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Les études qualitatives sur la peur du crime : Quelle est la situation? Une recension épistémologique, méthodologique et conceptuelle

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Qualitative studies on fear of crime: What is the situation? An epistemological, methodological, and conceptual review

Abstract

The review of scientific papers on fear of crime reveals that research has come up with a good number of quantitative studies. For certain authors, however, the studies based on quantitative approach entail a number of epistemological and methodological limitations. New knowledge based on qualitative studies in research on fear of crime could modify the configuration of this field of studies. This paper offers a systematic review of fear of crime articles based on qualitative approach. We present a descriptive analysis of 18 scientific articles according to three aspects: conceptual, methodological and epistemological. We also propose some critical observations on the reviewed articles and on research on fear of crime in general.

Key words : Insecurity; Fear of crime; Qualitative Research; Review; Criminology; Crime

Résumé

Les recensions des travaux scientifiques sur la peur du crime mettent en évidence que la recherche est déployée à partir de nombreux devis quantitatifs. Les études reposant sur un devis quantitatif comportent toutefois certaines limites épistémologiques et méthodologiques. La contribution de nouvelles connaissances produites à partir d'études reposant sur un devis qualitatif dans la recherche pourrait modifier la configuration du champ d'études sur la peur du crime. Cet article présente une recension systématique des articles scientifiques reposant sur des devis qualitatifs traitant de la peur du crime. Nos résultats portent sur une analyse descriptive de 18 articles scientifiques selon trois dimensions: conceptuelle, méthodologique et épistémologique. Quelques constats critiques sur les articles recensés et sur la recherche sur la peur du crime en général sont amenés en conclusion.

Mots-clés : *Insécurité; Peur du crime; Recherche qualitative; Recension; Criminologie; Crime*

Introduction

Over the last fifty years, several researchers have examined closely and attempted to explain fear of crime. This work has resulted in the publication of more than 800 articles (Ditton & Farrall, 2000). What is noteworthy in this vast scientific corpus? Many have tried, successfully, to answer this question (see, among others, the review by C. Hale, 1996). The literature reviews that we examined reveal that research on the fear of crime has mostly been done based on quantitative methods. These quantitative studies have provided numerous answers to the question "What is fear of crime?" and have permitted to elucidate the methodological and conceptual field around fear of crime. The results of a multitude of research projects have, therefore, allowed the study of fear of crime to distance itself from the simple methodological strategy that consists of using only one question, that is "How safe do you feel or would you feel being out (or walking) alone in your neighbourhood at night?". The methodological and conceptual refinement in contemporary studies favours the use of three components of observation and analysis to define the subject, that is, the emotional, cognitive and behavioural elements in fear of crime or insecurity (these two concepts being often considered as synonymous or equivalent) (Rader, 2004; Williams, McShane, & Akers, 2000). More precisely, the emotional component refers particularly to fear or anger (Farral, 2004). The cognitive component is concerned with the situational evaluation of the risk of being a victim of a criminal act (Rader 2004). Finally, the behavioural component corresponds to how an individual reacts to fear of crime (Sacco & Nakhaie, 2001).

However, studies based on quantitative research have a number of epistemological and methodological limitations (Farrall, Bannister, Ditton, & Gilchrist, 1997; Fattah, 1993). It would seem that too much emphasis is put on questionnaire-based statistical enquiries

(Hale, 1996). More recently, Farrall (2004, p. 167) questions the use of statistical investigations to interpret fear of crime: "This is not to suggest that the fear of crime is a "poor idea", but rather that it is unrepresentable (or at least, not well representable) given current quantitative/survey approaches to the topic". These assessments of the methodology emerged from the following observation: The use of quantitative methods has not helped in the understanding of the particularities and the circumstances surrounding fear of crime as it is experienced by individuals (Pain, 2000).

If systematically using one type of quantitative method for research purposes is questionable, what is the solution? The knowledge acquired through statistical inquiries "[...] will be enriched rather than impoverished by the deeper insights from alternative approaches" (Hale, 1996, p. 132), perhaps by using other methods to gather data, such as ethnographic studies, life stories, individual and group interviews. We perceive that the alternative methods favoured by Hale (1996) are essentially qualitative. The contribution of new knowledge obtained by using qualitative methods in research on fear of crime could be to give a whole new configuration to this field of study. However, before getting into a discussion about how research based on qualitative methods could be a possible solution to existing problems, it is important to first assess the current situation.

Having noticed that no systematic review has been done on qualitative research in the field of fear of crime, we undertook to do one. This process not only allows us to describe what has been done in the past, but it also allows identifying the limitations and the strengths of qualitative research.

Our systematic review of the qualitative studies on fear of crime is divided into three parts. In the first part, we will outline the methodology of our review. Then,

we will give the results obtained according to three aspects of specific analyses: conceptual, methodological and epistemological. Finally, in the light of the elements that emerge from our analysis, we will discuss their possible repercussions on the research on fear of crime.

Methods

Search Strategy

Using the keywords *fear of crime* and *qualitative*, we searched through the databases included in the Academic Search Complete [MEDLINE; PsycInfo; SocINDEX; Web of Science]. We included all the articles found up to October 2008. We completed our work by consulting the references of all included papers.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

We included only scientific articles based on primary research on fear of crime using a qualitative or mixed methodology. We excluded books, book chapters, governmental reports, communication papers, meeting abstracts, dissertations and book reviews.

Analysis

Our analysis method is based on three types of descriptive analyses. Firstly, we looked at the existing definitions of fear of crime, taking into account both the explicit - i.e. clearly stipulated – and implicit meanings. Moreover, we paid special attention to each of the conceptual components developed by Rader (2004) that is, the emotional, cognitive and behavioural aspects. Secondly, we reviewed the principal methodological characteristics in selected papers of our corpus, giving special attention to the sampling and the methods of observation and analysis. Thirdly, we scrutinized the epistemological approach and the underlying theoretical framework of the different studies.

Results

We identified 64 references in data bases. Only 15 of these papers met the criteria for inclusion. Of those 15 papers, three were not available - that is to say we were unable to obtain copies of the articles in the databases and library services that we visited. We added six studies that we had previously collected by other means and which met the inclusion criteria. In all, this systematic review is based on 18 scientific papers. Table 1 exposes a list of all the studies and describes the data as related to three aspects: conceptual, methodological and epistemological.

General Observations

The oldest paper in this group is an article by Pain dating back to 1995 based on the results of a study on the fear of crime in elderly women that uses a mixed method. The most recent paper was written by K. A. Snedker (2006). It is based solely on a qualitative research and deals with the social impact of gender on fear of crime.

Then, when we classified the papers according to their date of publication, we observed that the great majority was published before 2005 (79%). More precisely, there were seven articles published between 1995 and 1999, eight from 2000 to 2004 and only three since 2005. Is this not an indication that there have been fewer publications on fear of crime in the last few years? Could the cause of this decrease be that there have been fewer qualitative studies in recent years? If so, it is essential to elucidate the causes of the decrease, or lack of growth, in the number of publications. If not, we should, nonetheless, question why there are so few published papers resulting from qualitative studies on the fear of crime.

Tulloch (2000, 2003; Lupton & Tulloch, 1999) and Pain (1995, 1997, 2000) stand out among their colleagues with the number of research papers based on data

from qualitative methods. For their part, Ditton, Farrall, Gilchrist and Bannister have published three articles (Farrall et al., 1997; Gilchrist, Bannister, Ditton & Farrall, 1998; Ditton, Chadee, Farrall, Gilchrist & Bannister, 2004) using data from a mixed method on the fear of crime.

Finally, a large proportion of the reviewed studies – nearly half - were done in the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Scotland). Taking into account the fact that many of these papers are based on data from the same study, the evaluated proportion is affected somewhat. Two other countries, namely the United States with four studies and Australia with three studies are noticeable in our literature review. The other countries mentioned are South Africa, Brazil and Finland. Thus, interestingly, nearly 85% of the reviewed papers come from Anglo-Saxon countries.

Conceptual Aspect

None of the reviewed papers provided an explicit definition for fear of crime. This isn't really astonishing given that the aim of qualitative study is often, like Pain (1997) mentioned, to explore "[...] the meaning of crime to respondents, the nature of their reactions, and how their concerns are situated in space and time" (p. 119). Although the absence of a conceptual definition has often been brought up as one of the principal limitations in the study of the phenomenon (Fattah, 1993; Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; Rader, 2004; Yin, 1980), but throughout our corpus, the approach favoured by the studies might excluded all attempts of conceptualization; that is to say, that they prefer participants' representations rather than those of the researchers. It is then surprising that many researchers have heretofore emphasized that qualitative studies could be important in defining the concept of fear of crime (Farrall, 2004; Hale, 1996).

It is, nevertheless, necessary to nuance this observation because the articles

do contain some implicit definitions of fear of crime, that is, a conceptually latent or potential meaning that is not formally expressed. In fact, we identified 12 studies that set down or report an implicit definition of fear of crime. Many characteristics emerge from the reviewed implicit definitions. Most definitions put emphasis on the temporal, environmental or dynamic nature of the phenomenon. Moreover, many papers are focusing on the biographical aspect of fear of crime, that is, how the phenomenon is embedded into the life story of individuals is highlighted in some implicit definitions.

In our review, we paid attention to the three conceptual components taken up and elaborated by Rader (2004), that is, the emotional, cognitive and behavioural aspects, in order to observe the scope of a widespread conceptualization of the fear of crime in research. Thus, we notice that two studies deal with only one of these components (Lane, 2002; Madriz, 1997), one study addresses two of the components (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997), whereas four of the works propose a conceptualization of fear of crime that includes all three of the components (Pain, 1997; Tulloch, 2000; Snedker, 2006; Whitley & Prince, 2005). The cognitive component is the most frequently addressed in the implicit definitions, followed by the emotional and behavioural components.

Methodological Aspect

Our corpus includes ten studies using an exclusively qualitative research, while eight of the others are mixed methods that use both a qualitative and a quantitative method. It would be erroneous to conclude that our analysis addresses eighteen distinct studies because often, many papers result from the same study. This is the case for the articles published by Ditton et al. (2004), Farrall et al. (1997) and Gilchrist et al. (1998) and the publications of Koskela and Pain (2000) and Pain (1995). That being

said, our corpus includes ten qualitative and five mixed studies, for a total of 15 studies.

The reviewed articles do not describe very precisely the characteristics of the sampling strategies (i.e. the size of the sampling, the age, sex and background of the subjects). In fact, only four articles describe extensively the characteristics of their samplings (Cozens, Hiller, & Prescott, 2002; Hollway & Jefferson, 1997; Moulton, 1996; Pain, 1997); the others give only fragmented information. The size of samplings varies greatly from one study to the next, going from two subjects in some to more than 100 in others. The age of the target population or the samplings is given in only four of the papers (Cozens et al., 2002; Eckert, 2004; Moulton, 1996; Pain, 1997). Four of the publications do not mention the gender of the subjects (Ditton et al., 2004; Eckert, 2004; Farrall et al., 1997; Whitley & Prince, 2005). Only six publications (one third) of our corpus mention what types of samplings were used. Among them, there were five snowball samplings (Allen, 2002; Eckert, 2004; Lane, 2002; Madriz, 1997; Snedker, 2006), two convenience samplings (Madriz, 1997; Snedker, 2006) and one purposeful random sampling (Pain, 1997).

We find in all the articles reviewed that individual interviews were used as the principal method for collecting data. Four of the articles (Madriz, 1997; Tulloch, 2000, 2003; Whitley & Prince, 2005) indicate having used the focus groups alongside the interviews, one article (Eckert, 2004), the life story, and one article (Whitley & Prince, 2005), participant observation.

The method of analysis is specified in 13 of the 18 articles of our corpus. Thematic analysis is mentioned the most often in six articles (Allen, 2002; Madriz, 1997; Moulton, 1996; Tulloch, 2000; Whitley & Prince, 2005; Snedker, 2006). Besides the thematic analysis, there is comparative analysis in three articles (Ditton et al., 2004; Farrall et al., 1997; Gilchrist et al., 1998),

case analysis in two articles (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997; Lupton & Tulloch, 1999), an interpretive analysis in one article (Eckert, 2004), and a poststructuralist/conversational analysis in one article (Tulloch, 2003).

Closer examination of our corpus revealed an important methodological shortcoming; that is, the lack of clear and detailed information on the processes of sampling, observation and analysis. This result fuels the debate on the exactness of qualitative research. Is a methodological and rigorous approach being sacrificed in the name of enthusiasm and commitment (Daly & Lumley, 2007)?

Epistemological Aspect

The theoretical approach used is summarily identified in seven articles (Cozens et al., 2002; Hollway & Jefferson, 1997; Lane, 2002; Lupton & Tulloch, 1999; Madriz, 1997; Pain, 1995; Whitley & Prince, 2005). This number climbed to 11 articles when we considered implicit theoretical approaches, that is, approaches that are not clearly or directly detailed (Allen, 2002; Eckert, 2004; Koskela & Pain, 2000; Pain, 1997). These 11 articles propose nine different theoretical backgrounds. The feminist perspective appears the most frequently in our corpus, having been used in four articles (Koskela & Pain, 2000; Madriz, 1997; Pain, 1995, 1997). Then, we observed a series of approaches, all different from one survey to the other. Thus, to name only a few, Hollway and Jefferson (1997) use a psychodynamic approach, Pain (1997) borrows from the economic policy theory and Eckert (2004) uses a narrative approach. All in all, neither the qualitative nor the mixed methods studies detail the theoretical approach considered in the analysis of fear of crime.

We analysed the epistemological approaches of the reviewed articles according to the typology used by Guba (1990): postpositivist, critical and constructionist. According to the postpositivist approach, reality is

observable, but it is only partially perceivable and must necessarily be measured with the greatest possible number of methods. The critical approach, on the other hand, considers that reality is crossed with social values and ideologies, which is why it is necessary that researchers take into account the sociopolitical issues to observe it. Finally, the constructionist approach acknowledges the individual's interpretation of reality, whence the emphasis given to the meaning. Appearing in eight of the articles in our corpus, the postpositivist approach is predominant (Cozens et al., 2002; Ditton et al., 2004; Farrall et al., 1997; Gilchrist et al., 1998; Snedker, 2006; Tulloch, 2000, 2003; Whitley & Prince, 2005.) We observed the critical and constructionist approaches in six (Allen, 2002; Hollway & Jefferson, 1997; Koskela & Pain, 2000; Madriz, 1997; Pain, 1995, 1997) and four (Eckert, 2004; Lane, 2002; Lupton & Tulloch, 1999; Moulton, 1996) articles respectively. What can we deduce from these results? Firstly, that the postpositive approach is predominant in the reviewed articles. This approach is generally associated more with quantitative than with a qualitative methodology. However, when we looked more closely, we found that six of the eight articles are based on a mixed methods approach. Secondly, among the six articles that rely on a critical approach, four have a feminist theoretical perspective. The two remaining articles use a psychodynamic theoretical perspective in one (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997) and a critical race perspective (Allen, 2002) in the other.

Discussion

With the object of expounding our systematic review of the qualitative works dealing with the fear of crime, we propose a few critical thoughts on the reviewed articles and on research in general.

General Considerations

We reviewed 18 articles in which qualitative methodology was central in the

process of research on fear of crime. Eighteen articles is very little if we take into account the 800 scientific papers identified by Ditton and Farrall (2000). It is also very little if we consider that more than 10 years ago, Hale (1996) incited researchers to include a greater amount of qualitative data in their studies. In our review, we had hoped to observe an increase in qualitative studies as the years went by, but instead, there seems to be a tendency towards an upper limit, even a slight reduction in the number of scientific papers published. This tendency in the research on fear of crime is the opposite of what can be observed in the other fields of research in contemporary criminology. If, according to Meuser and Lösscher (2002), qualitative research is becoming more and more important in the science of criminology, the fact is that papers published on the qualitative study of crime are few.

It is hard to explain why. Is the lack of funding for qualitative studies on fear of crime at the root of the problem? Or is it that the qualitative studies on fear of crime have trouble being published by scientific journals? Is it possible that the results linked to the qualitative studies are not relevant to the research on fear of crime? A positive answer to this last question seems improbable if we consider the numerous positive commentaries that favour qualitative studies on fear of crime (Allen, 2002; Farrall et al., 1997; Fattah, 1993; Fattah & Sacco, 1989; Hale, 1996). Including qualitative research gives the possibility to address this complexity by putting the emphasis on subjectivity. In summary, at this point, the validity of using qualitative methods in research on the fear of crime is not being challenged.

Conceptual Considerations

We have come up with two principal observations when analysing the data concerning the conceptualization of fear of crime. Firstly, none of the reviewed articles gives a clear definition of fear of crime.

However, we found only four studies that were inspired by constructionism. The greatest number of the reviewed articles used a postpositivist approach for the observation and analysis of fear of crime. This epistemological approach compels the researcher to consider reality as an observable object. The observation that there is a lack of explicit conceptual detail is therefore akin to the widespread conclusion about the research on fear of crime, that is, that not much effort has been put into the conceptualization in this field of study (Farrall et al., 1997; Ferraro, 1995; Hollway & Jefferson, 1997). On the other hand, it would be premature to say that research on fear of crime is completely devoid of conceptualization. As mentioned previously, the conceptualization taken up by Rader (2004) consists of emotional, cognitive and behavioural elements that are regrouped under one principal concept, that is, the threat inherent to victimization. This type of conceptualization is of postpositivist inspiration because the phenomenon is objectified by the scientific outlook.

Secondly, the implicit definitions in the corpus reviewed compel us to consider fear of crime according to another epistemological approach that puts forth, among others, the dynamic nature of the phenomenon. This particularity of considering the nature of fear of crime from the dynamic perspective seems to pose certain difficulties in postpositivist research when it comes the time to detail the phenomenon conceptually (Farrall, 2004; Koskela & Pain, 2000; Pain, 2000). As Farrall pointed out (2004, p. 166): “[...] the problems we have encountered with the measurement of the fear of crime [...] are the result of asking quantitative tools to do tasks that they are ill equipped to do”. As a matter of fact, some of the studies reviewed show that fear of crime is primarily a situational and experiential phenomenon (Koskela & Pain, 2000), in that it is part of the personal events in an individual’s life course. Thus, the reason why researchers have trouble understanding the concept of

fear of crime could be due to the nature of the phenomenon. According to Skogan (1993, p. 131), “[...] the apparent heterogeneity of the meaning simply reflects the facts that fear of crime is a general concept. It is suited for everyday conversation [...], but the concept needs to be refined for research purposes”. Conceptualization requires some simplification of the phenomenon, some flexibility, so that it is possible to not only work on the object, but also, from the object.

Methodological Considerations

We have drawn three methodological observations from our review. Firstly, there is a shortage of description and detail in the description of methodological strategies; in other words, the information is more often than not partial, even lacking, in the reviewed articles. For example, we have very little information concerning the nature of the samplings, that is, the general characteristics of the participants. Furthermore, the information concerning data collection is sparse, primarily with regards to the process itself. Does this lack of information on the methodological strategies used not make the qualitative research appear to lack rigor (Dahlberg, 2006)? In fact, this observation opens the door to this question: Is there a lack of precision in the reviewed papers or is there lack of methodological rigor in the realization of the qualitative studies? We can *a priori*, point to several consequences of the methodological weaknesses in the reviewed articles. First, with such a lack of information, we cannot systematically compare the studies. Then, the lack of information weakens the scientific impact of the qualitative results, especially as it pertains to their validity. Hale (1996) has already identified this limitation, where the validation of the results of qualitative studies can be a cause for questioning. Finally, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) remind us, research done using a qualitative approach has had to constantly defend its legitimacy

to the scientific community. In fact, research in criminology does not escape this tendency. Glesthorne (2006, p. 275) insists that certain criminologists still consider qualitative research as being “[...] a purely subjective enterprise which lacks rigour”. Consequently, the absence of relative methodological information could diminish scientific legitimacy. Could this last fact explain, at least partially, why the publication of research papers on the qualitative study of fear of crime has not increased significantly since 2005?

Secondly, we observed methodological homogeneity among the reviewed studies, especially in the area of samplings. Those studies that mention the kind of sampling used generally report using snowball sampling (Patton, 2002). Would it not be advantageous to diversify the methods of sampling in the research on fear of crime? For instance, by using a maximum variation sampling, which would attempt to obtain a varied sampling and central themes among the participants in order to detect both heterogeneity in the fear of crime (i.e. individual variability) and the homogeneity of significant experiences (Patton, 2002). In order to attain the full potential of qualitative methods is it not preferable to elaborate a number of research strategies? In fact, it is through a diversity of qualitative methodologies and the comparison of the results that we will have the possibility to bring out and highlight the principal nuances surrounding fear of crime.

Thirdly, in the light of the methodological strategies used in the studies analysed, we noticed that there is no outstanding complexity in the qualitative research on fear of crime. In fact, according to the information given by the authors throughout the papers, the use of a snowball sampling is a matter of convenience. However, this type of sampling is less than desirable in research because of its lack of credibility and poorest rationale (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, all the studies rely on individual interviews for data collection. This

kind of observation strategy, though widespread, is often described summarily (Fontana & Frey, 2005), in that the description of the process surrounding the interviews is often omitted (Dahlberg, 2006). The penury of details concerning the interviews mentioned in the reviewed papers leads us to conclude that the validity and accuracy of the results are difficult to verify and consequently, can generally be challenged. The validity of qualitative research can, nevertheless, be verified through various scientific processes; among others, the triangulation of the observations, the depth and exhaustive nature of the social processes observed and the reflexivity of the researcher in his/her relationship with research subjects (Geertz, 1973; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In summary, the results of our analysis allow us to state that qualitative research in the field of fear of crime is methodologically imprecise and lacking detail. Furthermore, could it be that the homogeneity of the strategies and the weak methodological complexities are an indication of the embryonic level in the development of qualitative research on the fear of crime? Also, the review of our corpus allows us to establish where this research stands and affirm that it must rigorously invest the use of qualitative studies.

Epistemological Considerations

In the light of the results that emerge from the epistemological dimension of our review, we note that a good number of the studies adopted a postpositivist approach. We are surprised by this finding because in the epistemological tradition of qualitative research, there are very few references to this kind of approach. In fact, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 10), “Qualitative research is many things to many people. Its essence is twofold: a commitment to some version of the naturalistic, interpretive approach to its subject matter and an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of postpositivism”. Why

then, are there so many qualitative studies that adopt a postpositivist approach in the research on fear of crime?

We believe that one answer lies within the general nature of research on fear of crime, in that it is primarily conducted according to quantitative approach (Farral, 2004). Thus, we think that the “epistemological culture” relating to qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) has not completely penetrated the field of research on fear of crime. The use of qualitative approach may be manifest in research, but the epistemic qualitative elaboration seems to be little used. For example, from the methodological point of view, qualitative research appears to be limited. In other words, the use of a research approach where the observation and analysis strategies are principally qualitative does not ensure that the work will be conducted according to critical or constructionist epistemological approaches.

In summary, it is necessary for research on fear of crime to consider the use of the various possible epistemological approaches instead of concentrating on qualitative methodological approaches. On the other hand, we must keep in mind that the study of fear of crime could make a clean sweep of previously acquired knowledge (Hale, 1996). It is preferable for research on fear of crime to combine, even to make complementary, the various epistemological approaches. For example, could research on fear of crime not rely on the elaboration of mixed methods that combine various complementary epistemological approaches?

Conclusion

Is it necessary to recall that the study of fear of crime relies on fifty years of existence? On the one hand, half a century of efforts put into this research has given a vast empirical corpus largely dominated by results obtained from research conducted according to quantitative approach.

However, on the other hand, the wealth of knowledge acquired is less than obvious when fear of crime is considered from a conceptual and theoretical point of view (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997; Pain, 2000).

From another standpoint, in the past ten years, the knowledge acquired from research conducted according to qualitative approach has enriched the empirical corpus, but has also fuelled the theoretical and conceptual debates. Our review, nevertheless, points to the fact that much effort has been made to integrate a larger number of qualitative studies into the culture of research on fear of crime.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, we feel that we can propose a few possible paths for research on fear of crime. Firstly, it is necessary to give more importance to the realization and the publication of qualitative studies on the fear of crime. One way of giving this perspective the needed attention would be to consider publishing a special edition on the qualitative study of fear of crime in a scientific journal. Then, it is crucial that future studies pay particular attention to documenting the explanation of the process of their qualitative research. This would allow for a better comparison between the qualitative studies and allow the conceptual and theoretical nuances surrounding fear of crime to emerge. Furthermore, this methodological precaution could ensure the general acknowledgement of qualitative research on fear of crime and thus, promote new qualitative studies. Finally, we believe that it is essential to encourage the development of qualitative methods based on epistemological approaches that aren't postpositivist. In fact, our results show that the emphasis on qualitative studies should not only be related to research methodology, but also to the epistemological approach. Thus, the use of mixed methods, where different epistemological approaches meet, could certainly help to better understand fear of crime from a holistic perspective.

In the end, research on fear of crime would appear to have a long way to go before it imposes itself in any significant way in the advancement of the knowledge and the comprehension of the phenomenon. Our critical review of the scientific papers on fear of crime based on qualitative approach refreshes the debate surrounding the conceptual, methodological and epistemological choices in social sciences, especially when dealing with complex problems of vague definition.

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Table 1. Reviews of Qualitative Methods Studies

Study	Conceptual		Methodological			Epistemological	
	Manifest definition ¹	Latent definition ²	Sample	Observational methods	Analysis methods	Theoretical background	Paradigmatic position ³
R. Pain (1995)*	Not stated	Not stated	Quantitative sample of 389 women in Edinburgh (Scotland) Qualitative sample of 45 women	Interviews	Not stated	Feminist theory	Critical theory
H. J. Moulton (1996)	Not stated	Not stated	3 women and 1 man aged 60+ in New York	Semi structural interviews	Thematic analysis	Not stated	Constructionism
S. Farrall, J. Bannister, J. Ditton, and E. Gilchrist (1997)*	Not stated	Not stated	“Random walk” sample of 167 persons in Glasgow (Scotland) Qualitative sample of 64 persons	Semi structural interviews	Comparative analysis	Not stated	Postpositivism
W. Hollway and T. Jefferson (1997)	Not stated	“We are arguing that to understand the growth and impact of a fear of crime discourse, given the many other competing fear/risk discourses currently available, we must theorize the passage of this discourse through individual psyches [...]” (p. 262)	2 middle-aged men	Interviews	Cases studies	Psychodynamic theory	Critical theory
E. I. Madriz (1997)	Not stated	Fear of crime is a cognitive phenomena through perceived risk and personal representation	<i>Snowball</i> and <i>convenience</i> samples of 140 women in New York	Interviews, focus groups	Thematic analysis	Feminist theory	Critical theory
R. Pain (1997)	Not stated	“Fear of crime is a complex synthesis of perceptions and feelings, and it is also dynamic [...] Fear of crime also has a strong temporal dimension [...] fear is also situated in and affected by lifestyles and life histories” (p. 120-121)	<i>Purposeful random</i> samples of 12 women and 30 men aged 65+ in Ashington, Darras Hall, and North Shields (England)	Interviews	Not stated	Feminist and political economy theories**	Critical theory
E. Gilchrist, J. Bannister, J. Ditton, and S. Farrall (1998)*	Not stated	Not stated	Quantitative sample of 167 persons in Glasgow (Scotland) Qualitative sample of 32 women and 32 men	Interviews	Comparative analysis	Not stated	Postpositivism

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D. Lupton and J. Tulloch (1999)	Not stated	“[...] fear of crime does have a material base in people’s experience and so does have an intelligible relationship to their day-to-day lives [...] we also, however, attempted to elicit the situated narratives, myths and meanings within which fear of crime is generated [...]” (p. 515)	1 woman and 1 man in New South Wales (Australia)	Interviews	Case studies	Post-structuralist theory	Constructionism
H. Koskela and R. Pain (2000)*	Not stated	“There is no common agreement on what ‘fear of crime’ is, but a growing awareness that it is not a fixed trait that some people have and some do not [...], but rather ‘transitory and situational’” (p. 271)	Quantitative sample of 389 women in Edinburgh (Scotland) and 666 women in Helsinki (Finland) Qualitative sample of 45 women in Edinburgh and 18 women in Helsinki	Interviews	Not stated	Feminist theory**	Critical theory
M. I. Tulloch (2000)	Not stated	“Their perceived risk and fear of crime also relates to their experiences, direct and indirect, of crime and harassment. However, people not only assess risk; they respond actively by modifying their behaviour to avoid or resist potential threats” (p. 452)	102 women and 46 men in New South Wales (Australia)	Interviews, Focus groups	Thematic analysis	Not stated	Postpositivism
D. B. Allen (2002)	Not stated	Not stated	<i>Snowball</i> samples of 15 white women in Johannesburg (South Africa)	Interviews	Thematic analysis	Critical race theory**	Critical theory
P. Cozens, D. Hillier, and G. Prescott (2002)*	Not stated	Not stated	20 men and 20 women aged 65+ in Cardiff (Wales)	Interviews	Not stated	Defensible space theory	Postpositivism
J. Lane (2002)	Not stated	Fear of crime embed in real and perceived environment	<i>Snowball</i> samples of 40 women and 20 men in Santa Ana (United States)	Peer groups	Not stated	Social disorganisation theory	Constructionism

M. I. Tulloch (2003)*	Not stated	“[...] fear of crime is ‘multidimensional’ and more complexly geographically and temporally constructed than previously recognized” (p. 462)	Quantitative sample of 88 women and 45 men in New South Wales (Australia) Qualitative sample of 64 interviews and 15 focus groups	Interviews, Focus groups	Post-structuralism and conversational analysis	Not stated	Postpositivism
J. Ditton, D. Chadee, S. Farrall, E. Gilchrist, and J. Bannister (2004)*	Not stated	Not stated	Quantitative sample of 167 persons in Glasgow (Scotland) Qualitative sample of 64 persons	Semi structural interviews	Comparative analysis	Not stated	Postpositivism
C. Eckert (2004)	Not stated	“Fear is a social fact which varies according to places and situations” (Our translation, p. 141)	<i>Snowball</i> samples of 33 persons aged 65+ in Porto Alegre (Bresil)	Interviews, life stories	Interpretative analysis	Narrative theory**	Constructionism
R. Whitley and M. Prince (2005)*	Not stated	“We were primarily interested in participants’ cognitive, behavioural and affective response to fear of crime [...]” (p. 1680)	Quantitative sample of 900 persons in London Qualitative sample of 42 persons	Interviews, Focus groups, and participant observation	Thematic analysis	Social psychiatry theory	Postpositivism
K. A. Snedker (2006)	Not stated	“When a person fears that someone else may be the object of crime, existing literature labels it <i>altruistic</i> fear [...]” (p. 167) “[...] <i>vicarious</i> fear does not require that the concern for others be unselfish or devotional, or that it include action on their behalf, but simply indicates the fear that an individual feels for another” (p. 167)	<i>Snowball</i> and <i>convenience</i> samples of 28 women and 24 men in New York	Interviews	Thematic analysis	Not stated	Postpositivism

* Qualitative methods in mixed studies.

** Theoretical background indirectly stated.

¹ Definition of fear of crime clearly stated in paper.

² Definition of fear of crime not explicitly stated.

³ Based on Guba (1990).