

## FEAR OF CRIME AND GENDER: THE CASE OF THE BESECURE- FEELSECURE PROJECT IN PIRAEUS

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### Abstract

Fear of crime is a complex phenomenon primarily observed in urban settings. Research indicates that fear of crime is not solely connected to crime but is shaped by various factors. In this context, vulnerability seems to play a significant role, since risk perception mainly depends on the self-image of being vulnerable. This subjective dimension in relation to objective conditions, such as risk exposure, existing self-protective measures and the seriousness of threats, interacts and influences vulnerability, thereby shaping fear of crime. Research evidence indicates that gender is a factor related to fear of crime and insecurity, with women typically being more fearful than men and more worried about crimes against the person, which can be largely or partly attributed to differences in risk perception. This correlation is examined in the case of the BeSecure-FeelSecure Project, within which research was conducted on a representative sample of residents from two municipal departments in the city of Piraeus, Greece. The research data on fear of crime, perception of safety, direct victimisation, and citizens' attitudes towards the police and local authorities were also analysed, considering gender alongside other individual characteristics such as age, education, and income.

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## I. Introduction

Research evidence concerning fear of crime (Zarafonitou, 2002:40, 2009, 2011, 2023; Garland, 2001:122; Taylor & Hale, 1986; Robert & Pottier, 2004) concludes that fear of crime is primarily observed in the urban environment and although it is defined as “*a rational or irrational state of alarm or anxiety engendered by the belief that one is in danger of criminal victimisation*” (McLaughlin, 2006:164), the relationship between fear of crime and crime is far from straightforward. Thus, the conceptual delimitation based on the distinction between *direct fear of victimisation* (personal situation) and the *general worry* caused by the perception of crime as *a serious social problem* is crucial for grasping the various individual, social and environmental factors that co-shape the phenomenon (Zarafonitou, 2002, 2011). Fear of crime is strongly linked to the urban environment and the quality of daily life, while previous victimisation experiences, trust in the criminal justice system and police, crime seriousness, subjective risk perception<sup>4</sup>, and sources of personal knowledge about crime are also of great importance (Zarafonitou, 2002, 2011; Box, Hale and Andrews, 1988).

The relevant literature has also highlighted the core concept of vulnerability (Killias, 1990, 2001; Killias and Clerici, 2000). In this context, the subjective perception of threat is always grounded in the vulnerability attributed to oneself or those close to them (Zarafonitou, 2011:50; Killias, 2001; Killias & Clerici, 2000), while fear of crime relates, among other things, to the subject’s ability to react and protect themselves against criminal incidents (Mucchielli, 2002:22; Zarafonitou, 2011:50). Thus, vulnerability serves as a key factor in explaining the uneven distribution of the feeling

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<sup>4</sup> Ferraro (1996:668), referencing Warr and Stafford (1983), emphasises the importance of distinguishing between fear of crime and the perception of victimisation risk, noting that such a perception has a great impact on fear of crime. In this context, fear of crime is an emotional reaction, while perceived risk refers to a judgement regarding the risk of victimisation. See also Hale, 1996.

of insecurity among different population groups (Killias, 1990:97)<sup>5</sup>. The concept of vulnerability is introduced early in the study of personal insecurities. Defined as a “*belief that one is susceptible to future negative outcomes and unprotected from danger or misfortune*” (Perloff, 1983:43)<sup>6</sup>, it is related to the risk perception regarding criminal victimisation. Skogan and Maxfield (1981:69) distinguished personal vulnerability to crime as comprising both physical and social aspects. Within this spectrum, a person physically vulnerable to crime becomes an easy target for victimisation (*openness to attack*); they are physically unable to defend themselves (*powerlessness to resist attack*); and they are likely to suffer traumatic repercussions in the event of victimisation (*exposure to traumatic physical and emotional consequences*) (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981:69). Furthermore, social vulnerability pertains to an individual’s risk of being victimised due to their social and economic status, as well as their inability to cope with the impact of crime owing to limited resources<sup>7</sup>. In this context, they pointed out that “*age, race, sex, and income are among the most consistent correlates of all measures of fear of crime, reflecting the underlying dimensions of physical and social vulnerability to crime*” (Skogan, Maxfield, 1981:74). Age and sex, which are typically regarded as indicators of physical vulnerability, are linked to high physical risk, while demographic characteristics such as race, education level, and socioeconomic status may indicate the extent of an individual’s social vulnerability (Pantazis, 2000; Franklin & Franklin, 2008:4-5; Rader, Cossman, Porter, 2012:134).

According to Killias, three dimensions of threat play a crucial role in explaining the connection between vulnerability and fear of crime. These dimensions encompass a considerable risk of victimisation for the subject, their inability to protect themselves effectively (loss of control)<sup>8</sup>, and the severity of the impact of victimisation (Killias,

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<sup>5</sup> Hale (1996:95) notes that “*Any model trying to explain fear will include some notion of vulnerability*”, as cited by Jackson, 2009:4.

<sup>6</sup> According to Perloff, this definition combines a cognitive and an affective element.

<sup>7</sup> Socially vulnerable individuals usually reside in deprived urban areas characterised by high crime and victimisation rates. At the same time, their low income often prevents them from addressing the damage caused by criminal incidents (e.g. replacement of stolen items, lack of insurance). See Skogan & Maxfield, 1981:73-74.

<sup>8</sup> The *loss of control* refers to the “*inability to avoid victimisation (by fleeing or resistance) or to reduce the seriousness of its impact*” (Killias, 1990:105).

1990:98; Jackson, 2009:7). In this context, the interaction of the aforementioned dimensions is essential for the emergence of fear of crime, with each dimension possessing a physical, social, and situational aspect. More specifically, various physical (e.g. gender, age, health status), social (e.g. type of job, socioeconomic status, lack of a network of social support), and situational parameters (e.g. residing in an area with high crime rates or without formal or informal social control) may influence the subject's exposure to risk, their ability to exert control over the criminal event, and their capacity to protect themselves, as well as the magnitude of the repercussions of crime (Killias, 1990:99; Zarafonitou, 2002:38). All these interrelated elements constitute the nine dimensions of vulnerability (Zarafonitou, 2002:39). In this light, the role of gender in perceived risk of victimisation and vulnerability has received considerable attention in criminological research on fear of crime and insecurity.

## II. Gender and fear of crime: The research evidence

Gender is one of the most frequently studied variables in relation to fear of crime. (Rader, Cossman, Porter, 2012:134). Ferraro (1996:667) argues that “*gender is consistently the most important predictor-often twice as strong as other variables such as age or socioeconomic status*”. In this context, research evidence has shown that women fear victimisation more than men, despite being less likely to experience it (Ferraro, 1996; Zarafonitou, 2002; Fox, Nobles, Piquero, 2009; Johansson & Haandrikman, 2023; Jennings, Gover, Pudrzynska, 2007)<sup>9</sup>. To explain this “paradox” (Wilcox, Jordan, Pritchard, 2006:357; Young, 1992), one ought to consider the role of gender in shaping physical vulnerability. Women often feel that they are unable to protect themselves during a criminal attack due to their lack of physical strength and that such an attack will entail serious consequences for them. This perception is also linked to their belief that they are at a higher risk of becoming victims (Killias, 1990; Franklin & Franklin, 2008:4; Rader, Cossman, Porter, 2012:134). On the other hand, as Smith and Torstensson (1997) argue, men generally do not judge their risk of

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<sup>9</sup> However, Fox, Nobles & Piquero (2009:27, 34) point out that females display higher rates of victimisation compared to men in relation to personal crimes such as sexual attack, stalking, and intimate partner violence. In this vein, Pain (1995:585) outlines the dark figure of violent crimes against women such as rape, domestic violence, and sex offenses, concluding that the high rates of unreported violent offenses by females “*feed into and thereby justify higher rates of fear among women*”. See also Hale, 1996.

victimisation properly, thus reporting being less fearful compared to women. From another perspective, men do not readily display their emotional state, particularly feelings such as fear, which conflicts with the stereotypical view of masculinity; therefore, their actual levels of fear of crime cannot be fully captured (Sutton & Farrall, 2005:212-213).

Jackson (2009:14) analysed data from a random probability sample of 1,800 individuals, concluding that women felt they had less control over criminal incidents compared to men. Additionally, women viewed the consequences of crime as more serious for themselves than men did, and perceived a higher risk of victimisation, both personally and within their social group. They also exhibited greater concern about personal crime than men<sup>10</sup>. The research concluded that an individual's judgment of the likelihood of members of their own social group becoming victims, and their own chances of victimisation, are the most significant parameters in predicting their worry about falling victim to a crime (Jackson, 2009:16).

A nationwide study in the United States, which surveyed a representative sample of 2,610 individuals, aimed to explore how physical and social vulnerability contribute to the fear of crime. The findings revealed that women displayed higher levels of fear than men, with the latter being “34% less likely than females to feel unsafe daily” (Rader, Cossman, Porter, 2012:138-139). Similarly, Fox, Nobles, and Piquero (2009) investigated the association between fear of crime and victimisation through an online survey directed at college students<sup>11</sup>. They discovered that females experienced higher levels of fear of crime during both daytime and nighttime hours compared to men<sup>12</sup>. The researchers noted that “*females are consistently more likely to report being fearful*

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<sup>10</sup> Personal crime refers to crimes committed in public space, such as an attack by a stranger in the street, robbery in the street, harassment, threat, or verbal abuse in the street. See Jackson, 2009:11.

<sup>11</sup> 1921 participants with a 19% response rate. See Fox, Nobles, Piquero, 2009:28.

<sup>12</sup>Men accounted for 32.8% of those who reported feeling fearful during the day and 13.5% during the night (3.7% of participants stated they were fearful during daytime and 56.6% during nighttime). Notably, the research indicated that the victimisation rate was higher for females across all examined crime types, including theft, sexual assault, stalking, intimate partner violence, physical assault, family violence, and indirect victimisation. Regarding this finding, which is not in line with the well-documented *fear of crime paradox*, the authors pointed out that their research “*focused on interpersonal crimes that women tend to experience more often than men*” (Fox, Nobles, Piquero, 2009:31 & 34).

*while controlling for victimisation history and a variety of other demographic factors”* (Fox, Nobles & Piquero, 2009:31 & 34).

In the Greek context, all the surveys conducted from 1998 onwards<sup>13</sup> have shown that women are recorded as more fearful than men. For instance, a study undertaken in five areas of the Greek capital, involving a sample of 493 respondents, revealed that the majority of those who reported being fearful were females (71.8% vs. 28.2%) (Zarafonitou, 2002:104). These findings were consistent across all areas, as well as within each area, with some variations. Regression and multilevel analysis of the data showed that women *“had more than 5 times greater odds to be afraid than males of otherwise identical characteristics”* (Tseloni, 2002:184; Zarafonitou, 2011:54). In the same vein, subsequent research conducted in the Greek capital in 2004 with a sample of 450 residents, showed that *“men reported 83% lower odds than women of feeling unsafe walking alone after dark and roughly 60% lower odds of feeling unsafe at home alone after dark or perceiving a high crime risk”* (Tseloni & Zarafonitou, 2008:399). More recent surveys present a similar picture. In a study conducted in 2016 across five regions in the city centre of Athens with a sample of 150 shopkeepers and employees, it was found that women reported feeling unsafe at a higher percentage compared to men (67,2% vs 45,1%), revealing a statistically significant relationship<sup>14</sup> between gender and fear of crime (Zarafonitou & Kontopoulou, 2020). Similarly, a statistically significant relationship between gender and the feeling of safety was also identified in research data from a sample of 474 residents in the Municipality of Moschato-Tavros, located in the broader region of Attica, as women reported feeling unsafe while walking alone after dark at a higher percentage compared to men (57.7%% vs 29.7%)<sup>15</sup> (Zarafonitou, 2018:53-54). In 2021, a large-scale empirical study was conducted in three municipalities of Attica (the Municipality of Athens, Korydallos, and Filothei-Psychiko), aiming to explore crime and the fear of crime during the economic crisis in

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<sup>13</sup> Regarding the empirical studies in the Greek context conducted by Zarafonitou, see also Zarafonitou, 2002, 2013; Zarafonitou & Chrysochoou, 2015; Zarafonitou & Kontopoulou, 2020; Tseloni & Zarafonitou, 2008; Zarafonitou, 2004; Zarafonitou, Courakis & coll., 2009; Zarafonitou et al. 2021., Zarafonitou et al., 2022; Kontopoulou, 2023.

<sup>14</sup>  $p=0,009<0,05$ . The data regarding the relationship between gender and fear of crime are unpublished.

<sup>15</sup>  $p.< 0,01$ .

Greece (2009-2019) and beyond (2020-2021)<sup>16</sup>. In line with previous research data, the study revealed that women (with percentages of 43.9% and 41.0%, respectively) feel more insecure than men<sup>17</sup>. In contrast, men demonstrated significantly lower rates of fear of crime compared to women, both before and during the economic crisis (24.8% and 25.4%, respectively) (Zarafonitou et al. 2021:79)<sup>18</sup>.

In the framework of an intersectional approach, Johansson and Haandrikman (2023) investigated fear of crime among men and women, placing particular emphasis, inter alia, on the intersection of gender with other demographic factors. Their research demonstrated that although women are recorded as more fearful of crime compared to men, the explanatory framework concerning the phenomenon is complex (Johansson & Haandrikman, 2023:1253). In relation to other demographic characteristics, high socioeconomic status was associated with lower levels of fear of crime for both males and females, although it had a stronger influence on women (Johansson and Haandrikman, 2023:1249 & 1253). Furthermore, despite males exhibiting lower levels of fear of crime compared to women, elderly men displayed a significant increase in fear of crime. According to the authors, such a finding could be attributed to the fact that elderly women have a lower risk of being victims of a sex crime compared to younger women (Pain, 1997, as cited in Johansson and Haandrikman, 2023:1254; Warr, 1984, 1985).

The fear of being sexually attacked has been one of the most prominent scientific arguments for understanding the high levels of fear of crime among women. In this context, women tend to be more fearful of victimisation compared to men due to their established belief that they are at a greater risk of being sexually assaulted<sup>19</sup>. This

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<sup>16</sup>See Zarafonitou, 2022 available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10717897.2022.2070726> and Kontopoulou, 2023, available at: [Empirical results on fear of crime in the framework of the research projects “BeSecure-FeelSecure” and “UrbanCrime: Spatial aspects of crime and insecurity in the era of economic crisis: Trends, dimensions and correlations” | Urban Crime. An international Journal](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10717897.2023.2241111)

<sup>17</sup>  $p < 0,01$  and  $p < 0,01$ , respectively.

<sup>18</sup> The research report (in Greek ) is available in: [UrbanCrime\\_D2.3\\_v0.2.pdf](https://www.urban-crime.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/UrbanCrime_D2.3_v0.2.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Even though women have low victimization rates, they have an elevated risk of being sexually victimised. See Wilcox, Jordan, Pritchard, 2006:357, who underline that rape “*is the only index offense for which women stand a far greater likelihood of victimisation in comparison to men*”.

concept is known as the *shadow of rape hypothesis* (Wilcox, Jordan, Pritchard, 2006:357). According to this hypothesis, women's fear of becoming victims of rape *overshadows* their fear of any other potential crimes against them. It is worth noting that the perception of rape as a "*master offence*" primarily concerns young women, who are more likely to be sexually victimised compared to the elderly (Ferraro, 1996:669; Warr, 1984). Against this backdrop, Ferraro (1996) investigated the *shadow of rape* hypothesis using research data from a national sample of adults<sup>20</sup>. According to the research data, even though females' fear of rape was higher than their fear of murder, they reported lower levels of risk perception regarding sexual victimisation compared to their perceived risk of being victimised by other types of crime (e.g. burglary while being away from the house, robbery, auto theft) (Ferraro, 1996:675). Additionally, it was found that the fear of being sexually assaulted affected women's fear of other forms of victimisation, with this influence being stronger when their fear pertained to a violent or personal crime (Ferraro, 1996: 686)<sup>21</sup>. Warr (1985) explored the fear of rape among a sample of residents in Seattle based on a mail survey carried out in 1981<sup>22</sup>. The data indicated that younger women perceived rape as the most likely violent crime to occur against them, whereas the opposite trend was recorded for the older age groups (Warr, 1985:243)<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, in the case of women, strong correlations were identified between fear of rape and fear of other offences, such as murder, robbery, threat with a weapon, and assault by a stranger, highlighting the perception of rape as a crime that "*does or may include other serious offences*" (Warr, 1985:245). Warr's (1985:247) data also revealed that women's fear of rape was correlated with fear of crimes that could entail rape as a consequence (e.g. burglary while at home), thus casting "*its shadow*

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<sup>20</sup> The final sample derived from the Fear of Crime in America Survey included 1101 individuals, and the response rate reached 61%. See Ferraro, 1996:671.

<sup>21</sup> According to Ferraro (1996:686) "*whenever face-to-face confrontation is likely, most women fear rape, and such fear explains much of why women are more afraid of crimes for which they have low rates of victimisation relative to men*".

<sup>22</sup> Warr applied two models: (a) the multiplicative model; and (b) the sensitivity to risk model. He considered sensitivity to risk as a significant factor for understanding the distribution of fear of crime among women and men, as well as among the young and the elderly. See Warr, 1985:242-243; 1987:30-31; 1984.

<sup>23</sup> As Warr (1985:243) points out, "*Among those under 36, the mean perceived risk of rape (2.80) is almost three times that of murder (1.80), and is similar to that of other, less serious offences, such as auto theft and burglary while home*".

*over a wide variety of circumstances, including some that might appear innocuous to men, for whom rape is not an additional consideration”.*

According to another explanation, the fear-gender gap arises from the fact that women are usually socialised to believe that their dominant characteristics involve being physically vulnerable, compliant and nonviolent; therefore, they grow up perceiving themselves as physically incapable of protecting themselves from victimisation, thus relying on men for protection (Schippers, 2007:91; Johansson & Haandrikman, 2023:1240; Franklin, Franklin, 2008:4; Rader et al., 2012:135; Gilchrist, Bannister, Ditton and Farrall, 1998:284). As Rader et al. (2012:135) suggest, this context of socialisation, combined with women’s fear of sexual victimisation, could explain their persistent belief that they are “*physically vulnerable to crime*”, particularly in the public space. Indeed, a common perception among women is that they could be victimised in public space by a stranger<sup>24</sup>. Such a perception can have serious consequences on how women navigate and utilise public space, especially in the urban context (Johansson & Haandrikman, 2023:1240; Pain, 1997; Navarrete-Hernandez, Vetro, Concha, 2021; Dubey, Bailey, Lee, 2025; Tandogan, Ilhan, 2016). In this light, the city could become “*a territory from which women are often excluded by harassment and fear of male violence*”, thereby enhancing men’s control over it (Koskela, 1999:112-113). This observation underscores the need to create public spaces that are accessible to all citizens, fostering social inclusion and enabling individuals to feel safe and participate freely in everyday social life without mobility and spatial limitations leading to exclusion from the public sphere (Iqbal, 2023; Koskela, 1999; Navarrete-Hernandez, Vetro, Concha, 2021). As Sadeghi et al. (2023:2) emphasise, “*a successful urban space is a liveable, sociable, and highly frequented space with the qualities of attractiveness, animatedness, meaning a place for the constant moving of people, accessibility, comfortableness, liveliness, and security*”.

In the present analysis, the role of gender in fear of crime will be examined alongside other demographic characteristics, drawing on empirical findings from the first wave of research conducted under the European Programme “BeSecure-FeelSecure” (BSFS)

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<sup>24</sup> This belief may arise from the fact that women are usually taught to consider “*strangers and unknown settings*” as dangerous and to “*hold images of the “stranger” as a potential perpetrator of sexual assault*” (Franklin and Franklin, 2008:17).

(A Holistic Risk Management Approach for monitoring, assessing and forecasting the efficiency, sustainability and resilience of Piraeus). The project aimed to promote urban security in the city of Piraeus through a multistakeholder approach at the local level and was implemented from 2019 to 2023 under the scientific responsibility of the first author<sup>25</sup>. Such research findings may prove useful for criminal policy, particularly in the design and implementation of customised urban security measures to ensure that all groups in the population, with an emphasis on the most vulnerable, feel safe in public space<sup>26</sup>.

### III. The research

#### Objective and methodology

The study presents research data on the role of gender in fear of crime, while also considering other individual characteristics such as age, education, and socioeconomic status. The data were collected during the first wave of research<sup>27</sup> conducted under the European Programme “*BeSecure-FeelSecure*” (BSFS) in the city of Piraeus; however, the aforementioned data were processed specifically for the present study. Within the framework of the first wave, a diagnostic survey was carried out in 2020 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and

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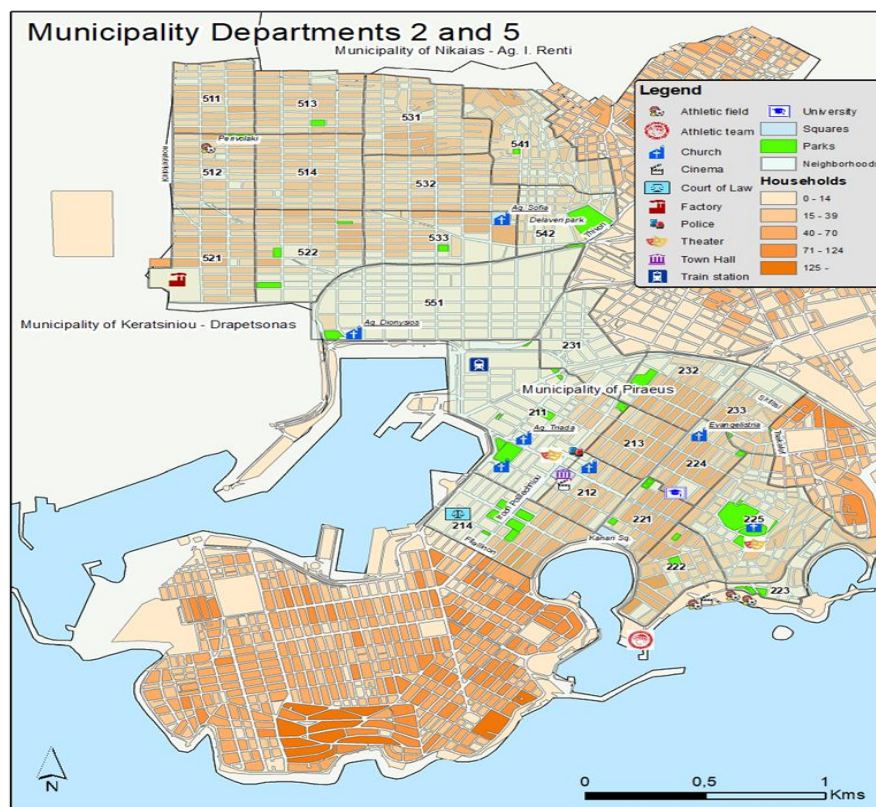
<sup>25</sup> The BeSecure-FeelSecure project was financed by the European Regional Development Fund within the framework of the Urban Innovative Actions Initiative (UIA) (<https://uia-initiative.eu/en>). The Municipality of Piraeus led the project, and the consortium included the Police (Ministry of Citizen Protection), the European Forum for Urban Security (Efus), Singular Logic, Space Hellas, and the Research Centre of the University of Piraeus. The first author, as the Head of the Laboratory of Urban Criminology of Panteion University, was the scientific responsible for the social and spatial interventions of the project. See the link: [Project Overview – Be Secure Feel Secure \(BSFS\)](#)

<sup>26</sup> Public space could be defined as “*the space where individuals see and are seen by others as they engage in public affairs*” (Mensch, 2007:31), while according to Iqbal (2021:3) public spaces are places that can be accessed by all people and “*provide opportunities for social interaction within the communities*”. In this framework, it is essential to ensure that all groups of people, including vulnerable groups, feel safe using public spaces. In this way, the inclusivity of public space becomes a top priority on the agenda of urban safety.

<sup>27</sup> Two waves of research were carried out under the scientific responsibility of the first author. See Zarafonitou, Mimis, Kalamaras, Synolakis, 2022; Kontopoulou, 2023.

5<sup>th</sup> Municipal Departments of Piraeus to explore the dimensions and spatial variability<sup>28</sup> of crime and fear of crime in the city, as well as the contributing factors.

The survey sample was representative, comprising 539 respondents selected at the household level through a multistage stratified sampling technique. Participants were interviewed using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) with a structured questionnaire. During the first wave of the survey, baseline values for five result indicators were measured (perception of safety, fear of crime, individual participation in community-based criminal policy, intention to participate in community-based criminal policy, citizens' trust in local authorities) (Zarafonitou, Mimis, Kalamaras, Synolakis, 2022; Kontopoulou, 2023)<sup>29</sup>.



<sup>28</sup> Through map visualisation.

<sup>29</sup> See in detail [Victimisation, insecurity & trust of citizens towards social institutions: Research findings in the 2nd & 5th Municipal District of Piraeus – Be Secure Feel Secure \(BSFS\)](#). The second wave of the survey, conducted in 2022 with a household sample of 548 respondents, aimed to evaluate the impact of the Project on the 2nd and 5th Municipal Departments of Piraeus by reassessing the five indicators. A multistage sampling technique and interviews via Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing were employed, as in the first wave.

## Research findings

The majority of the sample from the first wave were women (60.3% ), aged 55 years and above (21.9% and 29.3%<sup>30</sup>), Greeks (99.1%), permanent<sup>31</sup> residents (92%), married or in a cohabitation agreement (69%), pensioners (31%) and private sector employees (25.6%), with a high or relatively high educational level (95.7%), and with moderate (55.7%) to good (30.1% ) financial status.

Within the scope of this analysis, insecurity was examined from both a subjective and an objective viewpoint using relevant indicators. The fear of crime indicator referred to the residents' feelings of insecurity based on the classic question "*How safe do you feel walking alone in your area of residence after dark?*"; More specifically, it was measured by (a) the level of the residents' insecurity in the neighbourhood of the area of residence, (b) the number of occurrence of the most insecure areas, and (c) the factors that contribute to the creation of the feelings of insecurity<sup>32</sup> (Graph 1). Meanwhile, the perception of safety indicator referred to the physical and social features of the area of residence, reflecting the residents' perception of the area's safety<sup>33</sup> (Graph 2).

### Graph 1: Fear of crime indicator

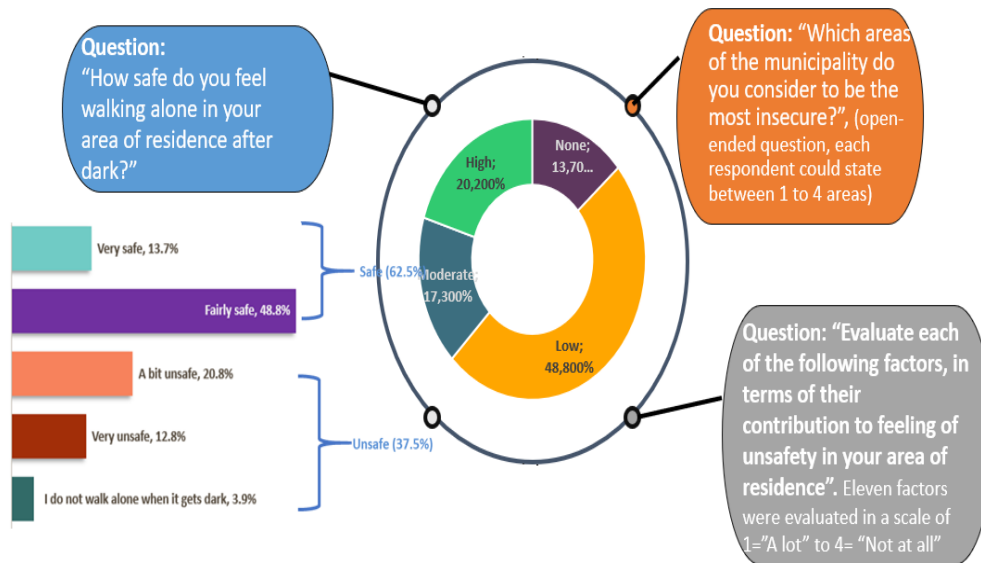
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<sup>30</sup> 21.9% were aged 55-64 years old, and 29.3% were aged 64 years old and above.

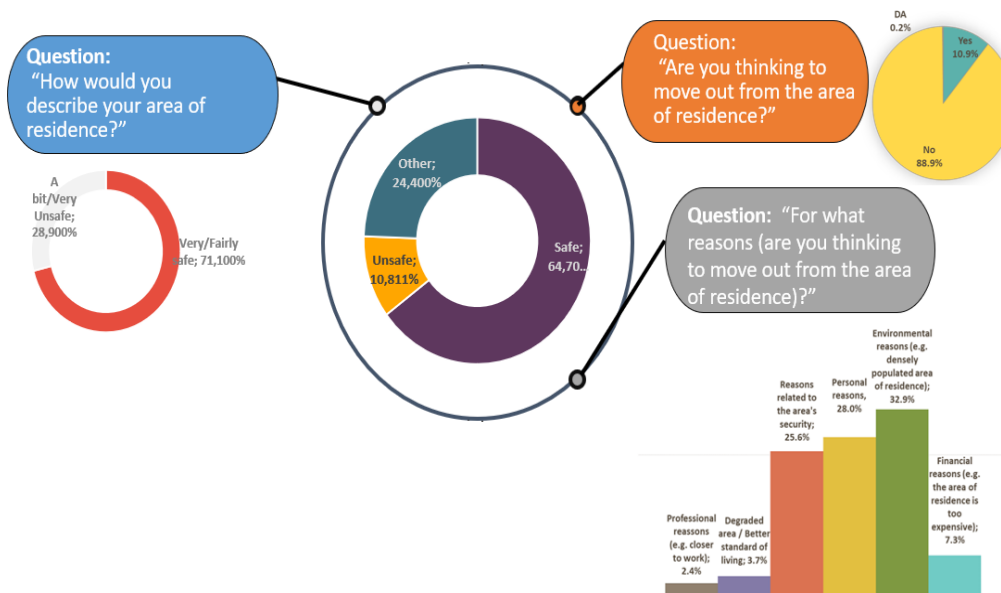
<sup>31</sup> Permanent residents were those who had lived in the area for more than six years.

<sup>32</sup> The indicator consisted of the following questions: (a) How safe do you feel walking alone in your area of residence after dark? (b) Which areas of the municipality do you consider to be the most insecure?, and (c) Evaluate each of the following factors in terms of their contribution to the feeling of insecurity in your area of residence (12 factors were assessed).

<sup>33</sup>The indicator is composed of the following questions: (a) How would you describe your area of residence? (b) Are you thinking to move out from the area of residence? and (c) For what reasons?



Graph 2: Perception of safety indicator



For the interpretation of the findings that follow, cumulative stacked bar charts were constructed based on the cross-tabulation of respondents' answers, using contingency tables as the underlying analytical structure. The statistical significance of the observed associations was assessed through the Chi-Square Test ( $\chi^2$ ), complemented by the examination of each cell's partial chi-square contribution. The partial chi-square represents the contribution of each individual cell to the overall  $\chi^2$  statistic and is used to identify the precise location of deviations from the assumption of independence. While the overall Chi-Square Test merely indicates that a dependency exists between the variables, the partial Chi-Square Test reveals where this dependency emerges. Its computation is based on the standardised residuals of each cell, which approximate a

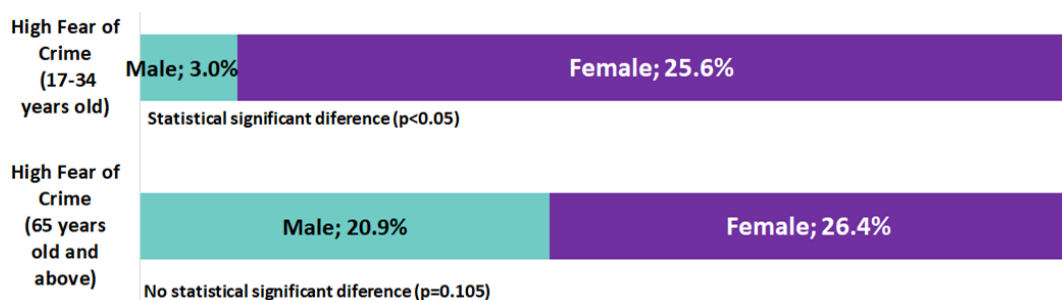
normal distribution; therefore, they can be interpreted as z scores. Consequently, absolute values greater than  $1.96 = z_{0.05}$  indicate cells that deviate significantly from the independence assumption at the  $\alpha = 0.05$  significance level. For example, in the crosstabulation presented in Graph 3, which examines perceived safety by gender and age group, the category “Unsafe” among males aged 17–34 shows a notably high adjusted residual (4.8), indicating that this group reports feeling “unsafe” far more frequently than would be statistically expected.

According to the research data, females showed significantly higher levels of fear of crime (25,2%) compared to their male counterparts (12,6%) ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Graph 3), with older females demonstrating the highest rates of fear (26.4%) compared to younger females (25.6%) and men, both young (3.0%) and old (20.9%). Young men displayed the lowest levels of fear of crime (partial chi-square  $p < 0.05$ ) (Graph 4).

**Graph 3:** Fear of crime indicator per gender

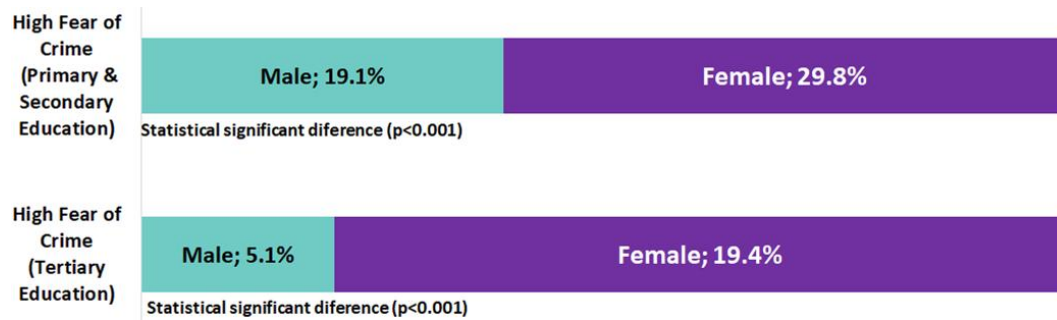


**Graph 4:** Fear of crime indicator per gender and age



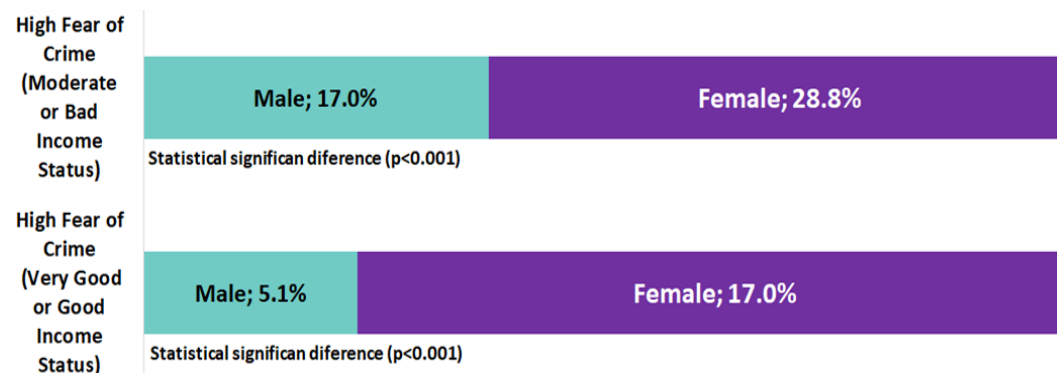
Regarding the role of education in combination with gender on fear of crime, it was found that the less educated women tended to feel more insecure (29.8%) than more educated women (19.4%), and men, regardless of their education (19.1% for those with low education level and 5.1% for those with high education level, partial chi-square  $p < 0.05$ ) (Graph 5).

**Graph 5:** Fear of crime indicator per gender and education level



Moreover, the intersection of gender and income status showed that the less wealthy women were the most fearful (28.8%, partial chi-square  $p < 0.05$ ) (Graph 6).

**Graph 6:** Fear of crime indicator per gender and income status



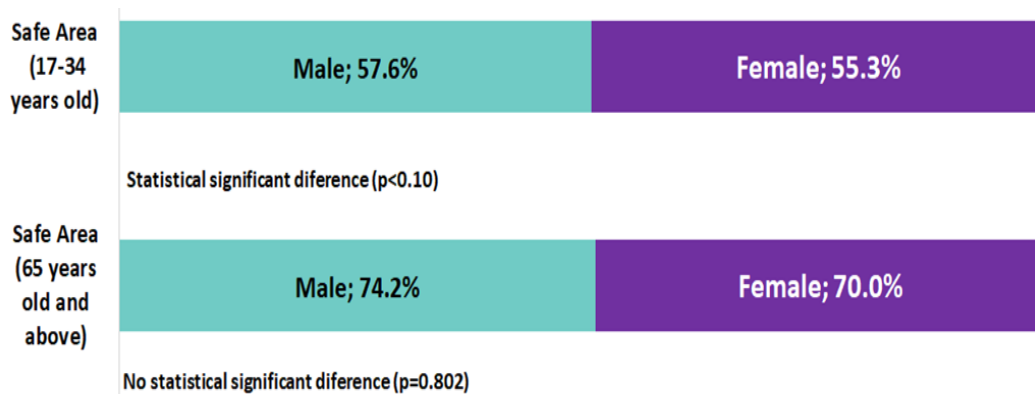
Moreover, women exhibit lower levels of perception of safety compared to men. Indeed, a breakdown by gender of the perception of safety indicator revealed that men reported higher levels of perception of safety regarding their area of residence (68.5%) compared to women (62.2%) ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Graph 7).

**Graph 7:** Perception of safety indicator per gender



Furthermore, the oldest<sup>34</sup> men reported the highest levels of perception of safety (74.2%) compared to the youngest<sup>35</sup> men (57.6%) and women, both the youngest (55.3%) and the oldest (70.0%). Indeed, older men and women tend to have a higher perception of safety than their younger counterparts (partial chi-square  $p < 0.05$ ), highlighting the greater role of age compared to gender in this case (Graph 8).

**Graph 8:** Perception of safety indicator per gender and age



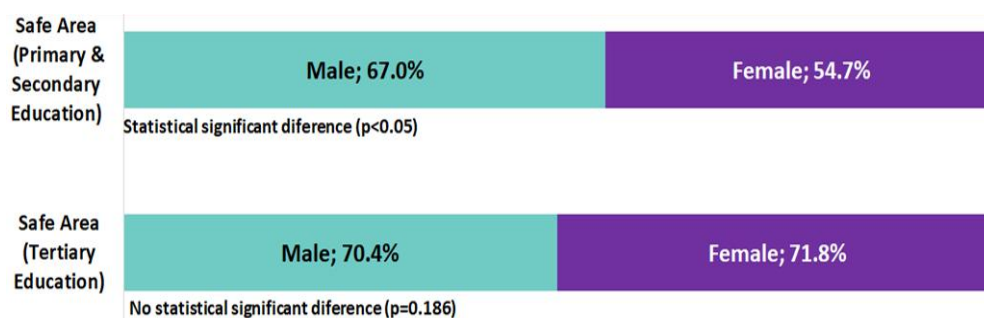
Further data analysis, based on the questions included in the indicator, revealed that perception of safety per age was influenced by years of residency in the area, combined with the reluctance of permanent residents to move out, as only 10.9% of the respondents reported having thought of moving out of their area of residence. Indeed, the older respondents (men and women) tended to show higher perception of safety scores compared to the younger ones, because they were permanent residents with no intention of moving out of their area.

Regarding the intersection of gender and education in relation to the perception of safety, the data showed that the less educated men and women had a lower rate of perception of safety compared to those with a higher level of education. In any case, the less educated women reported the lowest levels of perception of safety (54.7%, partial chi-square  $p < 0.05$ ) (Graph 9). In addition, the intersection of gender and income status revealed a similar picture, with women of lower income status having the lowest rates of perception of safety (55.9%, partial chi-square  $p < 0.05$ ) (Graph 10).

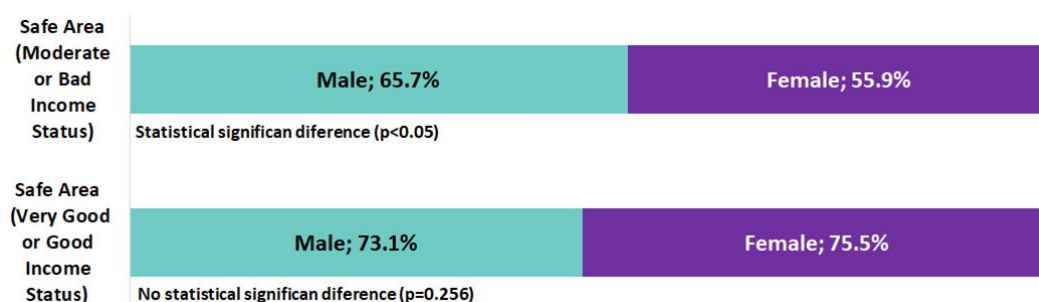
<sup>34</sup> Aged 65 years and above.

<sup>35</sup> Aged 17-34 years.

**Graph 9:** Perception of safety per gender and educational level



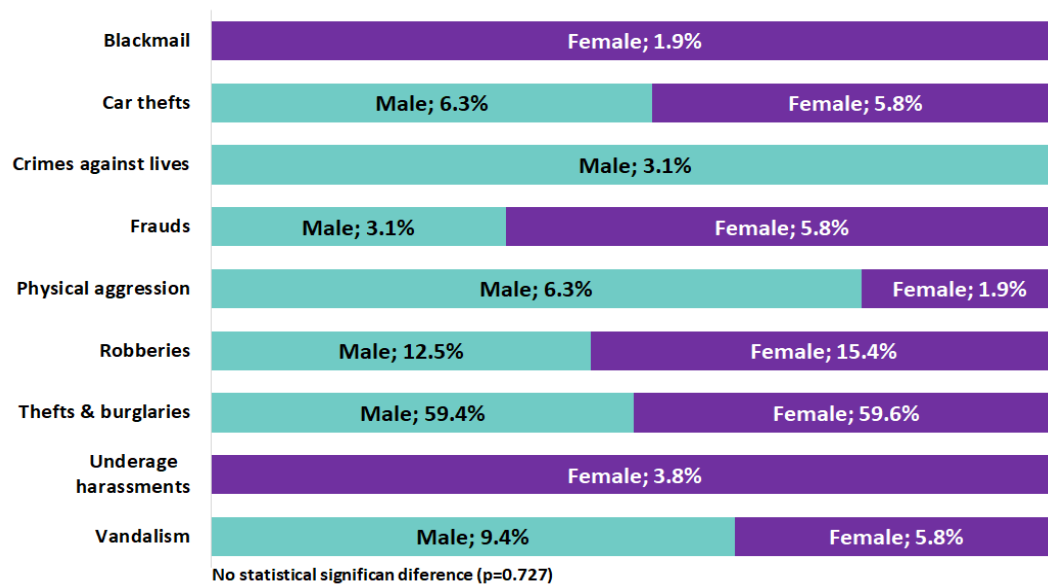
**Graph 10:** Perception of safety per gender and income status



Regarding victimisation rates, women reported being victimised at a higher percentage (15.4%) compared to men (9.8%); however, this difference in proportions did not reach statistical significance. The crimes of which they were victimised were mainly theft/burglary and robbery. Nevertheless, only women reported being victims of personal crimes such as underage harassment and blackmail (Graph 11).

The higher victimisation rates observed among women in the sample appear to be directly associated with the spatial distribution of incidents, as certain areas exhibit markedly elevated levels of reported criminal activity while simultaneously having a higher proportion of female respondents. Specifically, neighbourhoods such as Tampouria, Maniatika, and Evaggelistria display the highest levels of self-reported victimisation. Given that these same areas include a relatively larger share of women in the sample, the overall victimisation rate for women increases not because women are “generally” more frequently victimised, but because they are more present in spatial contexts where victimisation is correspondingly more prevalent.

**Graph 11:** Offences of which they were victimised

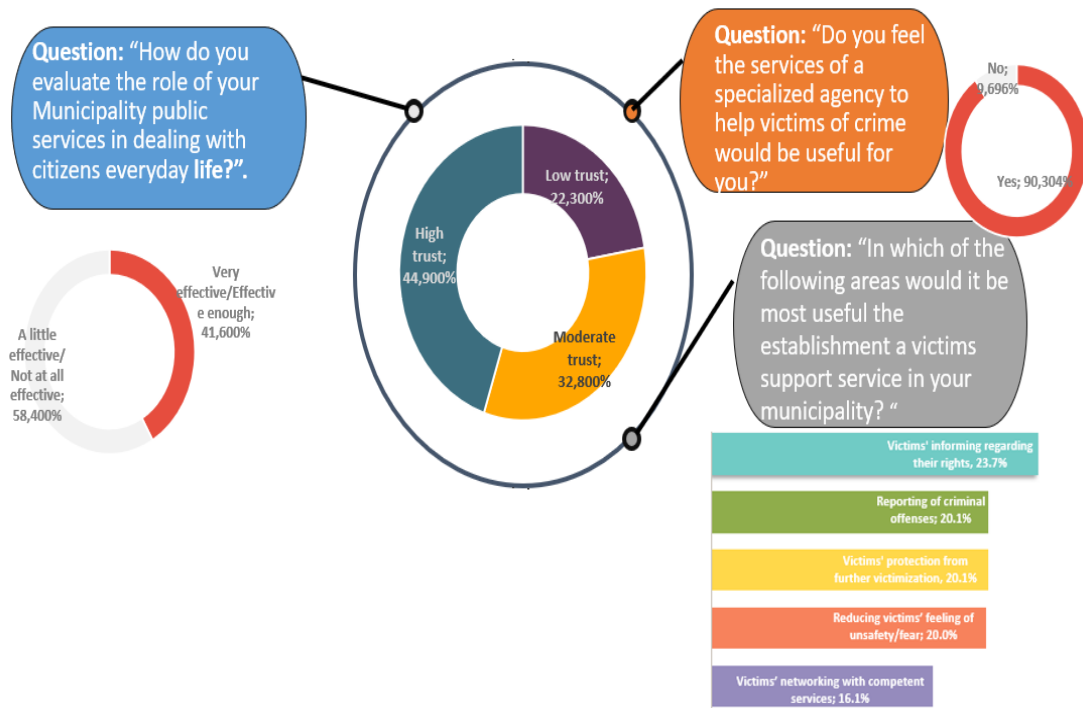


Furthermore, older females (13.2%,  $p < 0.05$ ) were more likely to report being victimised compared to younger females (10.3%) and also compared to younger and older males (12.1% and 7.5%, respectively, partial chi-square  $p < 0.10$ ). It was also found that the less educated women reported having been victimised at a higher percentage (17.1%) compared to more educated women (13.2%) and men, either with lower (9.6%) or higher (10.1%) educational level. Finally, women with less financial resources were more likely to have experienced victimisation (18.1%) compared to wealthier women (10.4%), and men, whether economically disadvantaged (9.6%) or not (10.3%), partial chi-square  $p < 0.10$ .

During the first wave, the attitudes of the sample towards the local authorities and the Police were also investigated as they relate to the citizens' feelings of safety. In this context, an indicator of citizens' trust in local authorities was developed to measure their confidence that local authorities can ensure a safer urban environment<sup>36</sup> (Graph 12).

**Graph 12:** The trust in local authorities indicator

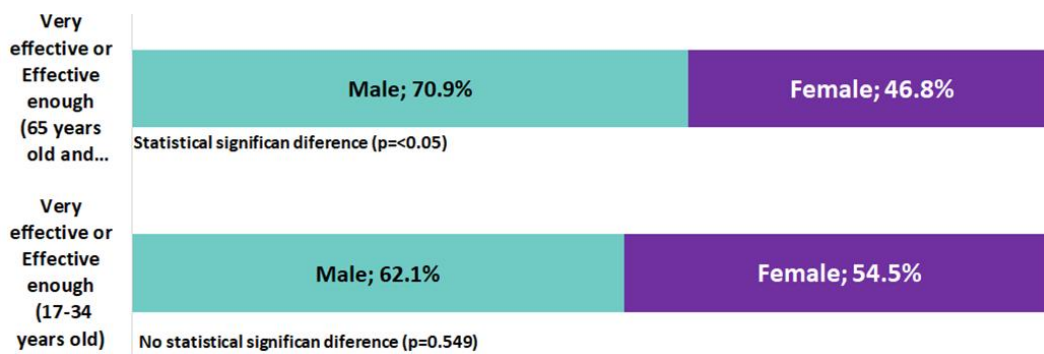
<sup>36</sup> The indicator consisted of the following questions: (a) How do you evaluate the role of your Municipal public services in dealing with citizens' everyday life? (b) Do you feel the services of a specialised agency to help victims of crime would be useful for you? and (c) In which of the following areas would it be most useful the establishment a victims support service in your municipality? (6 areas were included).



According to the results of the indicator, women displayed higher levels of trust in local authorities (49.8%) compared to men (37.4%) ( $p < 0.05$ ), with the older women exhibiting the highest levels of trust (26.4%) compared to the younger ones (25.6%) and men, both young (3.0%) and old (20.9%). Furthermore, females with higher education (54.9%, partial chi-square  $p < 0.05$ ) showed higher levels of trust than those with lower education (45.9%, partial chi-square  $p < 0.05$ ), and higher than men in both categories (34.3% and 40.0%, respectively, partial chi-square  $p < 0.05$ ). Finally, among respondents, females with moderate- or bad-income status (34.9%) showed lower trust in local authorities compared to males of the same income status (46.9%,  $p < 0.05$ ) and also compared to the wealthier males and females (52.3%, 40.8% respectively, partial chi-square  $p < 0.10$ ).

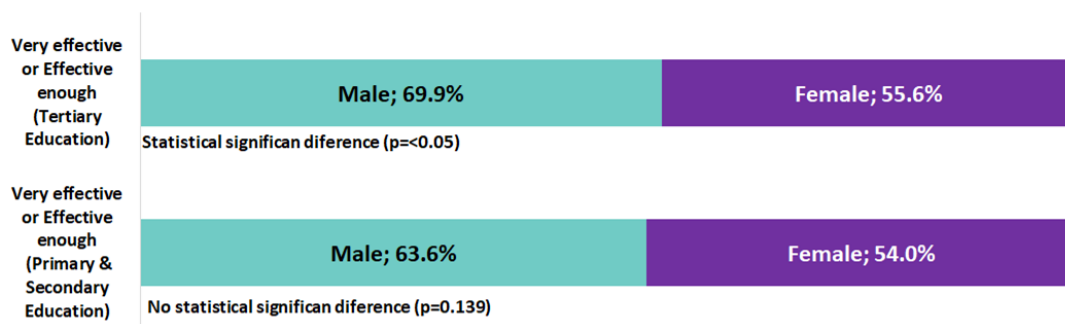
Regarding participants' attitudes toward police effectiveness, the research data indicated that there was a significant difference in the rates of positive evaluation of police work, as men were more likely to consider police work very effective or effective enough at a higher rate (66.5%) than women (54.7%) ( $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, older women tend to evaluate police work as very effective or effective enough at a lower rate (46.8%,  $p < 0.05$ ) compared to men of the same age group (70.9%) and compared to younger women (54.5%) and men (62.1%) (Graph 13).

**Graph 13:** Assessment of the police work per gender and age

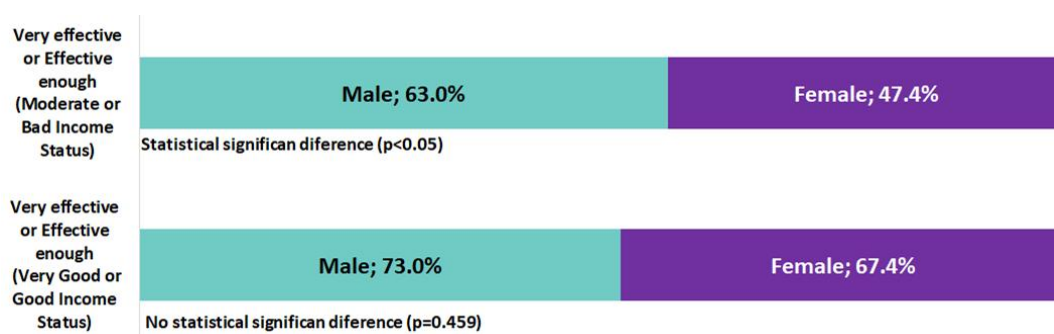


When satisfaction with the role of the police is examined in relation to the educational level of men and women, it emerges that the more educated men evaluated police work as effective at the highest percentage (69.9%, partial chi square  $p<0.05$ ), while women with the lower education evaluated the police work positively at the lowest rate (54.0% partial chi square  $p<0.05$ ) (Graph 14).

**Graph 14:** Assessment of the police work per gender and educational level



**Graph 15:** Assessment of the police work per gender and income status



Finally, regarding the intersection of gender and economic status, the research data showed that financially wealthier men tended to evaluate the police work as effective at the highest rate (73.0%, partial chi-square  $p<0.05$ ) and financially weaker women at the lowest rate (47.4%) (Graph 15).

Overall, the study revealed that women show lower levels of security from both a subjective and objective point of view, as they fear crime more than men and also have a lower perception of safety regarding their area of residence compared to their male counterparts.

The age seems to shape fear of crime, as older women are more fearful than younger women and men (regardless of their age). Moreover, the intersection of gender with education revealed that the less educated women reported the highest rates of fear of crime. At the same time, a similar picture emerged regarding the intersection of gender and income status.

In the case of the perception of safety regarding the area of residence, the data showed that older men and women reported higher perception of safety scores, being permanent residents in the area and having no intention to move out. Furthermore, the intersection of gender with education revealed that the less educated women reported the lowest levels of perception of safety regarding their area of residence. In the same vein, women with a lower income were less likely to consider their area of residence safe.

Reported victimisation rates were higher for women, and personal forms of victimisation were reported only by them, whereas less educated and less wealthy women were more likely to have experienced some form of victimisation.

Finally, regarding the attitudes towards the local authorities and police, the research showed that even though women tend to assess police work positively at a lower rate compared to men, they exhibit higher levels of trust in local authorities than men.

#### **IV. Concluding remarks**

Building on previous research, the present analysis revealed that gender is a key variable in shaping feelings of insecurity, as women are generally more afraid of being victimised than men. In fact, according to the research data, twice as many women reported high levels of fear of crime compared to men. In this context, the relevant criminological theories highlight the role of the “shadow of rape” hypothesis and the socialisation context within which girls usually grow up believing that they are physically vulnerable and unable to protect themselves effectively in the event of a criminal attack (Ferraro, 1996; Wilcox, Jordan, Pritchard, 2006; Warr, 1985). The fact that older women exhibited the highest levels of fear of crime underscores the

significance of the combination of physical factors in shaping individuals' perception of their risk of victimisation, their capacity to protect themselves, and the severity of the crime's impact on them. Additionally, social vulnerability reflected by low educational level and low income was found to be related to high levels of fear of crime (Killias, 1990), with less educated and less wealthy women exhibiting the highest rates of fear of crime and the lowest levels of perception of safety regarding their area of residence.

Contrary to previous research experience, the data analysis showed that women reported being victimised at a higher rate compared to men; however, the higher victimisation rates reported by women in the sample appear to be directly associated with the spatial distribution of incidents, since certain areas exhibited markedly elevated levels of reported criminal activity while simultaneously having a higher proportion of female respondents. It is noteworthy that personal crimes such as blackmail and underage harassment were reported as past victimisation experiences only by women. This finding aligns with the well-supported argument that females experience higher rates of victimisation in personal crimes, particularly sex crimes (Fox, Nobles, Piquero, 2007; Wilcox, Jordan, Pritchard, 2006; Hale, 1996; Pain, 1995). In addition, the less wealthy women showed the highest rates of reported victimisation. In fact, research data has shown that individuals with low socioeconomic status are more likely to reside in deprived areas with high crime and victimisation rates and be unable to address the damage caused by their victimisation due to a lack of financial resources (Skogan, Maxfield, 1981).

Women also tended to assess police work positively at a lower rate compared to men. Research in the field of fear of crime, has repeatedly demonstrated that individuals who show high rates of fear of crime tend to evaluate police work negatively (Zarafonitou, 2002, 2011, 2018; Zarafonitou et al. 2021; Zvekick, 1997), a finding that should be considered alongside the well-established argument that women are generally more fearful than men; however, women displayed a higher level of trust in local authorities than men. In this context, it should be considered that the relevant indicator included, *inter alia*, questions regarding the operation of a victim support unit, as well as the fact that women reported victimisation at a higher rate compared to men; therefore, the prospect of local authorities establishing a victim support unit probably strengthens their trust in them.

Women having higher levels of fear of crime and lower levels of perceived safety compared to their male counterparts is significant for urban planners and policy makers in the field of urban security. From a criminal policy perspective, the aforementioned research findings emphasise the need to design and develop a safe, accessible and inclusive urban environment that considers both the characteristics of the built environment and the individual and social factors that affect women's feelings of safety (Dubey, Bailey, Lee, 2025:4-5). Thus, measures of a social and situational crime prevention nature are required for a holistic approach to the phenomenon. Although policing, technological measures and crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED)<sup>37</sup> interventions are valuable for the enhancement of safety in the urban context, social cohesion and the establishment of trust within the community are vital for reducing the fear of crime and enhancing feelings of safety, especially among vulnerable groups in the population, such as women (Koskela, 1997 as cited in Dubey, Bailey, Lee, 2025:5). Therefore, participatory crime prevention actions that promote social cohesion and solidarity among citizens, along with the development of a robust network of stakeholders, actively involved in such actions, as well as the holistic support for crime victims are essential conditions for the development of an effective urban safety strategy that aims to ensure a *successful* public space. According to Sadeghi et al. (2023:2), “*a successful urban space is a liveable, sociable, and highly frequented space with the qualities of attractiveness, animatedness, meaning a place for the constant moving of people, accessibility, comfortableness, liveliness, and security*”. This goal becomes a top priority of the urban safety agenda, as women often restrict themselves when using and navigating public places, leading to feelings of exclusion from the public realm due to their intense fear of crime (Navarrete-Hernandez, Vetro, Concha, 2021:3; Koskela, 1999:112).

In the effort to create a safe and inclusive city, under the BSFS Project and based on the valuable findings of the diagnostic research, a series of actions were designed and implemented, also considering the needs of women. The actions and interventions<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Regarding CPTED see Crowe, 2000; Newman, 1973; Jeffery, 1971; Mihinjac, Saville, 2019; Cozens & Love, 2015

<sup>38</sup> The project was organised into three layers: governance, social and spatial actions, and cyberspace. Concerning the social actions, informative, sensitising, and mobilisation activities such as consultation meetings with local institutional and social stakeholders, training on urban security issues for public servants, members of the Piraeus Local Council for Crime Prevention, and local stakeholders, awareness

addressed to the women included: (a) the creation and establishment of a Victim Information Unit<sup>39</sup> in the city of Piraeus which collaborated with other agencies to refer, among others, women who have been victimised, (b) the implementation of spatial interventions based on the CPTED approach in playgrounds mainly used by women and their children, and (c) and the conduct of various social actions to inform, raise awareness, and mobilise the local community on urban safety issues related to women (e.g., violence against women). It is worth noting that a broad and solid network of local stakeholders was developed to collaborate closely with the Victim Information Unit and the Local Council for Crime Prevention, which was set up by the project to supervise the implementation of the foreseen actions. Among the engaged stakeholders were also organisations focusing on women, such as the Women's Counselling Centre, the SOS Children's Villages- Child and Family Centre in Piraeus, and others<sup>40</sup>.

Overall, a multilevel approach to urban safety is essential to reduce crime and fear of crime, as well as to foster social cohesion, solidarity, and connectivity through the community's active involvement. The ultimate goal is to develop safe, inclusive, and sustainable cities (Iqbal, 2021), thereby improving the quality of daily life for all citizens in urban settings.

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sessions for high school students on bullying and cyber threats, training sessions on urban security issues for local shop owners, sporting events, etc. were implemented.

<sup>39</sup> [Press Release | The Establishment of the Crime Victims Information Unit of the Municipality of Piraeus – Be Secure Feel Secure \(BSFS\)](#)

<sup>40</sup> For the actions and interventions designed and implemented under the project and the scientific responsibility of the first author, see [Be Secure Feel Secure – Be Secure Feel Secure \(BSFS\)](#)

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