The fallacy of objective security and its consequences[1]

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Abstract

The determination that the main ground for citizens' security perception was not linked (directly and uniquely) with crime had, as a consequence, the definition of two kinds of security: the objective one, empirically demonstrable, truly existing, and the other one, the subjective, volatile und unreal, related to population's security perception. The later, although not necessarily based on crime, had to be taken into account because it influences people's conducts. This article aims to evidence that the so called "objective security" (security measured from objective, *neutral*, parameters) depends on a lot of subjectivities from diverse actors, on which risks are considered acceptable, the ground values considered to need protection, the circumstances that influence the main actors' decisions making procedures, the rules from assurance companies, resources in police stations, or the time coincidence of incidents that require police attention or response. That's to say: Objective security is also quite subjective. Nevertheless, the fact that security be mainly composed of subjective elements doesn't mean that the sources used to ascertain the traditional objective security (surveys and police statistics) are not relevant anymore, or that the origin of insecurity is not important in order to design policies and strategies as response to it.

Key words: objective security, subjective security, perception /feeling of in/security, fear of crime.

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[1] This is the second version of "*La falacia de la seguridad objectiva y sus consecuencias*", published originally in Spanish in 2020 in this journal. One could say that this is the second "version" of the article because it is not exactly a translation of its Spanish version. While it is true that most of it is actually a translation of the previous article, some new reflections (especially in chapter 3) have been included. The author considers those changes necessary to better convey the message of the original work and due to new evidence in this field.

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0. A preliminary terminological note.

It is not easy to write an English version of a paper in Spanish that deals with "seguridad". It would not be any problem to translate it into German, Portuguese, French, Catalan or Italian. In all those languages we find a single word to express what the Spanish concept "seguridad" implies. However, in English we have to deal with two distinct words: "security" and "safety". We could even add a third concept, the concept "fear of crime", which is commonly used in British and American criminology, and whose meaning is closely related to the other two ones (Hale, 1990). The original work deals with a concept which is wider in its meaning than the English concept of 'security' (i.e., to protect people from illegitimate external attacks or crimes). The original article is concerned with a concept of 'security' which is conceptually close to 'quality of life' or 'wellbeing' (Davey and Wootton, 2014). Of course, the Spanish concept of 'security' would also be wider in its meaning than 'fear of crime' (unless we take a flexible interpretation of the latter term), and a bit wider than "security"; although the second meaning of "security" provided by the Collins dictionary is quite close to safety ("safety from possible harm or loss"), and some English Thesaurus declare both of them (safety and security) as synonymous (Webster's New Thesaurus, 1990). Very recently, Davey and Wootton (2019) have proposed "feelings of unsafety" as a better concept to define "feelings of insecurity", with a quite reasonable arguments, at least from my point of view. However, although I tend to agree with the arguments used by these authors, and I would prefer "safety" as a word to define what I am dealing with in this paper, I will use mainly "security". The reasons are three: A lot of (I would say the majority, but not all of them) English-speaking criminologist use "security", and thus it is better understood for non-English readers (although some of them opt by using "safety"; Ferretti et al, 2018), who in most of their languages have a single word to express in/security. Moreover, after reading dictionaries and Thesaurus of the English language I am beginning to doubt the fact that these are two

clearly differentiate terms. Since it is not the aim of this paper to eventually, scientifically, define which English term would be the most appropriate (and it is out of my reach), I take a pragmatic solution and will use 'security' as a synonym of the Spanish concept 'seguridad'.

1. Introduction

There is a strong body of criminological literature that suggests that citizens' perceptions of security are not largely affected by high crime rates but instead, in general, these depend on disorder in public spaces (Gondra, 2009). First, victimization surveys carried out in both the United States of America (Moore et al. 2019) and the United Kingdom (Hough, 2017), as well as the conclusions of relevant reports such as the so-called Bonnemaison report in France[3] highlighted this fact. That is to say, fear of crime or perceptions of insecurity do not necessarily correlate with crime measures (Glas et al. 2019; Prieto Curiel and Bishop, 2017). Based on this finding, a new concept of security was developed which included two factors or variants: so-called 'objective security', which refers to incidents that actually occurred or an actual risk of these incidents taking place, and 'subjective security', which was first identified as fear of being a victim of crime, and later as perceptions of security (Guillén, 2012).

The correlation between one (objective) and the other (subjective) is far from constant and clear. Thus, as Valente and Crescenzi (2018), among others, point out, despite a continuous crime decline in Europe (with some exceptions in recent times), its inhabitants feel more unsafe now than ever. In this direction, one of the latest victimization surveys conducted in Germany, in 2017, shows how subjective security is declining (i.e., citizens feel more insecure) in times of a sustained downward trend in

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[3] Vid. https://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/var/storage/rapports-publics/834037801.pdf

crime[4]. In contrast, the latest Public Security Survey of Catalonia estimates, whose results have been published (corresponding to 2016-2017), show that an increase in victimization of almost 5% not only is not associated with an increase in insecurity, but also that interviewees feel slightly safer (a relative increase of 0.3 points) than in the previous survey[5]. Prieto Curiel and Bishop (2017) provide further examples of the lack of a systematic correlation in both directions. In general, it can be stated, as Jackson (2004, 946) makes clear, that "public perceptions of the seriousness of the crime problem exist independently of official estimates of its incidence and risk of victimisation". Doran and Burgess (2011, 2) describe the "paradoxical nature of the fear of crime", precisely to visualize the lack of rationality that it often suffers (in the same sense, see also the work of Ferretti et. al. 2018; Glas et al. 2019).

Nowadays, one could argue that the concept of 'security' is a fairly consolidated construct (or two, depending on how we operationalise it). The vast majority of serious research refers to both spheres of security in order to determine the level of security of a neighbourhood, community, city or country. It is thus common to describe the levels of subjective in/security (perception)[6], differentiating them from objective security measurements (i.e., police statistics and victimization). Despite this context, there is often a (perverse) idea that, although subjective security is important, what is actually real, and thus exists, is the 'objective' security, whereas the former is the fruit of people's imagination (Guillén, 2012). Despite the fact that, the remarkable dark figure of crime

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[4] Vid. https://notesdeseguretat.blog.gencat.cat/2019/05/27/germany-the-crime-rate-continues-to-fall-but-insecurity-is-on-the-increase/
[5]Vid.
http://interior.gencat.cat/web/.content/home/010_el_departament/publicacions/seguretat/estudis_i_enquestes/enquesta_de_seguretat_publica_de_catalunya/enquesta_de_seguretat_publica_de_catalunya_2017/PRESENTACIO-LLARGA-ESPC2017.pdf
[6] Curbet (2009) used the term in/security to stress how we talk about subjective security to refer the lack of security (insecurity). At the same time, he tried to show that insecurity and security are two faces of the same coin.

that affects police data is known to a fairly wide public, surprisingly, police records are still the main source of data used to gain knowledge of this "real" or "objective" security. Those records published annually and, in some cases in real time on the Internet[7], are usually the core data used to determine the level of objective security. The vast majority of security analysts use figures made public by the police to discuss the state of security. It is true that, in some cases, such as in Spain, there are no other tools (with the exception of Catalonia[8]) that regularly record complementary information about security. However, in cases where there are such tools (usually victimization survey-type instruments), the debate ends up focusing on the discussion of police data as well. It is common (this is the case in Catalonia) for the annual presentation of police statistics to be entitled "crime in year x" or "y". In contrast, when victimisation data from the corresponding survey are presented, the term 'presentation of survey data' is used. In other words, in the first case (i.e., police data) one speaks of knowing the crime situation, while in the second case one speaks of the results of the instrument (i.e., the survey). This is by no means a simple confusion of terminology.

The aim of this paper is, firstly, to clearly characterise the concept of subjective security and, subsequently, to discuss in a well-founded way not only the reliability of the sources that provide us with knowledge of the so-called objective security, but even consider if there is an 'objective security' as such (i.e., whether there is a measure of 'security' which is not subject to human interpretation or decisions). To this end, an analysis of the data provided by the police, victimization or security surveys will be

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[7] Vid.
https://mossos.gencat.cat/ca/els_mossos_desquadra/indicadors_i_qualitat/dades_obertes/cataleg_dades_obertes/dades -delinqueencials/ in the case of Catalonia or https://www.police.uk/ in the case of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
[8] Vid. the results of the different editions of the Public Security Survey of Catalonia in http://interior.gencat.cat/ca/el_departament/publicacions/seguretat/estudis_i_enquestes/enquesta_de_seguretat_publica_de_catalunya/.

presented, as well as the objective nature of the indicators considered to assess the levels of security, in order to end up considering what sense and usefulness the existing data have, what improvements could be applied and in what direction public security policies should be oriented on the basis of available information. It seems clear that public strategies and interventions do need to consider where public insecurity comes from in order to establish measures that are effective in mitigating it.

2.   **A walk-through subjective security. A basic concept for security management**

There is much consolidated scientific research showing that subjective security is dependent on individual factors (previous experiences of victimization, age, gender, ethnicity and nationality, but also psychological profile, ideology, level of socialization) and socio-environmental factors (i.e., social status, home environment, population density, public opinion) (Guillén, 2018b; Kessler, 2009). Zarafonitou (2011) argues that the opinion of the level of action and effectiveness of the police are also important factors, as well as the levels of health or education services as factors contributing to the state of insecurity. Buil-Gil et al. (2019a) present the explanations given to define these different perceptions of security, often verbalized as fear of crime, focusing on differences on personal and environmental factors (Ferretti et al., 2018; Hough, 2017) and, furthermore, differentiate between insecurity (fear of crime) as a "mental event" and as a "state of mind". In the first case, it is related to a particular place and time, while in the second it would be related to the perception of security in general, the belief in the (high or low) levels of security/crime that exist.

A first group of factors identified by criminologists refer to the individual characteristics of the person. Perceived vulnerability, understood as the result of the

assessment of one's own effectiveness to prevent crime victimization (of protection and response) and the perception of the hypothetical consequences of crime (Doran and Burgess, 2011; Glas et al., 2019; Jackson, 2004), is a fundamental factor. The more vulnerable a person feels, the more severe the consequences of being victimised. This may explain the tendency of elder people to feel more unsafe despite their lower levels of victimization (although this trend now appears not to be universal or to be evolving[9]). Direct or indirect experiences of victimization would also be a factor, as would be exposure to crime news in the media (Buil-Gil, 2017). Belonging to a certain ethnic group has shown to be a fundamental element for the level of subjective security of individuals (Ferretti et al., 2018), and the dissemination of events that have taken place in totally different contexts can also favour insecurity. Chacón and Téllez (2017) have studied the mechanisms that favour the spread of waves of insecurity to places or groups that have no direct or indirect relationship with the events that increase such insecurity.

Actually, if we reflect a little on the idea of security, it does not seem to be controversial to claim that it refers to people. It is true that we can sometimes talk, for example, of the security of buildings or transport vehicles. It is done, however, in the sense of whether the people who are in them or use them are at risk. If we look a little more closely at the purpose of security, we will see that it refers to people living free from risks, being able to carry out their daily activities in freedom, including those activities that are necessary for them but also those that give them pleasure or satisfaction. We could argue that security is a state of certain freedom that, at the very least, allows people to act by facing risks and fears, without being too conditioned or impeded by them (Guillén, 2012). It is very important to point out that what allows people to carry out activities freely is that they are not afraid to do so (or that this fear is not dominant), not
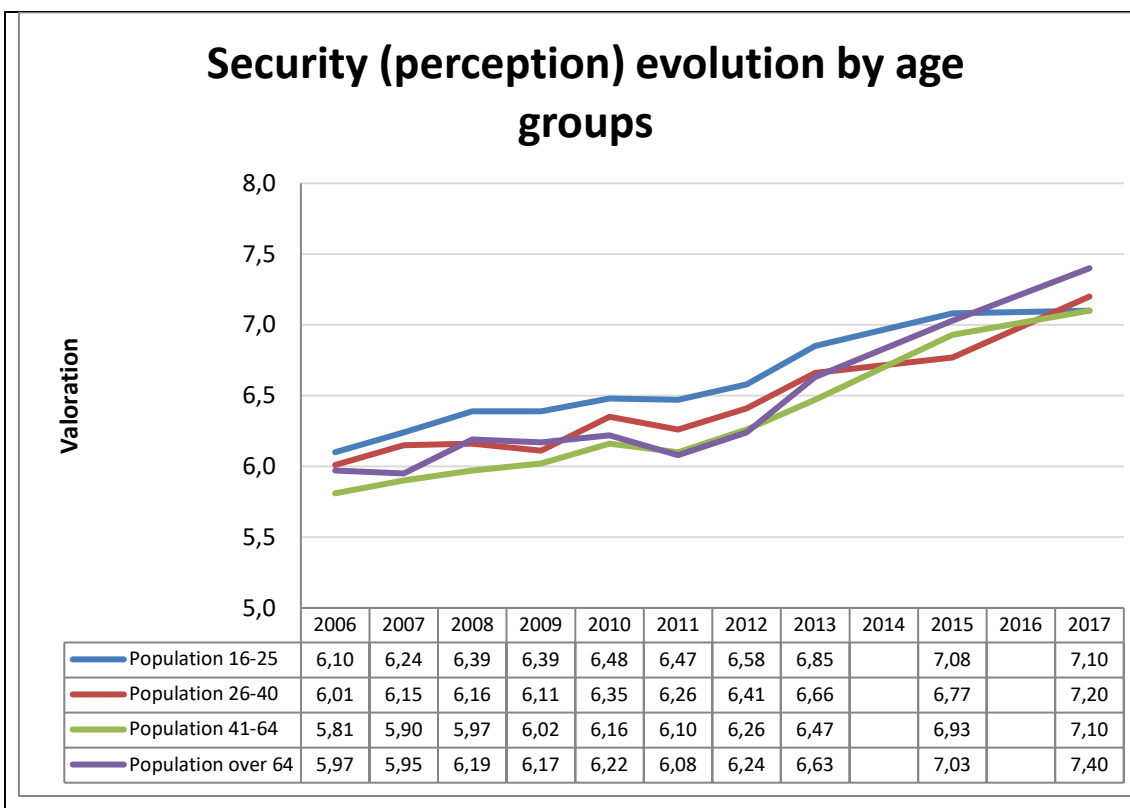
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[9] As we are going to see in next pages, the Public Security of Catalonia survey corresponding to 2016-2017 and The Crime Victimisation Survey of Barcelona of 2019 show that the +65 age group is not that who feels the least safe. Further research should check whether this trend is confirmed or not.

that there is a given level of 'objective' risk. Those who believe that they can be attacked if they walk through a certain public space avoid doing so even if statistics show that they have no reason to fear such an incident. In fact, all reality needs to be processed by the filter of one's subjectivity in order to be conceived by people. We are used to seeing that the same situation is considered as 'fair' by some, 'unacceptable' by others and 'indifferent' by a third group of people. The reality is the same but different personal factors make them perceive it differently, and even in the opposite way. Politics is a great example of these very different perceptions of the same reality. Nothing different happens with security - it is not an exception.

If we analyse responses to security surveys according to the age or gender of respondents, we see how, in the same context, with shared realities, assessments of security can vary. Graph 1 shows the assessment that respondents make about security in their municipality of residence within a range of 0 to 10.

Graph 1

Security (perception) evolution by age groups

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Population 16-25	6,10	6,24	6,39	6,39	6,48	6,47	6,58	6,85		7,08		7,10
Population 26-40	6,01	6,15	6,16	6,11	6,35	6,26	6,41	6,66		6,77		7,20
Population 41-64	5,81	5,90	5,97	6,02	6,16	6,10	6,26	6,47		6,93		7,10
Population over 64	5,97	5,95	6,19	6,17	6,22	6,08	6,24	6,63		7,03		7,40

Source: Public Security Survey of Catalonia (DGAS; Department of Interior, Generalitat of Catalonia).

Graph 1 shows a clear trend: until the 2017 survey, the age group with a largest score of security in their municipality of residence was the population between 16 and 25, the people that we could describe as "young". On the other hand, higher age groups start the series with lower levels of security, but progressively improve them until they reach the last series as the safest age group (that over 64). Conversely, the 26-40 age group has

become relatively less safe over time. It is interesting to observe how belonging to an age group affects the perception of safety in the municipality.

In any case, it is important not to take anything for granted, even if it is a characteristic which is repeated in many contexts. Trends can change in other contexts with different conditioning factors. Although, as seen in Catalonia and elsewhere, young people tend to feel safer, this is not a universal or ever-lasting law. Very recently, the survey carried out in the state of Morelos (Mexico), within the framework of the National Survey on Victimization and Perception of Public Security (Envipe)[10] , showed that young people between the ages of 12 and 19 were the age group that perceived the highest levels of insecurity (Vera et al., 2017). Even in the latest Barcelona Victimization Survey, the results of which were published in 2019, the age group that feels most secure in their neighbourhood is 65+, while if the territory reference is the city, the group with the largest feeling of security is people between 16 and 44, but respondents aged 64+ are still above those between 45 and 64[11]. It is possible that the relatively good state of physical and mental health with which many of people reach the age of 65 has positively influenced their perceptions of safety. Because they do not feel so vulnerable, their perception of security may be higher, since the consequences of a hypothetical victimization experience does not seem that serious to them. Moreover, in the case of the neighbourhood, this age group lives much longer in it than the other groups, and consequently knows the context much better, a circumstance that provides them with security. It is very possible, but it need to be empirically tested, that the previous situation of elder unsafety remains with those who are approaching or exceeding 80. Presumably, when levels of vulnerability and isolation increase, the number of those who respond the survey decreases. Although this

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[10] Vid. https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/envipe/2017/
[11] Vid.
https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/prevencio/sites/default/files/documents/presentacio_de_resultats_enquesta_victimitzacio_2019.pdf, page 41.

approach seems reasonable, it is not always a reality. For example, the survey carried out in the state of Lower Saxony, Germany, shows that people in the early years of their retirement are normally different from that of people over 80. Consequently, it establishes age ranges between 65 and 79, and 80 and over, when dealing with spatial insecurity. Paradoxically, their result does not confirm the hypothesis that people over 80 are now those with the highest levels of insecurity. Let's see the graph 2:

Graph 2

people that feel unsafe related to space by sex and age (percentage) 2017
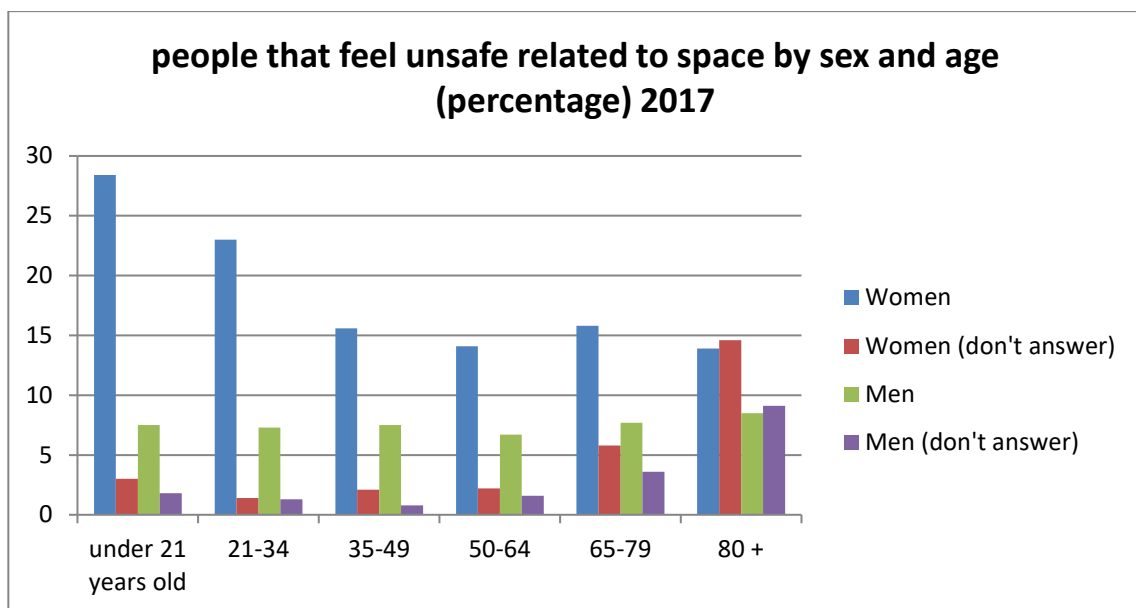
Source: Landeskriminalamt Niedersachsen (2018, 24).

Interestingly, this survey shows higher levels of safety among those aged over 80 than among those in the immediately preceding age band (Landeskriminalamt Niedersachsen, 2018). In other words, the latter survey shows that the eldest people are not the ones who feel most unsafe (especially in the case of women, as men would feel slightly more

unsafe), but it does not confirm that the vulnerability of people over 80 necessarily makes them feel more unsafe than those in the preceding age group. In other words, there is a lot of work to be done in this field to establish rules with fewer exceptions.

We have just seen an example where gender has a determining influence on people's subjective security. It has traditionally been considered that women, because of their supposedly greater physical weakness and their special risk of suffering from certain types of crime (male violence, sexual assault), would tend to have lower levels of subjective security than men (Vauclair and Battanova, 2017). However, let us look in detail at this historical perception of security by gender in the Public Security Survey of Catalonia. The graph shows the evaluation that the people interviewed make of security in their municipality of residence within a range of 0 to 10.
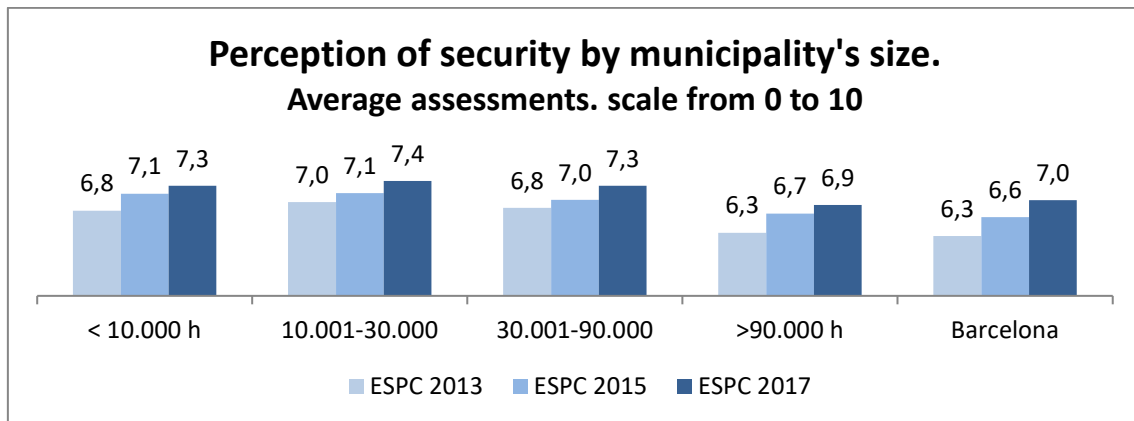
Graph 3
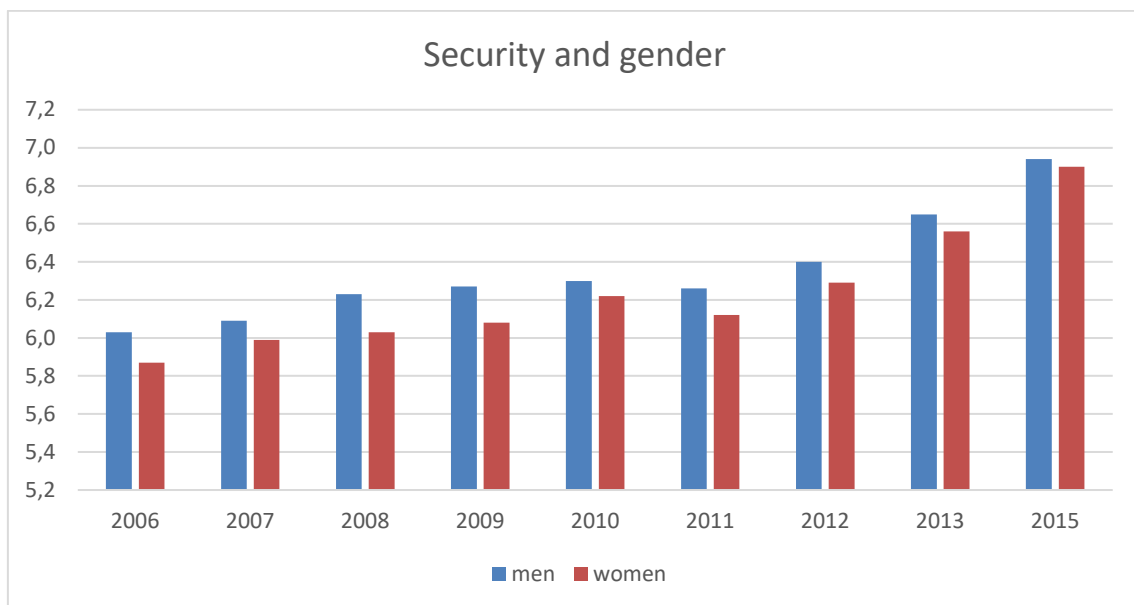
Source: Public Security Survey of Catalonia (DGAS; Department of Interior, Generalitat of Catalonia).

Until 2015, men's subjective security (the value, out of ten, that they give to security in their municipality of residence) is higher than that of women. However, it is important to note that the difference has been gradually reduced (with some ups and downs) until the 2015 survey when it is no longer statistically significant. It should be investigated whether the progressive equalization of the roles of men and women in society would have ended up equalizing perceptions of vulnerability and, consequently, levels of subjective security. This is not the case, as we have just seen above, in the case of Lower Saxony, where women's unsafety is notably higher than men's, especially among younger people (Landeskriminalamt Niedersachen, 2018). In any case, it should be pointed out that the Saxon survey relates to fear and insecurity to space (*Raumbezogenes Sicherheitsgefühl*), while the Catalan survey asks about levels of safety in general, within the municipality, without limiting them to particular spaces. Once again, we see a factor, gender, which can influence subjective security, but more in-depth research is needed to determine to what extent and in which cases gender is associated with perceived security. However, many authors (Doran and Burgess, 2011) claim that the results of surveys are much more explained by the expressions of 'masculinity' in men, who often reject the acceptance of fear or insecurity as unmanly, than by the fact that they actually feel safer. If this was the case, the evolution of the Catalan survey could be due not only to the greater integration of women in conditions of equality, but also to a greater predisposition of men to share and express their vulnerabilities. Surely all these factors have an influence, the difficulty lies in knowing for sure to what extent.

Another factor that may also have an impact on perceptions of security is the territorial environment in which people live, very specifically the size and population of the municipality affects their perception of security.

Graph 4

Perception of security by municipality's size.
Average assessments. scale from 0 to 10

	< 10.000 h	10.001-30.000	30.001-90.000	>90.000 h	Barcelona
ESPC 2013	6,8	7,0	6,8	6,3	6,3
ESPC 2015	7,1	7,1	7,0	6,7	6,6
ESPC 2017	7,3	7,4	7,3	6,9	7,0

Source: Public Security Survey of Catalonia (DGAS; Department of Interior, Generalitat of Catalonia.

The data presented in Graph 4 show a clear trend: inhabitants of more populated municipalities tend to give lower values of security level in their municipality (although in all of them there was an improvement in the perception in the period 2013-2017). In contrast, those living in less populated urban (or directly rural) areas perceive their municipality as safer. In rural environments with lower population sizes, interpersonal knowledge and, consequently, informal social control is higher, which traditionally increases the security levels of their inhabitants.

There is a second group of factors related to the specific space, or place, where the person is located. Buil-Gil et al. (2019a) show us very clearly how fear of crime (or insecurity) is not distributed homogeneously throughout the territory, not even at the neighbourhood level. The area's visibility, existence of places where someone (with bad intentions) can take refuge, and the presence of escape routes from a possible attack or aggression are minimal (or give this impression) (Buil-Gil, 2017) are all factors that

influence the perceived risks of criminal opportunities (Doran and Burgess, 2011). Empirical research shows that the construction of urban spaces according to CPTED[12] standards also facilitates an improvement in subjective safety (Doran and Burgess, 2011; Lee et al., 2016). Likewise, perceived external disorder, the appearance of social efficacy and diverse spatial-temporal lifestyle patterns are relevant to increasing or decreasing people's subjective security, as well as low-income levels in the neighbourhood (Buil-Gil et al., 2019b). The influence of the neighbourhood of residence on one's perceived security varies depending on the majority ethnic group living there. That is, only in the case of living in a neighbourhood with a majority presence of certain ethnic groups it is this a factor that conditions the perception of security, for instance living in a neighbourhood with majority of people of German or Dutch origins don't cause a higher level of insecurity (Lai et al., 2017). In the state of Lower Saxony, Germany, in neighbourhoods where neighbours perceive (regardless of whether or not it is really so) a high presence of refugees, levels of insecurity soar (Landeskriminalamt Niedersachsen, 2018). Glas et al. (2019) show how the context in which in/security is perceived is not so much defined by the neighbourhood, an administrative and often artificial unit, but by *egohoods*, that is, the spaces in which people carry out their everyday activities which often do not coincide with the administrative divisions or neighbourhoods. It would be these spaces, which are related to people's movements, which would influence the security of the people who frequent them.

However, one should bear in mind that the weight of each of these factors will depend on the characteristics of each person, and will not have a regular influence on all passers-by either (Solymosi et al., 2018).

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[12] *Crime Prevention Though Environmental Design.*

A study carried out by Vauclair and Battanova (2017) using data from the European Social Survey found a correlation between the countries' level of economic inequality and their subjective security or, in other words, a high inequality correlated with high fear of crime. This is another factor that should be taken into account and could explain the low levels of security in many Latin American countries which, in general, have profound social inequalities.

In general, as Buil-Gil et al. (2019a) and Landeskriminalamt Niedersachsen (2018) point out, fear of crime (which can be extrapolated to subjective security) comprises three dimensions: a) cognitive, knowledge of the risk of the situation, b) emotional, the feeling of fear, and c) a behaviour that is a consequence of the other two. The modification of the first and/or the second will undoubtedly affect the behaviour of the person in question (Meier, 2019). In fact, the most relevant dimension for security managers is the third, behaviour, which is that which entails external consequences that affect third parties and/or public space.

Despite a certain consolidation of the subjective weight of security, a trend can be identified which, although perhaps not in an absolutely explicit manner, seems to support the idea that there is real, objective security, given the crimes that actually take place and the specific risks that citizens have to face, and a second, much more volatile, without the necessary connections with reality, which depends on people and contexts, which we could name subjective security. It is an approach that seeks to convey the message that the really relevant security is the objective one, although it is also necessary to manage the non-existent problems derived from subjective security (Guillén, 2012). This is a totally wrong approach, as subjective security has a real effect on the risks people face in their daily activities. There is an example that clearly shows us what we are talking about. Passengers on a plane who are too afraid to travel in this environment can be panicked by

mild, objectively harmless turbulence. Their behaviour can pose an objective risk to their safety and that of the other passengers if, for example, they become frightened and get up and start wandering around inside the aircraft, because the panic causes them an urgent need to move or, for example, to go to the toilet. It should be borne in mind that the majority of injuries in these cases are caused by passengers not sitting down with their seatbelts properly fastened (Guillén, 2015).

Once the importance of subjective security has been assumed, it is important to consider what its appropriate degree or level should be for the maintenance of a proper level of security. There are environments which aspire to a situation of maximum subjective security, that is, that citizens do not have the feeling of being able to suffer the slightest mishap to their personal integrity or their rights. In these places, citizens should live without any concern or anguish about being a victim of a crime. The ideal context that seems to lie behind certain discourses is one in which people at no time devote attention to security issues in order to carry out their activities because there is no threat or risk in the environment, or, if there is, there is a protective factor that will prevent it from becoming a real and effective danger. At first sight, it may indeed be considered an obtainable and ideal scenario. This is undoubtedly a mistaken approach; a society with a mobility as great as ours cannot be governed if people are not aware of the risks they run, if certain precautions are not taken (Doran and Burgess, 2011; Guillén, 2012). No one is going to properly close the doors of their homes or use their five senses when driving a vehicle if they think that not doing so will not cause them any inconvenience. If we have managed to reduce the number of road accidents it has been, among other things, because we have been able to convince drivers that it is a dangerous activity and that certain precautions must be taken (putting on your seat belt, paying attention to driving, not consuming alcoholic drinks or other types of drugs). Until humans have access to fully

automatic vehicles (which will not last that much), it is necessary for people driving to be aware of the risks involved in the use of motor vehicles.

Accordingly, some authors consider that the use of subjective in/security (or, more specifically, fear of crime) by security authorities is legitimate if it is used to make citizens aware of the risks and take the necessary measures not to be victimised. In this way, security becomes more governable (Lee, 2007). Other authors (Gray et. al. 2011) speak of two categories of fear (or insecurity): functional and dysfunctional. Functional fear makes people aware of the existence of a risk (crime, offence, accident) that can cause damage to the person, and, consequently, makes it easier for citizens to take appropriate measures to avoid being victimised and to be able to continue living their lives. In contrast, the fear (or insecurity) that prevents people from carrying out their daily activities and favours their isolation from society is defined as 'dysfunctional' (Doran and Burgess, 2011). In other words, a person who overestimates the risks of driving and drives totally stiff, or stops having social relationships because he or she does not use the motor vehicle when necessary, is an example of dysfunctional fear, which prevents people from carrying out the daily activities that they need or want.

Thus, it is desirable that citizens are aware of the risks they face so that they can take the necessary precautionary measures to continue carrying out their daily activities, minimising the possibility of the risks turning into danger and this into damage. Closing house or car doors, identifying personal objects, avoiding spaces without visibility or lighting, and not setting fires near forests are all necessary behaviours for the good maintenance of safety in society. In order to carry them out, it is necessary to be aware of the existence of the risks they avoid.

Finally, it is worth reminding that subjective security also depends on the trust that citizens have in institutions. If the population feels that there is a public

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administration, which seeks its welfare, in which they can receive support in the event of difficulties, levels of incivility or crime do not affect the population's perception of security so directly. Newark's very early experiment (Kelling et al., 1981) showed that the presence of police on foot, who came into contact with citizens, improved the perception of security, even though crime levels were not altered. Much more recently, Alda et al. (2017) report a research showing how a reasonably high level of confidence in the police modifies citizens' perception of security, increasing it and, consequently, reducing risk assessment. In many cases, trust is related to a sufficient police presence and a high degree of receptiveness to citizens' demands and needs, which in turn would explain an improvement in the level of security. Furthermore, these authors show that personal (e.g., age, gender, educational, and economic level) and social factors (e.g., community cohesion) that affect security also have an impact on the confidence in the police (and not always in the same sense). Thus, in general, young people tend to have reasonable perceptions of security although they tend to have little confidence in the police and, elder people have traditionally been found in the opposite situation (low subjective security and a high confidence in the police).

3. A comprehensive approach to subjective security: The Feelings of Unsafety Lifecycle Model.

Within the context of the H2020 Cutting Crime Impact Project (www.cuttingcrimeimpact.eu), Davey and Wootton (2019) have elaborated the idea of security perceptions as a lifecycle which integrates all individual, social and contextual factors that, with or without an effective victimisation, modulate it. Actually, as abovementioned, they prefer to use the term "unsafety", because it represents better the wider concept they are dealing with. The "Feelings of Unsafety Lifecycle Model" proposed by them is shown below.
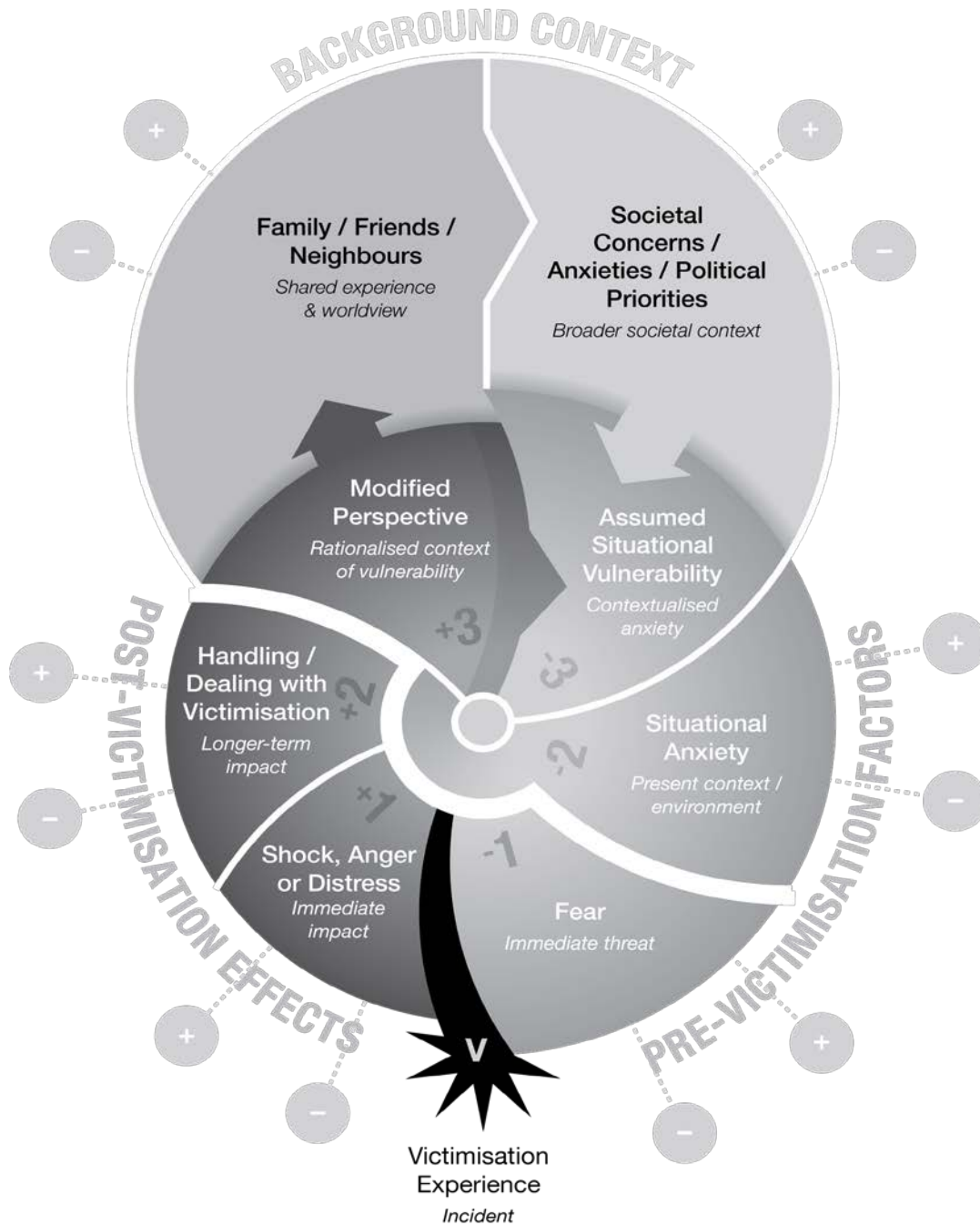
Source: Davey and Wootton (2019, 12).

The cycle starts with what they call *Broader societal context,* which refers to societal concerns or anxieties, political priorities, and public opinion. Those would affect ones' perceptions even before considering particular situations of vulnerability or risk, such as age, health, neighbourhood of residence, or resources to cope with victimisation. Once personal and environmental situations are considered, people have a perspective related to their actual situation, with the concrete existing threats that are likely to become victimisation (e.g. it is not only that they live in a relatively depraved area, but also that they have to walk though places where they know that people are being assaulted). Those actual threats can worsen their feelings of insecurity. When (if) victimisation takes place its impact and later treatment of it would influence the original assumed vulnerability.

Nevertheless, it should be considered that this lifecycle is not fulfilled by everybody. Obviously, there are people that will never get victimised, whereas others will never face a factual threat and others will be repeatedly victimised. Furthermore, the impact of the different phases is bound to be different for each person. For instance, victimisation is not going to have the same effect on everybody, and the consequent modification of their perspective is not going to go in the same direction. However, the immediate impact of victimisation and the way it is later processed will influence the initial perspective.

In my opinion, the main contribution of the idea behind the unsafety lifecycle is to stress the psychosocial components of safety and their volatile character. The same facts (crimes) are bound to impact in a quite different manner in the perception of security of each individual, depending on his or her personal and societal factors. It is also remarkable that this perspective is widely shared by partners of the project, which is also composed by five Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs).

4.   Police statistics: crimes? Criminal evidence? What do they report?

The main source data that still, in practice, focuses the debate on security are the data provided by police records. What do these records really contain? The answer to this question is clear: the evidence of (some) criminal acts that have been known to the police. The ways in which these (indicative) offences come to the attention of the police are either through a report made by the public (the majority) or through the ex officio action of the police, based on the actions of uniformed patrols and investigative units. However, to what extent do these statistics inform us about the commission of attacks against people or their rights, that is, about crimes?

First of all, we should ask ourselves whether police records contain, from a technical-legal point of view, crimes. The answer is very simple: a crime legally exists when a judge or court determines in a sentence that there is sufficient evidence to prove that a criminal offence has been committed. To the extent of my knowledge, there is no data on the percentage of acts that are indicatively criminal that are detected by the police and subsequently confirmed by a criminal sentence. However, it is not necessary to have an in-depth knowledge of the subject to intuit that crimes recorded by the police are not always confirmed by a criminal conviction. There are cases in which the indications which lead the police, legitimately and legally, to arrest a person for the presumed commission of a criminal act, are not confirmed and evidenced in the criminal process (the purpose of which is precisely this: to verify its legal existence or not). It is therefore inaccurate to directly link police data to crimes committed. It is also wrong to say that we are in dealing with objective terms and facts, since both, the interpretations (subjectivity) of police officers and members of the judiciary (and, where appropriate, juries) in relation to the same facts lead to different results. In other words, establishing that a crime has been committed requires an interpretation of reality and of the legal mandate that is far

from being absolutely objective, since it is conditioned by the perspective of the interpreter.

Secondly, it is necessary to reflect on the extent to which the operational decisions of police organisations condition subsequent records. The police, like any other public body or agency, have limited resources to carry out their legally established functions. Faced with the impossibility of effectively exercising all their legal powers, they give priority to some while postponing others according to various (legitimate) criteria: the possibility of successful intervention, political or public pressure in relation to specific problems or the number of available personnel. This is a decision-making process which is also carried out by the public prosecutor's office, even though they vehemently deny it, claiming that they are pursuing any infringement of legality (Guillén, 2012). These decisions condition the crimes which will appear in the police register, since if they dedicate their officers to prosecute or, preferably, prevent a type of crime or infraction, this will be precisely the infraction which we will find most in police register instead of other crimes which remain outside the police magnifying glass. In other words, it is likely that when the police establish their priority objectives, they are deciding the type of facts that we will find in their future statistics. Nor is it, however, a situation exclusive to the criminal justice system, since when, for example, the health administration decides to place the emphasis on the detection and prevention of some diseases to the detriment of others, it is also predefining the content of its future statistics. If a major campaign is carried out to detect, for example, colon cancer, it is likely that many more will be detected than if the campaign were not carried out, so that, at first, the statistics will show an increase in this disease.

In the case of the police, one of the most intense debates is often about where to make their presence more visible. It is common for neighbours to compete to have police

patrols present in their neighbourhood, even if this means that they are not present in others, due to the precariousness of police resources in recent times. There is no doubt that the places where the police patrol have an effective presence (and the people with whom it has contact), as well as those in which it is absent, will have some impact on future police records and, obviously, on the spatial location of crime (NAO, 2012).

It should also be considered the temptation of making up police figures in order to provide with a lighter reality of the criminality. There are several contrasted cases in different countries in which different "technical" criteria have been used in order to minimise criminality levels or, to say it otherwise, to make figures up (Eterno and Silverman, 2012, Guillén, 2009).

Finally, as we will discuss in more detail in the following section, a very important part of the criminal acts which are actually committed do not come to the attention of the police because the people who have been victims of them do not report them to the police, due to various factors which we will discuss.

5. Victimization or safety surveys

This type of surveys was designed, among other aims, to surface the dark figure of crime that did not come to the attention of the police, and indeed they succeeded in doing so (Killias, 2010). Victimization surveys have shown that only a percentage of people who report being victims of a crime reports it to the police (Zauberman, 2008). This percentage rarely exceeds fifty percent (Enzman, 2017). For example, in the case of Catalonia it has fallen to 29.1% in the last published survey (2016-2017), a truly worrying rate (which in

the Barcelona Metropolitan Area stands at 25.5% [13]). The temporal trend of non-reporting in Catalonia is shown in Graph 5, according to data from the Public Safety Survey:
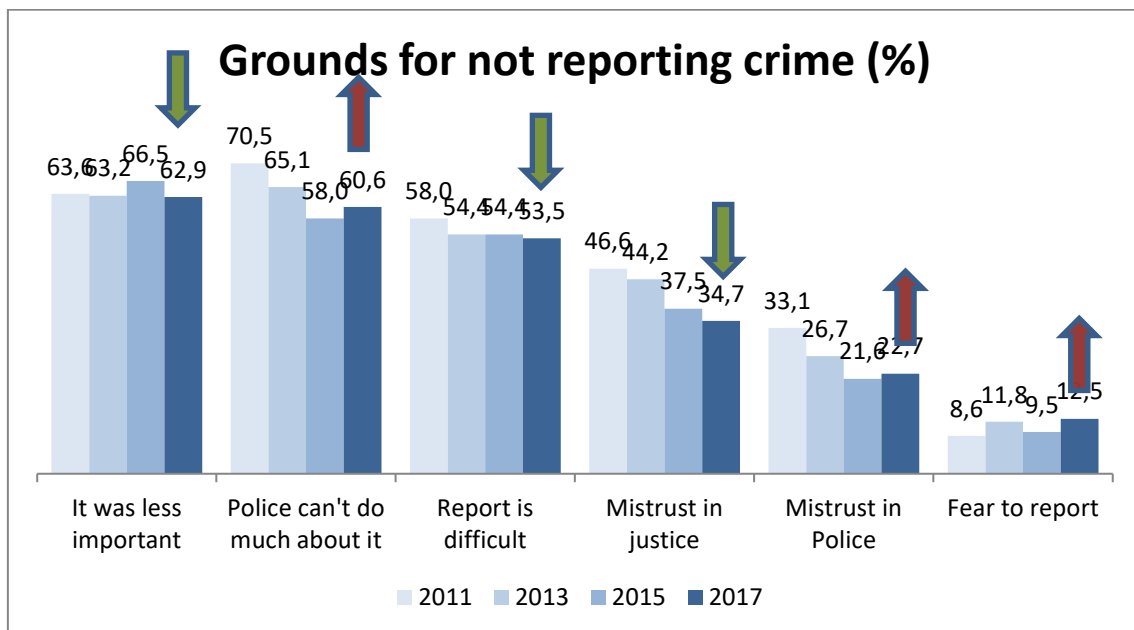
Graph 5
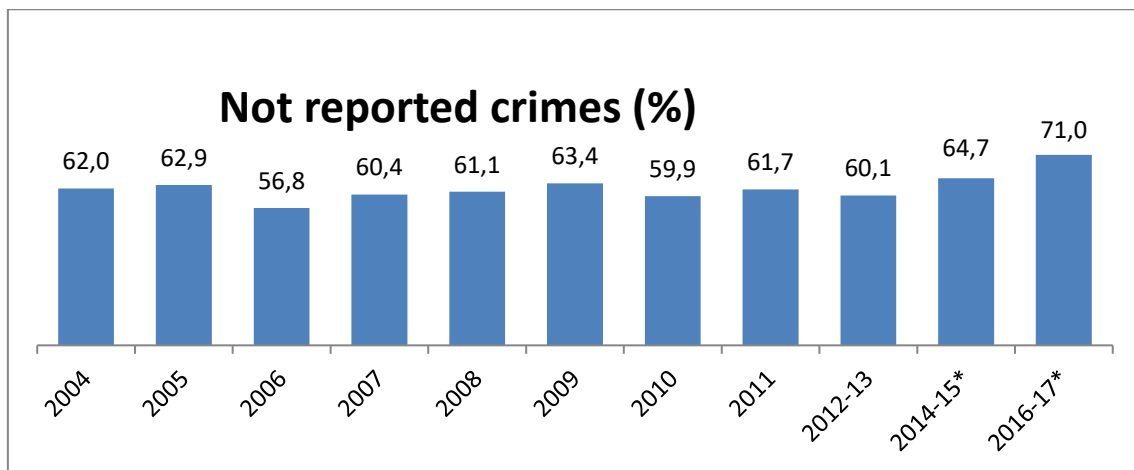
Source: Public Security Survey of Catalonia (DGAS; Department of Interior, Generalitat of Catalonia).

As it can be seen, in Catalonia we are at the lowest reporting rate since 2004. It is necessary to research what this decrease is due to; if, for example, it has to do with the scarcity of police resources in recent years or with the introduction in the survey of complex types of crime (swindles and frauds). Both circumstances discourage complaints due to the foreseeable long wait at the police station (so far, people have to go to a police station to report a crime) and the few possibilities of a positive resolution of the investigation of the facts. The grounds traditionally expressed by those surveyed for not

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[13] These values correspond to estimates obtained from data of the Crime Victimisation Survey of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, which was carried out in the spring of 2018 (vid. https://iermb.uab.cat/ca/enquestes/convivencia-i-seguretat-urbana/).

reporting the events of which they have been victims appear in the following graph with data from the Survey.

Graph 6

Source: Public Security Survey of Catalonia (DGAS; Department of Interior, Generalitat of Catalonia).

The main reasons for not reporting are cases which, always in the opinion of the victim, are not excessively important, those in which the police can do little and in which it is complicated to make the complaint effective, either because the timetable of the police station are limited or the waiting times are excessively long, are clearly predominant.

This is not exclusive phenomenon of Catalonia but, with logical variations, is repeated throughout the world (Aljumily, 2017). For example, in 2017 only 9.2 out of every 1000 victims of violent crime in the United States reported the crime to the police

(Morgan and Truman, 2018). In Mexico, in 2018 the level of unreported or reported crimes that did not lead to a preliminary investigation or investigation file was 93.2% (INEGI, 2019)[14]. In the case of the last victimization survey in Germany (2017), the crimes with the highest reporting rate were theft and credit card fraud, neither reaching 50% (42.3% and 40.7%, respectively) (Bundeskriminalamt, 2017). On the other hand, there is evidence that in certain circumstances the police do not record all crimes of which they are aware (Enzman, 2017). In Sweden, a country with a democratic and citizen-oriented police force, the overall reporting rates do not exceed 20% (Brå, 2019).

However, it should be noted that the crimes that emerge from these surveys do not follow the legal criteria of police records, but are those that respondents consider as such, with no guarantee that their perception is in line with legal provisions. There is no guarantee that what the respondent considers a crime is in fact a crime and vice versa (i.e., acts that citizens do not consider to be crimes, and which are defined as such in the Criminal Code). In other words, the survey, although it is a great source of information, provides data that is conditioned by the subjectivity of those who respond to it. The average citizen does not know the necessary amount that has to be subtracted for it to constitute a theft or the difference between it and a robbery. Many do not know whether travelling without a travel document or occupying an unoccupied home is a crime or other type of offence.

On the other hand, crimes without a direct individual victim such as environmental crime, money laundering or corporate crime, and even drug trafficking or homicide, do not appear in victimization surveys either. Respondents often do not report such events, probably because they do not consider themselves direct victims or being these crimes do not have clearly identifiable victims.

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[14] Vid. https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/envipe/2019/doc/envipe2019_presentacion_nacional.pdf

These types of surveys are also designed to obtain information on how safe respondents feel, the fear they have of suffering from a criminal act, as well as how it affects their behaviour (whether they avoid or carry out certain conducts because of their insecurity or fear). In short, how insecurity affects their quality of life (Gray et al., 2011). Police-citizen relations are also the subject of these surveys, or in other words, citizens' satisfaction with the police and the level at which they value it. This factor is relevant because it ends up affecting subjective security (Guillén, 2018a), as we will confirm later.

In any event, it should be remembered that surveys do not usually provide information on security in small areas for reasons of sample size, a circumstance that makes it difficult to articulate responses and public strategies capable of addressing the specific problems of each area (Buil-Gil et al. 2019b; Doran and Burgess, 2011).

6. The subjectivity of indicators. The non-existence of objective risk

There is a large body of criminological literature which argues for the need to work with a broad concept of security, which, although it must include crime, must incorporate other factors, such as disorder in public spaces (both physical and behavioural), accidents, dangerous activities, and natural disasters, among others. In practice, however, there is still a tendency to link security directly to crime. The professional model of police (Guillén, 2016) does this, in a paradigmatic way, by attempting to objectify police interventions and disassociate them from any political vagaries. According to this model, the police must pursue those conducts which the criminal code establishes as crimes and move away from acts more related to civic morality which are more discussed and which, consequently, present a great subjectivity and provoke controversy, which can deteriorate the prestige of the police (Guillén, 2016 ; Medina, 2011; Vollmer, 1936).

A minimal reflection on criminal types leads us to a different conclusion: the decision of which facts constitute an offence is a decision of society which is based on values, on a mostly shared subjectivity. Thus, a greater or lesser sensitivity to the difficulties of those who do not have a home can lead to the penalization or, on the contrary, the decriminalisation of illegal occupation of housing. This has been an area of legislative upheaval in Spain. But it is not the only area of frequent variability, there are many more: crimes which become misdemeanours (now *minor crimes* in Spain) or simply become administrative offences. Let's take a clear example: We can imagine that one (bad) day the majority of the legislature comes up with the idea of making alcohol consumption a crime, as happened with the so-called "dry law" in the United States of America in the last century. Perhaps initially alcohol consumption would not vary that much, perhaps it would tend to be reduced, while consumers would observe the intensity of enforcement. However, if we focus the safety indicator on the number of offences, the number would have increased significantly, since much the activity that existed before, as it was fully legal, we would not have it recorded among the criminal behaviours. Objectively, there would have been much more insecurity (although alcohol consumption would have decreased). On the contrary, if we imagine that a moment comes when the authorities recognise the strategic error of the decision and decriminalise alcohol consumption, although consumption may increase due to the euphoria of the first moment, the official measure of 'objective' security will increase since the offences that were registered during the period of the ban will disappear from the scene. In short, the vaunted objectivity of crime seems no less subjective than the perception of security. In fact, the behaviours that end up being criminalised are those that are perceived by the public (or their representatives) as unsafe or harmful. This means that the content of penal codes varies according to the values that are mostly present in each society, and our current penal codes present notable differences with those existing a hundred years ago.

On the other hand, not all crimes affect subjective security in the same way. Jackson (2004) shows how the social significance given to certain acts or situations that we may witness in the spatial and social environment very clearly affects the perception of security. He cites the idea of "signal crimes" defined by Innes and Fielding (2002) to show how certain crimes evidence the deterioration of concepts or values that are socially important for coexistence and, consequently, generate much more insecurity or alarm than others, since they are valued as evidence of a profound degradation of social structures (in the same sense, Doran and Burgess, 2011; Glas et al., 2019).

The moral (subjective) nature of the offences is also applicable to other security incidents, namely those resulting from accidents, fires, dangerous materials, disorder in public spaces, or natural disasters. Here too, acts that exceed our risk tolerance level are qualified as "incidents" (or offences) and this changes over time and society. Fifty years ago, no one would have considered a small fire in the forest to cook a couple of steaks as a safety incident. Today, it is considered an offence and, if detected by a competent public official, it will be reported, recorded, and considered in objective security figures. In the same direction, some time ago spitting in the street, littering, or the uncontrolled emission of smoke were not considered acts that affected security. They were not, therefore, objective indicators of security. They (indicators) all depend on a prior (subjective) decision, on what is considered harmful or dangerous. Thirty years ago, there were no complaints about not wearing a helmet when cycling, to add another example to the long list. In other words, the decision as to what is legally dangerous is very much dependent on the aspirations of societies for safety at any given time (often linked to the level of economic and social development or quality of life).

The consequences of the current Covid19 pandemic have provided us with an exceptional example about the moral and subjective nature of insecurity. Few years ago,

in several European countries there was a great debate about the use of burka in public spaces and the need of prohibiting its use (as France or Belgium did). Although it was a religious issue, some people argued that people with a hidden face would cause feelings of insecurity in those people who met them on the beat. If we consider that argument nowadays, within the pandemic reality, we can't help laughing. Now a lot of people are afraid when they meet somebody without the compulsory face mask., because they think they that put them in risk of being infected by the virus. So what makes people unsafe now is the other way round.

Indeed, as Hopkins (2005, 113, quoted by Griffiths and Brooks, 2012, 220) states, the same perceptions of risk are "imperfect estimates of an objective reality". Risk assessments are based on the idea that risk can be objectively measured (Hopkins, 2005, quoted by Griffiths and Brooks, 2012), but risk does not seem to have an external existence, independent of our minds and cultures. Objective estimates of risk are in fact "subjective and loaded with assumptions...dependent on our judgement" (Slovic, 1999, p. 690, quoted by Griffiths and Brooks, 2012). We have already seen in the second section of this article how individual factors influence the perception and "objectivation" of security. We must now discuss how group, collective and cultural conceptions affect the very conception of risk. Cervera and Vallès (2013) show how people from different cultures or contexts react differently to similar emergency situations. The results they present, from a European project involving various EU countries, are conclusive in this respect: different national groups or collectives react differently to the same external stimuli (dangers). It is not only the determination of what is a crime that is impregnated with a high degree of individual and social subjectivity, but the idea of risk or emergency also depends on individual and cultural factors (from our "worldview", Griffiths and Brooks, 2012, and similarly Jackson, 2004). There are obvious examples. In road safety, what is considered (socially) a risk in some countries is not considered in others. In our

context, overtaking on a section marked with a continuous line is considered dangerous and unacceptable (especially if it is a road with bends and poor visibility), while in other countries it is considered to depend on the skill of the driver, much more than on objective risk (regardless of whether he or she may be equally sanctioned).

7.   First conclusion: objective security as a fallacy. The need to objectify subjective security.

The reasoning carried out so far does not seem to leave any doubt as to the subjectivity of the elements that constitute "real" objective security. It will therefore be important to reject the belief that the most important indicator for public managers must be "real" security as opposed to that "unreal", "volatile" and "capricious" security which depends on social and individual factors of the members of our societies. Not only is the latter, the subjective one, perfectly objectifiable, since it translates into citizens' behaviour (or lack thereof) (Landeskriminalamt Niedersachsen, 2018), but what is considered objective measurement of security has a number of subjectivities (decisions, interpretations) in its path of elaboration that deprive it of most of its objectivity.

On the other hand, information on the population's feeling of security (subjective security) can be clearly objectified in many cases: when citizens state (or it is externally stated) that there are spaces and times when they do not carry out certain activities due to their perception of insecurity in them, the situation becomes substantially objective. That there are places that are not transited, activities that are not carried out, or, on the contrary, "defensive" activities (e.g., special locks, alarm systems, acquisition of defensive or protective instruments, weapons) that are carried out to protect themselves of insecurity is much more real and objective than the much-touted objective security. Likewise, if citizens express when and where they feel the greatest degree of in/security, they provide public authorities with more information to articulate appropriate responses. It is therefore

very important that an effort be made to identify as objectively as possible what behaviours and in what circumstances and contexts are affected by fear of crime or a high perception of insecurity. Levels of in/security in the abstract do not provide sufficient information for the articulation of public policies and strategies to counteract them. In order to manage security, with a majority burden of subjectivity as pointed out here, it is important to focus on its consequences in order to avoid its enormous variability both in intensity and in temporal or spatial level. Obviously, public policies cannot be based simply on the perceptions of all citizens in all areas. The overflowing personal and social (and even spatial) subjectivity requires objectification and concreteness in order to be addressed by public security managers.

8. Second Conclusion: All sources of information are necessary to identify the causes of insecurity.

It is very important, however, not to fall into the easy trap of believing that neither police statistics nor victimization surveys are of any use in knowing the objective reality and that they only serve to 'mask' safety data to the liking of the consumer. Above all because this statement is not in line with reality. Police records give us very valid information to analyse the state of security: they inform us about the activity of the police and the indications of crimes and offences that come to the attention of their agents. A high number of police arrests for burglaries will hardly correspond to a low incidence of this crime. The police are not in the business of inventing criminal activities of third parties to feed their statistics, it is not among their functions (or it shouldn't be). What is important to know is that the operational decisions and the interpretation that the police make of the law and of the behaviour of citizens have a relevant influence on the crimes recorded in their statistics.

Similarly, safety or victimization surveys are a great assistance in bringing to light a significant part of the dark figure that escapes the knowledge of the police. They also provide us with information about the subjective security of the population, as well as their opinion about the police and other key security issues.

Very possibly, the challenge consists of elaborating methodologies, as the English Home Office is already doing, and in Catalonia it has been experimented in a very limited way (Nadal, 2010), which allow for the joint (and complementary) treatment of police statistics and survey results. Work in this direction would allow much greater use to be made of the data offered by both sources. It may provide us with information on the relationship between crimes recorded in certain territorial areas and the value residents place on the police and security, on the relationship between complaints about the police and the perception of security in the territory, or, conversely, the relationship between a high value for the police and a high subjective security.

Finally, other sources of information on security should not be wasted, whether they be qualitative sources (focus groups, field observation, self-incrimination) or quantitative ones from areas theoretically different from security but which can inform it (health data in the case of drugs is a clear example) (Guillén, 2018b).

9. Third conclusion: the origin or cause of poor subjective security is important in order to articulate the response to mitigate it.

However, all the above does not imply that public security actors should not consider the relationship between effectively objective (or objective) data and subjective security (also objectively verifiable, as we have just seen). That is, in the face of a level of subjective security that is remarkably low, it will be important to know where it comes from when it comes to articulating policies and response strategies. If low security coincides in time and space with an increase in attacks on personal integrity, observed by the police or

through the victimization survey, it requires a certain response. However, if this type of crime is absent and the problem is centred on disorderly spaces and behaviour, the response will have to be of a different type. Even considering that the reference for the intervention of the public operator is subjective insecurity, the causal factor must be attacked, otherwise the response will not meet its objectives. Insecurity caused by the absence of public lighting in the evening and at night cannot be tackled by an increased police presence in order to reduce crime against people or property. On the contrary, if insecurity is caused by an abnormal increase in victimisation, it will be difficult to reverse the situation if the escalation of crime is not stopped, no matter how much the lighting or cleanliness of public spaces is improved.

Furthermore, as mentioned in section eight, it is important to know to what extent low levels of subjective security condition citizens' behaviour, specifically which of them, how and where. Although some sector of the population feels insecure, this information is not sufficient to arbitrate public responses to mitigate their insecurity, it is important to know how this insecurity conditions their actions. That is, whether it truly involves them abandoning behaviours they would like to carry out and taking actions which they would otherwise not take. In concrete terms, it is necessary to know if people who declare themselves to be unsafe stop going out on the streets, in what areas and at what times, if they equip themselves with defensive instruments, if they stop relating to other people. It may be the case that those who say they feel very unsafe later claim not to modify their activities substantially because of the insecurity, a circumstance which, at least, relativises or transforms the problem. This is the case of the survey cited above from the State of Morelos (Mexico), where the most fearful population (young people aged 12-19) was the age group that changed least their activities because of insecurity (Vera et al., 2017).

Obtaining information related to what most describe as objective security assists to verify the extent to which subjective security coincides with it and, consequently, to

identify the bases of the problem to be addressed. In the same way, if we know that the number and distribution of police services may condition the results of police statistics, a study of the data corresponding to the distribution and objectives of police patrols will help us to understand the factors that have affected the situation to be faced. We can, for example, understand that there has been an increase in the registers of certain criminal typology because it was a priority to which time and personnel were dedicated, or that there has been an increase in police searches in certain spaces and times because the police have patrolled intensively in them (and, obviously, because the crimes have occurred). Thus, if we blindly believe that the data offered by police statistics totally describes the criminal reality, objectively, regardless of all these factors, we are likely to make a wrong diagnosis. Intensive campaigns against a certain type of crime, dedicating many staff and hours of work to its detection, will justify an increase in police reports of crime in the first moment, which should be understood as logical. However, if the increase after a long police intervention is prolonged, should provoke a profound reflection on the established police strategy. If, to the contrary, the analysis focuses only on the first increase in the number of records of the crime in question, the analysis can lead to a totally negative and erroneous conclusion, to the articulation of responses which are mistaken and therefore useless.

In short, the realisation of the non-existence of objective security should not lead us to reject traditional sources of information, but rather to increase them, to relate them to each other and to analyse them much more carefully in the light of criminological research which has already begun to establish evidence in the field which is the subject of this article. The answers must focus on the areas and moments in which security deficits have been detected.

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