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# Social Representations of Protection: Gender Divide

**Prof. Sofia Morgado Pereira , Lisete dos Santos Mendes Mónico , Ana Filipa Neves**

*University of the Azores*
*University of Coimbra, Portugal*

## Abstract

Studies on protection and security indicate that the distribution of protection across social groups remains uneven across societies, and that individuals with different gender identities have dissimilar perceptions and experiences of security and insecurity, and consequently, protection. However, studies comparing the social representations of protection held by individuals with different gender identities are lacking in the literature. According to the Theory of Social Representations and the Theory of the Central Core of Social Representations, social reality is (re)constructed by the subjective interpretations that individuals attribute to social objects, in this case, protection. These are formed by meanings, theories, or common-sense knowledge, which are influenced by beliefs, knowledge, experiences, perceptions, opinions, and attitudes. Moreover, social representations are shared among members of social groups, with central meanings pointing to objects relevant to a given group. These elaborations guide decision-making and behavior, for example in the political domain, which entails support or resistance to policies and initiatives aimed at granting protection. Thus, to gather profound knowledge of the perceived social and political reality, it is essential to consider the perspectives of individuals and the social groups to which they belong. This study aimed to analyze and compare social representations of protection, considering different gender identities. Data were obtained using a questionnaire fulfilled by 11400 participants from 11 countries. The results indicate that the central meanings attributed to protection differ according to gender, supporting the existence of different protection realities and pointing to the need for targeted protective policies and initiatives.

**Keywords:** Gender identity; Political thought; Public opinion; Representational processes; Security