

Extent of fear of crime in Croatia and effects of television viewing on fear of crime

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INTRODUCTION

Although “fear-of-crime” has been the subject to substantial theoretical and empirical attention over the past decades worldwide, in Croatia systematic empirical research on fear of crime has been conducted just in the past 5 years. According to the International crime victimization data Croatian citizens experienced relatively low rates of fear of crime. In comparison to other western societies in which exists long tradition of systematic research on fear-of-crime, relatively little is known about the correlates and predictors of fear-of-crime in Croatia. However, in our recent research (2003, 2005) conducted at the national level we focused on demographics, previous victimization, and crime related attitudinal variables (guardianship, neighborhood incivilities, believes in national crime trends, attitudes toward institutions of social control) as the predictors of fear of crime. Those data showed that demographic variables are relatively weak predictors of fear of crime, while crime related attitudinal variables, especially perception of neighborhood incivilities, showed to be much better predictors. In this research we focused on one additional correlate of fear of crime, namely frequency of television viewing.

AIM

The aim of the current study was to present the trend in prevalence of fear of crime in Croatia over the past 5 years. Also, the aim was to explore the relations between television viewing and fear of crime when the effects of demographic variables are controlled for.

METHOD

Participants

• nationally representative probabilistic sample of adults (N=1129)

Measures

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES:

- gender (male; female)
- respondent's age (18-40; 41-60; 61-)
- education (low; middle; high)
- area type - urbanity level (low; high)

FEAR OF CRIME:

it was measured by asking respondents to indicate on 4 point scale how worried they feel about becoming victim of:

- physical attack or robbery
- theft
- burglary
- physical or verbal threat

TELEVISION VIEWING:

it was assessed on 4 point scale by asking respondents how often they watch: 1- talk shows with politicians and public persons; 2- fictional crime series; 3- daily informative news and 4- documentaries with crime themes. Based on factor analyses two composite scores for television viewing were calculated:

- frequency of informative content viewing (talk shows and news)
- frequency of entertaining content viewing (fictional or documentary crime series)

RESULTS

Table 1. Trend in prevalence of fear of crime in Croatia over the past 5 years

	Not at all worried			Bit worried			Fairly worried			Very worried		
	2003 N=1238	2005 N=1004	2007 N=1129	2003 N=1238	2005 N=1004	2007 N=1129	2003 N=1238	2005 N=1004	2007 N=1129	2003 N=1238	2005 N=1004	2007 N=1129
Theft	21	16	40	40	40	37	30	35	19	9	8	2
Physical attack or robbery	30	25	44	45	46	38	21	22	16	5	7	2
Burglary	21	17	36	40	44	39	30	31	21	9	8	3

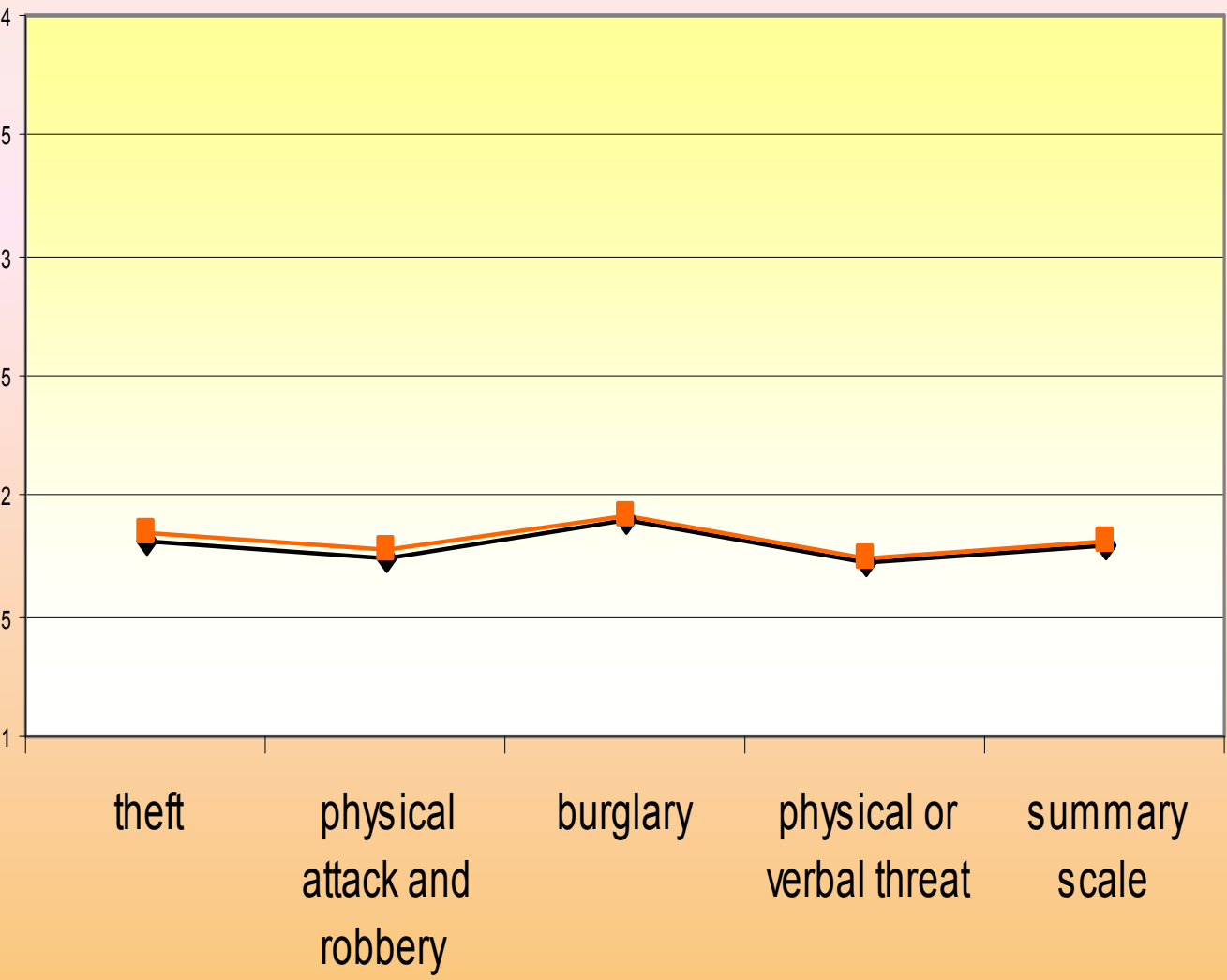
According to our data, Croatian citizens are far less concerned about becoming victims of all types of crimes (theft, robbery, burglary, physical attack) in 2007 than in 2003 and 2005, although according to the official data on crime reports (Statistical information, 2008) frequencies of crime reports are relatively stable (69 329 in 2003, 76 409 in 2005, and 73 082 in 2007 (Statistical information, 2008; 2005). Since data from 2007 are quite surprising and unrelated to the official crime trends future research is needed to conclude if we can talk about the increase in general feeling of safety in our country over the years, or this is just a temporary result.

Predictors and correlates of fear of crime

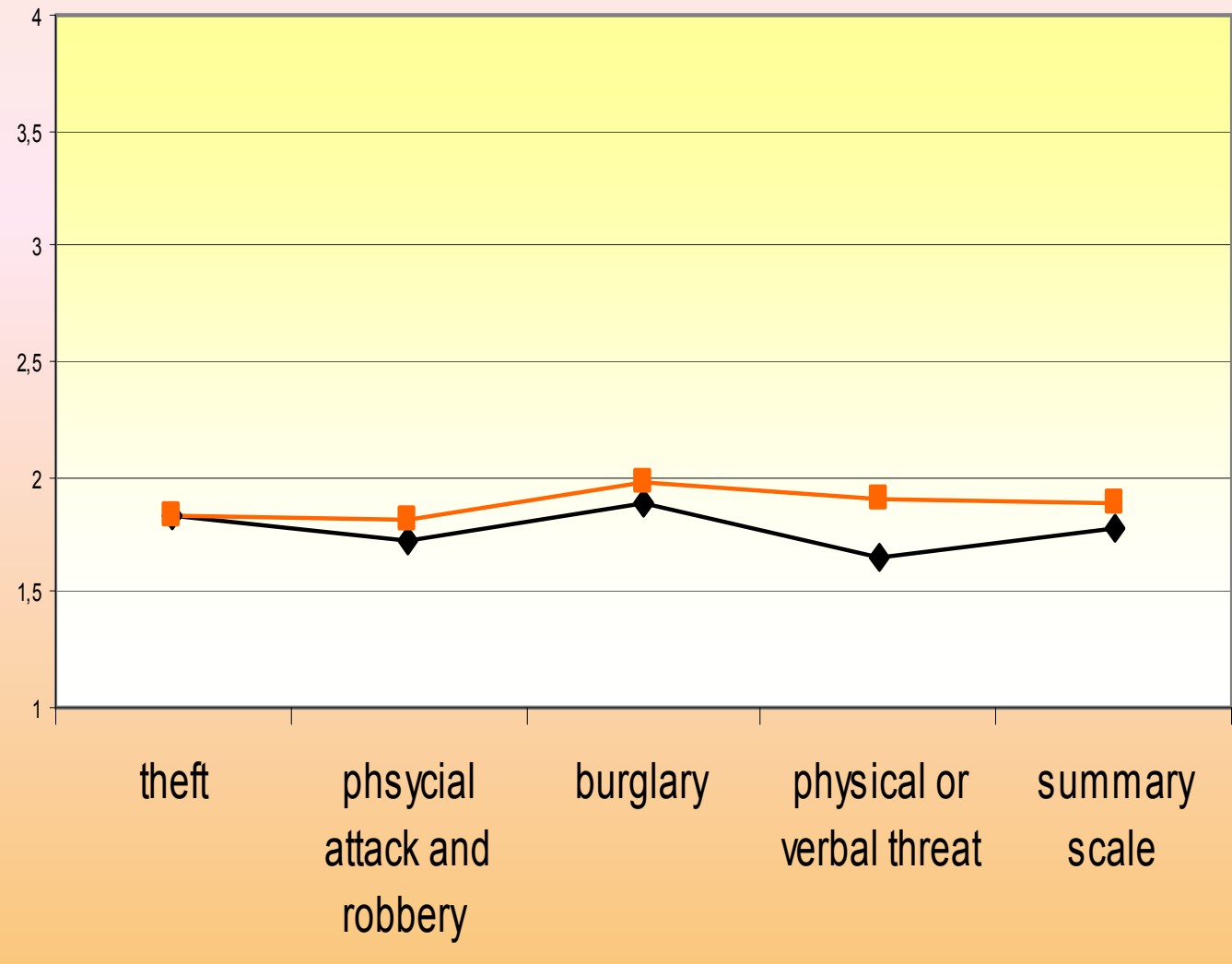
Univariate analysis of fear of crime with regard to demographic characteristics showed that:

- women reported significantly higher levels of fear of crime for all types of crime than men
- citizens older than 40 are less worried of becoming victim of crime in general, as well as becoming victim of burglary, and physical or verbal threat, than those younger than 40
- participants with higher education and those who live in highly urban areas reported higher level of fear of crime for all types of crime

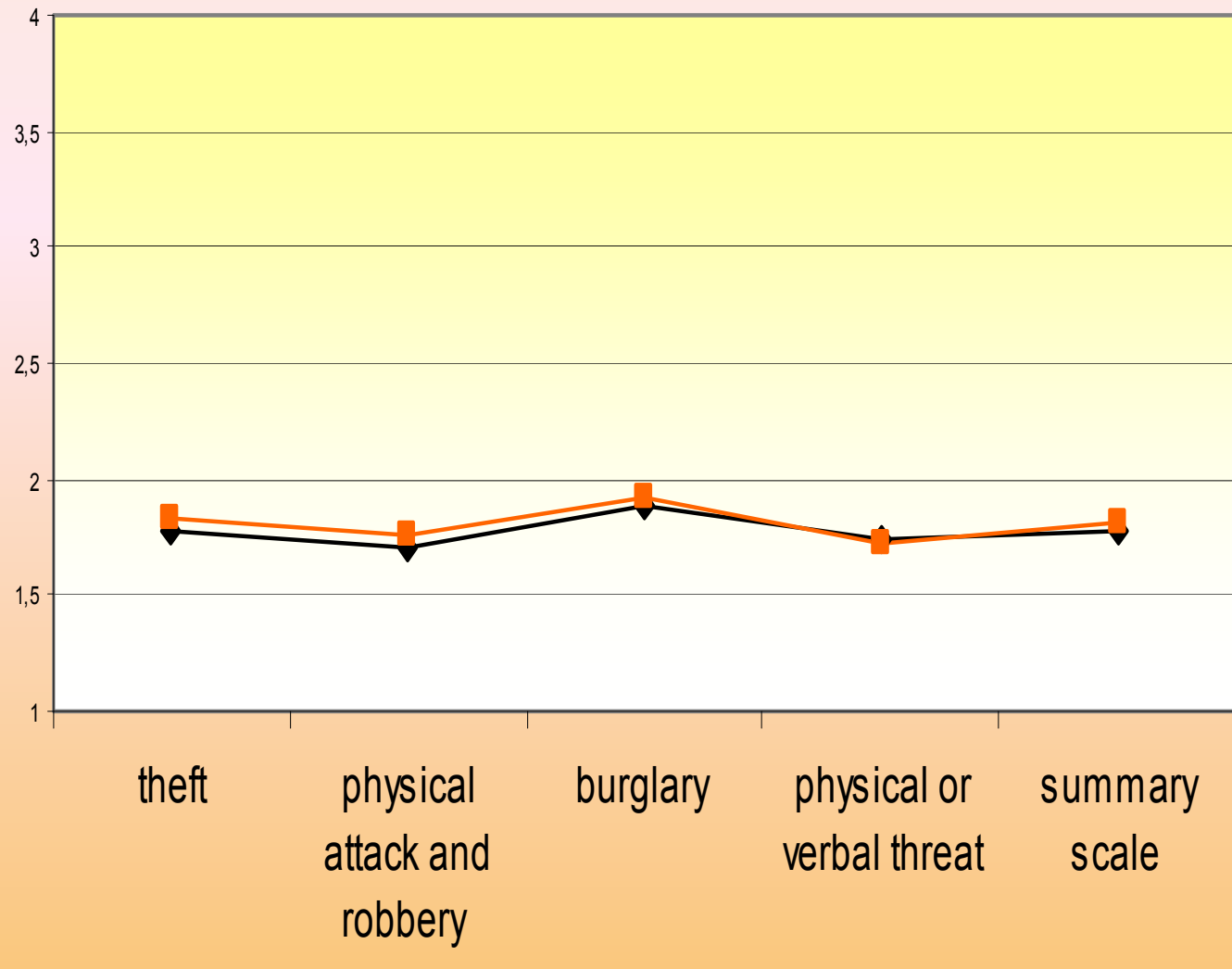
Graph 1. Differences in fear of crime with regard to viewing talk shows with politicians and public persons



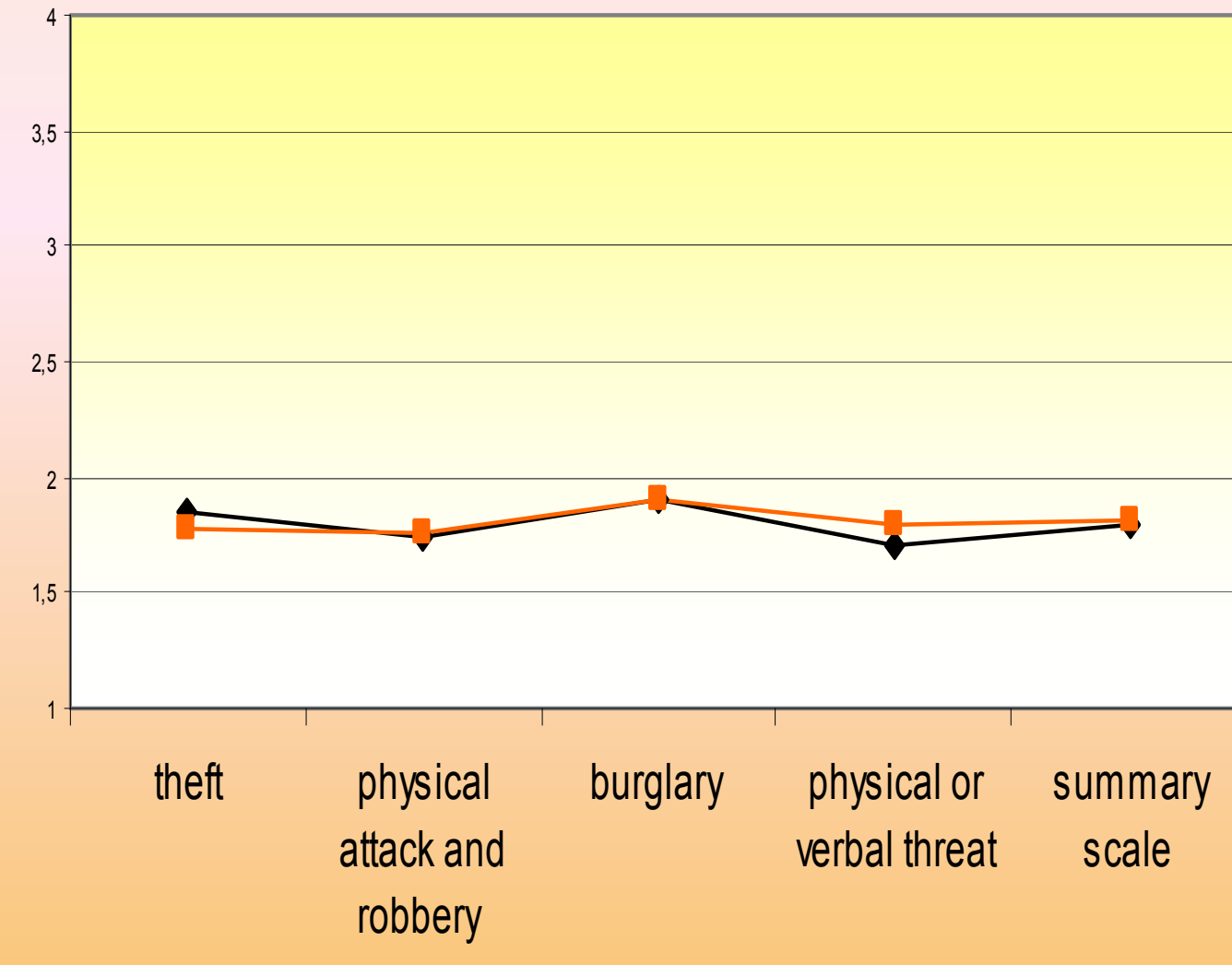
Graph 2. Differences in fear of crime with regard to viewing fictional crime series



Graph 3. Differences in fear of crime with regard to viewing daily informative news



Graph 4. Differences in fear of crime with regard to viewing documentaries with crime themes



Univariate analysis of fear of crime with regard to television viewing showed that:

- citizens who watch more frequently talk shows with politicians and public persons didn't show significantly higher levels of fear for all types of crime from citizens who watch less frequently talk shows with politicians and public persons
- citizens who watch more frequently fictional crime series showed significantly higher levels of fear for physical attack or robbery, physical or verbal threat and fear of crime in general
- citizens who watch more frequently daily informative news didn't show significantly higher levels of fear of crime from citizens who watch less frequently daily informative news
- citizens who watch more frequently documentaries with crime themes showed significantly higher levels of fear for physical or verbal threat

Table2 . Summary results of hierarchical regression analysis of fear of crime on demographic variables and frequency of television viewing

VARIABLES	Worry of...									
	theft		physical attack or robbery		burglary		physical or verbal threat		summary scale	
	β	ΔR ²	β	ΔR ²	β	ΔR ²	β	ΔR ²	β	ΔR ²
STEP 1 Demographics		.053**		.061**		.051**		.052**		.066**
gender	.123**		.107**		.103**		.090**		.119**	
age	.013		-.048		-.001		-.099**		-.038	
education	.109**		.076*		.103**		.047		.094**	
area type	.149**		.178**		.155**		.150		.176**	
STEP 2 TV viewing		.001		.004*		.001		.017**		.004*
informative content	.041		.030		.011		-.001		.023	
entertaining content	-.007		.053*		.023		.134**		.056*	
FULL MODEL		.054**		.065**		.052**		.069**		.070**

Hierarchical multiple regression indicated that fear of theft, robbery, burglary and fear of crime in general are significantly predicted by gender, education and urbanization. Only fear of physical and verbal treat is not significantly predicted by education and area type, but it is significantly predicted by respondent's age.

Variables related to the frequency of TV viewing entered in the second block, accounted additionally between 0.4% and 1.7% of the variances. Only frequency of viewing entertainment content on TV is a significant predictor of fear of robbery, physical and verbal treat and fear of crime in general. In general this results showed that frequency of watching different contents on TV does not have any substantial contribution on fear of crime over and above demographic characteristics.

CONCLUSION

Croatian citizens are far less concerned about becoming victims of all types of crimes in 2007 than in 2003 and 2005, although according to the official data on crime reports frequencies of crime reports are relatively stable. At the univariate level respondents who watch more frequently fictional or documentary crime series showed greater fear of becoming a victim of physical or verbal threat. Multivariate analysis also showed that effect of frequency of viewing crime related entertaining TV content on fear of crime cannot be fully explained by demographic characteristics, although this effect is in general pretty weak.