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**WHAT MAKES PEOPLE FEEL SAFE? PUBLIC
PERCEPTIONS OF STREET BASED SAFETY.**

A Review of Literature

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Topic: What makes people feel safe? Public perceptions of street-based safety.

Overview

This review of literature was commissioned to examine factors that influence public perceptions of street-based safety, especially at night and investigate possible pragmatic solutions that can be adopted by stakeholders like law enforcement, policy makers, etc. to enhance feelings of safety.

Problem

Feeling unsafe on streets and fear of crime can lead to a sedentary lifestyle, increased carbon footprint, social isolation, reduced business, decreased use of public spaces, and negative perceptions of safety. This can lead to a cycle of fear and crime, straining community relationships.

Solutions

There is a need for a multifaceted approach to address safety concerns, including tackling social, economic, and environmental factors as well as engaging with local communities. On an immediate stakeholder level, practical solutions would involve improved lighting and design, increased monitoring, and enhanced community partnerships.

1. Lighting is essential for feelings of safety, particularly at night. Features of streetlights such as their distribution, illuminance levels, location, frequency, and type are found to make a difference in perceptions of safety. White light with uniform distribution that leaves no blind spots is found to be an optimal solution.

2. CCTV is a means of monitoring public spaces that is viewed by the public as effective in apprehending offenders, deterring offenders, and reducing fear of crime. However, there is a discrepancy between presence of CCTV and perception of safety, so raising awareness about CCTV to the public may help reduce this. Further the use of additional safety measures and live monitoring along with CCTV produce best result.
3. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies can help create public spaces that foster a sense of safety, by designing open spaces that are inclusive, gender sensitive, easy to monitor, with few hiding spots.
4. Community Oriented Policing (COP) and community involvement in policing and safety, as well as reassurance policing, awareness, and intervention programs like Smart serve, Ask for Angela, Street safe, etc. can enhance perceptions of safety while also developing confidence in policing.

Value

Perceptions of safety contribute to personal well-being and community health, it has economic implications, and is a matter of equity and social justice. Understanding and addressing perceptions of safety contributes to quality of life, creating safer, more inclusive, and vibrant public spaces that benefit communities and local businesses.

Further

For more detailed information on factors that influence public perceptions of street-based safety, refer to the comprehensive literature review.

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE FEEL SAFE? PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF STREET-BASED SAFETY.

A Review of Literature

Introduction

Public perceptions of street-based safety vary based on several factors including cultural, social, and personal influences. The common factors that enhance feelings of safety in public spaces include presence of law enforcement or security personnel, lighting, infrastructure, surveillance, social cohesion and community engagement, perceived absence of crime, inclusivity, diversity, as well as personal safety measures (Ceccato, 2013; Fergusson & Mendel, 2007). Public perception of safety is important as it contributes to personal wellbeing and community health, fostering a sense of community pride by encouraging social interaction and promoting neighbourhood cohesion (Hassen & Kaufman, 2016). When people feel safer in their communities, they are more likely to engage in outdoor activities promoting healthy, active lifestyles and an overall sense of security (Committee on Environmental Health, 2009). Additionally, street-based safety has economic implications, as business and commercial areas rely on foot traffic – people are more likely to visit and patronise areas perceived as safe. Marginalised and vulnerable people such as women, children, elderly individuals, minority groups and individuals with disabilities are frequent victims of harassment, assault, and discrimination. Street-based safety is therefore also a matter of equity and social justice (Box et al., 1988; Pain, 2000; Pain & Smith, 2008). Perceptions of street-based safety can thus impact the extent to which these groups feel included, respected, and valued in public spaces. Understanding and addressing perceptions

of safety contributes to creating safer, more inclusive, and vibrant public spaces that benefit everyone in the community (Rishbeth, 2001; Schmidt & Németh, 2010).

If public spaces are perceived as unsafe it can lead to a decrease in their usage, negatively affecting local businesses, community engagement, and overall spirit of the neighbourhood (Whitley & Prince, 2005; Cattel et al., 2008). Furthermore, fear of crime or feeling unsafe on streets deters people from engaging in activities like walking, cycling, or using public transportation, leading to a sedentary lifestyle (Committee on Environmental Health, 2009) which can deteriorate public health and further burden the healthcare system. The increased use of personal vehicles can also contribute to the ever-growing carbon footprint. Social isolation resulting from unwillingness to go out and interact with others can lead to a decline in mental health (Whitley & Prince, 2005). Moreover, reduced foot traffic, a decrease in use of public spaces, and negative perceptions of safety will discourage investments, development, and economic growth. This can eventually lead to a cycle of fear and crime where neglected or abandoned areas attract criminal activities resulting in an increase in crime and disorder reinforcing perception of streets being unsafe (Skogan, 1986). This can also strain relationships between the community and law enforcement as distrust and fear of police can reduce cooperation, communication, and engagement with the law enforcement, making it challenging to address safety concerns effectively (Gil et al., 2014). Essentially the perception of streets as “unsafe” negatively impacts the quality of life for individuals and communities (Khaef, 2013). Individual characteristics like physical capacity, psychological ability, age, gender, ethnic background, sexual and socio-economic statuses all impact perception of safety in different environments (Box et al., 1988; Garofalo & Laub, 1979; Pain & Smith, 2008). It is important to note that even though perceptions of safety are subjective and can vary among individuals and communities, much can be done on a general

scale to alleviate these concerns. Addressing safety concerns requires a multifaceted approach which involves tackling social, economic, and environmental factors as well as engaging with local communities to understand their specific worries and perspective.

Factors Influencing Public Perceptions of Street- Based Safety

The review of literature identifies four key factors that can be pragmatically improved on to enhance public perceptions of safety. They are lighting, CCTV, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), and Community Oriented Policing (COP).

Lighting

Lighting is found to be vital to feelings of safety (Green et al., 2015, Johansson et al., 2011), as streetlights are found to most closely be attributed to the perceptions of street-based safety, particularly at night (Park & Garcia, 2020). This is important as perceptions of safety at night are found to be significantly lower than during daytime (Park & Garcia, 2020). A review of literature shows 72% positive effect of good lighting on safety (Ceccato, 2020). Improving street lighting may result in a 21% reduction in property crime (College of Policing, 2015a), and an increase in perceived safety (Herbert & Davidson, 1994; Tjoa & Devon, 2010). Features of streetlights like their distribution, illuminance levels, location, frequency, and type are found to make a difference in perceptions of safety based on setting. For example, the same levels of perceived safety are observed with lower illuminance in rural areas and higher illuminance in urban areas (Boyce et al., 2000). The spectrum of light plays a small but significant role in perception of safety with 30 lux being necessary for good security and feelings of safety at night (Boyce et al., 2000). Furthermore, areas illuminated with white light, which is brighter, are felt to be safer and more comfortable than yellow light due to white light resulting in better facial recognition (Knight, 2010). CDO 2800K lights

are preferred over SON as it is perceived as brighter even though there is no difference in actual illumination (Knight, 2010). It is also found that facial recognition increases by 20% with the use of CDO lighting (Knight, 2010).

The distribution of street-lighting also plays a role in perceptions of safety. Having a good overview of your environment, possible routes of escape, and possible places of refuge are often used as measures for the success of street-lighting (Haans & De kort, 2012). Appropriately allocated lighting creates an where escape routes are easily seen (Haans & De kort, 2012), and immediate (rather than distant) illumination increases people's view of their environment (Haans & De kort, 2012). Uniform streetlights are perceived to be safer than non-uniform lighting (Nasar & Bokharaei, 2017). Additionally, lighting must be situated in such a manner to minimise dark spots because presence of dark spots is associated with feelings of lack of safety (Haans & De kort, 2012).

Despite their effectiveness in enhancing perceptions of safety, streetlights are a subject of contention due to their environmental impact (Green et al., 2015). A possible solution identified was timed switch off of streetlights, which was found to show conflicting responses during a pilot scheme (Green et al., 2015). Positive impacts of the timed switch off of streetlights included cost effectiveness, improved quality of sleep, and better perceptions of night sky (Green et al., 2015). Negative impacts included increased anxiety and fear about personal safety, neighbourhood safety as well as limited mobility reported by women, though some adopted strategies such as torches and changing schedules (Green et al., 2015). Quality of life suffered, leading to a sense of neglect and lack of trust in authorities, in addition to demarcating public areas as accessible or not (Green et al., 2015). The police also had strong negative views regarding this as it had a direct impact on their job and public

perceptions of fear of crime, creating hurdles to effective response (Green et al., 2015).

However, differences in number and reduction in brightness of streetlights was noticed only by 50% of the population (Green et al., 2015) and so this could be a viable alternative.

Intelligent dynamic street lighting can be a means to overcome the limitations of traditional streetlight. It makes use of sensors, adapting to the presence and behaviours of users to conserve energy and reduce luminous pollution (Haans & De kort, 2012).

Recommendations

- Use white light, minimum 30 lux
- Uniformly distributed street lights
- Minimise dark spots

Anticipated Outcomes

- Good lighting has a 72% positive effect on feelings of safety
- May lead to 21% reduction in property crime
- Increased feelings of safety at night may lead to increased activity in the night-time economy

CCTV

CCTV is a means of monitoring public spaces that often receives public support due to its perceived effectiveness in apprehending offenders, deterring offenders, and reducing fear of crime (Bennett & Gelsthorpe, 1996). 82% of people surveyed in the UK in 2002 were 'happy with' the installation of CCTV (Spriggs et al., 2003). A recent survey showed that over 80% of people agree with police use of CCTV enabled with automatic facial recognition to search for people who have committed a crime, search for missing persons, and to generally aid criminal investigations (Ritchie et al., 2021). CCTV can lead to a small decrease in crime, possibly due to increasing offenders' perceptions of getting caught as well as actually helping

to catch offenders (College of Policing, 2015b). Their presence is found to increase night-time economy and business as 20% more people are more likely participate in their presence (Bennett & Gelsthorpe,1996). There is a noted discrepancy between presence of CCTV and perception of safety, simply because people are unaware of their presence. Only 15% of the population accurately identifies and locates CCTV in their immediate surrounding, indicating a mismatch between policy discourses and perception by visitors of nightlife (Brands et al., 2016). Detailed understanding on the functioning of CCTV is found to enhance perceived safety (Brands et al., 2016). CCTV in conjunction with policing and live monitoring is found to dramatically increase the feelings of safety (Brands et al., 2016). Thus, a system in which CCTV act as an intermediary tool, with control rooms and involvement of emergency services on call (Latour, 1999), would better serve to enhance feelings of safety. Fundamentally active CCTV schemes have significant impact on safety perceptions (Piza et al., 2019). This can be attributed to scepticism about CCTV to prevent crime, and perception of them in retrospective aspect for apprehension of offenders (Brands et al., 2016). Raising public awareness about active CCTV systems may serve to reduce the discrepancy between presence of CCTV and perceptions of safety (Brands et al., 2016). It is noted that Lincoln city centre has an active CCTV system with CCTV control, emergency services, and local site-specific security e.g. in shops and bars being in contact with each other 24 hours a day.

A demographic difference is observed in the perceptions of CCTV between genders and age groups. While women are more in favour of CCTV, some have found opposition among men to their presence in public as an imposition on civil liberties (Bennett & Gelsthorpe, 1996). In spite of their popularity in relation to safety, CCTV still rank below brighter streetlights and increased police foot patrolling (Bennett & Gelsthorpe, 1996).

Overall, the evidence for CCTV is mixed (Brown, 1996), often dependent on other factors such as lighting and other security measures (Cozens & Davies, 2013; Skudder et al., 2018).

On a basic level integration CCTV would require an analysis of the particular environment, street-life, and street-designs. Additionally, the use of large-scale live monitoring found to have maximum effect would require human resources and funding. There is also a need to understand the differences of ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities in perceptions of CCTV as they indicate greater levels of fear, but research on these demographics is severely lacking. Another point of note is that much of research on CCTV and safety perceptions rely on qualitative information and non-random sampling, and so they cannot be generalised and are subject to biases of interpretation.

Recommendations

- Raise public awareness of Lincoln's active CCTV system (live interaction between CCTV operators, emergency services, and local security personnel)

Anticipated Outcomes

- Public awareness of active CCTV systems enhances feelings of safety
- CCTV may lead to a reduction in crime
- CCTV can increase the night-time economy by 20%

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED, Jeffery, 1971), is defined as "the corrected design and the efficient use of the built environment that can lead to a reduction in fear of crime and crime incidents and to an improvement in quality of life" (Crowe, 2000).

Later development of CPTED included social dimensions i.e., individuals offering their own unique perspectives, particularly women and children (Armitage & Ekblom, 2019); as well as

the inclusion of safety, public health, and sustainability (Mihinjac & Saville 2019). The design of public spaces is important because areas that are perceived as unsafe are avoided (Ceccato, 2012; 2013). Traditionally women experience greater fear in urban spaces (Pain, 2000), and so female centred planning is necessary as women tend to make greater use of public transport and pedestrian walkways than men (Damyanovic 2013). The factors women and girls associate with enhanced safety in planning included visibility which allows for greater monitoring, open areas that provide escape routes, presence of others increasing passive surveillance, equitable distribution of space, presence of guardians and help points (Barker et al., 2022).

The main predictors for perception of safety are land use, businesses, and pedestrian stream (Park & Garcia, 2020). Mixed land use i.e., inclusion of residential and business area enhances perception of safety as it increases natural guardians or witnesses (Jacobs, 1961), however the practicability of this debatable (Park & Garcia, 2020). Abandoned buildings, lack of maintenance, and poor guardianship are associated with fear (Loukaitou-Sideris & Sideris, 2009). Additionally, streets need to be designed to adapt to the needs of both day and night (Park & Garcia, 2020), as perception of factors that are seen as positive during the day can be perceived as negative at night-time e.g., trees, foot traffic, etc.

Public spaces that do not give a good overview of your environment or offer possible places of refuge are associated with feelings of being unsafe (Cozens &Suns, 2019). This means that unsafe areas tend to be isolated with poor natural surveillance, broken lines of sight and enclosures that are narrow and closed (Cozens &Suns, 2019). Designing spaces especially bus stops and rest stations that allow for greater visibility with an absence of hidden spots that create refuge for offenders to hide is found to enhance perceptions of

safety (Ceccato & Hanson, 2013; Loukaitou-Sideris & Sideris, 2009). The use of advance survey tools to identify hotspots on maps can aid in urban planning (Park & Garcia, 2020) as it incorporates user perspectives (Cozens & Suns, 2019). It is found that CPTED decreases both fear of crime and crime significantly (Cozens & Suns, 2019; Ceccato & Tcacencu, 2018; Kajalo & Lindblom, 2010). Thus, integration of evidence based CPTED strategies can aid in creating public spaces that foster a sense of safety (Armitage, 2013; Saville, 2009).

Recommendations

- New spaces should be designed with good visibility, places of possible refuge, and natural surveillance (e.g. mix of business and residential properties)
- Particular consideration should be given to factors that affect women and girls' sense of safety

Anticipated Outcomes

- Reduction in fear of crime
- Reduction in levels of crime

Community Oriented Policing

A manner in which community and police can be integrated is through increasing the quantity and quality of police-public contact (Farrington et al., 2003). This is because increasing public awareness, access and familiarity with policing has a positive impact on perceptions of safety and enhancing confidence regarding police efficacy (Dalgleish & Myhill 2004). A model that creates cooperation between police, other agencies and organizations in the community has a small but positive impact on perceptions of safety (Flemming, 2005).

Reassurance policing which focuses on increasing public confidence in police is found to increase perceptions of safety and reduce fear of crime (Dalglish & Myhill 2004).

Community oriented policing (COP) emphasizes community partnership, neighbourhood policing, organizational transformation, and problem solving (Gill et al., 2014; Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2012). The implementation of this model involves long term systemic change wherein police move away from being reactive and emphasize building relationships with the community (Gill et al., 2014). This model is found to reduce perceptions of disorder and enhance feelings of safety, particularly at night (Gill et al., 2014). Community policing programmes like night watch schemes provide greater sense of security, community cohesion as well as reducing opportunities to offend by providing sense of occupancy (Flemming, 2015). Inclusion of licensed staff on establishments part of the night-time economy, who are specially trained and have close contacts with the police can be beneficial to promote safety (Bates et al., 2022) and may increase night-time economy. Research however fails to understand the long-term impacts of COPs, commonly focusing on short term impacts (Gill et al., 2014). Furthermore, the lack of clarity in definition of COPs make the assessment of their effectiveness even more difficult (Gill et al., 2014).

A range of programmes in the UK such as Ask for Angela, StreetSafe, Good Night Out Campaign, Street Pastors, Safer Streets Liverpool, etc have come about in an attempt to increase awareness and make the public active participants in enhancing safety. However, it is to be noted that despite efforts, only 22% - 28% of the population has awareness of these programmes and only 50% – 60% of the population indicated that they would make use of

these programmes when needed (Bates et al., 2022). More research is needed to establish the efficacy of these newer programmes.

Recommendations

- Emphasise community partnerships and neighbourhood policing
- Increase awareness of schemes such as Ask for Angela, StreetSafe, Good Night Out etc.

Anticipated Outcomes

- Enhanced feelings of safety
- Reduction in opportunities to offend
- Increase in night-time economy

Limitations of this Review

Due to limited time and resources the review of literature fails to capture the true richness and depth of research available on a range of factors influencing public perceptions of street-based safety. The present review can be expanded on to include more factors and greater in-depth analysis into the factors presented.

Conclusion

Perceptions of safety have physical, social, economic, and personal impacts in the public sphere. While the perception of safety is a subjective matter, it is possible to bring about changes in the environment and community to help enhance general feelings of safety, making public spaces more inviting. Changes focusing on lighting, CCTV, design, and community- police integration are found to have greater significance in improving

perceptions of safety. A consideration of these factors in policy and funding decisions has the potential to enrich quality of life and bring about economic growth.

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