

# Residents feel safer with walkable, retail space

October 8 2013, by Jason Boudville

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Results suggest that by ensuring residents have access to shops and services in their local area, they might not only enhance walking, but also help limit fear of crime. Credit: Daniel Lee

The characteristics of walkable neighbourhoods have been explored for their associations with perceived crime risk and fear of crime in Perth's new suburban housing developments.

Neighbourhood design has an impact on [population health](#) by providing amicable walking environments from thoroughfares to retail destinations.

Mixed use neighbourhoods that attract people to local retail destinations appear to make it safer by generating natural surveillance or 'eyes on the

street'.

UWA Centre for the Built Environment, School of Population Health's Sarah Foster, says while there is advocacy around (re)designing neighbourhoods for walking, the team wanted to see whether this translated to residents feeling safer.

Drawing on a five year longitudinal study, The RESIDential Environments project, data was provided by 1195 new home occupants within the study areas at 12, 36 and 48 month intervals. The current findings focused on residents who had been living in their new area for about 36 months.

"We examined two safety outcomes [fear of crime and perceived crime risk] because 'safety' can be measured using very different survey questions," Dr Foster says.

Participants were asked questions on perceived crime risk, for example, 'there is a lot of petty crime in my local area', and asked to answer on the Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree).

Fear of crime was derived from the question: 'In your everyday life, how fearful, or not, are you about the following situations?' and given 10 crime scenarios to answer.

"'Fear of crime' focuses on emotional reactions such as worry or anxiety about crime, whereas 'perceptions of crime risk' asks participants to weigh up potential threats and make judgements about whether they will occur," Dr Foster says.

Researchers found the association between retail land and 'safety' was very different depending on how the outcome was measured.

"The presence of more retail land was associated with less fear of crime among residents, but it was also associated with a greater perception of crime," she says.

Results suggest that by ensuring residents have access to shops and services in their [local area](#), they might not only enhance walking, but also help limit fear of crime.

Dr Foster also says while people who live in mixed use [neighbourhoods](#) perceive more crime; this does not necessarily translate into fear of [crime](#).

Nonetheless, she says it is important for local governments and [residents](#) to take a proactive role in the upkeep of public areas, for example cleaning up litter, graffiti and vandalism as poor presentation of public space magnifies safety concerns.

**More information:** [www.sciencedirect.com/science/ ...  
ii/S0272494413000571](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0272494413000571)

Provided by Science Network WA

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