

The Impact of Crime News Exposure on Public Fear of Crime in South Sulawesi Province

Dian Anggreni Thamrin, Abu Rizal Fatwa Ramli, Fikry Fathurahman

Faculty of Law, Andi Sapada Institute of Social and Business Sciences

Corresponding Email: diananggrenithamrin@amsir.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to examine the influence of exposure to crime news on the level of fear of crime among the public in South Sulawesi Province. The background of this research is driven by the increasing intensity of crime reporting across various mass media platforms, particularly social media and online news portals, which have the potential to affect public perceptions and psychological conditions related to community safety. The study employed a quantitative method using a survey approach involving 115 respondents from various districts and cities in South Sulawesi. Data analysis techniques included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression tests. The results reveal a significant positive relationship between the habit of consuming crime news and the level of fear or anxiety about crime ($r = 0.590$; $p < 0.01$). Regression analysis shows that the variable of crime news exposure has a significant effect on fear levels ($\beta = 0.639$; $p = 0.000$), with a contribution of 34.8%. These findings indicate that the more frequently individuals are exposed to crime related news, the higher their perceived fear of crime. This research provides important implications for public information management and media literacy, encouraging individuals to be more critical in receiving and interpreting crime news.

Keywords : Crime News Exposure; Social Anxiety; Fear of Crime; Public Perception.

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Introduction

Fear of crime has emerged as a significant social issue that has received increasing scholarly attention over the past two decades.¹ This phenomenon is not only related to the actual level of criminal activity but also to how individuals perceive threats to themselves and their surroundings.² Fear of crime does not always reflect real crime conditions rather, it is often a social construct shaped by various sources of information, particularly the mass media.³

In the study of mass communication, cultivation theory explains that the more frequently individuals are exposed to media content depicting violence and criminality, the more likely they are to perceive the real world as dangerous⁴ a phenomenon known as the mean world syndrome.⁵ Consequently, even those who have never directly experienced criminal victimization may still feel unsafe and perceive their social environment as threatening. This perception can influence daily behavior, such as excessive vigilance, avoidance of public spaces, and a decline in trust toward others.

¹García Castro, J. D., & Pérez Sánchez, R. (2018). Fear of crime and cultivation effect. Social and psychological predictors. *Universitas Psychologica*, 17(3), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.11144/JAVERIANA.UPSY17-3.FCCE>.

²Abraham, J., Kang, Y., Ceccato, V., Näsman, P., Duarte, F., Gao, S., Ljungqvist, L., Zhang, F., & Ratti, C. (2025). Crime and Visually Perceived Safety of the Built Environment: A Deep Learning Approach. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 115(7), 1613–1633. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2025>.

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³Silva, C., & Guedes, I. (2023). The Role of the Media in the Fear of Crime: A Qualitative Study in the Portuguese Context. *Criminal Justice Review*, 48(3), 300–317.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/07340168221088570>

⁴Perera, A. (2023). *Cultivation Theory In Media simplypsychology.org/cultivation-theory.html*. 1–11.

⁵Jankovic, S. (2016). Career feature: All you need to know about gp practice pharmacists. *Pharmaceutical Journal*, 296(7889), 304–305.

In Indonesia, mass media and social media play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of social reality. Crime related news such as murder, theft, sexual violence, and drug offenses often dominates television broadcasts and online news portals.⁶ In some cases, such reports are repeatedly presented with a focus on the violent and emotional aspects of the incident.⁷ Meanwhile, on social media, similar content spreads rapidly, often without adequate verification.⁸ As a result, the public is exposed to an overwhelming flow of crime information that may not accurately represent actual conditions.

South Sulawesi Province, known for its dynamic economic and social activities, ranked third nationally in crime rates in 2023.⁹ Makassar City recorded the highest number of criminal cases, with 7,671 reported in 2024, followed by Gowa Regency (1,725 cases) and Bone Regency (1,573 cases).¹⁰ These areas often attract public attention due to high profile criminal incidents, including robbery, street theft, gang violence, motor vehicle theft, and assault cases that frequently go viral on social media. Although crime rates in some areas have not shown a significant increase, the intensity of crime reporting may create a perception that society is becoming increasingly unsafe.¹¹ This perception could

produce a domino effect on citizens' psychological well-being and social relations.

Previous studies have found a positive relationship between exposure to crime news and fear of crime.^{12,13} Warr describes fear of crime as a complex emotional reaction influenced by perceived risk and personal vulnerability. Media exposure can either amplify or reduce such fear, depending on how crime stories are framed.¹⁴ Reports emphasizing violence and victimization tend to evoke greater fear than those that are balanced and informative. In the context of digital media, Intravia found that social media consumption is significantly associated with increased fear of crime, particularly among young adults.

Demographic factors such as age, gender, and personal experience also shape individuals' responses to crime news.¹⁵ Research consistently shows that women and the elderly tend to experience higher levels of fear than young men due to perceived physical vulnerability.¹⁶ Conversely, younger generations especially adolescents and young adults are more exposed to crime related content via social media, which forms different patterns of perception compared to previous

⁶Lim, M. (2013). Many Clicks but Little Sticks: Social Media Activism in Indonesia. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 43(4), 636–657. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2013.769386>

⁷Hollis, M. E., Downey, S., Del Carmen, A., & Dobbs, R. R. (2017). The relationship between media portrayals and crime: Perceptions of fear of crime among citizens. *Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, 19(1), 46–60. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41300-017-0015-6>

⁸Intravia, J., Wolff, K. T., Paez, R., & Gibbs, B. R. (2017). Investigating the relationship between social media consumption and fear of crime: A partial analysis of mostly young adults. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 77, 158–168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.08.047>

⁹Badan Pusat Statistik. Statistik Kriminalitas Indonesia 2023. Tingkat Risiko Kejahatan Menurut Provinsi. Diakses pada 24 Oktober 2025.

¹⁰Badan Pusat Statistik. Data Kriminalitas Sulawesi Selatan 2024. Diakses pada 24 Oktober 2025.

¹¹Roche, S. P., Pickett, J. T., & Gertz, M. (2016). The Scary World of Online News? Internet News Exposure

and Public Attitudes Toward Crime and Justice. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 32(2), 215–236. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-015-9261-x>

¹²Warr, M. N. (2000). Fear of crime in the United States: Avenues for research and policy. *Criminal Justice*, 4(4), 451–489.

¹³Lee, M. (2018). Inventing fear of crime: Criminology and the politics of anxiety. *Willan Publishing*.

¹⁴Chadee, D., & Ng Ying, N. K. (2013). Predictors of fear of crime: General fear versus perceived risk. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 43(9), 1896–1904. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12207>

¹⁵Cops, D., & Pleyzier, S. (2011). “Doing gender” in fear of crime: The impact of gender identity on reported levels of fear of crime in adolescents and young adults. *British Journal of Criminology*, 51(1), 58–74. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azq065>

¹⁶Gray, 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. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azq066>

generations.¹⁷ Chadee and Ying further differentiate between general fear of crime and specific risk perception, both of which are influenced by the intensity of media exposure.¹⁸

In South Sulawesi, where internet penetration and digital culture continue to grow, communities are increasingly dependent on online media and social networks as their primary sources of information.¹⁹ This condition amplifies the potential influence of crime news exposure on people's sense of security. Roche found that exposure to online crime news has a stronger effect on public perceptions of crime than traditional media exposure.²⁰ However, there remains a scarcity of empirical studies investigating the relationship between crime news exposure and fear of crime within the context of South Sulawesi society.

Based on these considerations, this study is crucial to understanding the extent to which exposure to crime news influences fear of crime among residents of South Sulawesi Province. This understanding holds not only academic value but also practical implications for policymakers, media institutions, and the general public.²¹ Dengan By identifying how media shape public perceptions of safety, local governments can design more effective public communication strategies, while media organizations can apply more ethical and balanced reporting practices.²²

Therefore, this study aims to determine whether exposure to crime news significantly affects the level of fear of crime among the

general public in South Sulawesi Province. The research is expected to provide empirical contributions to criminological studies in Indonesia, particularly in understanding the role of media in shaping social perceptions of safety and fear of crime.

Research Methodology

This study used a quantitative approach with a cross sectional survey method. This approach was chosen because it can measure the relationship between variables objectively through numerical data that can be statistically analyzed.²³ The quantitative research approach employed the Fear of Crime Scale (FoCS) instrument. The main objective of this study is to determine the extent to which exposure to crime news (X) affects the level of fear of crime (Y) among the public in South Sulawesi Province. This study is causal associative in nature, which seeks to explain the cause and effect relationship between two main variables.

The population in this study consists of all residents of South Sulawesi Province aged at least 18 years and actively accessing social media or online news platforms. Based on the results of the questionnaire distribution, 115 respondents were obtained, divided into two group categories: Urban for city areas including Makassar, Parepare, and Palopo; and Non-Urban for regency areas including Pinrang, Pangkep, Maros, Bone, Takalar, Bulukumba, and Gowa. The sampling technique used was stratified

¹⁷ Kohm, S. A., Waid Lindberg, C. A., Weinrath, M., Shelley, T. O. C., & Dobbs, R. R. (2012). The impact of media on fear of crime among University students: A cross national comparison. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 54(1), 67–100. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cjccj.2011.E.01>

¹⁸ Chadee, D., & Ng Ying, N. K. (2013). Predictors of fear of crime: General fear versus perceived risk. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 43(9), 1896–1904. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12207>

¹⁹ Wheeler, D. L., & Mintz, L. (2012). New Media and Political Change. In *iPolitics*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139059893.015>

²⁰ Roche, S. P., Pickett, J. T., & Gertz, M. (2016). The Scary World of Online News? Internet News Exposure and Public Attitudes Toward Crime and Justice.

Journal of Quantitative Criminology, 32(2), 215–236. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-015-9261-x>

²¹ Hirtenlehner, H., & Farrall, S. (2013). Anxieties About Modernization, Concerns About Community, and Fear of Crime: Testing Two Related Models. *International Criminal Justice Review*, 23(1), 5–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1057567712475307>

²² Hollis, M. E., Downey, S., Del Carmen, A., & Dobbs, R. R. (2017). The relationship between media portrayals and crime: Perceptions of fear of crime among citizens. *Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, 19(1), 46–60. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41300-017-0015-6>

²³ Juliardi, B., Runtunuwu, Y. B., Musthofa, M. H., TL, A. D., Asriyani, A., Hazmi, R. M., ... & Samara, M. R. (2023). Metode penelitian hukum. CV. Gita Lentera.

random sampling with stratification based on geographical area to ensure proportional representation of the population.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire using Google Forms, which was constructed using a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Data analysis was carried out through several stages, namely Descriptive Analysis, Pearson Correlation Test (Product Moment), and Simple Linear Regression Test.

Analysis and Discussion

A. Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis aims to provide an overview of the demographic characteristics of respondents and the distribution of research variables, namely exposure to crime news (habits) and fear of crime (anxiety) among the general public in South Sulawesi Province.

1. Respondents' Characteristics

A total of 115 respondents participated in this study, representing both urban and non-urban areas in South Sulawesi. Based on gender, 71 respondents (61.7%) were female and 44 respondents (38.3%) were male. This indicates that women were more represented in this study, which aligns with previous research suggesting that women tend to show higher awareness and concern toward crime related news.

In terms of age, the majority of respondents (45.2%) were between 26–35 years old, followed by 18–25 years old (35.7%), 46–55 years old (7.0%), and over 55 years old (8.7%). This distribution suggests that most respondents were adults in their productive years who actively consume online and social media content.

Regarding educational background, most respondents held a Bachelor's degree (S1) (53.0%),

followed by Senior High School (SMA/SMK) graduates (31.3%), Master's and Doctoral degrees (S2–S3) (12.2%), and Diploma (D2–D3) (3.5%). This indicates that the majority of respondents possess a relatively high level of education, enabling them to engage critically with media content.

Based on domicile, 83 respondents (72.2%) lived in urban areas (Makassar, Parepare, Palopo), while 32 respondents (27.8%) came from non-urban areas (including Pinrang, Pangkep, Maros, Bone, Takalar, Bulukumba, and Gowa). This shows that the sample was dominated by urban residents, which reflects the higher accessibility to digital news media in city areas compared to rural regions.

2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

The descriptive statistical results show that the mean score for exposure to crime news (habit) was 33.29 with a standard deviation of 6.754, while the mean score for fear of crime (anxiety) was 35.16 with a standard deviation of 7.314. These findings indicate that both variables are relatively high, suggesting that respondents frequently consume crime related news and experience crime moderate to high levels of anxiety or fear associated with crime.

These findings indicate that the people of South Sulawesi frequently access crime news, particularly through social media, which serves as the main source of information for the respondents. This is consistent with national data showing that 90% of Indonesians use social media to obtain news²⁴.

These descriptive findings

²⁴ **We Are Social.** (2024). *Digital 2024: Indonesia report*. DataReportal.<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-indonesia>.

reflect the media consumption patterns of the South Sulawesi public, where social media has become the dominant source of crime information. The emotional impact and frequency of exposure to such content may have shaped respondents' perceptions of safety in their social environment.

B. Corelation Analysis

The Pearson correlation test showed a strong positive relationship between exposure to crime news and the level of fear of crime, with an r value of 0.590 and $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.01$). This means that the more frequently individuals are exposed to crime news, the higher their level of anxiety about the possibility of becoming a victim of crime. The correlation is statistically significant, indicating that the relationship did not occur by chance.

This finding is consistent with George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory, which explains that long term exposure to certain media content can shape individuals' social perceptions. In this context, intense and repetitive exposure to crime news can instill a belief that the surrounding world is more dangerous than it actually is a phenomenon known as the "mean world syndrome." Thus, exposure to crime news on social media can foster a sense of threat and fear that is not always proportional to the actual level of safety.

C. Simple Linear Regression Analysis

The results of the simple linear regression test show that the variable exposure to crime news (X) has a significant influence on the level of fear of crime (Y) among the people of South Sulawesi Province. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.348 indicates that exposure to crime news explains 34.8% of the variance in the level of fear of crime.

In other words, the more frequently individuals consume crime news, the higher their perceived fear of becoming a victim of crime in their surroundings. The remaining 65.2% is explained by other factors outside the model, such as personal experiences with crime, social environment, trust in law enforcement, and individual psychological characteristics.

These findings emphasize that the media has a tangible impact on shaping public perceptions and emotional responses toward crime, even though it is not the sole determinant of fear levels.

Discussion

The findings of this study support previous research that demonstrated a significant relationship between crime news consumption and fear of crime. Chiricos' research revealed that the intensity of watching crime related news is positively correlated with an increased perception of risk and fear of crime among urban residents.²⁵ Similarly, a longitudinal study by Romer et al. confirmed that long term exposure to local crime news substantially heightens individuals' estimates of victimization risk.²⁶

In the Indonesian context, research by Ramadhani and Mulyana found a similar pattern, showing that televised crime programs elevate anxiety related to personal safety²⁷. However, this study introduces a novel contribution (novelty) by examining the phenomenon within the context of social media and the population of South Sulawesi. Unlike previous studies that focused on television and major cities such as Jakarta or Bandung, this study emphasizes that social media has become the dominant channel for crime related information, directly influencing the public's

²⁵ Chiricos, T., Padgett, K., & Gertz, M. (2000). Fear, TV news, and the reality of crime. *Criminology*, 38(3), 755-786.

²⁶ Romer, D., Jamieson, K. H., & Aday, S. (2003). Television news and the cultivation of fear of crime. *Journal of Communication*, 53(1), 88-104.

²⁷ Ramadhani, A., & Mulyana, D. (2021). Pengaruh tayangan kriminal terhadap persepsi keamanan masyarakat urban di Indonesia. *Jurnal Komunikasi Indonesia*, 10(2), 145-162.

psychological state. Thus, the Cultivation Effect, which was once confined to television, has now evolved into a Digital Cultivation phenomenon, where social media algorithms amplify fear perception through repetitive visuals, emotionally charged narratives, and public commentary that heightens emotional impact²⁸. This finding aligns with Intravia's research, which found that social media consumption has a stronger association with fear of crime than traditional media, particularly among younger generations.

Furthermore, this study indicates that the effect of crime news exposure is not merely informational, but also affective. Individuals not only understand crime related information but also internalize the sense of threat, which manifests as emotional reactions such as anxiety, hyper vigilance, or avoidance of public spaces. This result supports Nairn's findings, which revealed that repetitive crime news reduces collective feelings of safety within communities. Similarly, Roche found that online crime news tends to provoke more intense emotional responses due to its immersive and on demand nature, extending the duration of exposure to fear inducing content.²⁹

Beyond empirical observations, this research holds important implications for criminology and mass communication, particularly regarding media literacy and public mental health. The results suggest that the public needs to be equipped with the ability to critically evaluate and interpret crime related information, minimizing emotional manipulation by media. The digital media literacy framework developed by Livingstone offers a relevant approach to reducing the negative effects of crime news exposure especially through education about algorithms and confirmation bias in social

media platforms³⁰. For broadcasters and digital platform operators, these findings serve as valuable input to promote balanced, educational, and non alarmist crime reporting. The Journalistic Code of Ethics established by the Indonesian Press Council should be strengthened by including specific guidelines for responsible digital crime reporting.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study reinforces the relevance of Cultivation Theory in the digital era, showing that exposure to social media produces similar, if not stronger, effects compared to television in shaping public perceptions of safety. However, this research identifies that speed, emotional proximity, and interactivity inherent in social media amplify fear effects beyond those of traditional media.

The findings extend Gerbner "mean world syndrome" into the digital ecosystem, where individuals who frequently consume crime content on social media tend to perceive the world as more dangerous than crime statistics suggest. Supporting this, Nellis and Savage found that the unique characteristics of digital news such as graphic videos, emotional commentary, and rapid virality can amplify cultivation effects by up to 40% more than conventional media³¹.

Moreover, this study lends empirical support to the Social Amplification of Risk Theory proposed by Kaspersen, positing that social media acts as an "amplifier station" that magnifies public perceptions of crime risk through rapid and uncontrolled information dissemination. In the context of South Sulawesi, this phenomenon is intensified by high internet penetration and low digital media literacy, making individuals more vulnerable to amplification effects.

²⁸ Morgan, M., Shanahan, J., & Signorielli, N. (2015). Yesterday's new cultivation, tomorrow. *Mass Communication and Society*, 18(5), 674-699.

²⁹ Roche, S. P., Pickett, J. T., & Gertz, M. (2016). The scary world of online news? Internet news exposure and public attitudes toward crime and justice. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 32(2), 215-236.

³⁰ Livingstone, S., Mascheroni, G., & Staksrud, E. (2017). European research on children's internet use: Assessing the past and anticipating the future. *New Media & Society*, 20(3), 1103-1122.

³¹ Nellis, A. M., & Savage, J. (2012). Does watching the news affect fear of terrorism? The importance of media exposure on terrorism fear. *Crime & Delinquency*, 58(5), 748-768.

Therefore, community based media literacy programs and stronger digital platform regulations should become priority agendas for local governments and related stakeholders to mitigate the psychological and social impact of crime news exposure in the digital age.

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Conclusion

Exposure to crime news has a significant influence on increasing fear of crime in the South Sulawesi community. Based on simple correlation and regression analyses, it was found that the more frequently individuals consume crime news, particularly through social media, the higher their levels of anxiety and perceived threats to personal safety. These results support cultivation theory, which explains how repeated media exposure can shape people's perceptions of social reality, particularly through the phenomenon of mean world syndrome, where the public tends to perceive the world as more dangerous than it actually is.

These findings confirm that the impact of crime news is not only informational, but also emotional and behavioral, leading people

to become more anxious, vigilant, and avoid public activities. In a policy context, this study emphasizes the importance of media literacy and responsible journalism practices to mitigate the effects of excessive fear. Integrating media literacy education in schools and communities is a crucial step in strengthening people's psychological resilience to exposure to crime news in the digital age.

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³² Nugroho, Y., & Syarif, S. S. (2012). *Beyond click-activism? New media and political processes in contemporary Indonesia*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

³³ Vraga, E. K., & Tully, M. (2021). News literacy, social media behaviors, and skepticism toward information on social media. *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(2), 150–166.

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Conflict of Interest Statement:

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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