



FEAR OF CRIME AND ITS EFFECTS ON OLDER PEOPLE: COMPARING SIX COUNTRIES.

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Research about older people from the UK and other high income countries shows that fear of crime is often significantly associated with low quality of life, limited mobility and poor health status. There is no systematic research comparing fear of crime and its potential effects across low and middle income countries. This brief presents newly available data from a World Health Organisation survey of older people's health and wellbeing in six countries.

Key findings:

- *There are large national variations in rates of fear of crime*
- *Older women and frail older people are most susceptible to fear of crime*
- *Fear of crime is associated with reduced social networking outside the home*
- *Fear of crime is associated with depression, poor self-reported health and low quality of life*

WHICH OLDER PEOPLE ARE MOST AFRAID OF CRIME?

Figure 1 shows large variations in reported fear of crime: 49% of older people in South Africa felt unsafe alone at home, compared to only 3% in China. Older women and poor older people are consistently more afraid of crime than older men and richer people. Figure 2 shows that fear of crime among older people is also associated with frailty.

Box 1. The WHO Survey of Global Ageing and Adult Health (SAGE)

SAGE is a collection of nationally representative household surveys for people aged 50 and over in China, Ghana, India, Mexico, South Africa and the Russian Federation. These surveys were conducted between 2008 and 2010, and include 35,125 people. More information about the SAGE survey is available at www.who.int/healthinfo/systems/sage.

This policy brief mainly draws on two items in the questionnaire:

- i. In general, how safe from crime and violence do you feel when you are alone at home? (**home fear**)
- ii. How safe do you feel when walking down your street alone after dark? (**street fear**)

Figure 1: Fear of crime among people aged 50 and over.

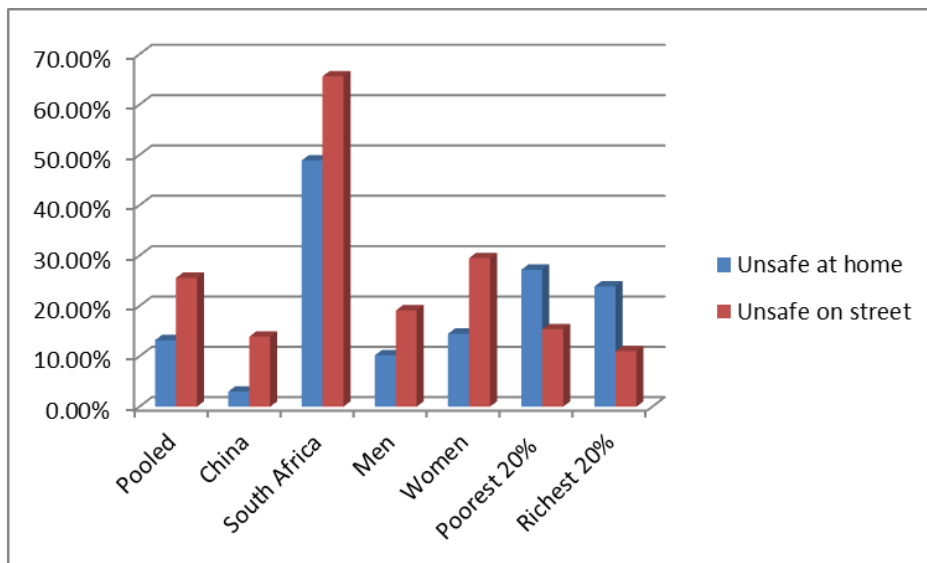
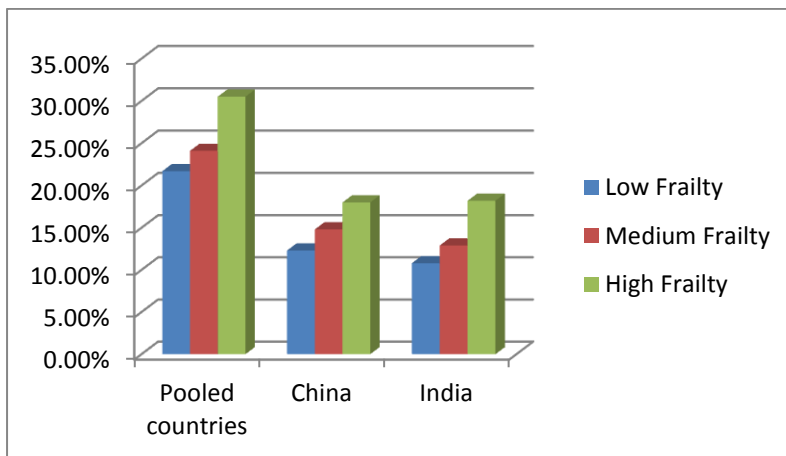


Figure 2: Fear of street crime in relation to frailty index.



HOW DOES FEAR OF CRIME AFFECT OLDER PEOPLE’S LIVES?

The SAGE data show fear of crime restricts older people’s mobility and social capital. For example, older people who reported street fear went out of the home less frequently to visit friends and relatives. This effect was still significant when controlling for other factors such as physical mobility (Table 1).

Fear of crime was also consistently associated with a wide range of poor health and quality of life outcomes in the SAGE countries. For example, older people identified as depressed according to International Classification of Disease criteria were more likely to report home fear (19.2%) than those who were not (12.7%). In India, only 16.4% of older people reporting home fear said their health was satisfactory or better, compared to 29.2% of those who did not.

Table 1. Frequency of leaving house for social events, visiting friends or relatives (multivariate associations).

Variables	China	South Africa	All SAGE countries
Street fear (slightly/unsafe vs safe)	+	+	+
Rural vs urban	-		-
Physical mobility (some versus none)	+	+	+
Female vs male	-		+

+ = positive association (based on odds ratios, 95% confidence interval)

- = negative association

blank = no association

It is difficult to establish whether fear of crime is a cause of poor health and low quality of life, or whether they are linked through more complex two-way relationships. For example, fear of crime may increase the risk of depression, but depression itself may heighten susceptibility to fear. It is difficult to separate these effects with the available data, although ongoing multivariate analysis indicates that fear of crime contributes to poor health in some countries.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Policy and research on older people in low and middle income countries are understandably focussed on providing pensions and basic health services. Compared to countries like the UK, little attention has been paid to issues such as crime and security. In countries such as South Africa and Mexico, fear of crime has a large effect on older people's lives, particularly among older women and the poor. There is an evident need for national and international organisations to address the causes of national variations, determining factors, consequences and potential interventions.

This policy brief taken from a wider study of older people's health and wellbeing funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council. Further information is available from <http://www.uea.ac.uk/international-development/research/research-themes/life-course-migration-and-wellbeing/research-projects/pensions-health-and-wellbeing-of-older-people-in-low-and-middle-income-countries>.

