

# Chapter 7

## Understanding Women's Fear of Crime: The Role of Intimate Partner Violence

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### ABSTRACT

*In recent decades, research on the fear of crime has significantly expanded within the fields of criminology and victimology. Similarly, studies on gender-based violence have also increased, particularly concerning domestic violence and intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetrated against women. Criminological evidence has consistently shown that women report high levels of fear of crime, despite having a lower risk of becoming victims of common (or street) crimes. The disparity between women's fear and risk has given rise to what is known as the "fear-victimization paradox," and several theories have been proposed over time to explain this paradox. However, an apparent dichotomy between public and private spaces still influences empirical evidence, and researchers have often overlooked the effects of domestic violence and IPV on women's fear of crime. This theoretical chapter aims to shed light on a better understanding of this fear-victimization paradox. It seeks to provide an integrated approach to the concepts of women's fear of crime and IPV. Moreover, it will delve into the potential repercussions of this type of victimization and fear on women's quality of life and daily routines, thereby illuminating promising avenues for future research in this crucial area.*

### INTRODUCTION

Recent data highlights a troubling truth: women experiencing intimate partner violence often have nowhere safe to turn (UNFPA, 2023). Their closest relationship,

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meant to be a haven of safety and comfort, can instead become a frightening and threatening place. For these women, home, which should offer protection and care, becomes a dangerous space where their safety and well-being are at risk.

When the conventional notion of safety is inverted in the lived experiences of women victimized by their intimate partners, spaces intended for safety become arenas for violence. This violence extends beyond sporadic encounters in public domains; instead, it infiltrates intimate relationships and personal spaces, intensifying the feelings of threat and fear experienced by these women. (Stanko, 1995).

Taking this into consideration, when addressing women's fear, it's imperative to acknowledge the actual scale of victimization they face within and beyond their household boundaries. This nuanced understanding is vital to avoid dismissing women's fears as unfounded or exaggerated. Instead, it underscores the persistent feeling of insecurity arising from vulnerability to gender-based violence encountered in both private and public spheres, with a specific focus on cases of domestic and intimate partner violence.

Despite this reality, research in the field of fear of crime and its correlates has consistently overlooked the impact of these forms of violence on women's fear of crime. Consequently, studies linking these two subjects are scarce. This can be attributed in part to the continued conceptualization and examination of the fear of crime exclusively as a response or reaction to the public environment (street crime). Furthermore, enduring misconceptions surrounding the privacy of violence occurring behind closed doors further contribute to this research gap.

Therefore, in this chapter, we aim to provide a deeper understanding regarding the scale and repercussions of the violence to which women are exposed, specifically domestic violence and intimate partner violence, intending to explore their impact on the fear of crime experienced and reported by these women.

## **1. Gender-based violence against women: The reality behind closed doors**

*(...) the phrase "behind closed doors" is intended to capture that kind of criminal behaviour that is likely to be recognized as such, by the victim in particular, and as a consequence less likely to come to the attention of the criminal justice system (Walklate, 2006, pp. 65)*

Gender-based violence stands as one of the prevailing forms of violence globally (Morrison & Orlando, 2004), disproportionately impacting women and girls within societies. These types of violence fundamentally violate the human rights of women and girls, presenting themselves in diverse manifestations. Among the most prevalent are domestic violence, namely intimate partner violence (IPV) in its

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