

THE IMPACTS OF FEAR OF CRIME ON THE MENTAL HEALTH AND AVOIDANCE BEHAVIORS OF OLDER CHINESE

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Introduction: Fear of crime is a kind of unpleasant and often intense emotion caused by perceived risk of being victimized. It is evidenced that fear of crime has tremendous impacts on the mental health of older people who resort to avoidance behaviors for self-protection.

Objectives: This study examined the impact of fear of crime on the mental health and avoidance behavior of the community-dwelling older adults living in urban China.

Methods: For the present study, data were collected from a representative sample of 453 older persons aged 60 years and above from Kunming, Yunnan province using face-to-face interview. Associations between fear of crime and mental health, and avoidance behavior were measured using linear regression.

Results: The final sample ranged from 60 to 100 years of age (Mean = 72.29, SD = 8.27) and included 198 (43.7%) males and 255 females. Preliminary results showed that 258 participants (57.0%) reported fear of one or more types of depicted crimes; 397 (87.6%) carried on one or more kinds of avoidance behaviors; and 234 (51.7%) presented deteriorating mental health. Results of hierarchical regression analyses indicated that fear of crime was a significant predictor of both poorer mental health ($p < .05$) and more avoidance behaviors ($p < .001$), independent of gender, age, education, household finance, length of residence in neighborhood, household size, living arrangement, physical health and social networks.

Conclusions: Fear of crime had detrimental impacts on mental health of older Chinese and resulted in reduced social participation due to their avoidance behaviors.