

Introduction

Women's security: Critical perspectives on assessment techniques and preventive responses

Security Journal (2009) **22**, 175–177. doi:10.1057/sj.2009.5

This issue is the second of two special issues of *Security Journal* expressly dealing with a range of issues related to women's security. The first (Volume 22, Issue 1) focused on women's safety and security issues on university and college campuses, including both 'traditional' campuses and US military academies. These papers in the first issue explored college women's fear of crime and victimization, as well as responses to these issues by potential victims and campus security personnel.

The current issue examines another dimension of women's security: assessment techniques and preventive responses. Whitzman, Shaw and Travers, and Beebeejaun, focus on how the women's safety audit has been used in community settings to identify places and situations that are seen as unsafe by the community respondents. Robinson and Rowlands, and DeKeseredy, Donnermeyer and Schwartz examine more closely gender issues in relation to domestic violence. Smith takes a more theoretical approach to concerns about women's personal security, seeing them in relation to fear of crime and perceptions of risk. From another perspective, three of the papers, those by Whitzman *et al*, Beebeejaun, and Robinson and Rowlands, examine issues related to assessment instruments whereas the other two, by DeKeseredy *et al* and Smith, focus on new perspectives building on existing crime prevention and security approaches. Individually and collectively, these topics have special application to women's security. The authors demonstrate how the number of assessment tools currently being used to examine women's security can be expanded to deal with new populations (for example, gays, lesbians and transgender individuals) or emerging security problems (for example, domestic violence in rural areas). Most importantly, the authors show that it is possible to develop innovative approaches to deal with long-standing concerns, especially surrounding domestic violence and women's views about their personal security in public areas.

Whitzman and her colleagues discuss efforts that have been put forth around the world in relation to women's safety audits. They describe an assessment tool first used in Toronto to identify how women perceive their safety at locations in the city's subway system (METRAC, 1989). This type of audit has been expanded and fine-tuned by researchers at the Women's Design Service in London and adopted for use in a number of different countries and cultures. Whitzman and her colleagues document not only how the safety audit was used in parts of South Africa, India, the United Kingdom, Russia and Tanzania, but also the positive effects the development and implementation of safety and security audits had on participants and other members of the local communities.

Beebejaun provides background on the use of the women's safety audit developed by the Women's Design Service. Using a critical lens to examine issues such as urban planning, regeneration and women's use of public spaces within cities, she sets the stage for understanding the importance of the audit carried out in four sites within the United Kingdom: London, Manchester, Bristol and Wolverhampton. Beebejaun details the audit process used in these urban areas and explains how the information gathered from these safety audits can expand the community's knowledge base about how women view their own security and how such information might be effectively used to address women's safety and security concerns.

Domestic abuse is a problem worldwide and not just isolated to residential setting or heterosexual relationships. Domestic abuse effects relationships in all types of community, including spilling over to the workplace and threatening the safety and security of women who are employed. A number of social service agencies in the United Kingdom, address the risks of domestic violence by using a number of different assessment tools and management strategies. Robinson and Rowlands describe the approach to risk assessment for victims that was developed in Cardiff, Wales. They compare the information gathered from several risk instruments to look at what these indicate about the factors associated with the risk of violence for both male and female victims. According to Robinson and Rowlands, these comparisons suggest that risk assessment instruments developed for use with heterosexual partners may not be able to identify risk factors for violence among other types of relationships, such as those involving gay, lesbian and transgender partners.

DeKeseredy and his colleagues also look at violence against women by their partners (or ex-partners), but they do so within a rural context. They describe how a new gendered approach to Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (Second Generation CPTED) can be used to understand and address societal attitudes in these rural communities that foster or condone violence against women. Presenting their approach within a feminist framework, they discuss four different strategies for improving the collective efficacy of the community. By achieving these improvements, they see women's lives changing and the likelihood of violence against them diminishing.

Smith presents a theoretical model of the influence of concerns about personal security on the decision making of potential victims, in particular on their decisions to change location. Adopting an opportunity-theory approach to issues surrounding fear of crime and perception of risk, Smith highlights the important influences that situational cues about crime in particular locations, and the available responses of potential victims have on their concerns about personal security. Issues traditionally seen as important in relation to views of personal security, such as gender and victimization, are considered in terms of their effects on the concepts formed through experiences, particularly those related to crime. In her model, these concepts are compared to the situational cues seen by potential victims in particular locations. The meanings attached to these situational cues, in turn, affect potential victims' decisions about movement into different locations.

These papers present a wealth of information about innovative approaches to women's security issues in different settings and cultures. These innovative approaches challenge the status quo. They remind us that there is still much to be learned about women's security. Developing methods, especially new theoretical frameworks and assessment techniques, will help to further security professionals' and researchers' understanding about the



security needs of everyone and improve the effectiveness of their responses and practices in the growing area of women's security.

Reference

METRAC [Metropolitan Toronto Action Committee on Public Violence Against Women and Children]. (1989) Women's Safety Audit Guide. Toronto, Canada: METRAC.

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