

# **From Questionnaires to Eye-Tracking in Studying Fear of Crime in Urban Environments: A Discussion on VR for a Next Step**

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## **Abstract:**

Fear of crime is a classic theme in criminology, with researchers, since the 1960s, using victimization surveys to measure the level and extent of it. However, multiple problems regarding this type of measurement have been pointed out: epistemological, conceptual, operational, and technical. Over time, our team and previous researchers made meaningful efforts to address these challenges and improve the measurement of this subject, including the use of photographs in surveys, assessing the subjects' physiological

responses in laboratory settings, and progressing to more immersive and objective methods, such as eye-tracking. Given pictures' less ecological validity than other stimuli, researchers have recently turned to virtual reality (VR) as a potential next step. This presentation aims to present the results obtained in the studies conducted in Portugal regarding this topic, tracing a methodological evolution from classic self-reported questionnaires to those that included (manipulated) photographs and, more recently, moved the measurement of this dimension to eye-tracker. Furthermore, it will outline the fragilities of each method and how this sequential path strengthened the study of fear of crime. Finally, it will discuss the importance of incorporating VR into our studies and how this tool can enhance the measure of fear of crime in urban settings.

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