

# Summary

## Fear of victimisation; an alternative policy guideline

Lonneke van Noije  
Jurjen Iedema

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## Summary, conclusions and policy implications

### S.1 Summary of study findings

The Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice set itself the target of reducing feelings of unsafety in Dutch society by 10% in 2017 compared with 2012, when 37% of the Dutch public reported that they occasionally feel unsafe (TK 2013/2014). According to the most recent figures for 2016, 35% of the Dutch public occasionally feel unsafe. The Ministry had also set a similar reduction target (10%) for 2014 compared with 2010 (TK 2012/2013a). It fell just short of achieving this target, with a reduction of 8%, from 39% in 2010 to 36% in 2014. This policy attention for subjective safety is not new: concerns about the impact of crime on people's physical and emotional well-being have imposed a clear stamp on the political debate since the turn of the century. Major efforts were made to develop visible measures to counter those types of crime which citizens could potentially encounter in the public space, motivated in part by the reassuring effect this visibility was expected to have (TK 2002/2003). Targets were not formulated at this time.

The trend in feelings of unsafety is measured using a standard question that has figured in the successive *Safety Monitors (Veiligheidsmonitors)* for many years: 'Do you occasionally feel unsafe?'. This general question formulation elicits information on how uneasy the Dutch feel about safety. In some people, this unease could manifest itself as fear of victimisation; in others it could reflect their belief that there is too much crime in their neighbourhood, while for yet others it could be an expression of their opinion on general safety in the Netherlands and whether they believe this is being adequately addressed. Subjective safety can be seen as an attitude and can be divided into an affective (e.g. fear), cognitive (e.g. risk perception and views) and conative dimension (behaviour) (Fattah & Sacco 1989). People may also experience lack of safety as a personal or social problem, leading to a different expression of each dimension. For example, people may fear a personal threat or may be angry or sad about crime as a social problem (affective); they may assess the risk to their personal safety as high, or believe that behavioural norms are too often trampled underfoot (cognitive); or they may display avoidance behaviour in order to avoid threats or use their vote to try and put a political party in power which takes decisive action against crime (conative). An affirmative answer to the standard research question therefore does not provide a firm basis for determining the perspective from which people say they occasionally feel unsafe; that can vary widely between individuals.

The reduction in feelings of unsafety realised does not automatically mean that the feelings that impose the biggest emotional burden have been eliminated. Since the subjective safety differs between people who say they occasionally feel unsafe, we cannot say to what extent policy aimed at reducing this general feeling of unsafety is in reality mainly harvesting the 'low-hanging fruit'. However, policy may be expected *as a minimum* to seek to reduce the most serious problems. This implies that priority should not be given to tackling feelings of unsafety that are sporadic or even functional (because they make people alert),

or perceptions of or opinions about safety of people who are in reality not afraid. This lack of clarity regarding the outcome of current policy prompted an exploration in this study of ‘fear of victimisation’ as an alternative route for policy aimed at improving the subjective safety of the Dutch population. In our view, fear of victimisation addresses the seriousness of the problem more directly, because this fear is not simply a perception, opinion or concern, but a negative emotion that is evoked when people genuinely feel threatened. This approach aligns with the international literature which focuses on fear of crime in research and policy aimed at improving subjective social safety.

To establish whether a focus on fear of victimisation can add value to research and policy, we first explored the question of whether the subjective safety of people with a specific fear of victimisation differs fundamentally from that of people with a general feeling of unsafety (as assumed in the policy). If that proves to be the case, it would be an argument for making a deliberate choice in the policy between both indicators of subjective safety, depending on the policy objective. If the goal of policy is that people should be less afraid of becoming victims of crime, those with a fear of victimisation should be taken as the starting point in research and policy. The general standard question could be used as a supplement to provide a summarising measure of unspecified unease about unsafety in Dutch society.

We explored the added value of a focus on fear of victimisation by comparing the nature, extent and determinants of this fear with the general feeling of unsafety and with other aspects of subjective safety that can cause people to say they ‘occasionally feel unsafe’. This comparison of indicators is a common thread running through this report. The indicator used to measure fear of victimisation is an offence-specific question about a genuinely felt fear: ‘Below is a list of different types of violence and/or aggression. To what extent have you experienced fear in the last twelve months because you felt you could become a victim of [one of eight different crimes]?’ The eight crimes were: burglary (while the victim is at home and away from home, respectively); robbery with violence (by a stranger); physical abuse (by a stranger and someone known to the victim, respectively); sexual aggression (by a stranger and someone known to the victim, respectively); and mental abuse (by someone known to the victim). In combination with questions about the cognitive and behavioural aspects of subjective safety, these offence-specific questions were included in a large module on subjective safety and experiences of victimisation in the 2012 Emancipation Opinions survey (EMOP’12). The research questions answered with these data are discussed below; a summary of the research approach and findings for each question is also given.

## Question 1

*To what extent do people experience fear of victimisation and how burdensome is this in their daily lives? How does the extent of this problem relate to general, cognitive and behavioural dimensions of subjective unsafety?*

According to EMOP'12, general, affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects of subjective unsafety occur to differing degrees in the Dutch population. Over a third of respondents occasionally felt unsafe (35% according to EMOP'12 and 37% according to the Safety Monitor 2012), while almost a quarter (24%) reported that they had experienced fear in the preceding year in relation to at least one of eight crimes (affective); just under a tenth (9%) assessed the probability of them falling victim to one of the eight crimes as fairly to very high (cognitive).

Situational fear (fear at a specific location and/or at a specific time) leads 19% of people not to modify their behaviour (conative). They choose to ignore these feelings. A large group (49%) who experience these feelings do not avoid the situation, but do adapt their behaviour, for example by walking more quickly, keeping their mobile phone close at hand, avoiding eye contact, being more vigilant, and so on. Finally, 16% avoid the situation completely because of the perceived safety risk.

Fear of victimisation is not always situational, and can therefore not always be shaken off once the situation in question has ended. Fear can leave a more lasting mark and continue to pursue people in their daily lives. For 8% of the Dutch population, this fear of victimisation has some impact on how they *feel* in their day-to-day lives, and for 5% it has a great or very great impact (13% altogether). Fear of victimisation affects the everyday *behaviour* of 7% of the Dutch population to some extent and 4% to a great or very great extent (11% in total). Taken together, this means that the daily lives of 15% of the Dutch population are affected to a greater or lesser extent by fear of victimisation, either in terms of how they feel or how they behave.

Compared with the sizeable group (over a third) of Dutch people who report in the annual Safety Monitors that they occasionally feel unsafe, therefore, a relatively small group have an experience of safety which affects their mental or physical freedom of movement. While for some the general feeling of unsafety may mean only a temporary period of unease or may primarily reflect an attitude, this smaller group are confronted with the day-to-day consequences of their fear. If the Ministry of Security and Justice succeeds in reducing the number of people who occasionally feel unsafe by 10% in 2017 compared with 2012, it cannot be taken for granted that the group of Dutch people who are pursued by fear will be among that 10%. It is more plausible that people whose feelings of unsafety are less deep-rooted will be relieved of those feelings by general policy measures.

Some people are pursued by fear because they are aware of a real threat: they are more at risk of being a victim and their functional fear alerts them to this (Goffman 1971). Policy aimed at removing this fear will therefore need to focus first on the objective threat. In this situation, measures aimed at combating crime are more likely to succeed than measures designed to improve subjective safety. Others who are pursued by fear in their daily lives may not be exposed to a threat in reality, and their fear can therefore be described as dys-

functional. This group will benefit from measures aimed directly at improving subjective safety. We will describe some possible avenues for this in the answers to research questions 4 and 5 about determinants of fear and the general feeling of unsafety.

### Question 2

*To what extent is fear of victimisation a differentiating dimension of subjective safety?*

As we saw in the answers to research question 1, general feelings of unsafety, the perceived probability and seriousness of victimisation (the risk perception), the fear of victimisation and the day-to-day impact of that fear do not occur to the same degree across the Dutch population. Moreover, these different aspects of subjective unsafety do not have the same meaning for everyone. An exploratory factor analysis of the responses in EMOP'12 shows that people who occasionally feel unsafe do not automatically fear that they will fall victim to specific crimes (affective) and vice versa. Nor do people who occasionally feel unsafe or who are fearful automatically assess the probability or the seriousness of victimisation as high, and vice versa. In addition, general feelings of unsafety and fear of victimisation do not automatically mean that people feel pursued by those feelings in their daily lives. There are however two cases where a relationship was found between some of the forms of subjective safety. First, fear of victimisation is closely associated with the perceived probability of becoming a victim, but only regarding victimisation in the personal sphere. In other words, when it comes to potential violence by someone who is known to the potential victim, or to burglary in the victim's own home, a high (or low, respectively) assessed probability also means a high (or low) level of fear. This implies that people can sometimes be afraid of the unknown for no reason, but much less so in the case of the known.

Second, the general feeling of unsafety, which is interpreted differently by different people, partly coincides with anxious moments in certain public locations and at certain times. The distinction between this situational feeling of unsafety in the public space and the fear of becoming a victim of specific crimes resembles the distinction between 'formless fear' (Fattah 1993; Figgie 1980), or concern (Taylor & Hale 1986) about safety around the home, neighbourhood and wider community, and specific or acute fear of a particular crime. Two distinctions can therefore be drawn: the first between general perceptions of safety in the public space and fear of victimisation, and the second between fear of victimisation and cognitive forms of subjective safety (except in the personal sphere). This confirms the importance of using a more specific indicator to study fear of victimisation than the general standard question 'Do you occasionally feel unsafe?' which is generally used to measure subjective safety in the Netherlands.

### Question 3

*In which combinations do fear of victimisation and other dimensions of subjective unsafety occur in the population, and in which sociodemographic groups?*

Subjective (un)safety thus has several aspects or dimensions, which can occur independently of each other. These individual aspects occur in different combinations and together form an experience of safety that varies between different individuals. We used latent class analysis to explore which combinations of these elements occur in practice. Multinomial logistic regression was used to determine the population groups in which these combinations occur.

There are four variants of subjective safety. The most common variant is called 'unafraid' in this report. The unafraid include the biggest group (over 70% of the population) who feel little fear of victimisation or any other dimension of subjective unsafety. Women, people of faith, people who vote for the Freedom Party (PVV), the Socialist Party (SP) and non-voters (compared with those who vote for the centre-right VVD party) are less likely to be unafraid.

The second variant is 'afraid in the close personal sphere' and characterises the subjective safety of 19% of the Dutch population. These people have an above-average fear of becoming a victim in the personal sphere and believe there is a real chance of this happening. They are afraid of being burgled at home or of suffering violence from people they know. Compared with the other groups, they also feel relatively unsafe in specific locations (possibly in and around the home where they may encounter the feared people they know). Women, people of faith, people who vote for the Socialist Party (SP) and non-voters (compared with those who vote for the centre-right VVD party) are more likely to be afraid in the personal sphere.

In the third variant, fear of victimisation dominates. This affects a much smaller group, namely 5% of the population. These people only experience excessive anxiety about becoming a victim – something that impacts their everyday lives – but don't believe the risk of it actually happening to be high. We describe this group as 'fearful without cause'. People with a low education level and tenants are more likely to be in this group.

The fourth variant affects 4% of the population and can be summarised as 'persistently afraid'. These people are pursued by an experience of unsafety in their daily lives, in which virtually all elements are present to an excessive extent. In particular, they assess their chance of becoming a victim as high and are also very afraid of this, feel the impact of this daily and are plagued by feelings of situational unsafety. This fear, risk perception and feeling of being unsafe appear to be focused on the public space rather than the personal sphere. These people are more often women, people without work and people who consider voting for the Labour Party (PvdA) (compared with VVD voters).

In short, fear of becoming a victim plays a role in each of the four variants of subjective safety identified in the Dutch population. This fear occurs in varying combinations with other aspects of subjective safety. Some sections of the population are also more susceptible to certain variants. To identify the risk factors for fear of victimisation, therefore, it is important to study fear independently, though relative to other aspects of subjective

safety. The risk factors can then serve as pointers for policy aimed at reducing fear of victimisation.

#### Question 4

*Which individual and environmental characteristics influence fear of victimisation and the degree to which that fear is burdensome?*

Based on a literature review, we built a conceptual model to explain fear of victimisation, centred around the criminological opportunity theory. The opportunity theory (Cohen & Felson 1979) posits that the occurrence of a crime depends on a number of factors:

- the presence of and exposure to (potential) offenders;
- the presence of attractive targets;
- the technical and social protection of the targets.

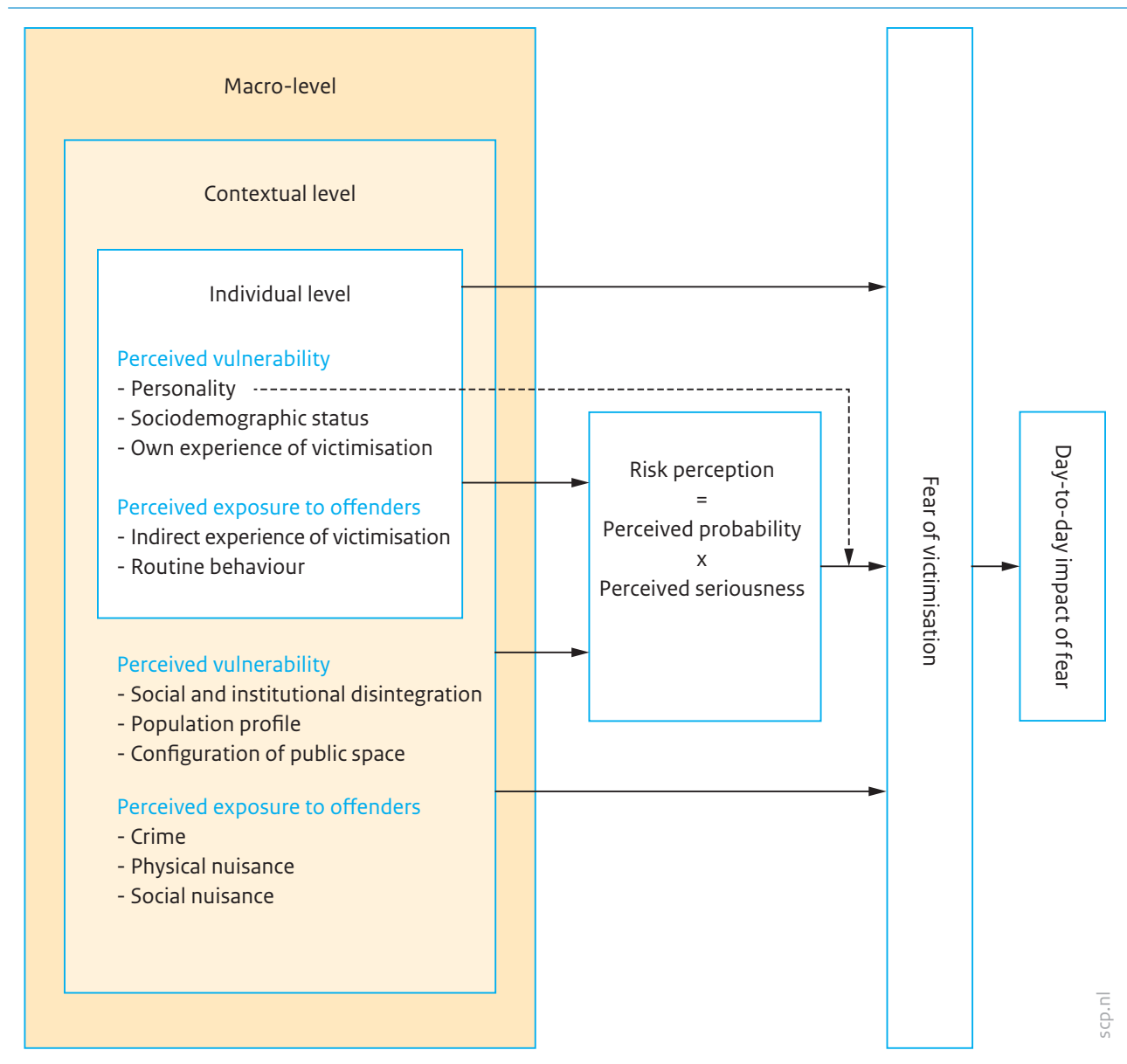
These three opportunity factors can be defined at both the individual and contextual level; in our study, the latter is the neighbourhood level (Wilcox Rountree et al. 2003). The more someone feels that they or their neighbourhood are exposed to potential offenders, the more attractive they are as a target, or the less they are protected, the higher their perceived risk of becoming a victim. The opportunity theory assumes that the (cognitive) risk perception precedes the (affective) fear of crime, in other words, that fear is conditional on risk perception.

In our conceptual model we combine the fear of being an attractive target and the feared lack of protection as per the opportunity theory under the heading ‘perceived vulnerability’. Broadly speaking, psychological personality characteristics at the individual level (such as perceived stress sensitivity and perceived resilience) are assumed to influence perceived vulnerability, as are sociodemographic characteristics (physical, social or financial vulnerability) and personal previous victimisation. According to the literature, perceived vulnerability is influenced at neighbourhood level by the degree of social and institutional integration: the degree to which the local community forms a close-knit network of social cohesion and collective efficacy as a protection against external threats, and the degree to which people trust that the police or local authorities can protect them. Closely linked to this is the social stratification of the neighbourhood population: the presence of different population groups could have a direct effect on the fear felt by certain groups, but can also exert an influence through social integration (or a lack thereof). Finally, the configuration of the public space can also influence the perceived vulnerability of the environment; in an open and uncluttered environment, for example, people can much more readily identify potential escape routes and also have more time to see danger approaching and to anticipate it.

The perceived exposure to offenders, the remaining criterion in the opportunity theory, is posited to be determined at individual level by people’s indirect experiences of victimisation obtained from the media or from accounts in the social setting, thus making them aware of incidents that could also happen to them. How inclined people are to take risks in their daily routine can also influence how aware they are of threats from others. The cau-

sality is the big question here, however: do people avoid risks because they see threats everywhere, or do they never get into threatening situations because they do not take risks? At neighbourhood level, it is assumed that the actual level of crime, together with the perception of social and physical neighbourhood problems, influences the perceived exposure to offenders and therefore the fear of victimisation.

Figure S.1  
Conceptual model of fear of victimisation



We tested the conceptual model using structural equation modelling (SEM), in which our offence and experience-specific questions were used as an indicator for fear of victimisation. A first finding is that a high risk perception, as is assumed in the conceptual model, has by far the biggest influence on fear of victimisation. This applies to fear of unknown offenders, and definitely to fear of offenders who are known to the potential victim. We also found confirmation for the mediating function of risk perception, in line with the con-



ceptual model: a high risk perception explains why women are more anxious about violence by strangers. Risk perception also explains part of the fear of people who have been a victim before and of people who feel less resistant to stress and less resilient.

A number of individual characteristics are associated with fear of both known and unknown offenders. Low perceived resilience is found to be a risk factor for both types of fear. Among sociodemographic characteristics, a lower educational level, bisexuality and living in a rented home are risk factors for both types of fear, as is previous experience with violence. The effect of all these risk factors on fear of victimisation is explained in the conceptual model by means of the perception of individual vulnerability. It is also notable that neither type of fear is influenced by any of the presumed risk factors at neighbourhood level.

There are clearly also differences between the risk factors for 'fear of strangers' and 'fear of known persons'. These differences manifest themselves first between sociodemographic groups, with age, for example, influencing both factors, but in a different way. While young people (16-24 years) are more afraid of strangers than middle-aged people (25-54 years), people aged over 65 are afraid of people they know more often than young people. Fear of strangers is also more common among people who are no longer working. Fear of known persons is more common among men (if the risk perception of men and women were to be the same) and people of faith, and less common among pupils/students. Second, the psychological stress sensitivity proves to be a risk factor for fear of strangers, but not for fear of known persons. Third, victim experiences have different effects on the two types of fear. People who have themselves been a victim of sexual aggression feel more fear of people they know; this is explained in the conceptual model by the fact that people's experiences make them feel more vulnerable. People who have encountered victims in their circle of acquaintances, by contrast, are more afraid of strangers. Our explanation for this was that they have become more aware that crime occurs in their surroundings and that they too could be exposed to it.

The final difference between the two types of fear is their impact on daily life. In the case of fear of victimisation by strangers, that fear has an impact on everyday life; the risk perception (the sense that there is a genuine threat) has little or no influence. As regards fear of victimisation by someone known to the victim, the impact of risk perception is by contrast at least as great as that of the fear itself. This confirms once again that risk perception is key to understanding fear in one's own social setting, for example in the case of domestic violence.

### Question 5

*To what extent do the determinants of fear of victimisation differ from the determinants of a general feeling of unsafety?*

We tested the conceptual model to explain fear of victimisation not just using the offence and experience-specific question as an indicator of fear of victimisation, but also the general standard question 'Do you occasionally feel unsafe?'. The input in the structural equation models was the same, in other words we entered the same set of presumed risk fac-

tors, but the outcomes of these empirical models were different. The main differences are set out below.

### *Risk perception*

Both types of subjective safety are strongly affected by cognitive risk perception. Those effects are greatest for fear, especially fear of known persons, and weaker for feeling unsafe. People who fear persons they know do not do so without reason, but most often think that this fear is based on a genuine threat; people who occasionally feel unsafe least often perceive such a threat.

### *Sociodemographic characteristics*

Among the individual risk factors, sociodemographic characteristics are more often relevant for fear of victimisation than for a general feeling of unsafety (when controlling for risk perception). In addition, the two types of subjective safety are determined by entirely different sociodemographic characteristics. Lower-educated people have more fear than people with a higher education level, but both groups feel equally safe or unsafe. Young people are more fearful of violence by strangers than middle-aged people, but again both groups feel equally safe or unsafe. People aged over 65 are more fearful than young people of violence by people they know, but once again both groups feel equally safe or unsafe. People of faith are also more fearful of violence by known persons, but feel just as safe or unsafe as non-religious persons. Pensioners are more anxious about violence by strangers, but at the same time (like non-workers) feel less unsafe than the working population. Our theoretical explanation of the effect of sociodemographic risk factors is based on the notion that some population groups feel physically, socially or financially more vulnerable. This perceived vulnerability mainly affects fear of personal victimisation, more than the general feeling of unsafety. As we controlled for them, these effects of vulnerability are not explained by a higher risk perception or a lower feeling of resilience in some socio-demographic groups – together referred to as the risk sensitivity.

### *Psychological characteristics*

The risk factor 'perceived stress sensitivity', which is also explained by a feeling of personal vulnerability, also impacts the two types of subjective safety differently. The effect of perceived stress sensitivity on feelings of unsafety is particularly notable; no other personal characteristic has a stronger effect on whether or not someone occasionally feels unsafe. Perceived stress sensitivity is a much weaker risk factor for fear of strangers, and is not a factor at all for fear of known persons. The psychological characteristics 'perceived resilience' and 'happiness' do not differentiate between fear and feeling unsafe – happiness because it has no direct effect on either, perceived resilience because it has a comparable effect on both.

### *Personal and indirect experiences of victimisation*

Personal and indirect experiences of being a victim exacerbate both types of subjective safety, but to differing degrees. While indirect experiences of victimisation have a substantial effect (more than direct personal experiences) on feeling unsafe, they are of subordinate importance for fear of strangers, while only personally experienced victimisation has an effect on fear of known persons.

### *Neighbourhood safety*

None of the presumed risk factors at neighbourhood level had an influence on the fear of victimisation. By contrast, safety in the neighbourhood does have an influence on a general feeling of safety. Similarly to the effect of indirect victimisation experiences, the effect of (objective or perceived) neighbourhood safety can be understood by referring to the signs of criminal activity that residents pick up in their surroundings. Both indirect experiences of victimisation and (perceived) neighbourhood safety mainly or exclusively influence the general feeling of unsafety. The importance of the physical environment for feelings of unsafety is also supported by the earlier finding that feeling unsafe constitutes the same factor and is therefore closely associated with locations that are perceived as threatening. This was discussed in the answers to research question 2.

### *Impact*

Finally, people who are afraid of victimisation by unknown offenders experience a greater impact on their daily lives than people who occasionally feel unsafe. As regards known persons, the risk perception appears to be at least as important in determining the everyday impact as the actual fear itself.

### *Summary*

Fear of victimisation is more closely associated with sociodemographic characteristics and risk perception, while the general feeling of unsafety is fuelled more by a stress-sensitive personality and by *indirect* experiences of victimisation in the social or physical setting. If we feed these results back into the conceptual model, we can conclude that fear of victimisation depends mainly on a feeling of vulnerability at individual level and on risk perception. Environmental signals of potential exposure to offenders have less influence, and the neighbourhood even less. By contrast, these environmental signals of the possible presence of perpetrators (at both individual and neighbourhood level) have a bigger effect on the general feeling of unsafety.

## **S.2 Implications for policy**

This study makes clear that the risk factors for fear of victimisation are not the same as those for a general feeling of unsafety. This means that the policy approach will need to vary depending on whether the focus is on combating fear of victimisation or on reducing general feelings of unsafety. Moreover, in seeking to combat fear it is highly relevant to

know whether that fear is caused by the unknown or by the threat from persons known to the potential victim in their own setting. Our findings argue for a three-pronged policy, focusing not just on actual crime and on the physical environment (the emphasis in current policy), but also on the population groups where fear of victimisation is concentrated. While responsibility for subjective safety is currently mainly regarded as the preserve of the Ministry of Security and Justice, interdepartmental coordination, particularly with the Ministries of Health, Welfare and Sport, of Education, Culture and Science and of Social Affairs and Employment, offers new perspectives. We will look at this briefly below.

### 5.2.1 Fear of known persons most often the result of personal experience and risk perception

Fear of known persons is linked most directly to people's own appraisal of their risk of becoming a victim. In chapter 2 we saw that fear of victimisation and the perceived probability of victimisation are in principle independent aspects of subjective unsafety, but it is only when it comes to fear of known persons (and burglary in one's own home) that they come together to form something that we call 'being afraid in the close personal sphere'. This characterises the subjective safety of 19% of the Dutch population. In chapter 3 we also saw that fear of known persons is relatively heavily influenced by the degree to which people believe they are at risk, and also by their own experiences as a victim. More than fear of strangers, and even more than a general feeling of unsafety, fear of known persons thus originates from the everyday reality of those concerned. Older persons and people of faith, in particular, more often see factors in their social setting which cause them to be specifically afraid of persons they know.<sup>1</sup>

The policy approach to subjective safety involves a diversity of visible measures in the public space (such as visible surveillance, an open configuration, good lighting, supervision of young people's activities, attractive ornamentation and green landscaping, rapid reinstatement after vandalism, rapid cleaning after contamination, etc.). These general measures focused on the public space obviously have little effect if people are afraid of specific individuals in their social setting, and the government is under no illusion that this is the case. Reducing fear of acquaintances is not a policy goal in itself, but stopping and preventing violence in dependent relationships, better known as domestic violence, most certainly is. The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport has since 2012 coordinated collaboration with the Ministries of Security and Justice, of Education, Culture and Science and of Social Affairs and Employment in combating this category of violence. This interdepartmental policy focuses on all forms of domestic violence, violence in the professional sphere and violence in the voluntary sector. The policy is based on three principles: strengthening the position of victims, punishing and helping offenders, and breaking through the intergenerational transfer of violence (TK 2012/2013b). Violence in dependent relationships faces investigative agencies with the added difficulty that the violence is often ingrained and largely takes place behind closed doors. Because of their personal relationship with the offender, victims are much more often unable, unwilling or afraid to report the violence.

One way of removing the fear of people known to the victim is therefore to increase the willingness of victims to report incidents, and at the same time improve the investigation of such incidents. A guarantee of good protection and care is also of decisive importance, especially if intervention in the domestic situation means the victim no longer has a home to return to. For many victims of domestic violence, there is no way back, and this may also make them reticent to reveal what is happening. Since the publication of the policy memorandum ‘Personal Violence – Public Concern’ (*Privé Geweld – Publieke Zaak*) (TK 2001/2002), this hidden problem has been high on the policy agenda. In 2004, for example, the police were given the power to record violent incidents specifically as domestic violence. In recent years, the approach has also increasingly been supported by legislation, for example in the Temporary Domestic Exclusion Act (*Wet tijdelijk huisverbod*) (since 2009), the Domestic Violence and Child Abuse (Reporting Code) Act (*Wet meldcode huiselijk geweld en kindermishandeling*) (since 2013), the Social Support Act 2015 (*Wmo*), the Youth Act (since 2015) (TK 2015/2016), and the Forced Marriage (Countermeasures) Act (*Wet tegengaan huwelijksdwang*) (since 2015).

Given this extensive and coherent package of measures, which has been deployed by the government for some time to protect people against violence from people they know, we simply conclude here that the determined effort to combat the objective problems (i.e. actual victimisation by persons known to the victim) also appears to be the right way to ameliorate the subjective problem (i.e. the fear of victimisation by a known person). Tackling the objective problems will have a direct effect in reducing both the chance of having personal victim experiences as well as the high risk perception. At most we can add to this that the policy should include special attention for signals from older persons and persons in a religious setting, two at-risk groups which most often fear people known to them. Older persons are already on the government’s radar, as reflected in the action plan *Older Persons in Safe Hands* (*Ouderen in veilige handen*) (TK 2014/2015). People of faith are currently included in policy mainly if they have a non-Western background. Our dataset does not allow us to determine whether this applies equally for all religious faiths, and we therefore do not rule out the possibility that people with a Christian background may also be in the at-risk group, even though the policy does not focus specifically on them.

## 5.2.2 More attention for group-specific policy to target fear of victimisation

### General feeling of unsafety

Over a third of the Dutch population sometimes feel unsafe; just under a quarter have been afraid of becoming a victim and around a seventh feel the impact of this on a daily basis. It is quite possible that the general, visible measures taken in the public space, as for example recommended to Dutch local authorities in the ‘Subjective Safety Toolkit’ (*Toolkit veiligheidsbeleving*) and the ‘Table of Twelve’ (*Tafel van Twaalf* (Eijsink Smeets & Van ’t Hof 2010)), will enable the Ministry of Security and Justice to achieve its envisaged reduction in general feelings of safety by 10% between 2012 and 2017. This study provides substantiation for the policy choice of taking the public space as an important starting point in tack-

ling general feelings of unsafety by showing that these feelings have a strong spatial component. In chapter 2, for example, we noted that a feeling of being unsafe coincides with people's feelings of anxiety in potentially threatening locations and situations. We summarised this as a situational feeling of unsafety. It also emerged in chapter 3 that residents of neighbourhoods where there are safety issues more often feel unsafe but do not more often fear victimisation. Even if people know of someone being victimised in their social setting (including neighbours), this is much more likely to lead to a feeling of being unsafe than to a fear of becoming a victim. A location-specific approach to signs of lack of safety (in particular crime, wrongdoing and decay) therefore appears to be a good means of improving situational feelings of unsafety. This is a route that has been followed often in the past, for example in projects and experiments under the umbrella of the neighbourhood approach (*40-wijkenaanpak*, Kullberg et al. 2015). More police on the streets or other visible supervision in the public space, a more colourful and lively street scene, social meeting places and activities, a clean and well-maintained streetscape, a well-lit and open street plan, can all boost public familiarity and reduce the number of situations and fellow citizens that pose a perceived threat (Blokland 2008). It is plausible that the reassuring effect of these measures helps reduce situational feelings of unsafety. Less plausible is that situational feelings of unsafety can be *entirely* removed in this way, since they are also based heavily on the stress sensitivity of those concerned (including those with anxiety disorders). Individual therapeutic solutions are more likely to be the answer here, which lie more in the province of care policy than safety policy.

### Fear of victimisation

This study has shown not only that spatial factors are important in determining general feelings of unsafety, but also that they are of subordinate or no importance in determining fear of victimisation. Even if the target of a 10% reduction in situational feelings of unsafety in the public space is achieved, therefore, it is likely that people who fear becoming a victim (and certainly the small group who are pursued by this fear in their daily lives) will derive less benefit from this. The first question is therefore where the government should focus its priorities: on helping the greatest numbers and reducing general feelings of unsafety, or on tackling the more deep-seated problem of fear of victimisation. The second question is how feasible the second of these priorities is in practice.

### *Sociodemographic risk factors*

In tackling fear of victimisation, there first needs to be a greater focus on specific sociodemographic groups in the population. Just as a psychological characteristic such as stress sensitivity is difficult to influence, so policy aimed at subjective safety will have little impact on the sociodemographic group to which someone belongs. A target-group policy could however be used to address the feelings of vulnerability in these groups (preventative or curative). An example of this is the present international attention for gender-sensitive policy to halt violence against women and so create a key condition for equal social opportunities (Steketee et al. 2016). This is an interdepartmental policy. Similarly, the perceived

vulnerability of young people, lower-educated people and people with a bisexual preference – all groups which generally experience higher levels of fear – might also be reduced. We have already mentioned older persons and religious people being afraid of specific persons in their social setting. In schools, teaching materials are increasingly being developed to promote mutual tolerance, self-confidence and self-efficacy, among other things with regard to ethnic minorities, girls and LGBT persons (e.g. WE CAN Young). The aim here is to bring about a cultural change that reduces fear in different groups, and at the same time to increase the resilience of future generations so that they are less obvious targets or are mentally more robust. Interdepartmental cooperation could advance the policy on subjective safety on this point.

#### *Risk perception as a risk factor*

Apart from sociodemographic background characteristics, fear of victimisation depends heavily on risk perception (the combination of the perceived probability and the perceived seriousness of victimisation). This applies particularly to fear of violence by persons known to the (potential) victim. If someone fears a specific person in their own setting, the perception of a risk is much more relevant than in the case of a hypothetical perpetrator who the person concerned has not yet met. The person concerned has more information about the potential risk, giving their fear a cognitive basis. Consequently, their fear will only reduce if the threat reduces; this requires specific action in very specific situations. Fear of unknown perpetrators is also strongly determined by risk perception. That perception stems partly from earlier victimisation, and more specifically from a person's own experiences of sexual aggression and threat. Such negative experiences have probably made those concerned more aware of what could happen to them and/or made them more sensitive to the consequences of being a victim, so that they perceive the risk as greater. Research has shown that people who have already been victims are indeed more likely to become victims again (Farrell & Pease 1993; Wittebrood 2006; Wittebrood & Nieuwebeerta 2000). Where the reason for the earlier victimisation still exists and has given rise to a higher risk perception, the fear of becoming a victim can be removed by removing this specific threat. Where the risk perception no longer has a tangible basis, but takes the form of a trauma following an earlier event, the solution would appear to lie more in victim support than safety policy.

There is no strong correlation between risk perception itself and sociodemographic characteristics; women are the only group where the greater fear of becoming a victim is explained entirely by the higher perceived risk of violence by strangers. Chapter 2 showed that it is not so much the probability of becoming a victim that women assess as higher than men, but above all the seriousness of the potential consequences. In particular, the seriousness of becoming a victim of a sexual offence plays a key role in women's risk perception and fear (Van Noije 2012a). Women are therefore the only group for which a policy aimed at reducing the actual or perceived risk would appear to be worthwhile. It is not enough to increase women's resilience: even with equal levels of perceived resilience and stress sensitivity, women still have a higher risk perception than men. This may be an indication that a

policy for women should not focus in the first place on bringing about changes in potential victims, but rather on what causes the perceived threat, i.e. potential offenders, or perhaps social attitudes (Van Noije et al. 2016). Here again, interdepartmental safety policy involving the Ministries of Security and Justice, of Education, Culture and Science, of Health, Welfare and Sport, and Social Affairs and Employment can make a contribution.

#### *Resilience: a shared risk factor*

Finally, the potential policy avenues highlighted above should include individual resilience. Although resilience is not a differentiating factor between fear of victimisation and general feelings of unsafety, it is the only characteristic that influences all aspects of subjective safety studied here. The more resilient people feel, the less they report fear of violence by both acquaintances and strangers, the lower they assess the risk of both, the less often they say they occasionally feel unsafe, and the less they are impacted in their daily lives by feelings of fear.<sup>2</sup> An approach that increases people's perceived resilience would thus also appear to be a panacea for subjective unsafety in a broad sense. One caveat here is that resilience is only one of many determinants, and its effects are not enormous. Increased resilience is therefore likely to have only a limited effect in reducing fear, risk perception and feelings of unsafety; moreover, this positive effect can be undermined by the socio-demographic, psychological, situational and experiential factors referred to above.

### 5.3 What we would still like to know

The list of risk factors for fear of victimisation and general feelings of unsafety is not exhaustive; we did not have access to suitable data for all determinants in the conceptual model, for example, whereas each of these missing factors could turn out to offer relevant pointers for effective policy. We will take two examples here.

At the individual level, we had no data on media reports as a source of indirect victimisation experiences. Identifying the media reports to which people were exposed in a given period is a study all on its own, though one that could pay dividends in this highly technological and interactive age. While incidents would sometimes not pass through the filter of the traditional media, the growth of social media and the Internet means there is an unlimited number of sources of immediate information, news or not news, discriminating or not discriminating.

At neighbourhood level, there was a lack of information about how much trust residents have in the police and other government agencies; do people believe that the police are capable of offering them adequate protection and that the local authority is taking the necessary steps to limit the opportunities for crime? An insight into this institutional trust is all the more interesting given its direct relationship with the functioning of government and thus of the policy itself.

We would also like more information on the degree to which different forms of subjective unsafety are experienced as a burden. Fear of victimisation is the only variable for which we have information regarding the daily impact on people's feelings and behaviour. Our



assumption is that fear of victimisation is a relatively deep-seated form of subjective lack of safety, because it is not just a perception, opinion or concern, but is a deeper emotion that is evoked when people feel personally threatened. We therefore assume that people who fear becoming a victim experience a greater everyday impact from this than the large group of people who occasionally feel unsafe. It would be good to be able to test this assumption empirically by establishing which forms of subjective unsafety impose the biggest constraints on people's emotional and physical freedom of movement.

Future research would benefit not only from the gathering of additional data, but also from improvements in the conceptual model. The structural equation model could be optimised by modelling expected mutual influences and connections between variables. As the conceptual model is already large and complex, however, it proved not possible to add more complexity. Doing so could lead to some adjustment of the size of effects, but we do not believe that this would have consequences for the set of risk factors that were found to be the most relevant in determining fear of victimisation and general feelings of unsafety. Rather, it would mainly provide information on the degree to which fear itself has an effect on factors such as happiness or the perception of neighbourhood problems. It would also provide an insight into the moderation or mediation of the effects of other determinants on fear of victimisation. For example, we now had to resort to a separate model to test whether the effect of risk perception on fear is moderated by a person's perceived stress sensitivity and resilience.

Finally, although the choice of fear of victimisation as a target variable is already very specific compared with general feelings of unsafety, and was also measured much more specifically, the model could if desired be broken down further. For example, we found that the risk factors for fear of strangers are not the same as those for fear of known persons. It is also possible that we would find more differentiation in the risk factors if fear of victimisation were studied for each crime individually; however, this degree of detail goes beyond the scope of this study. It is moreover unclear whether the ability to obtain additional, offence-specific information would be worth the large number of highly complex models that would be needed. The common denominators among the risk factors offer the most attractive avenues for creating an effective policy, both in terms of having the broadest possible scope and of efficiency.

## Notes

- 1 Lower-educated people, people living in rented homes and bisexuals are also more often afraid of people they know, but are also more often afraid of strangers, suggesting that they may be generally more afraid of victimisation.
- 2 This effect of resilience on impact is only visible in the model which controls for feelings of unsafety. The effect is absent in the model which controls for fear of victimisation.