

## Walking Alone at Night: Do You Feel Safe?

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

Walking alone at night is Americans' number one fear, according to the Chapman Survey on American Fears, conducted among 1,500 adults by the Wilkenson College of Humanities and Social Sciences of Chapman University in Orange, Calif. In the U.S., 37 percent of adults are afraid to walk alone at night within a mile of their home, Gallup's 2014 Annual Crime Survey reports.

Personal safety is the number one factor in satisfaction with the place you live, measured specifically by how safe you feel from crime when walking in your neighborhood after dark, as reported by CityLab analysts, using data from the Atlantic Media/Siemens State of the City Poll. Fear of crime constrains behavior, restricts freedom, and affects the local economy. In places where there has been a period of serious crime, fear spreads about walking alone after dark, so dining out and shopping decrease, people do not take jobs that require them to stay out after dark, and the neighborhood economy suffers.

Of the top 50 U.S. metropolitan areas studied in Gallup's 2012 World Poll, Philadelphia showed up in the middle, number 24, with 27 percent of respondents saying they did not feel safe walking alone at night in their neighborhood. Residents of Memphis and New Orleans top the list, while residents of Minneapolis, Denver, and Raleigh report the least fear. The FBI's violent crime statistics for these metropolitan areas correlate with residents' feelings of safety.

Men and women differ significantly on this issue. Nearly half (45 percent) of women said they did not feel safe walking alone at night, compared with 27 percent of men, as stated in the 2014 Gallup Annual Crime survey. The gender difference was even greater in another survey: twice as many women as men reported being afraid, according to the 2012 General Social Survey, conducted by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center. Notably, women's perceived sense of danger has declined since the 1970s, while men's fear has remained the same.

How does fear of walking alone at night compare across countries? According to Gallup's 2012 World Poll, 25 percent of adults in the largest U.S. metropolitan areas



Statistics show that while Philadelphia falls about midway among the 50 largest cities in the US for fear of walking alone at night, Center City is considered a safe neighborhood.

reported they were afraid to walk alone at night in the city where they live. The percentage was much higher in Venezuela and South Africa and much lower for residents of Canada and China.

The current Better Life Index website, created by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, consisting of 36 developed countries), shows that in the U.S. 26 percent of people do not feel safe walking alone at night, lower than the average of 31 percent for all member countries. (This data set is not limited to metropolitan areas.)

Feelings of insecurity have grown despite a reduction in assault rates over the past five years. The Chapman survey reports that a majority of Americans fear crimes such as child abduction, gang violence, and sexual assault, and believe these crimes have increased over the past 20 years. However, according to police and FBI records, crime in America has actually lessened over that period. In 2013 on average, 3.8 violent crimes were reported for every 1,000 residents, a decrease of 4.4 percent compared to the previous year. Violent crimes include homicide, rape, aggravated assault, and robbery.

What are the odds of being a victim of violent crime? Center City is rated one of

the 10 safest neighborhoods in Philadelphia by NeighborhoodScout.com, a website that summarizes data from the FBI Uniform Crime Report. According to this source, in 2013 (the most recently released FBI data), in Philadelphia, 11 violent crimes were reported for every 1,000 residents. You could estimate that your chance of being a victim, on average for Philadelphia as a whole, is about one percent, but it's actually less if you are in a low-crime neighborhood like Center City. (Data are not separated by crimes committed indoors vs. outdoors.)

Are violent crimes committed more frequently at night? The answer is yes, at least by adult offenders. The U.S. Department of Justice analyzed data from the FBI National Incident-Based Reporting System and determined that the most violent crimes committed by adults (over age 18) are between 8 p.m. and midnight. In contrast, violent crimes by juveniles occur most frequently from 3 to 7 p.m., with the peak between 3 and 4 p.m., when they get out of school. (Data are not separated by indoor vs. outdoor.)

Media reporting of just one violent crime heightens the perception of danger, especially if it occurs in your neighborhood. Perhaps the best advice is don't feel afraid, but be alert and avoid unnecessary risk.