

On Social Equality and Perceptions of Insecurity

A Comparison Study between Two European Countries

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ABSTRACT

This study compares perceptions of insecurity and fear of crime in Scotland and Iceland and shows how these perceptions are related to social factors in the two countries. Independent samples *t*-tests and stepwise multiple linear regression models are used to analyse comparable data from surveys in the two countries. Scots report feeling significantly less safe than do Icelanders. The regression models show that social integration and smaller differences between households and neighbourhoods in terms of income and class are associated with greater perceptions of insecurity. The analysis therefore suggests that perceptions of insecurity are higher in Scotland than in Iceland because Iceland's population is more homogeneous, with stronger social integration, less pronounced class and income differentials, and less polarization between neighbourhoods. The wider implications for understanding perceptions of insecurity at different levels of analysis (macro and meso) are discussed.

KEY WORDS

Comparison Study / Equality / Fear of Crime / Perceptions of Safety / Security.

Introduction

Factors that influence people's perceptions of insecurity may operate at the societal level, at the individual level or at an intermediate level such as the neighbourhood. It is argued in this study that the relevant factors at the

macro and meso levels can be different between two countries, even though both are very much 'Western', so that perceptions of insecurity may vary between them. Many studies have been carried out in order to explain fear of crime and/or perceptions of insecurity at a micro or meso level (Farall and Gadd 2004; Gibson et al. 2002; Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Lane 2002; Mawby et al. 2000; Pantazis 2000; Stanko 2000). However, to the best of my knowledge, no study has attempted to explain differences in perceptions of insecurity between two countries in terms of their social particularities. Within the framework of theoretical perspectives drawn from the 'fear of crime' literature, this study aims to provide a rigorous comparison of perceptions of community insecurity in Scotland and Iceland and to show how these perceptions relate to levels of social equality in the two countries.

In the first section I review two broad theoretical perspectives on perceptions of insecurity and fear of crime and illustrate them by reference to the relevant literature and its main consistent findings so far. I then sketch and compare the two countries' geographical, demographic and social characteristics. The remaining sections present the methods, data and findings of the present study and discuss the findings in the light of the theoretical perspectives outlined earlier.

Meso- and macro-level perspectives on fear of crime and perceptions of insecurity

In discussing ontological security, Giddens (1991) has argued that the most important factor is community trust developed through kinship relations and local community or social integration. Bauman (1990, 1998) agrees with Giddens but puts this idea into the framework of territory, or what he calls 'territoriality', meaning the tendency for people to gather in local groups (e.g. in neighbourhoods) to increase feelings of safety and cohesion. The notion of social integration is a central feature of people's perceptions of safety in their communities (Austin et al. 1994; Gibson et al. 2002). It has been shown that perceptions of safety are positively related to levels of social integration in a community setting (Gibson et al. 2002; Lee and Earnest 2003; Rountree and Land 1996) and also to involvement in formal and informal organizations (Austin et al. 1994; Walklate 1998).

The neighbourhood disorder perspective broadens the scope of the social integration model by incorporating the social and physical characteristics of the neighbourhood. The model builds on the assumption that higher levels of community disorder will increase people's insecurity and/or fear of crime (Gibson et al. 2002). Both social and physical components of

the neighbourhood are used to derive an index of disorder. Social factors include drunken people, rowdy teenagers, incivilities and drug users (Kanan and Pruitt 2002; McGarrell et al. 1997; Ross and Mirowsky 1999). Physical factors are the visible features of these neighbourhoods such as vandalism, rubbish and litter, and graffiti (Ross and Jang 2000; Ross and Mirowsky 1999; Ross et al. 2001). Both social and physical signs of disorder have been shown to be negatively related to levels of security among residents who live in disorganized neighbourhoods (Kanan and Pruitt 2002; Ross and Mirowsky 1999).

At a macro level, many theories make links between broad features of modernity, inequalities between social groups and the risks of daily life. Nearly all perspectives on the impact of late modernity imply that the structural processes of recent social development (since around 1980) embrace increased individualism and ‘disembedding’ (Giddens 1991) of individuals from collectivities; these processes reduce collective security for the populations in Western societies (Bauman 1998; Beck 1992; Giddens 1991). They are considered to lead to a greater emphasis on the pursuit of personal satisfaction and an increasing tendency to assess the specific risks in the lives of individuals, such as the risk of unemployment, financial loss, criminal victimization, or death or injury from some other cause (Beck 1992; Stanko 2000). The argument is that risks are now borne more by individuals and are more specific to them, since these individuals are less enclosed in communities and supported by them.

Some scholars argue that the central problem inherent in this process is that the collective pursuit of security has been devolved to the individual level (Beck 1992; Zedner 2000). Personal security has become a personal matter. This is, according to Beck (1992), part of the more general process of individuation in Western societies, which leads people to want to develop their own, some would say ‘free’, perspectives on life, but which also imposes on them increased individual responsibility in terms of security and risk. The individual citizen should take responsibility as much as possible (Beck 1992; Stanko 2000). Nevertheless, according to Stanko (2000), not everybody is capable of providing themselves with the necessary requirements for security. Following on from that, she argues that higher levels of risk of criminal victimization among certain groups constitute evidence of social discrimination. Consequently, she argues for change in wider social structures rather than individual lifestyles. Hope (2000) agrees with Stanko and calls for a much more ‘egalitarian’ view: this would involve a more even distribution of private security than of private wealth because the consequences of an unequal distribution of security will be unmanageable collective insecurity in society. Thus, social inequality has negative consequences for everyone through its influence on perceptions of insecurity: ‘the

distribution of private insecurity is intimately connected to the distribution of private security' (Hope 2000: 87–8).

The 'fear of crime' literature

It has been argued that different social contexts are 'fear producing' and related to present inequalities in many Western societies (Stanko 2000). Others have argued that the discourse on crime and fear of crime is more of a problem in people's everyday lives than crime itself (Ewald 2000). Ewald labels this the 'disease of modernity' (2000). One has only to read today's newspapers or turn on the television news to recognize grounds for his argument.

Fear of crime or measures of people's perceptions of insecurity is not a simple phenomenon that follows a linear path (Bilsky and Wetzels 1997). It is a multi-element issue that has been divided into fear, anxiety, vulnerability, risk assessment, concerns, and perceptions of safety/insecurity (see Ferraro and LaGrange 1987; Gibson et al. 2002; Hollway and Jefferson 2000). Overall, it is believed that fear exceeds risk in Western societies (Mawby et al. 2000).

Gender is one of the key variables associated both with offending and with victimization. The overwhelming majority of crimes are committed by males; moreover, young men are most at risk of becoming victims of crimes against the person, with the exception of domestic violence (Heidensohn 2002; Vold et al. 2002; Zedner 2002). A consistent finding in research on fear of crime and perceptions of insecurity is that women fear crime more than men do and they also believe the risk of victimization to be higher when asked questions such as 'how safe or unsafe do you feel when walking alone outside in your neighbourhood at night?' (Bilsky and Wetzels 1997; Carcach et al. 1995; Lira and Andradepalos 1993; Mesch 2000; Pantazis 2000; Saltijeral et al. 1996). Various explanations have been presented for the difference between women's and men's fears (see, for example, Ferraro 1996; Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Pantazis 2000; Zedner 2002).

A second important and consistent factor found to affect people's perceptions of insecurity and/or fear of crime is age. Young people, especially men between 16 and 24, are most at risk of becoming victims of predatory crimes apart from domestic violence, but older people, particularly women, are those who admit to the highest volume of fear (Carcach et al. 1995; Pain 1995; Pantazis 2000; Zedner 2002).

The third variable that is regularly found to be associated with fear of crime and lack of security is social class. It has been a central concept in criminological literature for many years (Vold et al. 2002). At earlier stages in the development of criminology, social class was mostly linked with rates of offending and victimization (Mayhew 2000; Zedner 2002) but more

recently it has also been linked with perceptions of insecurity, and it has been found to be a significant factor associated with these perceptions (Borooah and Carcach 1997; Carcach et al. 1995; Pantazis 2000; Pantazis and Gordon 1999). Both official statistics and research show that there is an uneven distribution in criminal victimization and in fear of crime and that particular individuals and households with lower income are repeatedly victimized (Wiles et al. 2003). Findings have revealed that fear of crime is related to poverty (Garland 1996; Hollway and Jefferson 2003; Pantazis and Gordon 1999). Garland's conclusion is that victimization has more effect on poorer people because they have fewer resources to repair damage and improve security measures (1996). More specifically, Hope (2000) and Zedner (2002) both argue that private security measures are much less common among poorer people than among those who are better off. The number of such measures increases with the total income of the household, according to Hope (2000).

In relation to class division and fear of crime, inner-city urban inhabitants are much more likely to be victims of crime, to fear crime and/or to feel unsafe when walking alone in their areas at night than are rural residents or those who live in suburban neighbourhoods (Mayhew 2000; Zedner 2002). According to Walklate (2000: 50–1), the problem of 'repeat victimization' is also largely a 'locality based' problem and the urban communities where this takes place and the social problems they represent are seen to constitute a threat to mainstream society. The factors most often found to be correlated with perceptions of insecurity in the urban community are neighbourhood disorder, lack of neighbourhood cohesion or social integration, frequent racial conflicts, poor street lighting, vandalism, derelict buildings and drunks loitering on street corners (Kanan and Pruitt 2002; Zedner 2000).

To sum up, fear of crime is not a simple phenomenon but it has some effect on most people. One dimension of fear of crime is the way people perceive the safety of the community as a whole. Thus fear does not necessarily arise from the perception of risk to the individual. Researchers have found no direct relationship between fear of crime and the individual's risk of criminal victimization, which has led to the so-called 'paradox of fear'. In general, females feel less safe than males do, older people less than younger people, poorer people less than the better-off, and inner-city residents less than residents in suburbs or rural regions.

The two nations

The countries examined in this study, Scotland and Iceland, have experienced profound social and economic transformations and a considerable

rise in living standards over the past three decades or so and have, in many ways, followed a similar path. The occupational structure in both countries has been updated, and there is now much greater variety in the jobs available than previously. In both countries, the service sector has expanded dramatically, with a huge increase in commerce and leisure activities. Manufacturing has declined in Scotland and fisheries are not as massive as they were in Iceland. In both countries women work many more hours outside the home and have many fewer children, and families are generally much smaller, than before 1980. More people are educated to a higher level, fertility rates and death rates are now the lowest ever in both countries, and affluence has greatly increased. Along with these changes there has been a rise in individualism in both countries (see, for Scotland, Paterson et al. 2004; and, for Iceland, Hall et al. 2002). As elsewhere in Western Europe, a darker concomitant of economic growth and social change has been a large increase in recorded crime since the Second World War (Smith 1995b). However, even though clearly related, economic growth is not solely to blame for these rising rates. In fact, scholars have recognized that it is very difficult to explain the overall rise in crime rates in the developed countries, although structural changes and declining informal social controls are probably at the heart of the matter (Smith 1995b). Table 1 presents some of the main geographical, demographic and social characteristics of Iceland and Scotland in numbers.

The population of Scotland, at just over 5 million, is much greater than that of Iceland, which has just over 300,000 inhabitants. Population density is about 64 per square kilometre in Scotland but less than 3 per square kilometre in Iceland. However, a similar proportion of inhabitants of the two countries live in urban areas with more than 10,000 individuals. The main difference in the light of population density is that Iceland has only one city, Reykjavík the capital. Even so, Reykjavík is a small city compared with cities elsewhere, with only about 175,000 residents in the wider capital area, which nevertheless contains over 62 percent of the Icelandic population (Statistics Iceland 2004). Reykjavík is also the region with the most varied occupational structure; the fishing industry remains dominant elsewhere in Iceland (Hall et al. 2002).

Scotland, on the other hand, has six cities as defined by the Scottish Executive: Glasgow (578,710 residents), Edinburgh (449,020), Aberdeen (211,910), Dundee (145,460), Stirling (86,200) and Inverness (50,920). Neither Iceland nor Scotland has any cities that are large by international standards.

Life expectancy at birth is greater for both sexes in Iceland than in Scotland. Research has shown that life expectancy, along with average income and level of education, is a macro indicator of quality of life (Fritzell

Table 1 Geographical and demographic characteristics

	<i>Scotland^a</i>	<i>Iceland^b</i>
Area (km ²)	78,722	103,000
Population	5,062,011 (2001)	283,361
Population per km ²	64.3	2.8
Percent living in urban areas with more than 10,000 residents	70.2 ^c	67.2
Life expectancy at birth— males	72.8 years	77.6 years
Life expectancy at birth— females	78.2 years	81.4 years
Fertility rate	1.73 ^c	2.076
Infant mortality rate per 1000 live births	5 (1999)	3
GDP per capita in US dollars	23,622 (2001)	30,527 (2001)
Passenger cars per 1000 inhabitants	370	562
Percent with degree or higher	15 ^c	13.4 ^d
Percent labour activity rate	62.3 (UK) ^d	83.3 ^d
Average hours worked per week in paid employment	34 ^e	43.8
Weekly working hours in full- time employment—males	42 ^e	52.9 (2001)
Weekly working hours in full- time time employment— females	38 ^e	44.3 (2001)

Notes: All figures are for 2000 unless stated otherwise.

^a Source: Scottish Executive (2004a), except where indicated otherwise.

^b Source: Sigurdsson (2002), except where indicated otherwise.

^c Source: Scottish Executive (2004c).

^d Source: Statistics Iceland (2004).

^e Source: Paterson et al. (2004).

et al. 2004; Lin et al. 2003). Nevertheless, it has also been shown that average life expectancy at the national level rises with average consumption up to a certain point (Wilkinson 1992). Once consumption (as measured by gross domestic product per head of population) rises beyond US \$5000 per year, its relationship to national differences in life expectancy is rather weak (Smith 1995a). It has also been shown that levels of equality are positively related to health (Duleep 1995) and mortality rates (Smith 1995a).

On the United Nations' most recent 'quality of life' list, Iceland ranks number 7 in the world but the United Kingdom number 12 (see United

Nations 2004). This 'quality of life index' ranks countries according to average earnings, life expectancy, healthcare and educational level taken together. Unfortunately, Scotland does not have an individual rank on the list but it can be assumed that it is not above the UK average (see Barbor-Might 1999; Johnston 2004a). 'British people have a lower quality of life than people living in Iceland' (Johnston 2004a). This can, in part, be supported with the infant mortality rates, which are 5 per thousand in Scotland but only 3 per thousand in Iceland, the second-lowest in the world (see *World Almanac and Book of Facts 2004*¹).

Furthermore, the GDP per capita for Iceland is substantially higher than in Scotland. Scotland's participation rate in the workforce is less than that of the UK and Scotland also has a greater ratio of part-time to full-time workers. Both these will act to lower Scotland's GDP per head according to the Scottish Executive (2004b). On the other hand, Icelanders work more hours than do the residents of any other country in Europe and full-time working Icelandic women work longer hours than males in the whole of the European Union and European Economic Area (see Statistics Iceland 2004). Icelanders also have many more passenger cars than do Scots (562 against 370 per thousand inhabitants) but a similar proportion of individuals in the two countries have university degrees or higher degrees (15 percent in Scotland compared with 13.4 percent in Iceland).

One of the clearest sociological differences between the two countries is the class division. In Scotland the difference between the classes' income and sense of identity is much greater than in Iceland, where the population is relatively homogeneous (Aitkenhead 1999; De Muth 2003; Johnston 2004b; Njál's 2003; Paterson et al. 2004). Thus, it can be argued that social equality is greater in Iceland than in Scotland because the difference between individuals in terms of socioeconomic status and income is less in Iceland than in Scotland, yet overall prosperity is even greater in Iceland, as already shown. 'When looking at the human poverty index, the UK ranks 15th out of 17 high-income countries' (Johnston 2004a). Nevertheless, according to Barbor-Might (1999), 'a far larger proportion of the population [in Scotland] lives in poverty than in England and Wales'. This is because the average income level is lower in Scotland than in England, and because income inequalities are just as great.

The sociologists Paterson, Bechhofer and McCrone (2004) examine social and economic change in Scotland since 1980. They state that most

¹ See also www.aneke.com/. Aneke.com is an independent, privately operated website, based in Montreal, Canada, and is dedicated primarily to promoting wider knowledge of the world's countries and regions. Its sources include UN agencies and the United States' Central Intelligence Agency's *World Factbook*.

people in Scotland actually never have had it so good as they do today. Nevertheless, they also argue that Scotland has been left a seriously divided country, even though general well-being has increased in the population. A significant segment of the population has therefore missed out on the rise in living standards. Part of the problem is that, even though economic growth is related to reducing inequality, developments in distribution take place much more slowly than increases in production (Smith 1995a). Hence, 20 percent of Scots still live in poverty, claim Paterson et al. (2004). For the most disadvantaged, the sense of exclusion may have worsened since 1980 (Paterson et al. 2004). The economic growth during the past 20 years has yet to be more equally distributed among Scotland's residents and, in fact, even though the general long-term trend in countries with advanced economies has been towards greater equality of income, Smith (1995a) argues that this trend has been reversed in the UK. Thus, Scotland (and the rest of UK) seems to be on a different path from most other Western countries (along with the USA and Germany) when it comes to income equality.

Iceland, on the other hand, has been described as 'unique in being 80% middle class' (De Muth 2003) as well as being generally egalitarian with a homogeneous population (Halldorsson et al. 1999). An indicator of this is the fact that Reykjavík, Iceland's only city, does not have any 'slums' or specific multiply deprived areas. Neighbourhoods tend to be alike in Iceland. Scottish cities, on the other hand, have much sharper contrasts between neighbourhoods, some being opulent and others multiply deprived (Paterson et al. 2004).

Furthermore, health-related research has revealed that, within developed countries, people who live in more homogeneous regions (or countries) on average have better health and quality of life than those who live in more diverse settings (Duleep 1995; Sohler et al. 2003; Subramanian et al. 2003). This strongly indicates that quality of life in Iceland is higher than in Scotland. Also, according to Njál's (2003), in a book about poverty in Iceland, social equality policy in Iceland has followed a path more related to the Scandinavian model than to the British one. She argues that the welfare system has always been weaker in the UK than in Iceland and Scandinavia (Njál's 2003).

In the light of what has emerged from this discussion of theories, the existing literature and the comparison of the two countries, the following research questions are put forward:

- Q1. Do people generally feel safer in Iceland than in Scotland when outside walking on the streets in their neighbourhoods at night?
- Q2. Are household incomes positively related to perceptions of safety in Scotland but not in Iceland?

- Q3. Are gender differences greater in Scotland than in Iceland in terms of level of safety, even though it is expected that males feel safer than females within both countries?

Method and data

Samples

The sources of data used in the analysis are the 2000 Scottish Crime Survey (SCS) and the 2002 Icelandic Crime Attitude Survey (ICAS). The SCS data were collected from a random sample of Scottish residents and entered into computer files by MVA Consultancy in Edinburgh for the Scottish Executive. Respondents aged 16 and above were interviewed in their homes using a structured questionnaire during the period 28 January to 11 August 2000. The response rate was 70.5 percent and the total number of respondents was 5059. The total Scottish sample was split into two random halves whose members were asked different sets of questions. In the present analysis, only those in the B part of the sample are used, since these were the respondents who were asked the relevant questions. In addition, respondents under 18 years of age and those above 80 were excluded from the Scottish data to match with the Icelandic data, leaving us with 2363 individuals for this analysis. The ICAS data were collected from a random sample of Icelandic residents by the Social Research Institute at the University of Iceland. People aged 18–80 were interviewed by telephone, using structured questionnaires, during the period 20 April to 2 May 2002.² The response rate was 66 percent. As is usual with crime surveys, people who live in institutions (e.g. prisons and hospitals) and those living rough are excluded from the samples.

Measures

In the analysis I utilize sociodemographic variables as well as various continuous items. The study's dependent variable (DV) is people's perceptions of insecurity measured on a four-point Likert scale by asking 'How safe or unsafe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark?' The response set runs from 'very safe' (scored 1) to 'very unsafe' (scored 4). Here the item will be interpreted simply as 'perceptions of insecurity'.³ As has been shown from previous studies above, gender, place of residence, age, income of

² Professor H. Gunnlaugsson in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Iceland is the owner of this data. The author would like to thank him for allowing him to use the data and for his valuable contribution.

³ This item has often been used to measure the more general 'fear of crime'. Taking note of a debate that has been ongoing in the literature over this question, a decision was made to interpret it simply as 'perceptions of insecurity'.

household and prior experience of victimization are all factors that have been related to fear of crime and perceptions of insecurity. It is interesting to discover whether or not they relate similarly to perceptions of insecurity for Iceland and Scotland. Gender is of course treated as a categorical variable, with 'male' as the reference category. Respondents were sorted into four age groups, coded 1–4, and these values were then treated as a continuous variable. Respondents were asked to state which of eight household income categories they belonged to, and the resulting codes from 1 to 8 were similarly treated as a continuous variable (for further details, see below). Decisions to treat age and household income as continuous variables were taken after earlier analyses had shown that their relationships to perceptions of insecurity were linear.

A decision was made not to include ethnic group as a variable because over 98 percent of both samples were white people. The variable 'number of residents' is based on the traditional 'city versus country' division in Iceland (e.g. Gunnlaugsson 2000, 2003; Hall et al. 2002). As set out earlier, Reykjavík is the only 'city' in the nation; the wider capital area includes over 60 percent of the population and there are no other towns with significantly more than 10,000 residents (Hall et al. 2002). Therefore areas with more than 10,000 residents are those that count as urban in Iceland. Differences according to marital status (single, married, or separated, divorced and widowed⁴) in perceptions of insecurity will also be tested. Total household income per year was broken down into eight relatively even groups for each nation separately (see Table 2) because differences in purchasing power mean that it is not certain that the groups for Scotland would match up with those for Iceland.

Table 2 Coding for income of household per year

<i>Code</i>	<i>Scotland</i>	<i>Iceland</i>
1	£ 0–2499	£ 0–9230
2	£ 2500–4999	£ 9231–18,461
3	£ 5000–9999	£ 18,462–27,692
4	£ 10,000–14,999	£ 27,693–36,923
5	£ 15,000–19,999	£ 36,924–46,154
6	£ 20,000–29,999	£ 46,155–55,385
7	£ 30,000–49,999	£ 55,386–64,615
8	£ 50,000 and more	£ 64,616 and more

⁴ Being separated or divorced is, of course, not the same as being widowed, but all of these individuals have experienced separation from a partner.

Respondents' experience of victimization in the past 12 months was coded as a categorical variable for both nations (see Table 3 for the items used to measure victimization).⁵

Apart from the dependent variable, other continuous items used in the study are: 'Do you think crime is a serious problem in Scotland/Iceland, and if so, how serious?' measured on a four-point Likert scale in the SCS but a

Table 3 Items used to measure prior victimization

Scotland 'Since the beginning of last year. . .'	Iceland 'During the last twelve months. . .'
has anyone got into your house/flat without permission and stolen or tried to steal anything?	have you been a victim of violence/assault?
has anyone got into your house/flat without permission and caused damage?	has anyone stolen anything at all from you?
have you had anything else stolen out of your house/flat?	have you been a victim of burglary?
have you had anything else stolen from you or someone in the household, from outside the house/flat?	have you been robbed?
has anyone deliberately damaged or defaced your house/flat or anything outside it?	has anything of yours been vandalized or damaged?
have you had anything you were carrying stolen?	have you been a victim of a crime of a sexual nature?
has anything else of yours been stolen?	
has anything else been deliberately damaged or tampered with by vandals or people out to steal?	
has anyone, including people you know well, deliberately hit you?	
has anyone, including people you know well, threatened you in any way?	
has anyone, including people you know well, interfered with, assaulted or attacked you in a sexual way?	

Note: Icelandic questions translated into English by the author.

⁵ In the Icelandic survey, respondents were asked about victimization over the past 12 months, but in the SCS they were asked about victimization since 1 January 1999, which could be a period of almost 13 months to a little over 19 months.

five-point Likert scale in the ICAS (a high score meaning a lower level of concern). People's perceptions of the likelihood of being the victim of burglary and/or violence are measured by asking 'In the next 12 months, how likely do you think it is that your home will be broken into?' and 'In the next 12 months, how likely do you think it is that you will be a victim of a crime involving violence?' Both items are measured on a four-point Likert scale within both data sets (a high score meaning a low perceived likelihood of victimization).

Method

First, a simple comparison of key items is presented in percentages and mean scores. Mean differences are tested by using an independent samples *t*-test. In order to predict and explain people's perceptions of insecurity in the two countries and to compare the scores between them as precisely as possible, separate stepwise multiple linear regression models (SMLR) for both countries are presented thereafter. In using SMLR, the independent variable (IV) that explains the greatest amount of the variance in the DV is presented first, then the IV that explains the second-most amount of the variance in the DV, and so on until no further variable can significantly improve the model. This method is chosen because two unrelated samples are used in the comparison and it is interesting to discover whether or not the same variables are related to peoples' perceptions of insecurity in the two countries. This, however, is a limitation on the scope of this study because items that are comparable between the two samples (derived from similar questions) are the only ones that can be utilized. Furthermore, because data from two unrelated samples are being compared, the unstandardized regression coefficients will be used rather than the standardized betas more often used when data from one and the same sample are analysed.

Findings

A similar proportion of respondents in both countries had suffered from prior victimization during the past year. However, more females had been victimized in Scotland (12.3 percent) than in Iceland (7.3 percent). Nevertheless, a similar proportion of people had been victims of predatory crime in the two countries.

When it comes to comparing the raw scores for perceptions of insecurity in Iceland and Scotland, Table 4 reveals that people feel significantly less safe in Scotland. Whereas 84.1 percent of Icelanders reckon themselves to be either very or fairly safe walking alone in their area at night, only 68.6 percent of Scots do so. The mean difference is significant at the 95 percent level.

Table 4 How safe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark?

	<i>Scotland</i>	<i>Iceland</i>
Very safe (1)	23.6%	49.7%
Fairly safe (2)	45.0%	34.4%
A bit unsafe (3)	20.3%	12.4%
Very unsafe (4)	11.1%	3.5%
Mean (scale 1–4)	2.19	1.70
N	2314	761

Table 5 How safe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark? – by gender

	<i>Scotland</i>		<i>Iceland</i>	
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Very safe (1)	36.3%	14.2%	62.5%	36.5%
Fairly safe (2)	46.7%	43.7%	31.3%	37.6%
A bit unsafe (3)	13.5%	25.4%	5.7%	19.2%
Very unsafe (4)	3.5%	16.8%	0.5%	6.7%
Mean (scale 1–4)	1.84	2.45	1.44	1.96
N	993	1321	386	375

The difference between males and females is also significant at the 95 percent level in both countries, with females feeling less safe than males. The difference between the mean scores for males and females is 0.61 for Scots and 0.52 for Icelanders. Likewise, both males and females feel significantly less secure in Scotland than in Iceland (see Table 5).

Older people feel less safe than younger people in Scotland. However, feelings of insecurity in Scotland do not begin to rise until after the age of 50. Over 80 percent of respondents in all age groups in Iceland believe they are very or fairly safe outside walking alone in their neighbourhood at night, with no significant differences between age groups.

Tables 6 and 7 present the results of the multiple regression analyses, which provide a fuller understanding of the relationships between perceptions of insecurity and social and demographic factors in the two countries.

Scotland

For Scotland, the stepwise method produces nine regressions, where R^2 (the variance in perceptions of insecurity explained by the model) increases

significantly as each additional variable is added (see Table 6). This method excludes non-significant variables from the analysis, which are therefore not presented in the table. The actual p -values for each p -coefficient are presented in parentheses.

Gender has a stronger effect than any other variable, explaining just over 10 percent of the variance in the first model. When ‘concern about crime’ and ‘perceptions of the likelihood of burglary’ are added, the explained variance rises to 18.7 percent. The ninth and final model, which includes all of the variables found to be significant, explains 26.9 percent of the variance in the dependent variable. The variables excluded from the ninth model are ‘age group’ ($p=.806$), ‘singles’ ($p=.759$), ‘divorced, separated, never married’ ($p=.591$), and the interaction items ‘violence*age group’ ($p=.588$), ‘concern*age group’ ($p=.833$), ‘victim*age group’ ($p=.255$), ‘victim*gender’ ($p=.101$), ‘rurality*gender’ ($p=.320$), ‘rurality*age group’ ($p=.721$).

The following points can be made from the coefficients shown in the final model. First, females feel much less safe than males. On the four-point scale, the difference is almost a point (0.909) when controlling for other variables. Second, concern about crime as a societal problem is associated with perceptions of insecurity. When concern about crime rises by one point, perceptions of insecurity rise by .163 points. Also, people’s perceptions of their own risks of becoming crime victims are related to their perceptions of insecurity in walking alone after dark. When the perceived risk of the household being burgled rises by one point, the perceived insecurity of walking alone after dark rises by .247 points. Perhaps surprisingly, the perceived risk of becoming a victim of violence is less strongly related to perceived insecurity (captured by the ‘walking after dark’ measure) than is the perceived risk of burglary (the respective coefficients are .126 compared with .247).

So far these findings show that being female, being concerned about crime as a societal problem, and awareness of the risk of becoming a crime victim oneself are all related to the dependent variable measuring perceptions of insecurity. A third finding is that concern about crime has a different effect on males and females, as shown by the interaction term ‘concern*female’. The coefficient of .207 for this interaction term shows that concern about crime is more strongly related to perceptions of insecurity in women than in men. In fact, the whole pattern of findings implies that concern about societal crime is not significantly related to perceptions of insecurity in men at all, whereas it is rather an important factor for women. Also, when this interaction term is introduced into the model at step 8, there is a substantial increase in the main effect of female gender from .519 (at step 7) to .907 (at step 8). Thus a major underlying difference in perceptions of insecurity between males and females is revealed when the different linkages with concern about societal crime are allowed for.

Table 6 Stepwise multiple linear regressions explaining perceptions of insecurity: Scotland

	Model 1 (β)	Model 2 (β)	Model 3 (β)	Model 4 (β)	Model 5 (β)	Model 6 (β)	Model 7 (β)	Model 8 (β)	Model 9 (β)
Constant	1.893 (.000)	2.499 (.000)	3.354 (.000)	3.679 (.000)	3.624 (.000)	3.597 (.000)	3.497 (.000)	3.288 (.000)	3.427 (.000)
Female	.588 (.000)	.538 (.000)	.528 (.000)	.504 (.000)	.508 (.000)	.512 (.000)	.519 (.000)	.907 (.000)	.909 (.000)
Concern about crime		.311 (.000)	.295 (.000)	.278 (.000)	.278 (.000)	.282 (.000)	.275 (.000)	.164 (.001)	.163 (.001)
Likelihood of burglary			.272 (.000)	.263 (.000)	.351 (.000)	.331 (.000)	.322 (.000)	.328 (.000)	.247 (.000)
Household income				-.086 (.000)	-.067 (.000)	-.063 (.000)	-.063 (.000)	-.063 (.000)	-.061 (.000)
Likelihood of burglary*age group					-.033 (.000)	-.033 (.000)	-.036 (.000)	-.037 (.000)	-.038 (.000)
Rural						-.265 (.000)	-.265 (.000)	-.263 (.000)	-.270 (.000)
Prior victim							.238 (.000)	.246 (.000)	.238 (.000)
Concern*female								.207 (.002)	.207 (.002)
Likelihood of violence									.126 (.015)
R ²	.101	.153	.187	.215	.230	.242	.250	.256	.269
N	1226	1226	1226	1226	1226	1226	1226	1226	1226

Notes: Dependent variable: How safe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark? P-values in parentheses.

Fourth, household income is negatively related to perceptions of insecurity. When household income increases by one point on the eight-point scale, perceptions of insecurity decline by .061. The effect is statistically significant at a high level of confidence, and because the income scale extends over eight points (compared with four points for concern about crime) the effect is fairly substantial despite the small coefficient. Fifth, the interaction term 'likelihood of burglary*age group' is significant in this study. As has been mentioned, people's perceptions of the likelihood of their homes being broken into are related to feelings of insecurity, but the significant interaction shows this relationship to be less strong for older people than for younger ones. Sixth, those living in rural areas feel less insecure than those living in urban ones. The difference is .270 points on the 1–4 scale. Seventh, prior victimization also increases perceptions of insecurity, this time by .238 points.

Iceland

For Iceland, the stepwise method produces six regressions where the variance explained increases significantly with the rising number of items included. As before, non-significant variables are excluded from the analysis and not presented in Table 7. Likewise, the actual *p*-values for each ρ -coefficient are presented in parentheses.

As shown in the table, place of residence (urban/rural) explains 15.8 percent of the variance in the DV, which is more than for any other variable. When 'gender' is added, the explained variance rises to 26.9 percent. The sixth and final model, including all significant variables, explains 33.7 percent of the variance in the DV. The variables excluded from the sixth model are 'income of household' ($p=.301$), 'singles' ($p=.670$), 'divorced, separated, never married' ($p=.614$), 'prior victimization' ($p=.929$), 'likelihood of burglary' ($p=.139$) and the interaction items 'likelihood of burglary*age group' ($p=.291$), 'likelihood of violence*age group' ($p=.893$), 'concern*gender' ($p=.684$), 'concern*age group' ($p=.944$), 'victim*gender' ($p=.643$), 'rural*age group' ($p=.203$).

The following conclusions can be drawn from the coefficients in the sixth and final model. First, people's perceptions of insecurity are different for urban and rural residents. The difference is .386 points on the four-point scale, with those living in rural areas feeling safer than urban residents. Second, the difference between the genders is .716 points, with females feeling more insecure than males. Third, respondents' perceptions of the likelihood of becoming victims of violence are associated with their perceptions of insecurity in walking alone at night. When perceptions of the likelihood of violence increase by one point, perceptions of insecurity on the streets

Table 7 Stepwise multiple linear regressions explaining perceptions of insecurity: Iceland

	Model 1 (β)	Model 2 (β)	Model 3 (β)	Model 4 (β)	Model 5 (β)	Model 6 (β)
Constant	1.927 (.000)	1.649 (.000)	2.370 (.000)	2.279 (.000)	2.190 (.000)	2.387 (.000)
Rural	-.652 (.000)	-.591 (.000)	-.559 (.000)	.354 (.000)	-.371 (.000)	-.386 (.000)
Female		.546 (.000)	.551 (.000)	.743 (.000)	.753 (.000)	.716 (.000)
Likelihood of violence			.213 (.000)	.216 (.000)	.248 (.000)	.233 (.000)
Rural*female				-.460 (.000)	-.450 (.000)	-.418 (.001)
Age					.101 (.002)	.081 (.013)
Concern about crime	.158	.269	.294	.314	.328	.089 (.015)
R ²						.337
N	475	475	475	475	475	475

Notes: Dependent variable: How safe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark? P-values in parentheses.

decrease by .233. Fourth, there is an important interaction between gender and urban versus rural place of residence. People in urban areas feel more insecure than those in rural areas, and women feel more insecure than men, but in addition women living in urban areas feel particularly insecure – more so than might be expected by simply adding together the separate effects of gender and place of residence. This interaction effect is substantial, amounting to .418 points on the four-point scale of the dependent variable. Fifth, feelings of insecurity rise across the four age groups (in the context of the model controlling for the effects of the other variables). The effect is not great but it is significant. Moving from one of the four age groups to the next is associated with a rise of .081 in perceptions of insecurity on the four-point scale. Finally, concern about crime is related to perceptions of insecurity. Again, the relationship is not strong but significant. When concern about crime increases by one point, perception of insecurity increases by .089 points.

Comparing the two nations

Interesting differences are exposed when comparing the two countries' SMLR models. First, nine significant items explain 26.9 percent of the variance in the DV for Scotland whereas only 6 statistically significant items explain 33.7 percent of the variance in the DV for Iceland. This indicates that, overall, similarities between people are greater in Iceland than in Scotland because fewer items explain more of the variance in the DV there than in Scotland. This is not unexpected in the light of the earlier summary of the two countries' characteristics. Sociologically, Iceland is a relatively uncomplicated country where people tend to be alike. Presumably, different groups of people are 'closer' to one another in terms of values and attitudes, or, more theoretically, social stratification is likely to be less clear in Iceland than in Scotland, leading to more similarities in attitudes and overall identities.

Apart from the fact that Scots report feeling less safe on the streets than Icelanders, interesting differences and similarities between the two countries are also revealed when comparing the ρ -coefficients from the two SMLR models. First, the urban/rural dimension is a fairly strong predictor of perceptions of insecurity in Scotland ($-.270$) but considerably more so in Iceland ($-.386$). This is probably owing to the fact that Reykjavík is the only 'city' in Iceland and the differences between 'the city' and 'the country' are great in terms of population density, the division of labour and the overall composition of the communities (see the section about the two countries above). Scotland, on the other hand, has a broader range of cities and towns than Iceland and has fewer overall differences between the cities and the countryside.

Second, gender is a strong predictor of perceptions of feelings of insecurity on the streets in both countries. Females feel almost one point more insecure on the four-point scale in Scotland (.909) but the difference is not much less decisive in Iceland (.716). This is akin to other results in the literature. However, the interaction between place of residence and gender is significant in Iceland (-.418) but not in Scotland. The urban-rural difference in feelings of insecurity is considerably greater among females than among males in Iceland, whereas no such difference is found for Scotland. Again, this supports the notion about division between 'the city' and 'the country' in Iceland.

Third, concern about crime as a societal problem is stronger as a predictor of perceptions of insecurity in Scotland (-.163) than in Iceland (-.089). Icelanders seem to consider crime to be more a routine part or a 'taken for granted' feature of the society without relating it to their feelings of personal safety. Even stronger support for this notion is the finding that prior victimization does not relate to perceptions of safety in Iceland. Icelanders who have been victimized during the last year do not feel less safe than those who have not, but Scots do, and quite significantly ($\rho=.238$). This is quite unexpected, since prior victimization is usually a factor that relates positively to perceptions of safety in the 'fear of crime' literature. Once again, this indicates that Icelanders seem to be more homogeneous than the Scots, in that victims and non-victims think alike.

Fourth, perceptions of the likelihood of suffering from violence are significant as a predictor of feelings of insecurity on the streets in both countries. However, this indicator is much stronger for Icelanders (-.233) than for Scots (-.126). This might result from the fact that only six items are significant as predictors of perceptions of safety for Icelanders, compared with nine items for Scots. Nevertheless, it seems quite natural to relate perceptions of safety on the streets to fear of suffering from violence. However, if 'concern about crime' and 'perceptions of the likelihood of suffering from violence' are examined together, the difference between the two countries is relatively small.

Fifth, Scots link the likelihood of their home being broken into to feelings of safety on the streets ($\rho=-.247$) but Icelanders do not. This relationship is particularly interesting in the light of community safety. A possible explanation might be that there is a clearer division between the worse-off and the better-off in the Scottish society than in Iceland. Poor neighbourhoods or 'slums' are relatively non-existent in Iceland, indicating that there is no clear relationship between place of residence and the likelihood of burglary as there probably is in Scotland, where concentrations of potential offenders are often located in certain areas. To further support this notion, household income is related to perceptions of insecurity in Scotland but not

in Iceland. The effect is significant and fairly substantial. The better-off tend to feel safer than poorer people in Scotland, but no such relationship exists in Iceland. This suggests that the wider difference between 'haves' and 'have nots' in Scotland compared with Iceland generates a difference in perceptions of insecurity between the income classes. This also confirms prior research on the matter. What is particularly interesting is that, even though there should have been room within the Icelandic SMLR model to find any relationship between household income and perceptions of insecurity (given that there were only six significant items related to the DV in Iceland but nine within the Scottish model), no such relationship was discovered. This clearly indicates that Iceland is a more equal society than Scotland and that the level of equality is directly related to the population's perceptions of safety. Overall, the pattern of comparative findings suggests that, in the more homogeneous population and the more egalitarian society of Iceland, residents feel a stronger sense of community safety than do residents in the more differentiated and class-divided Scotland.

Discussion

Returning to the three research questions posed at the beginning of this article, they can now be answered as follows. First, people do generally feel safer in Iceland than in Scotland when walking on the streets at night, and the difference is substantial. Second, household incomes are related to feelings of insecurity in Scotland but not in Iceland. Although income is not one of the strongest predictors of feelings of insecurity, this relationship is statistically highly significant and is fairly substantial. Third, there is some evidence that differences between males and females in feelings of insecurity are greater in Scotland than in Iceland, but what is most striking here is that the pattern is different. In Scotland, feelings of insecurity among females (more than among males) are connected with concern about crime as a societal problem, whereas the same is not true in Iceland. A fourth finding, which does not directly relate to the original research questions, is that urban/rural differences in feelings of insecurity are rather greater in Iceland than in Scotland, and these differences in Iceland (but not Scotland) are connected with gender. Specifically, women in urban areas in Iceland have much greater feelings of insecurity than women in the countryside.

The general pattern of findings also points to further conclusions beyond the original research questions. In the regression models, fewer variables (six against nine) explain more of the variance in perceptions of insecurity in Iceland (33.7 percent) than in Scotland (26.9 percent). As already mentioned, gender differences are greater within Scotland than Iceland

(.917 against .716). Moreover, concern about crime has more effect in Scotland ($-.163$ against $-.089$), and household income, prior victimization and fear of burglary are all statistically related to perceptions of insecurity for Scottish residents but not for Icelanders. Fear of becoming a victim of violence is related to perceptions of safety in both countries, but more so in Iceland than in Scotland. However, this item should be considered along with people's concern about crime. When the two are taken together, the difference is relatively non-existent. On that interpretation, the only variable that shows a more significant effect in Iceland than Scotland is the difference between urban and rural residents.

Theoretical perspectives and findings from the literature provide a useful framework for interpreting these findings. At the meso level, Giddens (1991) argued that the most important factor in people's ontological security is community trust and kinship, which develops through the local community and social integration. He states that absence of these features will decrease trust between individuals. Other research has shown that a strong sense of social integration is a central feature of, and positively related to, people's perceptions of safety in their community (Austin et al. 1994; Gibson et al. 2002; Rountree and Land 1996). Findings from this study clearly suggest that overall social integration is greater in Iceland than in Scotland. There is less difference in perceptions of insecurity between subgroups in Iceland than in Scotland and stronger overall integration, and people feel substantially safer there than in Scotland. In fact, Icelandic scholars have argued that a strong overall sense of social integration is a key feature of Icelandic society (Baumer et al. 2001). Similarly, Bauman (1998) has developed the concept of 'territoriality', which he describes as people's tendency to gather in local groups to increase feelings of safety and cohesion. Thus, it can be argued that Iceland is a more 'territorial' country than Scotland at present.

The neighbourhood disorder model and research, on the other hand, point out that the relative uniformity of areas and neighbourhoods in Reykjavík, and of other much smaller localities in Iceland, lead to greater perceptions of safety among the country's residents (Kanan and Pruitt 2002; Ross and Mirowsky 1999). A 'sense of community' is central to residents' perceptions of safety (Hope 2000). As mentioned, Reykjavík, Iceland's only city, does not have any 'slums' or multiply deprived areas, which probably increases overall feelings of safety. Scottish cities (especially Glasgow and Edinburgh), in contrast, include certain neighbourhoods that are multiply deprived where repeat victimization and relative poverty are common among the residents (Hope 2000; Paterson et al. 2004). In this study, factors that indicate community discrimination (such as fear of the home being broken into) and economic discrimination (such as differences in household

income) were significantly related to perceptions of insecurity in Scotland but not in Iceland. Therefore the findings support the notion that class divisions (as reflected in differences between neighbourhoods and between the income and social status of individuals and families) serve to increase feelings of insecurity, as other research has already revealed (see Pantazis 2000; Pantazis and Gordon 1999).

Closely related to this interpretation is the macro notion from Beck (1992) and Bauman (1998) that, with the general process of individualization in Western countries, overall security and perceptions of safety decrease because 'among the negative effects of individualization processes is the separation of the individual from traditional support networks (e.g. family and neighbourhoods)' (Beck 1992: 93). Hope (2000) adds that, along with this individualistic development, people's sense of safety has been 'commodified' as something that follows the logic of the market. This is said to influence discrimination. Only the better-off will be able to afford safety measures, and this uneven distribution of security will reduce overall perceptions of safety still more. Hope calls for a much more egalitarian distribution of safety resources, which, in a way, would resemble Icelandic society (Hope 2000). Both he and Stanko (2000) suggest, on a macro level, that greater volumes of insecurity within a population serve as evidence of social discrimination and they call for an alteration of the relevant social structures. Furthermore, Stanko (2000) has argued that 'insecurity is embedded in social inequalities' and Hope (2000) and Currie (2003) state that uneven distribution of wealth leads to more insecurity. A more equal distribution of wealth and stronger social support for the average person should therefore be a measure against this tendency. Findings from the 'fear of crime' literature repeatedly support this by demonstrating that poverty and insecurity are negatively related (Borooah and Carcach 1997; Garland 1996; Pantazis and Gordon 1999).

From the globalization perspective, both Ewald (2000) and Beck (1992) point out that the structural transitions embedded in the globalization process lead to conflicts between cultural groups, in gender roles, between age groups and in economic status, which will serve to increase insecurity among residents in Western countries. Iceland has a much more homogeneous population and less conflicting cultural groups than Scotland; its residents tend to think of the country as absolutely middle class, indicating less potential for dissidence between its internal groups. Because of this homogeneity, Icelandic culture may not be as vibrant as Scottish culture. However, in Iceland there should be more interchange between members of its relatively homogeneous population, and this should make Iceland a safer country, on the whole, than Scotland.

Thus, social integration theory, the neighbourhood disorder perspective, and the late modernity/risk viewpoint (which identifies the impact of rising

individualism and the 'disembedding' of individuals from the social matrix in a perpetually globalizing world) can in combination explain the differences between residents' perceptions of safety in Scotland and in Iceland. The first theory recognizes the importance of equality when integrating individuals into society, which points to greater integration and security in Iceland than in Scotland. The neighbourhood disorder model takes its starting point in neighbourhood differences and class division, which are much more persistent in Scotland than in Iceland. And the late modernity/risk perspective highlights the macro differences between the two countries in terms of the population composition and risk. This last theory indicates, at least in part, that differences in safety perceptions between the two countries may be explained by the overall differences in population composition, but, like the social integration and neighbourhood disorder models, it also suggests that the distributions of income, wealth and cultural capital are reflected in the distribution of risk, and that an unequal distribution of risk leads to a high overall level of insecurity for everyone.

It could be considered problematic and therefore a limitation in this study that the differences between the coefficients in the two SMLR models are not tested with a formal significance test. The fact that two separate data sets are utilized in the study, producing two independent findings, makes this a problem. Therefore in future research it is suggested that one questionnaire and one set of data would be desirable for formal significance testing between two or more countries. Also, there is no specific item in the two data sets that can be utilized as an indicator of differences in 'equality' on an item-to-item basis.⁶ That should also be desirable in future research. Furthermore, a considerable limitation in the study is that no variable controls for or tests a 'nation effect'. That is, if we are truly interested in studying the effect of a nation on its residents' safety perceptions, it would be desirable to include variable(s) that could indicate this. The problem here, as stated before, is that two completely unrelated data sets are being utilized, which entails that the study be driven by the data that happen to be available. Similar items from the two data sets are compared but others are not. In an ideal world, more items would have been used.

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⁶ The data from the SCS on household income were delivered after being coded into eight groups, making direct comparison impossible.

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