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Abstract

Perception of insecurity arises as a complex social phenomenon affected by factors that go beyond actual crime rates. Previous contributions to the field of fear of crime studies have shown, for instance, that the perception of social and physical disorder may generate insecurity among residents even in contexts where crime is comparatively low. Meanwhile, sociological approaches have led to a conceptualization of insecurity as an umbrella sentiment grounded in a wider feeling of unease. Building further on this assumption, data gathered in a large-scale survey in Italy (n = 15,428) were analysed by implementing exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis with the objective of assessing the validity of a model of "ontological insecurity". The results of our analysis support a conceptualization of insecurity where socially constructed anxieties (due to health and financial precariousness), as well as ethnic, sexual and religious-based stigmatization, play a prominent role in determining an individual's feeling of insecurity.

Keywords

Ontological insecurity, subjective perception, disorder, social exclusion, anxieties, factor analysis

1. Introduction

Nowadays, insecurity arises as a very heterogeneous concept not limited to actual crime rates but encompassing a wide range of other aspects including personal wellbeing, social integration and trust in public institutions. This paper addresses the topic of insecurity by taking into account its heterogeneity in an attempt to deepen the understanding of its root causes in the specific context of Italy.

Robert Castel (2006) viewed insecurity as a social phenomenon that is inherent to citizens' coexistence in modern society. Similarly, authors that have studied the advent of the so-called post-modern society (Beck, 2006; Beck, Giddens and Lash, 2008; Douglas, 1992; Luhmann, 1996; Lyotard, 1985; Reith, 1999) have posited the emergence of a new, generalized feeling of uncertainty in contemporary society. Bauman (2006; 1999) suggested that individuals are currently experiencing a loss of security at three different but interconnected levels: first, people are experiencing a loss of certainty with regard to the course of their lives, which is more and more discontinuous; second, confidence in the basic rules that regulate social coexistence have diminished drastically; and, finally, as a result individuals perceive a loss of safety in terms of their own physical integrity. Paradoxically, as explained by Giddens (1990), the improvement in both material conditions and health experienced in the Western world over the last few decades has been offset by an increase in insecurity in other areas due to economic instability, dissolution of a framework of shared values, precarious living conditions and environmental risks. As a consequence, Beck (1998) concludes that we face the emergence of a new type of society (i.e., the risk society) that abandons the ideal of equality in favour of the ideal of security. In the same words used by this German sociologist, "the axiological system of the

'unsafe' society occupies the place of the axiological system of the 'unequal' society" (Beck, 1998: 49).

The emergence of a "generalized syndrome of insecurity" (Hirtenlehner, 2008: 127) is particularly relevant in light of new explanations regarding subjective feelings of unsafety among citizens. Recent studies have linked citizens' insecurity to existential uncertainties (Hollaway and Jefferson, 1997), as well as to social risks derived from changes in welfare policies (Hummelsheim et al., 2011). Furthermore, according to Pantazis (2000: 417): "debates on modernity have elucidated that fear of crime could be related to other forms of risk in every social, environmental, and economic circumstance". Quantitative approaches to the study of fear of crime have indicated an increasing misperception between concrete worries resulting from specific threats and more general, socially constructed anxieties (Farrall, Jackson and Gray, 2009; Gray, Jackson and Farrall, 2008a, 2008b; Jackson, 2004; Wallace, 2012; Wallace, Louton and Fornango, 2015). Consistent with these findings and as noted by Vieno and colleagues (2013: 521), "many sociologists consider fear of crime not as fear of specific offences but as a compound of a wider feeling of insecurity and a lack of social trust". In an attempt to analyse fear of crime and the perception of insecurity from a sociological perspective, the overarching goal of this article is to explore the relationship between self-perceived social exclusion, neighbourhood-based worries and individuals' perceptions of insecurity.

2. Theoretical dimensions of fear of crime and subjective perceptions of insecurity

As a specific manifestation of a more general feeling of fear, fear of crime has in recent decades emerged as "one of the most researched topics in contemporary criminology" (Farrall et al., 2000: 399) and, ever since, scholars have tried to develop comprehensive theoretical frameworks for understanding this phenomenon. As a result of this effort, researchers have gathered evidence-based knowledge on the social determinants of fear of crime, which is nowadays seen as a multi-faceted social phenomenon encompassing a broad spectrum of elements ranging from emotional concerns directly linked to crime and victimization (Garofalo, 1981), cognitive elements related to one's evaluation of the likelihood of becoming the victim of a crime (Jackson, 2011), behavioural patterns and routine activities (Rader, 2004), as well as to social vulnerability (Franklin, Franklin and Fearn, 2008).

Despite this progress, the topic of fear of crime remains controversial for at least two main reasons. On the one hand, the definition and operationalization of the concept of fear of crime is problematic. Current approaches to the study of fear of crime are usually carried out by means of survey-based methods, primarily through the implementation and analysis of Crime Victimization Surveys. They have been in use since the 1960s for the collection of comprehensive information concerning the public's views on security, independently from administrative data that is routinely provided by police (for a comprehensive review of Crime Victimization Surveys, see: Aebi and Linde, 2010; Van Dijk, 2014; Van Dijk, Mayhew and Killias, 1990; Zauberman, 2008). Topics covered by the surveys vary depending on the specific context in which they are conducted, although these surveys generally ask people how worried they are about various offence-specific fears (property crimes, crimes against personal integrity, sexual offences, etc.), the perceived risk of crime and experiences of victimisation. Fear of crime is generally assessed in these surveys by asking people how safe they feel *walking alone after dark* in the area where they live, on an answer scale ranging from "very safe" to "very

unsafe". Although this item is generally accepted as a way to operationalize the concept of fear of crime, researchers have become increasingly critical of it, among other reasons because it implies at least some normalization of fearfulness (Jackson, 2006). At the same time, the question assumes that the act of walking alone after dark is a precondition for being involved in a threatening situation while, according to a consistent literature (Holfreter et al., 2015; Pratt and Turanovic, 2015; Pratt et al., 2014), what really matters is whether or not a person actually does go outside after dark at all and, in addition, what kind of activities s/he is involved in when outside after dark.

On the other hand, a second order of limitations affecting the study of fear of crime is dependent on the fact that this concept identifies a complex human emotion that merges together concerns that are not necessarily linked with the perceived risk of becoming the victim of a crime. Several studies have shown, for instance, that fear of crime is comparatively higher among people who consider themselves to be socially marginalized (Herda, 2016; Vieno, Roccato and Russo, 2013) or among people who believe that they live in a country with unsatisfactory welfare provisions (Hummelsheim et al., 2011). Ecological analyses have also stressed the importance of the characteristics of the neighbourhoods in which people live when it comes to explaining variations in terms of perceived insecurity (Boggess and Maskaly, 2014; Brunton-Smith and Jackson, 2012; Weisburd et al., 2016). Similarly, Sampson and Raudenbush (2004; 1999) argued that worries about being the victim of a crime are mediated by perceptions of neighbourhood disorder. Skogan (1995) has distinguished between physical and social disorder, the former related to deteriorated spaces and the latter to anti-social behaviours, both of them being strong predictors for a high level of fear among residents. For his part, Hirtenlehner (2008) has shown that fear of crime is actually the manifestation of several other forms of insecurity, which constitutes a reaction to the profound social changes affecting Western societies. Similarly, Wacquant (2010) hypothesizes that the loss of security experienced by citizens is not due to criminal insecurity but to growing social insecurity resulting from the explosion of the contradictions of the neoliberal model.

As a result of the above, researchers are increasingly searching for a way "to seek more accuracy in the way we understand and interpret survey reactions on the fear of crime" (Gray, Jackson and Farrall, 2008b: 11). In particular, authors such as Farrall and Gadd (2004: 128) argue in favour of a focus on dynamic rather than static feelings of fear and unsafety "to gauge the extent to which such emotions are regularly encountered amongst the population". At the same time, it is nowadays accepted that exhaustive analysis of fear of crime and the perception of insecurity cannot be exclusively restricted to the study of people's concerns about crime but should rather emphasize a wide range of factors. In order to cope with these emergent issues in the literature, the present study was grounded in the concept of "ontological insecurity" as a theory-driven notion, allowing the social phenomenon of perceived insecurity to be addressed in all its heterogeneity.

3. Conceptualizing "ontological insecurity"

The concept of ontological security (and its reverse "ontological insecurity") originated in psychiatry and was coined by Ronald David Laing in his book *The Divided Self* (1960). Following Laing's definition, the ideal-type of ontological security identifies those people that can rely on a stable sense of self and/or collective identity to cope with "all the hazards of life"

(Laing, 1960: 39). In contrast, an ontologically insecure person would instead feel "precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question" (Laing, 1960: 42). Developed on the basis of his experience as a psychiatrist dealing with people affected by mental health issues, Laing's conceptualization of ontological insecurity emphasizes the precariousness of the self that could lead to the impossibility of forecasting what the future will bring and, in turn, producing anxiety.

Following Laing's idea, Anthony Giddens (1991; 1990) provided a sociological version of ontological security. He considers ontologically secure people to be those who have sufficient physical, social and emotional resources to cope with the unpredictability of the future. At the opposite end of the spectrum, ontological insecurity for Giddens (1984: 61) is characterized by being overwhelmed by anxieties and living with a permanent feeling of "radical disjuncture of an unpredictable kind [...] that threaten or destroy the certitudes of institutionalized routines". Consequently, according to the definition provided by Giddens, ontological insecurity is not limited to the private sphere but also involves a public concern for the deterioration of social networks and relations that could threaten collective identity and undermine the very foundation of mutual trust.

Increased precariousness and the emergence of this feeling of existential fear results in an altering of daily routines that are key to the construction of certainty in people's lives. Isabel Lorey (2015) has recently provided a radical explanation of these phenomena and postulates the emergence of a "government of the precarious". Inspired by Butler (2006) and her sociological arguments regarding the precarity of life, Lorey argues that precariousness has become an inherent existential condition of humankind. Nevertheless, contrary to the opinion of Robert Castel (2006) and his negative interpretation of precarity as the opposite of security, Lorey's conceptualization of precarity outlines the emancipatory potential that could be engendered by the feeling of common belonging.

Despite the differences present in the psychological approach of Laing (1960), the sociological account developed by Giddens (1991; 1990; 1984) or the political interpretation of Lorey (2015), all these theories have in common their understanding of insecurity as more than just physical safety. Based on the assumption that feelings of insecurity cannot be solely explained by taking crime-specific concerns into account, the conceptualization of ontological insecurity used in this study is structured around two main theoretical pillars: on the one hand, the intention is to address individuals' present levels of existential precariousness while, at the same time, considering their future-oriented anxieties. Such a multi-dimensional conceptualization of insecurity is particularly prominent in the context of this analysis that is designed to explore the social determinants of the perception of insecurity beyond crime itself. Furthermore, such an approach appears better-suited to offer a proper explanation for why, despite the drop in crime recorded in Europe, four out of five European citizens ask for more action against organized crime and terrorism (De Wever, 2011). In fact, "it is not always crime which is meant when crime is spoken about" (Hirtenlehner, 2008: 134).

4. Objective

Given the above, why do people feel unsafe even though crime is decreasing? What can explain the rise of subjective feelings of unsafety? Building further on the idea of fear of crime as an

"umbrella sentiment people develop to disguise their high levels of social and economic insecurity" (Vieno, Roccato and Russo, 2013: 521), this study draws upon previous attempts at exploring the social significance of people's perceptions of insecurity. As such, the overarching goal is to make a substantive contribution towards the understanding of the social phenomenon of insecurity beyond actual crime-specific concerns. The specific objective consisted of testing the reliability of a theory-driven model referred to as an "ontological insecurity" model. Moreover, with its focus on the analysis of the influence of the frequency of feelings of unsafety and their potential consequences on people's routines, our study can be seen as an alternative approach to the traditional measure of fear of crime that is predominant in the criminological literature.

5. Method

5.1 Data

The data basis for this study is a survey of 15,428 residents distributed across 110 Italian cities, each with over 50,000 inhabitants. The sample was geographically distributed across three subgroups: 40.6% of respondents lived in a city with a population of between 50,000 and 199,000 inhabitants, 20.5% resided in a city with over 200,000 inhabitants, while the remaining 38,9% of respondents were in one of the four larger cities of Turin (9.6%), Naples (9.6%), Milan (9.7%) and Rome (9.9%). The following is a breakdown of the sample by geographic location across the country: 44.4% of respondents lived in a city located in the north of the country, 21.1% in one of the central regions, 24.4% in southern regions and 10.1% in one of the two islands of Sicily or Sardinia.

The sampling was stratified according to the characteristics of sex, age, nationality, educational attainment and employment. Male respondents accounted for 46.9% of the total sample and the remaining 53.1% were female. A breakdown by age groups shows that 7.9% of the respondents were aged between 18 and 25 years old, 20.5% were between 26–40 years old, 44.4% between 41–65 years old, and 27.2% were over 65. The mean age of the sample was 55 years old, somewhat higher than the mean age of the Italian population (44.6) as measured by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) as of 1 January 2016.

The absolute majority of the people surveyed were born in Italy (92.8%) while foreign-born individuals accounted for 7.2% of the total sample. The distribution of the sample by nationality reflects to a great extent the demographic reality of the country as measured by the ISTAT, whose data indicate that, as of 1 January 2016, foreign-born residents accounted for 8.3% of the total population of Italy.

With regard to the level of educational attainment of the population surveyed, more than one-third (34.5%) reported holding higher education degrees, which is above the official figure gathered by ISTAT. Respondents who had finished secondary school accounted for another 41.7%, and a further 5.8% had attended professional training schools. Deficits in formal education were seen in the remaining 17.9%, among whom 15.7% did not continue their education after primary school and another 2.2% who dropped out of the school system before finishing primary school.

Analysing respondents' participation in the labour market, 30% were employed full-time (more than 30 hours per week) at the time of the survey while 7.3% were in part-time employment (between 8 and 29 hours per week). Unemployment affected 9.1% of the total sample, with 6.3% of the respondents classified as long-term unemployed (more than one year out of work) and another 2.8% had been unemployed for less than one year. The sample characteristics in terms of unemployment reflect the official figures published by ISTAT showing that, as of May 2017, the unemployment rate in Italy was 11.3%. Retirees accounted for 27.9% of the total sample, 9.2% were self-employed and individuals engaged in some type of domestic work represented 8.8% of the sample. Finally, 6.6% of respondents reported that they were either full-time students or completing an internship, while another 0.9% had less than 8 hours of work per week, 0.2% were not working due to precarious health conditions, and 0.1% were neither working nor looking for a job.

Random probability sampling of household addresses was used to implement the survey through the CATI system (Computer-Assisted Telephonic Interview). A team of survey takers had been trained so that they were familiar with the survey prior to carrying it out during the months of June and October 2016. The ratio of completed interviews (n = 15,428) to the number who were eligible and found (n = 139,798) is equal to 11.04% (Table 1).

Table 1. Phone Calls Outcomes' Breakdown

Category	**Outcome**	**Frequency**
Interview	Completed	15,428
Eligible, non-interview	Refusal	139,798
Unknown eligibility, non-interview	Always busy	97
	No Answer	95,603
	Answering machine (don't know if household)	154
Not eligible	Out of sample	15,297
	Fax/data line	4,726
	Non-working number	108,458
	Call blocking	2,285

Low response rate was predictable and could be justified on the grounds of the sensitiveness of some questions referring to crime-related issues, victimization or personal income. Young (1988) showed that non-response rates in surveys dealing with victimization are often considerable and, more generally, declines in respondent cooperation have been widely reported in the literature (Groves, 2011). Moreover, as a country-specific explanation it is worth mentioning that in Italy call centres are often used not only for academically oriented surveys but also for advertising and marketing activities, leading to respondents who are less keen on participating in these kinds of initiatives.

Some measures were implemented in order to improve the response rate. An ad-hoc database was used, for instance, to improve the response rates of the foreign-born citizens who are usually more difficult to reach by landline telephone. There are critical issues associated with the foreign population both regarding coverage (e.g. low incidence of landline use) and the likelihood of response. A table with the most common surnames of the main foreign ethnicities in Italy was created in order to find phone numbers corresponding to those surnames within the telephone directory. Another procedure implemented in an effort to raise the response rate

involved refusal conversion conducted through additional attempts to reach contacts that refused to answer in the first instance.

In the survey research literature, missing data are often interpreted as further evidence of declining respondent cooperation. In the case of the present survey, the percentage of missing data is below 4%, with the exception of questions asking for respondents' expectations regarding the future evolution of their health (6.3%) and their monthly income (12.2%). A high non-response rate for income-related questions is consistent with prior research reporting rates as high as 20%–40% (Tourangeau and Yan, 2007). Given the sensitiveness of these items, non-response could be attributed to the reluctance of the respondent to reveal personal information. No data imputation was performed.

5.2 Instrument

The survey was designed with a view to overcoming the limitations identified through a comparative analysis of five Crime Victimization Surveys at the EU level performed by Baudains and colleagues (2016). In recognition of the need to consider contextual factors when analysing fear of crime and the perception of insecurity, the survey design followed the suggestion of Killias (2010) to collect a more consistent set of explanatory variables that may help to understand differences, trends and variations of perceived insecurity. The full version of the questionnaire, titled the "MARGIN Questionnaire on Perception of Insecurity" (2016), is publicly available.

5.3 Measures

The principal topics of the survey analysed in the present article are: (a) the subjective perception of insecurity, (b) neighbourhood-based concerns on social and physical disorder and (c) social insecurity.

In order to assess perceived insecurity, we opted to use measures for overcoming the previously mentioned criticisms associated with the classic questions operationalizing fear of crime. The theory-driven construct labelled "subjective perception" was treated as a conceptual dimension integrated by two items respectively asking how frequently respondents feel unsafe in their neighbourhood and how frequently they change their plans and/or routine to avoid situations that make them feel unsafe. In both cases, the 10-point scale ranged from "never" to "very often" (data description referring to items informing the "subjective perception" is shown in Table 2). The item traditionally used to operationalize the "fear of crime" dimension was thus excluded from the analysis considering that our objective was to test a conceptual model that could be alternative to the reductionist approach to insecurity as a mere consequence of crime-related issues. Furthermore, the focus on the frequency of the feeling of unsafety and its potential consequences on people's daily routines is based on the arguments of Farrall and Gadd (2004), who have highlighted the need for addressing dynamic rather than static feelings of fear and unsafety.

Table 2. Items used to inform the theoretical construct of "subjective perception"

	N	**Mean**	**SD**
Frequency of the feeling of unsafety	15,307	4.36	2.64
Frequency of changes in routine because of fear	15,282	3.30	2.66

The construct labelled "neighbourhood-based concerns" was measured by asking respondents how worried they were about a list of problems affecting their neighbourhood. Specifically, they were asked to rate their degree of worry on a scale from 1 (not worried at all) to 10 (very worried) with reference to the following problems:

- Poverty and economic difficulties among neighbours;
- Drug trafficking and other illegal behaviour in public spaces;
- The perceived likelihood of being victimized/becoming the victim of a crime within their neighbourhood of residence;
- Anti-social behaviours (people hanging around making noise, being drunk, littering public spaces);
- Lack of infrastructure (health, education, leisure, public transports);
- Poor condition of urban furniture (poor lighting, vandalized property, deteriorated houses, abandoned cars).

As a result, the construct addressing neighbourhood-based concerns is consistent with the differentiation articulated by Skogan (1995) between physical and social disorder. In this particular case, physical disorder is expressed in terms of poor condition of urban furniture and lack of infrastructure while social disorder is connected with anti-social behaviour and crime-related issues. The first problem included on the list is associated with the perception of social vulnerability that, combined with physical and social disorder, may increase the sensation of living in an unpleasant place (Pan Ké Shon, 2012). Finally, the construct also encompasses an item related to the perceived risk of becoming the victim of a crime. Table 3 provides an overview of the data informing the construct labelled "neighbourhood-based concerns".

Table 3. Items used to inform the theoretical construct of "neighbourhood-based concerns"

	N	**Mean**	**SD**
Worry about criminality	14,814	5.16	3.02
Worry about anti-social behaviours	15,320	5.07	3.00
Perceived risk of victimization	15,079	5.15	2.95
Worry about poor condition of urban furniture	15,302	5.12	2.94
Worry about lack of infrastructure	15,271	5.31	2.99
Worry about economic difficulties of neighbours	15,076	5.43	2.57

The operationalization of the concept of "social insecurity" addresses two different but complementary sub-dimensions. The construct referred to as "future-oriented anxieties" was measured by asking respondents the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements (using a 10-point scale from "totally disagree" to "totally agree"):

- I feel that my health may get worse in the next 12 months;
- I feel that my financial situation may get worse in the next 12 months.

A further sub-dimension, labelled "self-perceived social exclusion", was measured by asking respondents the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements (using a 10-point scale from "totally disagree" to "totally agree"):

- Some people look down on me because of my income or job situation;
- Some people look down on me because of my religion;
- Some people look down on me because of my ethnic/racial background;

- Some people look down on me because of my sexual orientation;
- I feel left out of society.

A data description referring to items informing the construct of "social insecurity" is reflected in Table 4.

Table 4. Items used to inform the theoretical construct of "social insecurity"

	N	Mean	SD
Pessimism towards evolution of health	14,460	3.86	2.70
Pessimism towards evolution of financial condition	14,867	4.46	2.84
Feeling excluded because of income or job situation	14,935	3.07	2.62
Feeling excluded because of religious beliefs	15,089	2.06	2.16
Feeling excluded because of ethnic background	15,130	1.89	2.05
Feeling excluded because of sexual orientation	11,963	1.81	1.96
Feeling left out of society	15,189	2.54	2.52

These two sub-dimensions are conceived as a comprehensive means of enabling an analysis of both future-oriented worries and actual social conditions. On the one hand, expectations regarding personal wellbeing and good health are pre-conditions for the use and enjoyment of urban spaces. Health outcomes and financial status have been proven to be strongly interlinked (Marmot, 2004) and pessimistic views about their evolution could engender "status anxiety" (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009) and, in turn, negatively affect on people's social participation. Similarly, Standing (2011) makes the case that insecurity is really about the threat of losing something (e.g. your health or socio-economic status) in the future. For his part, Bauman (1999) argued for a relationship between insecurity and downward social mobility. From this standpoint, the definition of social insecurity is intended to encompass factors that have been proven to "erode well-being and community cohesion", as stated by Jackson and Stafford (2009: 832) in their study on the relationship between public health and fear of crime.

5.4 Data analysis

The analysis involved the use of both Principal Component Analysis (hereinafter referred to as PCA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (hereinafter referred to as CFA).

Following the definitions of subjective perception, neighbourhood-based concerns and social insecurity provided in the previous section, PCA on 15 selected variables was conducted with oblique rotation (direct oblimin). The answer scale for all the variables involved in the analysis ranged from 1 to 10. In order to improve the reliability of the extracted component, Cronbach's α coefficients were calculated as an approximate estimate with a certain internal consistency (Bland and Altman, 1997; DeVellis, 2003; George and Mallery, 2010).

The specific objective for performing an exploratory factor analysis was to determine the underlying constructs for the selected variables and provide data oriented inputs that could inform the subsequent confirmatory approach. The partial results obtained from factor estimations indicated a certain stability of the theoretically generated constructs, which permitted the implementation of a theory-driven refinement prior to confirming the factor structure.

With these data and in light of the ordinal nature of the variables transformed into decatypes, we opted to evaluate the factor structure by applying the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) model. According to Byrne (2009: 164), "an important preliminary step in the analysis of full latent variable models is to test first for the validity of the measurement model before making any attempt to evaluate the structural model. Accordingly, CFA procedures are used in testing the validity of the indicator variables." Parameter estimation was conducted by means of weighted least squares means and variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimation. Mplus software version 5.0 (Muthén and Muthén, 2007) was used for that process.

6. Results

6.1 Exploratory factor analysis

An exploratory factor analysis was performed to examine the structure underlying the theoretical constructs involving the three dimensions of ontological insecurity labelled as "subjective perception", "neighbourhood-based concerns" and "social insecurity". In order to determine the structure of the scale factor, the direct oblimin rotation method was used and the principal components factor analysis method was applied. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .884 above the commonly recommended value of .6 (Kaiser and Rice, 1974), and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, x^2 (105) = 62868.66 with a p value < 0.001.

PCA extracted three components with eigenvalues exceeding Kaiser's criterion of 1. These components together explained 58.6% of variance of results. The variables' loading onto the extracted components can be appreciated in Table 5 showing the pattern matrix. A cut-off value of .4 was sought when deciding upon the number of variables to be retained within each component.

Table 5. Pattern Matrix

Variables	**Components**		
	1	**2**	**3**
Worry about criminality	.826	-.051	-.051
Worry about anti-social behaviours	.815	-.001	-.057
Perceived risk of victimization	.782	-.053	-.025
Worry about poor condition of urban furniture	.746	-.031	.046
Worry about lack of infrastructure	.671	-.050	.097
Worry about economic difficulties of neighbours	.652	-.049	.086
Frequency of the feeling of unsafety	.625	.119	-.046
Frequency of changes in routine because of fear	.467	.268	-.010
Feeling excluded because of ethnic background	-.026	.894	-.034
Feeling excluded because of sexual orientation	-.005	.884	-.075
Feeling excluded because of religious beliefs	.008	.847	-.026
Feeling left out of society	.034	.631	.204
Feeling excluded because of economic situation	.037	.491	.347
Pessimism towards evolution of *financial* condition	.048	-.036	.853
Pessimism towards evolution of health	-.010	.053	.797
Total variance explained	**34.5%**	**16.8%**	**7.3%**
Cronbach's α	**.853**	**.842**	**.635**

For the first component, accounting for 34.5% of the total variance, variables associated with "neighbourhood-based concerns" and variables identifying "subjective perception" showed positive and generally strong factor loadings. In line with Skogan's theoretical conceptualization (1995), it can be argued that worries about social disorder in terms of criminality (.826) and anti-social behaviours (.815) have a stronger incidence on the component's structure than worries about physical disorder, viewed in terms of poor condition of urban furniture (.746) and lack of infrastructure (.671). The item conceptualized as "perceived risk of victimization" (.782) acts as a dividing line between social and physical disorder, while the presence of the item referring to concerns about poverty and economic difficulties among residents (.652) endorses the conclusions of previous research showing that context-based worries are often intertwined (LaGrange, Ferraro and Supancic, 1992; Lewis and Salem, 1986; Ross and Jang, 2000). At the same time, the variables associated with the subjective perception of insecurity also show strong loading to this component, consistent with the ecological theories of fear of crime (Brunton-Smith and Jackson, 2012; van Ham et al., 2012) and suggesting that the socio-structural characteristics of the geographic areas in which people live may affect their perception of insecurity. Cronbach's α coefficient for this component is .853, well above the value of .65 or higher needed to accept the set of items as being related to a single latent factor (Vaske, 2008).

The second component accounts for 16.8% of the total variance. The variables showing highest factor loadings relate to the theoretical construct of "self-perceived social exclusion" where ethnic (.894), sexual (.884) and religious-based (.847) stigmatizations play a major role. Cronbach's α coefficient is .842, suggesting that the component has high reliability. The third component, accounting for 5.8% of the total variance, encompasses two variables pertaining to the dimension labelled "future-oriented anxieties". The anxieties loaded to this component respectively refer to the future evolution of the respondent's financial situation (.853) and health status (.797). Cronbach's α reliability coefficient for this component is the lowest among the extracted components (.635). However, by considering the two sub-dimensions of self-perceived social exclusion and future-oriented anxieties as one unique component of social insecurity Cronbach's α increases up to .822.

6.2 The ontological insecurity model

At this stage of the analysis, a theory-driven technique such as Confirmatory Factor Analysis appeared to be particularly suitable for testing the validity of the "ontological insecurity" model. In fact, although the PCA largely endorsed the theoretical structure behind the conceptualization of insecurity adopted in the framework of this study, some considerations arose with a view to implementing a confirmatory analysis of the factor structure, which can be summarized as follows:

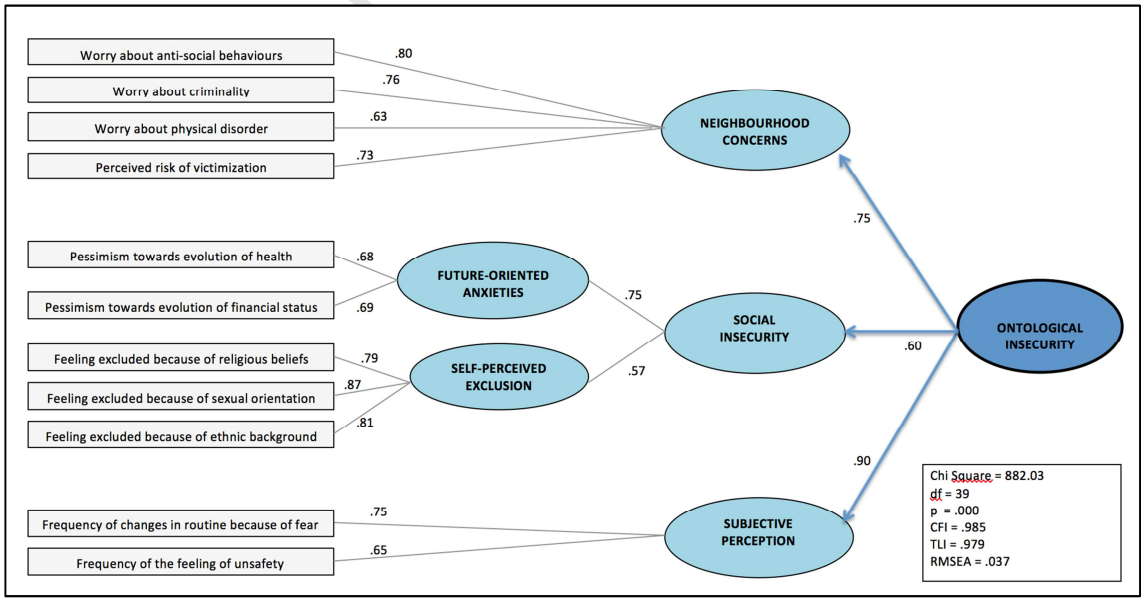
- The first component was divided into two factors of first-order, one including the two variables associated with the subjective perception of insecurity (α = .657) and the other encompassing the variables linked to individuals' worries about their neighbourhood (α = .847). This modification coincides with the original theoretical framework discussed in section 5.3 (cf. *Measures*) while at the same time ensuring a satisfactory reliability of the internal compositions of each factor;
- Two items linked to the construct labelled "neighbourhood-based concerns" were removed (i.e. worry about poverty and worry about the lack of public services) since

they appeared to be less informative with regard to perceptions of physical and social disorder, according to the definition given by Hirtenlehner (2008) or Skogan (1995). The internal consistency of the newly determined factor was highly satisfactory (α = .821);

- The two variables with lowest loading on the component referred to as "self-perceived social exclusion" were taken away. These variables were respectively categorized under self-perceived stigmatization due to the respondent's financial situation and a general feeling of being left out from society. The removal of the first variable was done on the basis of a partial duplication of information already provided by the items categorized as anxieties provoked by the feeling that one's financial situation might worsen. On the other hand, the theoretical reasoning behind the removal of the general feeling of being left out from the society was its redundancy and overlapping with the other items of self-perceived exclusion. In the end, this newly generated factor recorded a Cronbach's α of .863;
- Finally, and building further on the idea that socially marginalized groups may experience higher levels of insecurity (Vieno, Roccato and Russo, 2013), the second and third components extracted through PCA were treated as a second-order factors identifying a dimension of "social insecurity" (α = .755).

Following these refinements, a CFA was performed with 11 variables that were considered most appropriate for informing the "ontological insecurity" model. The proposed model yielded a Cronbach's α = .822 for the global scale. The model is integrated by two first-order factors respectively identifying the constructs labelled "neighbourhood-based concerns" and "subjective perception", plus a second-order factor addressing the two sub-dimensions of "social insecurity". A representation of the model can be appreciated below in Graphic 1 summarizing the standardized estimates of each parameter in the measurement model. This factor structure implies that the various dimensions of insecurity are interlinked and lead to a more abstract condition of malaise and existential fear that is identified by a factor of a higher order and which we have called "ontological insecurity".

Graphic 1. Confirmatory factor analysis of the "ontological insecurity" model



The CFA derived from the "ontological insecurity" model shows a good fit between the proposed model and the observed data, assuming the weighted least squares means and variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimation. All the goodness-of-fit statistics have satisfactory values: the comparative fit index (CFI = .985) and Tucker-Lewis fit index (TLI = .979) were both above the recommended cut-off value of .95 or greater, while the value of the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was .037 and below the cut-off value of .05 suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999).

Three additional factor extractions were performed to confirm the model structure, as presented in Table 6: standardised factor loading (λ), composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). Composite reliability was used to measure the factors' internal consistency, where values above the threshold .60 indicated good reliability (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). For convergent validity, the values of the average variance extracted approximate the threshold .50, which is considered acceptable according to Netemeyer and colleagues (2003).

Table 6. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE)

Factors and items	**λ**	**CR**	**AVE**
Subjective perception		**0.66**	**0.49**
Frequency of the feeling of unsafety	.750		
Frequency of changes in routine because of fear	.653		
Neighbourhood-based concerns		**0.82**	**0.54**
Worry about criminality	.762		
Worry about anti-social behaviours	.796		
Perceived risk of victimization	.733		
Worry about poor condition of urban furniture	.627		
Social insecurity		**0.88**	**0.59**
Pessimism towards evolution of health	.678		
Pessimism towards evolution of financial condition	.688		
Feeling excluded because of religious beliefs	.788		
Feeling excluded because of ethnic background	.868		
Feeling excluded because of sexual orientation	.806		

These results provide support for the third-order factor structure identifying the "ontological insecurity" model. The model shows that items generally load strongly on their respective latent constructs. On closer consideration the loading of future-oriented anxieties (.75; $p < 0.001$) on the two first-order and second-order factors labelled "social insecurity" appear remarkable, while the loading of self-perceived social exclusion is comparatively lower but still significant (.57; $p < 0.001$). On the other hand, the contributions of the frequency of feelings of unsafety (.65; $p < 0.001$) and the impact of this feeling on respondents' daily routine (.75; $p < 0.001$) as part of the factor addressing the "subjective perception" of insecurity are also significant. Concerning the factor labelled "neighbourhood-based concerns", worries about anti-social behaviours exert the highest influence over the latent construct (.80; $p < 0.001$), followed by worries about criminal activities that could take place within the neighbourhood (.76; $p < 0.001$), the perceived likelihood of being the victim of a crime (.73; $p < 0.001$) and worries linked to physical disorder in terms of poor lighting, vandalized property, deteriorated houses, or abandoned cars (.63; $p < 0.001$). Reviewing the general model, the three sub-dimensions of insecurity show significant loadings at the level of $p < 0.001$ on the "ontological insecurity" of the third-order factor. A breakdown of the results indicates that the highest contribution to the

model is exerted by "subjective perception" (.90), followed by "neighbourhood-based concerns" (.75) and "social insecurity" (.60).

In an attempt to offer new insights that may contribute to the study of the social determinants of perceived insecurity, the proposed model suggests that structural factors (i.e., problems affecting the place in which people live) combined with more intangible attributes (i.e., self-perceived unsafety, anxiety provoking situations and social exclusion) can limit a person's ability to cope with real or perceived factors of insecurity. At the same time, even though the model reproduces the data very well, it should be stressed that "acceptable model fit alone does not ensure that its conclusions are warranted, because alternative well-fitting models may lead researchers to divergent conclusions" (Coman et al., 2014: 74). Bearing in mind this limitation, the model indicates that the three dimensions of insecurity addressed (i.e., subjective perception, neighbourhood-based concerns and social insecurity) significantly contribute to the emergence of a generalized feeling of anxiety and existential fearfulness.

7. Discussion and conclusions

The main aim of this paper was to adopt a broad and comprehensive approach to the study of social determinants of perceived insecurity by taking into account both individual characteristics and contextual features of the places where people live. Using factor analysis, we have examined the impact of the frequency of feelings of unsafety, respondents' daily routines and their concerns about disorder as part of a general construct of ontological fear. The results of the analysis are consistent with the hypothesis that insecurity is an "umbrella sentiment" that expresses social and context-based anxieties.

Three main conclusions arise from our study. Firstly, respondents' assessments of signals of disorder affecting the area in which they live have been shown to have a significant effect on ontological insecurity. This result is consistent with the conclusions of the ecological theories of crime (Brunton-Smith and Jackson, 2012; Sampson and Raudenbush, 2004; Valera and Guàrdia, 2014; van Ham et al., 2012) that have focused on the relationship between the structural characteristics of a geographic area and individuals' perceptions with regard to their own security. In particular, the outputs of our model suggest that living in areas that concentrate signs of social disorder (i.e., people hanging around making noise, being drunk, littering in public spaces), physical disorder (i.e., poor lighting, vandalized property, deteriorated houses, abandoned cars) and crime-related issues both at a personal level (i.e., the perceived likelihood of being involved in a crime) or at a public level (i.e., drug trafficking and other illegal behaviour in public spaces) may engender higher levels of ontological insecurity.

Secondly, the subjective dimension of insecurity, expressed as both the frequency with which people experience fear and the frequency with which they are pushed to change their routine in order to avoid risky situations, plays a major role within the model of ontological insecurity. In fact, according to our results the factor associated with the subjective assessment of perceived insecurity exerts the highest influence on the general model. This conclusion is consistent with previous literature that has shown how psychological issues may lead to increased fear and deteriorate the subjective perception of well-being (Hanslmaier, 2013; Lorenc et al., 2014; Staubi, Killias and Frey, 2013). Nonetheless, a substantial difference characterizes our approach since we have explored the influence of the frequency of feelings of unsafety and the potential

consequences for routines, instead of opting for a focus on the traditional measure of fear of crime. The rationale behind this methodological reasoning is based on the criticisms of the operationalization of the item addressing self-reported fear of crime (e.g. *How safe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark?*). For example, Klaus Sessar (2008) argues that by assuming that people may feel unsafe and then making specific references to darkness and the condition of being alone, the classic question included on fear of crime surveys is "capable of sending a shiver down [the respondents'] spine even in the absence of any threatening event" (Sessar, 2008: 26). Following the analysis of Sessar (2008), it is reasonable to presume that the current wording of this item could lead to an overestimation of individuals' fear of crime-specific issues. This deduction is endorsed by the research of Farrall and Gadd (2004) showing that the frequency of fear is comparatively lower than the incidence of fear of crime. Despite the fact that the omission of the item traditionally used to measure fear of crime could be interpreted as a limitation for our study, the promising results derived from the confirmatory analysis should be understood as a starting point for analyses more directly focused on the perception of insecurity as a socially constructed phenomenon beyond actual crime-specific concerns.

Thirdly, our findings support the assumption that social insecurity is a key element for determining general feelings of existential insecurity. The definition of social insecurity used to build our model results in another key difference compared to traditional approaches in fear of crime and perceived insecurity studies. The criminological literature typically addresses vulnerability in terms of the likelihood of involvement as the victim of a crime (Jackson, 2009; Killias, 1990; Perloff, 1983; Sacco and Glackman, 1987), thus neglecting the social determinants of vulnerability in favour of victimization-related vulnerability. This gap has been partially filled with contributions in the field of sociology and social-psychology showing that fear of crime is comparatively higher among socially excluded groups (Vieno, Roccato and Russo, 2013; Hummelsheim et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the results of our analysis appear to go further and sustain a conceptualization of insecurity where socially constructed anxieties (due to health and financial precariousness) and self-perceived stigmatization play a more prominent role in determining people's feelings of insecurity.

There are, of course, a number of limitations to the present study. First, our survey was affected by a relatively low response rate. Nevertheless, as discussed above, the sample closely approximates the same aggregate characteristics for the population, which might have helped to reduce selection bias. Second, as for any survey, there were inevitably some questions that could have been asked but were not due to the need to reduce the length of the survey. Third, an analysis of data at the finest geographic level was not undertaken due to small sample sizes at the neighbourhood level, which would have led to substantial uncertainty in our findings.

These limitations point to opportunities for future research. In fact, although much progress has been made towards the improvement of survey-based measures of insecurity, a number of theoretical perspectives for further research should be considered. It would also be appropriate to develop further analysis focusing on emerging topics such as cyber-crime and cyber-victimization, whose relationship with perceived insecurity has been understudied to date. More direct measures aimed at understanding the situational causes of the fear of crime, asking specifically about the situations when respondents felt insecure, should be explored as well in order to deepen our understanding of the relationship between respondents' activities and their

fears and insecurities. Finally, exploring how people value their safety and how this may vary across countries is another possible avenue for research.

Our contribution to present debates on the study of insecurity consisted of an analysis addressing a consistent set of explanatory variables to understand insecurity beyond its crime-related determinants and, in turn, propose new measures to improve the value of survey-based analysis of fear of crime and perceived insecurity. Specifically, the goal was to explore the influence of self-perceived social integration and neighbourhood-based variables on the perception of insecurity while at the same time addressing the frequency of people' feelings insecurity (instead of more traditional static measures) and the impact of such feelings on their routine. The output of the "ontological insecurity" model showed support for the underlying hypothesis of the research by providing evidence on the growing role of social uncertainties within a general framework of subjective insecurity.

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