Community mobility: older people’s personal safety needs in the urban environment

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Overview

• Importance of research
• Virtual reality, user-led methodology
• Older people’s perceptions of their environments
• Recommendations for safer environments
• Discussion points
• Summary
Our project

- The design, management and layout of the environment can influence feelings of fear and safety
- Negative senses of personal safety and environments dominated by fear of crime can lead to avoidance behaviour and social exclusion
- Groups that feel ‘safe’ within an environment are more likely to make extensive use of the services available
- People scan the environment in such a way that contributes to their perceptions of safety
- Understanding how space-users interpret environmental spaces is crucial to designing safer environments

Aims:
- To identify the personal safety and fear of crime needs of older people in their communities by exploring how older people use their environment
- To develop and refine a package of user-led recommendations and design guidelines for a range of appropriate and cost-effective solutions intended to contribute to reducing crime and personal safety concerns
An identified need for this research

- Literature claims that older people often experience a high fear of crime
- There is often a discrepancy between fear and actual crime levels
- Previous research based mainly on quantitative techniques
- Crime surveys reduce perceptions to narrow responses
- Techniques do not provide insight into social or physical contexts of crime and fear of crime
A perceptual approach

• Perceptions are useful to explore situational and contextual details of fear of crime

• A qualitative perceptual approach provides revealing insights into how the design and maintenance of communities impact on older people’s personal safety
Importance of stakeholder involvement

“the missing discourse in work on crime and elderly people is the perceptions of elderly people themselves.”

Local context - Wales

• Wales has the oldest population in the UK
• The total number of people over the age of 60 in Wales is 657,700 (2001 census)
• This is 22.7% of the population as a whole
• Addressing the needs of older people is therefore an increasingly important concern, socially and politically
• Recognised in WAG’s Strategy for Older People in Wales (2003)
Methodology

• Identify two case study communities
• Liaise with local organisations and target groups
• Identify older people’s common routes in the community
• Assess each route based on a safety index
• Film each route using VR Panorama Tool
• Present the VRs in focus groups to discuss personal safety concerns and possible environmental refinements
• Framework of recommendations
Local context - RCT

- The research was carried out within the Borough of Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT), one of the most socially and economically deprived regions in Wales.

- RCT has a population of over 88,000 people over the age of 55.
Sampling frame – Borough of Rhondda Cynon Taff, South Wales

- Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000

- 11 wards from RCT are in top 50 most deprived in Wales
The selected case study communities

- Tylorstown
- Cwm Clydach
Questionnaires asked respondents:

• The two routes they used most frequently in their community

• Their experiences and key concerns over crime and safety in their community
Route identification

- To derive user-led routes to film in a systematic way
- Identified a sample of most commonly used routes from questionnaires
- Downloaded A0 size street community maps from DigiMap
- Manually drew all routes from questionnaires on to hard copy of maps
- Most commonly used routes had thickest lines
- Identified 6 representative pedestrian routes in each community
- Routes were amalgamated for ease of filming and presentation
Street maps
www.digimap.ac.uk

Tylorstown

Cwm Clydach

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VR Panorama Tool

Uses QuickTime software and digital photography to produce an interactive environmental stimulus
Virtual Reality Panorama filming of routes
Virtual Reality Panorama filming of routes

• Useful Stimulus for the group discussion
• Photographic representation is familiar to users
• Less directed than video
• More flexible than stills
• Easy for participants to manoeuvre through walkthroughs
Example route maps
Street Segment Personal Safety Index

- Binary framework
- Measure of environmental characteristics along each route
- Ten safety domains, including presence of CCTV, street lighting and vegetation
- Provides objective data to compare with user perceptions
### Sample SSPSI

#### SPARC Project
Exploring personal safety concerns of older people in deprived communities in South Wales

### Street Segment Personal Safety index (SSPSI) for Tyldesley

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute reference</th>
<th>Street Segment Personal Safety Index (PSSI)</th>
<th>Environmental attribute</th>
<th>SEGMENT NUMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LENGTH OF SEGMENT (FEET)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>CCTV present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Street lighting present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Presence of vegetation ever since (ancient vegetation)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Residential buildings facing route present (natural surveillance)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Free from indication of vandalism (bragging)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Presence of more than one pedestrian Refuge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Vertical access (surveillance access)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Presence of public bars (physical security)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Presence of pedestrian nodes – bus, train, taxi (activity generating, surveillance, territoiriality)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Presence of public transport nodes – bus, train, taxi (activity generating, surveillance, territoiriality)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Score of 1 = feature present
Score of 0 = feature absent
NI scale of 0 to 10, with 10 being the ‘best’ in terms of objective characteristics.*
Focus groups

- Four focus groups in each community
- Filmed on two levels:
  - Participant’s discussion
  - VRs they are shown on projector screen
Research Findings
Questionnaire analysis

• On average 50% of respondents had been a victim of crime
• Over two thirds of respondents were concerned for their personal safety
• On average half of the older people surveyed avoided parts of their community because of personal safety concerns
Focus group analysis
Key concerns with social environment

- Youth gangs
- Anti-social behaviour
- Violence
- Crime and a lack of police support
- Anti-social tenants
- Drug and alcohol problems
- Changing social values
- Transient communities
Key concerns with social environment – resident quotes

ID2: “Nowadays they haven’t got respect for the police, for the clergy, for teachers, for nothing.” F/85

ID2: “The house the other side of me….the people who own the houses…were living away and filing them up with unsatisfactory people really because they don’t care a fig. they don’t look after the place. It’s a terrible state.” F/85

ID2: “Ashamed to say I live in Tylorstown to be honest. I’ve lived up here 46 years since I was married and to be honest it’s disgusting. It’s gone worse.” F/66

ID3: “If you do tell ‘em off you have a mouthful of language.” M/66

ID5: “Put it this way if we see a policeman walking, well we’ll get a camera to take a photo!” F/71
Key concerns with physical environment

- Gathering places
- Run-down communities
- Litter and fly-tipping
- Poorly maintained gardens
Key concerns with physical environment – resident quotes

ID4: “When an area’s neglected that’s when the problems start.”
F/71

ID1: “The litter in the Valley’s, it’s incredible. It’s the mental attitude, it’s the apathy.” M/67

ID1: “Years ago the people living down there…were all elderly. Their gardens were tidy…but now…” F/86
Key concerns with physical environment

Cwm Clydach: gullys

Tylorstown: poorly maintained garden
Perceived problem areas
Perceived safe areas

Lake area 1

The lake area scored poorly on the safety index because it was isolated from residential streets, had no lighting, was surrounded by vegetation, provided little visibility into the distance and wasn’t near a transport node.

Despite this participants thought the lake area felt safe and had few concerns for their personal safety.

This suggests that the lack of physical measures to reduce crime and fear do not always indicate an unsafe area.
Solutions to address personal safety concerns

• Higher police presence
• More CCTV
• Improved street lighting
• Better maintained environments
• Alley-gating
• Improved environmental design
• Parental responsibility and children exhibiting respect
• Effective crime reduction policies
• Tenant checks
• Social and community change
Key discussion points

• Social environment main concern
• Built environment not a major primary problem because of familiarity and local knowledge
• Many respondents didn’t go out at night but didn’t perceive this as limiting their activities
• Main factors influencing perceptions of personal safety were concern over gangs of youths, drugs and rented properties
• SSPSI suggests that environmental design or physical environment alone will not make a place safer if the social element is not simultaneously tackled.
• Environmental design will not make a place safer if the social element is not simultaneously tackled
Practical outcomes based on user-led research:

• Study provided a new focus in safety and crime research by emphasising an engagement with key stakeholders
• It allowed older people’s personal safety to be explored with the end-user guiding the discussions
• It provided a powerful understanding of the personal safety concerns and needs of older people in deprived communities
• Resulted in an informed and user-led framework of recommendations for personal safety improvement with specific environmental characteristics to target
• We hope that this will contribute to more inclusive communities and improved quality of life for older people