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# Improving Perceived Safety for Public Health through Sustainable Development

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## Abstract

Evaluating the contribution of perceived safety for improving quality of life and community health is crucial. Planners and designers realize the importance of improvement in wellbeing of the society that promotes public health. Public health applications aim to extend healthy and safer environments to cover quality of life to achieve sustainable development. In this study, the effect of fear of crime on the elderly's lifestyle has been investigated for reconsidering age differences in perceived safety and security. To do that, systematic observations and face-to-face survey conducted to analyze public health and safety issues for creating sustainable cities and communities.

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## 1. Introduction

In urban environments people experience feelings of insecurity in different formats that affects them at any stage of their lives. This usually makes it different from actual crime, that can be concentrated on particular areas and fear of crime can have a devastating effect on quality of life. In other words, public insecurities about crime are widely assumed to destroy individual well-being and community connections. Perceived safety in public areas constitutes as much a problem as crime itself and it may differ significantly of members of the society depending on gender, age, disability etc. Fear of crime is getting one of the most serious problems of today's cities and perceptions of crime do not necessarily reflect its realities.

Fear of crime and feelings of insecurity in public areas create a barrier to participation in public life and reduce the livability of the city. The fear of crime and feelings of insecurity keeps people off the public places and activities that limit people to access to opportunities and facilities in their public environment. In other words, it creates a

barrier for participating public life and mostly changes the forms of public spaces. Therefore, it reduces the livability and sustainability of the city.

In this context, the crucial question is how can we deal with the problem of perceptions of crime? Considering the international literature, feelings of insecurity can be reduced by a better design and maintenance of the built environment as well as public and personal safety tools. It is obvious that, level of the fear of crime is unequally distributed considering the varied user profiles and places of cities. It is also believed that fear of crime can be reduced by a better design and maintenance of the built environment as well as public and personal safety tools. It is obvious that, level of the fear of crime is unequally distributed considering the varied user profiles and places of cities. For instance; elder people and people with disabilities are more vulnerable to crime than the others. Therefore, they are more fearful in public spaces and they often limit their activities in order to protect themselves from any types of crime or fear of crime. Additionally, fear of crime also limits people's behavior to access to opportunities and facilities in their public environment. Many crime-based researches suggest that fear of crime often affects people more than the actual risk to their safety. Particularly, perceptions of crime and safety influence elder people to choose how to interact with spaces, places and other people. When people perceive that an environment is unsafe their behavior is likely to modify in a way that reflects these perceptions. For instance, they might use the environment at specific times of the day/night, not using the environment at all. For some specific groups whose fear of crime is higher than others are more vulnerable to crime than others like women or elder people and this situation also reflects to their behaviors. Importantly, such modifications in behavior occur even when perceived fears are not supported by actual crime statistics.

Considering the national literature, most of the researches on crime and health studies focus on the direct health impacts suffered by victims of crime in Turkey. However, fear of crime is the crucial indirect effects of crime and its harms on communities may also have important impacts on wellbeing, particularly for specific groups of people who are more vulnerable to crime or fear of crime, such as; elderly or people with disabilities. In this context, the effects of fear of crime on the elderly's lifestyle and settlement preferences investigated through systematic observations in two different homes for the elderly (nursing homes) and a survey conducted to analyze public health and safety issues in order to find out the reasons of their lifestyle choices and preferences.

## **2. Improving Perceived Safety in Public Areas**

Considering the previous studies, a variety of environmental and social features have been correlated with fear of crime and perceived safety and characteristics that contribute to feelings of insecurity do not always match those that contribute to crime. Varieties of environmental and social features have been correlated with fear of crime and people may have an exaggerated perception of the level of crime in specific areas (Pyle 1980). In addition, fear of crime is influenced by a variety of factors including the actual crime rate, the demographic and psychological profile of the individual, and the physical and social characteristics of the environment (Ito,1993; Deniz&Ozcan, 2014). For some cases, fear of crime is not necessarily related to actual victimization, and crime affects more than its direct victims. Feelings of personal safety may be more closely correlated with individual demographics as well.

Victimization risks are also linked to lifestyle and routine activities. People when they age and feel more vulnerable to crime, they do change their lifestyle and activities that significantly affect their quality of life and thus reduce public health issues. As stated above, public safety and security are essential for sustainable communities including well-designed, attractive and secure environments to live that improve the quality of life. According to Zelinka and Dean (2001), sustainable communities have to meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents. They include safe, well-planned places and should offer equality of opportunities for all to contribute to a high quality of life. Sustainable communities should be fair with a shared community activities, offering a sense of belonging, low levels of crime and fear of crime. In this case, designers can prevent a place being targeted by manipulating opportunities via design and planning details (Clarke, 1999).

Environmentally sensitive design is essential by providing places for people that enable a lifestyle that minimizes negative environmental impact and create safer neighborhoods through well designed and built environment by helping to improve quality of life for each member of the society (Blöbaum&Hunecke,2005). Sustainable communities should also offer a sense of place by user-friendly public spaces with its design and layout that

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