

Impact of the Media on Crime and Attitudes about Crime: A Qualitative Study

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While existing research on the impact of the media on attitudes toward crime and fear of crime, with the exception of one study (Boda in Szabó, 2011), has focus primarily on how the audience receives, filters and interprets the messages, this paper uses qualitative research to determine what role the news media and other intervening factors have in shaping attitudes towards crime and fear of crime. This study of the relationship between media consumption and attitudes toward crime and fear of crime, is based on the findings of reception studies conducted previously. Eighty-four participants in 13 focus groups from Ljubljana were interviewed.

The results indicate that the participants generally obtain information about crime through the mass media, and since all participants clearly used a discourse on crime that has much in common with the dominant media discourse about crime, we can conclude that media consumption impacts attitudes toward crime. The participants expressed an attitude that crime is generally increasing, especially violent crime, economic crime and political corruption, although official statistics do not support these claims. The participants believe that the media exerts a strong effect in shaping attitudes toward crime. A key finding of the research is that the impact of the media on the construction of attitudes toward crime and fear of crime is not direct, but filtered through social, collective, interpersonal and individual interpretative processes.

Keywords: crime, attitudes toward crime, fear of crime, media, media consumption, media impact, Slovenia

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