

Mental well-being and fear: Examining the association between affective well-being and affective fear of crime in Finland

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Abstract

There is a dearth of knowledge regarding the association between mental well-being and fear of crime. This study utilises several measures of well-being and fear to examine how poorer affective well-being is associated with affective fear of crime in Finland. In addition, the article explores the extent to which feelings of unsafety and generalised distrust moderate this association. The research comprised 2020 survey data representing the Finnish-speaking population in mainland Finland. Descriptive methods, median regression, and interaction terms are used for the analyses. These results indicate that poorer affective well-being is positively associated with a stronger affective fear of crime in Finland. Furthermore, feelings of unsafety and generalised distrust were found to moderate the considered association. This indicates that the perceived risk of victimisation facilitates the association between poorer affective well-being and stronger affective fear of crime in Finland.

Keywords: fear of crime, well-being, feelings of unsafety, distrust, median regression, moderation analysis

Introduction

Existing research on fear of crime has demonstrated that the perceived risk of victimisation and feelings of unsafety are associated with different social concerns. For instance, at the national, regional, or neighbourhood level, fear of crime is associated with wider economic inequality (Kujala et al., 2019; Nilsson & Estrada, 2003; Vieno et al., 2013), material deprivation (Kujala et al., 2019), low socioeconomic status, low social capital (Ferguson & Mindel, 2007; Vieno et al., 2010) and lower social protection expenditure (Hummelsheim et al., 2011; Vieno et al., 2013; Visser et al., 2013). At the individual level, a high level of fear is associated with generalised social distrust (Visser et al., 2013), social disintegration, and reduced participation in social activities (Gibson et al., 2002; Stafford et al., 2007).

In the literature on health disparities, the abovementioned factors are also understood as social determinants of mental health (e.g., Alegría et al., 2018). Indeed, the association between fear of crime and men-

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tal well-being has been demonstrated by previous studies (Collins & Marrone, 2015; Pearson & Breetzke, 2014; Stafford et al., 2007). Although research has primarily examined how fear of crime affects mental well-being, some studies have also suggested that fear of crime and mental well-being have a reciprocal relationship (Collins & Marrone, 2015; Jackson & Stafford, 2009). Longitudinal research suggests that poorer mental well-being is more likely to strengthen fear of crime over time than fear of crime is to decrease mental well-being (Foster et al., 2016).

This study contributes to understanding the association between mental well-being and fear of crime; it explores the association of mental well-being with affective fear of crime through the lens of affective well-being. Emotional reactions are a core aspect of fear of crime (LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987). Hence, the association should be studied through the affective sphere, that is, through the negative emotional reactions to crime, such as the fear of falling victim to a crime. The affective sphere differs from the cognitive and the behavioural spheres. The cognitive sphere emphasises a person's perceived risk of victimisation (Amerio & Roccatò, 2005) while the behavioural sphere emphasises fearful avoidance and defensive behaviour, aiming to protect the individual from victimisation (Gabriel & Greve, 2003).

However, many existing studies on the association between mental well-being and fear of crime examine fear of crime through the cognitive sphere. They use measures related to the perceived risk of victimisation (Cossman et al., 2016; Cossman & Rader, 2011; Daigle et al., 2021; De Donder et al., 2012a; Rader et al., 2020) or a single aggregate measure of the combination of cognitive and affective fear (De Donder et al., 2005). Hence, there is a lack of knowledge about how mental well-being is specifically associated with affective fear of crime (Foster et al., 2016).

Similarly, the approach to mental well-being should involve examining it through the lens of emotional well-being. This perspective associates well-being with happiness by maximising positive emotions and minimising negative ones (Keys, 2013). Emotional well-being can be classified into affective and cognitive well-being. Affective well-being considers the frequency and intensity of people's positive and negative emotions or moods, while cognitive well-being refers to life satisfaction and the overall evaluation of life (Luhmann, 2017). Prior research on fear of crime has primarily focused on examining mental well-being in terms of loneliness or mental health issues, such as anxiety and depressive symptoms. By focusing on affective mental well-being, this study considers a wider array of psychosocial components related to overall well-being (Eiroa-Orosa, 2020; Keys, 2013).

Existing literature on the relationship between affective well-being and affective fear of crime recognises the significance of feelings of unsafety and generalised trust as moderators yet lacks thorough exploration through moderation or mediation analyses (Chadee et al., 2017; Cossman et al., 2016; Jackson & Stafford, 2009). Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by examining the extent to which feelings of unsafety and generalised distrust moderate this association.

This study utilises survey data from a nationally representative sample of mainland Finland. Existing literature on the association between mental well-being and fear of crime is mainly based on studies conducted in the United States (Cossman et al., 2016; Cossman & Rader, 2011). Studies that examine this association appear to be restricted to small samples from restricted geographical areas (De Donder et al., 2012a; De Donder et al., 2005) or samples covering university and college campuses (Daigle et al., 2021; Rader et al., 2020).

Cross-national comparisons frequently place Finland among European nations with low fear of crime (Kujala et al., 2019; Vieno et al., 2013). However, despite its seemingly low level, the negative effects of fear of crime still exist among Finnish citizens (Kujala, 2022). Moreover, despite Finland being hailed as one of the happiest nations on Earth, cross-national studies also show that approximately 7% of its population suffers from psychological distress, and approximately 18% have mental health issues (OECD, 2020; OECD, 2018). This makes Finland a noteworthy case study for the association between affective well-being and affective fear of crime.

Mental well-being and fear of crime

Prior knowledge about the association

Affective fear of crime, that is, fear of becoming the victim of a crime, arises in certain situations, such as walking on dark streets; repeated experiences can develop into a more permanent state of fear (Gabriel & Greve, 2003). Affective well-being refers to the self-reported frequency and intensity of people's positive and negative emotions or moods (affective states), which are often examined over a specific timeframe (Luhmann, 2017). As there has been limited research on the association between affective well-being and affective fear of crime, little is known about the mechanism underlying these two phenomena.

When measuring the affective fear of crime, Foster et al. (2016) found that a higher fear of burglary, robbery, vandalism, and general disorder was positively associated with increased psychological distress. Their longitudinal study concentrated on individuals (N=1,230) constructing houses or moving to new housing developments in 48 Perth suburbs, Western Australia, surveying residents during the 36th and 84th months of their relocation. In addition, De Donder et al. (2005) utilised a composite measure for fear of crime, encompassing the affective, cognitive, and behavioural spheres of fear. They analysed the association between fear of crime and loneliness among older adults in West Flanders, concluding that loneliness is strongly associated with a stronger overall fear of crime.

Some studies have also incorporated mental well-being measures and physical health measures as proxies for overall public health. Their results indicated that poorer public health is positively associated with a stronger risk of victimisation and affective fear of crime (Chadee et al., 2017; Jackson & Stafford, 2009). Klama and Egan's (2011) findings suggest that poorer mental health is associated with stronger punitive attitudes. Moreover, this association was mediated by the perceived risk of victimisation. Although these studies did not examine the separate effects of mental well-being on fear of crime, they highlight its importance. They also demonstrated that both mental well-being and fear of crime are public health concerns.

This connection was further evident in a longitudinal study involving British civil servants (Stafford et al., 2007) based on the Whitehall II study. The study found that concerns about home invasions, being mugged or robbed, car theft or car break-ins, or being a victim of rape are associated with poorer mental health, reduced physical functioning, and a lower quality of life. It also showed that involvement in social activities and social participation, in general, was lower among those with greater fear of crime, with the authors concluding that "curtailment of physical and social activities is one pathway linking fear of crime to mental and physical health". However, they did not identify a mediating effect of these activities on the fear of crime-health relationship, suggesting that "other mediating pathways should be explored".

Feelings of unsafety and generalised distrust as moderators of the association between affective mental well-being and affective fear of crime

Despite limited studies on the association between affective fear of crime and mental well-being, there is a clear association between poorer mental well-being and stronger affective fear of crime. Furthermore, there is extensive evidence on the more cognitive aspects of fear of crime, particularly when examining it through the feelings of unsafety. This is often measured by the subjective perception of safety among individuals walking alone in the dark.

Feelings of unsafety are commonly used as indicators of the fear of crime (see, e.g., Baumer, 1985; Kujala et al., 2019). However, there is a widely accepted conceptual distinction between affective fear of crime and feelings of unsafety (Ferraro, 1995; Rountree, 1998; Visser et al., 2013). While feelings of unsafety emphasise an individual's general risk perceptions, the affective sphere concerns the emotional aspects of fear surrounding different types of crimes (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987). The determinants of feelings of unsafety and affective fear of crime differ; thus, previous studies have taken for granted the assumption

that feelings of unsafety precede fear of crime (Chiricos et al., 2001; Ferraro, 1995). However, there is no evidence of a causal order (for discussion, see e.g., Gabriel & Greve 2003).

Previous studies have shown that stronger feelings of unsafety are associated with loneliness and psychological distress (De Donder et al., 2012b), the self-reported existence of psychiatric problems and mental health issues (Cossman et al., 2016; Cossman & Rader, 2011; Daigle et al., 2021), utilisation of psychological or mental health services, and the diagnosis or treatment of mental health issues (Rader et al., 2020).

Stronger generalised distrust has been associated with a stronger affective fear of crime and feelings of unsafety (Visser et al., 2013). Generally, the literature emphasises the influence of social capital on perceived safety (e.g., De Donner et al., 2012b). Regarding mental well-being, studies concerning social capital and health outcomes have consistently demonstrated a positive association between trust and health status (see, e.g., Barefoot et al., 1998; Miething et al., 2020).

It is possible that both feelings of unsafety and generalised distrust moderate the association between poor affective mental well-being and affective fear of crime. Moreover, some results regarding public health combine mental and physical health components. These results support the role of feelings of unsafety and generalised distrust as facilitators of the association between poorer health and fear of crime (Jackson & Stafford, 2009). However, previous analyses of affective mental well-being and affective fear have not considered the moderating role of feelings of unsafety or generalised distrust (Foster et al., 2016).

Feelings of unsafety and generalised distrust can be seen as negative emotional responses to risk and, therefore, as manifestations of the evaluations of a higher risk of victimisation (Amerio & Roccatò, 2005; Jackson & Stafford 2009; Visser et al., 2013). Affective well-being is associated with personality and traits that affect the balance between positive and negative emotions (Schimmack et al., 2008), while emotional distress is associated with the perceived risk of victimisation (Klama & Egan, 2011). In addition, the perceived risk of victimisation is situated in the cognitive sphere of fear of crime; it is influenced by personal traits and changes, such as growing fearfulness or timidity (Gabriel & Greve, 2003). Evidence suggests that evaluations of the risk of victimisation precede affective fear of crime (Gabriel & Greve, 2003; Krulichova, 2019). Consequently, it could be argued that those with poor affective well-being have traits that strengthen their notion of a high risk of victimisation. Therefore, higher perceived risk reinforces affective fear of crime.

Socioeconomic and demographic determinants

In addition to feelings of unsafety and generalised distrust, several demographic and socioeconomic factors related to fear of crime should be included in the analysis of the considered association. These factors account for some social groups reporting a stronger average fear of crime than others (Vieno et al., 2013; Visser, et al., 2013). Such groups include, for example, older adults, women, the less educated, the unemployed, and the economically disadvantaged. These groups have fewer resources to protect themselves against crime victimisation and its consequences (Vieno et al., 2013; Visser, et al., 2013).

Previous findings have shown that older people are more fearful than the young (Vieno et al., 2013; Visser, et al., 2013). However, old and young people could fear different types of crime (Tulloch, 2000; Vieno et al., 2013). Some results also suggest that young people are almost as fearful as older people in more disadvantaged neighbourhoods but that older people are significantly more fearful than young people in better-off neighbourhoods (Köber et al., 2020). Concerning gender, the results indicate that, overall, women are more fearful than men (Kujala, 2022; Vauclair & Bratanova, 2017). However, it might be that much of women's fear of crime is related to fear of rape or sexual violence, whereas men fear other types of crime (Ferraro, 1995; May et al., 2010). Moreover, men may downplay their fears for cultural reasons, leading to a bias in the survey results (Brownlow, 2005; Walklate, 2007).

Materials and methods

Objectives of the study

This study investigates the association between affective fear of crime and affective mental well-being, employing various measures to assess affective mental well-being. Moderation analyses are also conducted to examine the mechanism between poor affective well-being and a stronger affective fear of crime. The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. How is affective well-being associated with affective fear of crime in Finland?
2. How are the different components of affective well-being associated with affective fear of crime?
3. To what extent do feelings of unsafety and generalised distrust affect the considered association?

Data

Data for this study were obtained from the Well-Being and Inequality in Finland survey ($N=2,700$) conducted at the end of 2020 (Kainulainen et al., 2022). The data included a nationally representative sample of Finnish-speaking people aged between 18 and 79 years in mainland Finland. Åland Islands are excluded from the data. Telephone interviews were conducted by Suomen Kyselytutkimus Oy, a company specialising in survey data collection. Sample selection was based on a stratified sampling with the regions of residence as strata. The respondents were selected from each stratum using simple random sampling. The data were gathered via telephone interviews and weighted using a post-stratification sampling weight that adjusts for the age and gender distribution in the population. Most variables examined in this study had missing values (see Table 1). The current study included only respondents who have answered all the questions ($N=2587$). Thus, 4.2% of the respondents (113 cases) were excluded from the analysis.

Dependent variable

Table 1 shows descriptive figures of the dependent and independent variables. To assess affective fear of crime, the respondents were asked, '*Have you feared becoming a victim of assault, sexual assault, burglary, theft, or vandalism during the last year?*'. Each of the five variables was measured using a 5-point Likert scale: totally disagree, disagree to some extent, do not disagree or agree, agree to some extent, and totally agree. The different types of fear of crime were combined into an additive index of affective fear, ranging from 0 to 20 (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.81$).

Affective fear of crime is commonly measured using 'How often do you feel afraid of...' or 'How afraid are you...' type of questions (Ditton et al., 1999; Ferraro, 1996; Gabriel & Greve, 2003). The former aims to assess how many 'fear of crime occurrences' the person experiences or the relative frequency of such occurrences in daily life. The latter is empirically closely linked with the former, yet they are not conceptually identical; 'How often...' question covers a mixture of affective and cognitive aspects (Gabriel & Greve, 2003, 607–609). Our approach to measuring affective fear of crime is closer to the 'How afraid are you...' question. While this study is interested in the variation in the scale/magnitude of the fear of different types of crime, the Likert-scale response option aims to assess affective states and the magnitude of fear. Thus, rather than 'How often...', the study is interested in 'how strongly' respondents fear becoming a victim of different crime types.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

Variable	Unweighted				Weighted			
	Mean	Sd	N	%	Mean	Sd	N	%
Affective fear of crime	2.62	3.60			2.76	3.61		
Poorer affective well-being	3.38	2.85			3.50	2.90		
Age	59.17	16.44			48.12	17.39		
Generalized distrust	3.07	1.92			3.01	1.89		
Gender								
Male			1,363	52.7			1,305	50.2
Female			1,224	47.3			1,295	49.8
Level of education								
Tertiary			752	29.1			936	36
Secondary			1,432	55.4			1,420	54.6
Primary			403	15.6			244	9.4
Labor market position								
Employed			830	32.1			1,335	51.3
Unemployed			98	3.8			161	6.2
Retired			1,537	59.4			805	31
Student			58	2.2			194	7.5
Other			64	2.5			106	4.1
Making ends meet								
Easy			2,060	79.6			2,010	77.3
Difficult			527	20.4			589	22.7
Feelings of unsafety								
No			2,425	93.7			2,442	93.9
Yes			162	6.3			158	6.1
Total			2,587	100			2,600	100

Note: Total N for weighted data is the sum of weights.

Explanatory variables

Affective well-being is examined by asking the respondents, ‘How frequently during the last 12 months did you feel lonely, depressed, unsuccessful, or happy?’. Each mental health question had five response choices: never, rarely, sometimes, quite often, and continuously. The well-being variables were combined into an additive index of poorer affective well-being, ranging from 0 to 16 (Cronbach’s alpha=0.71). The variable measuring happiness was reversed for this index.

Feelings of unsafety are examined by asking the respondents, ‘How safe do you feel while walking alone at night in their neighbourhood?’. The response choices were *very safe*, *safe*, *unsafe*, and *very unsafe*. The measurement of feelings of unsafety was dichotomised because the number of respondents who felt unsafe or very unsafe was significantly lower than that of those who felt safe or very safe. The dichotomisation

of a highly skewed variable is justified when two groups can be clearly defined (MacCallum et al., 2002). Generalised distrust was examined by asking the respondents, 'Do you think people can be trusted or that you cannot be too careful?'. Generalised distrust was measured on a scale of 0 to 10.

Demographic and socioeconomic variables

Age was a continuous variable ranging from 18 to 79 years, whereas gender was a dichotomous variable. The level of education was categorised in accordance with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) as follows: tertiary education, secondary education, and primary education. The labour market position includes three categories: employed, unemployed, and retired. Economic living conditions are measured with the standard question regarding financial management: 'Taking into account all of your household income, are you able to pay your regular expenses?'. Response choices were very easily, easily, fairly easily, with some difficulty, with difficulty, and with great difficulty. The number of respondents who could easily pay their expenses was considerably higher than those who had difficulty paying them. Thus, making ends meet was dichotomised as easy (very easily/easily/fairly easily) and difficult (with some difficulty/difficulty/great difficulty).

Data analysis

An analysis was conducted on the relative share of affective fear of crime and affective well-being to create a generalised picture of the data. This was followed by an analysis of the mean scores of the affective fear of crime index by different components of affective well-being. A concentration curve was employed to examine the association between poorer affective well-being and fear. A concentration curve is often used to portray the inequality between groups. However, it is also a practical and relatively easy way to determine whether affective fear of crime is concentrated on either side of the spectrum of mental well-being. In this case, a downward-bent curve would indicate that stronger fear is concentrating among those with poorer affective well-being. Conversely, an upward-bent curve would indicate that stronger fear is concentrating among those with better affective well-being. However, a concentration curve does not produce a numeric value for the concentration of fear of crime (O'Donnell et al., 2008). Therefore, a concentration index should be examined. A standard concentration index was used for this purpose (see O'Donnell et al., 2016). A positive index indicates that a stronger fear of crime is concentrated among those with poorer affective well-being. In contrast, a negative index indicates that stronger fear is concentrated among those with better affective well-being.

A regression analysis was used to examine how the explanatory and contextual factors were associated with affective fear of crime. Multicollinearity was analysed using variance inflation factors (VIF). The mean VIF for the data was 2.41, indicating an acceptable amount of high intercorrelation between the explanatory variables. However, the Breusch-Pagan test for heteroscedasticity indicated that the data were not homoscedastic ($p < 0.05$). Moreover, the Shapiro-Wilk test showed that the dependent variable was not normally distributed ($p < 0.001$). Consequently, the assumptions of linear regression are unmet, preventing their use. Instead, median regression is part of the conditional quantile regression framework. Overall, median regression is better suited for non-normal data than ordinary linear OLS regression. This is because it describes how explanatory factors affect the median rather than the mean of the dependent variable (Yuan & MacKinnon, 2014). Unlike the OLS regression, median regression is insensitive to outliers (Chen et al., 2008; Yuan & MacKinnon, 2014).

The median regression coefficients are presented as the least absolute deviations. The coefficients indicate how many units the dependent variable increases or decreases, while an explanatory variable increases by one and the other explanatory variables are held constant. Robust standard errors were obtained using the standard Koenker and Bassett method. McFadden's pseudo- R^2 assesses the model fit. The model with the highest pseudo- R^2 was considered the best. Finally, a moderation analysis was conducted on feelings of

unsafety and generalised distrust. This is accomplished by adding interaction terms to the median regression similarly to that of a linear regression (Jaccard & Turrisi, 2003; Jose, 2013). If a variable is associated with fear of crime and has an interaction effect on affective well-being, it can be considered a moderator.

Results

Descriptive analyses

Table 2 shows the percentages of respondents in the response categories for the considered types of affective fear of crime. Overall, the fear of becoming a victim of violent crime was low, as 4.8% of the respondents reported to agreeing to some extent or totally that they fear assault. Regarding sexual assault, 2.3% agreed to some extent or totally with the fear of sexual assault. The proportions of different types of property crime were significantly higher: 11.3% reported a strong fear of burglary, 14.3% reported a strong fear of theft, and 14.9 percent reported a strong fear of vandalism. Notably, affective fear of crime is more closely related to fear of different types of property crimes than to fear of violent crimes.

Table 2. Percentages of respondents by components of affective fear of crime and affective well-being.

<i>Affective fear of crime</i>	Assault		Sexual assault		Burglary		Theft		Vandalism	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Totally disagree	2,205	85.2	2,388	92.3	1,668	64.5	1,578	61.0	1,552	60.0
Disagree to some extent	184	7.1	99	3.8	463	17.9	463	17.9	470	18.2
Do not disagree or agree	76	2.9	41	1.6	165	6.4	176	6.8	181	7.0
Agree to some extent	92	3.6	41	1.6	267	10.3	338	13.1	349	13.5
Totally agree	30	1.2	18	0.7	24	0.9	32	1.2	35	1.4
Total	2,587	100	2,587	100	2,587	100	2,587	100	2,587	100

<i>Affective well-being</i>	Lonely		Depressed		Unsuccessful		Happy	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Never	1,316	50.9	1,466	56.7	1,600	61.8	42	1.6
Rarely	557	21.5	549	21.2	564	21.8	156	6.0
Sometimes	406	15.7	361	14.0	285	11.0	373	14.4
Quite often	265	10.2	180	7.0	111	4.3	1,505	58.2
Continuously	43	1.7	31	1.2	27	1.0	511	19.8
Total	2,587	100	2,587	100	2,587	100	2,587	100

In regard to affective well-being, Table 2 shows that affective well-being is quite strong among the respondents. While approximately 12% of the respondents reported feeling lonely, 8% experienced depressive feelings quite often or continuously. In addition, approximately 8% of the respondents reported never or rarely feeling happy. Regarding perceptions of self-worth, only 5% of the respondents felt that they were unsuccessful quite often or continuously.

Table 3 presents the mean scores of the affective fear of crime index in the categories of different

well-being indicators, demonstrating the association between the different components of affective well-being and affective fear of crime. The results showed that, on average, affective fear of crime was stronger among those who reported feelings of loneliness, depression, being unsuccessful, and being less happy. These results indicate that those with poorer affective well-being suffer from a stronger fear of crime.

Table 3. Mean score of affective fear of crime index by components of affective well-being.

	Lonely		Depressed		Unsuccessful		Happy	
	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd
Never	2.06	3.21	2.12	3.24	1.87	2.98	3.98	4.50
Rarely	2.92	3.54	3.14	3.65	3.45	3.88	4.16	4.42
Sometimes	3.49	4.19	3.36	4.02	4.11	4.11	3.39	4.06
Quite often	3.17	3.90	3.23	4.24	4.44	4.68	2.35	3.25
Continuously	4.21	4.48	4.90	5.19	6.56	5.74	2.26	3.64

The association between poor affective well-being and affective fear of crime is also illustrated in Figure 1. It shows the cumulative percentage of respondents ranked by poorer affective well-being plotted against the cumulative proportion of fear of crime. The diagonal lines represent equality. If the relative proportion of affective fear of crime were the same, despite differences in affective well-being, the concentration curve would be aligned with equality. As the concentration curve is below the line of equality, the figure demonstrates that stronger affective fear of crime is more concentrated among those with poorer affective well-being. The normalised concentration index had a positive value (index: 0.159; Std. error: 0.014; $p < 0.001$). This indicates that stronger affective fear is concentrated more in those with poor affective well-being.

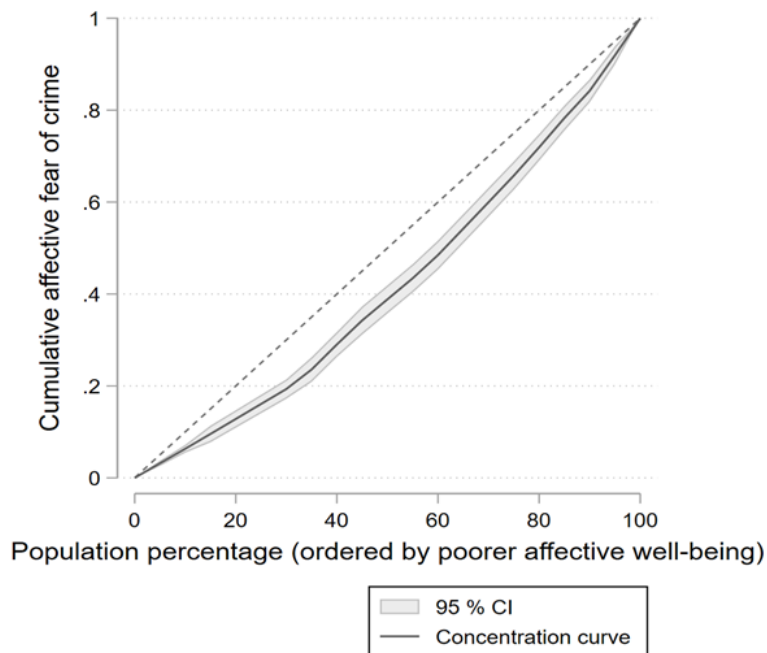


Figure 1. Concentration curve for cumulative proportion of affective fear of crime by ranked poorer affective well-being.

The effects of the explanatory and demographic and socioeconomic factors

Table 4 shows how the explanatory as well as demographic and socioeconomic factors are associated with affective fear of crime. Model 1 indicates a positive association between poorer affective well-being and stronger fear. Models 2 and 3 examine the role of age, gender, level of education, labour market position, challenges in meeting financial obligations, and other explanatory variables (feelings of unsafety and generalised distrust). Model 2 includes all demographic and socioeconomic variables, while Model 3 includes all the considered explanatory, demographic and socioeconomic factors.

Model 2 shows that the controlling for the demographic and socioeconomic factors somewhat weakens the coefficient for poorer affective well-being. However, with the exception of retirement as a category of labour market position, none of the factors were statistically significantly associated with affective fear of crime. Regardless, the coefficient for the pseudo- R^2 indicates that controlling for the demographic and socioeconomic factors leads to an increase in the model fit. Despite the lack of statistical significance, accounting for the demographic and socioeconomic remains important. To further examine these factors, separate models were constructed (results not shown) in which each factor was added to Model 2 as a separated control. The statistical significance of the coefficients remains the same as in Model 2.

Model 3 shows that the coefficient representing the association between poorer affective well-being and fear decreases considerably as feelings of unsafety and generalised distrust are controlled for. The association between feelings of unsafety and affective fear of crime is strong and statistically very significant. However, it should be noted that the standard error regarding the effect of feelings of unsafety is also relatively high. Distrust had a relatively small effect but a statistically very significant association with affective fear of crime. The coefficient for the pseudo- R^2 indicates that controlling for feelings of unsafety and distrust leads to a considerable increase in model fit.

Further analysis of the roles of feelings of unsafety and distrust was conducted using interaction terms (see, Models 4 and 5 in Appendix Table 1). The results showed that feelings of unsafety have an interaction effect with poorer affective well-being. The strength of effect was relatively weak but statistically significant. Thus, the results support the moderating role of feelings of unsafety. The interaction effect between poor affective well-being and feelings of unsafety is illustrated in Figure 2, which depicts the predicted margins of feelings of unsafety concerning poor affective well-being and affective fear of crime. Notably, the 95% confidence intervals were relatively wide. This may indicate the instability in the estimates.

The results of moderation analyses also showed that generalised distrust had an interaction effect with poorer affective well-being. The strength of the effect was weak but statistically significant. These results supported the moderating role of distrust. The interaction effect between poor affective well-being and distrust is illustrated in Figure 3, which shows the predicted margins of generalised distrust concerning poor affective well-being and affective fear of crime. Once more, the wider 95% confidence intervals and their overlap suggest instability in the estimates.

Table 4. Median regression model for affective fear of crime with least absolute deviations of the explanatory and contextual factors.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Poorer affective well-being	0.400*** (0.054)	0.366*** (0.050)	0.241*** (0.039)
Age		0.014 (0.009)	0.0125 (0.008)
Female (ref. Male)		0.211 (0.238)	0.144 (0.164)
Level of education (ref. Higher)			
Medium		-0.113 (0.256)	-0.367* (0.150)
Lower		-0.127 (0.293)	-0.476* (0.241)
Labour market position (ref. Employed)			
Unemployed		0.056 (0.594)	0.422 (0.449)
Retired		-0.761* (0.301)	-0.724** (0.258)
Student		0.197 (0.596)	0.204 (0.346)
Other		0.310 (0.663)	-0.265 (0.934)
Difficult to make ends meet (ref. Easy)			
Difficult		-0.042 (0.285)	-0.085 (0.187)
Feelings of unsafety (ref. No)			4.049*** (0.976)
Generalized distrust			0.315*** (0.061)
Intercept	0 (0.163)	-0.338 (0.408)	-0.649 (0.340)
N	2,587	2,587	2,587
Pseudo R²	0.040	0.042	0.082

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.
 Statistical significance: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

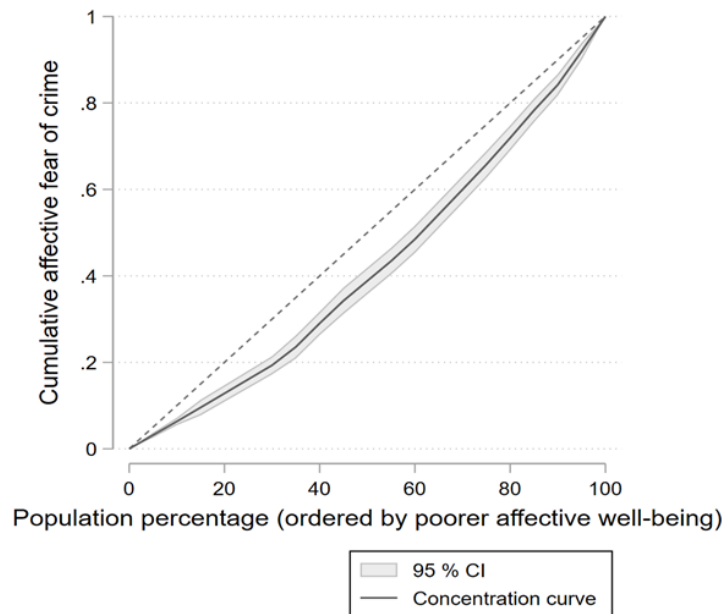


Figure 2. Predicted margins of feelings of unsafety with regard to poorer affective well-being and affective fear of crime.

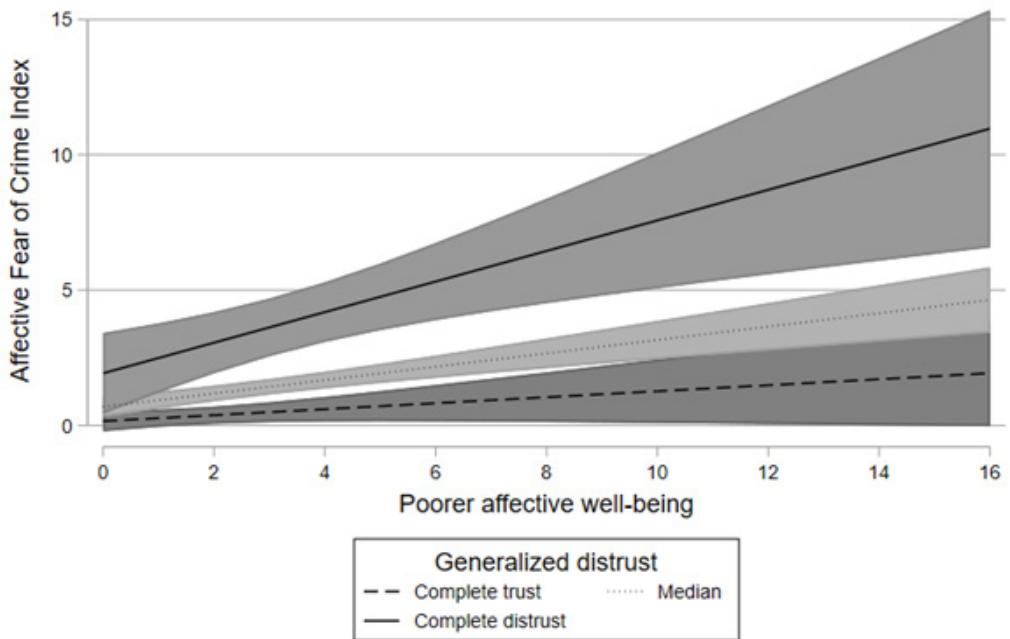


Figure 3. Predicted margins of generalized distrust with regard to poorer affective well-being and affective fear of crime.

Conclusions

This study examined the association between mental well-being and fear of crime from a less-researched perspective, arguing that from a conceptual and methodological perspective, the association should be studied through the affective sphere. Hence, this study explores how affective mental well-being is associated with affective fear of crime. While many existing studies on the association between mental well-being and fear of crime have focused on examining fear of crime through the cognitive sphere, there is a dearth of research about how mental well-being is specifically associated with affective fear of crime. Similarly, the study argues that when examining fear of crime, mental well-being should not be understood just as the absence of mental illness. Therefore, this study focused on affective mental well-being by covering various psychological components.

Results showed that the overall level of affective fear of crime was relatively low. The results indicate that Finns fear becoming victims of different types of property crime, such as vandalism, theft, or burglary, more strongly than becoming victims of violent crime or sexual assault. Thus, the findings suggest that affective fear of crime is more closely related to the fear of different types of property crimes than to fear of violent crimes. The findings provide insights into fear of crime research by highlighting that the emotional aspects of fear of crime vary by type of crime. This differs from the feelings of unsafety approach emphasising the risk perceptions of the individual in general. Consequently, our results confirm previous findings that there is a conceptual distinction between affective fear of crime and feelings of unsafety (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; Rountree, 1998; Visser et al., 2013).

Analyses of the association between affective mental well-being and affective fear of crime demonstrate that affective well-being is an important predictor of fear of crime. The results indicated a moderate association between poorer affective well-being and a stronger affective fear of crime. Previous research has provided little information on the possible mechanisms of these phenomena, although it has acknowledged the importance of the moderating role of feelings of unsafety and generalised trust (Chadee et al., 2017; Cossman et al., 2016; Jackson & Stafford, 2009). However, no moderation or mediation analyses of their roles have been conducted. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature by investigating the moderating role of feelings of unsafety and generalised distrust.

The results supported the idea that the association between poor affective well-being and affective fear of crime is facilitated by the general perceived risk of victimisation. Previous studies have established the association between mental well-being and perceived risk (Cossman et al., 2016; Cossman & Rader, 2011; Daigle et al., 2021; De Donder et al., 2012a; Rader et al., 2020). It could be argued that poorer affective well-being increases timidity, leading to a higher perceived risk of victimisation. Evaluations of higher risk, then, strengthen affective fear of crime (Gabriel & Greve, 2003; Krulichova, 2019). The results of some public health studies suggest that feelings of unsafety and generalised distrust may act as mediators between mental well-being and fear of crime (Jackson & Stafford, 2009). Further mediation analysis of this association is needed to better understand the causal path between affective well-being and affective fear of crime.

Notably, demographic and socioeconomic factors, previously recognised as significant predictors of fear of crime in studies, played almost insignificant roles in this investigation (Vieno et al., 2013; Visser et al., 2013). Perhaps the most surprising result was the insignificance of gender. Preliminary analyses indicated that, when measured through the different components of affective fear of crime, women were more fearful than men, but only by a few percentage points. In turn, approximately 8% more of women reported feeling unsafe than men did. Thus, the results regarding gender may depend on how fear of crime is measured. The preliminary results also showed that the association between poorer affective fear of crime and affective well-being were similar in strength among men and women. The results of the current study suggest that vulnerability does not explain the differences in the association between poorer affective well-being and affective fear of crime.

This study had several limitations. Firstly, these results were based on a single cross-section. In addi-

tion, the survey was conducted via telephone interviews, which could account for instability in the data. Future studies should use longitudinal data to allow for causal deductions regarding the considered association. It should also be noted that the data for the study was gathered in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the restrictions and health concerns during this time may have influenced survey results. This study used multiple measures of poor affective well-being. However, the scientific literature appears vague about the best way to comprehensively measure affective well-being especially concerning its association with fear of crime. This issue should be addressed in future studies.

Furthermore, the data for this study did not include measurements of previous crime victimisation, an aspect that future research should consider. Future studies should also investigate more direct measurements of the risk of crime victimisation to examine the mechanisms between affective well-being and fear of crime more thoroughly. Despite these limitations, this study provides insights into the association between affective well-being and affective fear of crime based on a nationally representative sample other than American studies with restricted and small samples. Further research from a cross-national perspective is required to form a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between affective well-being and affective fear of crime in Europe.

In conclusion, the results of this study have important policy implications for fear-reduction strategies. Reducing fear of crime demands supporting positive mental health support, thus improving mental well-being. It should also be acknowledged that mental well-being is not just the absence of mental illness. Positive mental health strives for a wider sense of well-being, emphasising mental resources, opportunities, self-efficacy, social relationships, and the positive self-image of the individual (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2022). It is also essential to improve social cohesion and trust in communities. A lack of social cohesion increases generalised distrust and anxiety in the presence of others (Visser et al., 2013). This, in turn, makes other people seem as a threat (Ross & Jang, 2000). Therefore, improving social cohesion and trust can reduce fear of crime.

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