

9TH INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CONFERENCE ON LOCAL SAFETY AND SECURITY



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Erasmus+



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PERCEPTION OF PERSONAL SAFETY IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY: YOUNG VS. OLDER ADULTS

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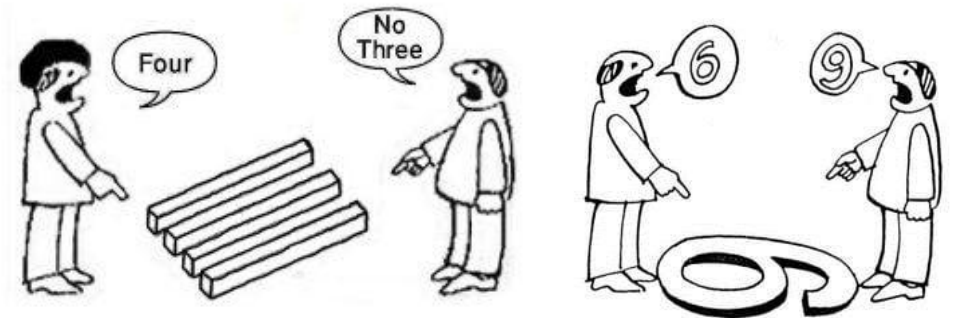
Problem Definition



- Sense of personal safety:
 - quality of life, well-being, everyday functioning
 - modern society (feelings of threat, search for safety)
 - environmental influence (interpreting signals from surroundings)
 - perception of personal safety = broad, multidimensional
- Article: *Between Fear and Control – Perception of Personal Safety among Young Adults* (Erčulj, 2025)
 - safety experienced through: cognitive, emotional, behavioral
 - extension: inclusion of older adults
- Research question: What are the differences in the experience and understanding of personal safety between young and older adults?

Perception of Personal Safety

- Two aspects of safety:
 - **objective:** actual conditions (crime, traffic, risks)
 - **subjective:** personal feeling of safety and risk
- Psychological perspective:
 - safety as a basic need, value, feeling
 - influences decisions, behavior, movement
- Perceived personal safety:
 - subjective sense of how safe/unsafe one feels
 - depends on environment and presence of others



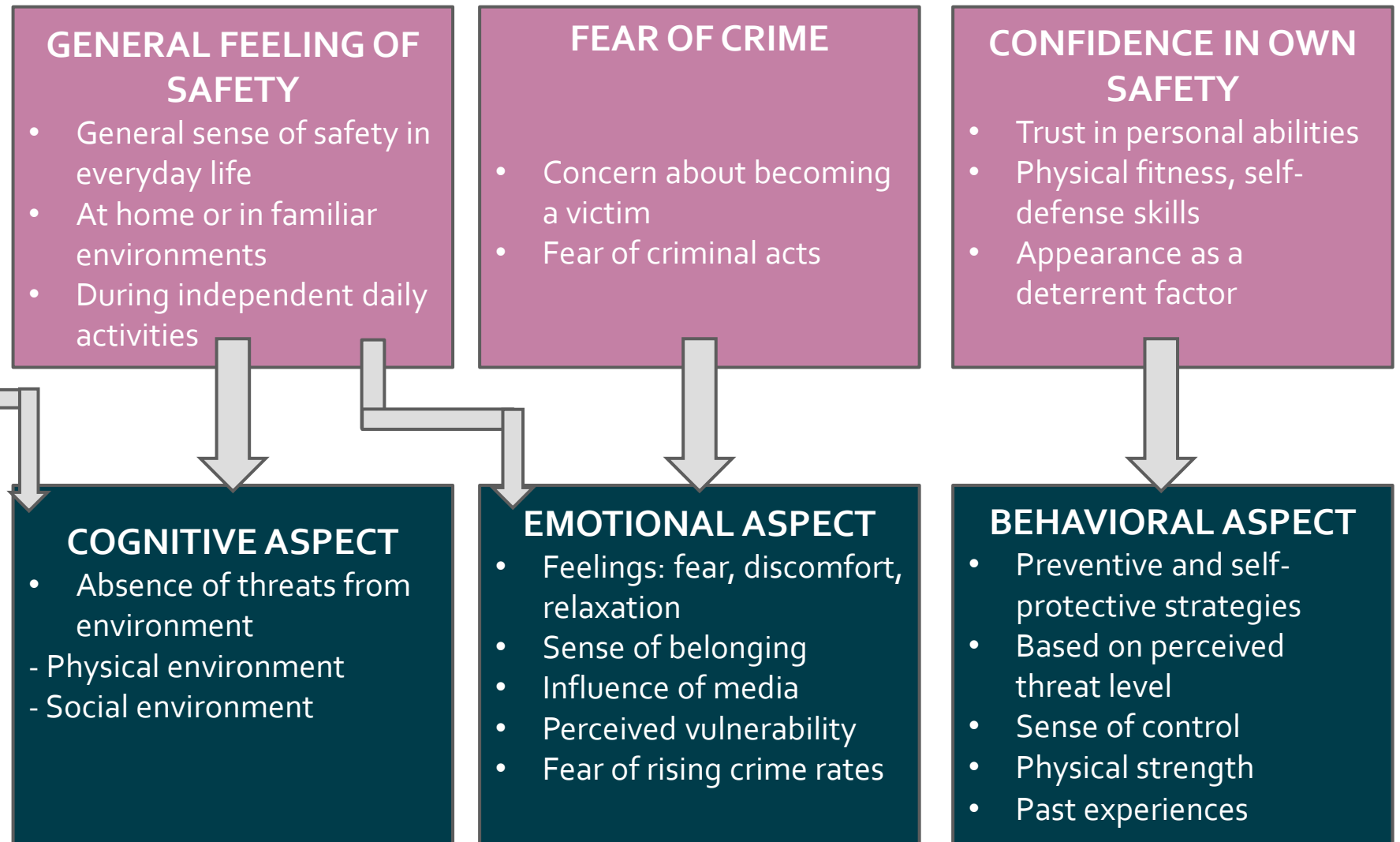
Dimensions of Personal Safety Perception

Three key dimensions explaining differences in safety perception (Syropoulos et al., 2024):

Two additional dimensions (Dabbous et al., 2025):

- Safety in the neighborhood
- Safety at night

Three key aspects: Young adults understand personal safety through **cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects**, with an important role of **situational and environmental factors in the local community** (Erčulj, 2025).



Comparison: Young vs. Older Adults

ASPECT	FACTOR	YOUNGER ADULTS	OLDER ADULTS
COGNITIVE	visibility (lighting, night)	✓	✓
	surveillance (police, cameras)	✗	✓
	environmental order (cleanliness, pathways)	✓	✓ (mobility-related importance)
	presence of people	✓	✓
	trust in community (social cohesion)	✓	✓ (key protective factor)
	perception of increasing crime	(no data)	✓
	contextual factors: media, politics, indirect victimization	✓ (just media)	✓
EMOTIONAL	fear at night	✓ (more pronounced)	✓
	fear of strangers	✓	✓
	perception of crime	✗	✓
	sense of vulnerability	✓	✓ (stronger: health + psychosocial f.)
	social isolation	✗	✓
BEHAVIORAL	avoidance	✓ (of risky areas)	✓
	reduction of activities	✗	✓
	staying at home	✗	✓
	general caution	✓	✓ (more pronounced)
	situational adaptation	✓	✗
	protective behaviors (locking, safety tools)	✓	✓

Older Adults and Perception of Personal Safety

Vulnerability theory: Older adults are more prone to fear of crime due to: physical weakness, reduced mobility, and more severe consequences of victimization, which further strengthens the feeling of vulnerability.

→ rely on others to ensure safety (police, surveillance cameras, trust in community)

→ an accessible environment in terms of mobility limitations (ground obstacles, availability of benches, n. of stairs)

→ use activity restrictions as a preventive measure (passive self-protection strategies)

→ other aspects of life become more important (experience higher levels of social isolation, health care)



Young Adults and Perception of Personal Safety

→ more exposed to fear at night (differences in lifestyle - higher activity levels) and in urban environments (more interactions with strangers)

→ emphasis on situational awareness and active self-protection strategies (monitoring surroundings, locking doors, avoiding risky areas)



SIMILARITIES MOSTLY IN
Local physical and social environment -
similar priorities for both groups:

- orderliness and cleanliness
- social cohesion

Conclusion

- The perception of personal safety is multidimensional (interaction of age, environment, gender, race, social context...)
- Older adults report higher fear of crime and lower perceived personal safety but are probably more safe than youngsters (**victimization paradox**).
- The importance of a supportive community environment (community events, neighborhood watch programs, and better communication with local authorities)

- **Gender**

→ women: higher perceived safety risk and more frequent preventive behaviors

→ men: greater confidence in their own ability to self-protect

Interesting question: who perceives lower personal safety – older men or younger women?

- **Limitations**

- classifying factors into cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects was challenging
- the research on older adults comes from international contexts and relied on data from different studies and models which use varying dimensions, making direct comparison more difficult; the findings may also not be fully applicable to Slovenia