roles, women are more confined to the domestic sphere, while men have more freedom to engage in public and criminal activity (Palk, 2006; King, 2009). Similar findings were revealed in the sense that most crimes perpetrated in the neighbourhoods were perceived to be committed primarily by males, as shown in Table 4. Indeed, the majority of both male and female respondents in all the different neighbourhoods considered the male youth (18–35 years) to be the lead perpetrators of all forms of crime, except perhaps prostitution. Male juveniles (below 18

## *Gendered perception of crime and safety*

years) were also perceived as the second-most frequent perpetrators of crime by both male and female respondents.

This perception of males as the more common perpetrators of crime was attributed to the high unemployment rate among the male youth. Therefore, the motivating factor to commit crime was perceived to be economic, in the sense that financial stress pushes such young men to commit these crimes. These perceptions were confirmed during KIIs and FGDs, which revealed that young men aged 19–24 years, and sometimes boys as young as 12–14 years, were particularly prone to criminal activities—especially robbery, burglary, and theft. As explained by an opinion leader:

*Lack of jobs is one of the major factors pushing many young men into all kinds of criminal activities. Many of these young men you see around just idle with nothing to do .... You know, if one is not working, thoughts of stealing or engaging in other criminal acts can occur. Friends easily influence them; and since money is their main goal, even though most of them know very well that such actions are criminal they engage in them. Lack of skills to work is also pushing these young men to commit crime. Some parents are unable to support their children because of poverty, and so the children start doing their own thing and they end up becoming criminals. (Opinion leader, New Takoradi, a low-income community).*

Similar factors were expressed throughout most of the interviews conducted. Female youth (18–35 years) were considered to be the third-most likely group to perpetrate crime (Table 4). This fact was confirmed during FGDs. It was explained that some young females are increasingly getting involved in criminal activities such as drug peddling together with their male counterparts, conforming to notions elsewhere in the Western world (see for instance Adler 1975; Shover et al., 1979; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). As females are traditionally not closely associated with criminal behaviour, this emerging trend was a major source of worry for community members, as noted by an elderly woman:

*These days many young women are doing the bad things that young men do. Increasingly, some of them are caught smoking wee [marijuana] with their male counterparts in obscure places. Some also assist the men in duping people, and they get their share of the proceeds. These things were not so during our time where most of us stayed at home and supported our mothers. These days, things have changed, and all of these are as a result of poverty and bad parenting. (Woman, Glefee, a low-income community)*

This increasing involvement of females in criminal activities was further confirmed by a police official who explained how such females often engaged in fraudulent activities:

*Many of the criminals are relatively young men, and these are often the school dropouts and therefore cannot secure any good job. The desire to survive or become rich is the major reason why they engage in these criminal acts.... But, increasingly, women are also involved,*

particularly with fraud cases where they often pose as girlfriends to get information. Thus, they are often conduit to obtain information about the target. (Senior Police officer, Accra)

Table 4 further shows that adult females (35 and above) were considered the least likely perpetrators of crime in the different neighbourhoods, possibly owing to the fact that this category of women are considered more mature, stable, and responsible. Such women are more concerned about their marital and reproductive roles and thus often confined to the domestic sphere (Palk, 2006; King, 2009). They are therefore less likely to be engaged in nefarious criminal activities.

**Table 5: The most feared crime in the community by respondents**

Type of crime	Neighbourhood type							
	Low		Middle		High		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Robbery	14.1	10.8	39.3	43.9	20.0	30.6	25.7	27.7
Stealing/theft	40.6	40.2	40.5	40.4	63.2	45.0	43.4	40.7
Burglary	5.0	3.3	10.3	6.9	10.4	18.9	8.0	6.4
Drug peddling	17.9	26.5	3.7	3.7	3.2	1.8	10.0	13.9
Rape	1.1	2.0	0.7	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.8	1.5
Assault	14.7	12.2	1.9	1.5	1.6	1.8	7.6	6.4
Fraud	2.0	1.3	2.8	1.3	0.0	0.0	2.1	1.2
Murder	2.5	2.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	1.8	1.2	1.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Male=993 (45.2); Female=1205 (54.8)

Source: Household Survey 2014

Regarding the most feared crime in the respective communities, stealing/theft appeared to be the most feared for both male and female respondents (Table 5).

Drug peddling was, however, reported as the most feared crime in low-class neighbourhoods compared with middle- and high-income communities, with a higher proportion of females expressing this fear. This is not surprising as KIIs with the police and community leaders

### *Gendered perception of crime and safety*

revealed that the sale and use of illicit drugs is prevalent in such low-income communities, with men often involved in these acts. This often makes the men culpable of other types of crime, in the sense that as they become addicted to drugs, they are led to steal or to defraud people for monetary gains so as to continuously purchase and use such drugs. This fact was corroborated by the opinion leaders and the FGDs with women's groups in the low-class neighbourhoods, as echoed by one of the speakers:

*In this community, smoking of wee is a major problem for particularly the youth, especially the young men; but increasingly, the young girls are also engaging in this act, and that is our concern. There are several ghettos in this area, and they sell them [drugs] and this attracts the bad boys to this area. They end up stealing our belongings, and that is our major source of worry and concern. (Woman, New Takoradi, a low-income community)*

Robbery was perceived as the most feared crime particularly in the middle- and high-class neighbourhoods, with females expressing a greater proportion of such fears. Similarly, burglary was perceived as a feared crime in these two types of neighbourhoods, with more females in the high-income neighbourhoods (18.9%) expressing such fears. It was explained that perpetrators often target cash and handy electronics, and these neighbourhoods are likely places where these items can be found. Interestingly, rape, fraud, and assault were considered among the least feared crimes, as reported by both male and female respondents, but a higher percentage of males (14.7%) and females (12.2%) in low-class neighbourhoods considered assault as the most feared crime compared with those living in middle- and high-class neighbourhoods. This implies that assault cases are likely to be rampant in such low-class neighbourhoods. This fact was confirmed by the police, who reported receiving many reports of assault cases on a daily basis, and these cases are often from low-class communities, with women as victims as well as perpetrators. The fact that rape was reported as one of the least feared crimes may perhaps be due to the fact that most perpetrators and victims of sexual assault cases (rape and defilement), in particular, often consider the issue a family matter because it is most often perpetrated by close family members or neighbours—as explained by the police. The police further revealed that parents may also not have the financial means to commute to the police and/or to seek medical care, and thus parents would prefer to be compensated by the perpetrator. Moreover, abused women in particular refuse to report sexual assault for fear of being divorced (Coker-Appiah, 2004; Cusack & Manuh, 2009). This situation calls for more education and state support for such victims.

In responding to the types of crimes that any member of the household had been a victim of, personal theft was considered the number one crime that both male and female respondents had been victims of, while robbery was reported as the second (Table 6). This confirms the fact that the most feared crime, as earlier noted, in all the different neighbourhoods was theft, corroborating the views of Warr (2000) that the most feared crime is a multiplicative function of the seriousness, frequency, and risk of being a victim of that crime. In addition to cash, personal

theft often included household items such as laptops, mobile phones, utensils, clothing, poultry, and livestock.

Theft cases appeared to be very high in low-class neighbourhoods compared with the other two communities, with about a third of both male and female respondents indicating they had been victims. On the other hand, robbery appeared to be more prevalent in the middle- and high-class neighbourhoods than in the low-class neighbourhoods. This is not surprising, as these communities may tend to own the assets that perpetrators desire. In both the middle- and low-class neighbourhoods, males also tended to be victims of assault or threat of assault more often than males in high-class neighbourhoods. This suggests that men have a higher risk of victimization for almost all non-sexual violent crimes, including robbery and aggravated assault (Reid & Konrad, 2004).

**Table 6: Type of crime an individual or household member has experienced**

Type of crime	Neighbourhood type							
	Low		Middle		High		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Drugs peddling/addiction	0.7	2.1	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	1.6
Robbery	13.4	9.5	37.9	28.8	27.8	27.8	23.5	17.0
Personal theft	66.2	65.3	51.6	57.7	50.0	38.9	59.6	61.2
Rape	2.1	1.6	2.1	4.8	5.6	0.0	2.4	2.6
Defilement	0.7	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.6
Assault/threat	15.5	15.3	8.4	6.7	0.0	22.2	11.8	12.8
Fraud	0.0	3.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.2

Male=255; Female=312

Source: Household Survey, 2014

Interestingly, 22.2% of females in high-class neighbourhoods reported being victims or a household member being a victim of assault or threat of assault, with no male cases reported. This raises concern about the possible existence of domestic violence cases in such households, where it has been argued that power imbalances perpetuate stereotypes and contribute to males being in control in a relationship (Coker-Appiah, 2004; Cusack & Manuh, 2009). It may also imply that women in such households experience psychological abuse, which includes insult and threats of assault. Yet, many such cases are not reported, as people feel it is a family matter (Cusack & Manuh, 2009). The findings further showed that 4.8% of females compared with 2.1% of males in middle-class neighbourhoods reported that they had either been a victim of rape, or a household member had been a rape victim. This may further suggest that women have a higher victimization rate than men in terms of rape (Reid & Konrad, 2004).

## Gender and safety issues in communities

Women have consistently been found to have higher levels of fear of crime across contextual settings (Sacco, 1990), and there are significant gendered effects for all types of victimization as well as for overall measures of fear of crime (Ferraro & LaGrange 1992; Steffenmeier & Allan, 1996). In this regard, women’s reported levels of fear of crime have been found to be two to three times higher than the level of fear of crime reported by men (Bell, 1999; Fox et al., 2009). These assertions based on experiences in the Western context conform to the Ghanaian situation, as the study found that more female than male respondents reported not feeling safe when walking during the day and at night in all the different socio-economic neighbourhoods (Tables 7 and 8). Almost 8.0% of females compared with 3.8% of males reported not feeling safe during the day, and 35.6% of females compared with 25.8% of males reported not feeling safe at night.

**Table 7: Perception of safety in community during the day**

Day	Neighbourhood type							
	Low		Middle		High		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Very safe</b>	48.2	40.8	37.0	31.9	67.3	45.3	46.0	37.4
<b>Safe</b>	47.9	51.7	58.2	58.9	32.0	50.4	50.1	54.7
<b>Not safe</b>	3.9	7.5	4.80	9.2	0.7	4.3	3.8	7.9
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

X<sup>2</sup>=0.000      Male=1223 (45.3)      Female=1475 (54.7)

Source: Household Survey, 2014

**Table 8: Perception of safety in community during the night**

Night	Neighbourhood type							
	Low		Middle		High		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Very safe</b>	30.1	26.1	22.8	13.6	49.0	23.5	29.5	20.5
<b>Safe</b>	44.9	44.2	46.6	42.4	37.7	50.0	44.7	44.0
<b>Not safe</b>	25.0	29.7	30.6	44.0	13.2	26.5	25.8	35.6
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

X<sup>2</sup>=0.000      Male=1198 (45.7)      Female=1426 (54.3)

Source: Household Survey, 2014

This means that more males than females within all the different neighbourhoods felt safer during the day and at night, reflecting a widespread feeling of insecurity among females. These feelings of insecurity were vividly expressed during FGDs:

*There are no lights on the road leading to the community; and because we have to walk down to the main road, it is scary since we could be attacked from there.... Most of us women are petty traders.... We get up early at dawn to go and sell fish, but we are often attacked and all our goods and monies collected from us by the bad boys who lay ambush. So most often, we either have to go as a group or in twos and make loud noise on our way as if we are many, to ward off those thieves. We are pleading with the authorities to fix lights at those places for us. (Woman, New Takoradi, a low-class neighbourhood)*

A similar concern was expressed in another neighbourhood:

*There are many dark places and hideouts in this community, and these are the places where the young men snatch people's bags and mobile phones.... The houses are also close and the alleys are dark; one can easily run away and hide. And because there are no lights—and even where there are, some do not work—it is very difficult to even see the one who stole your bag or phone. The only thing is that we try to avoid such places, especially at night, for fear of being attacked. (Woman, Nima, a low-class neighbourhood)*

Such dark places highlighted by community members included spaces such as the public toilet facilities and transport terminals. This conforms to studies in the USA that showed that women felt unsafe at particular locations and in particular situations, including certain modes of transport, going out at night, walking through a neighbourhood, or driving alone at night (Bell, 1999; Fox et al., 2009). While more women reported feeling unsafe both during the day and at night than males, the majority of the women in the middle-class neighbourhoods (44.0%) reported feeling unsafe at night compared with the low- (29.7%) and high-class (26.5%) neighbourhoods (Table 8). A higher proportion of males (30.6%) in the middle-class neighbourhoods than in the other neighbourhoods felt unsafe walking alone at night (Table 8). This shows a higher feeling of insecurity at night in the middle-class neighbourhoods. This situation was attributed to the non-functional infrastructure in such neighbourhoods, as explained by an opinion leader:

*All the streetlights here are now off. You see the road has been tarred, but the street lights are not working. So the young men hide in the dark and attack the vulnerable, particularly the women and sometimes the businessmen. You know it is very easy to attack women because most of them cannot resist; if she tries, she could be hurt. So the thieves always forcefully snatch their bags, money, and mobile phones. So the issue of light is a big problem—but it appears nobody cares about repairing the light. (Opinion leader, Zogbeli, a middle-class neighbourhood)*

The concerns about the absence of street lighting and non-functional lighting systems recurred throughout the interviews in almost all the low- and middle-class neighbourhoods, and this absence creates a sense of insecurity among residents, particularly among women. Opinion leaders reiterated the concerns of women's safety issues even though they emphasized that the crime rate had decreased compared with about five years earlier. They noted that the presence of

gangsters and drug addicts/peddlers, coupled with the absence of proper lighting systems, contributed to a sense of fear among women. This also raises concern about planning generally, in the sense that physical infrastructure and planning do not incorporate crime prevention measures; hence, the poor and inadequate street lighting in these neighbourhoods. The view expressed by the opinion leader also suggests a general notion that females are weak and cannot protect themselves during a physical attack, since women believe they are physiologically weaker than men (Smith & Torstensson, 1997; Killias & Clerici, 2000). Since gender is the strongest predictor of fear of crime (Warr, 2000), a major explanation of such fear is that women feel vulnerable. In effect, the findings suggest that women, compared with men, may feel more vulnerable to crime regardless of their physical characteristics, as they have been socialized to believe that they are more vulnerable to victimization (Warr, 2000; Cossman & Rader, 2011). The findings also suggest that women feel less in control over crime occurrence, and therefore they are more sensitive to the consequences of victimization (Warr, 2000; Jackson 2009). This conforms to studies conducted in the developed countries of the Western world.

## **Concluding comments**

This paper sought to highlight the gender difference in level of crime and victimization and its implications for safety in different socio-economic neighbourhoods. The findings showed that crime levels were generally considered to be low in all the different neighbourhood types. However, when a comparison is made, a higher proportion of respondents in high-class neighbourhoods considered crime levels to be lower when compared with the other two neighbourhood types. Moreover, more females in all the different neighbourhoods (low-, middle-, and high-class) perceived crime levels to be higher in their communities than did their male counterparts. Females reported feeling unsafe during the day and at night more than males did, in spite of the general perception among both male and female respondents that crime levels were low. The fear of victimization among women, particularly in the low- and middle-class neighbourhoods, was as a result of poor infrastructure in the form of absence of proper lighting systems (either non-functional lighting systems or the absence of street lighting). In the low-class neighbourhoods, the presence of gangsters and drug addicts/peddlers, as well as the poor infrastructure layout, further contributed to fear of victimization, among women especially.

These findings thus tend to support the vulnerability hypothesis theory that proposes that females feel more vulnerable than males because they are less able to physically defend themselves and feel less in control over crime occurrence (McCrea et al., 2005) and they are therefore considered more sensitive to the consequences of victimization (Fox et al., 2009; Jackson 2009). The results further showed that male youth were perceived as the most common perpetrators of crime by both female and male respondents, suggesting that women commit fewer crimes than men. Nevertheless, female youth were also considered the third-most common perpetrators of crime, reflecting the masculine theory that females are increasingly getting involved in criminal



activities (Shover et al., 1979; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). The fact that fewer females than males were perceived as perpetrators of crime also supports the notions of feminist theory that the private and domestic lives of females make it less likely for them to engage in criminal offences than males.

High rates of youth unemployment, financial stress, poor parenting, and increasing poverty levels were the major factors reported as contributing to the high perpetration of crime by male youth. Personal theft and robbery were the two top crimes that both male and female respondents in all the different neighbourhoods had been victims of. Stealing, robbery, burglary, drug addiction/peddling, and assault were considered by both males and females as some of the most feared crimes, with stealing as the most feared by both male and female respondents. With respect to robbery, assault, and the threat of assault, more male than female respondents in both the middle- and low-class neighbourhoods reported being victims, suggesting that men have a higher risk of victimization for almost all non-sexual violent crimes (Reid & Konrad, 2004). While both male and female respondents considered rape, fraud, and assault as the least feared crimes, a higher proportion of males and females in low-class neighbourhoods than in middle- and high-class neighbourhoods ranked assault higher. This indicates that assault cases (particularly sexual assaults) are more prevalent in these low-class neighbourhoods.

The findings therefore suggest that it is critical to improve safety and security measures in all three types of neighbourhoods, but particular attention should be paid to middle- and low-class neighbourhoods. Effective urban planning and most importantly, upgrading of housing schemes particularly in low-class neighbourhoods are imperative to improve security and safety issues in urban areas. This should include improvement in the lighting systems along the streets and alleys in the various neighbourhoods. Considering the fact that unemployment and financial need were highlighted as the motivating factors for perpetrating crime, government and all stakeholders must create productive opportunities for the youth in particular, so as to engage and financially sustain them. The perception that females are generally weak and cannot protect themselves must also be addressed through continuous education and sensitization of both males and females in Ghanaian society. It is also important to engage women in training programmes in order to build their capacity to effectively protect themselves. It is hoped this will create safer cities and, in turn, reduce the sense of fear and feelings of insecurity among the citizenry.

## **Acknowledgements**

This work was carried out with the financial support of the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Canada. However, the views expressed in this presentation are solely those of the author. I also thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments.

## **References**

- Adler, F. (1975): *Sisters in crime: The rise of the new female criminal*. New York, McGraw-Hill.
- Bell, C. (1999): *Appealing for justice for children and young people: A critical analysis of the Crime and Disorder Bill 1998*. Pp. 191-210 in: Goldson, B. (ed.): *Youth justice contemporary policy and practice*. Aldershot, Ashgate.
- Coker-Appiah, D. (2004): *For a world free of violence against women in Ghana*. Yamens Printing Press, Accra.
- Cossmann, J. S. & Rader, N. E. (2011): *Fear of crime and personal vulnerability: Examining self-rated health*. *Sociological Spectrum* 31(2):141-162.
- Cusack, K. & Manuh, T. (2009): *The architecture of violence against women in Ghana*. Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre. Accra, Ghana.
- De Coster, S. & Heimer, K. (2006): *Crime at the intersection: Gender, race, and violent offending*. Pp. 138-156 in: Peterson, R., Krivo, L. & Hagan, J. (eds): *The many colors of crime: Inequalities of race, ethnicity and crime in America*. New York, New York University Press.
- Ferraro, K. F. (1995): *Fear of crime: Interpreting victimization risk*. State University of New York Press, New York.
- Ferraro, K. F. & LaGrange, R. L. (1992): *Are older people most afraid of crime? Reconsidering age differences of victimization*. *Journals of Gerontology* 47:233-244.
- Fisher, B. S. & Sloan, J. J., III (2003): *Unravelling the fear of victimization among college women: Is the shadow of sexual assault hypothesis supported?* *Justice Quarterly* 20(3):633-659.
- Fox, K. A., Nobles, M. R. & Piquero, A. R. (2009): *Gender, crime victimization and fear of crime*. *Security Journal* 22(1):24-39. doi:10.1057/sj.2008.13

- Heidensohn, F. (2012): Gender and crime. Pp. 336-369 in: Maguire, M., Morgan, R. & R. Reiner (eds): *The Oxford handbook of criminology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.
- Heimer, K. & De Coster, S. (1999): The gendering of violent delinquency. *Criminology*, 37:277-317.
- Jackson, J. (2009): A psychological perspective on vulnerability in the fear of crime. *Psychology, Crime and Law* 15(4):65-390.
- Jennings, W. G., Gover, A. R. & Pudrzynska, D. (2007): Are institutions of higher learning safe? A descriptive study of campus safety issues and self-reported campus victimization among male and female college students. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education* 18(2):191-208.
- Kanazawa, S. (2009): Evolutionary psychology and crime. Pp. 90-110 in: Walsh, A. & Beaver, K. M. (eds): *Biosocial Criminology: New directions in theory and research*. Criminology and Justice Studies. Routledge. ISBN 9780415989435.
- Killias, M. (1990): Vulnerability: Towards a better understanding of a key variable in the genesis of fear of crime. *Violence and Victims* 5:97-108.
- Killias, M. & Clerici, C. (2000): Different measures of vulnerability in their relations to different dimensions of fear of crime. *British Journal of Criminology* 40:437-450.
- King, R. (2009): Women's fear of crime on university campuses. New directions? *Security Journal* 22:87-99. doi:10.1057/sj.2008.14.
- McCrea, R., Tung-Kai, S. & Stimson, R. J. (2005): Fear of crime in Brisbane: Individual, social and neighbourhood factors in perspective. *Journal of Sociology* 41(1):7-27.
- McKee, K. & Milner C. (2000): Health, Fear of crime and psychosocial functioning in older people. *Journal of Health Psychology* 5(4):473-86.
- Owusu, G., Wrigley-Asante, C., Oteng-Ababio, M. & Owusu, A. Y. (2015): Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) and built-environmental manifestations in Accra and Kumasi, Ghana. *Crime Prevention and Community Safety* 17(4):249-269.

*Gendered perception of crime and safety*

- Palk, D. (2006): *Gender, crime and judicial discretion, 1780–1830*. Woodbridge, Royal Historical Society / Boydell Press. ISBN 0 86193282-X.
- Pantazis, C. (2000): Fear of crime, vulnerability and poverty: Evidence from the British crime survey. *British Journal of Criminology* 40(3):414-436.
- Reid, L. W. & Konrad, M. (2004): The gender gap in fear: Assessing the interactive effects of gender and perceived risk on fear of crime. *Sociological Spectrum* 24:399-425.
- Sacco, V. (1990): Gender, fear, and victimization: A preliminary application of power-control theory. *Sociological Spectrum* 10:485-506.
- Scarborough, B. K., Like-Haislip, T. Z., Novak, K. J., Lucas, W. L. & Alarid, L. F. (2010): Assessing the relationship between individual characteristics, neighborhood context, and fear of crime. *Journal of Criminal Justice* 38:819-826.
- Shover, N., Norland, S., James, J. & Thornton, W. E. (1979): Gender roles and delinquency. *Social Forces* 58(1):162-175.
- Silvestri, M. & Crowther-Dowey, C. (2008): *Gender & crime*. London, Sage Publications.
- Skogan, W. G. & Maxfield, M. G. (1981): *Coping with crime: Individual and neighborhood reactions*. Beverly Hills, CA, Sage.
- Smith, W. R. & Torstensson, M. (1997): Gender differences in risk perception and neutralizing fear of crime: Toward resolving the paradoxes. *British Journal of Criminology* 37(4):608-634.
- Steffensmeier, D. & Allan, E. (1996): Gender and crime: Toward a gendered theory of female offending. *Annual Review of Sociology* 22:459-487.
- Warr, M. (2000): Fear of crime in the United States: Avenues for research and policy. *Journal of Criminal Justice* 4:451-483.

Wilcox, P., May, D. C. & Roberts, S. D. (2006): Student weapon possession and the “fear and victimization hypothesis:” Unraveling the temporal order. *Justice Quarterly* 23(4):502-529.

Williams, S., Seed J. & Mwau, A. (1998): *The Oxfam gender training manual*. Oxfam UK and Ireland.

Wyant, B. R. (2008): Multilevel impacts of perceived incivilities and perceptions of crime risk on fear of crime: Isolating endogenous impacts. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 45(1):39-64.