VICTIMIZATION AND FEAR OF CRIME IN ROMANIA AND HUNGARY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

**VICTIMIZATION AND FEAR OF CRIME
IN ROMANIA AND HUNGARY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

Using multivariate analyses on cross-sectional data from the European Social Survey Round 3–2006/2007 conducted on representative samples of persons aged 15 and over in Romania (N=2139) and Hungary (N=1518), this comparative study will explore the relationships between victimization, trust in the police and fear of crime in two Eastern European neighboring countries that recently became EU member states. Socio-demographic and personal-level indicators which are likely to influence people's perception of safety will also be examined. Based on the number of crimes reported to the police in 2005, total crime rates in Hungary appear to be significantly higher than in Romania. However, the fear of victimization is, on average, significantly more intense in Romania than in Hungary. Although results show that in both countries, persons with higher levels of trust in the police are less likely to be afraid of being victimized, direct and indirect experience with victimization is the most important predictor of fear of crime in Hungary and Romania. Consistent with previous research, gender, age, and urban residency are additional significant correlates of fear of crime.

Keywords: fear of crime, victimization, trust in the police, fear of crime correlates, Eastern Europe.

INTRODUCTION

The popularity of crime-related television shows in North America, Europe, and elsewhere, continuously confirm the public's fascination with crime. However, crime is not a fictitious fact and most modern societies consider it a serious social problem. And news stories about crime, terrorism, civil wars, and international conflicts are a constant daily reminder of that. Despite inter-country variations in

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crime rates, in each nation there is a general consensus that local policies should identify strategies meant to create crime-free or safer environments. Direct and/or indirect experience with victimization negatively affects social integration at the community level, contributes to out-migration and neighborhood stigmatization, restricts certain human activities, adds security costs, lowers real estate values, generates avoidance behaviors, and overall, negatively impacts the residents' quality of life.

Scholars have noted that similar to the criminal victimization effects, the negative consequences of fear of crime should not be ignored. Fear of victimization can erode public health and psychological well-being, can change routine activities and habits, can generate people's withdrawal from communities perceived as unsafe, and can adversely impact a neighborhood's cohesion, trust, and stability[1]. In addition, a high fear-of-crime level may signal perceived police ineffectiveness[2]. As a result, public policy makers should know more about the intensity and extent of fear of crime and should focus not only on crime-reduction measures, but also on strategies that would alter public beliefs about crime levels and the potential risk of victimization.

More than two decades ago, Pearson noted that along with fear of streets and fear of youth, fear of crime was present in Western culture since immemorial times[3]. Although crime rate trends registered in the last decade, suggest a decrease in violent and property offenses in North America and Europe as well, fear of crime continues to persist in all industrialized societies. In fact, as research shows, fear of crime levels remained relatively stable since the 1960s across different geographic units[4].

Fear of crime is an emotional response to crime or to symbols perceived as being associated with crime. In order to obtain a fear reaction in humans, a certain situation has to be recognized as a real or imaginary potential danger[5]. That is why people's feelings of (un)safety should be discussed in relationship with the probability of being victimized, as indicated by official crime data.

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[1] See Hale, C. (1996), Fear of crime: A review of the literature. International Review of Victimology, 42), p. 79–150; Stafford, M., Chandola, T. & Marmot, M. (2007). Association between fear of crime and mental health and physical functioning. *American Journal of Public Health*, 97, p. 2076–2081.

[2] Baur, J. (2007), Fear of crime: The impact of age, victimization, perceived vulnerability to victimization, and neighborhood characteristics. *Australasian Center for Policing Research Issues*, 6, p. 1–8.

[3] Pearson, G. (1983), *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears*. Basingstoke, GB: Palgrave Macmillan.

[4] See Warr, M. (1995), The polls – poll trends, public opinions on crime and punishments. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 59, p. 196–310.

[5] See Ferraro, K. F. (1995), *Fear of Crime. Interpreting Victimization Risk*. Suny Series in New Directions in Crime and Justice. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

This research is an empirical comparative analysis of how people interpret criminal realities and potential victimization risks in two neighboring EU countries, which are former members of the Eastern Block. To the author's knowledge, this is the first cross-national study that compares Hungary and Romania in terms of victimization levels and fear-of-crime correlates. While the central research question focuses on the inter-country distribution and etiology of fear of crime, this study will also identify the characteristics of the Romanian and Hungarian residents especially sensitive to issues of safety and insecurity. For the ten-year period (1995–2005) that preceded the survey conducted on nationally representative samples that serves as the basis for the secondary analyses presented in this paper, Romania and Hungary had on average different total crime rates. This paper will explore the relationship between official crime statistics and fear of victimization.

In a comparative study of police practices in several European countries, Mawby[6] noted that in many post-Communist societies the socio-political context has changed dramatically and that increased crime rates and fear of crime influenced police practices, and as a consequence, the public perception of police efficiency. If in the past, the lack of information gave the impression that crime was under control, in recent years, public opinion polls registered changes in attitudes toward the police. In Mawby's view, in many former Communist countries order maintenance replaced freedom and democracy at the top of the political agenda. The present study will also examine the level of trust in the police and its effect on fear of crime.
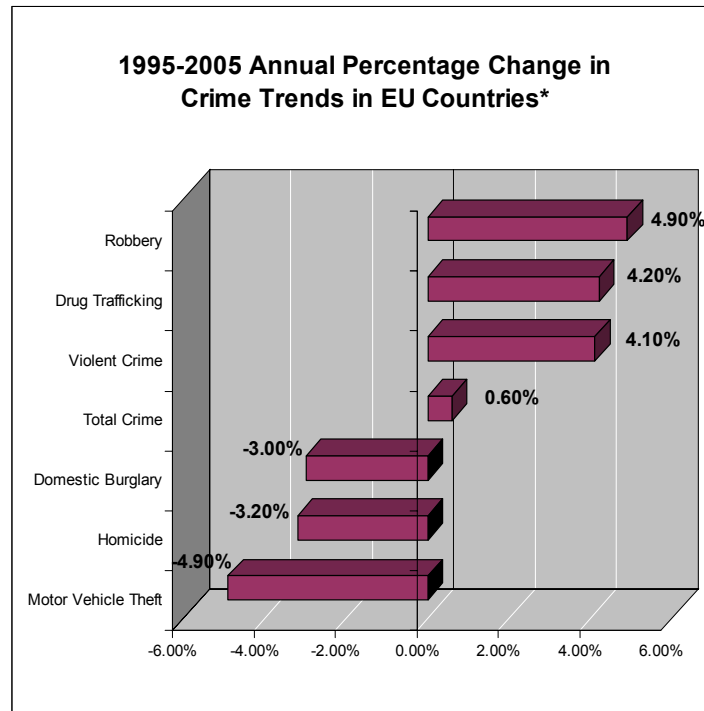
RECENT CRIME TRENDS IN ROMANIA AND HUNGARY

Based on official statistics[7] regarding 1995–2005 crime trends in Europe, it can be concluded that in most EU countries the total number of crimes increased up to 2002, with a downward trend in the following years. The greatest overall annual increases in crime rates were recorded in Slovenia (10%), Poland (5%), Malta, Greece, and Portugal (all 3%). Violent crimes increased (4.1%) in most EU countries with reliable data, with the highest annual rises in France (7%), the Netherlands (6%), and Portugal (5%). For all countries with complete information (Figure 1), average crime rates suggest the highest increase for robberies (4.9%).

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[6] Mawby, R. J. (1996), Comparative research of police practices in England, Germany, Poland, and Hungary. In Pagon, M. (ed.), *Policing in Central & Eastern Europe. Comparing Firsthand Knowledge with Experience from the West*. Ljubljana, Slovenia: College of Police and Security Studies, p. 473–485.
[7] http://ep.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/crime/data/comparisons

Crime trends in EU countries (1995–2005)[8]

1995-2005 Annual Percentage Change in Crime Trends in EU Countries*

Category	Value
Robbery	4.90%
Drug Trafficking	4.20%
Violent Crime	4.10%
Total Crime	0.60%
Domestic Burglary	-3.00%
Homicide	-3.20%
Motor Vehicle Theft	-4.90%

      When crime trends are compared, from 1995 to 2005, Hungary registered a decrease (–2% annually) in the total number of crimes recorded by police; Hungary also registered a decrease in homicides (-5%) and burglaries (–5%). However, overall, Hungary registered a 3% annual increase in violent crimes. Although the total number of crimes recorded by police in Romania in 2000 (353,745), was higher than in 1995 (297,046), the total number of crimes constantly decreased from 2000 to 2005. From 1995 to 2005, homicides decreased in Romania by 4%, robberies by 3%, and domestic burglaries by 13%. Nevertheless, drug-related offenses increased in both countries. Drug trafficking increased by 16% in Romania and by 30% in Hungary. Table 1 shows the overall distribution of crime in Hungary and Romania for the years 1995 and 2005. Based on police records, 2005 crime rates per 100,000 people have been also calculated for selected

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      [8] Adapted from Tavares, C. & Thomas, G. (2007). Crime and criminal justice. In Statistics in focus. Population & Social Conditions, 15/2007. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. It should be noted that these data refer only to European countries (aproximately a half or a third of EU states) that had consistent time series and no missing data for the included offenses.

offenses. It can be noticed that in 2005, the total crime rate in Hungary was almost five times higher than in Romania. Also, the violent crime rate was approximately eleven times higher in Hungary than in Romania. In addition, robbery, domestic-burglary, motor- vehicle- theft, and drug-trafficking rates in Hungary were much higher than in Romania. From the reported selected offenses, however, in 2005, homicides had a higher prevalence in Romania than in Hungary. The 2003–2005 average homicide rate per 100,000 people was 1.98 in Hungary and 2.33 in Romania[9].

Table 1

Police-recorded crimes in Romania and Hungary 1995–2005*

	Hungary			Romania		
	No. of offenses 1995	No. of offenses 2005	Crime rates 2005	No. of offenses 1995	No. of offenses 2005	Crime rates 2005
Total crimes	502,036	436,522	4395.5	297,046	208,236	936.0
Violent crime	25,773	32,760	329.9	9,212	6,469	29.1
Homicide	296	164	1.7	758	453	2.0
Robbery	2,657	2,982	30.0	4,157	3,326	14.9
Domestic burglary	22,372	17,786	179.0	31,163	9,135	41.1
Motor-vehicle theft	18,363	10,736	108.1	2,687	1,082	4.8
Drug trafficking	84	1,197	12.1	368	2,441	10.9

* Adapted from Eurostat data, 2007[10]. Crime rates) per 100,000 have been calculated by the author, based on population estimates in Hungary and Romania for 2005[11].

FEAR OF CRIME CORRELATES

Since it entered the criminological vocabulary in the 1960s, the 'fear of crime' concept has been the subject of an extensive academic debate.[12] In general, research considered as determinants of fear of crime individual-level variables (e.g., gender, age, socioeconomic status, marital status, religious denomination, standard of living, trust in the police, exposure to media, and experience with victimization) as well as contextual variables, such as, population size, residential area, area's racial composition, or crime rates. To summarize, the three theoretical

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[9] Tavares & Thomas, *op. cit.,* 2007.

[10] http://ep.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/crime/data/comparisons

[11] See CIA – World Factbook regarding population estimates based on Census data; The Romanian population at the 2002 Census was 22,246,862 and the population of Hungary at the 2001 Census was 9,930,915; https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html

[12] For a critical examination of different 'fear of crime' models, see Farrall, S. & Lee, M. (2008). Fear of Crime: Critical Voices in an Age of Anxiety. New York, NY: Routledge –Cavendish.

paths[13] identified in fear-of-crime research are the vulnerability perspective, the experience with victimization perspective, and the ecological perspective that focuses on the effect of contextual factors.

The vulnerability framework is primarily concerned with sociodemographic characteristics of persons (e.g., women, the elderly, racial/ethnic minorities, and the poor) who, in general, lack effective defense mechanisms and have a lower ability to control potential victimization events. With few exceptions[14], almost all studies that included gender among fear-of-crime predictors found that, despite overall lower victimization rates, women seem to be more afraid of crime than men are[15]. Similarly, despite a low objective victimization risk, the elderly appear to have higher levels of fear of crime than younger people do. Most research that examined the effect of age on perceived risk of victimization concluded that once they get older, people tend to become more fearful[16]. However, some studies did not find a linear relationship between age and fear of crime or found a negative relationship between these two variables[17]. Regarding the relationship fear-of-crime – socioeconomic status, research showed mixed results, as well. If some researchers found a negative relationship between fear of victimization and income[18], others

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[13] See Hale, C. (1996). Fear of crime: A review of the literature. *International Review of Victimology*, 4, p. 79–150.

[14] For examples of studies that did not find a significant relationship between fear of crime and gender, see Giles-Sims, J. (1984). A multivariate analysis of perceived likelihood of victimization and degree of worry about crime among older people. *Victimology: An International Journal*, 9(2), p. 222–233; Krannich, R.S., Berry, H.E., and Greider, T. (1989). Fear of crime in rapidly changing communities: A longitudinal analysis. *Rural Sociology*, 54(2), p. 195–212.

[15] See, for instance, De Donder, L.,Verte, D., and Messelis, E. (2005); Fear of crime and elderly people: Key factors that determine fear of crime among elderly people in West Flanders. *Ageing International*, 30(4), p. 363-376; Garofalo, J. (1979). Victimization and the fear of crime. *Journal of Research in Crime & Delinquency,* 16(1), p. 80-97; Lagrange, R.L. & Ferraro, K.F. (1989). Assessing age and gender differences in perceived risk and fear of crime. *Criminology*, 27(4), p. 697–729 ; Chiricos, T. Hogan, M. & Gertz, M. (1997). Racial composition of neighborhood and fear of crime. *Criminology*, 35(1), p. 107–129; Lane, J. & Meeker, J.W. (2000). Subcultural diversity and the fear of crime and gangs. *Crime & Delinquency*, 46(4), p. 497–521; Wilcox, P. Quesenberry, N. & Jones, S. (2003). The built environment and community crime risk interpretations. *Journal of Research in Crime & Delinquency*, 40(3), p. 322–345; Reese, B. (2009). Determinants of the fear of crime. *International Journal of Sociology*, 39(1), p. 62–75.

[16] For a review, see Ziegler, R., & Mitchell, D.B. (2003). Aging and fear of crime: An experimental aproach to an aparent paradox. *Experimental Aging Research*, 29(2), p. 173–187.

[17] For research suggesting that age is not related to fear of crime, see Dammert, L. & Malone, M.F.T. (2003). Fear of crime or fear of life? Public insecurities in Chile. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 22(1), p. 79–101. For research studies that found younger people having higher levels of fear than their older counterparts, see Chadee, D. & Ditton, J. (2003). Are older people most afraid of crime? *British Journal of Criminology*, 43(2), p. 417–433; Kanan, W.J. & Pruitt, M.V.(2002). Modeling fear of crime and perceived victimization risk: The (in)significance of neighborhood integration. *Sociological Inquiry*, 72(4), p. 527–548.

[18] Taylor, R.B., Gottfredson, S.D., and Brower, S. (1984). Block crime and fear: Defensible space, local social ties, and territorial functioning. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 21(4), p. 303–331.

have not found a significant relationship between these variables of interest[19]. Similarly, researchers did not reach a consensus when examining the impact of education on fear of crime[20]. Minority status is another variable considered to indicate social vulnerability. If some studies[21] found that people belonging to racial or ethnic minorities tend to be more fearful than non-minority residents, other researchers did not find a significant relationship between minority status and fear of victimization[22].

Regarding contextual factors, evidence suggests that the place of residence impacts one's feelings of safety. A number of researchers found that residents of larger urban areas tend to report higher levels of fear of crime than people living in smaller cities or rural areas[23]. In addition, other studies found a significant positive relationship between the population size of the residential community and the levels of perceived unsafety[24]. More recently, using the social integration model, research also examined the relationship between fear of crime and perceived neighborhood characteristics, such as collective efficacy (i.e., how trustworthy the neighbors are) and local social capital (i.e., how likely the neighbors are to help one another). Gibson et al., found, for instance, a negative correlation between perceived collective efficacy and fear of crime[25].

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[19] See, Clemente, F. & Kleiman, M.B. (1977). Fear of crime in the United States: A multivariate analysis. Social Forces, 56(2), p. 519–531.

[20] For studies that identified education as a significant predictor of fear of crime see, LaGrange, R.L. & Ferraro, K.F. (1987). The elderly's fear of crime. Research on aging, 9(3), p. 372–391; Lane, J. & Meeker, J.W. (2000). Subcultural diversity and the fear of crime and gangs. Crime and Delinquency, 46(4), p. 497–521; Scott, H. (2003). Stranger danger: Explaining women's fear of crime. Western Criminology Review, 4(3), p. 203–214. For research that did not find a significant relationship between fear of victimization and education, see Clemente, F. & Kleiman, M.B. (1977). Fear of crime in the United States: A multivariate analysis. Social Forces, 56(2), p. 519–531; Toseland, R.W. (1982). Fear of crime: Who is most vulnerable? *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 10(3), p. 199–209; Wyant, B. R. (2008). Multilevel impacts of perceived incivilities and perceptions of crime risk on fear of crime. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 45(1), p. 39–64.

[21] Skogan, W.G. & Maxfield, M.G. (1981). Coping with Crime. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

[22] See, Wyant, 2008.

[23] See Bankston, W. B., Jenkins, Q. A., Thayer-Doyle, C.L., and Thomson, C.Y. (1987). Fear of criminal victimization and residential location: The influence of perceived risk. *Rural Sociology*, 52(1), p. 98–107; Keane, C. (1992). Fear of crime in Canada: An examination of concrete and formless fear of victimization. Canadian Journal of Criminology, 34(2)., p. 215–224; Scott, H. (2003). Stranger danger: Explaining women's fear of crime. Western Criminology Review, 4(3), p. 203–214; Yin, P.P. (1980). Fear of crime among elderly: Some issues and suggestions. *Social Problems*, 27(4), p. 492–503.

[24] See Clemente, F. & Kleiman, M.B. (1977). Fear of crime in the United States: A multivariate analysis. *Social Forces,* 56(2), p. 519–531; Toseland, R. W. (1982). Fear of crime: Who is most vulnerable? *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 10(3), p. 199-209; Will, J.A. & McGrath, J.H. (1995). Crime, neighborhood perceptions, and the underclass: The relationship between fear of crime and class position. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 23(2), p. 163–176.

[25] Gibson, C.L., Zhao, J., Lovrich, N.P., and Gaffney, M.J. (2002). Social integration, individual perceptions of collective efficacy, and fear of crime in three cities. *Justice Quarterly*, 19, p. 537–564.

Research examining the effect of victimization on fear of crime had mixed results. While some authors[26] found a significant positive relationship between fear of crime and victimization, other scholars[27] concluded that experience with victimization had only a minimal impact on one's feelings of safety. In a recent cross-national study that examined fear of crime determinants, Reese[28] found significant positive correlations between victimization and fear of crime in 21 European countries out of 22 included in the analysis. When controlling for gender, age, education, and the country crime rate, this study found that indirect and direct experience with victimization was actually the strongest fear-of-crime predictor. Contrary to expectations, Reese's analysis also identified a significant negative relationship between national crime rates and fear of crime (i.e., the proportion of respondents who are fearful decreases as the country crime rate increases).

Taking into account the fact that only a small percentage of individuals are victims of crime, researchers also considered the impact that media accounts of crime might have on perceived risk of victimization. Although it has been anticipated that people who read print media and watch television news will have a distorted view regarding the incidence of crime and will feel more at risk of victimization, research focusing on the effect of media consumption on fear of crime has been in general characterized by a lack of consistent findings[29].

DATA AND METHODS

Data analysis has been conducted on probability samples of persons age 15 and over from Romania (N=2139) and Hungary (N=1518). The source of the data was the European Social Survey Round 3 (2006/2007)[30]. The main objective of this research was to identify a set of indicators most likely to influence variations in fear of crime at the country level and to determine if there are inter-country differences when the impact of the independent variables on fear of crime is compared.

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[26] See Bennett, R. & Flavin, J. (1994). Determinants of fear of crime: The effect of cultural setting. *Justice Quarterly*, 11, p. 357–381; Saltiel, J., Gilchrist, J, and Harvie, R. (1992). Concern about crime among Montana farmers and ranchers. *Rural Sociology* 57, p. 535–545. In this study experience with victimization has been found the most important fear-of-crime predictor.

[27] See Donnelly, P. (1989). Individual and neighborhood influences on fear of crime. *Sociological Focus* 22 (1), p. 69–84; McGarrell, E., Giacomazzi, A, and Thurman, Q. (1997). Neighborhood disorder, integration, and the fear of crime. *Justice Quarterly* 14(3), p. 479–500.

[28] Reese, B. (2009). Determinants of the fear of crime. *International Journal of Sociology* 39 (1), p. 62–75.

[29] Eschholz, S. (1997). The media and the fear of crime: A survey of the research. Journal of Law and Public Policy, 9, p. 37–59.

[30] R. Jowell and the Central Co-coordinating Team, European Social Survey 2006/2007: Technical Report, London, Center for Comparative Social Surveys, City University (2007). Access to the data archive was provided by NSD (Norwegian Social Science Data Services), the distributor of ESS data.

It has been hypothesized that persons considered as having a higher level of vulnerability (e.g., females, older residents, persons with a low socioeconomic status, persons who state they belong to a discriminated group, individuals who show signs of depression, and persons who directly or indirectly experienced victimization) will be more afraid of victimization than their counterparts, respectively, males, younger residents, persons with higher SES, individuals who do not consider themselves members of discriminated groups, persons who are not generally depressed, and persons who have not been victimized. It is anticipated that residency in large urban area and the amount of exposure to TV news will be positively related to fear of crime, while a general sense of well-being is expected to be associated with a lower level of fear of crime. Also, it is expected that fear of crime will be negatively related to the perceived social capital in the respondent's residential area, to interpersonal trust displayed by the respondent, and to the level of trust expressed toward the police.

Data have been analyzed using multivariate regression analyses. The dependent variable, fear of crime, is a composite measure that incorporates three indicators of fear of crime (e.g., extent of fear of walking alone in the dark in residential area; frequency of fear that home might be burglarized; fear of becoming a victim of a violent crime). This summative scale takes values from 3 (lack of fear) to 12 (highest level of fear). The variable has a normal distribution for both samples (i.e., Skewness and Kurtosis are, respectively .399 and -.327 for the Romanian sample and .864 and .567 for the Hungarian sample) and can be considered a reliable measure of fear of crime. The standardized coefficient Alpha is .70 for the Hungarian sample and .73 for the Romanian sample. Following is presented a brief description of the selected fear-of-crime predictors:

– **Gender** [dummy variable; female coded 1, male coded zero]
– **Age** [dummy variable coded 1 for people 65 and over, zero otherwise]
– **Standard of living** [continuous variable, takes values from 0 (extreme dissatisfaction with standard of living) to 10 (extreme satisfaction with standard of living)][31]
– **Perceived discrimination** [dummy variable; respondents who declare they are member of a discriminated group, coded 1, zero otherwise]
– **Residency** [dummy variable; living in a big city coded 1, zero otherwise]

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[31] This variable was used as a proxy measure for socioeconomic status. Additional analyses, not included, showed non-linear relationships between education and fear of crime. Although in both samples there is a positive relationship between education and a subjective assessment of personal income (r = 25), the relationship was not strong enough to generate a 'socioeconomic status' factor. In both countries, there are highly educated persons who do not have a high income. This is particularly true for retired persons, who have college degrees but rely on pensions as the main income source. In this analysis, a higher level of satisfaction with the standard of living was considered a subjective indicator of a higher socioeconomic status, while a lower level of satisfaction with the current standard of living was considered an indicator of a lower SES.

– **TV exposure** [dummy variable; persons who do not watch TV news at all or watch news/politics/current affairs for 0.5 hours a day or less are coded 1, zero otherwise]

– **Interpersonal trust** [continuous variable; this three-item factor scale includes the following questions: "Most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful"; "Most people try to take advantage of you, or try to be fair"; "Most of the time people are helpful or mostly looking out for themselves". Each question took values from 0 to 10. Principal Component Analysis has been conducted and only one factor has been obtained in each sample. The factor loadings varied from .862 to .902 (Eigenvalue = 2.32; 77% of the variance is explained by the factor) in the Romanian sample. Factor loadings varied from .806 to .843 (Eigenvalue = 2.04; 68% of the variance is explained by the factor) in the Hungarian sample. The standardized Cronbach Alpha is .85 (Romanian sample) and .77 (Hungarian sample). Higher scores indicate a higher level of interpersonal trust]

– **Trust in the police** [continuous variable, takes values from 0 (no trust at all) to 10 (complete trust)]

– **Depression scale** [a composite measure, this summative six-item scale takes values from 6 (no signs of depression) to 24 (very high level of depression); it is based on cumulative scores obtained at six questions that asked how often in the past week the respondent felt depressed, sad, lonely, felt everything (s)he did as effort, had restless sleep, and could not get going; the standardized Cronbach Alpha = .77 (Romanian sample) and .87 (Hungarian sample)]

– **General happiness** [continuous variable, takes values from 0 (extremely unhappy) to 10 (extremely happy)]

– **Religiosity** [continuous variable, takes values from 0 (not at all religious) to 10 (very religious)]

– **Social capital** [continuous variable, takes values from 0 (people in local area never help each other) to 10 (people in local area help each other a lot)]

– **Victimization** (dummy variable; if respondent or another family member had been a victim of burglary or assault in the past 5 years coded 1, zero otherwise).

RESULTS

Compared to the average level of fear in each country, when computations based on frequency distributions for the "fear of crime" scale have been produced, results suggest (Figure 2) that in each country there is a comparable proportion of individuals who express a similar level of fear. For instance, the percentage of those who are (highly) afraid they might be victimized is approximately the same

(14%) in both countries. In both countries, the proportion of people who feel safe most of the time is approximately the same (11.3% in Hungary and 12% in Romania).

Figure 2

Levels of fear of crime in Romania and Hungary
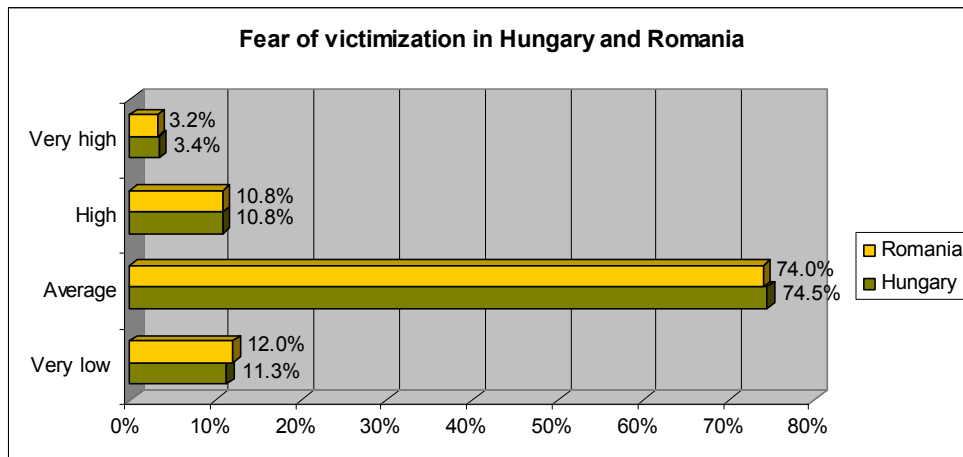
Note: "Very low"= scores less than one std. dev. below the mean; "Average" = scores within one std. dev. of the mean; "High" = between one and two std. dev. above the mean; "Very high" = scores more than two standard deviations above the mean.

However, the intensity of fear differs from one country to another. When a three-item (e.g., fear of walking alone in the dark in local area; fear of home being burglarized; fear of violent crime) summative fear-of-crime scale has been computed[32], the scale mean for the Romanian sample was 6.12 (std. dev. = 2.08) and the scale mean for the Hungarian sample was 5.48 (std. dev. = 1.84). The fear of victimization appears to be significantly more intense in Romania than in Hungary (t = 9.657, p< .001).

As figures 3, 4 and 5 show, there are inter-country variations in the levels and frequency of fear of crime when Romanians' and Hungarians' attitudes toward different aspects of potential criminal activities are compared. Although in both countries most people feel safe walking alone in the dark in their own neighborhoods (Figure 3), the proportion of those who feel unprotected is higher in Romania than in Hungary. The proportion of people who feel unsafe walking alone at night in their neighborhoods is significantly higher in Romania (37%) than in Hungary (24%).

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[32] The scale values vary from 3 (highest level of safety) to 12 (highest level of unsafety).

Figure 3

Perceived neighborhood safety in Hungary and Romania

Feeling safe walking alone in local area after dark
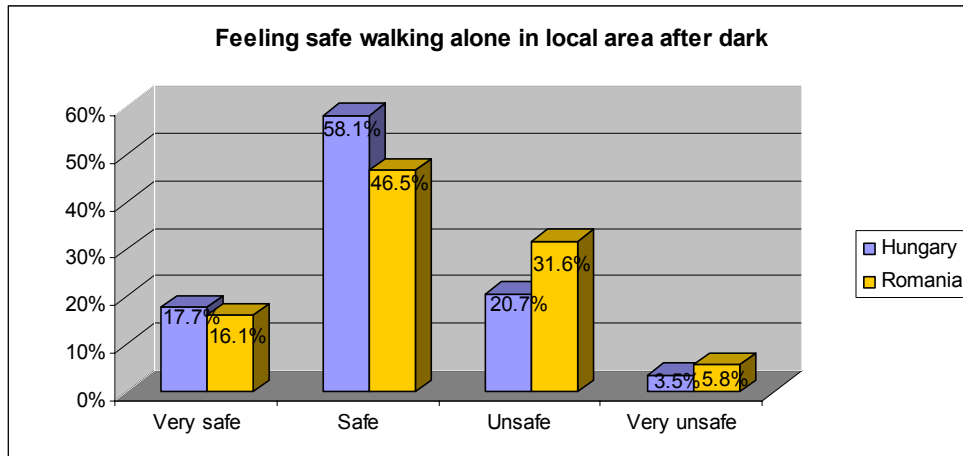
Similarly, the fear of becoming a potential victim of a property crime (Figure 4) is higher in Romania than in Hungary. While only 21% of Hungarians are often afraid of a potential property crime, 37% of Romanians share similar feelings. However, the percentage of those who never think their home could be burglarized is approximately the same in both countries (i.e. 43% in Hungary and 39% in Romania).

Figure 4

Fear of property crimes in Hungary and Romania

Fear of home being burglarized
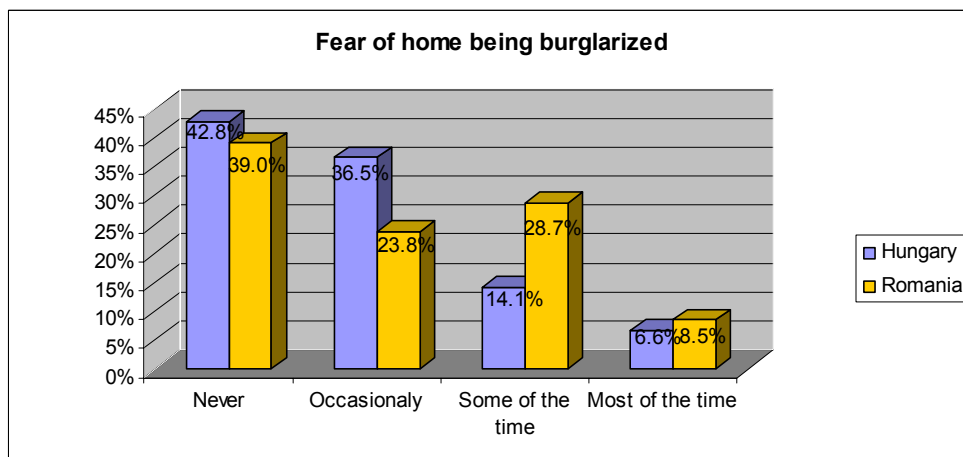
The proportion of Romanians (6%) afraid most of the time of a violent crime is approximately three times higher than the proportion of Hungarians (2%) who express similar attitudes (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Fear of violent crimes in Hungary and Romania
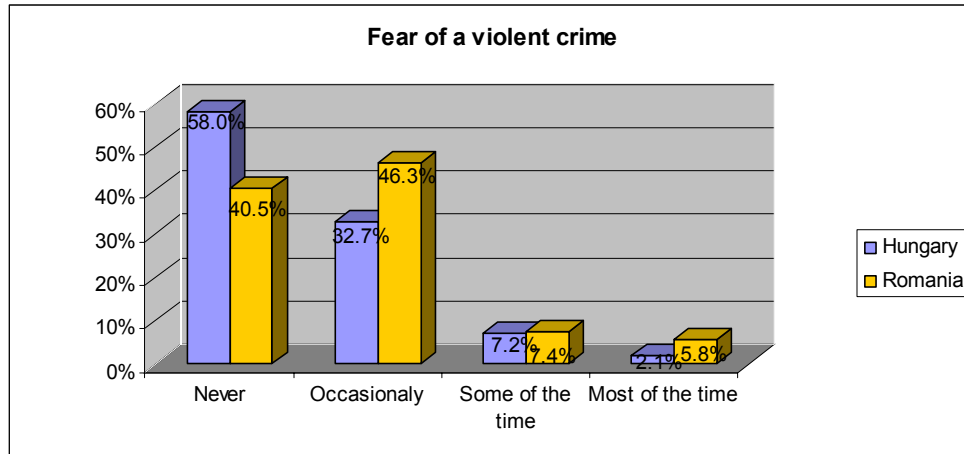
In each country, the proportion of people who have been victimized and the average level of fear of victimization vary by region. Table 2 shows the distribution of fear of crime and the level of victimization by region in Hungary and Romania.

Table 2

Victimization and fear of crime by region in Romania and Hungary

Romania				Hungary			
Region	**N**	**Victim**	**Fear of crime (mean)**	**Region**	**N**	**Victim**	**Fear of crime (mean)**
North-West	258	15%	5.7713	Central region	338	19%	5.4083
Central region	270	17%	5.9593	Middle-Transdanubia	203	12%	5.5764
North-East	350	19%	6.3886	West-Transdanubia	170	6%	5.1941
South-East	296	16%	6.2128	South-Transdanubia	171	11%	5.2924
South-Muntenia	350	10%	6.1029	North Region	193	19%	5.8342
Bucharest-Ilfov	202	18%	6.6238	North-Plain	231	10%	5.1472
South-West Oltenia	229	12%	6.0349	South-Plain	212	15%	5.9104
West	184	16%	5.7935				
Total sample	**2139**	**15%**	**6.1220**	**Total sample**	**1518**	**14%**	**5.4783**

When the respondent's region of residency is considered, in Romania, the proportion of those who directly or indirectly experienced victimization varies from 10% to 19%. In Hungary, victimization rates vary from 6% to 19%. It can be noticed that exposure to victimization is the highest in Moldova (North-Eastern region of Romania) and Bucharest region. Bucharest residents have the highest level of fear of crime. Residents of Moldavia have the next high level of fear. Residents of South Muntenia have the lowest proportion of victims of crime (10%), but their level of fear is close to the national average. The lowest level of fear of victimization is found among North West residents, who are also living close to neighboring Hungary.

In Hungary, residents of South Plain and Northern regions have on average the highest level of fear (5.91 and 5.83, respectively). Residents of the North and those of the Central region have the highest frequency of victimization (19%).

Descriptive statistics and the bivariate correlations for all the variables used in the regression models are displayed in tables 3 and 4.

Beside differences in perceived fear of crime, Hungary and Romania also differ in terms of several other characteristics. For instance, while in Romania 31% of the residents live in large cities, in Hungary the proportion is lower (23%). The proportion of Romanians 65 years old and over is lower (19%) than in Hungary (28%). Romanians (Mean = 6.79) appear to be more religious than Hungarians (Mean = 4.41). Hungarians (Mean = 12.03) appear to display on average more signs of depression than do Romanians (Mean = 10.30). Although in both countries the average level of trust in the police is close in value to the midpoint of the scale, as indicated by independent-sample t-tests for differences in means, Hungarians have on average a significantly higher level of trust in the police ($Mean_{HU} = 5.22$) than do Romanians ($Mean_{RO} = 4.56$)[33]. The majority of Hungarians (52%) do not watch TV news/politics for more than half an hour a day. In Romania, only 36% percent of the respondents have a similar TV exposure. Hungarian communities appear to be characterized by a higher level of social capital than Romanian communities. More Hungarian ($Mean_{HU} = 4.10$) respondents declared that people in their neighborhood tend to help each other than did Romanians ($Mean_{RO} = 3.07$).

The average level of satisfaction with standard of living ($Mean_{RO} = 5.51$; $Mean_{HU} = 5.41$) and the average level of happiness ($Mean_{RO} = 6.16$; $Mean_{HU} = 6.24$) are very close in value, when the two countries are compared. In both countries, the same proportions of residents (5%) consider they belong to discriminated groups. In addition, no significant inter-country differences in experience with victimization can be noticed (14% in Romania; 15% in Hungary).

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[33] Abbreviations used: Romania (RO), Hungary (HU).

Table 3

Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations among Study Variables Romanian sample (N = 2139)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Fear of crime	1													
2. Female	.147**	1												
3. Senior citizen	.063**	-.024	1											
4. SES	-.146**	-.077**	-.081**	1										
5. Perceived discrimination	.097**	.022	.053*	-.105**	1									
6. Resident of a big city	.123**	-.004	-.022	.007	-.012	1								
7. Religiosity	.000	.155**	.155**	.103**	-.030	-.141**	1							
8. General happiness	-.174**	-.023	-.138**	.509**	-.090**	.041	.052*	1						
9. Depression	.177**	.127**	.149**	-.293**	.097**	-.081**	.079**	-.331**	1					
10. Interpersonal trust	-.167**	.012	.060**	.137**	-.060**	-.058**	.040	.122**	.011	1				

11. Trust in the police	-.147**	.017	.053*	.172**	-.022	-.127**	.148**	.199**	-.054*	.193**	1			
12. Low TV-news exposure	-.054*	.137**	-.020	-.023	.027	.000	-.020	.014	.039	.019	-.008	1		
13. Social capital	-.129**	-.011	.073**	.192**	-.035	-.082**	.202**	.103**	.005	.234**	.155**	-.042	1	
14. Victimization	.253**	-.024	-.056*	-.018	.063**	.070**	-.070**	-.066**	.052*	-.098**	-.118**	.009	-.104**	1
Mean	6.12	0.52	0.19	5.51	0.05	0.31	6.79	6.16	10.30	0.00	4.56	0.36	3.07	0.15
Std. Deviation	2.08	0.49	0.39	2.36	0.21	0.46	2.14	2.18	3.11	1.00	2.80	0.48	1.67	0.36

*p< .05; **p<.01

Table 4

Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations among Study Variables Hungarian sample (N = 1518)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Fear of crime	1													
2. Female	.184**	1												
3. Senior citizen	.095**	.078**	1											
4. SES	-.154**	.013	-.008	1										
5. Perceived discrimination	.032	-.034	-.097**	-.074**	1									

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
6. Resident of a big city	.004	.010	.005	.055*	-.012	1								
7. Religiosity	.134**	.175**	.282**	-.011	.004	-.115**	1							
8. General happiness	-.163**	-.021	-.099**	.526**	-.063*	.079**	-.014	1						
9. Depression	.215**	.100**	.158**	-.370**	.082**	-.087**	.134**	-.506**	1					
10. Interpersonal trust	-.221**	-.045	-.023	.243**	-.081**	.032	.011	.266**	-.221**	1				
11. Trust in the police	-.103**	.060*	.070**	.168**	-.122**	-.022	.004	.209**	-.110**	.266**	1			
12. Low TV-news exposure	-.065*	.034	-.167**	.002	.014	-.040	-.026	-.009	-.030	.029	-.039	1		
13. Social capital	-.129**	.035	.034	.241**	-.076**	-.016	.012	.309**	-.249**	.273**	.136**	.007	1	
14. Victimization	.211**	.001	.018	.000	.057*	.015	.040	-.058*	.045	-.052*	-.061*	-.039	-.013	1
Mean	5.48	0.58	0.28	5.41	0.05	0.23	4.41	6.24	12.03	0.00	5.22	0.52	4.10	0.14
Std. Deviation	1.84	0.49	0.45	2.45	0.22	0.42	3.14	2.54	4.09	1.00	2.74	0.49	1.58	0.35

*p< .05; **p<.01

In both countries, women and men have similar experiences with victimization. Old age is not significantly related to victimization in Hungary. In Romania, persons over 65 appear to have a significantly lower experience with victimization than younger respondents. In both countries, there is a significant positive relationship between victimization and perceived discrimination. Only in Romania, residents of large cities experienced victimization more frequently than people living in smaller areas.

In the Romanian sample, all but one variable (i.e., 'religiosity'), are significantly related to 'fear of crime'. In Romania, fear of crime has the highest bivariate correlation (r = .25) with 'victimization'. In the Hungarian sample, persons who consider themselves discriminated and residents of large cities do not appear to have significantly different levels of fear when compared to persons who do not belong to discriminated groups or those who do not live in large cities. In Hungary, fear of crime has a relatively large bivariate correlation with victimization (r=.21), but 'feelings of depression' appear to have an equal impact on perceived feelings of unsafety. Interpersonal trust has the strongest bivariate correlation with fear of crime in the Hungarian sample (i.e., higher the perceived collective efficacy, lower the level of fear). In both samples, higher the level of trust in the police, lower the level of fear of crime will be.

Table 5 presents the results of the regression analyses, separately for the Romanian and Hungarian samples. The estimated model tried to address all the three theoretical perspectives identified in the fear-of-crime literature. The present analysis considered the sociodemographic and psychological characteristics of the population; it included the effect of direct and indirect experiences with victimization, and also evaluated objective (e.g., residential area) and subjective contextual factors (e.g., perceived collective efficacy and social capital in local neighborhood).

Table 5

OLS Regression Estimates for Fear of Crime Predictors[34]

Independent variables	Romania (N=2139)				Hungary (N=1518)			
	b	Std. Error	Beta	p	b	Std. Error	Beta	P
Intercept	5.560	.273		.000	4.911	.293		.000
Gender (Female)	.607	.085	.146	.000	.587	.091	.157	.000
Age (Senior citizen)	.320	.107	.061	.003	.139	.105	.034	.186
Standard of living	-.021	.021	-.024	.317	-.050	.021	-.066	.020
Perceived discrimination	.512	.195	.053	.009	-.018	.203	-.002	.928
Resident of a big city	.477	.091	.106	.000	.094	.105	.022	.368

[34] Abbreviations used: b = unstandardized regression coefficient; BETA = standardized regression coefficient; p = probability level, 2-tailed test.

Religiosity	.020	.021	.021	.325	.046	.015	.078	.002
General happiness	-.066	.023	-.068	.004	.000	.023	.000	.985
Depression	.076	.015	.108	.000	.046	.013	.101	.000
Interpersonal trust	-.219	.043	-.105	.000	-.261	.048	-.142	.000
Trust in the police	-.048	.016	-.064	.002	-.026	.017	-.038	.128
Low exposure to TV-news	-.345	.086	-.080	.000	-.179	.089	-.049	.044
Social capital	-.076	.027	-.060	.005	-.057	.030	-.049	.056
Victimization	1.262	.117	.218	.000	1.015	.127	.190	.000
R²			.171				.159	
Adj. R²			.166				.152	

The model explains approximately 17% of the variation in fear of crime in Romania. The explanatory power of the estimated model is slightly lower in Hungary (15%). It can be noticed that for both samples, victimization can be considered the strongest predictor of fear of crime (Beta$_{RO}$ = .218; Beta$_{HU}$ = .190). Gender is the second most important fear-of-crime predictor (Beta$_{RO}$ = .146; Beta$_{HU}$ = .157). As hypothesized, women in both countries, have significantly higher levels of fear of crime than men do. While senior citizens in Romania tend to feel less safe than their younger counterparts, older Hungarians do not differ significantly in their level of fear when compared to people younger than 65. Only in Romania, people who perceive themselves as being discriminated have a higher level of fear of victimization than social majoritarian groups. Also, only in Romania, residents of larger urban areas tend to have higher levels of fear of crime than people who live in smaller cities or in rural areas.

As it has been hypothesized, in both countries there is a significant positive relationship between feelings of depression and feelings of unsafety (Beta$_{RO}$ = .108; Beta$_{HU}$ = .101). In Hungary, with an increase in one's level of religiosity there is a significant increase in the fear-of-crime level. When controlling for the other variables in the model, religiosity is not a significant predictor of fear of crime for the Romanian sample.

As anticipated, in both samples fear of crime is significantly and negatively associated with the level of interpersonal trust and the level of trust people have in police. Also, in both samples, persons who watch TV-news for half an hour or less have significantly lower levels of fear of victimization than persons who are daily exposed to TV-news/politics/current affairs for longer periods of time. A general sense of well-being is also negatively associated with fear of crime. With an increase in Romanians' level of general happiness and with an increase in Hungarians' satisfaction with their standard of living, there is a decrease in one's

perceived risk of victimization. Although multicollinearity tests[35] did not identify extremely high correlations among variables that would affect the results, it should be noted that in both samples 'general happiness' and 'satisfaction with standard of living' have the highest bivariate correlations (r_{RO} = .51; r_{HU} = .53).

CONCLUSION

As previous research has shown, fear of crime is a complex phenomenon, influenced by a multitude of factors, of which many continue to remain unknown. Compared to other quantitative studies of fear of crime, the predictors used in this analysis have an explanatory power within the reported range that typically varies from 10%[36] to approximately 40%[37]. This study suggests that fear of crime is a result of combined objective (experience with victimization; residency in large urban areas) and subjective factors, such as gender-and-age based emotions, perceptions of one's environment, life satisfaction, and personal interpretations of life events.

This examination of fear of crime correlates continues to reveal the importance of the vulnerability perspective and also recognizes the merit of the crime experience perspective. Although results show that victimization does not vary significantly with gender and age, in both samples women tend to have a significantly higher level of fear. Similarly, the elderly, especially in Romania, tend to be more afraid of becoming victims of crime.

Although it is true that Romanians and Hungarians who are less afraid of crime have also a limited or no exposure to media sources, which indirectly might alter one's opinion about the incidence of crime, it should be noted that when controlling for the selected sociodemographic variables used in the estimated models, experience with victimization had the strongest impact on 'feeling unsafe' in both countries. These results appear to suggest that fear of crime is far from being an irrational phenomenon. However, it is possible that prior victimization

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[35] Variance inflation factors (VIF) were calculated for all the estimated models and for no analysis did the VIF for an individual variable exceed 1.9, indicating that multicollinearity did not impact the findings. For a discussion of multicollinearity diagnostics, see Gujarati, D.N. (1995). Basic Econometrics. (3rd edition). New York: McGraw Hill, p. 339.

[36] See Gomme, I.M. (1988). The role of experience in the production of fear of crime: A test of a causal model. *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 30(1), p. 67–76; Ortega, S.T. and Myles, J.L. (1987). Race and gender effects on fear of crime: An interactive model with age. Criminology, 25(1), p. 133–152.

[37] See Doob, A.N. and Macdonald, G.E. (1979). Television viewing and fear of victimization: Is the relationship causal? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37(2), p. 170–179; Liska, A. E., Lawrence, J.J., and Sanchirico, A. (1982). Fear of crime as a social fact. *Social Forces*, 60(3), p. 760–770; Toseland, R. W. (1982). Fear of crime: Who is most vulnerable? *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 10(3), p. 199–209.

had a stronger effect on fear of crime than other studies found because it included both indirect and direct experience with victimization, increasing the proportion of victims of crime included in the analysis.

The present research offers support for the integrative model as well. In both countries, respondents who acknowledge living in places where people tend to help each other, feel safer and are less afraid of victimization. Regarding the effect of objective contextual factors, only in Romania residency in large urban areas was significantly and positively linked to fear of crime. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the present analysis included only one variable describing the respondent's environment. Additional models that would incorporate a larger number of neighborhood characteristics and would use different statistical procedures, such as multilevel analyses, would be more appropriate to test the accuracy of the ecological model when examining the determinants of fear of crime.

Finally, despite inter-country differences, this analysis suggests that fear of crime should be also considered in relation with one's more general feelings of anxiety and unhappiness. People who are dissatisfied with their standard of living are more likely to express life dissatisfaction, loneliness, sadness, and an increased level of fear of crime. In both countries, economic distress and perceived discrimination are linked to symptoms of poor mental health, a possible mediator of the effects these indicators had on fear of crime. In this sense, it can be supposed that the perceived risk of victimization might be an expression of a more general sense of insecurity that also affects interpersonal and institutional trust, in this case trust in the police. While a unidirectional causal relationship between variables of interest cannot be easily established, it can be noted that fear of crime is negatively related to perceived collective efficacy and trust in the institution meant to ensure community safety and protection. As mentioned before, the level of fear of crime represents an important indicator of the crime policy effectiveness. This analysis implies that when there is trust in the police, the fear of victimization is decreasing. As a result, policy makers, especially in Romania, should focus on finding ways meant to improve the public perception of police, particularly among men, younger adults, and residents of large urban areas.