

## The International Crime Victims Survey

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## 2. The International Crime Victims Survey

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### *Abstract*

Over the past three decades an increasing number of countries have undertaken "victimization surveys" among the general population about experiences of crime. These surveys provide a source of data on crime independent of crime statistics recorded by police. They also provide important additional information on crime including rates of reporting crimes to the police, victims' experiences with the police, fear of crime and the use of crime prevention measures. If the research methodology used is standardised, the surveys also offer a new opportunity for the collection of crime statistics that can be used for comparative purposes. This allows crime problems to be analysed from a truly international perspective.

The first fully standardised International Crime Victims Survey took place in 1989 in a dozen countries. It has since been repeated five times in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2005 and 2010. Since its initiation, surveys have been carried out one or more times in 78 countries including all 27 Member States of the European Union, Argentina, Australia, Canada, Japan and The United States of America. Over 350,000 citizens have to date been interviewed in the course of the ICVS with the same questionnaire, translated into thirty or more languages. This process has resulted in a body of victim survey data across a variety of countries covering a period of twenty years. The full dataset is currently available for secondary analyses at <http://easy.dans.knaw.nl/dms?query=icvs>, or <http://rechten.uvt.nl/icvs20053full.zip>

### *Résumé*

Au cours des trois dernières décennies, un nombre croissant d'Etats ont mis en œuvre des « enquêtes de victimisation » en population générale portant sur le fait d'avoir été victime d'infractions. Ces enquêtes offrent une source d'information sur le crime indépendante des statistiques relevant les faits constatés par la police. Elles apportent aussi une information complémentaire importante en matière d'infractions qui inclut le taux de dénonciation de faits à la police, le vécu des victimes dans leur contact avec la police, la peur du crime et l'utilisation de mesures préventives. Dès lors que la méthode utilisée est standardisée, les enquêtes offrent encore la possibilité de collecter des statistiques criminelles à des fins comparatives. Ceci permet d'analyser les problèmes de criminalité de manière véritablement internationale.

La première authentique Enquête Internationale de Victimisation totalement standardisée a été réalisée en 1989 dans une douzaine de pays. Depuis, elle a été répétée cinq fois, en 1992, 1996, 2000, 2005 et 2010. Depuis cette origine, des enquêtes ont été menées une ou plusieurs fois dans 78 pays,

lesquels incluent les 27 Etats membres de l'Union Européenne, l'Argentine, l'Australie, le Canada, le Japon et les Etats-Unis d'Amérique. Plus de 350 000 citoyens ont à ce jour été interviewés dans le cadre de l'ICVS sur la base d'un questionnaire identique, traduit dans plus de trente langues. Ce procédé est le résultat d'un corps de données issues d'enquêtes de victimisation à travers une variété de pays et couvre la période des vingt dernières années. Les informations complètes permettant de réaliser des analyses secondaires sont actuellement accessibles : <http://easy.dans.knaw.nl/dms?query=icvs>, or [http://rechten.uvt.nl/icvs20053\\_full.zip](http://rechten.uvt.nl/icvs20053_full.zip)

### 1. Background to the International Crime Victim Surveys

Over the past three decades an increasing number of countries have undertaken "victimization surveys" among the general population about experiences of crime (Zauberman, 2008). These surveys provide a source of data on crime independent of crime statistics recorded by police (Maxfield, Hough & Mayhew, 2007). They also provide important additional information on crime including rates of reporting crimes to the police, victims' experience with the police, fear of crime and the use of crime prevention measures. If the research methodology used is standardised, the surveys also offer a new opportunity for the collection of crime statistics, that can be used for comparative purposes. This allows crime problems to be analysed from a truly international perspective (Kury, 2001).

#### *The International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS)*

The ICVS was initially set up at the end of the 1980s by a small group of criminologists including the author, who were knowledgeable about national victimisation surveys techniques. It was clear then (and still is) that using police statistics for international comparisons of crime was fraught. This is because of variations in the way the police define, record, and count crime, and differences in the extent to which victims in different countries might choose to involve the police. Police figures are also strongly affected by the scale and effectiveness of policing activities. This influences the amount of crime recorded, and contaminates trend data insofar as policing efforts or priorities change.

The first ICVS took place in 1989 in thirteen industrialised countries (see Van Dijk, Mayhew & Killias, 1990). It has since been repeated five times - in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004/05 and 2010. Some of the initial 1989 survey countries took part again (though not in all subsequent rounds). Other new countries joined. From 2000 onwards, efforts were made by UNICRI in Italy to execute surveys (usually at city level) in a selection of countries in transition and developing countries (see Gruszczyńska (2004) and Alvazzi del Frate (1998) for results). These had financial support from the Dutch Ministry of Development Aid. Until the 2004/05 ICVS round, western industrialised countries have largely paid their own way in the ICVS.

The fifth round of the ICVS in 2004/05 was organised rather differently from previous rounds. Whilst mainly coordinated through the UN offices in Turin and Vienna and the Dutch Ministry of Justice (as previous rounds were), there were two survey exercises. The first was the *European Survey on Crime and Safety (EU ICS)* in which all the 15 older member states of the European Union (EU) took part. This was organised by a consortium lead by Gallup Europe, and financed by the European Commission's Directorate General for Research and Technology Development. Results are in Van Dijk *et al* (2007). The second set of surveys was done in countries outside the EU, coordinated by the UN. Van Dijk *et al* (2008) report on the results for all countries, in and outside the EU. All told, 30 countries were covered at national level, with another 33 surveys in main or capital cities. In 2010 the ICVS was carried out in seven countries.

Since its initiation, surveys have been carried out one or more times in 78 countries including all 27 Member States of the European Union, Australia, Canada, Japan and The United States of America (Van Dijk, Van Kesteren & Smit, 2007). Over 350,000 citizens have to date been interviewed in the course of the ICVS with the same questionnaire, translated into thirty or more languages. This process has resulted in a body of victim survey data across a variety of countries covering a period of twenty years. The full dataset is currently available for interested scholars at <http://easy.dans.knaw.nl/dms?query=icvs>, or <http://rechten.uvt.nl/icvs> 2005 3 full.zip

## 2. *The ICVS methodology*

The thrust of the ICVS has been to use the same questionnaire and analysis methods to produce equivalent across-country results. To ensure further consistency, much of the data collection in each round of the ICVS was supervised by one polling company. In the first four rounds, survey co-ordinators were appointed in each country liaising with the central team to minimise deviations from the ICVS 'template'. Country coordinators were invited to preparatory meetings, made responsible for correct translation of the questionnaire, and for briefing of interviewers.

Many features of the methodology of the ICVS are similar (and deliberately so) to those adopted in bespoke national surveys. The surveys target a nationally representative sample of householders in which one randomly chosen respondent (aged 16 or more) is selected. The template for the ICVS surveys was that national samples should be at least 2,000 respondents, although some countries increased sample size to aid better local measurement. The rather modest sample size requirement was to curb costs, whilst allowing 'top level' comparisons across different countries for broad categories of prevalent crimes, rather than precise estimates of a larger number of specifically defined types of crime. Criticism of the ICVS sample sizes is justified for analysis tasks based on small numbers. However, comparative analyses of national (or city) risks are sound enough. The main measures used are the proportion of those victimised once or more in the previous year (prevalence rates), published with their margins of error at the 90% confidence level.

The ICVS template is to interview respondents using the Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) technique. In countries where there is insufficient national telephone penetration, face-to-face interviews are conducted in the main cities, generally with samples of 1,000 - 1,500 respondents.

Since its inception, the ICVS screener questions have covered ten types of 'conventional' crime that affect private citizens. The questionnaire includes sections on ten types of "conventional" crime, of which each question provides a standard definition. The ICVS provides an overall measure of victimisation in the previous year by any of the "conventional" crimes included in the questionnaire. Among the ten "conventional" crimes, some are "household crimes", i.e. those which can be seen as affecting the household at large, and

respondents report on all incidents known to them. A first group of household crimes deals with the vehicles owned by the respondent or his/her household:

- § Theft of car
- § Theft from car
- § Theft of bicycle
- § Theft of motorcycle

A second group refers to break and enter at the home address:

- § Burglary
- § Attempted burglary

A third group of crimes refers to victimization experienced by the respondent personally:

- § Robbery
- § Theft of personal property
- § Assault/threat
- § Sexual incidents (women only in the first rounds)

In later rounds of the ICVS, additional questions have been added on experiences with street level corruption, consumer fraud (including internet-based fraud), credit card theft, drug-related problems, and hate crime.

The initial ICVS 'recall period' is five years, although the main measure of victimisation is for the calendar year prior to the survey. To minimise memory loss about what happened in the previous calendar year, the ICVS template is for surveys to be conducted as early as possible in the following year. (Respondents are asked whether what happened occurred in the interviewing year, the previous calendar year, or in the period before this.) Details of victimisation incidents are collected about the 'last' incident of a particular type (the most recent incident of assault for instance). This approach reduces interviewing time, although it may risk bias insofar as respondents choose a 'last' incident which is most salient to them, or about which they have more to say.

Because, as said, the ICVS has tried to provide a measure crime which is independent of police records, it has been important to assess levels of reporting to the police - differences in which can help explain variations in police figures at country level. The proportions of crimes reported, can also serve as a measure of confidence in the police. Reporting rates show considerable variation across countries, even among developed countries. Asking about reasons for *not* reporting has provided additional contextual information, as has the assessment of those who have reported crimes to the police about how well the police dealt with their report. One consistent question has been about all respondents' views of local police performance. Internationally, this has shown marked differences. In countries where victims are less likely to report, police performance tends to be rated as poorly.

Questions about fear of crime have been modest in scope in the ICVS. One regular question asks about the perceived likelihood of becoming a victim of burglary in the coming year. Again, it shows substantial across-country variation. Another question is the ubiquitous one which asks "how safe do you feel walking alone in your area after dark". This has achieved currency through repetition, although it does not mention fear of crime, and may be tapping other concerns about general 'pavement safety', particularly amongst the elderly. There have also been questions to victims in the ICVS on their need for victim support. Finally, all respondents are asked about attitudes towards sentencing, and the use of common household security measures (for instance, burglar alarms and secure window locks).

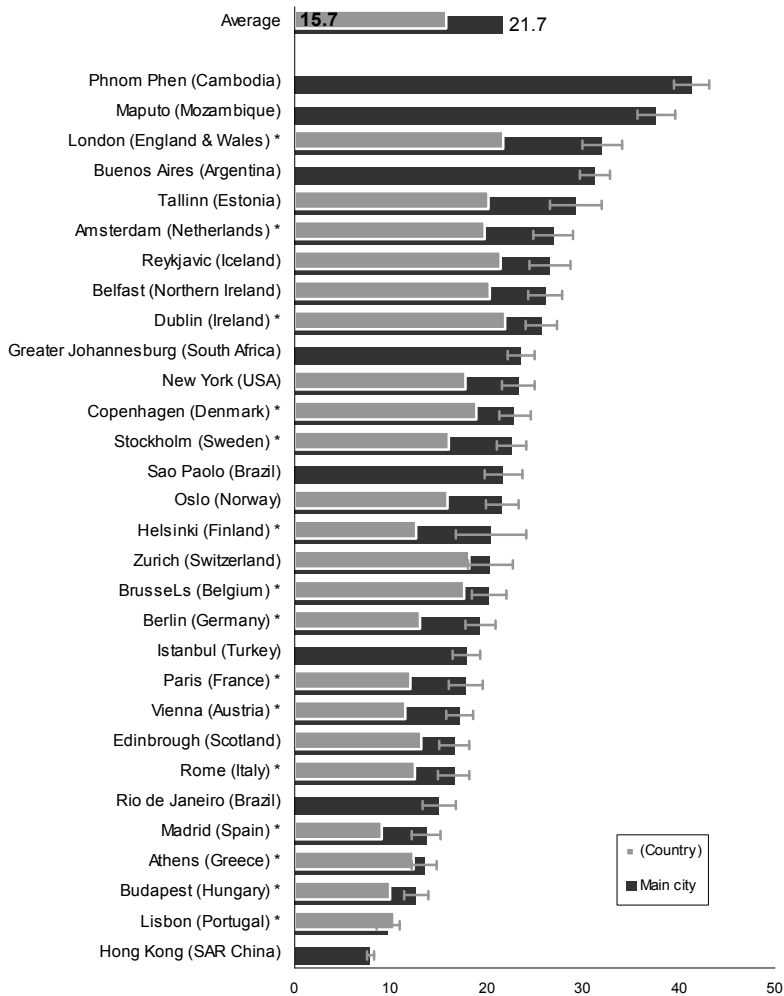
### *3. Some major findings on levels of crime*

The results of the ICVS 1996-2005 shows that, on average, approximately 25% of citizens, living in urban areas suffered at least one form of victimization over the twelve months preceding the interview. In Africa and Latin America significantly higher levels of victimisation were observed (33% and 34 % respectively).

Globally, over a five year period, two out of three inhabitants of big cities were victimised by crime at least once. Criminal victimization has evidently become a statistically normal feature of urban life across countries of both the developed and developing world. Almost no citizens anywhere in the world can feel immune from these threats to their personal security.

Figure 1 shows one year victimisation rates for any of the ten crimes included in the ICVS for the countries participating in the ICVS 2004/2005. Surveys in the fifteen original member states of the European Union were funded by the European Commission under the name EU/ICS. In most of the surveys carried out in 2004/2005 booster samples of 1.000 were drawn from the capital cities. This allows the calculation of special capital city rates.

**Figure 1 Overall victimization for 10 crimes; one year prevalence rates (percentages) of capital cities and national populations in 28 countries. ICVS 2005**



\* Source: the European Survey of Crime and Safety (EUICS 2005). Gallup-Europe, Brussels

Figure 1 confirms that levels of victimization by common crime are universally higher among capital city populations than among national populations, with Lisbon as the only exception to this rule. The mean victimization rate of the participating cities is 21.7%, whereas the mean national rate was 15.7%. In almost all countries, risks to be criminally victimized are a quarter to a third higher for capital city inhabitants than for others. Differences between the ten top countries and the ten at the bottom are statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

The ranking of cities in terms of crime puts Phnom Phen (Cambodia) and Maputo (Mozambique) on top. Relatively high rates are also found in London, Buenos Aires, Tallin, Amsterdam, Reykjavik, Belfast, Dublin and Johannesburg.



Victimization rates near the global city average of 21.7% are found in New York, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Sao Paulo and Oslo. The five safest capital cities of those participating are Hong Kong, Lisbon, Budapest, Athens and Madrid.

High crime countries include, as said, both relatively affluent countries (Ireland, Denmark and Iceland) and some of the least affluent (New Zealand, Estonia and Mexico). The category of low crime countries is equally diverse. It includes both relatively affluent countries, such as Austria, and less prosperous ones, such as Hungary, Spain and Portugal. Among the participating countries, levels of common crime seem to be neither associated with poverty nor with wealth. Macro factors known to be consistently associated with levels of common crime are urbanization and the proportion of young adolescents in the population. Together, these factors can explain some of the variation in overall levels of crime across countries.

The crime category of assault and threat is defined in the ICVS as personal attacks or threats, either by a stranger or a relative or friend, without the purpose of stealing. It is another "contact" crime and although physical consequences may be minor in most cases, it may well have important emotional repercussions for victims. Assaults on women are more likely to be domestic in nature than assaults on men. In a third of the cases of violence against women, the offender was known at least by name to the victim. In one of five of the cases the crime was committed in the victim's own home. The level of violence against women across countries is inversely related to the position of women in society, with most developing countries showing much higher rates (Van Dijk, 2008).

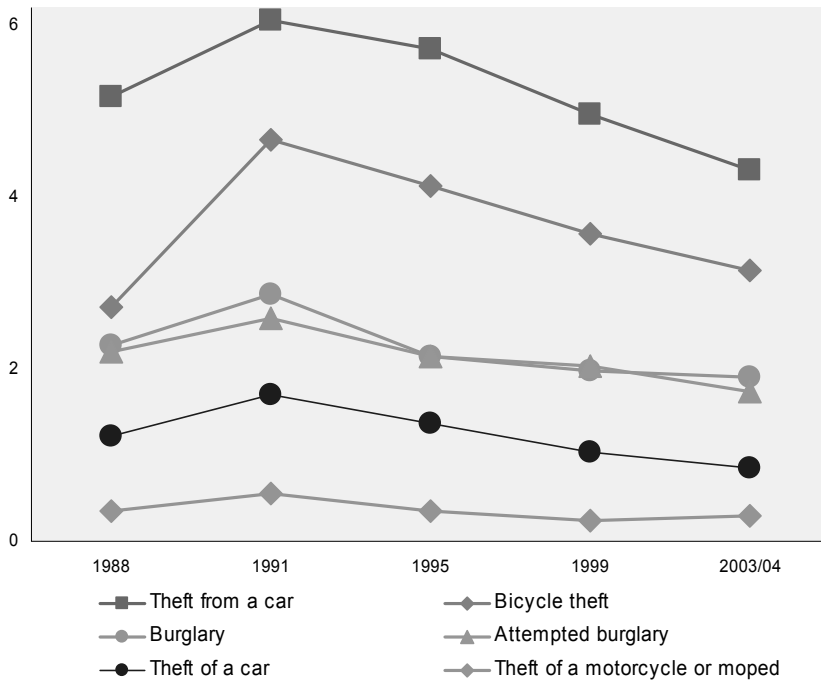
#### *4. Trends in over all victimisation and by type of crime*

The repeats of the ICVS allow a comparison of the 2004 rates with rates recorded in previous rounds of the ICVS for most of the participating countries. Available trend data point to a curvilinear trend in victimisation by common crime since 1988. The rates of victimisation of North America, Australia and the nine European countries for which ICVS-based trend data are available, show distinct downward trends. In the USA the drop in crime was already in evidence between 1988 and 1992. According to ICVS data, the level of common crime in Europe reached a plateau around 1995 and has shown a steady decline over the past ten years. The level of victimisation in Europe has now fallen back to the levels of 1990. No drops in over all victimisation can be observed in the ICVS-based trend data on Belgium and Northern Ireland.

The results show that trends in victimisation show very similar patterns in the majority of countries. As a consequence, the ranking of countries has not been much affected by recent downward trends. A drop in national victimisation rates does not necessarily result in a lower international ranking. Some countries have changed places. In the first sweep for example Northern Ireland, Switzerland and Belgium featured as low victimisation countries and England and Wales was not yet among the top five.

As said, overall trends in victimisation have shown a curved trend since 1988 with a peak in the early or mid 1990s. We will now take a closer look at these trends, differentiating between different types of crime. Since countries participating in the ICVS have changed across the five sweeps of the surveys, mean rates of the sweeps may have been affected by changes in the composition of participants. Fifteen Western countries have participated in at least four different waves of the ICVS and five have participated in all five (Canada, Finland, England/Wales, the Netherlands and USA). Trend data have been analysed for both the group of 15 countries and for the group of five countries separately. The trends of types of crime did not differ between the two groups and we will therefore focus here on the trends shown by the group of 15 countries participating four times or more. Figure 2 shows the mean rates for property crimes since 1988.

**Figure 2** Trends in crime: average of one year prevalence rates for 5 property crimes in the 15 countries \*\* that participated four times or more. 1989 - 2005 ICVS and 2005 EU ICS\*



The six types of property crimes depicted show very similar trends, although at different levels. The most frequently occurring types of property crime are theft from a car and bicycle theft. Both types peaked around 1991 and showed a consistent decline thereafter. The drop in bicycle theft seems to have

\*Source: The Burden of Crime in the EU, A comparative Analysis of the European Survey of Crime and Safety (EUICS 2005). Gallup-Europe, Brussels

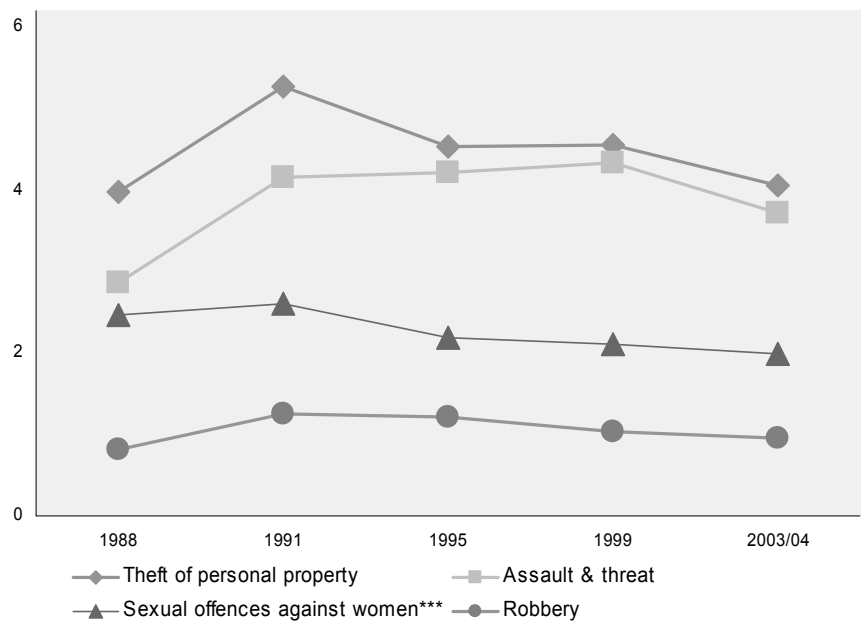
\*\* Australia, Belgium, Canada, England & Wales, Estonia, Finland, France, Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Poland, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland and USA

stagnated since 1999 in some countries. These two highly prevalent types of crime have greatly contributed to the decreases in over all crime since 1991. Burglaries and attempted burglaries show less pronounced trends. Car theft is a less common crime with rates declining after 1991, followed by stabilization. As discussed the decrease is mainly caused by a drop in less professional types of car theft such as for the purpose of “joyriding” or temporary transportation. Thefts of motorcycles or mopeds declined after 1991 like the other types of property crime but no further decline is in evidence.

*Contact crimes and theft of personal property*

Personal thefts show the by now familiar curve-linear trend with an all- time peak in 1991. Threats/assaults do not fully conform to this pattern: rates of victimisation peaked around 1999. Sexual offences and robberies show no distinct trends but seem to be decreasing slowly.

**Figure 3** Trends in crime: average of one year prevalence rates for three contact crimes and theft of personal property in the 15 countries that participated four times or more. 1989 - 2005 ICVS and 2005 EU ICS\*



As said, ICVS-based prevalence rates of 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2004 are available for five countries. In the USA victimisation by common crimes has peaked earlier than elsewhere. Rates of victimisation in 1992 were below those

\*Source: The Burden of Crime in the EU, A comparative Analysis of the European Survey of Crime and Safety (EUICS 2005). Gallup-Europe, Brussels

\*\* Australia, Belgium, Canada, England & Wales, Estonia, Finland, France, Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Poland, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland and USA

\*\*\* Sexual offences against women in 2004/04 are based on one country less, because this crime was not included in the 2004 Australian questionnaire

in 1988 and have continued to go down thereafter. In Canada the turning point in levels of common crime came somewhat later than in the USA, similar to what happened in most European countries and Australia. Since comparable data on sexual offences are missing for 2004, the over all victimisation rate of Australia is not strictly comparable. Nevertheless Australia shows the same trend as the European countries with an all time peak around 2000 for most types of crime and a sharp drop thereafter (Johnston, 2004).

The three EU countries participating in all surveys show roughly identical trends. Rates went up between 1989 and 1992/1996 and subsequently decreased between 1996 and 2004. In Finland, the 2004 rates were much lower than those of 2000. Continuing declines since 2000 were also recorded in the Netherlands, England & Wales and Scotland<sup>3</sup>. Poland, for which national data are available since 1990, shows a clear and consistent downward trend. From a European perspective, Poland has turned from a high crime into a medium crime country. This is also the case with Spain.

In the course of the past ten years the levels of victimisation in the Western world seem to have converged. Differences between the USA, Canada, Australia and Western and Central Europe have narrowed down. Although trend data are available from only two middle income cities in the developing world, these too point at a downturn in overall victimisation since 1996 (Buenos Aires) or 2000 (Johannesburg). Crime trends across the developed and middle income countries, then, show remarkable uniformity.

ICVS results show an increase in general crime between 1988 and 1991 and a downward trend since 1996 or 2000 across the developed world. The ICVS seems to have been launched just in time to register the rise in volume crime, its 'peaking' around 1995 and its subsequent decline.

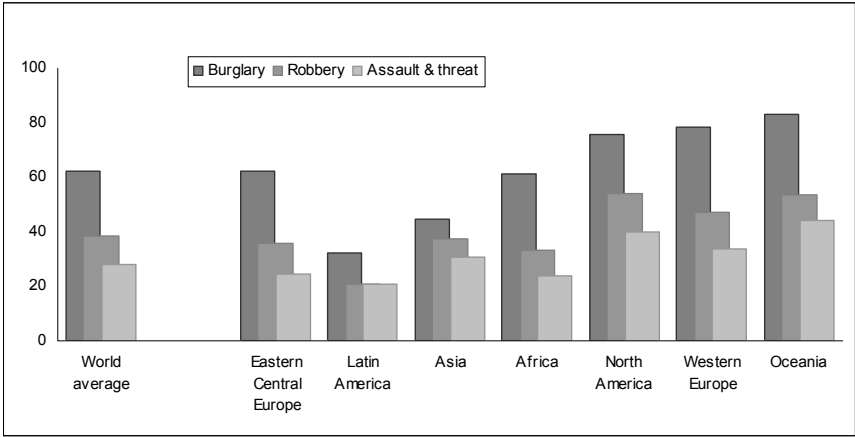
##### *5. Victim empowerment: police responses and victim support*

###### *Reporting to the police*

The ICVS shows that victims in Western Europe, North America (US and Canada) and Oceania (Australia and New Zealand) are more likely to report their victimization to the police than those in other regions (see figure 4). The picture of regional reporting rates is the reverse of that of victimization rates. In the regions where more crimes occur, fewer of those crimes are reported to the police. This general pattern introduces a fatal flaw into international police figures of crime by systematically deflating crime in developing countries.

<sup>3</sup> The ICVS trends are broadly in line with those emerging from the British and Dutch national crime surveys, indicating drops in over all crime of 40% over the past ten years (-sources-: [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/05/hosb1105tab201.xls](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/05/hosb1105tab201.xls); [www.wodc.nl](http://www.wodc.nl)).

**Figure 4 – Percentage of assaults, robberies and burglaries, respectively, reported to the police, by region (source: ICVS, 2005)**



In general, burglary is the most frequently reported crime (apart from car theft that is almost universally reported). Burglary was most frequently reported in Western Europe, North America and Australia. Important factors determining reporting are insurance coverage (the requirement for making a claim for compensation being dependent on reporting the incident to the police) and the ease of reporting (determined by factors such as access to the local police, availability of telephones, etc.).

Robbery was also frequently reported in Western Europe, but much less in the remaining regions, with a minimum in Latin America, where only one victim of robbery out of five reported to the police. In places where robberies are rampant victims are less likely to report. In the case of robberies reporting seems to be dependent on confidence in the police. Those refraining from reporting often have no trust in their local police. This is born out by the finding that more than 50% of the Latin American victims of robbery who did not report to the police said they did so because “the police would not do anything” and approximately 25% said that they feared or disliked the police.

Finally, assault/threat was the least frequently reported crime. Globally less than half of violence victims report to the police. Less than one in three of the female victims of threat/assault had filed a complaint with the police. Reporting rates are again lowest in Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe and Asia (one in five). As a general rule the most vulnerable categories of victims- such as women in developing countries- are the least likely to seek assistance from the police. Those most in need of such empowering services are least likely to receive it

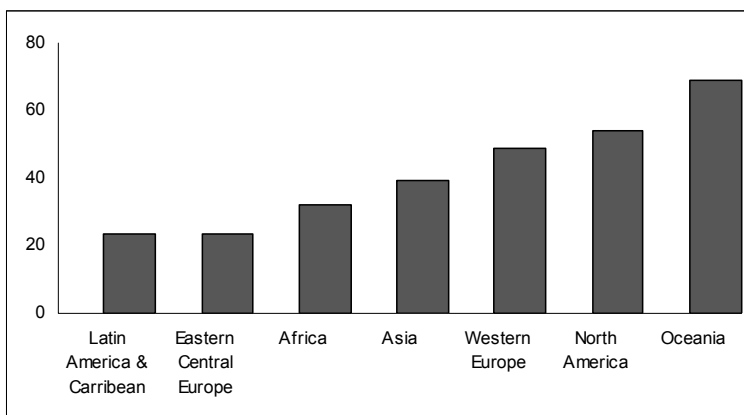
### *Victim satisfaction and trust levels*

Among those who reported, less than half were satisfied with the way the police dealt with their case. Those least satisfied were the respondents from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Central-Eastern Europe. Only in Western Europe and North America and Australia more than 60% of victims who reported to the police positively evaluated the treatment received. The most common reason for dissatisfaction was that the police “did not do enough” or “were not interested”. Roughly one in five victims were unhappy that the police had not kept them sufficiently informed. Around 10 % said the police had been impolite or incorrect. This reason was given most often by victims of violence against women, especially by those from Latin America .

A special section of the ICVS deals with the assessment of police performance by respondents. The results confirm that respondents in Latin America, Eastern-Central Europe and Africa show a poor appreciation of police efforts in preventing and controlling local crime. Percentages of respondents satisfied with the job that the police were doing in their area were much lower in these regions (figure 5). The results suggest that in many developing countries the public remains sceptical about the capacity of the police to control local crime. At the country level lack of trust in the police appears to be strongly related to low rates of reporting of crimes to the police.

Ironically, then, low levels of police recorded crime in a country should not necessarily be seen as a good sign. Rather than as evidence for low levels of crime, low police figures may actually point to poor performance of the police and a resulting low trust level among the public, limiting the proportion of crimes reported to the police.

**Figure 5 – Satisfaction with the police in controlling crime (percentages of public satisfied with police performance in their area)**



\*Taking everything into account, how good do you think the police in your area are at controlling crime? Do you think they do a very good job, a fairly good job, a fairly poor job or a very poor job?'. The table shows percentages for 'very good' and 'fairly good' answers.

*Victim support services*

Victims of more serious crimes who had reported to the police were specifically asked whether they had received support from a specialised agency. In most countries few victims had received such help. The figures are variable across offence type. Of those who reported burglaries to the police, four per cent had received help. The level of support was the highest in the Western European countries, especially in United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands where victim support for such victims is indeed institutionally most developed.

Approximately 16% of women victims of sexual offences who had reported to the police had received specialised support in North America, Western Europe and Africa. Elsewhere the percentages were lower. In all regions only very few percentages of male victims of assaults had received specialised help (4%).

Victims who had not received help from a specialised agency were asked whether they would have appreciated help in getting information, or practical or emotional support. Two-thirds of victims of serious crimes who had reported to the police indicated unmet needs. Levels of demand were highest in Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. Globally three out of four victims of violence against women, including sexual violence, would have appreciated help. There is obviously a huge gap between the need for help and its actual provision. The international community has still a long way to go with the implementation of the United Nations Declaration of the Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power of 1985 (A/res/40/34, adopted by the U.N General Assembly in 1985).

*6. Strengths and limitations of the ICVS*

The ICVS has over the years proven to be a reliable source of information on the level and trends of crimes which directly affect ordinary citizens on a large scale (so called volume crime) (Lynch, 2006). It has over the years also improved its measurement of street level corruption and of sexual violence, although for the latter type of crime the use of specialized survey instruments such as the International Violence Against Women Survey (IWAWS) seems preferable (Johnson, Ollus, Nevala, 2007).

Household victimisation surveys have limitations that also apply to the ICVS. Briefly, the main ones are:

- Sample surveys do not represent the entire population completely. The most common household sampling frames exclude those in communal establishments, for instance, and the homeless. Their omission makes little difference to national victimisation estimates in fact, although it obviously precludes building up a full picture of victimisation patterns.
- As only a sample of the population is questioned, findings are subject to sampling error. Margins of error are obviously greater for surveys with smaller samples – an issue that is pertinent to the ICVS. Estimates are most imprecise for types or sub types of crimes that happen relatively infrequently, and for answers to follow-up questions such as whether

reporting victims were satisfied with their treatment by the police. The experience of the ICVS has shown that sample sizes of a few thousand per country suffice to obtain rough estimates of national crime problems that can be used for comparative purposes. For more accurate estimates, and for estimates of sub-populations, considerably larger sample sizes are needed. Household victimisation surveys provide incomplete coverage of crime. For instance, they omit 'victimless' crimes (such as drug possession), and crimes against businesses and society at large (e.g., racketeering, grand corruption, and environmental pollution). There are omissions even for crimes against private individuals. The victimisation of children is largely ignored. There is no victim to be interviewed in the case of homicide. And it is difficult to cover fraud well, since people will not always be aware they have been victimised.

- By no means all potential respondents can be contacted, and some who are approached do not wish to take part, either through lack of time or interest. Possible bias from non-response needs to be acknowledged, although its extent is somewhat contested. One view is that those who cannot be contacted, or who refuse to take part may have 'more to say' in victimisation terms. The other view is that people who are available and willing to be interviewed are those who have 'something to say'.
- Other types of response bias are a problem in victimisation surveys. Serious victimisation incidents may, as said, be overcounted because of 'forward telescoping'. Counter to this, many incidents may well be undercounted. Some relatively minor incidents are simply forgotten (memory loss). These include incidents which could be on the borderline of what people actually regard as criminal (e.g., street brawls). Incidents of a sexual nature and / or those perpetrated by someone well known to the victim are also likely to be undercounted. This is because incidents between intimates may not be perceived as 'criminal', or because respondents are reluctant to talk to unknown interviewers about issues deemed private or sensitive. As said, dedicated surveys are often seen as more suitable here, although the use of more anonymous modes of questioning within a conventional household survey may also help (Johnson, Ollus, Nevala. 2009).
- There is a further challenge as regards what is known as 'series' victimisation – that which is repetitive in nature (such as domestic violence). It can be hard for respondents to remember incidents as discrete and definitionally tidy events and locate them accurately in time. Series incidents pose a problem in terms of counting the number of victimisations spread across a given number of respondents ('incidence rates'). Respondents often cannot give a reliable numeric value, and very high values, taken at face values, can distort risk estimates for some groups. Surveyors have taken different approaches to dealing with series incidents. They often set an arbitrary ceiling as to the number counted. Reporting simple 'prevalence rates' (the number of respondents victimised once or more) is another option, and one which the ICVS has taken.



In sum, then, household victimisation surveys leave out populations that may be more at risk; there is inevitable imprecision in their risk estimates; they cannot claim to cover all offences that directly or indirectly affect private citizens; and they are susceptible to a number of response biases. The count of crime from household victimisation surveys, then, is both incomplete and possibly biased. With the exception of forward time-telescoping and statistical sampling error, the way victimisation is counted will tend to deflate rather than inflate the extent of victimisation actually experienced.

Finally, no information is provided by the ICVS on the most serious violent crimes such as homicides and kidnappings or on crimes victimizing businesses or society at large (racketeering, grand corruption, environmental pollution). In these areas ICVS data must be supplemented by data on police-recorded crimes or from other sources. Within Europe the European Sourcebook has become an important source of international information on crime and justice (Aebi et al, 2006). Global information on homicides and on convictions for human trafficking can be consulted at the website of UNODC ([www.unodc.org/statistics](http://www.unodc.org/statistics)). A comprehensive overview of available international data on crime and justice is given in Van Dijk (2008).

### 7. The way ahead

By disclosing important aspects of crime and victimisation at the international level, the ICVS has become an indispensable source of information for researchers, policy makers, and the international community. It is expected that in the future the ICVS will become even a more solid source of data, due to the fact that a greater number of countries will be included and that those who have already participated will continue to do so, thus reinforcing the longitudinal series.

In 2009 the UN office in Vienna has produced a *Manual on Victimisation Surveys* which provides an overview of organisational and methodological issues (see Further Reading). The existence of this manual should help those who have made no in-roads into victimisation surveys, although it is no guarantee that comparable surveys will be carried out. The experience of comparing independent surveys in the 1980s, and the subsequent experience of the ICVS, has shown that the reasonably high level of methodological standardisation that is critical for producing reliable comparative results requires organisational coordination and, preferably, collective core funding.

At the time of writing, there are definite plans for standardised surveys in 2013 in all 27 member states of the European Union (EU), to be called the EU Safety Survey. This is being coordinated by Eurostat, with part funding from Eurostat and part funding from the Directorate General for Justice, Liberties and Security. There have been pilot tests in 17 countries, looking at different modes of interviewing for one. The questionnaire content is not as yet decided although comparability with a set of core questions from the ICVS seems assured. Sample sizes are likely to vary between 6.000 and 8.000 per member state. Undecided is the degree of stringency that can be imposed as regards interview mode. Dictating a common mode is unrealistic given different survey capabilities in different countries, but some degree of 'pressure' towards

standardisation seems advisable. At this point in time Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing seems the best option in the majority of member states (Van Dijk, et al., 2010).

In tandem, the International Government Research Directors (IGRD) group is taking forward pilot testing of surveys using a reduced version of the questionnaire used in the fifth ICVS, carried out in 2004/05. There were pilot surveys in 2008 in four countries (Canada, Germany, Sweden and the UK). Further ones were conducted in 2010 in the same four countries, as well as Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland. The pilots are centred largely on testing different modes of survey administration, including CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) – essentially a form of self-interviewing using the internet. The work is being organised in the Netherlands through the NICIS Institute. It is being done at the request of the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Dutch Ministry of Justice, whose Director is a member of the IGRD. NICIS has subcontracted the survey work to a consortium of polling companies. NICIS is responsible for overall coordination of the pilots, data management and reporting of the pilot results.

Policy interest in international comparisons of crime using victimisation survey techniques has been considerably enhanced by the results to date. This means that countries are likely to be keen to enter into future comparative survey exercises. This is especially so if they do not have to fund their own fieldwork costs. But even where self-funding is necessary, countries that have not so far taken part in any standardised survey may wish to sign up, particularly when they do not have the resources for a bespoke national survey. This makes it attractive for them to ride on the back of another survey vehicle, especially when there are comparisons with other countries on offer. Countries that are planning the conduct of national surveys in the near future using the ICVS methodology include Argentina, Brazil, Japan and South Africa. The ICVS has also been repeated in Georgia (in 2010).

Regrettably, the conduct of victimisation surveys in developing countries seems to have stalled. This is the more regrettable since statistics of recorded crimes are of poor quality, or even lacking altogether, in many developing countries. Here, victimisation surveys are the most viable option for collecting information about national or local crime problems, and about the performance of the police.

The logistical challenges of carrying out international comparisons through victimisation surveys remain. So too do the methodological challenges of improving the measurement of crime internationally through survey techniques that are hard to standardise in diverse environments. Over the lifetime of the ICVS, the development of CATI has been a major bonus, reducing fieldwork costs and facilitating consistent questionnaire administration. A problem to be faced, however, is the fact that many people are forsaking landlines for mobile phones. 'Survey saturation' in Westernised countries may also become an obstacle, whatever mode of interviewing is adopted.

With increasing internet use, Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) clearly provides a window of opportunity for surveys in the future, particularly in terms of cost. In the Netherlands and Finland, pilot testing has begun with

CAWI, with encouraging results. However, the methodological challenges of CAWI cannot be denied (cf. Rand, 2007). There is possible bias due to differential access to the internet, and a degree of respondent self-selection (with or without incentives). Response rates may also be low. There is also some evidence of over reporting of victimisations by respondents, possibly because of the anonymous setting. In the medium to long term, however, ways round these problems may be found, particularly by using representative panels of willing respondents that polling companies are increasingly likely to offer.

#### *Further reading*

Lynch and Addington's (2007) book *Understanding Crime Statistics* usefully reviews the differences between (and scope of) police statistics and victimisation surveys in the US. The European research group, CRIMEPREV, has issued a collection of essays comparing police statistics with survey results from several European countries (Zaubermann, 2008). Aebi and Linde have compiled a comprehensive overview of victimisation surveys in Europe up to 2009 (published as an annex to Van Dijk et al, 2010) My own 2008 book *The World of Crime* covers global results of household surveys and surveys of violence against women, as well as a critical review of available international statistics on police-recorded crimes. The UN *Manual on Victimisation Surveys* gives a useful introductory overview of design and implementation issues. This can be found at <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/Crime-Monitoring-Surveys.html?ref=menuaside>

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