

People out and about make cities secure

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Young people who have experienced threats and violence feel more insecure than others in urban public spaces, especially when alone. This is one conclusion from researchers at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Gabriella Sandstig, researcher at the Faculty of Social Sciences has explored how [people](#) perceive threats and risks in urban public places. More exactly, her research focuses on how a city's physical environment - for example buildings and streets - interacts with the [social environment](#) and people's perceptions of sharing the city with others. For example, a desolate parking garage in the night hours feels more threatening than the same place during the day when there are lots of people around.

The feeling of being alone is a strong factor behind people's feelings of insecurity. People feel the most secure when they are together with friends or acquaintances, but being around many strangers, for example on a busy street, also makes people feel secure. In addition, her research shows that cities can be made more secure by creating a sense of community and togetherness.

'We need to populate public spaces and make it evident that nobody is alone and that somebody cares about our public environment. It may be more effective to invest in more street lights - and make sure they are in working condition - than to pay for crime prevention measures,' says Sandstig.

The most common reason people feel insecure is personal experience of threats and serious risks, which includes both having been victimised personally and having seen somebody else become a victim. Contrary to previous studies, Sandstig found that young people feel more insecure than old people.

The findings on the role of the media are quite complex. Sandstig found that while media reports in themselves do not affect people's feelings of security, it seems that people's beliefs about how media do their work play an important role. People who believe that the media often under-reports risks, threats and violence tend to feel more insecure than people who believe that the media's coverage is correct or exaggerated.

Sandstig says that her study is the first Swedish study to more comprehensively explain the perceived sense of [insecurity](#) in urban public spaces. The study is based mainly on 2001-2007 data from the Swedish so-called SOM surveys, but also on two quantitative content analyses of threats and risks reported in the leading newspapers in western Sweden, *Göteborgs-Posten* and *GT*, from 1950 to 2003. The regional surveys targeted people in the Västra Götaland County and in the city of Kungälv. The study utilised simple random sampling and involved, in 2007, a total of 6000 individuals aged 15-85 from the Västra Götaland County and the city of Kungälv.

More information: More information on this paper can be found at hdl.handle.net/2077/21513

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