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## Citizen Insecurity and Community Transformations: An Analysis from a Psychosocial Perspective

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### Abstract

*Citizen insecurity in Ecuador has evolved beyond its criminal dimension to become a multidimensional psychosocial phenomenon that is fundamentally reshaping the foundations of community life. This study examines these community transformations through a psychosocial approach, analyzing their emotional, behavioral, and social impacts. The research employed a quantitative design based on a structured survey administered to 963 participants, using an instrument organized into two analytical dimensions: Perception and Emotions (14 items) and Distrust and Social Isolation (5 items), combining dichotomous (Yes/No) and qualitative responses. The sample, predominantly female (55.2%) and concentrated in urban areas of Guayas (37.1%) and Pichincha (13.4%), revealed alarming patterns: 76.4% reported stress when traveling, 73.5% anxiety in their immediate surroundings, and 85.7% a sustained increase in worry, with fear (45%) and anxiety (34%) as the predominant emotional responses. Behaviorally, 87.4% modified daily habits, evidenced by avoidance of high-risk areas (77.6%) and restricted nighttime transportation use (80.8%). Socially, the findings demonstrated erosion of social capital, including neighbor distrust (52.4%), reduced community participation (69.9%), and relational withdrawal (78.4%). These results suggest that insecurity functions as a mechanism of social disintegration, where individual protective strategies exacerbate collective fragmentation. The study concludes that public policies must prioritize rebuilding social fabric, revitalizing public spaces as spheres of cohesion, and strengthening institutional trust, moving beyond purely punitive paradigms.*

**Keywords:** Citizen Insecurity, Psychosocial, Violence, Ecuador, Fear.

### Introduction

Citizen insecurity in Ecuador has ceased to be a merely criminal problem and has become a complex psychosocial phenomenon that is reconfiguring the very foundations of community coexistence. The data speak for themselves: in just five years, the country went from being considered one of the safest to registering the highest homicide rate in the region, 46.5 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2023 (El Universo, 2023) with 8,004 violent deaths (OECS, 2024) becoming the most violent country in Latin America.

This unprecedented wave of insecurity and violence in the country responds to a multiplicity of interdependent factors. To understand this radical transformation, it is necessary to analyze at least three of them. In the first place, it is necessary to refer to the growing presence of organized crime and drug violence, responsible for 61% of homicides (Infante Miranda et al., 2022).

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Phenomena such as contract killings registered 127 cases in Quito in 2023, 23% more than in 2022 (National Police of Ecuador, 2024), in a context where more than 402,000 illegal weapons are circulating in civilian hands (Borja Martínez et al., 2025). Secondly, the structural conditions of job insecurity and inequality present in the country. According to figures from the Central Bank of Ecuador (2023) 67.7% of households reported difficulties in finding employment in 2023, a situation that is aggravated in rural areas, with a Gini coefficient of 0.479 (INEC, 2024) where extreme poverty fuels social hopelessness and criminal recruitment (Oleas Ausay, 2023). And, finally, the deep crisis of institutional legitimacy, evidenced by the fact that only 24.5% of the population trusts the police (Latinobarómetro, 2021), and 95% of crimes are not reported due to mistrust in the judicial system (González-Gutiérrez, 2024).

The indicators are alarming, 50% of families report that at least one of their members has been a victim of robbery or assault in the last four months of the year (Gallup, 2023), while 64% of Ecuadorians feel unsafe in their own community (Montalvo, 2024). According to a recent analysis by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Ecuador, between 2019 and 2023, violence experienced an increase, with an increase in homicides of 574.30%. Provinces such as Los Ríos and Guayas registered rates of more than 85 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, figures that reflect the seriousness of the crisis. Among the main effects of insecurity in the country are: the erosion of social cohesion, the impact on livelihoods, the increase in internal and external flows of the population, the recruitment, use and use of children and adolescents (NNA), trafficking in persons, increases in forms of violence and impact on mental health and the increase in the risks of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the implementation of activities at the territorial level (IRC, 2024).

Against this backdrop, this article analyzes the community transformations derived from insecurity from a psychosocial approach, exploring the emotional, behavioral, and social impact; and how perceptions of risk, mistrust, and adaptation to violent environments reconfigure social interactions and collective identities. This article proposes that understanding these transformations requires a psychosocial approach that analyzes how insecurity is reconfiguring not only crime statistics, but also the very foundations of social coexistence.

### **Citizen Security in Ecuador**

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) defines citizen security as:

"The capacity of States [...] to provide a framework of protection that allows citizens to live together peacefully, without fear, in order to achieve a better quality of life"(IDB, 2018).

In Ecuador, this definition contrasts with a reality where 82.2% of the urban population considers that the State does not guarantee their safety (Orellana Batallas & Alfonso Caveda, 2022). The situation becomes more critical in territories dominated by criminal groups where communities resort to protection pacts fostering a parallel system of governance that further weakens trust in state security institutions(IRC, 2024). This reflects a fundamental rupture of the social contract, where the State has lost its role as the exclusive guarantor of security (UNDP, 2021).

Although punitive policies have gained ground as a strategy against crime, with measures such as tougher penalties and the expansion of the prison system that has increased the prison population by 190% between 2010 and 2019 (Pontón Cevallos, 2023) and at the same time, the legitimate defense recognized in the Comprehensive Organic Criminal Code (COIP) (National Assembly, 2021) has emerged as a self-protection mechanism. These initiatives have proven ineffective by focusing on reactive measures rather than on structural causes such as poverty and

inequality (Ramos Arévalo et al., 2025), which perpetuate cycles of violence without improving citizen security. For its part, the application of self-defense has generated debates about its potential to promote justice by one's own hand (Bernal Patiño et al., 2023) bringing to the surface ethical and legal dilemmas that surround this illustrated issue in paradigmatic cases such as that of policeman Santiago Olmedo, convicted of exceeding the limits of self-defense (Almachi-Pachacama, 2022).

### **Citizen Insecurity from A Psychosocial Perspective**

From a psychosocial perspective, insecurity transcends the mere occurrence of crimes, becoming a multidimensional phenomenon that erodes the social fabric, deteriorates mental health, and alters community dynamics. One of the most significant impacts is the erosion of social cohesion, evidenced by widespread distrust of institutions and citizens themselves. The decrease in participation in community activities and the increase in neighborhood surveillance reflect this weakening of community ties and the perception of risk among citizens. In cities such as Guayaquil and Quito, the perception of risk has led to self-segregation in fortified enclaves, reducing social interactions between socioeconomic groups (Freitas & Costa, 2022). This socio-spatial fragmentation not only limits the formation of community support networks, but also weakens the capacity for social resilience in the face of violence.

The situation is aggravated by the normalization of violence and the polarization of opinions on security and justice (IRC, 2024), factors that contribute to a deep social division and fragmentation of the social fabric, especially in areas with a high presence of organized criminal groups (OCGs). This fragmentation has reached the point where some sectors perceive these groups as alternative providers of security, which seriously undermines the legitimacy of the state.

The impact on the mental health of the population reveals alarming figures. The normalization of violence (gender-based, racism and xenophobia), both in the public and private spheres, exacerbates social inequalities and generates an environment of fear and insecurity that contributes to the increase in cases of chronic stress, depression, anxiety, hopelessness and suicide, particularly among young people (Leiva Tarazona & Ramírez Ríos, 2021). 20% of children and adolescents (NNA) have symptoms of depression or anxiety, and 10% have considered or attempted suicide due to exposure to violence (World Vision Ecuador, 2023).

The effects of insecurity are particularly devastating for vulnerable groups (women, children, adolescents, ethnic communities and the LGTBIQ+ population), who face greater risks of recruitment by criminal groups, human trafficking and gender-based violence (IRC, 2024). It disproportionately affects women, who restrict their mobility and participation in public spaces for fear of victimization (Contreras et al., 2024). This isolation has economic repercussions, such as reduced job opportunities, and social repercussions, such as increased loneliness and depression (Ávila et al., 2016). According to statistics from the ALDEA Foundation (2024), 65% of women in Ecuador have suffered violence in their lifetime, with an increase in femicides linked to organized crime. In 2023, 321 femicides were reported, 178 of them related to criminal groups. Trafficking in persons, especially women and children, has increased in a context of impunity and inequality. Between 2019 and 2022, 475 victims of trafficking were registered in Ecuador, mainly young people between the ages of 19 and 29. Insecurity has forced thousands of people to leave their homes, generating trauma and uprooting. Some 80,747 people have been displaced as a result of armed violence (3iSolution, 2024). While 47% of Ecuadorians expressed their intention to emigrate due to insecurity (CID Gallup, 2023). The lack of opportunities and

the influence of criminal groups have turned children and adolescents into victims and actors of violence; the GDOs' promises of quick money seduce young people into committing criminal tasks. This has penetrated the nuclear family, displacing the family from its protective role and increasing the risks of recruitment. In 2023, 770 homicides of children and adolescents were recorded, an increase of 640% compared to 2019 (UNICEF, 2024).

Distrust of government institutions and the security system deepens due to the perception of inaction, corruption, and lack of adequate resources to address violence and crime. This distrust leads to the fact that, in some cases, the GDOs are seen as providers of security and protection, evidencing a serious crisis in the legitimacy of the State and an alteration in the social contract, where citizens seek protection from non-State actors.

## **Methods**

This study is based on a quantitative approach, using the structured survey as the main technique. The instrument applied, called "Survey of Perceptions on Citizen Insecurity and its Impact on Community Dynamics", was designed from a Social Work approach with the aim of analyzing how the perception of insecurity affects coexistence, neighborhood trust and community participation in urban contexts.

Nineteen items from the survey were selected for this study, grouped into two central categories: Perception and emotions (14 questions) and Distrust and social isolation (5 questions). Of these, 16 present dichotomous closed answer options (Yes/No), while three allow open answers to delve into qualitative aspects. The selection of questions was aimed at capturing key dimensions of social interaction in environments affected by insecurity.

Data collection prioritized obtaining direct information that would allow the evaluation of the psychosocial and community impact of the phenomenon. The results derived from this instrument provide an empirical basis to discuss the dynamics of social cohesion and fragmentation from the perspective of Social Work.

This methodological design allows a systematic approach to individual and collective perceptions, combining quantitative analyses (frequencies and basic correlations) with qualitative elements (interpretation of open responses), which enriches the multidimensional understanding of the problem studied.

## **Participants**

Table 1 presents a detailed sociodemographic profile of the sample studied, whose characteristics allow us to understand the population dynamics and contextualize the main findings. The sample has a marked concentration in Guayas (37.1%), followed by Pichincha (13.4%) and Los Ríos (13.5%). This distribution may be conditioned by the higher population density of these provinces – particularly in their metropolitan areas (Guayaquil and Quito). The low representation of provinces such as Cotopaxi (0.1%) and Sucumbíos (0.3%) suggests limitations in the territorial coverage of the study, which implies caution in generalizing the results to rural contexts or those with lower population density

Sociodemographic factors		Freq	%
Province	Cañar	8	0.8%
	Cotopaxi	1	0.1%
	Gold	76	8.0%
	Galapagos	12	1.3%
	Guayas	352	37.1%
	Imbabura	28	3.0%
	Los Ríos	128	13.5%
	Manabí	54	5.7%
	Pichincha	127	13.4%
	Saint Helena	37	3.9%
	Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas	77	8.1%
	Sucumbios	3	0.3%
	Other	46	4.8%
	Age	18-22 years old	67
23-27 years old		134	13.9%
28-32 years		156	16.2%
33-37 years old		149	15.5%
38-42 years old		119	12.4%
43-47 years old		131	13.6%
48-52 years old		78	8.1%
53-57 years old		64	6.6%
58-62 years old		31	3.2%
Over 63 years old		32	3.3%
Gender	Male	426	44.2%
	Female	532	55.2%
	Other	2	0.2%
	He preferred not to say it	5	0.5%
Marital status	Single	399	41.4%
	Married	314	32.6%
	Divorced	65	6.7%
	Common-law marriage	166	17.2%
	Widow or widower	19	2.0%
Educational Level	Incomplete Primary	23	2.4%
	Complete Primary	69	7.2%
	Incomplete Secondary School	94	9.8%
	Complete Secondary School	401	41.6%
	Technique	50	5.2%

	Technological	51	5.3%
	Incomplete Superior	111	11.5%
	Superior Complete	199	20.7%
	No studies	7	0.7%

Table 1

Sample composition according to sociodemographic factors

Source: Own elaboration

The age profile shows an overrepresentation of young adults, with a higher concentration in the ranges of 28-32 years (16.2%) and 33-37 years (15.5%). This pattern, added to the significant presence of the 23-47 age group (which accounts for about 60% of the sample), indicates a clear bias towards the working-age population. The low participation of older adults (58+ years: ~6.5%) could reflect both barriers in access to the survey and differential patterns of participation in social studies, which limits the understanding of the particularities of this age group. The female predominance (55.2% vs. 44.2% male) coincides with recurrent trends in social research, where women show greater willingness to participate in surveys. The minimal presence of other gender identities (0.7% in total) raises questions about the effective inclusion of diverse populations in the methodological design. Marital status reveals transformations in contemporary family configurations: while singles constitute the majority group (41.4%), free unions (17.2%) surpass divorced/widowed (8.7%), suggesting a cultural shift towards less formalized marital models. The educational panorama shows a population with a majority of completed secondary education (41.6%), although significant gaps persist: 23.4% do not complete this level, while only 20.7% reach completed higher education. The relative growth of technical/technological training (10.5%) possibly reflects a growing valuation of this type of training in the labor market. The profile obtained is particularly suitable for analysing the phenomenon as it predominantly reflects the economically active population residing in main urban centres.

## Results

### Emotional Impact

The results presented in Figure 1 show a serious deterioration of psychological well-being in the population studied, derived from the perception of insecurity. Most of the participants (76.4%) report feeling stress when they leave their home. A significant 73.5% mention that they have experienced anxiety when traveling through their own neighborhood. While a significant 85.7% report an increase in their level of concern in the last year.

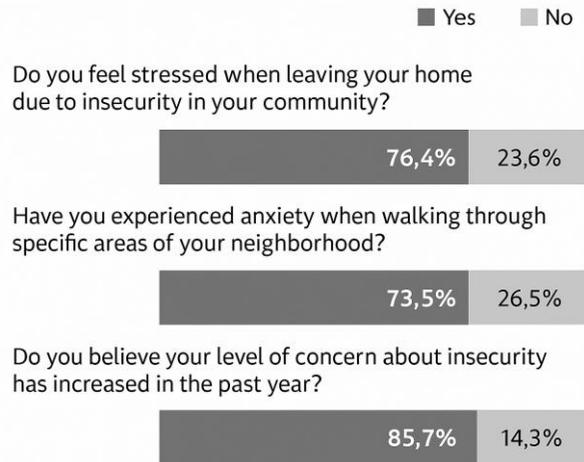


Figure 1 Stress and Anxiety

Source: Own elaboration

Among the predominant emotions associated with the perception of insecurity (Figure 2), fear (45%) and anxiety (34%) stand out as the most frequent psychological responses. Fear manifests itself primarily as a reaction to specific physical threats (robbery, violence, kidnappings) and a persistent concern for family safety. On the other hand, anxiety is expressed through a state of hypervigilance, accompanied by insomnia and chronic stress, which suggests a sustained alteration of emotional well-being. At a second level of prevalence, frustration (17%) emerges linked to the perception of institutional inefficiency, materializing in criticism of the authorities and feelings of impotence in the face of the lack of structural solutions. Likewise, sadness (11%) reflects a grieving process due to the loss of tranquility and the deterioration of the social fabric, evidencing the profound impact of insecurity on quality of life. Emotions such as anger (9%), although less frequent, are significant because of their catalytic role: they are associated with collective actions (e.g., protests) as a response to perceived impunity. Finally, an additional 6% report complex emotions (distrust, paranoia), which reflect a dysfunctional adaptation to the context of insecurity.

These findings reveal that insecurity not only triggers immediate emotional reactions (fear/anxiety), but also chronic effects such as learned hopelessness and the erosion of trust in institutions. The presence of anger, although a minority, underlines the search for mechanisms of social enforceability in the face of the perception of institutional abandonment.

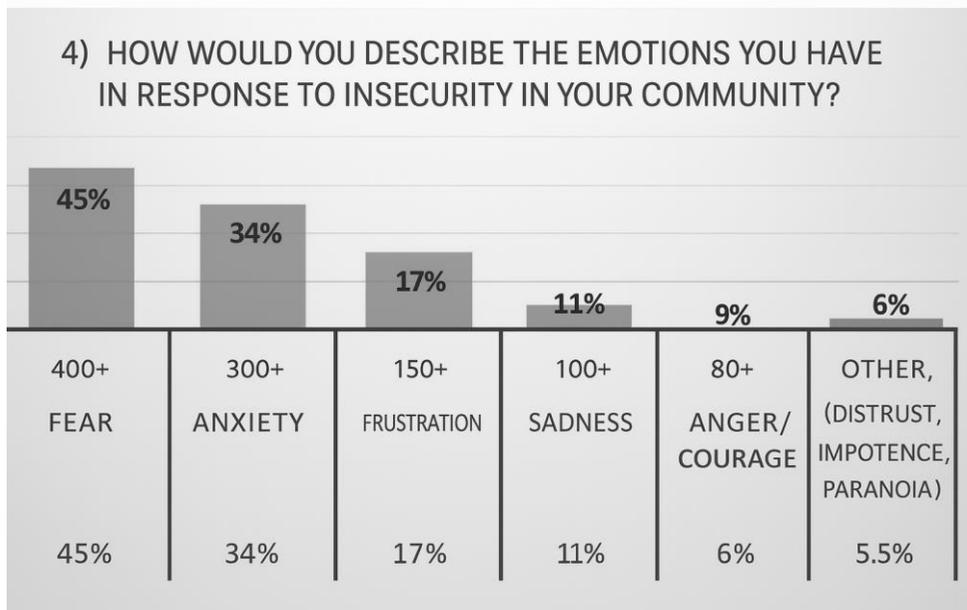


Figure 2 Predominant Emotions in The Face of Citizens' Insecurity

Source: Own elaboration

The data collected in Figure 3 reveal significant behavioral patterns associated with the perception of insecurity. The vast majority of respondents (87.4%) state that they have modified their habits due to the fear generated by the perception of insecurity in their community. Likewise, a significant percentage (78.4%) express concern about the constant risk to which they and their families are exposed as a result of crime. These results reflect a possible significant correlation between the perception of insecurity and behavioral changes in the population studied. The figures not only confirm the hypothesis of correlation between perception and behavior, but also reveal a process of normalization of defensive strategies that: redefine urban mobility, prioritize safety over freedom of action and configure new routines based on the calculation of risks. The statistical magnitude ( $\geq 75\%$  in both indicators) suggests that these phenomena represent a structural – not anecdotal – characteristic of the urban experience in the context studied.

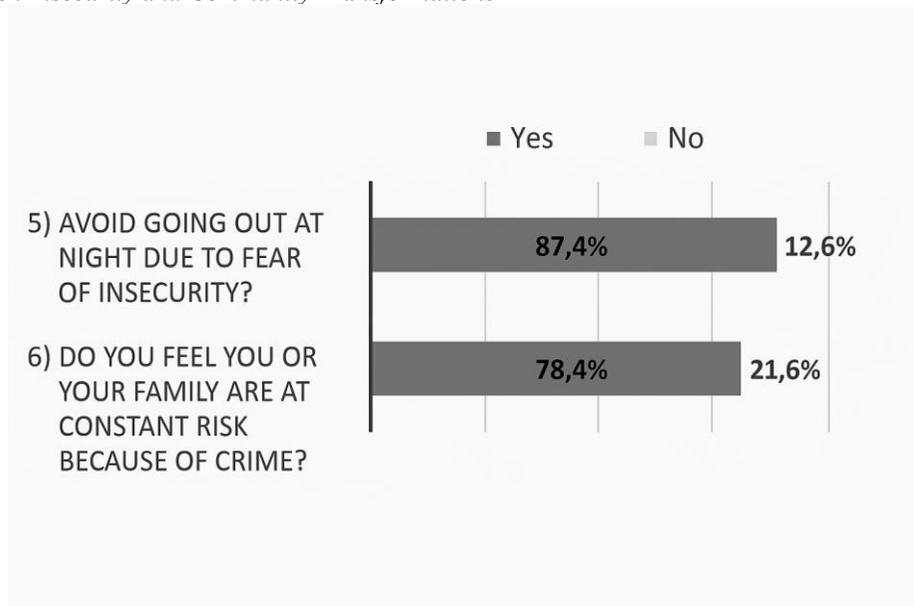


Figure 3

### Fear and perception of vulnerability

Source: Own elaboration

The results presented in Figure 4 show the profound psychosocial impact generated by the perception of insecurity in the daily lives of the respondents. The analysis reveals that mobility restriction is the most prevalent effect (40%), manifesting itself particularly in vulnerable groups such as women and children, which reflects a significant alteration in traditional urban circulation patterns. At the same time, a marked impact on mental health was observed (35%), characterized by chronic anxiety, insomnia and feelings of helplessness. Likewise, the data show a notable reconfiguration of daily routines (29%), evidenced by the increase in spending on private security and the replacement of means of transport, with the consequent deterioration in quality of life. The phenomenon of social isolation (23%) emerges as a paradoxical adaptive strategy that, although it seeks to mitigate immediate risks, contributes to the gradual deterioration of social capital. Finally, the development of interpersonal distrust (17%) represents a critical factor that weakens both neighborhood relationships and the capacity for collective action. These findings coincide with the theoretical postulates on habituation to violent environments, suggesting a process of normalization of insecurity that prioritizes individual responses over community solutions, with significant implications for the social fabric and urban governance.

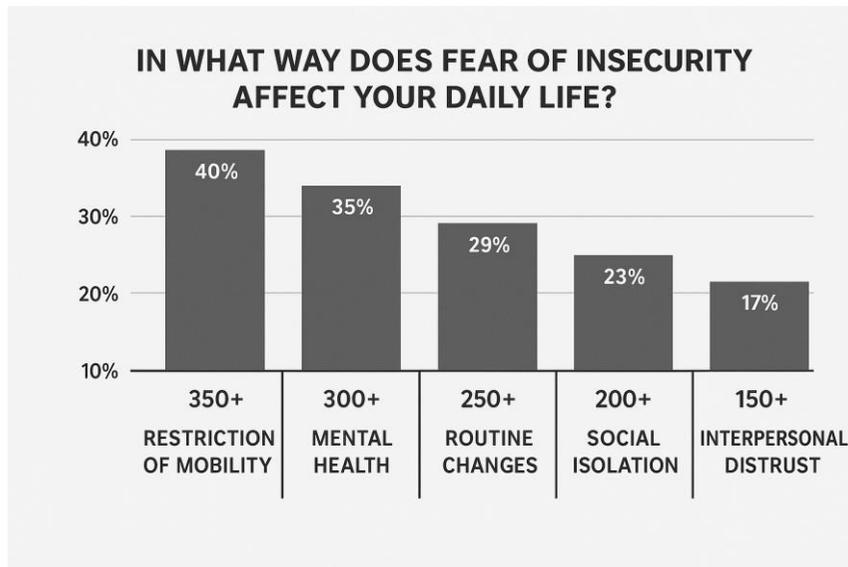


Figure 4

Effects on daily activities related to fear of insecurity

Source: Own elaboration

Table 2 shows the most common expressions mentioned by respondents for each of the categories illustrated in Figure 4.

The results presented suggest that insecurity generates a severe emotional impact, evidenced by high levels of stress and anxiety that lead to avoiding public spaces and daily activities in most of the respondents. The perception of risk is widespread and has increased significantly.

Category	Most common expressions
Mobility restriction	<p>"I don't go out at night anymore,"</p> <p>"I avoid places I used to frequent,"</p> <p>"I used to go for a walk after dinner; now I don't even go to the corner,"</p> <p>"My children no longer play in the park for fear of kidnappings,"</p> <p>"I take longer but brighter streets to get home"</p>
Mental health	<p>"Stress, insomnia, constant anxiety,"</p> <p>"I live on permanent alert,"</p> <p>"I feel my heart racing every time I hear a motorcycle", "I wake up startled thinking that they broke in",</p> <p>"Helplessness makes me cry; I don't enjoy anything anymore"</p>
Changes in routines	<p>"I changed my work schedules,"</p> <p>"I use only safe transportation,"</p> <p>"I stopped using buses; now I spend on taxis,"</p> <p>"I leave work earlier so I don't travel at night,"</p> <p>"I don't wear jewelry anymore or take out my cell phone on</p>

	<i>the street"</i>
Social isolation	<i>"I stopped meeting friends," "I don't go to parks with my kids," "My children only watch TV; I don't let them go out anymore," "I canceled my book club because it was in a dangerous area"</i>
Interpersonal distrust	<i>"I distrust even my neighbors," "I avoid interacting with strangers," "If I see someone new in the neighborhood, I close my door," "I don't report robberies because I don't trust the police"</i>

Table 2

Most common expressions associated with the fear of insecurity that affects daily life

### Behavioral Impacts

The perception of insecurity has led to the adoption of adaptive strategies that significantly modify daily routines. Figure 5 shows the results of the questions related to specific modifications implemented by the respondents in response to insecurity. As main findings, it is observed that a significant majority (77.6%) have altered their usual routes to avoid dangerous areas, 80.8% avoid night-time public transport, and 77.5% have abandoned outdoor activities. This corroborates how freedom of movement has been replaced by restrictions on mobility.

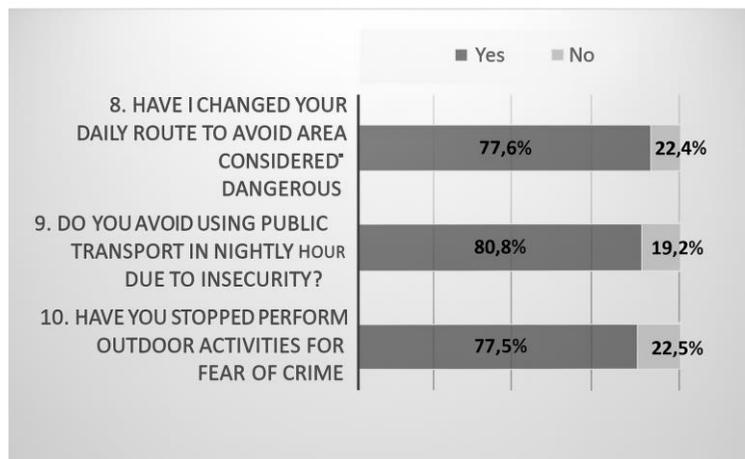


Figure 5 Modifying Daily Routines

Source: Own elaboration

The data presented in Figure 6 reveal a clear pattern of behavioral adaptation to the perception of insecurity, where avoidant strategies stand out as the most prevalent. The most adopted measure, avoiding going out at night (30%), reflects a significant restriction of urban mobility during times considered to be of greater risk. This behavior is complemented by the change of transport routes (22%), which indicates a spatial modification of travel to avoid areas perceived as dangerous, even if this implies longer travel times or discomfort. Together with the reduction of social activities (20%), these responses configure a scenario where the population prioritizes security over freedom of movement and community participation, which could have long-term

effects on social cohesion and the vitality of public spaces.

At a second level of frequency are strategies aimed at minimizing risks in the personal and domestic spheres. Not carrying valuables (17%) represents a form of "performative poverty," where individuals adapt their appearance and belongings so as not to attract the attention of potential criminals. At the same time, the increase in security measures in the home (15%) shows a trend towards the privatization of protection, with economic investments in surveillance systems and physical reinforcement of homes. Isolation and sedentary lifestyle (12%), although less frequent, emerges as a worrying consequence that could affect both the physical and mental health of those who adopt this extreme defensive posture.

Modifying schedules (10%) appears as the least used strategy, suggesting that respondents have less flexibility to adjust their work or personal commitments. The general distribution of these responses indicates that the population favors passive avoidance measures over more proactive or collective actions. This behavior not only reflects a forced adaptation to the context of insecurity, but also signals the normalization of these practices as part of everyday life. The results underscore the need for comprehensive public policies that address both the objective causes of insecurity and their subjective perceptions, in order to mitigate the negative impact on quality of life and the social fabric.

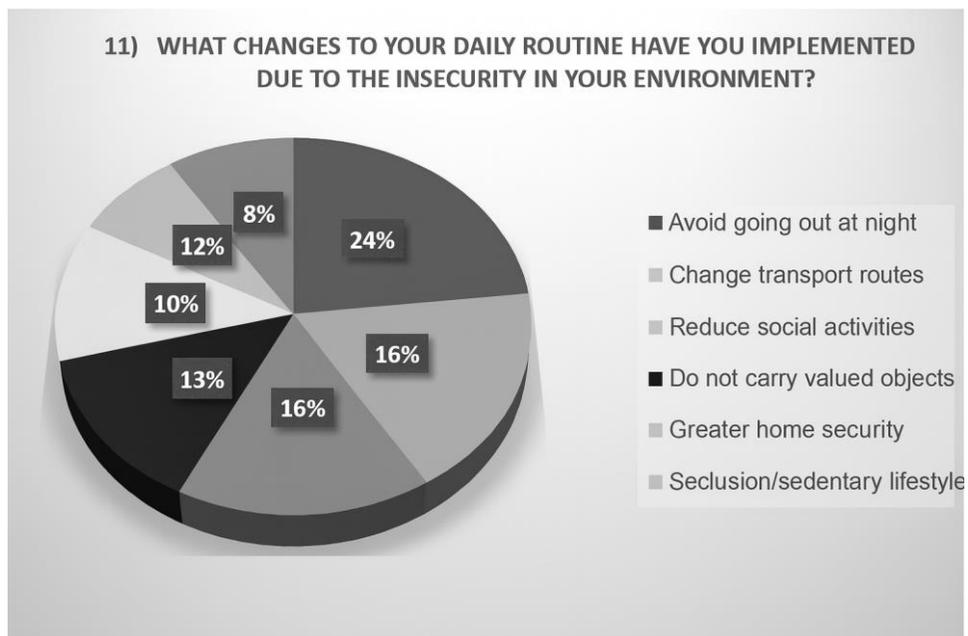


Figure 6 Implementation of Self-Protection Measures

Source: Own elaboration

The data summarized in Figure 7 show the implementation of specific self-protection measures. It is evident that more than half of the participants have invested in security, 57.2% report installing cameras or reinforcing their home, although only 20.9% carry personal defense objects. The majority (79.1%) say that they do not take personal protection measures when they leave their home. The data indicate that the population predominantly adopts passive strategies (avoidance, withdrawal) instead of confrontation, which shows a forced adaptation to insecurity.

This pattern, observable in the abandonment of public spaces and the increase in spending on security, reflects a normalization of violence as a structural phenomenon.

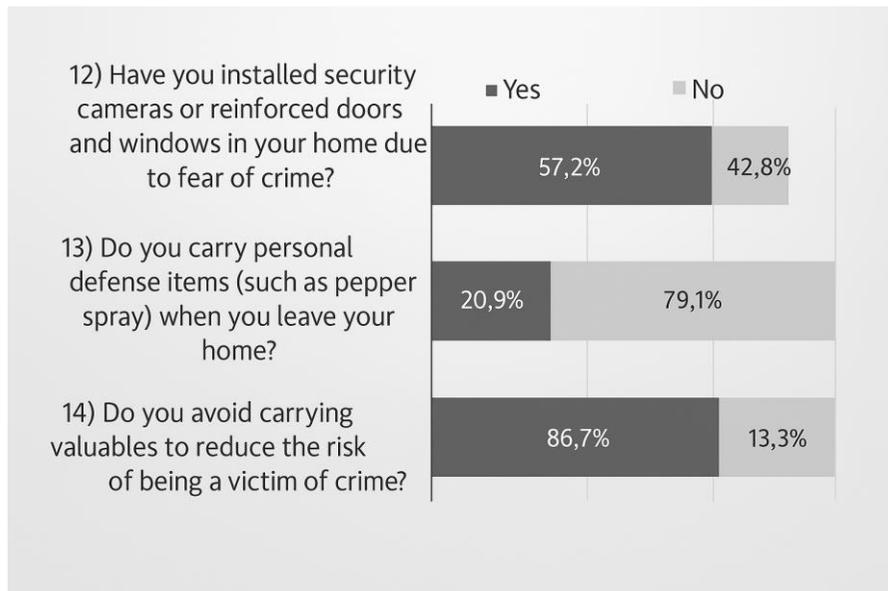


Figure 7 Implementation of Self-Protection Measures

Source: Own elaboration

### Social Impacts

Insecurity has eroded social capital and community cohesion. The figures shown in Figure 8 show the development of interpersonal distrust. More than half, 52.4%, distrust their neighbors, and 33.1% attribute the crimes to acquaintances. These findings highlight the fragmentation of the social fabric.

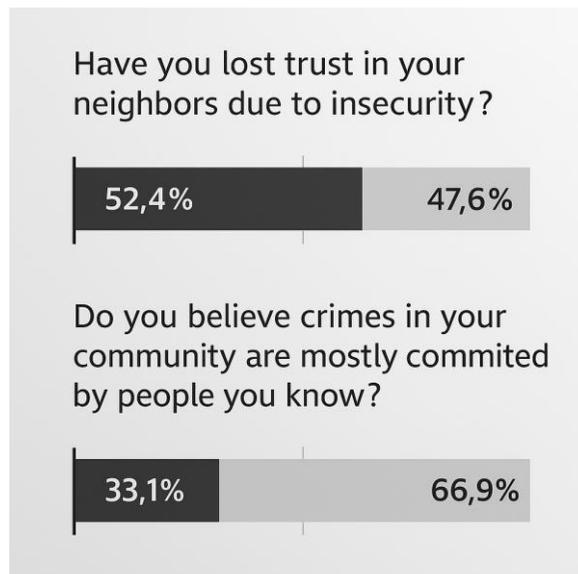


Figure 8 Distrust of Other Community Members

Source: Own elaboration

Isolation reflects a defensive response that limits collective action. A significant 69.9% state that they participate less in community activities, and 78.4% avoid interacting with people outside their circle of close acquaintances and 79.5% perceive that insecurity has damaged the community environment (Figure 9).

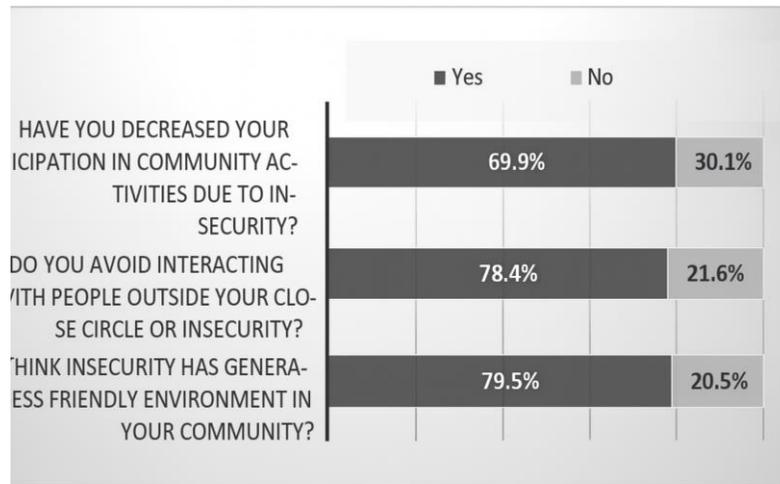


Figure 9 Social Isolation

Source: Own elaboration

These results show how insecurity has eroded the social fabric, generating interpersonal distrust and isolation. The perception, although a minority, that criminals are known people intensifies distrust, while isolation reflects a defensive response that limits action. This behavior perpetuates a cycle of individualization and weakening of support networks.

## Discussion

The results of this research reveal that insecurity in Ecuador has produced significant psychosocial transformations, manifested in three interrelated dimensions. On the emotional level, high levels of stress, anxiety and fear are found in the population, findings that agree with what was documented by Leiva and Ramírez (2021) in contexts of structural violence, where the perception of chronic risk substantially deteriorates collective emotional well-being. These results coincide with the analysis carried out by International Rescue Committee (IRC) Ecuador (2024) stating that the impact of insecurity on the mental health of the Ecuadorian population is high. The normalization of violence in the public and private spheres is responsible for the increase in cases of depression, anxiety and suicide, particularly among young people, a situation that is aggravated by the lack of access to mental health services and the stigmatization of people with mental illness.

At the behavioral level, the documented restrictive adaptations find theoretical support in the concept of "culture of fear" developed by Bauman (2006). While the widespread adoption of defensive strategies by the population exemplifies the phenomenon of "urbanism of fear"

described by Freitas and Costa (2022), through which individuals internalize limitations on their fundamental freedoms as a protection mechanism. However, as Contreras et al. (2024), these adaptations generate paradoxical effects: while they seek to reduce immediate risks, they end up exacerbating social fragmentation through isolation and interpersonal distrust. Proof of this is the massification of the closed citadels as a residential type chosen for the expansion of Guayaquil. According to the study by Pérez de Murzi y Orejuela of (2023) 229 citadels in this city are quantified, creating what Kokoreff (2003) defines "voluntary ghettos" in response to the insecurity that transforms cities by generating: spatial fragmentation, privatization of security and loss of social cohesion. According to the Gallup 2024 index, 73% of Ecuadorians feel unsafe walking through their streets and squares at night (Vásquez González, 2025), the lowest figure recorded in Latin America, exemplifying the "topographies of fear" described by Caldeira (2000) and that the findings of this study show in action through mobility restriction, route changes and isolation. These results also find theoretical support in Tuan's postulates (1979), this study reveals that fear shapes the perception and use of space, the restriction of mobility is one of the main reactions of the respondents. The state of hypervigilance and avoiding activities in public spaces reflect urban topophobias.

Similarly, the relationship between insecurity and impairment of social capital is supported by robust theoretical and empirical evidence. The findings of this study validate Putnam's postulates (2000). Interpersonal distrust and isolation reflect the erosion of social capital. Community fragmentation limits collective responses to violence. While the privatization of security (cameras, fences, etc.) replaces community networks (neighborhood surveillance) with individual solutions. This theoretical framework helps to interpret why insecurity in Ecuador not only generates fear, but also destroys community mechanisms to deal with it.

As Ortega y Pino highlights (2021) returning to Lunecke and Ruiz (2007), "the increase in crime and violence erodes social capital and social control by the community, weakening the bonds and bonds between people" (p. 242). This phenomenon explains the behavioral patterns observed in the study, where most participants report avoiding social interactions and public spaces, coinciding with what is documented in contexts of urban violence that generate "isolated or disconnected areas." As the UNODC warns (2012), this loss of social cohesion creates a "propitious scenario for the appropriation of public space by illegal actors" (p. 136), thus perpetuating cycles of violence and community disintegration.

## **Conclusions**

This study shows how insecurity reconfigures community dynamics from a triple psychosocial dimension. Emotionally, it generates a collective syndrome of fear (45%) and anxiety (34%) that normalizes hypervigilance and erodes institutional trust. Behaviorally, it promotes restrictive adaptations (87.4% modify habits), prioritizing private security (57.2%) over public freedoms and fragmenting the use of urban space. Socially, it deepens interpersonal distrust (52.4%) and isolation (78.4%), weakening social capital and perpetuating cycles of vulnerability.

These findings reveal a critical paradox: individual protection strategies, far from mitigating risks, intensify community fracture. The study proposes that addressing this crisis requires policies that transcend crime control to rebuild social fabrics, through: psycho-emotional interventions that reduce the climate of fear, recovery of public space as a scenario of cohesion, and institutional mechanisms that revitalize collective action. Insecurity, thus, emerges not only as a problem of public order, but as a phenomenon that redefines the very foundations of urban coexistence.

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