

Renouncing going out alone: An avoidance behaviour affecting 17% of the population

For safety reasons, individuals may develop specific behaviours or attitudes so as to stay away from places, people or situations that they perceive as unsafe (DuBow et al., 1979). Known as “avoidance behaviours”, these precautions take different forms - in some cases leading to individuals no longer going out alone. They can be “dysfunctional”, however, which means they do not provide sufficient reassurances and adversely affect quality of life (Gray et al., 2011). Such precautions can also have “hidden costs”, such as reducing mobility (Gray et al., 2011).

Through the “Living environment and security” crime victimisation survey (CVS), it is possible to study several aspects of the phenomenon of renouncing going out alone for safety reasons. Between 2007 and 2017, more than 170,000 respondents aged 14 and over, living in Metropolitan France, were asked about this subject. The main aim of this Note is to present a descriptive analysis of this phenomenon as it occurs in Metropolitan France, but not to identify the associated predictors.

Nearly one person in six (17%) decides to renounce going out alone for safety reasons. This form of avoidance changes depending on personal characteristics: it is more common among women, as well as the elderly and young people. A relatively larger proportion of victims avoid going out - especially when the offence they suffered happened in their neighbourhood. Finally, individuals have a greater tendency to avoid going out when they feel unsafe in their neighbourhood or embarrassed by the observation of phenomena involving drugs and “heavy drinking”.

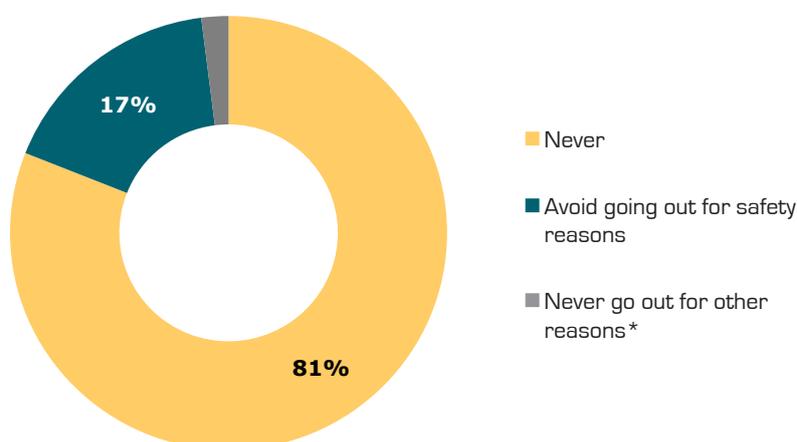
17% of individuals no longer go out alone

Although the majority of individuals declare to never avoid going out alone for safety reasons (81%), nearly one person in six resorts to this form of avoidance, whether they do so often, sometimes or very seldom (17%) [1]. Moreover, 2% declare to never go out for reasons other than safety.

The evening is the main time when individuals avoid going out. Indeed, among those who develop this reaction, 50% declare to avoid going out from early evening, and 39% at night only. Around 6% avoid going out most of the time - including during daytime.

For more than a quarter of individuals who avoid going out, this form of avoidance is associated with the presence of groups perceived as worrying near their home (28%).

1 Avoiding going out alone for safety reasons



Scope: Individuals aged 14 and over, living in Metropolitan France
Source: CVS survey, 2007 - 2017, Insee - ONDRP - SSMIS

*: the exact wording of this option (translated from French) is: «never go out for reasons other than safety»

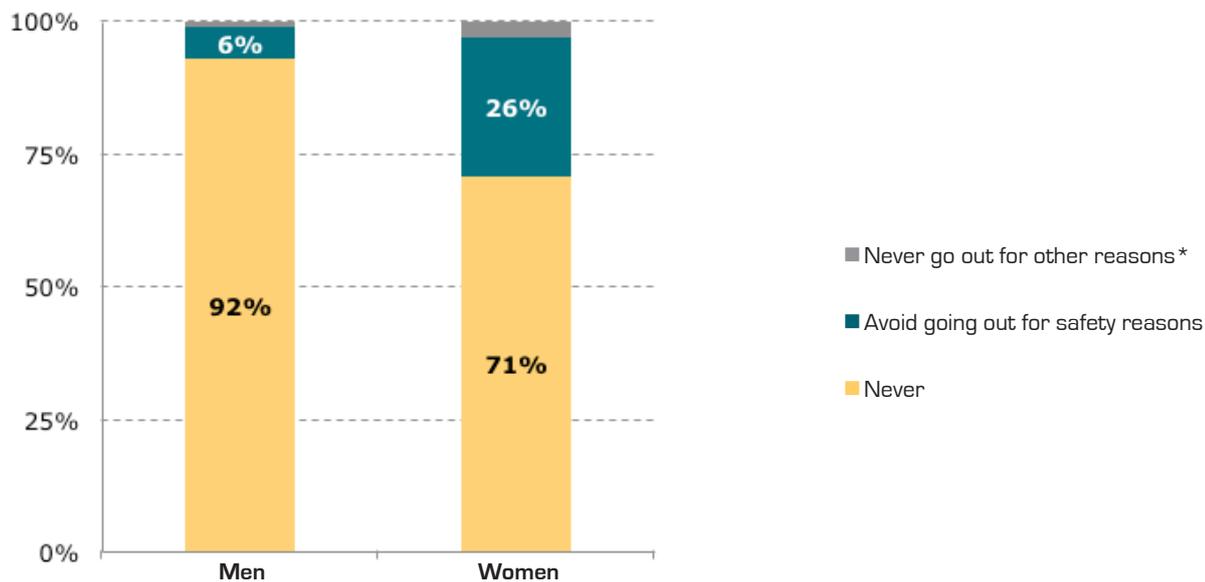
26% of women adopt this form of avoidance

The tendency to avoid going out alone can be more or less common depending on personal characteristics. Accordingly, such reaction is more widespread among women: over a quarter declare to adopt this form of avoidance (26%, versus 6% of men) [2]. Among those who develop this behaviour, around one woman in two avoids going out from early evening (52%, versus 43% of men). However, among such people, men have a greater tendency to avoid going out because of groups perceived as worrying near their home (35%, versus 26% of women).

The elderly (aged 66 and over) and young people (14-25 year olds) avoid going out more often (22% and 20% respectively, versus 17% on average). Among those who adopt this form of avoidance, nearly two-thirds of elderly people avoid going out from early evening (63%, versus 50% on average).

Individuals in the 14-25 y/o and 26-45 y/o age ranges, meanwhile, feel more worried about groups near their home. Among those who practise this form of avoidance, 30% and 32% of them avoid going out for this reason respectively (versus 28% on average).

2 Avoiding going out alone for safety reasons, by gender



Scope: Individuals aged 14 and over, living in Metropolitan France
Source: CVS survey, 2007 - 2017, Insee - ONDRP - SSMSI

*: the exact wording of this option (translated from French) is: «never go out for reasons other than safety»

39% of victims of violent theft in their neighbourhood renounce going out alone

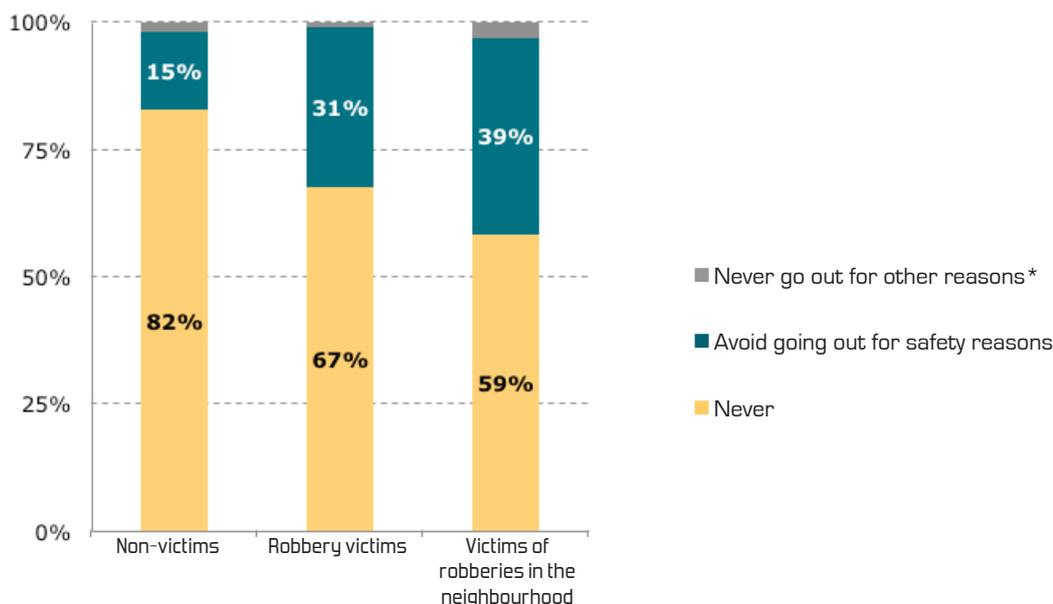
Individuals who have been victims of a personal offence (excluding sexual violence)¹ in the past 24 months are more likely to avoid going out alone. This reaction affects more than 30% of victims of violent theft (31%), and nearly a quarter of victims of other offences (23-24%). Avoidance is even more common when the offence happened in the neighbourhood. Accordingly, nearly 40% of victims of violent theft - the most recent of which took place in their neighbourhood - renounce going out (39%) [3].

In addition, victims are more likely to avoid going out alone most of the time - including during daytime. This particularly affects victims of physical violence (13%), robberies (11%), and threats (10%).

For most victims, avoidance is related to the presence of groups perceived as worrying near their home - especially if the offence happened in the neighbourhood. This is particularly the case for victims of violent theft (55%), threats (52%), as well as physical violence and insults (50%), the most recent of which took place in their neighbourhood. Either the perpetrators may themselves be part of the groups perceived as worrying, or the victims may associate them with such groups.

(1) Such offences include the  violence or threats, thefts without violence or threats, physical violence, threats, and insults.

③ Renouncing going out alone for safety reasons, among victims of violent theft



Scope: Individuals aged 14 and over, living in Metropolitan France
 Source: CVS survey, 2007 - 2017, Insee - ONDRP - SSMSI
 *: the exact wording of this option (translated from French) is: «never go out for reasons other than safety»

44% of individuals who do not feel safe in their neighbourhood develop this form of avoidance

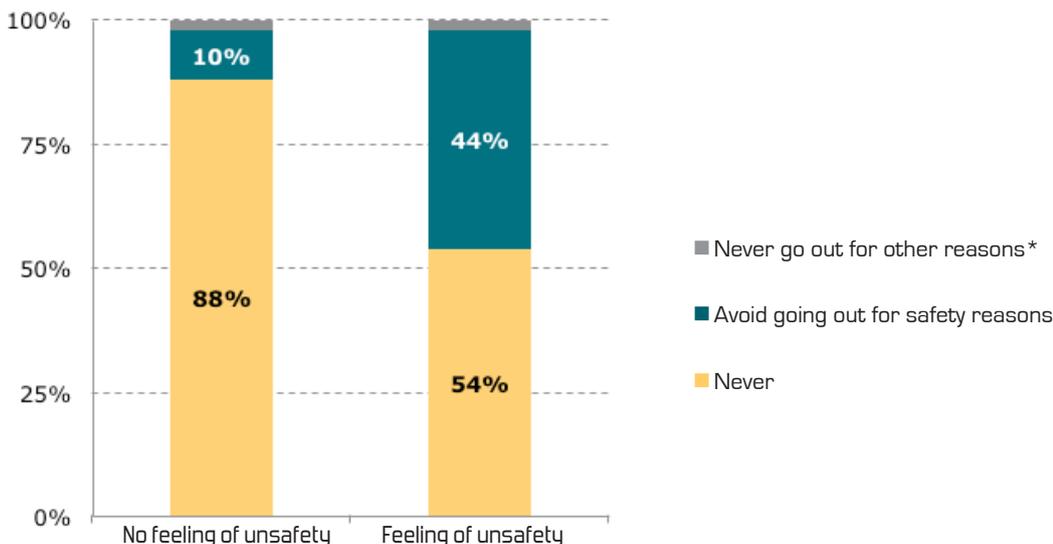
Avoiding going out alone is especially common among individuals who feel unsafe in their neighbourhood, as well as those who are embarrassed by the observation of phenomena involving drugs and “heavy drinking”².

Individuals who declare feeling unsafe in their neighbourhood³ have a greater tendency to avoid going out. Indeed,

44% of them adopt this practice, compared with just 10% of those who declare never feeling unsafe [③]. When individuals who feel unsafe no longer go out, the majority of them adopt this behaviour from early evening (53%, versus 47% of others). For 42% of people who feel unsafe and renounce going out, this practice is related to the presence of groups perceived as worrying near their home (versus 11% of others).

Beyond fear of crime, this avoidance behaviour is more common among individuals who are embarrassed by the observation of local phenomena involving drugs (e.g.

③ Renouncing going out alone for safety reasons, according to the feeling of unsafety in the neighbourhood



Scope: Individuals aged 14 and over, living in Metropolitan France
 Source: CVS survey, 2007 - 2017, Insee - ONDRP - SSMSI
 *: the exact wording of this option (translated from French) is: «never go out for reasons other than safety»

(2) See Notes no. 1 and 2 of the ONDRP on bother caused by the observation of phenomena involving drugs and “heavy drinking” in the neighbourhood:
 (3) i.e. those who declare feeling unsafe often, from time to time, or seldom.

consumption, trafficking, litter) or “heavy drinking” (e.g.: assaults, vandalism, litter). Indeed, this behaviour affects 30% of individuals embarrassed by drug-related phenomena (*versus 17% of others*); and 29% of those embarrassed by phenomena involving “heavy drinking” (*versus 16% of others*)⁴. Where embarrassed individuals no longer go out, the majority of them adopt this behaviour from early evening (55% of those who are embarrassed by drug-related phenomena, 54% of those who are embarrassed by phenomena involving “heavy drinking”). Most people who feel embarrassed and stop going out associate this behaviour with the presence of groups perceived as worrying near their home (60% of those embarrassed by drug-related phenomena, 52% of those embarrassed by phenomena involving “heavy drinking”).

Avoidance therefore appears to be related with objective and subjective aspects of unsafety / insecurity. From the CVS survey

does not provide information about the temporality of certain events or feelings. With respect to victimisation for example, it is not possible to determine with certainty whether the victims renounced going out after experiencing an offence, or if they had already adopted this practice beforehand.

In general, avoidance behaviours are ambivalent. No longer going out alone can reduce the risk of victimisation or exposure to certain phenomena. But since this practice is based upon the anticipation of danger, it can also create a greater sense of fear (Liska et al., 1988). Someone might avoid going out because they feel unsafe in their neighbourhood; but they might also feel unsafe because it has been a while since they ventured out alone.

Further analysis is therefore required to examine the links between this avoidance behaviour, victimisation, and perceptions of insecurity in more detail.

Methodological overview

This study has been carried out from the “Living environment and security” crime victimisation survey (CVS), which is conducted annually by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (Insee) and the National Observatory of Crime and Criminal Justice (ONDRP) since 2007, and with the Ministerial Statistical Department for Internal Security (SSMSI) since 2014. Nearly 16,000 individuals aged 14 and over, living in Metropolitan France, are questioned each year. Data are weighted by the Insee so that the findings are representative of the general population.

The survey allows estimating how often the respondents renounce going out alone for safety reasons. When they avoid going out, the survey determines at what time of day they adopt this practice; and whether such behaviour is due to there being groups perceived as worrying near their home.

Regarding victimisation, the survey estimates the number of people declaring to have been a victim of thefts with or without violence, physical violence, threats, or insults in the past 24 months. One question allows determining whether the most recent offence of each type took place in the neighbourhood.

Lastly, as regards perceptions of insecurity, the survey estimates how often the respondents declare feeling unsafe in their neighbourhood. When the respondents declare having observed phenomena involving drugs or “heavy drinking” in their neighbourhood, questions also assess how embarrassed they feel by these. For the questions about respondents feeling embarrassed, the study period was limited to 2009-2017 due to methodological changes.

Bibliography

- DuBow, F., McCabe, E., & Kaplan, G. (1979). *Reactions to crime: A critical review of the literature*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.
- Gray, E., Jackson, J., & Farrall, S. (2011). Feelings and functions in the fear of crime: Applying a new approach to victimisation insecurity. *British Journal of Criminology*, 51 (1), 75-94.
- Liska, A.E., A. Sanchirico, & Reed, M. D. (1988). Fear of crime and constrained behavior: Specifying and estimating a reciprocal effects model. *Social Forces*, 66 (3), 827-837.

⁽⁴⁾ Embarrassed individuals are those who describe these phenomena as being bothersome or very bothersome. “Other” individuals are those who describe them as being not very or not at all bothersome or who do not specify.