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Auditing Fear of Crime on North Tyneside: A Qualitative Approach

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study of people's concerns about crime carried out for North Tyneside Council in order to inform their crime audit. It is suggested that such an investigation requires methods which are capable of developing a complex and nuanced picture of fear of crime in particular localities, which are sensitive to local and social variations and which, ideally, are inclusive of people not normally consulted in such exercises. Some of the findings of the study are discussed in the light of these imperatives.

Introduction

The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act in England and Wales gave local authorities and police forces joint statutory responsibility for community safety for the first time. The Act represents a change in emphasis towards 'community safety' first proposed by the Morgan Report (Home Office, 1991). In theory, community safety entails a more holistic approach than previous models of crime prevention, and aims to tackle both the social and situational dimensions of crime in a sustainable manner which includes and empowers local communities (Hirschfield and Bowers, 1998). Local authorities must now carry out regular local audits of crime and safety that form the basis of strategies to reduce crime and disorder, and set performance indicators so that these strategies can be evaluated every three years. The overarching aims of the partnership are 'to reduce crime, disorder and their social and economic costs in the local authority area in a cost effective and socially equitable way' (Hough and Tilley, 1998).

One important social cost is identified as the fear of crime:

Fear of crime can often be more debilitating than crime itself. It can prevent people from leading normal lives, and distort their perceptions as to the safety of the communities in which they live. There is a clear expectation on the part of the Government that the strategies should address fear of crime and disorder, as well as actual levels thereof (Home Office, 1998).

However, there are conflicting messages from national government with regard to addressing the fear of crime; Hough and Tilley (1998) suggest in contrast that 'whether tackling fear of crime should be a strategic priority deserves careful thought'. They are doubtful that it should be a priority in itself, on the grounds that it is hard to measure, difficult to reduce, and that the best way of ameliorating it may be reducing crime itself. In many ways these assertions reflect a welcome shift in thinking about fear of crime as compared with the much criticised position of the Home Office in the 1980s (see for example Stanko, 1987; Walklate, 1989). However, this new position seems to have led in many cases to the subject of fear of crime being omitted from crime strategies, despite the fact that some of them have been so wide-ranging as to encompass fire and road safety in their scope. We would argue that fear of crime doesneed pursuing independently, if not in isolation from crime itself. As we discuss later in

this paper, the constitution of fear of crime is more complex than a simple geographical match for crime rates. Moreover, the imperative of including the voices of local people in the construction of the audits and strategies, if it is to be met in any serious way, demands consultation about their concerns in their local communities.

Acknowledging and addressing local people's safety concerns has an important place in rectifying the 'democratic deficit' of much previous crime prevention practice - the paucity of consultation which accompanied the policy-making which typified the 1980s and early 1990s (DETR, 1998). These new imperatives point to more participatory or qualitative methods to aid investigation of the fear of crime at a local scale, especially given the growing methodological critique over the last few years of the way in which fear of crime has tended to be measured (Farrall et al, 1997; Ferraro, 1995; Stanko, 1987; Walklate, 1995; Young, 1988). It is widely accepted now that the norm in fear of crime measurement has been for ill-formulated use of quantitative methodology. Essentially, survey methods tend to be unreliable and do not allow for contextualisation of answers (Farrall et al, 1997). With reference to the crime audits, Ditton et al. (1998: 10) have predicted that 'the chances of demonstrating 'fear' reduction via the usual crime survey are close to zero'.

However, in practice, while audits of crime and fear are supposed to be based upon a range of data sources, most have so far relied on traditional quantitative data and, where they are available, powerful computer-based analysis systems such as GIS (Geographical Information Systems). Aside from the criticisms of quantitative methodologies for investigation of the fear of crime referred to above, there are unlikely to be local data on fear available at the necessary scale, unit of aggregation and with the necessary coverage for input into such systems. In many areas there is a paucity of local quantitative as well as qualitative data on fear.

A number of reasons for the emphasis on quantitative data in the crime audits can be identified. First are the demands and timescale of the audits. A myriad of new multi-agency initiatives have recently been passed down from central government, including Health Action Zones, Education Action Zones, SRB Employment and Regeneration Initiatives, Youth Offending Teams, Drug Action Teams; it is difficult for any agency to prioritise community safety when it is not the core function of any one organisation. After the Act was passed there was relatively little time to carry out the audits and draw up and implement crime and disorder strategies, with the result that existing practice was likely to have a heavy influence on the new packaging (Ashley, 1998). The task has been aided in many areas where community safety partnerships between local authorities, police forces and other bodies already existed, including Northumbria/Tyne and Wear where the current study was sited (ibid.). Those areas where GIS were already in use to monitor crime levels and highlight hotspots were also at a distinct advantage. Thus existing systems set up to monitor crime levels and, in some cases, fear (typically through quality-of-life type questionnaire surveys), have been adapted for the purposes of the audits. In addition, many crime reduction partnerships cover relatively large areas. One assertion, supported by this research, is that fear of crime is often highly localised, and a neighbourhood approach is essential - however, the need to produce data for a wide area makes this difficult, and encourages reliance on quantitative measures.

Secondly, whilst growing in popularity in academic studies, qualitative methods are still relatively rarely applied in the policy making arena, partly due to the suspicion or lack of understanding with which they are viewed (Schofield, 1989), and partly because of the pressures of the fast growing evaluation and audit culture. The imperative of establishing baseline data which can be re-evaluated at a later date is most easily addressed by using questionnaire surveys of fear of crime (Hirschfield and Bowers, 1998), despite the widespread criticisms referred to above. Although the Hough and Tilley (1998) guidelines do stress the need to access 'hard to reach' groups through such methods as focus groups, in reality, time pressures, lack of expertise, the perception of the issue as peripheral, and resistance to consultation in general have limited such work.

From our experience we would suggest a third reason more specific to the fear of crime which may result in a low profile and inadequate measurement in the crime audits. In recent years attention has focused on the way in which discourses of fear are constructed and employed by different interest groups (Davis, 1992; Garland, 1996; Hollway and Jefferson, 1997; Sasson, 1995; Stanko, 1996). Crime prevention policy has always reflected particular constructions of fear of crime. An outdated understanding can be identified within police practice in some areas. This construction of the fear of crime is as a relatively minor problem (therefore not deserving to be a key element of the community safety strategies). It involves

assumptions about the irrationality of high levels of fear amongst certain groups and therefore places the fear of crime as a separate issue from the patterns and experience of crime itself (Stanko, 1996). So, for example, at least one local audit in the north east, lacking any local survey of fear, uses national British Crime Survey fear of crime findings as a proxy and makes assumptions about different identity groups within the locality on that basis. As we discuss below, this earlier received wisdom has been fundamentally challenged by more recent research, but these ideas remain entrenched among some professional groups.

That a number of academic researchers are now employing qualitative methods of investigation (e.g. Loader et al, 1998; Stanko, 1990a; Taylor, 1996) is both informed by, and informs, changing conceptualisations of fear. There is growing realisation that fear of crime is not a fixed trait which some people have and some do not, but rather 'transitory and situational' (Fattah and Sacco, 1989, 211). Neither is fear unrelated to conditions in localities including the level and nature of crime. It is locally differentiated - because of the population profiles in different areas; because of different physical environments and the reputations they acquire; because of different experiences of policy-making; and because of the unique blends of economic history and change and social and cultural identities which make up contemporary places. Fear of crime is also bound up with social identity and social exclusion, though recent research contradicts some previous stereotypes of fear, especially those pertaining to women and older people (e.g. Pain, 1997a; Stanko, 1995). There is growing realisation that other groups are affected as much by fear of crime, albeit in different ways - such as young men and ethnic minorities - and others excluded and marginalised not only from wider society but also from much academic research (e.g. homeless people and sex workers). The irony of community safety is that within geographically bounded 'communities' there are many differences in responses to crime and conflicts of interests around its resolution, while within identity 'communities' individuals may be multiply positioned in relation to their locality and to crime (Pain, 2000). In short, fear of crime is intrinsically and intricately part of the experience of living in different localities (Girling et al, 1998) and therefore, we suggest, qualitative methods are needed to highlight this.

In fact, qualitative accounts are growing in number, have raised new issues and challenged a numberof long-standing assumptions, and when considered together are capable of providing practical and theoretical support about the nature and causation of fear of crime. However, we are not suggesting that they should be viewed as a panacea, a replacement for quantitative methods, nor the single answer to the challenge of meaningful community safety audits and evaluation of fear. They are becoming more popular in policy research now, but considerable practical and ethical barriers exist, especially when translating findings into policy outcomes. A key aim of the research reported here was to evaluate and develop a qualitative approach to auditing the fear of crime.

A Working Definition of the Fear of Crime

Before the current research began, it was necessary to establish a working definition of the fear of crime. Within the debate over the construction of the fear of crime, some have suggested that it is little more than a methodological artifact or late twentieth century moral panic. 'Fear' is often unreflective of the broad range of reactions to crime of many people (Kinsey and Anderson, 1992; Farrall et al, 1997). Especially when applied to certain social groups, it may be interpreted as implying weakness and vulnerability rather than the commonplace resistance with which many people respond (see for example Koskela, 1997). Recently it has been suggested that the very existence of fear of crime might have been misunderstood, misrepresented or overstated; Farrall et al (1997:676) have asserted that 'levels of fear of crime...have been hugely overestimated', even that 'there was no 'fear' of crime in Britain until it was discovered in 1982' (Ditton et al, 1998: 10). These researchers are now focusing on 'anger' about crime rather than 'fear'.

Although we agree that a number of fear discourses exist which are constructed by a wide range of interest groups at different levels, we dismiss any suggestion that it is a trivial problem. We use 'fear of crime' in its broadest sense, echoing early feminist work which stressed the pervasiveness and dynamic nature of women's fear of male violence and its impacts (see Brownmiller, 1975; Griffin, 1979; Hanmer, 1978; Stanko, 1985). For the

purposes of the study reported here, 'fear of crime' describes the wide range of emotional and practical responses to crime and disorder which individuals and communities may make; their impact on everyday life present a tangible social and economic problem worthy of academic and policy attention. It is these impacts which we concentrate upon in this report.

The North Tyneside Study

The study was funded by North Tyneside Council in order to inform its Crime Audit and Community Safety Strategy published in April 1999. The study focused on people's concerns and perceptions about crime and the ways these affect their lives, though it did not exclude related victimisation experiences. The aims of the research were as follows:

1. To develop a more complex and meaningful understanding of the fear of crime, by means of a qualitative, nuanced fear of crime audit.
2. To examine who and what is feared, and where and when people are most fearful of crime; the precautions and restrictions which people employ in response to crime; the expectations people have of the local authority in relation to fear of crime; and differences in attitudes to policy issues held by people with different social/demographic backgrounds, especially differences of age, gender, race and class.
3. To evaluate the efficacy of the methods chosen, and develop methods for future employment.

Focus groups were chosen as a relatively quick way of achieving this 'audit' of fear. Some of their advantages and drawbacks for this task are discussed below. Focus groups were carried out with older women, mothers of primary school age children, Asian men, young men and young women in the two North Tyneside wards of Pegley Hall and Gilsea (pseudonyms have been given to the study areas and other areas mentioned for the purposes of this paper). These two areas were chosen because of their contrasting social class profiles and different economic histories. A focus group for each identity group was carried out in both Gilsea and Pegley Hall, except for Asian men in Pegley Hall. Here the number of Asians in the resident and/or business population was too low for successful recruitment. Two focus groups with Asian men were carried out in Gilsea. Otherwise, focus groups representing all the target groups in both areas were undertaken. One additional focus group in Gilsea was held as a pilot. All groups were held in local venues for ease of access to the participants.

Several methods were used to recruit participants. Initially a recruitment letter was sent to 10% of households in each ward, but this resulted in only a few responses from women over 65 and mothers of primary school aged children, and none from young men or Asian men. Associations and institutions were then targeted as follows: residents' association, sheltered housing, council residents' panel (older women); Brownies, playscheme, church group (mothers); schools, council youth worker, drop-in scheme (young men); schools (young women); Bangladeshi and Islamic community associations (Asian men). In addition, some participants were recruited through snowballing and two mothers recruited by approaching them on the street.

Focus Groups in Community Safety Research

Recently the social sciences have re-embraced focus groups as a qualitative methodology with some distinct advantages, including research on fear of crime (Burgess, 1996; Loader et al, 1998; Taylor et al, 1996). Focus groups are group discussions centering on particular questions and issues raised by a moderator. They may not be as 'focused' as their original use in marketing entailed (Goss, 1996); in fact they are increasingly used in an emergent sense, especially in the policy arena, allowing participants to raise issues of concern which are not on existing agendas.

Focus groups share a range of benefits in common with other qualitative methods, in that they are oriented towards exploration and discovery, offer interpretation of answers, and give context and depth. In addition they allow researchers to develop a sense of what is important to a group of people, rather than individual stories, and to capitalise on group dynamics for broader exploration of issues than is usual through one-to-one interviews (Morgan, 1998).

They are helpful therefore for raising issues around the fear of crime which relate to social roles or locality, as common interests tend to be the basis of discussions which then lead in that direction. On a practical level, where policy recommendations are required quickly they generate a large amount of data in a concentrated time span (Burgess, 1996). The interaction between group members allows the appraisal and reassessment of a range of viewpoints and their relevance to the community, and can fire related discoveries. Unlike other research methods, focus groups also give participants an opportunity to 'test their interpretations of events and processes with others, and whether confirmed or disputed, the result is a polyvocal production, a multiplicity of voices speaking from a variety of subject positions' (Goss and Leinbach, 1996: 118). In theory, then, focus groups provide a democratic method, suiting the ideals of community safety research, and some have even suggested that they can be empowering to participants (Goss and Leinbach, 1996). Compared to interviewing, the input (and therefore influence) of the researcher is generally less as the discussion is between group members rather than on a one to one basis.

In terms of limitations, the major advantage of focus groups - the interaction between research subjects - can also generate problems. In a group setting, individual detail is lost. In the current research, considerable differences in opinions and experiences were apparent amongst some groups, especially the older women, but no explanation of these was possible without the biographical information that an in-depth interview could offer. While common social roles and identities amongst the group (e.g. age, gender, locality of residence, being a parent) can often be related to issues of concern which are discussed, the 'master' identity of the group for which participants were selected is likely to obscure the influence of participants' other identities and roles, as well as the many influences on safety which arise from the unique circumstances of people's lives.

An additional concern is the fact that the focus group, as public arena, may inhibit frankness. Moderation is an important consideration in the success of focus groups, and probes and other techniques were used to attempt to encourage everyone to participate. However, the public nature of focus groups can still discourage the discussion of sensitive topics. Although it has been suggested that group members are willing to reveal extremely personal experiences and opinions, especially in the company of strangers (Morgan, 1998), we feel that there are topics best left to a private interview. In the current research, it is unsurprising that safety issues centred round the public domain and danger from strangers, with no mention made of the threat from familiar people in the domestic sphere. Problems with openness may also arise when the moderator's social background does not match that of the participants.

Finally, while focus groups appear to be a more democratic way of gauging opinions than formal surveys, they tend to involve fairly easily accessed social groups whose views on community safety may already be well represented or over-represented (Brown, 1995), rather than those frequently excluded from research and policy attention. Inevitably, some individuals cannot be organised into focus groups. It must also be recognised that researchers maintain a high degree of control over the research findings in the stages of analysis, interpretation and writing.

Study Areas

The research was carried out in two contrasting wards of North Tyneside. Socio-demographic data from the two study areas are summarised in Table 1. Gilsea is a relatively affluent part of the borough, its socio-economic profile skewed towards the higher groups. Over three-quarters of households in the ward are owner occupied, and house prices are amongst the highest in North Tyneside. The ward has a relatively low percentage of lone parents, an average proportion of households containing someone of pensionable age, and the highest proportion of ethnic minority groups in North Tyneside (although their number is still small). Crime rates are higher than average and higher than in Pegley Hall.

Pegley Hall ward has higher than average proportions of household heads in the lower socio-economic groups, lone parents and council rented accommodation. Approximately half the houses are rented from the council. Percentages of households containing someone of pensionable age, and ethnic minority population are about average. Crime rates are similar to the borough average, although car crime and burglary to properties other than a dwelling are

higher than average, probably due to the large number of industrial estates in the ward. However, rates of disorder are higher in Pegley Hall than in North Tyneside or Gilsea.

	Gilsea	Pegley Hall	North Tyneside average
% in socio-economic groups I and II (professional and managerial/technical)	45.8%	19.1%	33.1%
% in socio-economic groups IV and V (partly skilled and unskilled)	12.5%	34%	21%
% unemployment (1998)*	7.9%	9.4%	7.4%
% of households containing children with lone parent	13%	21%	16%
% of households with pensioner	34%	38%	36%
% of population of ethnic minority origin	2.3%	0.9%	1.1%
Crime rates per 1000 people*	133	86	85
Disorder rate per 1000 young people*	163	198	178

Table 1: Socio-demographic data for study areas

* North Tyneside Crime and Disorder Audit Report 1998
Sources: North Tyneside Ward Profiles based on 1991 Census

Indicative Findings

In this section we briefly present some of the findings of the research, in order to support the arguments made so far about the nature of fear of crime and its representation in local audits. We have purposefully selected examples to demonstrate important findings that would not have been accessed from quantitative work. What we seek to illustrate is the importance of including in the crime audits local concerns about crime, using qualitative methods; although as we conclude, the single tool used in this pilot study is not sufficient for this task alone. A full account of the findings can be found in the main report of the study (Hudson et al, 1998).

Precautionary Behaviour in the Two Areas

Despite appearing to be polarised localities - a stable, middle class neighbourhood and a poorer area containing a number of council estates - no clear sense emerged from the focus groups of generally higher fears existing in either Gilsea or Pegley Hall. Certain identity groups (especially some of the older women, and most of the young people) were very concerned about crime in both areas. However, gaining a general sense of levels of fear of crime is problematic with this method, indeed arguably with any method when the language people use and the ways in which they represent feelings of concern is so variable. Given the emphasis of our definition of 'fear of crime' on the range of responses which people make to crime and disorder, and echoing Hough and Tilley (1998), it is useful to look at the extent of precautionary behaviour and other ways in which people manage criminal threats in their

neighbourhoods. It is also important to consider these separately in relation to property and personal crime.

While some of the older women in Gilsea appeared preoccupied with burglary, generally property crime was more of a worry in Pegley Hall. Almost everyone interviewed takes what they perceive as routine precautions with their property - garaging cars, fitting alarms, double-glazing and locks are all mentioned on numerous occasions. However, precautionary behaviour employed in Pegley Hall against burglary is noticeably more extreme, suggesting greater concern here, perhaps relating to lesser ability to withstand economic loss. The group most preoccupied with security measures for their houses are the mothers in Pegley Hall. Their precautions include bricking up a window, screwing down windows, erecting ten foot high boundary fences, keeping weapons by the bed, refusing to leave the house vacant overnight and having three neighbours keeping an eye on the house while its owner was on a day trip. These extreme precautions are essential to induce a feeling of both property and personal security:

I get someone to stop in my house. I'll not leave my house empty. (Pegley Hall mother)

I mean my hubby works away quite a lot, but once I put the alarms on I've got a baseball bat and I feel quite safe cos if they come in I'd use it. (Pegley Hall mother)

Violent crime and harassment, on the other hand, seem to be of equal concern in both areas. It is a particular worry for the young men and women, who gave several accounts of first and second hand experience of victimisation. However, all groups in each area take precautions against attack, though the type of precautions taken varies between identity groups. Typical examples of strategies include staying at home rather than going out at night (some of the older women); walking a longer route to avoid areas perceived as dangerous (young women); avoiding public space at night by using a car (Asian men); arranging bags 'if you're passing men or boys' (older women); pretending not to have a watch if someone asks the time (older women); walking around in groups and looking confident (young men). Precautions taken over children's safety also transcend locality - no mother said she would let her children walk to school alone before the age of eight or nine years.

Statistics of recorded crime would suggest that Pegley Hall experiences lower rates of burglary than Gilsea (see Table 1), but as these are unreliable it would be unwise to conclude that fear of burglary in Pegley Hall is disproportionate. However, explanations for this more extreme precautionary behaviour and greater concern appear to be connected with the nature of crime in the locality. A particularly significant issue for all the groups was whether threats of crime and disorder were seen as coming from within the community or from 'outsiders'. In general, Pegley Hall residents of all age groups saw the threat of crime coming from people who were also residents of Pegley Hall itself or bordering neighbourhoods, whereas Gilsea residents in all the groups saw threats as being posed by outsiders.

Night time some people come from outside, like Leverton or Walforth or Newcastle. They're coming from outside Gilsea for drink. Then these people cause trouble. But the locals, no. (Gilsea Asian man)

So most of the damage is done, and most of the people who are around, it's done by people who don't live here. (Gilsea Older Women)

The groups that come around here, they all come down on the Metro [light railway system], it's like, they're from loads of places and they all come down and terrorise everyone at night-time and beat them up and stuff. (Gilsea Young Women)

I mean I was burgled at Christmas ... And it was the kid at the top of the street which I knew. (Pegley Hall mother)

Well you get abused by the children and threatened. (Pegley Hall Older Women)

Q: Do you think people around here are worried to approach teenagers?

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In case they get their windows broke or something like that you know.

You don't know if they're full of drink. (Pegley Hall mothers)

Therefore although levels of crime appear to differ quite significantly between the study areas, with Gilsea having higher rates, the nature of crime and the way it is experienced by the interviewees who live in Pegley Hall mean that it has more impact on their lives.

Mothers' Concerns for their Children

Another illustration of nuances in the data which would have been difficult to access using quantitative methods is provided by the fears voiced by mothers of primary school aged children. In fact, the mothers in the research were more concerned about their children's present day and future safety than their own. In both areas, concern was expressed about three main areas; stranger danger, traffic, and fears for the future prospects of their children. Here too, clear concerns specific to locality were evident. Bullying was a particular worry discussed in Pegley Hall:

There's a lot of things with the older kids, bullying the six, seven, eight, nine year olds. I mean I work at [local business] and we see it all the time, and it's horrendous. It's like, you've got the kids from [local secondary school] coming and bullying the ten year olds. And when you approach them, they look at you and you get the verbal. And it's like, if you were mine, I'd kill you. There's a lot of bullying. (Pegley Hall mother)

In contrast, bullying was less of a worry in Gilsea, where mothers talked extensively about a recent suggestion that a halfway house for paedophiles might be set up in the ward. Views were divided on the issue:

Well, there are certain places, hostels, well for instance there are half way houses where you have a mentally ill, psychiatrically ill person who they're trying to reintroduce into the community. That sort of half way house.

You see that wouldn't bother me.

There's certain, you know paedophiles.

But that's very different though isn't it, from someone that is mentally ill.

Yes, but you know there might be a paedophile living in the you know, trying to get back into the community. I don't know how it works. Plus there's these half way hostels, bail houses that people use when they leave prison. Now immediately, burglaries go up in and around places like that. Now if I was living in an area, yes these people have got to be helped, but if they're going to be put in a residential area, I think that is bad news. I do.

But where do you put them?

Well how about bang in the middle of Newcastle.

But there isn't accommodation in the centre of Newcastle.

I suppose ...

It emerged from the discussion that those opposed situate paedophiles firmly as dangerous others, while only a couple of mothers expressed the view that these men represent a small risk and that the likelihood is that there are many paedophiles living in the area already.

This tendency to distance crime from what is seen as a respectable neighbourhood is also reflected in discussion of drugs. In both areas, the discussion revealed that the fears mothers have for their children are not always immediate, but also focus on the time when their children will be teenagers. In Gilsea the prospect of children becoming involved with drugs was the key concern, which the following mother distances from the immediate locale:

But the thought of your children growing up and then going to these places themselves and being exposed to them [drugs], especially places where there are big problems.

It terrifies me ... (Gilsea mothers)

The Pegley Hall mothers also share these fears, but their view that problems such as drug dealing originate in their neighbourhood causes much broader concerns that their children will get involved with more serious crime:

The boys seem to be getting on OK, but everything that's happening is opening their eyes a bit, you know, and they're at an age where you're frightened which way they'll go. You know, you put your hooks in and tell them not to do this, you know, cos someone else does it, you don't have to do it, and we're the baddies, there's nothing to see there's nothing to do, we're the baddies, because we're trying to keep our grip on them, trying to keep our eye on them. (Pegley Hall mother)

Again, 'fear of crime' in Pegley Hall means something different and has a more profound effect on people's lives than in Gilsea.

Asian Men and Fear of Crime

On the whole, the methodology was successful in drawing out quite detailed accounts of mothers' fears for their children, as well as the concerns of other groups. In the majority of focus groups people participated freely and interacted with each other, developing and generating discussion around issues which appeared to be collectively relevant to themselves and their localities. However, the two groups of Asian men proved an exception. Although the sessions were well attended, few were willing to speak on the topic of community safety. Some concerns emerged, but there was relatively little mention of personal concerns about safety or the safety of family members. Part of the explanation for this may be the mismatch between moderator (white, female) and participants (Asian, male). In addition, English is not the residents' first language, which may have made them feel less at ease communicating with each other. However, the local link officer at the council felt that these were not absolute barriers to the research. Instead he described a hierarchy within the Asian community which may have inhibited certain less powerful members from speaking out in front of others. It may be that different methods such as one to one interviewing or participatory appraisal (discussed at the end of this paper) would have been more successful. Of course, the assumption that the method 'didn't work' may be obscuring real cultural differences in the experience and articulation of 'fear of crime'.

What was discussed, at some length, was racist behaviour targeted at Asian men. Their accounts suggest that racism is a common experience in the area. The fact that the Asian population in North Tyneside is numerically very small clearly does not reduce the likelihood of racist encounters. The most serious incident reported was one man having his shop and home petrol-bombed for unknown motivation; he had been deeply affected by the experience. However, there was a tendency in the discussions to downplay even serious incidents. Many of the men related harassment to alcohol and were keen to point out that Gilsea was better than some other localities.

In the ten years, right, I've found Gilsea nice people, their attitude is very good, right. A little bit of racism, OK, but everyone's nice, friendly, in Gilsea.

... Everybody's friendly with everybody now. There is still something inside, like, still you're coloured.

Sometimes you get some people saying "Oh you are a ... foreigner, go back to your country." That is a casual thing. Someone daft.

I find racism less now, you know. On weekends you still get your drunks and all that. Someone's going to call you something, aren't they? You know he's drunk, he doesn't know what he's doing, but next day you see him on the street, "Alright", "Alright, aye no problem", you know what I mean. It's just the drink that does it.

Solely relying on the focus group method makes it difficult to investigate further the apparent contradictions in some of their accounts.

Summary and Future Agenda

Using the examples of precautionary behaviour in the two areas, mothers' concerns for their children, and the fear of crime of the Asian men, we have sought to demonstrate the value of qualitative methods in raising issues and exploring complexities which have a direct bearing on the design and efficacy of community safety strategies. In this final section, we outline some of the main implications of the research, and critically reflect on this method of auditing fear and potential alternatives.

The study has demonstrated that while fear of crime is partly conditioned by social identity and life experiences, it is also locally sensitive and hence best tackled at the neighbourhood level. In line with an emerging sense of what 'community safety' means, concerns about crime are not experienced or perceived as separate from other social and economic issues which affect local people and their communities. A clear exception that the study has not dealt with is domestic violence, child abuse and other forms of crime in the home.

The study did not find evidence of insurmountable differences in concerns about crime and the ways in which they might be tackled between different social groups (for more details see Hudson et al, 1998). On the contrary, there were a number of genuinely shared concerns within these communities. Although fear does centre around certain groups, especially groups

of young men and increasingly (respondents suggested) also young women, at the same time residents displayed the belief that only a minority causes trouble and voiced consideration of the reasons behind anti-social behaviour. Significantly, the ways in which people respond to fear of crime differ; for example those who have cars will use them, especially to protect children from public space; women tend to avoid certain areas altogether if they perceive that they might be victimised there; young men find strength in numbers and adopt a facade of fearlessness. The research provides further support for recent challenges to common stereotypes that have dogged effective fear and crime reduction. These include the growing recognition that young men may experience high levels of fear of crime and victimisation (Loader et al, 1998; Goodey, 1997), although they tend to be labelled only as offenders - for example, relatively few of the 1999 Crime and Disorder Audits and Strategies represented or tackled young people's experiences of victimisation, disorder or fear of crime. Another example is provided by the differences between older women in their fear of crime, precautionary behaviour and attitudes to crime prevention, which are not reflected in the frequent assumptions about 'old age' as a master identity which underlie much policy-making and academic research (Pain, forthcoming).

'Fear of crime' remains a problematic concept and object of study, and the task of measuring and reducing it provides a considerable challenge for the crime audits. What we have suggested here is that this is unlikely to be achieved in a meaningful way if understanding is based on quantitative surveys alone. Quantifying differences in fear of crime between different localities is extremely difficult, but it is possible to investigate qualitative differences in the nature of fear which are more relevant to local strategies to improve community safety. We suggest that this qualitative understanding should be based upon investigating the ways in which fear of crime affects people's lives, rather than the 'amount' of fear which individuals have.

Such research, when repeated in different areas with wider groups of people, can go some way towards rectifying the democratic deficit in crime prevention and community safety strategies. Overall the method was successful in eliciting a flavour of local concerns amongst the different groups. Claims of the validity and reliability of qualitative methods are often queried, but where depth is required rather than generalisation, and so long as proper attention is given to issues of rigour, the use of qualitative methods is invaluable.

As discussed earlier, qualitative methods do not provide a panacea for the difficulties of researching fear of crime and other community safety concerns, but in conjunction with other methods are capable of providing a wider, more inclusive, locally sensitive reflection of these. For example, qualitative methods may be used in conjunction with a representative structured questionnaire survey, either to investigate issues which arise from the latter or, preferably, to raise salient issues for particular groups in particular places which then inform the survey questions.

The focus group method employed here was not equally successful with all groups (as the problems with the Asian men's group demonstrate). There also remain some problems of inclusiveness; while this project did reach the concerns of some traditionally 'hard-to-reach' groups, many were accessed through formal associations and institutions that socially excluded groups may not participate in. Those who volunteer to participate in focus groups may be more articulate and more likely to express certain views. While our research demonstrates the importance of auditing fear of crime at a local scale, the single method employed is not robust enough in itself for the task of monitoring fear and evaluating strategies. What we suggest, based on our experiences in North Tyneside, is a fuller methodology that might allow a more accurate, nuanced and inclusive picture of fear of crime in different localities.

Many of the shortcomings outlined above might be overcome by the use of participatory appraisal, which involves local people themselves in the design and implementation of research. In particular, participatory appraisal carries the advantages not only of emphasising the triangulation of different research methods (e.g. in depth interviews, observation and surveys as well as focus groups), but the involvement of members of communities in all stages of research design, implementation and evaluation, in order to build up as representative and realistic a portrait of community issues as possible. It also has a greater likelihood of including commonly excluded groups in the research, and of pursuing community safety concerns to saturation.

When it comes to the implementation of community safety projects, it is now widely agreed that their success is closely related to the following factors; being evidence based, having

local ownership, and including effective partnerships amongst local stakeholders. Research of a participatory nature allows projects to be based on the contextualised and triangulated opinions of a wide range of stakeholders. It also enables all groups to be involved from the beginning, encouraging ownership of and enthusiasm for ensuing projects. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal due to be launched early in 2001 will again placed emphasis on local responses to local problems, including crime and other community safety issues. It is hoped that this focus might be one mechanism which encourages meaningful auditing at a local level of the issue of fear of crime.

The introduction of crime audits reflects a broader shift in policy making from evaluation to auditing; while the former emphasises process and complexity, the emphasis of audit is on verification (Crawford, 1998). This has been further reinforced by the introduction from April 2000 from the Home Office of five year targets and annual milestones under the Crime Reduction Programme specifically for vehicle crime, burglary and robbery, regardless of whether these have been identified as local priorities or not. Best Value Performance Indicators and Audit Commission Performance Indicators add to the auditing demands. Anecdotal evidence from partnerships suggests a real frustration with attempting to implement local strategies whilst having to spend large amounts of time collecting information for national monitoring.

As Crawford argues, this shift is detrimental to the understanding and development of workable crime prevention initiatives that might be adapted to different local contexts. Further, as we have discussed, what most audits are currently 'verifying' with regard to fear of crime (where they are attempting some measurement) is close to meaningless. The audits are currently in their infancy and have been forced to run before they can walk. Concern about crime, and the impact it has on people's lives and localities, deserves a prominent place in local audits and independent and meaningful investigation and evaluation.

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