

Q&A – 18 March – Douglas Wiebe

1. Do outdoor assault risks vary inversely with proximity of nearest residence?

Ah - super basic issue, something we did not measure nor report on! Could easily (still) be done with these data.

2. In UK currently we're experiencing great outcry about sexual harassment of women following kidnap/murder of Sarah Everard in London. Government lamely proposing boost to street lighting, CCTV and even plainclothes cops in bars. Have you applied/considered applying your methodology to sexual harassment in public places?

That is such a tragic issue we should work to help address. In our study of gunshot assault, that being statistically rare, we used a case-control (and case-crossover design), starting by enrolling cases (shooting victims), and retrospectively learning about their paths. Sexual harassment unfortunately may be common enough that it can be studied prospectively; for example enrolling a cohort, and using ecologic momentary assessment (EMA) and "even-contingent responding" such that each time a harassment event is experienced, the participant logs it into their smartphone (location, circumstances, etc). Using a mixed-methods approach, with those being the quantitative data and an interview for qualitative data, could be valuable: compiling evidence to help establish new, evidence-based policy on how to make people and places safer.

3. Prospect-Refuge-Escape is good but wonder whether wider characterisation of immediate environmental circumstances could be done through exploring what I call 'archetypical script clashes' - pursue v escape, surprise v ambush, use force v resist etc.

Great idea. I encourage investigators to set up next studies to set up to capture a richer characterization as you suggest.

4. Be sure to distinguish casual relationships from friends or less casual as related to risk.

Yes that's an important distinction. Now that we have experience doing this (completing the research, and working with ethics committees) I will ask questions differently to better differentiate.

5. Be sure to look at isovists to understand how visibility & trees & buildings affect risk.

Isovists - the amount of 3D space that trees take up - great word and terrific idea! In the study I described we measured treecover with satellite imagery, so (plus or minus imprecision) we get "footprint" rather than volume, with the latter being more relevant I expect to the person walking down the street. Others could try using Google StreetView (and something the Nifety data collection instrument) to classify features (including tree shape and size) along a given path. Or of course in-person observation depending on the size and scope of the project.

6. Do you know if the participants had prior incidents of assault?

We assess that in only a dichotomous way (bullying yes/no, assaulted yes/no). Of course that may affect whether and how often subjects change their path to try to improve their perception of safety, and THAT we did ask about.

7. Will you incorporate the building heights or geometry features into the research?

Nice thought. On unrelated (ok distantly related) work, I am interest in preventing bird stikes (bird flying into windows and dying), and geometry is key there. In violence work by colleagues at our Injury Center they have factored in "viewshed" of buildings, which for example can then consider the position of sun to account for shadows depending of time of day. Features of ArcGIS make this possible for advanced users.