

## Media Exposure and the Threat of Victimization in MTR Sex-related Crimes against Hong Kong Women

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### Introduction

The MTR (Mass Transit Railway) is one of the most convenient public transport systems in Hong Kong. It serves about 5,100,000 passengers per weekday (MTR, 2014), so it is a busy and crowded public transportation. Interestingly, it seems to the public that MTR is becoming more dangerous because sex-related crimes are more common. Many news reports show that more and more cases of indecent assault and voyeuristic photography occur on the MTR. As seen in Table 1.1, the Hong Kong Police Force (2012) reported an increasing trend of sex crime in the Railway Police District in the period between 2007 and 2011. This has led to significant public concern about this problem.

Table 1.1

*Number of MTR sex-related crimes from 2007 to 2011*

MTR sex-related crimes	<u>Years</u>				
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Indecent assault	121 (87)	110 (67)	110 (74)	151 (110)	167 (111)
Under-skirt photography	88 (79)	117 (104)	80 (75)	91 (84)	78 (75)
Total	209 (166)	227 (171)	190 (149)	242 (194)	245 (186)

*Note. ( ) are the numbers of persons arrested*

According to the HKSAR press release (2014), there were 1,463 cases of indecent assault in 2013, which was an decrease of 32 cases from 2012, however, compared to 2012, the number of cases taking place on public transport increased by 23 to a total of 360, and notably, more than half occurred in MTR areas. Singtao (2014) also reports that the number of MTR sex crimes remains high, and that the Police Railway District recorded more than 300 cases of indecent assault and voyeuristic photography in 2013. This means that sexual offences on the MTR are reported almost every day. Nearly all victims of indecent assault are female (Information Services Department, 2013).

The mass media provides the main sources of information about crime. As the rate of sex-related crimes in MTR has risen in recent years, the frequency of this offence being reported in the mass media should increase correspondingly. Yeoh and Yeow (1997) claim that the mass media construct images of fear. With more media coverage on MTR sexual offence issues, fear of sex-related crimes is more likely to be induced. This may especially affect females who are the most likely potential victims of sex-related

crimes. In spite of the prevalence of this issue in the media, the relationship between female media consumption and fear of MTR sex-related crimes has received scant attention in Hong Kong. Notably, the concept of “threat of victimisation”, which is a reconceptualization of “fear of crime”, is employed in the current study.

### **Research Objectives**

In this study, we explore the relationship between media exposure and the threat of victimisation in MTR sex crimes against women, and try to identify the mediating effect of psychological processes. Our research objectives are:

1. To investigate the threat of victimisation in sex-related crimes against females in the MTR;
2. To understand the situation regarding female media exposure to information about MTR sex-related crimes;
3. To examine the impact of media exposure on the threat of victimisation in MTR sex-related crimes; and
4. To provide suggestions for authorities tackling the issue.

### **Significance of the Research**

There are certain elements of the significance of this research which should be highlighted as follows.

#### *- Social significance*

The shadow of sexual assault theory formulated by Ferraro (1995) argues that woman’s fear of rape and sexual assault increases their fear of other non-sexual crimes, because any type of victimisation such as robbery or assault could be escalated into a rape or sexual assault case. Fisher and Sloan (2003) also point out that fear of sexual assault must be addressed so as to lower the general fear of crime among women. Studying women’s fear of sex crimes is therefore a core position from which to understand features of the threat of victimisation.

The fear of crime levels found in this study arouses social concern and can bring insight to the authorities in order to implement related policies, because higher fear of crime levels can have unfavourable impacts (Marsh & Melville, 2009). According to Hale (1996), people who have a higher fear of crime tend to have greater negative physiological and psychological effects, such as feelings of vulnerability. The restriction of their social activities may result in disconnection with community and dissatisfaction with life. Farrall et al. (2000) even assert that “fear of crime is a larger problem than crime itself”. It is therefore worth to studying this important issue in Hong Kong.

#### *- Research significance*

The relationship between media consumption and fear of crime has been examined extensively in the field of research into the effects of mass media. The majority of these studies focus on offenses such as property crime and personal violence, but there is very little research into fear of crime in Hong Kong and few studies of the fear of crime that are specific to one type of crime. Due to the limited empirical analysis of the new conceptualization of fear of crime, the threat of victimisation, the possible connections between “known” correlates of fear of crime and this new concept are in desperate need of exploration. This research can therefore offer a new perspective for understanding and conducting further research into the influence of the media’s presentation of crime. It can also act as an illustration of expanding the exploration to examine other nature of crime issue with the adoption of threat of victimisation concept.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Fear of Crime and Media***

According to Garofalo (1981), there are two types of fear of crime: actual and anticipated fear. Actual fear is based on having experienced crime directly, and is later induced by perceived cues, however, fear is not necessarily caused by the experience of actual situations in the past. The anticipated fear of crime in a particular situation can be triggered by indirect experience, such as mass media experiences and informal social communication (Tyler, 1980). Indirect experience therefore matters in triggering a fear of crime.

Generally, individuals are in lack of correspondence between fear of crime and actual risk of victimisation in a specific area due to their limited knowledge (Howitt, 1998). They therefore tend to use other information sources as references. Personal experience of sexual violence is not necessary to produce fear. Instead, repeatedly hearing of other people suffering sexual violence is enough to feed a culture of fear among women (Yodanis, 2004). Mass media is the most common way that the general public receives information about crime (Warr, 2000). The media informs individuals about current events through various channels, including the internet and digital broadcasting. Many studies show that news reports place extra emphasis on the issue of crime and criminal justice (Surette, 2007, as cited in Kohm et al., 2012), and therefore, much of what people know about crime and criminal justice is constructed from reports in the media, and fear of crime may increase due to such exposure (Dowler, 2003). It has been suggested that media reports on crime can generate fear among the public (Chermak, 1994).

### ***Cultivation Theory: A Theoretical Explanation of Media Effects on Fear***

With the invention of mass media technology, especially the television, many scholars moved from communication or criminology disciplines to study its far-reaching effect on the public’s cognition, attitude and behaviour regarding crime (Gerbner &

Gross, 1976). Gerbner and Gross (1976) describe the relationship between audience and media message as a continuous and progressive interaction which indicates the role of socialization processes. In the 1960s, George Gerbner, who was a pioneer scholar studying the effects of television on society, introduced the cultivation theory, which is an important reference through which to study the media-fear relationship and serves as the foundation for the present research.

A number of scholars (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; 1978; 1980; Cohen & Weimann, 2000; Griffin, 2012) note from their analysis that there is positive correlation between television viewing and fear of crime victimisation. They examined the effects of television and discovered that the more time people spent watching television, the more likely they were to believe in the social reality presented on television. They become more afraid of being the victim of crime than light television viewers, since it produces a certain degree of misperception about what is true in society. Robinson (2011) argues that the media often sensationalizes crime. O'keefe and Reid-Nash (1987) indicate that the crime images represented in mass media are chosen, framed, and constructed, which is not completely the same as reporting the truth. This is because the news usually focuses on themes at the "criminal" level, reinforcing the effect of fear of crime. Individuals then find it difficult to distinguish between "socially constructed society" and the reality. Fear and worries about becoming a victim of crime will be induced eventually.

Apart from examining the relationship between media consumption and fear of crime, Gerbner et al. (1980) further developed and modified the cultivation theory in order to consider the differences among various groups of TV audiences who had similar amounts of media exposure regarding crime content, starting from the 1970s. Two key ideas in cultivation theory, "mean world syndrome" and "resonance" should be highlighted.

#### *Mean world syndrome*

Gerbner and Gross (1976) used the phrase "mean world syndrome" to describe the phenomenon where viewers are more likely to believe that the real world is full of violence and perceive society as a dangerous and frightening place than it actually is, after being exposed to frequent and long-term crime content by the media. They may even think that people in the world are despicable and malicious. Gerbner et al. (1980) also developed the "mean world index". This indicates the effect of long-term exposure to mass media by finding perceptions of reality among frequent viewers, such as reporting that most people "would take advantage of them if they get the chance" or "cannot be trusted".

#### *Resonance*

Resonance refers to situations in which the scenario shown in the media world and a viewer's real-life experience or perceived reality are more consistent, so that the

cultivating effect will be more significant (Gerbner, 1998). Gerbner (1998) defined this as a combination of day-to-day reality and the media provision of a "double dose" resonating with the individuals, which in turn amplified cultivation of fear. Those seeking information from the media tend to identify with certain content and characters in the media and consider the media world to accurately reflect actual life (Potter, 1986). Potter (1986) also finds that cultivating power is greater in urban citizens and the greatest to those who live in areas with high crime rates. It is said that they generally recognise criminal offences are a serious issue and have a higher fear of crime levels. Level of the fear of crime climb when the reported crimes occur near to someone's daily routines (Heath, 1984). Kohm et al. (2012) say that those who identify local TV news as their primary source of crime news are significantly more fearful of crime. Eschholz et al. (2003) concluded that local news accounts are obviously high on realism and proximate relevance, and presented crime information both frequently and prominently so that local media coverage of crime rather than national coverage induces more fear. The main reason for this is the similarity between the real-life environment and the stories in the media. Yeoh and Yeow (1997) add that more attention is paid to crimes that happen near an individual's place of residence or work, and by victims in similar socio-demographic characteristics, which facilitates identifying and empathising with victims by virtue of physical or social proximity. In that sense, daily life and demographic characteristics play a role in the effect of a cultivation of fear.

The identity of media viewers also demonstrates the resonance phenomenon. Jewkes (2004) says that certain types of criminal behaviour are portrayed in media frequently and intensely. This distortion cultivates fear among certain types of audience and exaggerates their risk of victimisation. For example, young women and the elderly who are exposed frequently to crime information on TV are more likely to feel strong emotions regarding fear of crime than other frequent viewers (Jewkes, 2004). This is because they generally have a higher level of consciousness and are more alert regarding victimisation. The resonance occurs in females when their personal experience or perceptions of crime are coherent to the violent world presented by media. Jewkes (2004) adds that crimes against this fearful group are over-reported and over-sensationalized. As the media tends to concentrate on the most atypical crimes and present them in a sensationalistic and voyeuristic manner, women are socialised into fear and become over-sensitised to their role in avoiding becoming a victim of crime. Women will therefore accept their risk status and modify their behaviour.

### ***Media-fear Research in Various Types of Programme and Media Channels***

There are significant differences in programme genres, programme content, and the perceived realism of the content. These may have a differential impact on the fear of crime (Yeoh & Yeow, 1997).

Yeoh and Yeow (1997) define crime news as an important source of spatial information, influencing women's mental maps of fear as it is chosen, interpreted and contextualised by individuals. The perceived realism of media messages plays an important role. The more an individual believes the content reflecting the real world, the greater the impact of the message on the individuals. There should therefore be a focus on the factual reporting of news. Heath and Gilbert (1996, as cited in Ditton et al., 2004) report that the characteristics of messages about crime from TV news are more sensational and fear-inducing than from TV drama.

Apart from television, which is the most commonly studied mass media, many studies have also found a positive relationship between reading newspapers and fear of crime (O'keefe & Reid-Nash, 1987; Jaehnig et al., 1981; Heath, 1984; Liska & Baccaglioni, 1990; Haghighi & Sorensen, 1996; Lane & Meeker, 2003). Skogan and Maxfield (1981) noted that the effect of the media, in both TV and newspapers, does not vary much because both largely dispense the same message within a city.

Studies about the relationship between the media and a fear of crime have mainly focused on mass media including TV, newspapers, and radio (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004; Truman, 2007; Kohm et al., 2012) in the past. More importantly, in the new age of technology, people can access media using electronic devices almost anytime and anywhere. Morgan and Shanahan (2010) note that various studies on cultivation have expanded into new areas, reflecting conspicuous changes in media messages. The invention and popularization of the internet has advanced our opportunity for media viewing. People can select more kinds of media than ever before, such as YouTube, online television, Facebook and Twitter, as computer technologies make the process of transferring information convenient, quick and affordable. The Cultivation Theory should be therefore be focused on more aspects, and other new forms of media, especially the internet which dominates people's daily communication and information exchange, including that about crimes.

Breakthrough (2010) shows that new forms of media, such as social networks, blogs, online forums, chat rooms and video-sharing websites, which are also the sources of exchanging, sharing and receiving news information, are popular with most of the young generation (10-29 year-old) in Hong Kong. Research should thus consider the role of the new social media in transmitting crime information and its effect on fear of crime.

### ***Mediating the Effect of the Media-Fear Relationship***

Gunter (1987, as cited in Howitt, 1998) indicated that fear of crime was actually a highly subjective reaction and may not be easily predicted by purely objective measures of the rate of crime reported in the media. Heath and Gilbert (1996) point out that the media effect on the fear of crime was dynamic, and the process is complex, involving

many moderators. Ditton et al. (2004) note that respondent perceptions and interpretations are more important than the frequency of media consumption or any objective characteristics of media materials. Indeed, the indirect experience effect is dependent on its informativeness, affectivity, and memorability (Ditton et al., 2004). Apart from solely viewing the influence of media exposing frequency on fear of crime, the media effect can also be affected by audience characteristics and perceptions, which may mediate the impact of the media-fear relationship.

In the 1980s, Tyler (1980), and Tyler and Rasinski (1984) were concerned about social cognition and the psychological mechanisms of social perceptions when reporting experience and information. They began to study the different mediating impacts of individual's psychological characteristics, including perceived informativeness, affectivity and memorability, on the relationships between direct or indirect crime-victimisation experiences, which include mass media events, and the crime-related judgments such as perceptions of personal vulnerability, crime rates and crime prevention behaviours. They found that there were mediating impacts in the two pieces of research. The three elements of mediators play important roles in the media-fear relationship, using three images of social perceiver.

Tyler (1980) assessed perceived informativeness by determining how informative respondents perceive the modality of experience about crime rates and risk of crime victimisation in the future. Tyler and Rasinski (1984) describe a psychological model called the 'naive scientist', arguing that human inference processes are based on perceptions of informativeness rather than taking positions on whether the perceptions are accurate. The model views the social perceiver as "motivated to attain a cognitive mastery of the causal structure of his environment" (Kelley, 1967, p.308, as cited in Tyler and Rasinski, 1984). Perceivers usually integrate and weigh experiences regarding about their judgments according to the information contained. Perceived informativeness can be understood as the perception of the abundance and usefulness of facts or ideas provided by events. It was found to be a major mediator of impact among risk judgments and crime prevention behaviour (Tyler, 1980; Tyler and Rasinski, 1984).

The image of an "affect-driven perceiver" suggests another important mediating role – affectivity, which concerns emotions aroused by events (Tyler, 1980; Tyler and Rasinski, 1984). The feelings and mood, such as worry, fear or anxiety, invoked by a particular setting or scenario are represented as affect aroused. It is also found to have a positive relationship to certain judgments and prevention behaviour regarding crime. Its impact is second highest of the three mediators.

Using the "top of the head" metaphor, Tyler and Rasinski (1984) discuss two aspects assuming that memorability may also mediate the impact of an event. These aspects are the availability heuristic, which is the ease with which instances come to mind, and focus of attention, which increases the impact on availability in the memory. In other words, memorability means the amount, accuracy and ease of remembering things. It is argued

that more easily recalled stimuli have a greater influence on estimations of the frequency or probability of victimisation. This has been assessed in various ways in previous research, such as asking respondents to remember instances of particular categories and then relate the number of instances recalled to estimates of category frequency. The mediating effect of memorability was insignificant in the studies of Tyler (1980) and Tyler and Rasinski (1984).

Tyler (1980) finds that the roles of perceived informativeness, affectivity and memorability aroused by victimisations are distinct. When the role of each process in mediating the impact on judgments about the risk of crime in the future and crime prevention behaviours is investigated, it is found that informativeness has the strongest and most significant mediating impact on the dependent variables, and affectivity ranks second. Memorability is an insignificant mediator in the media-fear relationship in general, however, and therefore the role of memorability will not be included in the current study.

### ***Reconceptualisation of the Fear of Crime: Threat of Victimisation (TOV)***

The definition of the fear of crime is not universal and there is a wide range of conceptualisations and operationalisations to measure this concept.

Particularly in early studies, fear of crime was usually conceptualised in a generalised manner and typically measured by a single indicator either from the General Social Survey or the National Crime Victimization Survey (Xiong, 2011), such as “how safe do you feel or would you feel being out alone at night in your neighborhood” (Ferraro & LeGrange 1987). In other words, some researchers of the fear of crime focused on tapping an individual’s generalised affective responses to safety (Garofalo 1979; Garofalo & Laub 1979; Eschholz et al., 2003). This conceptualisation has been criticised as too simplistic, as it “emphasizes only feelings of anxiety and cognitive assessment of safety relating to a neighborhood” (Xiong, 2011, p.3), and as treating the concept of fear as a combination of affective and cognitive responses to danger. The mono-questions, which did not refer to crime, have a low level of validity and reliability (Xiong, 2011).

In order to address the deficiencies associated with single-item measures, a growing number of researchers (Ferraro, 1995; Ferraro & LaGrange, 1992) use multiple-item scales associated with fear of different crimes, which are usually categorised into the fear of property crime and fear of personal crime. There has also been an attempt to highlight the different dimensions with a mixture of items related to the fear of crime. In spite of a tightening of conceptualisations, the problem of lacking a standardised set of instruments leads to operational confusion in the fear of crime literature. For example, some studies amalgamate participant avoidance behaviour and perceptions of safety into one construct of crime fear (Pauwels & Pleysier, 2008), and some measure fear of crime by considering only worry about crime and avoidance behaviour (Delone, 2008). Apparently, there is

still a lack of clarification and differentiation between cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses associated with fear. Recent researchers have also found that the term “fear” is misleading since it is usually defined as an emotional reaction or anxiety to something (Rader 2004; Rader et al., 2007). There is terminological ambiguity in the concept of fear of crime, since it can both refer to affective response and multidimensional phenomena of crime fear (Xiong, 2011).

Accordingly, Rader (2004) re-labels the multidimensional construct of fear as the threat of victimisation (TOV), arguing that responses to potential victimisation should be broadened to include emotional, cognitive and behavioural responses. In prior research which analyses correlates of the fear of crime, the findings are conflicting over time. Rader (2004) attributes this inconsistency of results to an over-simplified conceptualisation of fear of crime. To comprehensively interpret the complexities of the multi-dimensional phenomenon, a broad-based construct, which is subsumed under threat of victimisation, is adopted in the present study. The term of “threat of victimisation” is used. It embraces three indicators: cognitive (perceived risk of victimisation), emotional (fear of crime), and behavioural components (precautionary behaviours). Perceived risk is defined as “risk one assesses to respond to threat of victimisation”; fear of crime refers to “emotion or worry one feels over the threat of victimisation”; precautionary behaviours are “behaviours one takes for protecting oneself from threat of victimisation or for avoiding facing threat of victimisation” (Rader, 2004; Rader et al., 2007).

Findings illustrate that the cognitive and behavioural components of TOV do work together to provide a more comprehensive picture of the fear of crime (Rader et al., 2007; May et al., 2010; Xiong, 2011). The theoretical reconceptualisation offers a new insight into the fear of crime research and these three dimensions of TOV are included in the current thesis. In spite of the richness of TOV constructs, several modifications have to be made for the present study, which focuses on examining fear of MTR sex crime. TOV measures different crime-specific fears, but does not specifically investigate one kind of offence. Thus, the indicators have been adjusted, but are still under the framework of TOV.

### ***Possible Third Factors Affecting TOV***

Excluding media use, previous research finds a number of correlates of the threat of victimisation. Some may act as the confronting variables in this study. Firstly, educational level is found to be strongly associated with an increased threat of victimisation (Rader, 2007). Those more highly educated are more fearful of criminal victimisation than the less educated. The effect also exists in Chinese societies (Liu, 2007).

Secondly, satisfaction and confidence with the criminal justice system (Rader et al., 2007; 2010) or law enforcers (Xiong, 2011) is negatively associated with the threat of

victimisation. The lower opinions are towards current criminal justice measures against crime, the higher the one's threat of victimisation level.

The variables of education level and confidence in law enforcers are also considered in this study.

### ***Limitations of Previous Research***

Although a number of journals have attempted to examine the media-fear relationship which has strong theoretical support, their results are not consistent. Several common shortcomings from early studies into media and the fear of crime are explored.

Regarding the operationalisation of media exposure, most journals merely use the general total viewing figures as an indicator of the cultivation effect, or the total number of hours spent using media (Eschholz et al., 2003; Kohm et al., 2012). They generally do not consider the distinct natures and effects of different programme types, contributing to inconsistent findings. Secondly, most previous studies ignore the individual's psychological factors, which may have a significant mediating impact on the media-fear relationship. Very few papers (Tyler & Rasinski, 1984; Tyler, 1980) consider psychological processes. Thirdly, in spite of the growing coverage of new media such as the internet, research concern on new media is still weak.

Regarding the operationalisation of fear of crime, firstly, a wide range of measurement instruments are adopted in different studies, increasing the difficulty of comparing findings across studies. Some use the global measurement of fear of crime (Ditton et al., 2004; Kohm et al., 2012), whereas some define fear of crime exclusively via the emotional aspect (Alper & Chappell, 2012). "Such differences in meaning can lead to definitional, conceptual, and operational ambiguity, and ultimately, inconsistent findings" (Xiong, 2011). The more holistic measure, TOV, is not widely used. Only few practical research study on TOV (Rader et al., 2007; May et al., 2010; Xiong, 2011).

Thirdly, previous studies seldom consider the matter of location when asking respondents about the threat of victimisation and crime news exposure. According to the resonance effect noted above, when the location of crime reported in the media is a place respondents routinely use, their threat of victimisation in that place will be correspondingly higher. Measurement instruments should thus specify the location so that respondents can trace their threat of victimisation and media exposure specifically in that place, instead of responding to the questions in general.

All in all, "more detailed operationalization leads to stronger media-fear relationship" (Heath and Gilbert, 1996, p.382). With more specialised methodology, the relationship between media and fear, which is consistent with the cultivation theory, is more likely to be found.

## Research Framework

The following introduces the relationships between all variables in a theoretical framework, and the hypotheses of our research will also be discussed.

## Theoretical Framework

When a female MTR user is frequently exposed to media information about MTR sex-related crimes that usually involve female victims, she is likely to identify with the victims and think that she may suffer the same experience. She would then have more negative emotions, think that she is at risk, and enact preventive behaviour against those crimes. This in turn increases her threat of victimisation, which comprises affective, cognitive, and behavioural components. With more relevant media exposure, the threat of victimisation is augmented.

Furthermore, the intersection between media reports in regard to MTR sex-related crimes and the corresponding fear of crime is not only direct, but is mediated through certain psychological processes, which are perceived informativeness and affectivity. If a female perceives the media information as more informative or is aroused by more and deeper negative affections, her threat of victimisation is heightened. In contrast, those who perceive the crime information portrayed in the media as less informative and affective after viewing may not be so susceptible to the cultivation effect. The mediating process can be partial or complete, depending on the strength of the mediators in governing the relationship, while the media-TOV association is still present.

The independent variable (IV), dependent variables (DV) and mediating factors of this study are:

- *IV*: Media exposure to MTR sex-related crimes (MEMSC)
  
- *DV*: Threat of victimisation of MTR sex-related crimes (TOVMSC)
  - Emotional aspect: Fear of MTR sex-related crimes
  - Cognitive aspect: Perceived risk of victimisation
  - Behavioural aspect: Precautionary behaviour (both avoidance and defensive)
  
- *Mediating factors*: Perceived informativeness (PI) and affectivity (Aff) from the crime materials

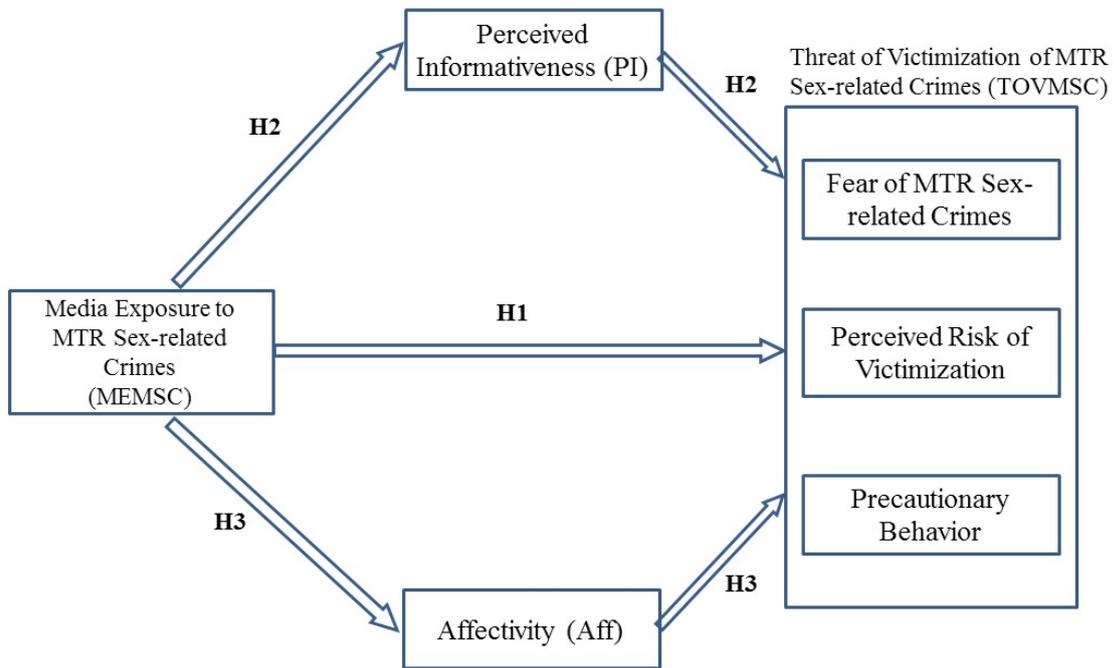


Figure. 3.1 Research framework

### Research Hypotheses

*Hypothesis 1 (H1):* The frequency of MEMSC is positively related to TOVMSC.

*Hypothesis 2 (H2):* The relationship between the frequency of MEMSC and TOVMSC is mediated by PI.

*Hypothesis 3 (H3):* The relationship between the frequency of MEMSC and TOVMSC is mediated by Aff.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

The nature of this research is explanatory, using a deductive approach whereby the threat of victimisation is explained by media exposure. The applicability of the cultivation theory is investigated. Hypotheses are derived from the new concept of fear of crime, the threat of victimisation, and are tested in this research. This is quantitative research whereby a survey is conducted to gather numerical data. Statistical tools, SPSS, are also employed to analyse the data to see if there are correlations between variables and the existence of mediating impacts. The research was carried out during two semesters, which were cross sectional, as we would like to examine the question in the current situation. It is not necessary to consider social change, so a one-time snapshot approach is taken. Finally, the unit of analysis is the individual, meaning women because almost all MTR sex crime victims are female.

### ***Sampling***

In this study, 18-29 year-old Hong Kong women who had studied to at least tertiary education level were the research subjects. The sample size was around 312. 18-29 year-old women were targeted because this age range there is characteristic of a higher risk of victimisation according to the crime statistics report conducted by the Census and Statistic Department (2005), which shows that female victims of indecent assault are mainly 12-29 years old.

The targeted females who have at least reached tertiary education levels can control the confounding effect of educational level on the threat of victimisation. They are also above 18 years old and it is easier to get their consent. It saves the cost of recruiting participants, as the researchers of this study, who are university students, can easily find female schoolmates or friends on the campus to participate in this research.

Two non-probability sampling methods – purposive sampling and convenient sampling methods – were employed to recruit the target samples due to the limited workforce and resources in this study. By means of purposive sampling, the most important premise is to verify that our samples are appropriate for the research. The samples, who were female university students or graduates, and aged 18-29 years old, were selected based on the purpose of this study. On the other hand, convenience sampling was used because the sample population was readily available and close to hand. The researchers selected some female schoolmates from City University (CityU) and friends studying at other universities to participate, since drawing on social networks can easily access the appropriate samples. Some female students were chosen accidentally at CityU and requested to complete the questionnaires. Snowball sampling, which is a convenient sampling method, was also employed by requesting that some of the initial study subjects, who were familiar with the researchers, find female acquaintances that

meet the noted criteria and could contribute to the study through their social networks. The sample size could therefore increase more easily through extended connections, and the data was gathered in a more efficient way for the research.

### ***Data Collection Method***

The survey was conducted by distributing self-administered Chinese questionnaires via online and face-to-face invitations to selected participants. Since the research topic was MTR sex crimes, and may be sensitive to some participants, they were able to answer the questions more naturally by making response on a self-administered practice instead of an interactive interview. The sample size was 312 female participants who participated voluntarily in the research. The data was successfully collected during the period of March and April in 2014. Relevant details of the data collection will be provided in the following.

140 participants responded to our survey by answering the printed version of the questionnaires. Some of the participants were the researchers' female acquaintances who were easily invited to take part in the survey at any time and place. Others were female students chosen randomly to participate in the survey at the CityU podium, study areas and classrooms at specific times on a weekday (morning: 10:00-12:00 or afternoon: 13:00-18:00). Most students are present in these areas during those time periods, so that the researchers could locate target respondents easily. As the researchers, we conducted the survey using the following steps. First, we spoke to the target respondents, introduced ourselves and proved our identities by showing City University student ID cards. Then, we briefly explained the study purpose: gathering the views of tertiary education students on MTR sex crime. After acquiring the verbal consent of respondents, we invited them to move to an area with fewer people around or to a nearby venue with seats to finish the questionnaire. They first had to sign a consent form attached to the first page of questionnaire before answering the questionnaire. During the survey, we stayed away from the participants and let them finish it by themselves. If they had questions, researchers were available to explain to them immediately. After the survey, we collect all the finished questionnaires and put them in a folder marked 'Confidential' on the cover, in front of the participants. The folder was sealed afterwards.

Making use of information technology and the internet platform, an online version of the questionnaire was also formulated on a website, "Mysurvey" (URL:<http://www.mysurvey.tw/s/66qR5jjX>). This is a convenient and efficient way to collect data since it has no time and space limitation. It also retains the anonymity of the self-administered survey when answering possibly sensitive questions. The samples were collected through social networks on the internet such as Facebook Messenger, which is a web-based instant messaging service for communication. 172 eligible targets were successfully invited for participation by sending an invitation text message introducing the researchers, purpose of study and the URL link of the survey to the researchers'

acquaintances. During the survey, if participants had questions, the researchers would also explain things to them immediately via instant messaging. After the survey, the researchers were able to check and obtain data online by logging into the website as the survey owner.

In both online and printed versions of survey, snowball sampling is used. Some of the participants were asked to forward the URL of the survey website or given a certain number of print questionnaires to their acquaintances, and then returned them to the researchers.

### ***Measurements***

#### *Key concepts in the study*

##### *MTR*

This is Hong Kong's largest railway transport system, which comprises eleven lines, including East Rail Line, Kwun Tong Line, Tsuen Wan Line, Island Line, Tung Chung Line, Tseung Kwan O Line, West Rail, Ma On Shan Line, Disneyland Resort Line, Airport Express Line and the Light Rail system (MTR, 2014). MTR areas include carriages, platform areas, lobby areas, passageways, escalators, stairs and lifts.

##### *Sex-related Crimes*

###### *- Indecent assault*

This is classified as deviance as well as criminal behaviour. It is an assault coupled with indecency. Some acts are clearly indecent, such as touching another's genitals without consent. According to Hong Kong Law (Chapter 200: Crime Ordinance, Section 122), indecent assault is a crime and it is defined that "a person who indecently assaults another person shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction on indictment to imprisonment for 10 years" (Department of Justice, 2012).

###### *- Voyeuristic photography*

This refers to the act of photographing or videotaping a party's body or sensitive areas, such as chests, thighs or under their skirt, without their knowledge or consent. The use of photographic equipment includes the use of techniques such as pinhole spy cameras, and the use of mobile phones.

##### *Media exposure to MTR sex-related crimes (MEMSC)*

MEMSC is the frequency of learning information about MTR sex crime, which includes news reports, detailed case descriptions, victims sharing information, and crime statistics from the mass media. With reference to previous studies (Truman, 2007), MEMSC is operationalised into two indicators, general and overall media exposure to information about MTR sex crime in the past 12 months.

In general MEMSC, respondents rate their frequency of MEMSC in general on a 5-point Likert scale from 0 to 4 (never, once every three months, once a month, once every two weeks, and at least once a week). It is measured in Item 4.1. For overall-classified MEMSC, respondents rate their frequency of MEMSC specifically in nine items, using the same scale as general MESC. The items include: television (“news reports”, and “information programmes”), radio (“news reports”, and “information programmes”), print news media, online news media, social networking sites<sup>1</sup> and online instant messaging<sup>2</sup>, online interactive platforms<sup>3</sup>, and video-sharing websites<sup>4</sup>. Referring to Truman (2007) and Ditton et al. (2004), an overall media index was created using the above eight variables, indicated with a theoretical range of 0 to 36, with a higher score representing a higher frequency of media exposure to information about MTR sex crimes. Both indicators are based on the respondent’s experience in the past 12 months.

#### *Threat of Victimization in MTR sex-related crimes (TOVMSC)*

This is “a large umbrella construct” (Rader, 2004) which comprises all potential responses to the threat of victimisation in MTR sex crime. It is operationalised into three dimensions (Rader, 2004): (1) emotional; (2) cognitive; and (3) behavioural.

*Fear of MTR sex-related crimes (FMSC)*, which is an emotional part of TOV, is “negative emotional reactions generated by” MTR sex crime or symbols associated with MTR sex crime (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987, p. 73). Using a modified version of the Fear of Rape Scale (Senn & Dzinis, 1996), it is measured with six items, such as “2.10 I am afraid of being sexually assaulted in MTR”. Respondents respond to these items on a 6-point Likert scale from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree.

*Perceived risk of MTR sex-related crimes (PRMSC)*, which is the cognitive dimension of TOV, is self-reported “judgment of the possibility or likelihood of being victimised” (Ferraro, 1995) in MTR sex-related crimes. It is measured using a modified version of the Fear of Rape Scale (Senn & Dzinis, 1996) and the perception of risk index (Rader et al., 2007), with six items. Items 3.1-3.5 are about judgments of the likelihood of being victimised by specific sex-related behaviour in the MTR in the ensuing 12 months, e.g. “3.3 Someone rubbing your body with their sexual organs”, and item 2.8 measures the generally perceived risk of experiencing sex crime in MTR. Notably, item 2.7 is revised and it has been re-coded for later analysis. PRMSC was measured using the same scale as FMSC.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Examples are Whatsapp, Line, Wechat, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Examples are Hong Kong Forum, Yahoo blogs, House News, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Examples are Youtube, Vimeo, etc.

*Precautionary behaviour towards MTR sex-related crimes (PBMSC)*, which is the behavioural dimension of TOV, is "behavioural adaptations to avoid or protect oneself from MTR sex crime" (Rader et al., 2007). It is measured with a modified version of the Fear of Rape Scale (Senn & Dzinis, 1996) and the rape avoidance inventory (RAI) (McKibbin et al., 2009), with 5 items. There are two indicators, which are avoidance and defensive behaviour. Avoidance behaviour refers to "actions taken to decrease exposure to crime by removing oneself from or increasing the distance from situations in which the risk of criminal victimisation is believed to be high" (DuBow et al., 1979, p. 31). Items 2.6 and 2.8 measure avoidance behaviour. Defensive behaviour involves self-protective acts performed to alleviate potential victimisation risks (Rader et al., 2007). Items 2.5, 2.11, and 2.12 measure defensive behaviour. PBMSC is measured using the same scale as FMSC.

Finally, a TOVMSC index consisting of 17 items in total was created, summing up the scores of the three dimensions, with a theoretical range of 17 to 102. Higher scores represent a higher threat of victimisation in MTR sex crime.

#### *Mediating factors*

The mediating factors include two categories: perceived informativeness and affectivity. They are measured with items 5.1 to 5.12 on a 5-point Likert scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

#### *Perceived informativeness*

This is defined as the degree of a respondent's perception of how informative the media information about MTR sex crime is. In the study of Tyler and Rasinski (1984), perceived informativeness is measured by 6 modified items (items 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.7, 5.9, and 5.10), such as "5.2 The information about MTR sex-related crimes concerning the risk of crime to you is informative" and "5.10 The MTR sex crime information is useful for helping you to understand this crime". After adding the scores for these items, an overall Perceived Informativeness index is created, with a theoretical range of 5 to 30. Higher scores indicate higher perceived informativeness.

#### *Affectivity*

This is defined as the emotion aroused by the media information about MTR sex-related crimes. Referring to the study of Tyler and Rasinski again (1984), affectivity is measured mainly by 6 modified items and each includes an adjective of aroused emotion such as "scared", "fearful", "angry", "disturbed", "tense" and "sympathetic" (items 5.1, 5.3, 5.6, 5.8, 5.11, and 5.12), such as "5.12 The media information about MTR sex-related crimes makes me empathise with the victims of the crime." After adding the

scores of these items, an overall Affectivity index is created, with a theoretical range of 5 to 30. Higher scores indicate higher affectivity.

#### *Confidence in officials*

This involves an individual's confidence in officials dealing with MTR sex-related crimes. Modified from the scale of satisfaction with criminal justice agents (Rader et al., 2007; 2010), respondents rate their level of confidence on 2 items, police and MTR staff, on a 10-point Likert scale from (1) strongly unreliable to (10) strongly reliable. An index is created by adding two items, with a theoretical range of 2 to 20.

#### *Socio-demographic variables*

Socio-demographic variables were included in the questionnaire to categorise the interview data: (1) age, (2) education level, (3) major subject, and (4) study year. These were placed at the end of the questionnaire. Patterns of MTR usage were also considered. This is measured by a set of 5 items (item 1.1-1.5) based on the respondent's experience in past three months, such as "Did you travel by MTR?" in a yes/no response format; "How often do you travel by MTR in one week?" in open-ended format; and "How often do you travel by MTR with people you know (e.g. your friends, partners or family members)?" on 5-point Likert scale from (1) always to (5) never.

#### *Validity and reliability of the measuring instrument*

Before collecting data, pilot tests were undertaken to check the face validity of the questionnaire so as to achieve more common agreements about particular concepts. We invited five respondents to take the survey, and then asked if they had any difficulties understanding the questions in the instrument. Several modifications were made after the pilot tests.

The reliability of the instrument was checked. As seen in Table 4.1, the five sets of scales in this study are shown to have acceptable internal consistencies with values of Cronbach's alpha higher than .70 (Cronbach, 1951). The coefficient alpha of overall-classified MEMSC, TOVMSC, and affectivity are even higher than .80, which is regarded as high in internal consistency.

Table 4.1  
 Mean, Standard Deviation and Reliability Coefficients of Scales

Scales	Items	Mean	S.D.	Cronbach alpha, $\alpha$	Actual Range	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Statisti c	S.E.	Statisti c	S.E.
Overall-classified MEMSC (Item 4.2.1.1-4.2.7)	9	13.04	6.851	.866	0-35	-.50	.14	.93	.28
TOVMSC (Item 2.1-2.12 & 3.1-3.5)	17	59.21	9.740	.836	22-88	-.55	.14	.15	.29
Perceived Informativeness (Item 5.2,5.4, 5.5,5.7,5.9 & 5.10)	6	20.70	3.061	.701	11-28	-.38	.14	.14	.29
Affectivity (Item 5.1, 5.3, 5.6,5.8,5.11 & 5.12)	6	20.23	3.628	.805	10-29	.32	.14	-.33	.28
Confidence in Officials (Item 6.1 & 6.2)	2	13.32	3.484	.795	2-20	-.44	.14	.10	.28

Note. (N=311). S.D. = Standard Deviation.

### Ethical Considerations

This research strictly follows the “Ethics Guidelines” proposed by the College Research Ethics Sub-committee of the City University of Hong Kong. The ethics approval was obtained on 28 Feb, 2014. The questionnaire design and data collection method strictly followed the guidelines. Voluntary participation was emphasised by obtaining informed consent from the research targets. The respondents could withdraw from the survey at any time if they want. Personal information such as names, addresses and phone numbers were not collected, as the study does not identify respondents. The data is only used for academic purposes and will be erased within six months of the findings. Anonymity and confidentiality can be enhanced.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were analysed using SPSS. Descriptive univariate analysis describes the characteristics of the dataset using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. Three sets of hypotheses were tested. For H1, bivariate correlation was used to test the relationship between media exposure to MTR sex-related crimes and threat of victimisation in MTR sex-related crimes. For H2 and H3, both simple and multiple linear regression tests were applied to examine the mediating effect of perceived informativeness and affectivity respectively in the relationship between media exposure to MTR sex-related crimes and the threat of victimisation in MTR sex-related crimes. Bivariate correlation can measure the relationship strength and significance between two variables, whereas linear regression can show the relationship significance between one or more independent variables and a dependent variable by generating a linear equation so that the more significant predictable variable(s) can be discovered. Simple and multiple linear regression tests are used to measure one explanatory variable and more than one explanatory variable respectively.

Independent sample t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) are employed to identify whether there are mean differences in dependent variables across the demographic variables. Multiple regression analysis was particularly used to determine whether there was any confronting effect of the demographic variables.

### **Findings**

#### ***Descriptive Findings of Research***

##### *Sample Characteristics*

Table 5.1 on the next page shows the demographic characteristics of 312 valid data units, who were all female respondents. All the respondents were within the target age range of 18 to 29 and more than three quarters (78.2%) were from 21 to 24 years old. Most of the respondents had a bachelor degree level of education or above (85.6%) and a minority have an associate degree or high diploma level (14.4%). Social science and business were the most common academic disciplines among the respondents and account for about half (51.3%) and one-fifth (21.2%) of the samples respectively. More than 80% of respondents had currently been studying in tertiary institutions in Years 1 to 4 and the remaining 17.6% had graduated.

Table 5.1  
*Sample demographic variables of the female respondents*

Variables	n	%
<b>Age Group</b>		
18-20	56	17.9
21-24	244	78.2
25-29	12	3.8
<b>Education level</b>		
Associate Degree/High Dip.	45	14.4
Bachelor Degree	262	84.0
Master or above	5	1.6
<b>Academic Discipline</b>		
Social Science	160	51.3
Business	66	21.2
Languages and Literature	30	9.6
Science and Engineering	18	5.8
Education	9	2.9
Media and Communication	8	2.6
Medicine and Nursing	8	2.6
Others <sup>a</sup>	13	4.2
<b>Academic Year</b>		
Year 1	15	4.8
Year 2	81	26.0
Year 3	106	34.0
Year 4 or above	55	17.6
Graduated	55	17.6

Note. (N=312). n=frequency.

<sup>a</sup>Others include “Architecture”, “Sports”, “Hospitality and Hotel”, “Fashion and Design”, “Filming” and “Housing Management”.

The respondent’s travel patterns in MTR in the past three months were recorded so that the general situation of MTR usage among females with a tertiary education level can be seen. As shown in Table 5.2 on the next page, nearly all respondents (99.7%) had travelled by MTR in the past three months and most (81.1%) reported that they mostly travel in crowded trains. The average number of MTR journeys in one week for the majority was 8 to 14 (64.0%) suggesting that respondents travel at least once per day on average and that the MTR is commonly used transportation among respondents. The

average travel time for a single journey was generally less than an hour (91.1%) and respondents mainly chose “sometimes” (44.9%) which was the intermediate choice describing their frequency of travelling with acquaintances.

Table 5.2  
*Travel pattern of respondents using the MTR in the past three months*

Variables	n	%
<b>Travel by MTR</b>		
Yes	311	99.7
No	1	.3
<b>Average MTR journey(s) in 1 week</b>		
1-7	86	27.7
8-14	200	64.0
15-22	24	7.6
No response	2	.6
<b>Mostly travel in crowded trains</b>		
Yes	253	81.1
No	57	18.3
No response	2	.6
<b>Average travel time in 1 journey</b>		
<30mins	139	44.6
30-59mins	145	46.5
1-1.5hour(s)	24	7.7
>1.5hours	3	1.0
No response	1	.3
<b>Travel with acquaintance(s)</b>		
Always	19	6.1
Usually	44	14.1
Sometimes	140	44.9
Rarely	104	33.3
Never	4	1.3
No response	1	.3

Note. (N=312). n= frequency.

### *Media Exposure*

In the descriptive statistics presented in Table 5.3 on next page, the percentage distribution, value of the mean and standard deviation of respondent MEMSCs are shown. The scores range from “0” to “4”, representing “never” to “at least once a week”. The first variable in the table is general media exposure (mean=1.79). In the overall-classified MEMSC which consists of nine items, there are also relatively low scores from 0.70 to 1.96. The top three most frequent sources of exposure to media are “Social Network & Instant Messenger” (mean=1.96), “Online Magazine/ Newspaper” (mean=1.78) and “Online Interactive Platform” (Mean=1.54). Radio news and informative programmes are the two least common media exposure sources with means of 0.81 and 0.70 respectively, suggesting that radio is less popular among young female adults. The results indicate that the respondents most frequently receive information of MTR sex-related crimes from new media through the internet. The mean scores among the traditional mass media (mean = 1.13) are generally less than that of new media (mean = 1.63).

Table 5.3

Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents' Media Exposure to MTR sex-related crimes

Variables	Never (%)	Once per three months (%)	Once per month (%)	Once per two weeks (%)	At least once a week (%)	No Response (%)	Mean (S.D.)
General Media Exposure	7.1	39.1	29.8	15.4	8.3	.3	1.79(1.06)
TV							
News	21.2	36.2	27.6	12.2	2.9	0	1.39(1.04)
Informative Programme	22.8	25.6	31.1	9.0	1.3	.3	1.30(.96)
Radio							
News	51.0	26.9	13.1	7.4	1.3	.3	.81(1.01)
Informative Programme	53.2	28.8	12.5	3.8	1.0	.6	.70(.90)
Printed Magazine/ Newspaper	24.4	32.1	21.8	15.7	6.1	0	1.47(1.19)
Total Mean of Traditional Media	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.13 (1.02)
Online Magazine/ Newspaper	21.5	21.5	25.3	21.5	10.3	0	1.78(1.29)
Social Network & Instant Messenger	14.4	19.9	28.5	29.5	7.7	0	1.96(1.18)
Online Interactive Platform	27.6	25.0	20.5	19.2	7.7	0	1.54(1.29)
Video Sharing Website	35.9	28.8	14.7	17.9	2.6	0	1.22(1.19)
Total Mean of New Media	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.63 (.99)

Note. Scores from “0” (Never) to “4” (At least once a week)

*Confidence in Officials*

Table 5.5 displays the distribution and means of level of confidence corresponding to police and MTR staff. The mean scores of the two official parties are around the level of 6. More than 70% of respondents rate above the average for the two parties. This shows that respondent perceptions and trust towards them are fairly satisfactory.

Table 5.5  
*Level of confidence towards official parties in MTR*

Variables	%										Mean (S.D.)
	Unreliable					Reliable					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Police	.6	1.0	3.8	8.3	9.9	12.8	19.6	25.6	9.6	8.7	6.89 (1.945)
MTR Staff	1.3	1.3	4.8	8.0	13.1	18.6	24.0	16.7	8.0	4.2	6.43 (1.879)

**Hypotheses Testing**

*Hypothesis 1 (H1): Correlation between MEMSC and TOVMSC*

Correlational analysis of the media exposure of MTR sex-related crimes (MEMSC) using the overall-classified scale and the threat of victimisation in MTR sex-related sex crimes (TOVMSC) was conducted. The results of the correlational analysis are shown in Table 5.6 on the next page. The MEMSC has a significant positive correlation with TOVMSC at  $p < .001$  level: respondents who are exposed more to media information about MTR sex-related crimes are more likely to feel a higher level of threat of victimisation of these crimes. The extent of correlation is weak, however, as the value of the Pearson Correlation was only .205.

Table 5.6  
*Correlation between overall-classified MEMSC and TOVMSC*

	TOVMSC	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Overall-classified MEMSC	.205***	.000

Note. \*\*\* $p < .001$

When the items of the overall-classified MEMSC are regrouped into two categories, traditional media (TV, radio and printed magazines/newspapers) and new media (online magazines/newspapers, social networks and instant messengers, online interactive platforms and video sharing websites), the correlations between the two categories of MEMSC with TOVMSC are different. New media shows a greater degree of positive correlation and significance ( $r = .202, p < .001$ ) with TOVMSC than traditional media ( $r = .167, p < .01$ ).

Table 5.7  
 Correlations between overall-classified MEMSC with two categories and TOVMSC

	TOVMSC	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Traditional Media (Item 4.2.1.1-4.2.3)	.167**	.003
New Media (Item 4.2.4-4.2.7)	.202***	.000

Note.\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

*Hypothesis 2 and 3 (H2 & H3): Mediating impact of perceived informativeness (PI) and affectivity (Aff) on the correlation between MEMSC and TOVMSC*

One of the main objectives of this research is to investigate whether the effect of the MEMSC on TOVMSC is mediated by perceived informativeness (PI) and affectivity (Aff). In order to test the two mediating mechanisms, the classical approach of mediation analysis using linear regression, which was introduced by Baron and Kenny (1986), will be implemented in this study. There are three steps in total (see Figures 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3) to investigate the mediating impacts of the two variables, PI and Aff. Before a mediation process can be examined, two prerequisites should be met. The first prerequisite is that the independent variable, MEMSC (using the overall-classified scale) should have an effect on the dependent variable, TOVMSC. This is demonstrated in Table 5.8 ( $\beta = .205, p < .001$ ) so the first prerequisite is met.

Table 5.8

*Simple linear regression between variables of overall-classified MEMSC on TOVMSC*

	TOVMSC
IV:	
Overall-classified MEMSC	.205***
R <sup>2</sup>	.040
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.037
F value	12.744***

Note. \*\*\* $p < .001$



*Figure 5.1 Step 1 of Mediating Analysis Mechanisms*

For the second prerequisite, the independent variable, MEMSC, should also have an effect on the mediators, PI and Aff. Similarly, Table 5.9 shows that MEMSC does have an explanatory effect on PI ( $\beta = .267, p < .001$ ) and Aff ( $\beta = .133, p < .05$ ) respectively.

Table 5.9

*Simple linear regressions between variables of overall-classified MEMSC and mediators (PI and Aff)*

	PI	Aff
IV:		
Overall-classified MEMSC	.267***	.133*
R <sup>2</sup>	.071	.018
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.068	.014
F value	21.753***	5.169*

Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

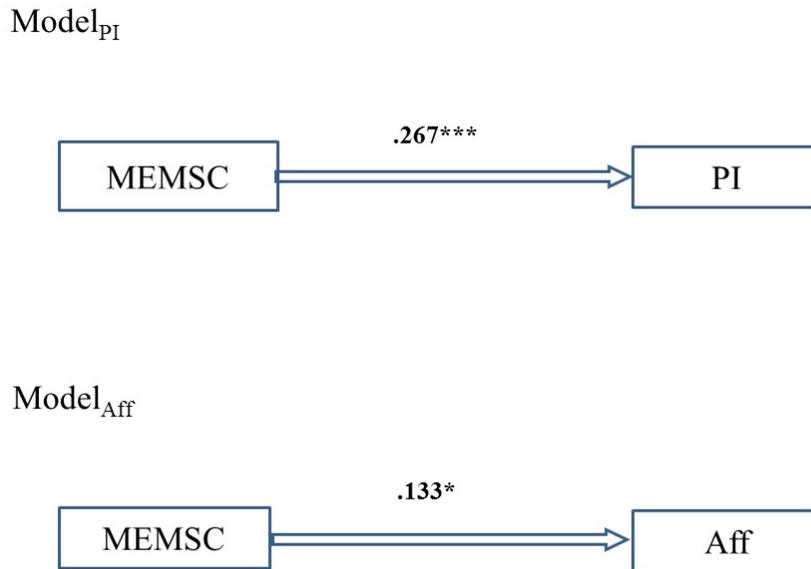


Figure 5.2 Step 2 of Mediating Analysis Mechanisms

After the two prerequisites are established, the mediating analysis is continued by confirming that the mediators, PI and Aff, are significant predictors of the DV, TOVMSC, when controlling for the IV, MEMSC. Ultimately, the results shown in Table 5.10 demonstrate that when the mediators, PI and Aff, and the MEMSC are used simultaneously to predict the TOVMSC, the previously significant paths between the MEMSC and TOVMSC in the first prerequisite,  $\beta = .205$  with  $p < .001$  in Table 5.8, are now greatly reduced to  $\beta = .089$  with  $p > .05$  (Model<sub>PI</sub>) and  $\beta = .100$  with  $p > .05$  (Model<sub>Aff</sub>) respectively. The correlations are near zero and no longer significant while the mediators become the dominating predictors. In other words, MEMSC no longer affects TOVMSC when PI and Aff have been controlled. In Model<sub>PI</sub>, the predicting effect of PI is significant ( $\beta = .236, p < .001$ ), whereas in Model<sub>Aff</sub>, the effect of Aff is even greater ( $\beta = .406, p < .001$ ). Perceived informativeness and affectivity exert total mediation on the correlation between MEMSC and TOVMSC. The two models, Model<sub>PI</sub> and Model<sub>Aff</sub>, explain 7.4% and 18.5% of variance respectively, which is much higher than that in the model of the first prerequisite (4.0%).

Table 5.10

*Multiple Linear Regression Analysis: Mediating Mechanisms of PI or Aff and Overall-classified MEMSC's effects on TOVMSC*

	TOVMSC	
	Model <sub>PI</sub>	Model <sub>Aff</sub>
IV:		
Overall-classified MEMSC	.089	.100
PI	.236***	
Aff		.406***
R <sup>2</sup>	.074	.185
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.068	.180
F value	11.314***	32.191***

Note.\*\*\* $p < .001$

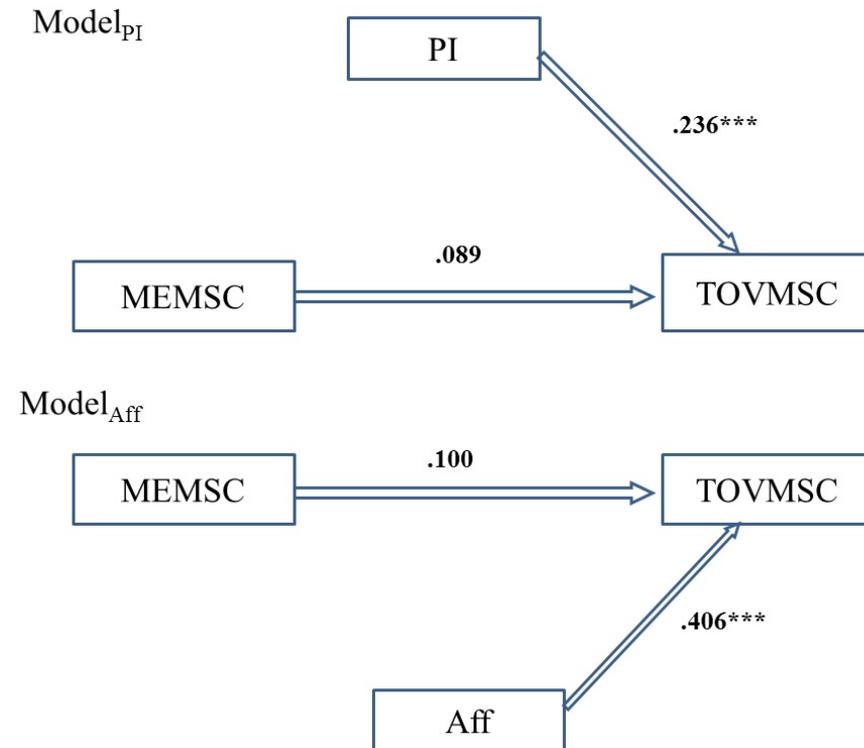


Figure 5.3 Step 3 of Mediating Analysis Mechanisms

**Other Findings**

Except for the variable “mostly traveling by MTR when crowded”, all other socio-demographic variables were found to have insignificant differences in the TOVMSC scores. An independent sample t-test was run to examine the difference between TOVMSC and the variable “mostly traveling by MTR when crowded”. The mean difference between groups was statistically significant at  $p = .035$ . The significant effect reveals that those who mostly travel under crowded conditions ( $M = 59.77$ ) score higher on TOVMSC than those who do not ( $M = 56.75$ ), however, the difference may be difficult to detect since the effect size is small ( $d = 0.29$ ) (Cohen, 1988).

Table 5.11

*Mean, Standard Deviation and T-test of Respondent’s TOVMSC on Variable of “Mostly Traveling by MTR when Crowded”*

	Mostly Traveling by MTR when Crowded		t	Cohen’s d	F
	Yes	No			
TOV	59.77 (9.400)	56.75 (11.022)	2.116	.29	.401*

Note.  $df=307$ . Standard derivations appear in parentheses below means. \* $p<.05$ .

The possible confronting variable, confidence in officials, is also analysed using bivariate correlation and multiple regression tests. The scale of confidence in officials is computed with two items and is shown to have high internal consistency with  $\alpha = .795$  in Chapter 4. As seen in Table 5.12, analysis reveals a statistically insignificant correlation between confidence in officials and TOVMSC,  $r = .063$ ,  $p = .270$ . Since confidence in officials is found to be unrelated to TOVMSC, its confronting effect on TOVMSC is non-existent.

Table 5.12

*Correlation between confidence in officials and TOVMSC*

	TOVMSC	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Confidence in officials	.063	.270

## Discussion

### *Implications of Findings and Suggestions*

The mean score for TOVMSC as identified in this study was approximately 60 out of 102. Although the concept of a threat of victimisation is still so new that a precise standard of calculation has not yet been developed, it can be concluded that the mean score among respondents is slightly higher than the intermediate level. The threat of victimisation in MTR sex-related crimes among female with tertiary education exists in Hong Kong and should not be ignored.

The current research finds that “Social Network and Instant Messenger” is the medium which young females with tertiary education use most frequently to receive relevant crime information. This finding is in line with the research by Breakthrough (2014), which showed instant messenger and social networking sites as the common media used daily among youngsters. They are mostly commonly used for sharing information in particular. As such information about sex-related crimes is often transferred and received through these media. The current research provides stronger evidence that the use of new media among youngsters to receive information is common, and even greater than traditional media use due to technological advances. Further studies of media exposure should involve new media as well as old.

The significant positive relationship found between frequency of media exposure and the threat of victimisation supports the previous findings of Gerbner and Gross (1976), Gerbner et al. (1977), Chiricos et al. (2000), and Weitzer and Kubrin (2004). It is also consistent with the arguments of cultivation theory noted in Chapter 2. According to the concept of “mean world syndrome”, females may regard the MTR area as a hotbed of sex-related crime, and perceive male passengers as dangerous perpetrators when frequently exposed to related crime information in the media. Certain beliefs, emotions and behaviours, which are elements of TOVMSC, will be formed among females and a media-TOV correlation is built.

Since few studies consider the effects of potential mediators, such as perceived informativeness (PI) and affectivity (Aff), when examining the media-TOV relationship, the current research has tried to provide a more comprehensive examination of the relationship by including them. When investigating their mediating effects, the previously found media-TOV relationship is no longer significant. PI and Aff are found to be strong predictors of TOVMSC. In other words, regarding the crime news information as useful and informative or being aroused to various emotions by the crime information will mediate the above correlation to a large extent. Although the result is slightly different from the research of Tyler (1980; 1984) because the mediating power of affectivity is greater than that of perceived informativeness in the current research, it is still in line with the assumption constructed in the current study, validating the mediating processes in cultivation. In fact, the complete mediating power of PI and Aff in the media-TOV

relationship is surprising. It importantly suggests that considering media exposure frequency alone is not enough when studying the media-TOV relationship. According to Sutherland (1974) and Miller (2005), the differential association theory of social learning perspective explains that the intensity of exposure from the outside world, including media as a source, is an important considerations, rather than frequency only. According to the current study, the frequency of media exposure is not a determining factor of TOVMSC. Instead, the informative and affective intensity of media content does directly influence people's TOVMSC levels.

The media-TOV correlation regarding MTR sex-related crimes in Hong Kong is clearly shown to exist in the current research. With more MEMSC, TOVMSC will be much heightened. Meanwhile, the media will not stop reporting or being used to share crime information due to its popularity and the gradually increasing trend of MTR sex-related crimes in reality. The role of the media is somehow paradoxical in this situation. On one hand, it serves to report facts to the public or exchange information, on the other, it results in a higher degree of TOVMSC. The crucial point is therefore how the media presents crime information so as to maintain its effect on TOVMSC at a reasonable level instead of elevating it to a critical point.

To prevent the elevation of TOVMSC induced by media, the presentation of sex-related crimes in media should be regulated. Currently, the Press Council is set to encourage the self-regulation of traditional media in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, it takes a passive role in regulating media as it only handle complaints with limited statutory protection. As such, the Press Council should actively review the media's presentation of crime news so as to avoid sensational or alarming details. Most importantly, journalists and media practitioners should be self-disciplined about reporting crime facts. In order to maintain their impartiality and the role of press responsibility, they should not exaggerate the seriousness of crime, use highly sensational audio-video elements to mislead the audience or over-dramatize crime stories. In this sense, it would be less likely to induce unrealistically perceived informativeness and undesirable affectivity from the news. The same principle of self-regulation should be applied to new media. Since everyone can be the editor of writing or forward crime stories and victimisation experiences using numerous channels on the internet, it is of utmost importance for internet users to ensure the accuracy of crime contents and to read them critically. The government and related parties such as internet service providers can educate people to use online media properly and not to over-sensationalise the information.

As well as the media, the current study also examines two possible contributing variables of TOVMSC. Confidence in officials in the MTR including police officers and MTR staff, which should be a significant variable, is unrelated to TOVMSC according to the research. This is probably due to a tendency not to report experiences of these crimes in Chinese culture. From a research by DAB Women's Commission (2011, as cited in Etnet, 2011), nearly all respondents indicated that they do not report cases, mainly due to

embarrassment. Thus, unlike findings in Western cultures, satisfaction in officials is insignificant in determining their TOVMSC. The current study also finds that TOVMSC is higher when females usually take the MTR when crowded. According to a press release from HKSAR (2013), MTR sex-related crimes usually take place during rush hours when the MTR is crowded with passengers. It is therefore reasonable that females who often travel by MTR in crowded conditions are more likely to experience a high level of TOVMSC. To lower their TOVMSC, women-only train carriages are a possible solution. In the situation in Japan (Horii & Burgess, 2012), the railway corporations have adopted women-only cars, especially during rush hours (commuting times). To provide a less fearful traveling environment for females, the MTR should take this into consideration.

### **Research Limitations**

Although the study was conducted on a comprehensive basis to minimise errors, admittedly, there are limitations which should be highlighted for improvement in future studies.

First of all, the sampling method is non-probability so the samples may not be representative of the general population. Purposive and convenient sampling methods, including snowball sampling, were employed to recruit respondents. The respondents are mostly friends of researchers and others referred by those friends. This technique fails to control the characteristics of respondents. Researchers are from the social sciences, and the sample units were found to be solely from social science (i.e. 160 out of 312). This may cause a generalisation problem as it does not include respondents from a variety of subjects at similar proportions. The current study also does not include the category of the university the respondents belong to, which may also be an influential variable.

Secondly, the nature of the threat of victimisation (TOV) is not investigated in a comprehensive manner. Since TOV consists of three different dimensions (emotional, behavioural and cognitive), examining the effects of media exposure on them separately may create a deeper understanding and interpretation of each aspect. For example, previous researchers (Rader et al., 2007; May et al., 2010) studied the effects on the three elements of TOV individually, and the results indicate that there are complex interrelations among the three which were not studied in the current research.

Thirdly, the actual reporting rate of MTR sex-related crimes through the media is not measured, so the actual number of media sources available in reality is not known. As a result, the scale of measuring MEMSC using responses such as “once per month” may not actually reflect the corresponding level of media exposure frequency.

## Conclusion

The mass media has penetrated deeply into our daily lives as it provides not only facts and information for us but also plays a role in people's perception, feelings and actions regarding crime. The research is significant in examining the three hypotheses about the relationship between media exposure and the threat of victimisation in MTR sex-related crimes. The frequency of female's media exposure to sex-related crimes (MEMSC) shows a significant positive correlation with the threat of victimisation of these crimes (TOVMSC). Furthermore, the level of perceived informativeness and affectivity completely mediates the effect of the MEMSC to TOVMSC. Further studies of the issues with more consideration of research orientation could therefore be conducted in the future. For example, the TOV can be standardised as the measurement of fear of crime due to its comprehensiveness. Future research into the media-TOV relationship should not only measure frequency, but the role of the mediator and its effect can be further considered. Since perceived informativeness and affectivity are found to be influential, content analysis of media's reporting styles can be emphasised. Last but not least, extending the age range of young female respondents and involving other means of public transport such as buses in TOV studies may provide a more complete perspective.

## Biographic Note

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