

Crime, Women and Information and Communications Technologies: Everyday Management of Insecurity in Santiago and Buenos Aires

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Abstract. In recent decades, crime has become a public concern and a daily issue in Latin America. While much research has focused on organized crime and crime prevention, less attention has been given to how crime affects the everyday lives of young women in cities. This study, based on interviews with women in Santiago, Chile, and Buenos Aires, Argentina, reveals that their primary concerns are street harassment and sexual crimes, which mainly impact their mobility in the city. Women avoid relying on mass media for information, instead turning to their mothers and grandmothers as primary sources of knowledge and fear. Chilean women express higher levels of concern, significantly restricting their activities, particularly leisure, compared to Argentine women. Despite these differences, women in both countries have adopted technologies for self-protection, although their lives remain deeply affected by the fear of crime.

Key Words: crime, fear of crime, women, urban mobilities, Information Communications Technologies (ICT), Latin America

Kriminal, ženske in informacijsko-komunikacijske tehnologije: vsakodnevno soočanje z negotovostjo v Santiago in Buenos Airesu

Povzetek. V zadnjih desetletjih je kriminal postal pereč javni problem in vsakodnevna skrb v Latinski Ameriki. Čeprav je bilo veliko raziskav osredotočenih na organizirani kriminal in njegovo preprečevanje, je

manj pozornosti namenjene vplivu kriminala na vsakodnevno življene mlađih žensk v urbanih okoljih. Ta raziskava, ki temelji na intervjujih z ženskami iz Santiaga v Čilu ter Buenos Airesa v Argentini, razkriva, da so njihove glavne skrbi nadlegovanje na ulici in spolni zločini, ki pomembno vplivajo na njihovo mobilnost v mestu. Namesto zanašanja na množične medije glede pridobivanja informacij se te ženske obračajo na svoje matere in babice kot primarne vire znanja ter previdnostnih ukrepov. Čilenske ženske v primerjavi z Argentinkami izkazujejo večjo stopnjo zaskrbljenosti, kar pomembno omejuje njihove aktivnosti, zlasti preživljjanje prostega časa. Kljub razlikam v zaznavi so ženske v obeh državah sprejele različne tehnologije za samozaščito, vendar so njihova življenja še vedno globoko zaznamovana s strahom pred kriminalom.

Ključne besede: kriminal, strah pred kriminalom, ženske, urbana mobilnost, informacijsko-komunikacijske tehnologije (IKT), Latinska Amerika

Introduction

I always do several things ... I exercise after work, but in winter, for example, I significantly reduce my activities because, since it gets dark earlier, I prefer to get home while it's still light.¹ [Young woman, Santiago, Chile]

The response of this young woman from Santiago de Chile to the question of how crime affects her daily life exemplifies the experiences of many young Latin American women. Currently, Latin America is the most violent region in the world (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2021; 2023). Its cities report high levels of criminal activity, a situation exacerbated by factors such as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the penetration of organized crime into various territories. The United Nations Global Drug Report (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2021) highlights the prominent role Latin America plays in post-pandemic drug trafficking dynamics, including an increase in illicit drug shipments and greater use of land and river routes for trafficking, contributing to a rise in homicidal violence. Thus, Latin American democracies today face the spread of organized criminal violence throughout the region. Even countries like Chile and Argentina, which

¹ Editor's note: All quotations originally published in languages other than English have been translated by the authors. Editor's note.

have historically shown better indicators of lethal violence, are now encountering new criminal patterns linked to transnational crime.

This scenario has a direct correlation with fear of crime, which shapes the daily lives of Latin Americans. Various surveys report increasing concerns about crime in the region, particularly in Southern Cone countries such as Chile and Argentina. According to the 2024 IPSOS survey on attitudes toward crime and law enforcement, 61% of Chileans and 45% of Argentinians cited crime and violence as their primary public concerns. These figures have risen compared to previous years, with Chile ranking second in Latin America, despite being relatively safe in terms of homicide rates compared to other countries in the region. The 2023 Latino-barómetro survey (<https://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp>) also highlights the growing fear of crime in both Argentina and Chile, where women, in particular, report significantly higher levels of fear than men. In Argentina, for example, nearly twice as many women as men report feeling afraid.

The gap between actual crime rates and the perception of insecurity is evident at both the national and individual levels. Not all individuals experience the same level of fear; factors such as class, age, ethnicity, and, especially, gender explain these differences (Lee and Mythen 2017). These disparities have been extensively explored through social and criminological studies since the 1970s (Hale 1996; Ceccato 2011; Ceccato and Nalla 2020). Evidence suggests that individual, social, and environmental factors influence the perception of fear of crime. At the individual level, sociodemographic variables such as gender and age significantly affect the level of fear reported, with older adults and women exhibiting higher levels of fear (Hale 1996; Pain 2000). Various analyses confirm that women consistently report higher levels of fear, while young people, despite being more frequently victimized, tend to express less fear.

At the social level, income levels are a noteworthy finding in the literature, although no clear trends are observed: 'International studies show slightly higher fear levels among lower-income groups, particularly due to greater social vulnerability, living in less protected areas, and difficulty replacing stolen items' (Kessler 2011, 90, note 12). Furthermore, environmental and community factors have proven to be key determinants in the perception of fear: neighbourhood disorganization, the presence of incivilities, low collective efficacy, physical deterioration, and interpersonal trust are consistent explanations in this regard (Sampson 2012). In terms of the physical environment, theories suggest that labyrinthine ur-

ban designs, poor lighting, and a lack of natural surveillance make public spaces appear more unsafe, particularly for women (Jeffery 1971; Pain 2001; Navarrete-Hernandez et al. 2023; Luneke Reyes, Trebilcock, and Robles, 2020).

Regarding gender, it is well known that women report greater fear, which is also associated with dealing not only with property crimes in public spaces but also with situations of a sexual nature (Walklate 2017). Gender dynamics in public spaces lead to specific ways of inhabiting the city. As analyses of fear of crime have shown, the violence women perceive in public spaces and flow areas creates a daily sense of insecurity (Kessler 2009). From a feminist perspective, fear of crime generates immobility for women (leading them to avoid going out) and is rooted in a context of unequal power relations between men and women that sustain dominant masculinity in public spaces (Srivastava 2012; Loukaitou-Sideris 2012). Thus, women's mobility and safety are interdependent because many women feel unsafe when they travel the city. A global study of 28 cities revealed that women were 10% more likely than men to feel unsafe in the subway and 6% more likely to feel unsafe on buses (Ouali et al. 2020). Another global report from 2022 indicated that 32% of surveyed women felt unsafe in urban spaces; 97% of young women in the UK reported having been sexually assaulted in public spaces, 55% of them felt unsafe using public transportation in Brazil, and 12% of them had experienced harassment in public bathrooms in EU countries (ARUP 2022).

In Chile and Argentina, a 2018 study on women's safety in public spaces revealed very high levels of fear of crime on public transportation, especially among women. In Buenos Aires, 72% of women reported feeling unsafe on public transport, compared to 58% of men. A similar situation occurred in Santiago, where 73% of women reported feeling unsafe, compared to 59% of men. The causes of this perceived insecurity vary by gender, with women highlighting the presence of men on buses and trains and the threat of sexual assault as significant factors influencing their fear. Researchers have linked these differences to the experience of sexual harassment in public spaces. According to the aforementioned study, 89% of women surveyed in Santiago and Buenos Aires reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment in their lifetime, with 49% having experienced it within the last 12 months. This includes harassment on the way to or from public transport, as well as within vehicles themselves (Allen et al. 2018).

The effects of fear of crime are numerous. Fear of crime reduces so-

cial interactions and fosters interpersonal distrust (Sampson 2012); it encourages the fortification of communities, further fragmenting cities and increasing social isolation (Caldeira 2000). In the case of women, the evidence highlights that perceived insecurity in public spaces negatively affects their mental health, causing daily anxiety and stress. Additionally, experiences of violence on public transport limit women's economic opportunities, as they tend to reject job offers that are too far away. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has shown that deficient and unsafe transportation reduces women's participation in the labour market by up to 16% (Oficina Regional para América Latina y el Caribe 2017).

As a result, recent research has focused on the processes, practices, and meanings that crime produces socially. As highlighted by Vania Ceccato (2011), Sandra L. Walklate (2018), and Vania Ceccato and Mahesh K. Nalla (2020), fear of crime should be addressed in terms of its productive capacity – understanding not only the causes but also the social and spatial effects it generates. Within this subfield, analysis has focused on the measures and practices that individuals and communities use to negotiate the anxiety and uncertainty produced by violence and crime in their immediate urban environments. The concept of 'managing insecurity' relates to sociological theories of risk management, which assume that insecurity is the result of human initiative and can be discouraged by actions that limit criminal behaviour and prevent risks and threats in public spaces. Villarreal (2015) refers to these as 'logistics of fear,' small everyday tactics that allow individuals to control perceived threats. The literature generally identifies two types of logistics: evasive and defensive. Evasive practices enable individuals to isolate themselves from risks and dangers. If the individual knows their environment well, this knowledge becomes a resource that allows them to anticipate emerging risks and threats on an individual basis (Auyero and Kilanski 2015).

These practices generally affect two aspects of daily life: mobility and the use of public spaces. In insecure cities or neighbourhoods, people spend more time at home, leading to the abandonment or disuse of urban spaces meant for socialization, such as parks or streets, due to the fear of victimization. Additionally, insecurity restricts individuals' mobility, as the more dangerous a route is considered, the less it is used, and individuals limit the times they venture out, preferring to use private vehicles (Kessler 2009). In high-violence cities, community caravans (travelling together) or moving in groups on public transport are common strategies (Villarreal 2015). Parents also avoid letting their children travel

alone, escorting them to and from bus stops, and constantly monitoring their movements and those of their friends (Luneke Reyes 2021).

Defensive practices, on the other hand, aim to protect individuals from danger. On a personal level, people take self-defence classes or carry weapons such as knives or firearms. To ensure their safety, they install geo-referencing systems on their cars or electronic devices (Auyero and Kilanski 2015). Protecting streets and homes is also common using enclosures (bars, gates, locks) or socio-technological systems (alarms, dogs, etc.), which are mobilized individually or in cooperation with neighbours. The use of WhatsApp, apps like SoSafe in Chile, or community alarms is widespread in various Latin American neighbourhoods, serving as platforms where neighbours inform each other of potential risks in the area (Torres 2017). In gated communities, common practices include hiring private security, building perimeter walls, installing gates at access points, surveillance cameras, and any devices that make the community resemble a fortress (Breetzke, Landman, and Cohn 2014; Grundström 2017; Lemanski 2004; Tedong et al. 2014). Conducting daily activities in the presence of such devices creates a sense of safety for individuals (Kessler 2009).

In the case of women, who are more frequently victims of sexual violence, they exhibit more preventive behaviours and a wider variety of strategies to manage insecurity in daily life than men. The 'She Moves Safely' study from 2018 also highlights that women, especially those with low to medium incomes, tend to plan and use more expensive transportation options, such as taxis or similar services, to avoid public transport (Allen et al. 2018, 82). In this sense, studies reveal that the masculinization of public spaces and areas of movement shapes women's mobility patterns and inhibits them (Koskela and Pain 2000). The specialized literature shows that, in general, these practices lead to restricted mobility, influence decisions about where to live, limit transportation options, and reduce the walkability of cities (Navarrete-Hernandez et al. 2023; Herrmann-Lunecke, Mora, and Vejares 2021). Specifically, 'areas of access and walkability to public transportation are marked as the most dangerous in the urban landscape, particularly for women' (Luneke Reyes, Trebilcock, and Robles 2020, 163).

A less explored aspect in this body of knowledge is the detailed study of insecurity management practices and their relationship with new information technologies and their use in daily life. Although the connection between fear of crime, gender, and safety has been widely addressed, and

the analysis of urban mobility has recently reintroduced the gender gap in this aspect of everyday life, less attention has been given to how technological advances allow women to negotiate more easily with crime in daily life, particularly in cities with higher levels of fear of crime. In this context, we ask how social information technologies are shaping the everyday security management practices of young women. Our main hypothesis is that technologies today mediate fear of crime and urban living, especially shaping mobility practices and access to the city, allowing women to cope better with the fear that crime generates.

To answer this question, we conducted a qualitative comparative study in Santiago and Buenos Aires in 2023. Both cities share similar characteristics as capital cities of two Southern Cone countries in Latin America, exhibiting relatively low levels of lethal violence compared to their regional peers. They are large cities with similar degrees of urbanization. The differences between them are directly related to the varying levels of fear of crime reported in international surveys. For both cases, we reviewed and analysed documents and specialized literature; applied the same information collection instrument; and selected a similar sample of participants. Thirty women aged 18 to 29 were interviewed, occupying various roles (students, workers, caregivers) and living in different areas of the city (at varying distances from the centre of their respective cities). The interviews were structured around key themes. First, we sought to understand the women's everyday mobility, paying attention to the means of transport they used to navigate the city. Once we had an idea of their modes of mobility, we delved into their perception of insecurity regarding their movement within the city, identifying the factors that influenced these perceptions and how they were constructed. Finally, we sought to understand the measures and actions they took to manage their mobility, especially those measures that made them feel safer, with a particular focus on how these measures were related to applications and new social information technologies. The results were analysed qualitatively using a thematic approach, organized into grids, and interpreted based on the relevant literature. Below, we present the main findings of this research, and in the final considerations, we highlight the theoretical and empirical findings of the study.

The Main Threat: Sexual Violence and Street Harassment

Despite the presence of crime associated with transnational organizations in Latin America and the fact that countries like Argentina and Chile now

face this threat, the main source of fear for young women remains sexual violence and street harassment. All the women we interviewed expressed fear regarding this issue, linking the primary risks to the presence of men in public spaces and areas of mobility. However, not all women experience the city with the same level of concern or fear of crime, as their fear is highly influenced by their personal experiences, families, peers, and the societal imagination surrounding public spaces. As the comparative evidence shows, the perception of insecurity is shaped both by direct experience and by the symbolic and social elements present in each society (Kessler 2009).

Some of the women interviewed move through the city in a constant state of alert, often altering their mobility patterns to avoid situations they perceive as risky. Others, while recognizing the issue of insecurity, do not allow it to paralyze them, finding ways to distance themselves from their surroundings and navigate through situations they consider inevitable.

Talking on the phone makes me feel safer – it's like a mind trick because I know it doesn't really change anything. I mean, if someone wants to rob me or do something to me, they'll do it anyway [*laughs*]. But being on the phone with my mom or dad makes me feel more at ease on the bus. [Caregiver, 28 years old, Santiago]

In both cases, certain environmental elements and situations contribute to the feeling of being 'constantly on alert.' These elements, deemed risky or dangerous, are multiple and often relate to the women's exposure to violence. The fear of being a victim of crime is commonly associated with violent acts, such as physical assaults and, more specifically, sexual violence, rather than material loss in the case of robbery.

And more than just the act of having my things taken, it's the distress of being mistreated, hit, or having someone get too close to me ...
[Worker, young woman, Buenos Aires]

This aspect tends to distinguish women from their male peers. As one interviewee put it, 'It's something only women understand.' For these women, moving through the city as a woman is inherently different from moving through it as a man, and they almost universally identify men as one of the key dangers in their environment. Whether it is a crowded subway car with mostly men, a male Uber driver, or being alone with a man on a bus, these factors heighten the fear experienced by the women. In this sense, as analysed in a Latin American study (Allen et al. 2018), the masculinization of public spaces contributes to greater fear associated

with crime. Many women report feeling less afraid when there are more women present in their surroundings. This relates to the fact that men represent not only a material threat but also a physical and sexual one, with the possibility of being victims of street harassment or even rape. It is also linked to their relative physical vulnerability as women.

For me, generally, street harassment is more top of mind. I've never really cared if someone steals something from me. It's never been a major fear for me. In fact, when I'm out at night and I tell my male friends that someone strange is on the bus, for example, they'll say, 'But hide your phone!' I don't care about my phone; what matters to me is whether someone says or does something inappropriate. So, it's always been like that. If I put my phone away and close my bag, I feel okay. What matters are other things, not robbery. [Student, 22 years old, Santiago]

This correlates with the literature, which states that women experience cities differently from men, particularly when it comes to their perception of insecurity. Thus, 'being a woman entails a specific, differential, and additional fear in comparison to the subjective representation of fear or insecurity experienced by men' (Añover López 2014, 29).

In general, when I think about my fears while walking through the city, they all involve men. Seeing a man on a corner, seeing a group of men together – it's even worse. An Uber driver doesn't inspire trust either. When I think about walking around, it's never women that make me feel afraid or defensive. [Caregiver, 28 years old, Santiago]

Therefore, the perception of risk is strongly influenced by being a woman in public spaces and interacting with hostile environments and individuals.

It really makes me angry that it's so unfair to be a woman. It sounds cliché, but the cliché is so true. Like, my brother can go out alone, and neither of us feels any worry when he does, but if I go out at night, I wouldn't even consider going alone [...] not because I think about it consciously, but because I feel like I'm putting myself in danger. So, it's not even something I consider as an option. I only think about it now because we're in an interview, and I'm reflecting more deeply on my decisions. But in practice, I make them unconsciously ... In the end, it's like ... Patriarchy [*laughs*]. [Student, 29 years old, Santiago]

These risks, identified by the interviewees, are often associated with

environmental elements that facilitate the commission of crimes, a loss of subjective control over the environment, and becoming highly visible in public spaces, which exposes them to sexual risks. Darkness emerges as a key factor in constructing fear, as it facilitates crime by concealing potential perpetrators and hinders the ability to maintain control over the environment due to a lack of visibility. Among the environmental elements that increase the likelihood of crime are the absence of potential witnesses, darkness, and access to escape routes for criminals. The presence of more people, especially other women, makes women feel safer. In contrast, the presence of unknown men creates greater social distance and distrust (Luneke Reyes, Trebilcock, and Robles 2020).

The presence of men also makes me to avoid certain spaces. For instance, if there are a lot of men around, I move closer to spaces where there are women, or I prefer spaces that are emptier. If there are five seats available and four are occupied by men, with one seat in the middle, I'd rather stand than sit between a group of men. [Student, 22 years old, Santiago]

Darkness, combined with the absence of potential witnesses, creates an insecure environment because it conceals potential aggressors who may suddenly appear. The proximity of highways also contributes to the perception of insecurity, as it offers a quick escape route for potential criminals. This perception is linked to the deficit of natural surveillance, which environmental design theories have identified as a predictor of crime (Newman 1997).

I have a therapy session in the city centre at three in the afternoon, but by the time I'm done, it's four, and that's when the crowds start to build up. I prefer to take a shared taxi at that time, so at least I'm sitting more freely, even though it takes longer to get home. I could take the train because it's faster, but it's horrible, with people pressed up against you. You've got men staring at you, a guy with his sweaty arm on you, or someone drinking next to you. [Worker, 22 years old, Buenos Aires]

Other situations lead young women to lose subjective control over their environment, which becomes unpredictable, increasing their sense of insecurity and forcing them to remain alert. This loss of control is caused by the presence of people deemed dangerous or unpredictable, such as immigrants, homeless people, or those consuming alcohol, all of whom are primarily associated with men's behaviour. This feeling of loss of con-

trol intensifies in crowded spaces, such as public transportation or street markets, where too many external stimuli require constant vigilance to avoid uncomfortable or dangerous situations, such as sexual harassment or violence.

When there's a lot of people, I can't stay fully aware of what everyone is doing. When there are fewer people, it's easier to keep track of those around me. [Student, 21 years old, Santiago]

The city centre is always packed when I'm there because all the courthouses are around, so lawyers are always rushing around. Then you've got street vendors and all kinds of people moving through the area [...] It gets so crowded during those hours that I think that's why harassment happens more frequently. Though I have noticed that it's gotten better recently. Three years ago, my experience in the city centre was entirely different. Walking through Plaza de Armas (in the downtown of the city of Santiago), for example, I would expect the worst. Now, I bundle up and wear lots of clothing so that I don't stand out, and things are calmer. But before, I would head there bracing for the worst. [Student, 29 years old, Santiago]

A significant source of fear is when rideshare drivers, like those using Uber, change routes, which puts women in a more vulnerable position since they are already exposed by the fact that a stranger is driving the vehicle. Darkness also plays a role in this, as it increases the loss of control over the environment and thus also fear, given the impossibility of being aware of one's surroundings. In the dark, any person could appear suddenly, turning potential dangers into unpredictable threats. The threat of street harassment leads young women to view their own visible presence in public spaces as a risk. Thus, 'blending in' becomes a form of protection to avoid victimization. From this, a series of actions deemed risky emerges, actions that expose women to harassment or other forms of aggression. Chief among these is how they present themselves through clothing; appearing feminine is considered risky, as being visibly a woman places them in a position of vulnerability. Wearing colourful clothes, carrying handbags, or being the only woman in a subway car full of men are perceived with fear, prompting actions specifically aimed at reducing visibility.

At night, I usually put my hoodie up and try to cover myself as much as possible. [Worker, 26 years old, Santiago]

I always dress conservatively because street harassment in the city centre is unbearable, especially during the summer. I'd rather be hot than show any skin. I hate being looked at, and in the city centre, men are constantly gawking. [Student, 29 years old, Santiago]

In the mornings on the bus, I wear the uniform I use for work because it makes me feel more disguised, more covered up. With regular clothes, I immediately look more like a woman. I don't wear makeup during the week for the same reason. On the bus, it's all about not being noticed. That's what matters most to me. [Caregiver, 28 years old, Santiago]

The Transmission of Fear in Families: The Role of Mothers and Grandmothers

When it comes to understanding how young women construct their perception of safety, it is evident that personal experiences play a role, but this perception is also largely influenced by their relationships with peers and family, as well as by their exposure to media and other sources of information. Some young women choose to avoid the news because it increases their feelings of insecurity, while others used to follow it but have since stopped. Many have decided to reduce their exposure to television and certain social media platforms to avoid excessive exposure to alarming content. It is common for young women to report that they prefer not to watch too much news, especially television news, which they feel amplifies fear unnecessarily. For those who prefer to stay informed, they primarily rely on social media and news websites.

The media often exaggerates the dangers, so a lot of it comes down to experience, hearing things like 'Watch out for this' or 'Be careful with that.' Watching the news just makes me more scared, so I try not to watch too much. [Student, 25 years old, Buenos Aires]

I watch the news, and there's also a Facebook group for my neighbourhood where people post about where robberies happen, so I use that to navigate. I check it almost every day, mostly in the mornings, so I know which areas are dangerous, but it's also helpful to know if, for example, there's a strike on the Alsina Bridge. [Worker, 28 years old, Buenos Aires]

I don't like watching TV for information. I used to watch it all the time, but I realized it just made me more scared. Before, I would

think, 'Nothing bad has ever happened to me,' but recently, I had a couple of attempts where people tried to snatch my purse, and that's when I started avoiding the news because it made me over-think things. [Caregiver, 26 years old, Santiago]

Young women also acknowledge that their perception of safety is shaped by the conversations they have with their peers and family members, particularly female relatives like their mothers and grandmothers. Among peers, they tend to share similar daily experiences, while within their families, the knowledge and perceptions they receive are often shaped by their mothers or grandmothers, who instil these concerns and teach them safety techniques. In some cases, their peer groups remain alert but are not overly alarmist, allowing them to discuss security measures within their group, such as sharing locations or checking in on each other's well-being.

However, a significant difference is noted in how family dynamics affect these young women's perceptions of security. Women whose mothers are more 'relaxed' tend to adopt a calmer attitude when navigating the city, while those whose mothers are highly concerned report that this has strongly influenced their current perception of safety and their public behaviour.

Others, while acknowledging that their mothers or families are very apprehensive, do not limit their mobility accordingly. For women who still live with their families, they often take safety measures that their families encourage, even when they don't feel these measures are necessary. For example, they may allow themselves to be picked up or implement safety precautions recommended by their family.

I think my mom is the one who's influenced me the most because she's experienced a lot of street harassment. She always asks me to share my location when I'm in an Uber, which is rare, but we both feel more afraid of Uber than other forms of transport because of being alone with a man. She taught me that public transport is much safer than other options, like Uber or walking alone at night. She also takes the bus and subway to work in the city centre because driving and parking there is impossible and too expensive, so she takes public transport. [Student, 22 years old, Santiago]

When I get home, my mom starts: 'Did you see what happened?' and repeats all the crime reports that my grandma already told me about. Then my dad sits me down and says: 'I want you to know this

happened, and you need to be careful ...' She tells me how to protect myself and what to do. [Student, 24 years old, Buenos Aires]

In many cases, parents relay preventive measures they picked up from media reports, passing them on to their children.

My parents mostly keep me informed; they always tell me to be careful. After going through it several times myself, I've started noticing certain things. I don't read the news, but I get alerts on Twitter, and most of what I know comes from home. [Worker, 20 years old, Buenos Aires]

The family environment not only transmits perceptions about public mobility but also teaches young women various mechanisms to keep in mind when navigating the city. These include not wearing headphones, not using their phones in the street, putting their phones away when public transportation is approaching a stop, always having pepper spray in hand while walking, being alert to suspicious behaviour, avoiding walking alone in dangerous neighbourhoods (especially at night), dressing more conservatively at night, sharing their location, informing others of their whereabouts, constantly scanning their surroundings, carrying their backpacks in front on public transport, and always standing near the door.

In general, young women show greater distance than other age groups in terms of media consumption and the credibility they assign to these sources, while at the same time demonstrating a clear predisposition to remain vigilant in the face of increasing insecurity, which, in some cases, includes reference to media-reported cases. Young women display what can be considered incidental consumption of news related to insecurity: even though they may not actively seek out news on web portals, social media, or television, they are still aware of it, either through their families or because cases are shared on social media. They often come across this information without actively searching for it, as news reaches them through different channels.

Thus, an intergenerational circular space emerges in terms of experiences and sensitivities related to insecurity: just as young people follow the advice of their parents regarding crime, older adults receive recommendations from their children and follow their advice as well (Focás 2020).

I am incredibly fearful when I move around, just like my mom. I feel bad blaming her [*laughs*], but she really taught me to be constantly

on edge – not just cautious but downright hysterical. And I’m even worse when it comes to my daughter, Emi. She’s even more hysterical than I am. I think the pandemic made us all worse because, besides the fear of being kidnapped or robbed, there was the fear of getting sick. My mom went a little crazy – she was terrified that she was going to die. And then when she got COVID, nothing happened. She just had a cough, that’s it [*laughs*]. [Caregiver, 28 years old, Santiago]

These experiences are intertwined with rumours and family conversations, becoming the source of information that ultimately shapes women’s perceptions of security and the strategies they use to navigate insecurity.

ICT's and the Management of Insecurity in Gendered Urban Mobility

The central role of new technologies as allies in crime prevention has been addressed by various authors from a governmental perspective (Ríos 2019; Aguirre Sala 2016; Lavorgna and Ugwudike 2021). However, less attention has been given to the role of ICTs (Information and Communications Technologies) in the everyday management of security, particularly their use in sharing information, opinions, and solutions related to security issues (Galar 2018; Galar and Focás 2018). In terms of using social media as a means of managing security, local research has shown that state crime prevention programmes incorporate electronic identification and control tools, particularly WhatsApp groups and citizen assistance apps, as instruments for managing or avoiding conflicts between social classes (Torres 2017; Lio and Urtasun 2016; Lio 2019). Additionally, recent research explores the integration of social networks and messaging services in the (self)management of urban security (Vélez 2019).

In relation to women and urban mobility, we found that the most-used apps by young women for transportation are Uber, Didi, and Cabify. Additionally, Google Maps is frequently mentioned as a tool for navigating the city. These apps serve different purposes in terms of mobility. Transportation apps, for instance, are not only used for commuting but also for sharing trip details and driver information, as explained by a young woman from Argentina:

I avoid putting myself in uncomfortable situations. If it’s late, I try to move with people and avoid being alone. I take the bus in busier areas, and whenever I feel in danger, I send my live location to my family and friends. If I take an Uber, I send the car’s details, the driver’s

name, or a screenshot of the ride to someone. [Student-worker, 22 years old, Buenos Aires]

In addition, other apps on their phones contribute to their sense of safety. As mentioned, sharing their location via WhatsApp is one of the most common security measures. Some differentiate between day and night, sharing their location only at night, while others share their location both day and night. Furthermore, women also use mapping apps to plan their trips, which helps reduce mental stress and makes them feel safer. Planning their routes before heading out allows them to calculate the travel time, decide on the best mode of transport, and avoid taking out their phone when navigating unfamiliar areas.

I'm very much a planner. The other day, I had a yoga class in Providencia, and the night before, I was already planning the route: I'll do this, take this bus, and then walk. Plus, sharing my location and knowing my route ahead of time gives me a sense of security because I know I won't need to take out my phone or ask someone for directions. So, that gives me some peace of mind. [Caregiver, 26 years old, Santiago]

When I travel at night, before I get on the bus, I check the license plate. If no one else gets on, I send a message to my mom or partner: 'I'm on this bus.' When I take a taxi or go out with new people, I send messages to my friends with details like the car's license plate, the driver, and where I am, so they know in case something happens. [Worker, 22 years old, Buenos Aires]

I always share my live location and plan my route using Google Maps. I check which bus to take, how long the journey will take, and what streets I'll need to walk down. I always do that before leaving, no matter what. [Worker, 23 years old, Santiago]

Finally, some of the women we interviewed mentioned using apps that allow them to share their location continuously with others, particularly friends or sisters. They referenced an iPhone feature that enables this, as well as an app called Live 360.

Conclusions

Insecurity has become a public concern and a daily issue in Latin America over the past twenty years, with various studies focusing on crime prevention tactics and the management of everyday safety. In simple terms,

managing everyday safety involves using preventive strategies to avoid becoming a victim of crime. Evasive practices, such as avoiding areas considered dangerous, restricting activities to certain times of the day, or choosing one route over another, are common. Defensive strategies also include the use of protective measures like installing alarms, cameras, fences, or hiring security services. Both individual and collective actions, as well as the deployment of such devices, shape the feeling of insecurity and define new ways of navigating the urban landscape.

However, one aspect that has been less addressed in studies of insecurity and crime is how these issues shape the daily lives of young women, who use various technologies to protect themselves and feel safer. In this study, we focused on how young women in two Latin American cities – Santiago, Chile, and Buenos Aires, Argentina – manage their everyday safety. This research highlights not only the everyday tactics they employ when navigating urban spaces but also the cognitive and emotional effort this entails. In this sense, we believe that this work contributes to at least three key dimensions in the literature and has implications for public policies that have addressed crime prevention from a gender perspective.

First, the results show that in both cities, women experience mobility with fear and insecurity. Young women are primarily concerned about street harassment and sexual crimes, and these are the aspects of their mobility that are most affected. In comparing the interviews, we noticed that Argentine women tend to ‘normalize’ urban risks and dangers more than Chilean women, who express greater anxiety and uncertainty when discussing their movements. For Argentine women, managing these risks does not necessarily involve restricting their outings; instead, they demonstrate a greater understanding of urban spaces than previous generations. Fear of crime studies have often focused on mobility restrictions as a protective strategy (McCrea et al. 2005; Walklate 2001). However, this study reveals another dimension: young women do not necessarily limit their outings but instead implement preventive measures almost instinctively, often showing creativity in ensuring their own safety. Regarding these risks, both Argentine and Chilean women avoid relying on mass media for information about crime, evaluating the role of the media negatively in spreading fear. However, the young women’s perceptions still show an indirect influence from information received through their parents, immediate family, and social networks, which they then reinterpret in conversations with their peers.

Second, the study shows that these young women identify their moth-

ers and grandmothers as their main sources of information and fear: it is their female caretakers who teach them how to protect themselves and manage their safety in daily life. The comparative analysis reveals that Chilean women express higher levels of concern about crime, which more significantly limits their mobility in the city, especially in terms of leisure activities. Unlike Argentine women, Chilean women are more likely to avoid going out, restricting their daily lives to a greater extent.

In the narratives presented in this study, we can trace some key relationships that emerge from intergenerational connections. As Carmen Leccardi and Carles Feixa (2011) explain, certain events mark a before-and-after in collective life, and in this case, it is evident in the socio-cultural changes brought about by preventive practices against crime. Here, mothers and grandmothers play a central role as 'guardians' of safety in a hostile environment for young women.

Finally, ICTs and especially apps have become essential tools in the daily management of young women's safety, with live location sharing replacing the need for accompaniment by family members, friends, or partners. In both cities, young women have learned to protect themselves by using technology and platforms intensively. Despite this, the everyday lives of young women remain deeply affected by crime and violence in Latin America.

This study's results also reveal many similarities between the experiences of young women in the cities of Santiago and Buenos Aires. Despite differences in how the cities are perceived and inhabited, both case studies demonstrate that the urban environment becomes a hostile space for these women, limiting the development of their lives. The analysis of the young women's narratives highlights how the unequal distribution of power between men and women is manifested in the urban space.

This also implies recognizing that fear of crime is not solely related to the presence of organized crime but is instead associated with multiple risks and threats. The criminal complexity facing Latin American societies today refers to the various manifestations of crime and insecurity in cities, particularly when analysed from a gender perspective. This study highlights the need to further explore the differentiated ways in which crime is structured and its social effects in Latin American cities.

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