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*Original Paper*

# Citizen Expectations of Public Safety in a Health Institution in Central Mexico

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## Abstract

**Objective:** Compare an empirical model with the models reported in the literature published from 2020 to 2024, considering the search by keywords: dimensions of security.

**Method:** A cross-sectional, exploratory, correlational and explanatory study was carried out with a sample of 208 older adults, selected for their participation in the professional internship and social service system of a public university in central Mexico.

**Results:** Five dimensions were established relating to the perception of unpredictability, the perception of controllability, the attitude towards corruption, the attitude towards negligence and the attitude towards opacity in matters of public security.

**Conclusions:** The hypothesis regarding significant differences between the findings reported in the literature with respect to the results found in the study was not rejected.

**Implications:** In relation to the state of the art which warns that perceived insecurity reflects the rule of law, the results show that it is perceived as unpredictable in the face of common law crimes. Therefore, the extension of the model to the stigma of public security administration in crime prevention is recommended.

**Keywords:** Public Safety, Risk Perception, Control Perception, Attitude, Fear of Crime.

## Introduction

According to the National Population Council (CONAPO, 2012), by the year 2050, it is estimated that Mexico will be the country with the highest proportion of older adults in all of Latin America, that is, 33.8 million people over 60 years of age. According to the National Survey of Victimization and Perception of Public Security (ENVIPE, 2021), crimes have increased in recent years. For 2021 there was a percentage of 30.7, for 2022 it was 32.8 and for 2023 it was 34.1%, where the main crimes are the following: vehicle theft, home robbery, robbery or assault on the street or in transport. public, fraud, extortion, verbal threats, injuries, kidnappings and crimes of a sexual nature. Only 9.9% of crimes, of which 62.7% lead to the beginning of a preliminary investigation before the Public Ministry. Of the total crimes, a preliminary investigation is initiated in 6.2% of the cases. The above represents 93.8% of crimes where there is no complaint or no prior investigation is initiated. Where the main reasons for not reporting crimes to the corresponding authorities, on the part of the victims, stand out the loss of time with 31.4% and distrust in authority with 21%. In Mexico City, on average, 190 crimes are reported per day against this vulnerable sector of the population, according to figures from the General Directorate of Criminal Policy and Statistics of the Attorney General's Office of the Federal District (PGJDF, 2023). The main types of violence detected are segregation of the family group, dispossession of property shares, physical intimidation, emotional violence,

The Law on the Rights of Older Adults (2010) has the right to:

1) Not be discriminated against due to their age, so the observance of their rights will be done without any distinction.

- 2) Enjoy the opportunities that facilitate the exercise of your rights under conditions of equality.
- 3) Receive the support of the institutions created to care for you regarding the exercise and respect of your rights.
- 4) Be protected and defended against all forms of exploitation and physical or mental abuse; therefore, your life must be free of violence.
- 5) Receive the attention and protection they require from the family and society.
- 6) Maintain relationships with your family, if you are separated from them, unless that relationship affects the health and interests of older adults.
- 7) Live in safe, dignified and decent places, where their needs and requirements can be satisfied.
- 8) Express your opinion freely and participate in the family and social sphere, as well as in all administrative and judicial procedures that affect you or your family.
- 9) Have health services.
- 10) Have education and work.

Now, according to Irvin Waller (2013), there are six essential rights that correspond to every person who is a victim of a crime: 1) Recognition of victims as people, 2) Access to information, 3) Receive psychological, medical and social, 4) Comprehensive reparation, 5) Participation and representation with their own voice and 6) Effective measures to reduce victimization.

In the framework of public security, understood as a context of uncertainty and risk around which fear (Alvarado & Davis, 2001), valuation (Bilen et al., 2013), avoidance (Cashmore, 2014), coping (Fiaz, 2012) and attitude (Gómez, Gómez & Durán, 2013) are psychosocial factors that reflect levels of vulnerability (Hughes, 2010), faith (Sutton & Hudson, 2013), victimization (Redondo & Frerich, 2014), crime (San Martín, 2013), incivility and corruption (Lorenc et al., 2012), the study of victims is established from their psychosocial and sociopolitical representations. The fear of crime is generated by a cognitive structure (Weaver, 2014). Psychosocial studies on the determinants of fear of crime indicate that **deviance secondary**, referred to as excessive concern about the consequences of crime on the well-being of the family, is indicative of fear of crime (Parra, 2000).

However, Herrero, Salas and Colom (2002) established significant differences between **sociopaths** (poor socialization due to negligent tutoring) and **psychopaths** (traits insensitive to socialization), with respect to impulsive risk behaviors. In this way, secondary deviation in reference to the sociopath and psychopath profiles, supposes the emergence of perceptions of insecurity and emotions related to crime or delinquency, which would be affecting subjective well-being, quality of life and local development.

Meanwhile, San Martín (2013) will warn that sociopathic and psychopathic profiles, as well as secondary deviation, emerge from the social representations of delinquency and criminality. In this sense, the **core Central** would be made up of the naturalization of those groups close to the individual, who are perceived as vulnerable to violence. In this way, the family, friends, school and municipality; They are entities that the individual perceives as victims of government action in crime prevention or combating crime.

**Peripheral** core involves abstract processes of objectification of delinquency and criminality such as: helplessness, prevention, participation, indifference, incapacity, justice and security. Of course, both nuclei would be influenced by the social representation of political corruption in matters of civil security. Therefore, fear of crime or delinquency would be defined as a degree of anxiety relative to an event perceived as uncertain, insecure, immeasurable, unpredictable and uncontrollable (Bradley, Rowe & Sedgwick, 2010; Mishra and Bhai, 2013).

Thus, there are five determinants of fear of crime; 1) crime victimization, 2) physical vulnerability prevalent in older adults, 3) social vulnerability indicated by levels of schooling, income or unemployment, 4) social disorder indicated by the index of marginality and crime in the neighborhood and 5) social networks regarding the opinion of the police.

Consequently, the fear of crime is determined by an increase in social vulnerability focused on the elderly, a decrease in defense networks and a reduction in support from the reference or membership group. That is, to the extent that public policies, programs and institutional strategies focus on the process of defenselessness, they orient their study on the individual and ignore the social context around which the social representation of crime, the self-concept, is built. of the victim and the emotions towards the crime (Lorenc et al., 2013; Radda & Nnameziri, 2013).

The multidisciplinary study of victims supposes the relationships of dependence between factors: the social representation of the crime disseminated in the media; levels of deprivation and unemployment; degrees of prejudice, anxiety, and attitude toward authority; perceptions of disorder (vandalism, graffiti, drug addiction); cohesion (effectiveness, networks.); risk perceptions (incommensurability and unpredictability) and the experience of victimization as determinants of fear of crime.

The automatic acceptance of the term victim in all professional areas, mainly in law, has a negative effect on the person who is, precisely, victimized. This is because it is necessary to ensure that those who suffer some type of crime get out of that pigeonholing; in other words, that this term is only transitory and not permanent, which is why victimology speaks, with complete precision, of the use of the term: *person in the condition of victim*.

### **Theoretical framework of public security**

The theoretical framework of public security addresses a set of concepts, theories and approaches related to the protection of society against threats and risks that may affect public order and well-being (Jackson, 2009).

Public security refers to the set of actions, policies and strategies implemented by government authorities and civil society to guarantee the protection, order and well-being of citizens in a community or country. It includes prevention and response to crimes, natural disasters, medical emergencies, and other events that may put collective security at risk (Gomes & Phillips, 2012).

Citizen security refers to the protection of citizens against common crimes such as robberies, assaults, vandalism and interpersonal violence (Soares, 2007). In this sense, road safety refers to the prevention of traffic accidents through traffic regulations, road education and the design of safe infrastructures. Consequently, food security guarantees access to safe and nutritious food for the entire population, including the prevention of food poisoning (Katsoris, 1984). In this way, health security related to protection against communicable diseases, pandemics and epidemic outbreaks through vaccination programs, disease control and epidemiological surveillance. In this order of ideas, environmental security links the protection of natural resources, the quality of air, water and soil, and the prevention of natural disasters such as floods, forest fires and earthquakes (James & Wier, 1990). This is how cybersecurity involves the prevention of cyberattacks, computer fraud, data theft and protection of digital infrastructure.

The dimensions of public security have been addressed from theories that allude to the rule of law (Leander, 2005). Social Control Theory proposes that criminal behavior is reduced through the establishment of social norms and formal and informal control systems. In a different sense, the Situational Prevention Theory emphasizes the importance of modifying the physical and social environment to reduce opportunities to commit crimes (Gompers & Lerner, 1999). For its part, Social Risk Theory analyzes how socioeconomic and environmental risk factors contribute to crime and insecurity (Tanner, 2002). In this order of ideas, the Deterrence Theory proposes that the effective imposition of deterrent sanctions can prevent the commission of crimes.

From public security theories it is possible to distinguish strategic approaches (Dong et al., 2019). The Community Approach promotes community participation in crime prevention and the promotion of local safety. In a broader sense, the Multisector Approach addresses public security as a complex problem that requires collaboration between multiple actors, including government, civil society, private sector and international organizations (Arias, 2009). For its part, the Evidence-Based Approach uses empirical data and systematic evaluations to design effective public safety policies and programs.

The theoretical framework of public safety provides a conceptual basis for understanding and addressing

challenges related to the protection and well-being of society (Brownell, 1953). The importance of implementing comprehensive, evidence-based and participatory strategies to promote public safety effectively and sustainably is emphasized. Collaboration between all the actors involved is essential to achieve positive results in the protection and strengthening of the social fabric.

However, the theoretical framework of public security has been built from a Top Down vision from the top down without considering the expectations of citizens regarding the public administration of their authorities in matters of security. Therefore, the objective of the present study is to contrast a conceptual theoretical model to establish the determinants of fear of crime in a sample of older adults with Alzheimer's who were victimized by delinquency and crime at some point in their lives.

What are the indicators of fear of crime and criminality observable in a group of older adults diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease?

From a psychosocial approach, anxiety related to crime and delinquency events is indicated by degrees of perceived **incommensurability**, **unpredictability**, and **uncontrollability** of the older adult with respect to victimization experiences. From a sociopolitical approach, anxiety related to crime and delinquency is indicated by attitudes towards **corruption**, **opacity** and **negligence**, attributed to authorities with respect to crime prevention, the fight against crime and the delivery of law. justice.

### Method and Materials

An exploratory, cross-sectional, correlational and explanatory study was carried out. A non-probabilistic selection of 208 older adults was carried out considering their diagnosis of Alzheimer's, in a stage indicated by the loss of procedural memory, although with the constant memory of a victimization event.

*Sex.* 45% of the sample is male and 55% is female.

*Age.* 34% are between 60 and 64 years old, 49% are between 65 years old and 70 years old, 17% are over 70 years old.

*Scholarship.* 58% have a high school degree, 34% have a bachelor's degree, and 6% have a graduate degree.

*Income.* 34% declared having a monthly income greater than 9,000 pesos (Mean = 500 USD with Standard Deviation = 24.37 USD), 56 % an income between 6,000 and 900 pesos (M = 346 USD with SD = 24.1) and 10% an income of less than 6,000 pesos (M = 241 USD with SD = 12.14)

*Cluster.* 49% declared that they live with their family (M = 269 USD with SD = 32.15 USD average monthly income), 26% indicated that they live with their partner (M = 378.89 USD with SD = 71.29 USD), 20% said they lived alone (M = 582.15 with SD = 39.49 USD) and 5% did not answer (M = 691.28 with SD 49.29 USD).

**Instrument.** Five conceptual and operational dimensions related to public safety were considered in order to establish the final scale (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Operational and conceptual definition of public security

| Aspect           | Conceptual Definition   | Operational Definition   |
|------------------|---|--|
| Public security  | Protection and general well-being of society against threats and risks. | - Crime rate: Number of crimes per 100,000 inhabitants in a year.                                      |
|                  |   | - Security perception surveys: Subjective measurement of how citizens feel about their security.       |
| Crime Prevention | Strategies and measures to avoid the commission of crimes.              | - Community surveillance programs: Participation of neighbors and authorities in surveillance patrols. |
|                  |   | - Security policies in public transportation:  |

| Aspect                | Conceptual Definition   | Operational Definition  |
|-----------------------|---|---|
|                       |   | Implementation of surveillance and security cameras in buses and stations.  |
| Social Control        | Set of norms and mechanisms that regulate the behavior of individuals in society. | - Criminal legislation and regulations: Laws that establish penalties for committing crimes.<br><br>- Rehabilitation and social reintegration programs: Activities aimed at reintegrating offenders into society. |
| Police Reaction       | Response of police forces to emergency situations and crimes.                     | - Police response time: Average number of minutes it takes the police to arrive at the scene of an incident.<br><br>- Number of arrests made in a specific period.  |
| Secure Infrastructure | Design and maintenance of safe physical environments.                             | - Adequate public lighting: Installation of lights in public spaces to prevent criminal acts.<br><br>- Implementation of alarm and security systems in residential and commercial buildings.                      |

#### Public Safety Scale

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements about your perception of safety in the community using a scale of 1 to 5, where:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Okay
5. Strongly agree

1. I feel safe walking alone in my neighborhood during the day.
2. I feel safe walking alone in my neighborhood at night.
3. I believe that the police presence in my area is sufficient to ensure safety.
4. I believe that the parks and public spaces in my community are safe to visit.
5. I have confidence in the security measures implemented in my place of work or study.
6. I think crime rates have decreased in my area in recent years.
7. I feel that my community is a safe place to live and raise a family.
8. I am worried about being a victim of robbery, assault, or another type of crime in my neighborhood.
9. I am satisfied with the emergency responses and police services in my area.
10. I think local authorities are doing enough to improve safety in my community.
11. I assume that the authorities prevent crime by carrying out checkpoints on the most problematic avenues.
12. I assume that the authorities execute a preventive strategy when searching the belongings of public transport users

Factors were established; three psychosocial [incommensurability ( $\alpha = 0.786$ ), unpredictability (0.841) and uncontrollability (0.716)] and three sociopolitical [corruption (0.718), negligence (0.897) and opacity (0.798)]. Each of the psychosocial subscales includes ten response options ranging from 0 = “not common” to 10 “very common.” It is important to indicate that each of the sociopolitical scales includes five response options ranging from 0 = “not at all agree” to 4 = “totally agree.”

The literature corresponding to the period from 2020 to 2024, related to the measurement and prediction of fear of crime, was reviewed. The model was specified considering the findings reported in the state of knowledge. The hypotheses were established based on the contrast between the psychosocial approach and the sociopolitical approach. The sample was contacted through the Alzheimer's Association. The selected sample was surveyed during their stay at the health center. The information was processed in SPSS and AMOS versions 21.0.

The reliability of the scale was estimated from the Cronbach's alpha parameter, considering an item subscale correlation greater than 0.80, while the validity was established with a calculation of sphericity and adequacy with the Bartlett and Kayser Meyer Olkin statistics, as well as an item-factor correlation greater than 0.600 considering a percentage of explained variance greater than 40%. Finally, the adjustment parameters and residuals were estimated in order to test the null hypothesis.

## Results

Adequacy and sphericity are prerequisites of the exploratory factor analysis of principal components with varimax rotation, their values indicate that there is a convergence of factors with respect to the construct of fear of crime and crime [ $X^2 = 12.35$  (24df)  $p = 0.000$ ; KMO = 0.601]. The validity of the construct showed 6 factors related to incommensurability, unpredictability and uncontrollability; that when correlated between them they formed a construct alluding to the fear of crime and criminality, as experiences in which the respondents perceive themselves as victims. The three factors explained 63% of the total variance; Regarding 37% of the variance, this is explained by attitudinal factors towards corruption, negligence and opacity. That is, the construct of fear of crime and criminality is indicated by psychosocial rather than sociopolitical factors. The biased perception of victimization is hegemonic with respect to the attitude derived from government action in matters of security. Overall kurtosis = 2.26; Bootstrap = 0.000; KMO = 0.601;  $X^2 = 12.35$  (24df)  $p = 0.000$ ; Perception of incommensurability (22% of the explained variance), Perception of unpredictability (20% of the explained variance), Perception of uncontrollability (21% of the explained variance), Attitude toward corruption (15% of the explained variance), Attitude towards negligence (13% of the explained variance), Attitude towards opacity (9% of the explained variance).

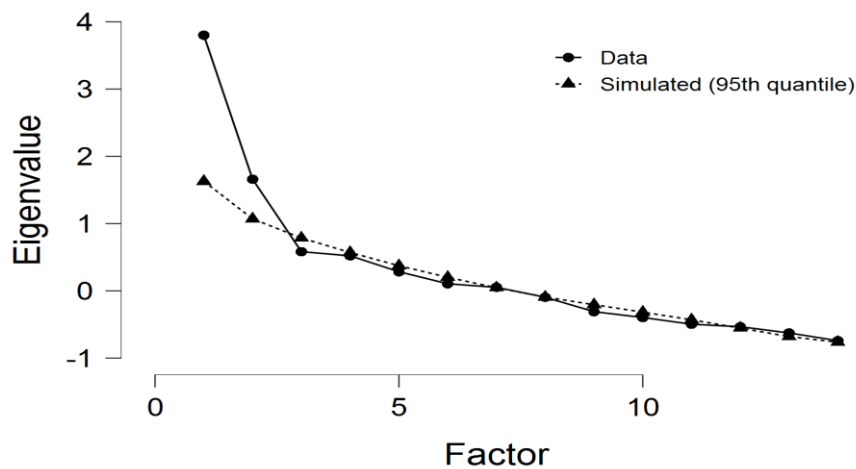


Figure 1. Eigenvalues

Regarding the reliability of the subscales, the values corresponding to the excluded item indicate that the instrument has sufficient consistency when measuring psychosocial and sociopolitical traits related to experiences of victimization in the face of crime and delinquency (general alpha = 0.817). Finally, the null hypothesis was accepted. This is because the adjustment parameters indicate that the model of hypothetical relationships fits the weighted model [ $\chi^2 = 14.12$  (15df)  $p < 0.000$ ; GFI = 0.975; CFI = 0.970; RMSEA = 0.001].

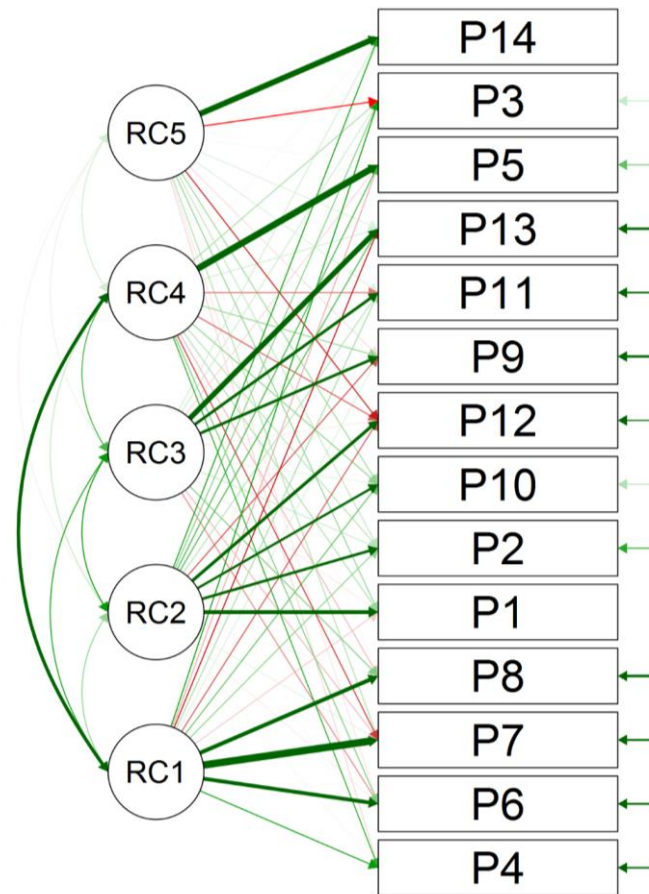


Figure 2. Exploratory factor model of public insecurity

## Discussion

The present study has established the reliability and validity of an instrument that measures six different factors indicative of perceived victimization and attitude towards crime and criminality. The results show that risk perception and control factors explain 63% of the variance compared to 37% of the variance that explained the attitude towards corruption, negligence and opacity of the authorities. The perception of control (0.81) was the predominant indicator in the model of reflective dependency relationships [ $\chi^2 = 14.12$  (15 df)  $p < 0.000$ ; GFI = 0.975; CFI = 0.970; RMSEA = 0.001].

In reference to the study by Garc ía, Carre ón, Hernández and Méndez (2013), in which they found favorable attitudes towards State propaganda in matters of civil security, this as an individual responsibility and complementary to crime prevention, the fight against crime or the administration of justice, this work has shown that there is an ambivalence, since the perception of risk / control and the attitude towards government action are indicators of victimized fear of crime and criminality. In this sense, the perception of control, an explanatory variable of trust in private security, in the sample of older adults, seems to indicate a negative emotion towards public action with respect to crime and criminality.

In this way, the perception of risk and the perception of control are factors indicative of a general fear of the sample towards crime, but the unfavorable attitude towards the authorities does not seem to evidence an anxiety of demand for public care, but rather would be related with an anxiety derived from old age with respect to youth.

Consequently, Garc ía (2009; 2012) warns that distrust of the local police is encouraged by the media more than by experiences of victimization, but points out that in scenarios of vulnerability, marginality and exclusion; The influence of the media is reduced to a minimum while perceptions of control and effectiveness in terms of prevention intensify. In the present study, it was found that old age seems to contradict the hypothesis according to which the State seeks justice through prevention, which, ultimately, is the responsibility of the citizen, but in the case of older adults it is not only necessary protect their integrity, but also correct their experiences that would be encouraging a fear of crime. In terms of public health, the State must not only prevent crime, but also in specific matters of mental health, address the negative emotions that older adults associate with corruption, negligence and the opacity of the authorities. In this sense, a study of the effects of levels of crime and delinquency on the mental health of older adults is recommended, since they not only have to deal with their physical limits, but also with their emotions and perceptions of risk. uncertainty and insecurity.

### Conclusion

The main contribution of this work is, without a doubt, to the state of knowledge; which lies in the reliability and validity of an instrument that measures the older adult's fear of crime and delinquency. The relationship between the referred construct and the fear of crime, with respect to mental illnesses such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's, could serve to discuss the role of the State in crime prevention, combating crime or administration of justice; since the effects of these government instruments could determine mental health or the development of dementia.

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