From Data to Discourse: A Longitudinal Analysis of Tourist Victimization and Its Public Narrative

James Hanrahana and Sahar Attari

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James Hanrahan[1] and Sahar Attari[2]

Abstract

This study investigates the "safe but vulnerable" paradox confronting destinations traditionally regarded as secure, focusing on Ireland as an illustrative case. Employing a longitudinal, mixed-methods design grounded in Routine Activity Theory (RAT) and the Risk–Fear Paradox, the research integrates official Irish Tourist Assistance Service (ITAS) crime data (2019–2023) with a qualitative content analysis of national media coverage. The findings reveal a sharp post-pandemic surge in tourist victimization rates, with incidents concentrated in Dublin's city centre and dominated by property crime, particularly theft from the person. However, media narratives disproportionately emphasized violent assaults, generating a perception of escalating danger. This divergence between statistical reality and mediated discourse exposes a systemic guardianship gap within destinations that rely heavily on a reputation for safety. The study advances theory by extending RAT and the Risk–Fear Paradox to "safe but vulnerable" contexts and offers actionable insights for destination management, law enforcement, and policy coordination. It calls for integrated safety governance, data-driven guardianship, and balanced communication strategies to align public perception with empirical risk.

Keywords: tourist victimization, Routine Activity Theory, Risk–Fear Paradox, media framing, destination safety, Ireland

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1. Introduction

Tourism's rapid global recovery and recent growth have re-ignited questions about visitor safety and destination resilience. While the global travel and tourism sector contributed approximately €10.1 trillion to GDP in 2024 and supported about 357 million jobs worldwide (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024), the sector's dependence on perceptions of safety remains a persistent vulnerability. Crime real or perceived can quickly destabilize a destination's brand and erode visitor confidence. Yet, as destinations reopen and urban tourism rebounds, an emerging paradox is evident: places long considered "safe" now face a growing mismatch between their statistical risk profiles and public perceptions of danger.

This study explores this "safe but vulnerable" paradox through an in-depth case study of Ireland a destination widely regarded as secure and hospitable yet experiencing a post-pandemic surge in tourist victimization. Despite low violent crime rates, reports of theft, fraud, and distressing public incidents have risen sharply since 2022 (Irish Tourist Assistance Service [ITAS], 2023). Meanwhile, high-profile media coverage has amplified fear of violence, casting Dublin's city centre as unsafe for visitors. These contradictory realities raise critical questions about the relationship between empirical crime trends, mediated narratives, and the guardianship mechanisms that underpin tourism safety.

Theoretical and empirical gaps. Although extensive research has examined the relationship between tourism and crime (Brunt & Mawby, 2000; Giusti & Raya, 2019; Hua et al., 2020), much of it focuses on high-crime or politically unstable destinations. Safe, developed countries where the threat is predominantly opportunistic and perception-driven remain comparatively under-theorized. Existing models such as Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) explain the situational convergence of offenders, targets, and the absence of guardianship, yet they have rarely been applied to destinations whose risk profile is low but rising. Similarly, the Risk–Fear Paradox (Mawby, 2000) suggests that tourists often underestimate danger in familiar or reputedly safe places, but this framework has seldom been tested empirically in low-risk environments. This theoretical blind spot limits our understanding of how crime, perception, and institutional response interact in destinations like Ireland.

Purpose and research questions. This paper addresses this gap by integrating longitudinal crime data and media narratives to examine how the guardianship gap manifests and evolves in a "safe but vulnerable" destination. Specifically, it seeks to answer:

How have patterns of tourist-targeted crime in Ireland evolved across the pre-, mid-, and post-pandemic periods (2019–2023)?

How do media representations of these incidents shape and amplify perceptions of insecurity?

What systemic factors explain the divergence between empirical crime trends and public discourse?

Methodological approach. A mixed-methods design is employed, combining quantitative analysis of ITAS victimization data (2019–2023) with qualitative content analysis of media coverage (2019–mid-2025). This approach allows triangulation between the empirical reality of tourist crime and its discursive construction within Irish media and political debate.

Expected contributions. The study makes three key contributions. First, it extends Routine Activity Theory and the Risk–Fear Paradox to low-crime destinations, conceptualizing the "safe but vulnerable" setting as one where perceived safety creates structural blind spots in guardianship. Second, it provides longitudinal, evidence-based insights into how tourism victimization evolved during and after the pandemic, filling a gap in Irish and international literature. Third, it translates these findings into actionable guidance for policymakers, tourism managers, and law enforcement advancing both theoretical and practical understanding of destination safety governance.

In doing so, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of tourism security, reframing "safety" not as a static attribute but as a dynamic equilibrium between crime patterns, institutional guardianship, and mediated public perception.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Crime and Tourist Safety: A Global Overview

Tourism is a cornerstone of the global economy, fostering development and cross-cultural exchange, yet it inherently presents unique safety and security challenges. A well-established

body of literature recognizes that tourists are particularly vulnerable to crime. This vulnerability stems not necessarily from being specifically targeted, but from their unfamiliarity with local settings, predictable travel routines, and perceived affluence, which collectively make them attractive targets for offenders (Brunt & Hambly, 1999; Giusti & Raya, 2019). This risk is amplified in urban destinations where high tourist density coincides with law enforcement resources that may be stretched thin across high-traffic areas. Globally, the most frequent threats to visitors are property crimes, including theft from the person, scams, and fraud, though personal assaults also occur (Matakovic & Mataković, 2019). In contrast, lower perceptions of crime safety were observed among female respondents, visitors active during night-time hours, repeat visitors, and individuals with prior victimisation experiences. (George et al., 2024). However, evidence from guided tourism contexts suggests that structured, organised activities can mitigate perceived risk, with most participants reporting a strong sense of safety despite the crime-associated nature of the destination (e.g. themed walking tours in high-crime urban areas) (MacAskill et al., 2023). Taken together, these patterns underscore the uneven distribution of perceived risk among tourists and highlight the need for context-specific safety strategies that account for both situational exposure and visitor characteristics.

Building on the broader recognition of tourists' heightened vulnerability, the empirical relationship between tourism flows and crime rates has yielded mixed findings. Some studies posit that an increase in tourist numbers creates more opportunities for crime, leading to higher victimization rates (de Albuquerque & McElroy, 1999). Conversely, other research emphasizes that crime spikes are not an inevitable consequence of tourism but are instead indicative of deeper structural or situational vulnerabilities within a destination (Giusti & Raya, 2019). Regardless of this causal debate, the perception of safety is a critical factor. Perceived insecurity, whether grounded in statistical reality or amplified by external narratives, can significantly deter travel and damage a destination's competitiveness (Hall et al., 2004; Zou & Yu, 2022). This shifts analytical attention from crime incidence alone to how risk is constructed, communicated, and interpreted by tourists.

Tourists' safety perceptions are shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including cultural distance, communication barriers, and the visible presence of security measures (Xie et al., 2020). Potential visitors often rely on media portrayals, online travel reviews, and word-of-mouth rather than official crime statistics to assess risk. Consequently, even isolated incidents can have a disproportionate impact on a destination's image if they receive widespread

publicity. Sensationalist media framing of relatively minor events can instil fear and cause long-term reputational harm, as evidenced in past cases (Norizawati & Tarmiji, 2014). These dynamic underscores the necessity for transparent and balanced safety communication from both tourism authorities and media outlets (Agarwal et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2003; Norizawati & Tarmiji, 2014). Ultimately, destinations that fail to manage not only crime but also its narrative risk undermining visitor confidence irrespective of actual safety conditions.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations: Routine Activity Theory and the Risk-Fear Paradox

Routine Activity Theory and the Guardianship Gap

Routine Activity Theory (RAT) (Cohen & Felson, 1979) explains crime occurrence as the convergence of three conditions: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. Within tourism contexts, visitors embody "suitable targets" visible, distracted, and carrying valuables (Brunt et al., 2000). However, in destinations that perceive themselves as safe, guardianship mechanisms (e.g., police presence, surveillance, or situational awareness campaigns) are often deprioritized.

Existing research largely applies RAT to high-crime destinations (Lisowska-Kierepka, 2017), but this study extends its relevance to low-crime tourism economies, showing that the absence of perceived risk can itself generate a form of guardianship deficit. In Ireland, for instance, law enforcement efforts and public safety communications are concentrated on violent crime rather than the more prevalent property crime affecting tourists. This systemic oversight what we term a branding-induced guardianship gap exposes a theoretical nuance in RAT, suggesting that perceptions of safety can indirectly increase target vulnerability by diminishing active protection.

The Risk–Fear Paradox and Mediated Perception

Mawby's (2000) Risk–Fear Paradox introduces a complementary psychological dimension. It posits that tourists often feel safer than objective risks warrant, especially in destinations marketed as welcoming and low crime. This cognitive dissonance leads to complacency underestimating hazards, ignoring warnings, and venturing into high-risk areas.

Recent studies (Zou & Yu, 2022; Agarwal et al., 2021) highlight that safety perception is socially constructed through cultural narratives and media discourse rather than direct experience. However, few have examined how media amplification reshapes the paradox itself. In Ireland's case, while most tourist crime is nonviolent theft, media framing has

emphasized assault and "lawlessness," inflating fear and distorting the public understanding of risk. This divergence illustrates an evolution of the Risk–Fear Paradox from a psychological bias among tourists to a systemic misalignment between statistical risk and mediated perception.

Research Gap and Conceptual Contribution

This research fills this critical gap by conducting a five-year (2019–2023) quantitative analysis of tourist-targeted crime in Ireland using official ITAS data. It moves beyond perception-based studies and isolated case reports to provide a longitudinal, data-driven perspective on how crime against tourists has evolved across pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic phases. The study examines trends by incident type, location, time, and victim demographics (age, gender, nationality).

Acknowledging the limitations of aggregated data, this research is strengthened by a complementary qualitative content analysis of media narratives from 2019 to mid-2025. This mixed-methods approach allows for the triangulation of empirical trends with their public discourse, contextualizing how tourist crime is communicated and perceived.

While comparative research offers strategies like technological interventions (Teslim & Jack, 2023; Zou & Yu, 2022) and collaborative policing models (Visit Malta, 2024), the literature predominantly focuses on high-risk destinations, often overlooking low-crime but high-perception-risk contexts like Ireland (Agarwal et al., 2021). This oversight is critical given Ireland's paradoxical status as a "safe" destination grappling with rising petty crime (ITAS, 2023).

Despite abundant research on crime and tourism, three critical gaps persist:

1. Contextual bias: Theories of tourist victimization are dominated by studies from high-crime or politically volatile destinations. Low-crime contexts remain understudied.
2. Lack of longitudinal evidence: Few studies trace temporal changes in tourist victimization, especially across pre- and post-pandemic periods.
3. Disconnection between data and discourse: Prior research rarely integrates empirical crime data with analysis of media narratives to explain public perception.

Therefore, this study makes a distinct contribution by applying the theoretical lenses of Routine Activity Theory and the Risk-Fear Paradox to a understudied destination type. It

provides an evidence-based assessment of both the empirical reality and the constructed narrative of tourist safety in Ireland, offering insights that are valuable for both the global literature and for local policymakers, destination managers, and law enforcement agencies seeking to enhance tourism resilience.

This study addresses these gaps by applying RAT and the Risk–Fear Paradox to Ireland as a "safe but vulnerable" destination, combining quantitative data with qualitative discourse analysis. The result is a refined conceptual model explaining how safety branding, media amplification, and guardianship deficits interact to produce systemic vulnerability in tourism environments.

2.3 Safety Monitoring, Institutional Roles, and the Irish Context

In response to the growing importance of tourist safety, international frameworks and destination-specific models have emerged. The European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS), for instance, includes tourist-reported crimes as a key metric for sustainable tourism (European Commission: Directorate-General for Internal Market & Smes, 2016). Countries like New Zealand and Malta have implemented integrated safety management systems that combine proactive policing, real-time crime mapping, community engagement, and victim support, highlighting the value of multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Digital technologies offer further advances in risk monitoring and communication. Mobile safety applications, geofencing for alerts, and crowd-sourced platforms are increasingly used to protect visitors (Psaroudakis et al., 2021; Zou & Yu, 2022). However, the adoption of such tools is uneven, often lagging in destinations where tourism safety is not yet a formalized policy priority. This includes Ireland, where the use of technology for tourist safety remains limited and primarily centralized within law enforcement rather than being integrated into consumer-facing platforms (ITAS, 2023).

Within this global context, Ireland presents a compelling and under-researched case study. It is globally recognized for its hospitality and relatively low levels of violent crime, a reputation that is central to its destination brand (Fáilte-Ireland, 2019). However, this very reputation may obscure emerging risks to international visitors, particularly in urban and transit environments. Despite tourism being a key economic sector, academic research on tourist-targeted crime in Ireland is scarce, with official attention often focused on marketing and infrastructure over security management.

The Irish Tourist Assistance Service (ITAS) provides a unique and valuable data source on this issue. ITAS offers national-level, standardized reporting on incidents involving tourists, based on referrals from A Garda Síochána (the Irish police service). Recent ITAS reports indicate a steady increase in tourist-targeted incidents since the pandemic, peaking in 2023 despite tourist volumes not having fully returned to pre-2019 levels (Fáilte-Ireland, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023; Office, 2020). Theft from the person, fraud, and other distressing incidents dominate the data, with a pronounced concentration in Dublin City Centre and public transport hubs.

Nevertheless, a significant research gap persists. No academic study has yet conducted a longitudinal analysis of ITAS data to explore evolving risk patterns, demographic vulnerabilities, or the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourist crime in Ireland. While Ireland is occasionally mentioned in regional comparisons, it lacks a dedicated, in-depth investigation. Furthermore, Ireland has not developed a comprehensive, tech-integrated tourism safety framework akin to models in Malta or New Zealand, and stakeholder collaboration in crime prevention remains informal and ad hoc.

3. Research Design

This research adopts a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative analysis of official crime data with qualitative media content analysis. The approach captures both the empirical evolution of tourist victimization (2019–2023) and its discursive construction within Irish media (2019–mid-2025).

Quantitative data were sourced from the Irish Tourist Assistance Service (ITAS), which compiles reports of crimes against international visitors referred by An Garda Síochána (national police). These were cross-referenced with visitor arrival data from Fáilte Ireland to calculate standardized incident rates

This study combining a quantitative, descriptive research design with qualitative content analysis to investigate patterns of crime affecting international tourists in Ireland. The primary focus of the quantitative component is to examine macro-level trends in tourist-targeted incidents between 2019 and 2023, using publicly available ITAS (Irish Tourist Assistance Service) data. This analysis explores demographic, geographic, and temporal patterns through

a non-experimental, observational design, relying on frequency distributions and trend comparisons.

To enrich the interpretation of these statistical patterns and provide greater contextual depth, the study incorporates qualitative content analysis of Irish news media reports spanning a slightly broader period, from 2019 to mid-2025. The extended timeframe for the content analysis was purposefully selected to capture high-profile incidents such as the 2023 Temple Bar drug dealing revelations and the 2024–2025 assaults on tourists that have sparked significant media attention and public concern. These incidents have played a key role in shaping public and political discourse around urban safety and tourism in Ireland.

The quantitative analysis of ITAS data revealed stark patterns in tourist victimization across Ireland, while the qualitative media analysis provided crucial context for understanding how these incidents are perceived and amplified. Together, these methods paint a comprehensive picture of both the *empirical reality* and the *public discourse* surrounding tourist safety.

By integrating these two methods, the study not only identifies empirical trends but also explores how such incidents are framed and perceived in the public domain. This dual approach supports the application of criminological theory in situ and informs more holistic, evidence-based responses to the challenges of tourist victimization.

While the analysis is primarily descriptive due to the use of aggregated data, the study also introduces contextual interpretation informed by existing theory namely, Routine Activity Theory and the Risk-Fear Paradox to deepen the analytical contribution.

3.1 Data Source and Scope

The data used in this study were extracted from the annual reports of the Irish Tourist Assistance Service (ITAS), published between 2019 and 2023. ITAS is a national organization that provides support to tourists who become victims of crime in Ireland, offering emergency assistance and compiling detailed reports based on referrals from A Garda Síochána, Ireland's national police service.

ITAS annual reports (2019–2023) were manually extracted, standardized, and analyzed descriptively. Variables included:

- Incident type (e.g., theft, fraud, assault)
- Location (e.g., Dublin city centre, transit, nightlife venues)

- Victim demographics (age, gender, nationality)
- Temporal distribution (time of day)

In addition, data on the total number of overseas tourist arrivals disaggregated by nationality were obtained from Fáilte Ireland, the national tourism development authority. Data were normalized per 100,000 tourists to compare risk across years and nationalities. These data were used to calculate incident rates per 100,000 tourists, allowing for a standardized comparison of risk across nationalities and time periods.

Qualitative phase.

Media articles were coded using NVivo software, following a hybrid inductive–deductive framework. Codes captured tone, framing, incident characterization, and institutional response. Repeated coverage of specific events (e.g., 2023 assaults near Store Street) was retained to assess narrative amplification.

Ethical Considerations

All data were publicly available and anonymized. No identifiable information was used. The research adheres to ethical standards for secondary data analysis and content review.

3.2 Rationale for Methodological Choice

This study employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to address the complex nature of tourist-targeted crime, which encompasses both objective patterns and their social perception. A quantitative, document-based approach was selected as the primary methodology because it is optimally suited for examining national-level trends over time using official secondary data. The use of aggregated data from the Irish Tourist Assistance Service (ITAS) ensures high reliability and institutional credibility, while descriptive analysis aligns precisely with the research objective of identifying key vulnerabilities and macro-level patterns (Saunders et al., 2019).

This dual-method approach facilitates triangulation, enhancing the validity and depth of the research by ensuring that the quantitative findings are interpreted within the broader social and communicative context in which tourism safety is constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

3.3 Data Preparation and Analytical Procedures

3.3.1 Quantitative Data Processing

The ITAS data were manually extracted from annual PDF reports (2019-2023) and structured within Microsoft Excel for systematic analysis. The data cleaning and preparation process involved a multi-stage protocol:

Standardization: Category labels (e.g., incident types, location names) were harmonized across all five years to ensure consistency.

Transparency: "Not Recorded" entries were preserved to maintain an accurate representation of data completeness.

Deduplication: Entries were scrutinized to eliminate potential duplicates.

Categorization: Variables were grouped into logical categories to facilitate clear analysis:

Time of Day was coded into six discrete intervals (e.g., 06:00-10:00).

Incident Types were consolidated into six overarching categories based on the ITAS classification system.

Locations were categorized into functional tourist zones (e.g., Dublin City Centre, Transport Hubs).

Numeric coding was applied to all categorical variables to enable efficient tabular visualization and comparative analysis.

3.3.2 Qualitative Content Analysis Protocol

The qualitative strand involved a systematic content analysis of 27 crime-related articles from two leading national news outlets, the Irish Independent (n=11) and the Irish Times (n=16), published between 2019 and mid-2025. The coding process was managed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software to facilitate systematic organization and retrieval of coded data. A single researcher conducted all coding using an iterative protocol to ensure internal consistency throughout the analysis process.

Sampling: A purposeful sampling strategy was employed using keywords such as "tourist attacked" and "tourist crime." The selection criteria required that the article describe a crime

occurring in Ireland where the victim was identifiable as a tourist and sufficient contextual detail (location, offender information, outcome) was provided.

Coding Framework: A thematic coding framework was developed inductively and deductively to analyse the articles. The framework included the following codes:

Incident Characteristics: Victim profile (age, gender, nationality), crime type, location.

Media Framing: Tone (sensationalist, sympathetic, alarmist), perceived impact, links to policy responses.

Narrative Elements: Offender description, institutional responses, and broader societal implications.

Handling Duplication: From the 27 articles, 14 unique criminal incidents were identified. Notably, 13 articles reported on variations of a single high-profile attack on a U.S. tourist in July 2023. These duplications were retained to enable analysis of media amplification and framing variance across different reports of the same event.

3.4 Analytical Techniques

Data analysis proceeded in two distinct phases:

Quantitative Analysis: Utilized descriptive statistics to calculate annual frequencies, proportions, and incident rates per 100,000 tourists. Trends were compared across pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic periods. Data were visualized using bar charts and tables to illustrate key temporal and categorical shifts.

Qualitative Analysis: Involved thematic analysis of the media content using NVivo software to identify recurring narratives and frames. This interpretive analysis provided crucial context for the statistical findings, helping to explain spikes in reported incidents and the evolution of public discourse surrounding tourist safety.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

All data used in this study are publicly available and fully anonymized. No personal information or case-level details were accessed. The research was conducted in compliance with academic ethical standards, with a commitment to transparency in data use and reporting. Limitations stemming from data access and granularity are explicitly acknowledged and addressed through the study's mixed-methods design.

3.6 Methodological Limitations

While ITAS data offer a valuable and nationally representative overview of tourist-targeted crime in Ireland, the study faces several limitations:

- The data are aggregated, preventing cross-tabulation of variables (e.g., age group by incident type or location by time)
- No independent verification of individual incidents was possible
- Incident reports likely underrepresent unreported crimes, especially for less severe cases or where language/cultural barriers exist
- Media content analysis is interpretive and subject to selection bias

Despite these limitations, the study provides meaningful insight into macro-level patterns of tourist crime and their policy relevance for tourism safety management in Ireland.

4. Results

4.1 Overview of Incident Volume and Trend (2019–2023)

The report categorizes tourists based on their trip status at the time of the incident. The findings reveal the distribution in table 1:

Table 1: Tourist Trip Status in Ireland Following Incidents (2019-2023)

Trip Status	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Continue Plans	86%	-	-	87%	88%
Abandoned Plans	1%	-	-	1%	1%
Forced to Stay	6%	-	-	6%	3%
Unknown	7%	-	-	6%	8%

Source: (ITAS, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023)

The report details the geographic distribution of incidents across different counties in table 2. Notable locations include:

Table 2: Number of Incidents by County in Ireland (2019-2023)

County	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Dublin	426	70	43	419	734	1692
Galway	1	1		1	9	12
Wicklow	14	1	3	1	6	25
Clare	3	1		1	4	9
Cork	2	2	2	3	4	13
Kilkenny	-	-	-	1	3	4
limerick	-	-	1	-	2	3
Sligo	1	-	-	-	2	3
Waterford	2	-	-	-	2	4
Louth	1	1	1	1	2	6
Meath	7				2	9
Longford	-	-	-	-	1	1
Kerry	2	1		5	1	9
Tipperary	-	-	-	-	1	1
Kildare	-	-	2	1	-	3
Westmeath	1	-	1	-	-	2
Wexford	-	-	1	-	-	1
Laois	-	-	-	1	-	1
Donegal	-	-	-	1	-	1
Offaly	1	-	-	1	-	2
Mayo	1	1	-	-	-	2
Total	462	78	55	438	773	1803

Source: (ITAS, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023)

Additionally, it's crucial to consider the number of overseas tourists in Ireland, as this information provides valuable context for understanding the incidence of incidents and crimes representing in table 3.

Table 3: Number of overseas tourists in Ireland

2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
10,6 million	4,295,800	-	7 million	6,300,000

Source: (Fáilte-Ireland, 2019, 2021, 2022; Fáilte Ireland'2023; Central Statistics Office 2020)

By dividing the number of incidents in each year by the total number of tourists, we can estimate the rate of incidents per million tourists in table 4:

Table 4: Tourist Incidents per Million Visitors in Ireland (2019-2023)

Year	Total Tourists	Incidents per Million Tourists
2019	10,600,000	43.6
2020	4,295,800	18.2
2021	-	-
2022	7,000,000	62.6
2023	6,300,000	122.7

Source: (Fáilte-Ireland, 2019, 2021, 2022; Fáilte Ireland'2023; Central Statistics Office 2020)

The impact of COVID-19 on tourist incidents in Ireland is evident, with cases dropping from 462 in 2019 to 78 in 2020 due to travel restrictions. Numbers remained low in 2021 but rebounded to 438 in 2022 and surged to 773 in 2023, the highest incident rate per million tourists (122.7). Dublin consistently accounts for most incidents, peaking at 95.7% in 2022 and 94.9% in 2023, while other counties show minimal cases. The 2023 spike may be due to increased travel, higher crime rates, or improved reporting, highlighting a shift in risk and the need for further investigation.

4.2 Predominant Crime Types

The report categorizes incidents into various types in table 5, with the following being the most common:

Table 5: Main Incident Types Reported in Ireland (2019-2023)

main incident types	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Theft from the Person	279	40	18	223	431	991
Theft from MPV	45	8	6	5	13	77
Fraud and Deception	4	7	8	14	16	49
Personal Crime	19	10	6	13	16	64
Other Crime	3	3	6	5	10	27
Other Distressing Incidents	221	88	49	178	287	823

Source: (ITAS, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023)

The number of tourist incidents closely aligns with fluctuations in tourism. During COVID-19, incidents dropped sharply as visitor numbers fell from 10.6 million in 2019 to 4.3 million in 2020. Theft from the person declined from 26.3 to 9.3 cases per 100,000 tourists. The

lowest point was in 2021, with minimal tourism and only 55 reported incidents. As travel resumed in 2022, incidents rose, with theft from the person increasing to 31.9 per 100,000 tourists.

4.3 Spatial Patterns

In 2023, despite fewer tourists (6.3 million vs. 7 million in 2022), incidents surged to their highest level. Theft from the person rose to 68.4 per 100,000 tourists more than double the 2019 rate. Other distressing incidents also peaked. Dublin remained the primary hotspot, accounting for over 90% of cases. The rise in 2023 suggests changing risk factors, possibly linked to increased crime targeting tourists, improved reporting, or economic influences. Incidents were reported in various locations in table 6, with key areas including:

Table 6: Location of Incidents against tourist in Ireland (2019-2023)

Location of incidents	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Dublin City Centre	315	52	38	214	393	1012
Pubs/Nightclubs	26	9	1	35	39	110
City/Town/outside Dublin	35	11	14	26	23	109
Dublin Airport		-	-	5	39	44
Shops/Visitor Attractions	35	7	3	20	50	115
Accommodation Providers	10	5	2	15	9	41
Restaurants & Cafés	10	1	0	7	22	40
Dublin Suburb	20	8	6	14	17	65
Bus/Train Stations	6	1	1	6	22	36
Public Transport/Ferries	44	7	6	28	55	140
Taxicab	-	-	-	-	16	16
Public Parks	-	-	-	-	2	2
Other	28	12	11	29	37	117
N/A	8	30	7	15	9	69
Unknown	42	13	4	24	40	123

Source: (ITAS, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023)

Tourist incidents align with travel patterns and crime trends, with Dublin City Centre consistently recording the highest cases, peaking at 393 in 2023 nearly double 2022. Incidents in transit areas rose sharply, particularly at Dublin Airport (0 in 2020–2021 to 44 in 2023) and bus/train stations, where cases more than doubled. Shops, attractions, and nightlife venues also saw increases, with restaurant and café incidents tripling from 7 in 2022 to 22 in 2023.

Newly affected areas like taxicabs and public parks suggest tourist-targeted crimes are expanding, warranting further investigation into emerging risks.

4.4 Temporal Distribution

Table 7: Time of Occurrence of Incidents against tourists in Ireland (2019-2023)

Time of occurrence	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	total
6am -10am	22	10	4	24	36	96
10am - 2pm	124	39	17	123	249	552
2pm - 6pm	150	41	37	119	226	573
6pm -10pm	55	13	5	41	66	180
10pm -Midnight	25	9	2	21	26	83
Midnight - 6am	64	8	1	35	44	152
Not recorded	139	36	27	75	126	403

Source: (ITAS, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023)

Incidents peak between 10 AM and 6 PM, with 2 PM - 6 PM (573 incidents) and 10 AM - 2 PM (552 incidents) being the riskiest, coinciding with peak tourist activity. Nighttime incidents (6 PM - 6 AM) are lower but notable, especially 6 PM - 10 PM (180 incidents) due to evening activities. After 10 PM, fewer tourists are out, but those remaining face higher risks, especially in nightlife areas. In 2023, incidents nearly doubled from 2022, particularly in 10 AM - 6 PM and midnight - 6 AM (44 incidents), indicating increased tourist-targeted crimes post-pandemic.

The "Not Recorded" category (403 incidents) highlights gaps in data, potentially obscuring trends, especially in peak risk periods. Data suggests tourists are most vulnerable during the afternoon, with crowded attractions and transit hubs increasing theft. However, the rise in nighttime incidents, especially in 2023, points to emerging risks linked to nightlife and intoxication. Improved security in both peak daytime and late-night areas could help reduce these risks.

4.5 Victim demographics

The following table presents the distribution of male incident victims in Ireland by age group from 2019 to 2023. This data highlights trends and patterns in victimization across different age demographics, providing insight into how age may influence exposure to incidents.

Table 8: Age Group of Male Incident Victims in Ireland (2019-2023)

Age group male	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Under 10	9	2	1	1	6	19
10-16	18	5	1	11	24	59
16-25	95	23	18	69	76	281
26-35	99	24	18	84	125	350
36-45	39	11	13	40	79	182
46-55	46	3	8	25	68	150
55-66	41	4	7	29	113	194
Plus 66	27	5	1	15	60	108
unknown	60	38	4	9	9	120

Source: (ITAS, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023)

Table 9: Age Group of Female Incident Victims in Ireland (2019-2023)

Age group female	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Under 10	8	0	1	1	9	19
10-16	18	1	1	3	22	45
16-25	149	34	13	123	136	455
26-35	108	51	14	92	132	397
36-45	57	10	14	47	85	213
46-55	70	2	5	43	147	267
55-66	71	9	3	48	168	299
Plus 66	37	7	3	19	98	164
unknown	72	32	8	16	7	135

Source: (ITAS, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023)

The 16-35 age group consistently experiences the highest number of incidents, making up nearly half of all cases, likely due to their higher mobility and nightlife participation. The 26-35 group saw a surge in 2023, with 125 male and 132 female victims, the highest for any age group.

Incidents among older tourists (55+) were low pre-pandemic but spiked in 2023, particularly among females (168 incidents) and males (113). This may reflect increased vulnerability post-pandemic, possibly due to more older travellers or changes in travel patterns. The impact of COVID-19 is evident, with a significant decline in incidents in 2020 and 2021, but 2023 saw record-high incidents despite fewer tourists than 2019, indicating increased crime or improved reporting.

4.6 Nationality-Specific Patterns

The table below shows the number of incident victims in Ireland from 2019 to 2023 by nationality, highlighting trends in victimization across different tourist groups.

Table 10: Number of incidents based on victim nationalities

Nationality	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Italian	127	31	17	92	234	501
American	133	22	11	56	187	409
German	195	21	15	96	172	499
Spanish	73	12	11	67	138	301
French	107	25	15	75	126	348
British	69	27	12	49	83	240

Source: (ITAS, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023)

This table presents the number of tourists visiting Ireland from 2019 to 2023, categorized by nationality. It highlights the volume of visitors each year, providing context for understanding the relationship between tourism and incident rates among different nationalities.

Table 11: Number of tourists based on their nationality

Nationality	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Italian	364,000	163,000	-	-	223,000	
American	1,673,000	280,000	-	-	1,173,000	
German	728,000	248,000	-	-	453,000	
Spanish	411,000	412,000	-	-	276,000	
French	534,000	238,000	-	-	386,000	
British	3,487,000	1,808,000	-	-	2,604,000	

Source: (Fáilte-Ireland, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023; Office, 2020)

Italian tourists demonstrated the most dramatic increase in victimization incidents from 2019 to 2023, with the highest in 2023 (234), despite a decline in tourist numbers from 364,000 in 2019 to 223,000 in 2023. Americans experienced 409 incidents in total, peaking in 2023 (187), as their tourist numbers dropped from 1.67 million in 2019 to 1.17 million in 2023. Germans had 499 incidents, with a decrease in 2023 (172), and their tourist numbers fell from 728,000 in 2019 to 453,000 in 2023. Spanish tourists had 301 incidents, with the highest in 2023 (138), despite a drop in their numbers from 411,000 in 2019 to 276,000 in 2023. French tourists had 348 incidents in total, with a slight decrease in 2023 (126), and their numbers fell

from 534,000 in 2019 to 386,000 in 2023. British tourists experienced 240 incidents, with the lowest in 2023 (83), as their numbers dropped from 3.49 million in 2019 to 2.6 million in 2023.

To better understand the frequency of incidents relative to the number of tourists, we calculated the incident rate per 100,000 tourists for each nationality in 2023 and entire period from 2019 to 2023.

Table 12: Incident Rates per 100,000 Tourists by Nationality in Ireland (2019-2023)

Nationality	incident rate per 100,000 tourists for 2023	incident rate per 100,000 tourists from 2019-2023
Italian	104.9	41.89
American	15.98	7.48
German	37.97	21.37
Spanish	50	18.23
French	32.64	18.03
British	3.19	1.83

This data reveals that while the total number of incidents may differ by nationality, the rate of incidents per 100,000 tourists provides a clearer picture of the relative risk faced by each group. Italians experienced the highest incident rate in 2023, while British tourists had the lowest incident rate both in 2023 and on average over the five years.

Tourist incident trends vary by nationality due to familiarity, reporting habits, and travel patterns. British tourists may face fewer incidents per capita due to familiarity with Ireland, while Americans and Italians might report crimes more frequently. English-speaking tourists tend to report more, while group travel, common among Germans and Spanish visitors, can increase risk in crowded areas. Despite Ireland's low violent crime rates, petty theft and scams remain concerns in busy locations.

The high incidence of 'Theft from Person' highlights a pressing concern, as this type of crime directly impacts tourists' sense of safety and enjoyment (Toker & Emir, 2023). Tourists who experience theft are not only less likely to return but may also deter others through negative word-of-mouth or online reviews (Giusti & Raya, 2019). Accommodation fraud further exacerbates the issue by eroding trust in online booking platforms. With the increasing

reliance on digital platforms for travel arrangements, such incidents could harm Ireland's reputation as a reliable and safe destination for international visitors.

The media significantly influences tourists' perceptions of safety, shaping their travel decisions. Research by Giusti and Raya (2019) highlights that crime reporting affects potential visitors' willingness to travel. Television news tends to evoke stronger negative reactions than other formats, amplifying safety concerns.

Even minor incidents, when widely publicized, can have outsized impacts on a destination's image (Brunt & Hambly, 1999). The framing of such events can contribute to a perception of risk, deterring potential visitors and affecting long-term tourism demand. In the context of Ireland, even isolated reports of theft or fraud can gain traction in international media, shaping perceptions among prospective tourists.

4.7 Qualitative Content Analysis of Media Narratives (2019–mid-2025)

To contextualize the statistical trends, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on Irish media reports concerning tourist victimization. The analysis of 27 articles from major national outlets, including the *Irish Independent*, *Irish Times*, and RTÉ, revealed several dominant themes that shape the public discourse on tourist safety.

1. Framing of an Escalating Crisis. Media coverage from 2023 onwards consistently framed tourist crime as part of a broader narrative of urban disorder. High-profile incidents, such as the violent assault on an American tourist near Store Street and a robbery close to the Guinness Storehouse, were not reported as isolated events but as evidence of a growing trend. The dominant media lexicon included terms like "lawlessness," "youth delinquency," and a perceived "failure of policing" within Dublin's inner city, constructing a narrative of a safety crisis demanding urgent intervention.

2. Politicisation of Safety and Institutional Response. The media served as a platform for political discourse on the issue. Coverage frequently featured responses from high-level officials, including the Minister for Justice and the Taoiseach, who publicly acknowledged the problem and cited plans to increase Garda presence and invest in urban safety. This was counterbalanced by critiques from opposition politicians, who highlighted policy inaction and amplified the "sense of lawlessness." This politicization elevated tourist safety from a law enforcement concern to a matter of national policy and governmental accountability.

3. Perceived Threat to Ireland's Tourism Image. A recurrent theme was the explicit concern for Ireland's international reputation. Articles directly linked negative media coverage to potential declines in international arrivals, framing tourist safety as an economic imperative. Statements from public figures, such as then-Taoiseach Leo Varadkar's admission that "Dublin is not 100% safe," were widely circulated, signalling an unusual level of official concern and contributing to a meta-narrative about the vulnerability of the country's brand.

4. Identification and Reinforcement of Crime Hotspots. The analysis confirmed and amplified the spatial patterns identified in the ITAS data. Specific locations, including Temple Bar, Talbot Street, and the vicinity of Store Street Garda Station, were repeatedly cited as high-risk zones. Furthermore, public transport networks and nightlife districts were consistently depicted as perilous, especially during evening and late-night hours, thereby creating a cognitive map of risk for the public and potential visitors.

5. Amplification through Victim Narratives and Social Media. The human impact of crime was central to media reporting. Victim testimonials describing confusion, fear, and a perceived lack of support were prominently featured. Crucially, the study noted that incidents often gained traction after being shared by victims on social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram before being picked up by traditional news outlets. This dual-layer amplification significantly extended the reach and emotional resonance of individual events, shaping public discourse from the ground up.

Together, these findings reveal a widening gap between empirical victimization (dominated by petty theft) and public perception (dominated by fear of violence) a dissonance at the heart of the "safe but vulnerable" paradox.

4.8 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The mixed-methods approach reveals a powerful convergence and a critical divergence between empirical data and public narrative, offering a nuanced understanding of the tourist safety landscape in Ireland.

The quantitative data provides an objective baseline, demonstrating a sharp rise in tourist-targeted incidents post-2022, culminating in a record-high victimization rate in 2023. The identification of Dublin City Centre, public transport hubs, and daytime hours as primary risk

factors is empirically robust. The qualitative analysis reinforces the reliability of these spatial patterns, as media reports consistently highlight the same hotspots, such as Talbot Street and Temple Bar.

However, a fundamental divergence emerges in the *nature* of the crime emphasized. While the ITAS data unequivocally identifies theft from the person as the most prevalent threat, media narratives disproportionately foreground violent assaults and the phenomenon of "youth gangs." This selective framing shapes a public perception of insecurity that is centered on violence, despite the statistical reality being dominated by property crime. This discrepancy is pivotal; it demonstrates how media discourse can amplify certain risks while obscuring others, influencing both public fear and policy priorities.

This integration enables a richer, multi-layered interpretation. The quantitative findings outline the *epidemiology* of tourist crime the "what, where, and when." The qualitative findings illuminate the sociopolitical reaction to it the "how it is framed, who is blamed, and what is demanded." The political acknowledgment and policy promises are direct responses to the media-amplified narrative of crisis, which itself was triggered by a rise in actual incidents (as per the quantitative data).

In conclusion, the combination of methods shows that the challenge for Ireland is twofold: addressing the empirical increase in opportunistic crime (e.g., theft) while also managing the perceptual damage wrought by high-profile violent incidents and the associated media discourse. The integrated evidence base underscores that effective policy must not only implement targeted interventions based on crime data but also engage in strategic communication to ensure public and tourist perceptions are accurately calibrated to the actual risk environment.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical and Empirical Insights: Refining Theory for "Safe but Vulnerable" Destinations

This study provides new, empirically grounded insights into the evolving landscape of tourist-targeted crime in Ireland. The quantitative data reveal a substantial rise in incidents post-2022, culminating in a record-high incident rate of 122.7 per million tourists in 2023, nearly triple the rate in 2019. This surge occurred despite a lower volume of tourists compared to pre-

pandemic levels, suggesting a fundamental intensification of risk beyond mere fluctuations in visitor numbers, potentially linked to economic strain or shifts in criminal behaviour.

The concentration of incidents, particularly "Theft from the Person," in central urban zones like Dublin City Centre and public transport hubs initially appears to be a straightforward validation of Routine Activity Theory (RAT) (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Indeed, these areas represent a clear convergence of motivated offenders, suitable targets (tourists), and, frequently, an absence of capable guardianship. However, the Irish case does more than simply confirm RAT; it refines the theory's application for a specific category of destinations we term "safe but vulnerable." In such contexts, the "absence of a capable guardian" is not merely a function of low police numbers but is systemic. It stems from a policing and security culture that is not primed for high-volume, low-level opportunistic crime because the overarching national brand is one of safety. The very factors that make Dublin attractive, a compact, walkable urban core with dense tourist flows, create a perfect and chronically under-guarded environment for theft, revealing a critical vulnerability that RAT helps to diagnose but that is particular to destinations trading on a secure image.

Similarly, the findings powerfully illustrate the Risk-Fear Paradox (Mawby, 2000), but with a critical nuance. In Ireland, the paradox is not just a psychological disconnect among tourists; it is an institutionally embedded blind spot. The destination's marketed image of safety creates a "protective halo" that likely discourages both individual precautionary behaviour and the systemic implementation of robust, visible safety measures by stakeholders. This explains why tourists may venture into risky situations and why older tourists (55+), a typically risk-averse group, experienced a significant spike in victimization in 2023. The "safe" brand overrides typical risk-aversion, making the paradox more potent and the consequences more severe than in destinations where risks are more openly acknowledged.

A striking methodological and substantive insight lies in the analysis of victimization rates by nationality. The finding that Italian tourists experienced a rate of 104.9 incidents per 100,000 tourists in 2023 dramatically higher than British tourists (3.19) moves beyond raw numbers to reveal nuanced vulnerability patterns. This suggests that factors such as cultural familiarity, travel style, and reporting propensity interact with the destination environment in ways that existing theories, often applied homogenously, have not fully explored within low-crime contexts. It underscores that in "safe but vulnerable" destinations, risk is not evenly distributed, and tailored interventions are necessary.

5.2 The Interplay of Empirical Reality and Mediated Narrative

Furthermore, the qualitative strand reveals a critical divergence that is central to the "safe but vulnerable" dilemma. While the empirical data are unequivocally dominated by property crime, media narratives disproportionately focus on violent assaults. This selective framing, amplified through social media and political discourse, shapes a public perception of insecurity centred on violence (Giusti & Raya, 2019; Norizawati & Tarmiji, 2014). This divergence is not just an academic observation; it has real-world consequences, potentially leading to a misalignment of policy priorities where public pressure demands responses to violent crime while the more pervasive issue of petty theft receives insufficient attention.

This integrated analysis demonstrates that the challenge for Ireland is twofold: it must address the empirical rise in opportunistic crime while simultaneously managing the perceptual damage wrought by a media-amplified narrative. The study shows that in the contemporary media landscape, the "fear" component of the Risk-Fear Paradox can be radically reshaped by a small number of high-profile incidents, creating a crisis of perception that is partly decoupled from the statistical reality of the primary risks (Agarwal et al., 2021).

5.3 Comparison with Previous Research and Limitations

The findings on the prevalence of petty crime align with global literature on its impact on destination reputation (Giusti & Raya, 2019; Toker & Emir, 2023)However, this study extends the conversation by illustrating a more complex interplay between quantitative crime trends and qualitative media framing, especially during post-pandemic recovery. Unlike many previous studies focused on either statistical patterns or perception-driven research alone, this mixed-methods approach provides a fuller picture of the crime-tourism nexus, particularly for destinations like Ireland that do not fit the traditional high-risk model.

This study is constrained by several limitations. The aggregated nature of the ITAS data precludes in-depth inferential analysis. The findings are also subject to underreporting, and the unavailability of official data beyond 2023 restricts analysis of whether the 2023 trends have persisted. The qualitative analysis is inherently interpretive and subject to selection bias, as media coverage focuses on extreme cases. Future research would benefit from access to case-level data, tourist surveys on unreported incidents, and comparative cross-country studies.

Empirically, the Irish case mirrors global findings that tourist victimization is overwhelmingly opportunistic (Giusti & Raya, 2019; Brunt & Mawby, 2000). Yet, it diverges from prior literature by showing how low-crime contexts develop their own form of structural vulnerability. Similar dynamics have been observed in destinations such as Malta and New Zealand, where reputations for safety led to underinvestment in visitor protection frameworks (European Commission, 2016; Hua et al., 2020).

Theoretically, this study contributes by integrating RAT and the Risk–Fear Paradox into a composite explanatory model for "safe but vulnerable" destinations. It demonstrates that perceived safety and media amplification interact to obscure real risks, misdirect resources, and sustain guardianship gaps. This framework enriches tourism criminology by emphasizing systemic vulnerability rather than episodic incidents.

5.4 Policy Implications

The study suggests several areas for improving Ireland's tourism and public safety policies to protect tourists and maintain the country's reputation as a safe destination. It suggests integrating tourist crime monitoring into national tourism strategy (Hua et al., 2020), promoting standardized safety protocols across all tourism zones (Tarlow, 2014), and establishing multi-stakeholder safety task forces (Ferede, 2019). Digital safety infrastructure should be supported through the development and promotion of tools like (Bustillo & Mateo, 2020), emergency contacts, and live safety alerts. A voluntary, restaurants, and transport services could foster a culture of safety and distinguish tourism businesses meeting national safety standards (Saepudin & Putra, 2023). Expanding multilingual victim support services (Ozascilar & Mawby, 2023), simplified reporting systems, and increased funding for ITAS could enhance post-incident care and trust-building with international visitors. National media guidelines on tourism safety reporting should be developed to balance crime reporting with destination reputation management.

5.5 Design Communication Strategies to Balance Fear and Fact.

Media coverage heavily shapes destination image. Tourism authorities should engage proactively with journalists to ensure balanced reporting, emphasizing crime prevention progress alongside transparency. Developing a real-time safety communication platform (e.g., a "Safe Travel Ireland" app) can counter misinformation and provide contextualized updates.

Tailor Safety Information for Vulnerable Visitor Segments.

Italians and older tourists displayed higher incident rates. Tailored, multilingual communication campaigns through airlines, hotels, and tour operators can improve awareness and encourage reporting.

Expand Victim Support and Reporting Infrastructure.

Strengthening ITAS with multilingual staff, digital reporting portals, and visible presence in tourist zones can foster trust and recovery. Simplified reporting processes also enhance data reliability for ongoing monitoring. Collectively, these recommendations operationalize theoretical insights into actionable governance strategies, ensuring that perceptions of safety are supported by robust, evidence-based guardianship systems.

6. Conclusion and Implications

6.1 Summary of Conclusions

This study provides a comprehensive, longitudinal examination of tourist victimization and its mediated representation in Ireland between 2019 and 2023. By integrating Routine Activity Theory and the Risk–Fear Paradox, it develops the concept of the "safe but vulnerable" destination one where reputational safety obscures systemic risk.

Empirical analysis revealed a post-pandemic surge in tourist-targeted crime, dominated by theft and concentrated in Dublin's city centre. Yet, media coverage disproportionately emphasized violence, fostering a perception of crisis. This divergence between data and discourse exposed an institutional guardianship gap rooted in the country's safety branding and reactive governance.

Theoretically, the study refines criminological frameworks by extending RAT to account for reputationally induced vulnerability and by evolving the Risk–Fear Paradox into a destination-level construct influenced by media systems. Practically, it provides a roadmap for data-driven guardianship, coordinated safety governance, and communication strategies that align perception with empirical risk. Ultimately, the Irish case exemplifies how destinations that trade on safety must also invest in it. Sustainable tourism resilience depends not merely on controlling crime, but on managing its narrative (George et al., 2024).

6.2 Limitations and Areas for Further Investigation

This study is constrained by several limitations. Primarily, the aggregated nature of the ITAS data precludes in-depth inferential analysis or multivariate testing of relationships. The lack of micro-level data consequently limits the ability to robustly assess causality or correlation between key variables. The primary constraint of this study is the aggregated nature of the ITAS data, which precludes the use of inferential statistical techniques (e.g., regression analysis) that require micro-level, case-specific data. To compensate for this limitation and to provide a deeper, contextual understanding of the statistical trends, the study incorporates a qualitative content analysis of media narratives. Furthermore, the findings are subject to the persistent issue of underreporting, particularly for less severe crimes or among tourist cohorts who may face language and cultural barriers. A significant temporal limitation is the unavailability of official data beyond 2023; the absence of subsequent annual reports restricts the analysis to the immediate post-pandemic recovery period and prevents insight into whether the alarming 2023 trends have persisted or evolved. To partially mitigate this data gap, the qualitative analysis was purposefully extended to include media reports up to mid-2025, thereby providing preliminary, albeit indirect, insight into emerging incidents and ongoing public discourse surrounding tourist safety. The qualitative analysis is also inherently interpretive and subject to selection bias, especially since media coverage tends to focus on more extreme or newsworthy cases, potentially skewing public perception toward violence even though theft remains the most common crime.

Future studies should test this model across multiple low-crime destinations using comparative longitudinal designs. Access to micro-level data (e.g., anonymized Gardaí reports) and victim surveys could enhance causal understanding of vulnerability dynamics. Incorporating digital trace data (e.g., social media sentiment analysis) would also clarify how mediated fear evolves in real time.

6.3 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

The findings offer significant implications for theory and practice, particularly for destinations considered safe but vulnerable.

Refining Guardianship in "Safe but Vulnerable" Destinations: The application of Routine Activity Theory reveals that the guardianship gap in Dublin is systemic. Practical responses must therefore move beyond generic security measures to include data-driven interventions. This includes the targeted deployment of Gardaí and tourism security ambassadors to Dublin

City Centre and transport hubs during the high-risk daytime hours (10 AM–6 PM) identified in this study (Giusti & Raya, 2019). Furthermore, crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), such as enhanced lighting and the strategic placement of CCTV in identified hotspots like Talbot Street, is crucial for deterring opportunistic crime and providing evidence (Anichiti et al., 2021).

Addressing the Amplified Risk-Fear Paradox: The disconnect between the reality of theft and the perception of violence requires a dual-strategy. First, empirical risk mitigation must focus on combating prevalent crimes like theft and fraud through public awareness campaigns and promoting secure booking platforms (ITAS, 2023). Second, proactive perception management is essential. Tourism authorities should engage with media to ensure balanced reporting and develop a "Safe Travel Ireland" app to provide transparent, real-time safety information, thereby empowering tourists and countering alarmist narratives (Agarwal et al., 2021; Zou & Yu, 2022).

Nuanced Interventions for High-Risk Groups: The strikingly high victimization rate among Italian tourists demands tailored actions. This necessitates culturally specific outreach, such as providing safety information in Italian and partnering with relevant tour operators (Matakovic & Mataković, 2019). Additionally, strengthening victim support services like ITAS with multilingual capabilities is vital for encouraging reporting and assisting affected visitors (Ozascilar & Mawby, 2023).

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