

Subjective Indicators as Measures of Living Conditions

Gli indicatori soggettivi per la misura delle condizioni di vita

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Riassunto

Il presente lavoro ha l'obiettivo di sottolineare, anche attraverso due esempi specifici relativi alla misura della povertà e della sicurezza dei cittadini, come l'uso di indicatori soggettivi (percezioni, opinioni, atteggiamenti) non sostituisca, né si contrapponga a quello di indicatori rilevati in termini oggettivi. Il loro utilizzo consente, piuttosto, di acquisire informazioni complementari e, in alcuni casi, di dare risposta a nuove o precedentemente trascurate esigenze conoscitive, non rilevabili in altro modo. Oltre ad arricchire lo spettro informativo, la disponibilità dei diversi indicatori permette di indagare la struttura associativa che lega i vari aspetti del disagio e le diverse dimensioni delle condizioni di vita.

Key words: Subjective indicators, living conditions, perception of safety, poverty indicators

1. Introduction

Social statistics are data that refer, implicitly or explicitly, to the social well-being as objective of political action. They help reach a set of measures that allow having information to understand and improve the life quality of citizens and the political action that is indispensable to obtain it. (United Nation, 1994). The concept of "life quality" has changed in the past years; it has been redefined and made more specific. Such transformations have implied new research practices, new evaluation models, new analysis methods and a new attitude. Starting with the evaluation of the material and immaterial resources, new conceptions have been reached that put the emphasis not only on the functioning, or the actual experiences of people, but also on the set of opportunities/possibilities of experimenting determined functioning (Sen, 1993). From this point of view social quality can be defined as the extent to which citizens are able to participate in the social and economic life of their communities under the conditions that enhance their well-being.

To put first the theme of life quality, and the need to consider a plurality of aspects of the life, mean to go from a traditional attitude of social research, that is, one that

involves the objectivity of the data, to a subjectivity design. The concept of 'quality of life' is based on an understanding of human well being as multi-dimensional (that is, embracing factors beyond income and material resources, such as health, education and social relationships) and as encompassing subjective perceptions as well as objective conditions.

Though the approach to life quality based on the importance of using multi-dimensional measures is obtaining increasing consent, the use of subjective indicators remains its most controversial aspect. In fact, it is important to distinguish two distinctive conceptualizations and operationalizations of welfare and life quality as they define the two extreme positions on a broad continuum of concepts currently available (Noll, 2004): the Scandinavian level of living approach, which focuses almost exclusively on resources and objective living conditions, and the American quality of life approach, which emphasizes the subjective well being of individuals as a final outcome of conditions and processes. Other multidimensional approaches to the measurement of human well being avoid subjective indicators on the grounds that their meaning is too uncertain to provide clear, easily interpretable information. For instance, the 18 statistical indicators for social inclusion adopted by the Laeken European Council in December 2001 (the 'Laeken indicators') do not include subjective indicators (Atkinson et al. 2002; Jowel, 2003).

In this context, the process that the official social statistics have followed in the past twenty years in Italy reveals a more or less wide use of subjective indicators that even characterize Istat's Multi-purpose survey system and other social surveys carried out since the beginning of the 1990s. Just to give some examples, the "Aspects of Daily Living" survey examines the level of satisfaction of individuals regarding the main dimensions of their life (work, family relationships, friendship, etc.); moreover, it studies not only the use people make of the public services, but also the degree to which citizens are satisfied with such services.

Over time, the subjective indicators have been widely used to deal with topics that meet new or previously left out cognitive needs, which also derive from institutional subjects that need extensive information to monitor the phenomena and plan policies. This is the case, for example, of the *ad hoc* surveys on the attitude of individuals regarding military service, their understanding and opinion on the presence of women in Parliament, on civil justice, and on the most important priorities of the country. Not only do the Time Use questionnaires survey the objective conditions, defined by the behaviors of the interviewees, but they also render the perception interviewees have of it and their level of satisfaction. These questions refer to the time devoted to the different life aspects, to feelings of stress, to how they view the quality of their own life in general and in relation to particular fields.

The "subjective" dimension of the phenomenon is thus dealt with not only in topics where individual perceptions, opinions and attitudes form an integral part of the survey theme (such as the perception of safety, increase in criminality, the social decay indicators in the "victimization" surveys or expectation of career success, a stable work relation, change in the work activity in the survey on the "criticality of work processes from a gender viewpoint"), but also in sectors, such as the economic conditions, and, in particular poverty, that, traditionally, focus almost exclusively on resources and objective living conditions. The paper has the purpose of underline, through two specific examples and the empirical evidence of data, as the subjective indicators represent an additional and complementary information regarding that obtained through

objective indicators. They represent an integration rather than an alternative through which it is possible to investigate new dimensions, not objectively observable, or to complete an analysis picture that otherwise would turn out only partially traced.

2. The objective-subjective distinction

At first glance, the distinction between objective and subjective indicators is rather clear. Objective social indicators are statistics that represent social facts independently of personal evaluations; subjective social indicators, on the other hand, emphasize the individual experience and evaluation of social circumstances. Objective measurement is based on explicit criteria and performed by external observers; subjective measurement involves self-reports based on implicit criteria (Veenhoven, 2002).

Actually, the distinction between the two is not always clear-cut. Many so-called objective indicators are based on self-reports that may be distorted by subjective influences (e.g. social desirability bias may influence self-reports of amounts of cigarettes consumed). Yet, some indicators combine subjective substance with objective measurement (for example, measuring happiness by suicide). Thus, while most indicators are clearly identifiable as either objective or subjective, some occupy a grey area where the distinction between the two is less clear.

Objectivity is one strength point of the objective measurement. These indicators can be defined and quantified without resorting to individual perception. Their main advantage is that they enable to compare life conditions over time, space and among different groups of population, with a wide consent on what is being measured and to which degree of precision. The use of such indicators derives from the assumption that life conditions can be judged favorably or unfavorably, comparing real situations with normative criteria (values, goals, etc). Hence, there must a wide consent on what dimensions are important for the well being of individuals, what does it mean to be in good or bad conditions, the direction in which the society should go (Diener, Suh, 1997). Theoretically speaking at least, any person could believe, for example, that the increase in unemployment represents an "ill" and that the increase in education levels must be considered as an improvement. On the other hand, a person becomes much less certain when having to evaluate indicators relative to retirement age or the spreading of part-time jobs. On the contrary, to use subjective indicators means that citizens themselves must evaluate the level of well being relatively to specific life aspects. Such position has led to deep controversy about the principles of welfare measurement, and, in particular, for the fact that the subjective appraisals largely depend on the level of aspiration of individuals and on their capacity of adapting to the circumstances, leading, in some cases, to contradictory results, at least apparently. For instance, improvement of living conditions might raise standards of comparison, and might thus result in rising dissatisfaction.

Contrary to this position, others have underlined that policy makers need to use subjective indicators along with objective indicators for both assessing policy success and for selecting policy goals (Veenhoven, 2002). Social policy makers must know what people want to decide on future directions. They must understand what people really need to correctly identify the objectives of the social policies; many of such data require subjective indicators. The transformations towards post-materialism (such as personal development and self-gratification) (Inglehart, 1977) of value orientations and

perspectives of social development reflect the decrease in the marginal utility of material wealth. The evaluation of life conditions goes beyond the concept of material prosperity and includes a new, multidimensional and much more complex goal of societal development. Social indicators will become evermore useful, as they are able to refer to the forces that actually influence the life of people, adapting continuously to ever-evolving societies.

It is, thus, essential to establish first a list of all the important dimensions that will guide in the choice of the indicators. Some of these have an objective content: for example, the availability/accessibility of goods and services (even indirect, that is, through the available income), health conditions, housing, mobility over the territory, etc. Others refer to the social context, such as the freedom to act, rights obtained, integration with one's environment culture (labor market, family relations, friendship, participation in collective events...). Others, yet, refer to the subjective experience: the dignity of a person, the possibility of appearing in public without being ashamed of one's own conditions (e.g. due to clothing), values, perceptions and attitudes towards different life aspects. Statistically speaking, to survey each dimension entails the need to establish operative definitions and observation/measurement techniques.

The data gathered can be used in many different analyses, and, in particular, to produce specific indicators or to synthesize all the data in one single indicator. The different methods for constructing synthetic indicators of life quality are not exempt from criticism, even to the point that influential scholars advise preserving the informative wealth of the observations made and to avoid synthesizing, in one single number, aspects that differ too much. The problem does not really involve the methods used but, rather, the concept, since it must never be set aside from the pre-established objectives. A synthesis index must really reflect a unitary concept; it would not be correct to aggregate indicators should there be a causative relationship among them or if one is part of another.

In conclusion, the multi-dimensionality must refer to the dimensions and not to the indicators. Indicators can indeed refer to one dimension of well being (for example monetary well-being); thus, to obtain an index of that dimension only, the information deriving from each indicator can be analyzed together and synthesized in one single measure (choosing the one that provides for a lesser loss of information). On the other hand, when the indicators refer to different dimensions, their relation structure must be maintained since, in that case, the objective would be that of measuring the structure of the relation among the dimensions that cannot be synthesized in one index only.

3. The perception of poverty

The information on poverty, in strictly monetary terms, can be extended, enriched and even "corrected", at times, by means of the subjective indicators. To be poor economically does not necessarily imply to feel poor. The concept of poverty is never an objective one only, but includes subjective evaluations that derive from the comparison one makes with other groups of people or families within the same socio-territorial context. Even before being considered for its social relevancy, it is a problem that involves people who have their own perception of well being, a perception that mirrors a general hierarchy of needs and opinions on what is the minimum life standard under which one lives in a state of deprivation. A person feels poor when he or she

believes to live unbearable deprivations or deprivations above average of the community in which he or she lives. The indicators of subjective poverty focus on the objectives of individuals (values, preferences and personal convictions) and valorize personal perceptions and cultural and geographical definitions of well being and poverty.

The joint analysis carried out with the objective indicators shows areas of superimpositions and convergence, as well as areas of divergence. It makes it possible to examine the associative structure that links the various aspects of poverty and, more generally, of life conditions.

Such comparison becomes even more revealing as regards the context of poverty, since the choice of the variable to be used strongly influences the interpretation and measurement of the phenomenon. Traditionally, a condition of poverty is identified as a household's scarcity of strictly monetary resources (measured by means of the level of available income or expenditure for consumptions) and, thus, presupposes that one same level of income and/or expenditure corresponds to a same level of well being.

Moreover, the choice between income and expenditure for consumptions to be used as informative basis for analyzing poverty is rather influential; it, indeed, determines, in a relative measurement, a higher diffusion of poverty when evaluated in terms of available income instead of expenditure for consumptions. Likewise, the different propensity to consumption during the various household life cycles could either reduce or increase the distances between the various types of household compared to an income-based analysis. For example, the recent formation of a couple or the presence of children, which often lead households to incur more debts, could induce a lower estimation of poverty diffusion compared to the estimation obtained when based on the income levels. Sober life styles usually associated with the last life phase, despite having the same income, could lead to overestimate poverty in the older population phases.

Hence, the introduction of subjective indicators could, at least partially, explicate the surroundings and profiles of poverty that derive from an analysis based on objective indicators and could provide information on some other dimensions that the analysis based on income or expenditure for consumptions does not necessarily discover.

Consequently, in 2002, an *ad hoc* module on life conditions was inserted in the Household Consumptions Survey (Istat 2003, Mastrovita et al. 2003). The traditional poverty analysis, the household characteristics and the subjective indicators were thus analyzed together.

Though being much more complex than the indicator here-after analyzed¹, the subjective approach to measure poverty helps, in this work (whose objective is not to determine a line of poverty from a subjective approach), show how the perception of being poor reveals a different dimension that is, often, not superimposed to the one measured by means of the objective indicators based on expenditure for consumptions. Based on this analysis, the reference context strongly influences the perception of poverty: to feel poor does not necessarily imply strong monetary limits or, vice versa, to experience economic difficulties does not always mean to feel poor.

¹ For more details, please consult the specific literature. Among others Goedhart et al. 1977; Hagenaars, 1986; Van Praag, 1991; European Commission 2005.

Table 1: *Households objective and subjective indicators of poverty, by geographical area and characteristics of the household and reference person – Year 2002 (percentage values)*

	Objective indicator of poverty	Subjective indicator of poverty	Total
Geographical area			
North	5.0	7.7	48.0
Centre	6.7	5.6	19.4
South	22.4	12.1	32.6
Household typology			
Single person less than 65 years	3.1	13.1	11.2
Single person 65 years and over	13.3	16.0	14.2
Couple without children with r.p.(a) less than 65 years	4.8	5.1	9.1
Couple without children with r.p.(a) 65 years and over	15.7	9.6	10.4
Couple with one child	8.1	4.5	18.3
Couple with two children	12.2	4.4	18.5
Couple with three or more children	24.4	9.6	4.9
Single parent	11.5	12.2	7.5
Other typology	15.7	8.5	5.8
Number of elderly members			
One	13.4	12.9	24.3
Two or more	17.4	9.2	11.1
At least one	14.7	11.7	35.4
Numer of minor children			
One	9.2	5.9	15.1
Two	15.2	5.4	10.8
Three or more	25.9	12.1	2.2
At least one	12.8	6.2	28.1
Total	11.0	8.7	100.0

(a) r.p.: reference person

In 2002, 11 households out of 100 live in relative poverty²; however, households that felt poor or very poor constituted only a minority, equal to 8,7%. On the other hand, 2% felt rich or very rich and 90% did not feel nor rich nor poor. Such high percentage could partially be due to the stigma effect; families could indeed have some difficulties in declaring to feel poor or rich.

In the North, perceptions of poverty are more diffused than the real incidence of poverty as estimated from the consumption expenditure, even though both indicators are under the national average value.

The higher feeling of relative deprivation in the richer regions is not only due households having higher expectations but also because they compare themselves with costs and levels of consumption that are higher than the national values. In reality, even some of the households that are objectively above the national line of poverty, have some difficulties in maintaining the average standards of the area in which they live.

² A two-member household is defined as poor when its expenditure for consumptions does not exceed a line of poverty, equal to the national per-capita average expenditure. For households of different size, its equivalent expenditure, to be compared with the line of poverty, is obtained, dividing the expenditure for consumptions by the coefficient of the equivalence scale, which equals: 0.6 for persons living alone, 1 for two-member families, 1.33 for three-member families; 1.63 for four-member families; 1.90 for five-member families; 2.16 for six-member families; 2.40 for seven or more member families.

Consequently, they feel relatively poor. On the contrary, the percentage of households living in the South that feel poor is lower, though being anyway above the national average, than that of households in condition of relative poverty. While the incidence of poverty is twice the national one, the perception of poverty is about 1.4 times.

The household typologies in which the perception of poverty definitely exceeds the average one, involve persons living alone, whether young or old, and single-parent households. In these cases, the higher perception of subjective poverty could depend on situations of loneliness – as regards elderly people living alone – or feelings of insecurity for the future in the case of young people and single-parent families.

When one or two elderly people live with the household, the condition of economic discomfort objectively increases. The incidence of poverty is indeed 1.5 times the average. However, the fact that at least another elderly person lives with the household greatly reduces the feeling of being poor, which results almost in line with the population average. On the other hand, a probable situation of solitude intensifies the self-perception of poverty, which rises to 12.9% among households with one elderly only. The particular economic discomfort of households with numerous children increases when there are minors. In case of three or more minors, not only is the incidence of poverty 2.4 times the average, but also the feeling of being poor is higher than average.

3.1 The intersection of objective and subjective indicators

The intersection of the objective indicator and the subjective indicator shows that, often, they do not coincide, at an household unit level. About 7.1% of households classified as not poor, based on the objective criterion, felt poor or very poor; only 21.9% of poor households based on the objective criterion felt so too.

More than the geographical area, the size of the residence municipality determines the coincidence of the two indicators: not relevant differences are observed between North and South (21.3% of the poor households in the North and 23.2% of the poor households in the South feel to be poor), but being objectively poor more often means to be subjectively poor as the residence municipality augments. About 34% of poor households residing in municipalities with more than 200 thousand inhabitants feel poor.

In addition, the perception of one's own condition is often linked with the type of household: persons living alone, whether old or young, and single-parent households are more pessimistic regarding their condition. Among poor, almost half of persons under 65 years of age living alone and more than one third of single-parent households feel poor or very poor. Even as regards households considered as non-poor according to the objective indicator, more than 10% of households made up of persons living alone feel poor.

In case of important living difficulties linked with specific episodes, the two indicators become more alike: more than 50% of objectively poor households who often have difficulties to buy basic goods and services (food, clothes, medical care, transports, rents and domestic services) declare to be poor, a percentage that rises to 80% in the case of rent and 70% in the case of food and transports.

Table 2: *Poor households in objective terms declaring to be poor or very poor by geographical area, size of the residence municipality and household typology - Year 2002 (percentage values)*

Geographical area		Household typology	
North	21.3	Single person less than 65 years	45.0
Centre	15.6	Single person 65 years and over	26.1
South	23.2	Couple without children with r.p. less than 65 years	13.5
		Couple without children with r.p. 65 years and over	18.9
Residence municipality size			
Up to 10,000 inhabitants	13.8	Couple with one child	18.8
from 10,001 to 50,000 inhabitants	21.5	Couple with two children	14.1
from 50,001 to 200,000 inhabitants	29.3	Couple with three or more children	23.8
More than 200,000 inhabitants	34.0	Single parent	35.5
		Other typology	22.7
Total	21.9		

In conclusion, to feel poor may not depend on an objective situation of poverty alone, since there are numerous other aspects that determine such negative feelings. A person feels poor when he/she feels excluded from the social, economic and cultural context of origin or when he/she lives alone and has some difficulties in dealing with daily problems, or yet when he/she feels insecure about personal future resources (families residing in Northern Italy, elderly living alone, single-parent families, families with children, especially minors). Vice versa, some families have low levels of consumption but do not feel poor. On the one hand, some of these families present low consumption levels due to a lower propensity to spend and to a sober life style rather than to balance obligations (elderly living alone or in couple, families in small municipalities, especially in the South). On the other hand, some other of these families consider their own difficulties as “normal” and not as linked with a condition of poverty when compared to a context in which they are fully inserted (numerous families living in the South of Italy, families with low levels of education, families that have not completely entered the labor market).

Hence, the contemporaneous availability of both indicators enables to have a complete and detailed situation on the poverty and life conditions of the population, object of analysis. Moreover, it also allows verifying the dimensions not covered by the objective dimension and the dimensions not gathered by the subjective one in order to take into account the multi-dimensionality that, inevitably, connotes a phenomenon such as poverty.

4. The perception of safety

Until a few decades ago, safety was dealt with, calculating only the criminal deeds that were known to the police force and carrying out criminal analyses, exclusively based on

the study of the criminal behaviour. Since the 1960s³, these criminal analyses have offered further perspectives, as the victims have become active subjects. On the one hand, this enables to study this topic based also on the victimisation experience, which, when directly asked to citizens, reveals the hidden part of the phenomenon and provides the real dimension of crimes. On the other hand, it gives more attention to a further new aspect of safety, the subjective one. Safety perception and fear are no longer considered as irrational, but they are valorised in the political programmes as social discomfort.

In Italy and in the whole world, the subjective side of safety is measured based on indicators that survey fear in various life contexts, both public and private (generally, the area of residence and the houses)⁴. Other indicators are used relatively to the fear of being victim of a crime, the level of criminality perceived in the area of residence, indicators of socio-environmental decay, the territory management by police forces, defensive strategies both individuals and families adopt. These are the elements that indeed influence in different way fear of crime and social worries.

Hence, the objective measurements of criminality are no longer enough to evaluate the impact criminality has on the quality of life; because of the many interrelated dimensions, it is necessary to consider also some subjective indicators to explain the behaviours of each individual.

Only the combining of criminality, socio-environmental decay, presence of the police, fear of crime and citizens' reactions presents an interesting and complete frame that goes well beyond the surveying only of criminality, to measure its consequences on the life quality of the citizens and for a possible improvement.

On the bases of the Citizens Safety⁵ survey data, 5.2% of citizens have suffered a crime against the person (bag-snatching, pick-pocketing, theft of personal belongings, robbery and assaults) and 18.6% of families have suffered from a crime against property (burglaries, car thefts, car part thefts, unlawful entry, vandalism acts). Despite a non-high rate of victimisation, fear in Italy has become an important phenomenon: 27.6% do not feel safe to walk alone in the dark (more than one fourth of the population), 12.2% to stay home alone, 25.5% decide sometimes not to go out alone for fear and 46.3% feel somehow influenced by criminality in their habits.

Other indicators used to complete the framework of subjective safety indicators are: a) soft-crimes - how often does a person see in the area of residence people assuming drugs, dealing drugs, prostitutes, vandalism acts, abandoned houses, homeless people; b) risk of criminality people perceive in their area of residence; c) presence of the police and the judgment on their capacity to manage the territory; d) perception people have of

³ The study of victimology began in the United States. The most important researches in this field are the NCVS – National Victimization Survey – from the USA, the General Households Survey – GHS – from Canada, the Victimization Survey from Australia, the British Crime Survey, and the Dutch Survey of NSO.

⁴ Some authors critic these indicators, because they deem these as measurements of a general social preoccupation, rather than as a specific fear of criminality. They consider them rather imprecise in surveying fear of crime, and so decontextualised that it could lead to over-estimating the fear of the group object of examination. Hence, Farrall (1997) proposed indicators that, by definition, take more into account the real situation, adopt a clearer language and depend less on the cultural stereotypes. Moreover, they help measure also the frequency and intensity of the fear of crime.

⁵ The Citizens Safety Survey is a thematic survey part of the Multi-purpose system, which, every five years (the first one was carried out in 1997-'98) surveys safety from a subjective and objective viewpoint on a sample of 60,000 households. It is a CATI survey in which only one person aged 13 and more is interviewed per family.

the gravity of a crime and the probability that it might occur, by evaluating the anxiety that they will take place; e) decision to change house because of fear of crime.

The analysis of the main safety perception indicator “How safe do you feel walking alone in the dark in the area where you live” shows the extent to which the fact of having suffered or not of a crime has an impact on fear. Persons who had suffered a victimisation experience feel, more often than others, not very safe or not at all safe; furthermore the fear of criminality increases when the gravity of the crime suffered is higher. 39% of persons who have suffered a crime against the person (Table 3), 38.4% of persons victim of a crime against the property and 42.4% of persons victim of a violent crime declare not to feel safe.

Fear also depends on the perception people have of the gravity of a crime and of the risk they are exposed: the influence of the bag-snatching crime is higher than others though robberies and assaults are more serious. The higher diffusion of bag-snatching compared to the other two is the cause of the feeling of being more exposed at risk.

Table 3. – *Persons over 13 years old, by crime type suffered in the last 12 months and safety perception when walking alone in the dark - 2002 (per 100 persons)*

Safety perception	At least one crime against property (a)		at least one violent crime (b)		At least one individual crime (c)	
	not suffered	suffered	not suffered	suffered	not suffered	suffered
Very safe	20,4	16,4	20,2	20,5	20,4	17,2
Enough safe	44,5	41,4	44,5	34,3	44,6	40,2
Little or completely unsafe	27,1	38,4	27,5	42,4	27,0	39,0
Never go out	8,0	3,7	7,8	2,8	8,0	3,7
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

(a) bag-snatching, attempted bag-snatching, pick-pocketing, attempted pick-pocketing, theft of personal belongings and their attempts;

(b) robbery, attempted robbery, assaults;

(c) bag-snatching, attempted bag-snatching, pick-pocketing, attempted pick-pocketing, theft of personal belongings and their attempts, robbery, attempted robbery, assaults.

Consequently, direct victimisation experience is not the only aspect that influences the perception of safety: over 27% of the population seem incoherently anxious, since they have not directly suffered of a negative experience, at least not immediately. Thus, we could speak of indirect victimisation, its diffusion and amplification, as well as the effect of the medias in diffusing news on crimes.

Finally, other factors are linked with this fear, such as the socio-demographic elements, including age, sex, education title, that are, often, correlated with different attitudes towards the experience of victimisation.

Even though young people and persons from a certain social class are more victimised, older people, women and persons from lower social classes⁶ are the most insecure: feelings of insecurity increase with the age, the percentage of women are afraid to go out alone in the evening is twice more than men and women are six times more prone to declare not to go out alone in the evening out of fear. Vulnerability in this case plays an essential role, the elderly, the women and the disadvantaged social classes are more

⁶ Such relation can also be seen in the logistic models applied to the data (in both survey editions 1997-98 and 2002), which reveal the importance of the variable professional condition/position in influencing the feelings of safety.

afraid, since they are more vulnerable economically (due to the lesser capacity of protecting oneself from crime and to the higher negative consequences), physically and socially.

Analysing the indicators in their specifics emerge how the composite dimension of the territorial context and the perception that citizens have of it greatly influence the definition of insecurity. Fear is stronger when, in the area in which one lives, there is a repetition of events perceived as signs that the moral order of the community has collapsed. Social disorder is correlated with fear of crime: higher is the number of soft-crimes taking place, more probably will the person feel less safe. Their impact on feeling fear is even stronger than the experience of victimisation itself. There is a vicious circle involving negligence, fear and lack of a police control, leading to a higher level of victimization, which will eventually contribute in increasing fear (Barbagli, 1998, Roché, 2000).

Persons living in an area at high or enough risk of criminality declare to be highly or averagely unsafe in 21.9 and 51.7 percent of the cases respectively. They are very afraid of being victim of a crime in 32.0 percent of the cases. Persons living in quieter areas, or who consider the areas in which they live as such, feel very unsafe in 11.1 and averagely unsafe in 42.9 percent. A good 26.5 percent declare not to be very afraid of being victim of a crime.

Feelings of higher vulnerability and fear are stronger when people are persuaded that the institutions whose objective is to prevent and control criminality, are no longer able to deal adequately with the increase in delinquency: people safety perception increases with the increasing of police work satisfaction. The feeling of insecurity and fear of crime strongly condition the life styles of the citizens. Sometimes, such fear and insecurity are not justified by a real risk of victimisation, despite many persons adopt explicit or implicit defence behaviours. As regards their own house, citizens resort to both home-made protective measures, such as going to the neighbours when they are not at home (40%), keeping the lights on in the evening (22.3%) or keeping a watchdog (11.8%), and to more efficient ones, such as using reinforced doors (40.8%), bars and railings (21.4%), window blockings (26,4%) and alarm systems (16%).

When going from one place to another, a good 38.1 percent of people in Italy, when walking in the evening in their own area, try to avoid, for safety reasons, certain streets, places or certain persons; women declare to avoid some places or some people, for fear of crime, more than men (47.2 percent compared 28.4 percent for men). Such defence behaviours, nevertheless, characterise even more the younger ones, objectively more exposed to dangerous situations, and elderly women. Moreover, 35.7 percent of who uses the car to go from one place to another usually insert the safety lock to the car door, a share that even increases to 40.7 percent among women and to almost 60 percent among young women aged between 25 and 34.

Victimisation experience, at last, activates individual defence mechanisms to try reducing the risk of predatory crimes: a person who has already been the victim of a bag-snatching, robbery or personal assault, will, more often than others, avoid particular places or persons.

5. Final remarks

The more or less extensive resort to the individuals' perceptions, opinions and attitudes does not substitute nor surrogate events or behaviors objectively surveyed through

modalities that the surveyor and the interviewee can verify. Rather, they allow acquiring complementary information on aspects and events of the reality, object of survey, which would, otherwise, not have been surveyed. The subjective data are not a proxy of the objective measurement of the phenomenon to be surveyed, but represent valid information that cannot be substituted – in determinate cases. Hence, this is not about moving the attention from one plan to another. Rather, it is an extension of the usual survey modalities and social statistic production procedures, an enrichment of the informative content to enable a wide reading of the phenomenon, thanks to the evaluations, judgments and attitudes of the population, which would, otherwise, have remained outside the context identified. This extension to the subjective plan might well be the innovation that has encountered most difficulties to establish itself in the official statistical culture. However, because it is inserted in a usually foreign context, this experience is of great importance, not only because it associates subjective aspects with the more traditional and quantitatively more relevant objective measures, but also because of the methodological implications the insertion of these measures entails, from the survey techniques to the treatment and analysis of the data.

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