

Sociology 3395: Criminal Justice & Corrections

Lecture 8.2: Victimization Surveys

* Victimization surveys have been the preferred methodological tool of victimologists since the 1970's.

*These gather information directly from victims. In the past, little was known relative to offenders

* Focus on crime:

- With direct, identifiable victims
- Direct, potentially identifiable offender
- Victimizations for which information available

Canadian Urban Victimization Survey (1981)

* Findings:

- Gender differences (assault)
- Age and risk (youth)
- Income
- Lifestyle (nights out on town)
- Fear of crime
- Only 42% of crimes reported
- Reasons: "Too minor"
 - "Police can't do anything"
 - "Inconvenient"
- Variation in sexual assaults
- Most likely to report when large financial

loss

Violence Against Women Survey (1993)

* 51% of Canadian women experienced at least 1 incident of physical or sexual assault since the age of 18 (vs. 10% in the preceding year).

* Women were at greater risk of violence by men they know (45%) than by strangers (23%). Many reported past violence from both.

* 39% of women had been victims of sexual assault (vs. 5% in the previous year). 17% reported physical threats or assaults by men other than spouses (vs. 1% in the previous year).

* 29% of women had been assaulted by a spouse or live-in partner (3% in prior year). More was reported in previous relationships than current ones (48% vs. 15%).

* There was a continued risk of violence to women from ex-partners despite a divorce or separation.

* The most common forms of violence were threats, followed by pushing, grabbing and shoving, slapping, throwing something, kicking, biting, and hitting with fists.

* The proportion who had been beaten up, choked, sexually assaulted, or had a weapon used against them were all less than 10%.

* A majority of respondents who have suffered violence had been victimized more than once. This was particularly evident in sexual violence.

* Women were at risk of sexual violence in a variety of locations/ situations. 46% of sexual assaults occurred in a private place, 10% at work, and were not an uncommon risk in public locations

* Wife assault did not merely involve low level violence such as threats, pushing, grabbing and shoving.

* The majority of abused women were assaulted repeatedly, 1/3 more than ten times.

*Men from previous relationships were reportedly more violent than others.

The VAWS also detailed the *relationship dynamics* involved:

* The percentage reporting emotional abuse was higher than those reporting physical or sexual violence (35% vs. 29%).

* Emotional abuse was used in conjunction with violence by the majority of violent men

* Obsessive and controlling behaviors were prominent in serious battering relationships, & its frequency increased dramatically as the seriousness of the battering increased

* Controlling and abusive men often found a woman=s pregnancy a threat to his exclusivity of attention and affection.

Finally, the VAWS indicated important *demographic* correlates:

* Young women 18-24 experienced rates of sexual assault twice that in the next age group (25-34), & had rates of wife assault 3 times higher.

* The rate of wife assault in new marriages (2 years or less) was almost three times the national average.

* Common-law relationships showed rates of violence 4 times higher than legal marriages.

* Single women & those with some (but not completed)

postsecondary education reported the highest rates of sexual assault.

* In wife assault, both men with less than a high school education, & those who are unemployed, assaulted their partners at twice the rate of others

* Wife assault and sexual assault were twice as high among those with low incomes

* Witnessing violence in childhood was a very important risk factor for both abusers and potential victims

* Alcohol abuse was strongly correlated with violence & seriousness of injury.

* Rates of violent victimization varied from higher levels in Western Canada to lower levels in the east.

* When all of these associated factors are weighed statistically, the most important predictors were:

verbal abuse/putdowns,
sexual jealousy
efforts to limit womens= autonomy/social
contacts
age
the man=s education
living in a common-law relationship
early exposure to violence
the man=s unemployment.

* This VAWS picture of intimate violence contradicts lifestyle and routine activities theories of victimization.

General Social Survey 2004

- 28% of Canadians aged 15+ reported being victimized one or more times in the preceding 12 months, up slightly from 26% in 1999
- Increases in victimization rates were recorded for 3 of the 8 offence types measured: theft of personal property, theft of household property, and vandalism. There were no significant changes in rates of sexual assault, robbery, physical assault, and motor vehicle theft, while there was a decrease in B&E.
- Household victimization offences occurred most frequently (34% of incidents), followed by violent victimization (29%) & thefts of personal property (25%).
- Residents of Western provinces generally reported higher rates of victimization than residents living east of the Manitoba/Ontario border.
- The risk of violent victimization was highest among Canadians aged 15-24. Other risk factors include being single, living in an urban area, and having a low household income (under \$15,000).
- For household victimization, rates per 1000 households were highest among renters, those living in semi-detached, row or duplex homes, and urban dwellers. Yet, higher household income made both households and individuals more attractive targets for victimization
- In total, only about 34% of criminal incidents were reported to police in 2004, down from 37% in 1999. Household victimization incidents were most likely to be reported (37%), while thefts of personal property were least likely (31%)
- In 4% of all incidents, victims believed the act was hate-

motivated (same as 1999). In 2004, 65% of these were believed motivated by the victim's race or ethnicity, 26% by their sex, 14% by religion, and 12% by sexual orientation

- Canadians who self-identified as Aboriginal were 3 times more likely than members of the non-Aboriginal population to report being victims of violent victimization.
- There was a significant difference between visible minorities and non-visible minorities, while rates were lower among immigrants than non-immigrants (68 vs. 116 per 100,000 population)
- Although the proportion of violent incidents without a weapon has remained relatively stable since 1999 (69% in 2004 and 72% in 1999), violent incidents resulting in injury increased (25% vs. 18%)
- Most often, violent incidents took place in a commercial establishment or public institution (38%). Workplace violence represented 43% of these.

International Crime Victimization Survey 2000

This is the fourth round of this survey, previously conducted in 1989, 1992, & 1996. Key findings:

- On average, for 13 of the industrialized countries, 22% of the population aged 16+ were victims of at least 1 of the 11 listed offences in the prior year. Canada was near the average at 24%
- Between 1996-2000 victimization rates were fairly stable. Of the 10 countries that participated in both rounds, 6 (including Canada) did not experience any significant change. The rest showed decreases.

- Of the 11 types of offences measured, the most prevalent in 2000 was car vandalism (7% of population on average), followed by theft from car at 5%.
- On average, just over half of incidents were reported to police. These range from a high of 65% (Scotland) to a low of 39% (Japan). Canada's figure was near the low end at 49%. Many incidents were not reported because the victim did not believe they were serious.
- In 2000, a majority in each of the 13 countries felt safe when walking alone after dark. Figures were highest for Sweden (85%), followed by Canada and the U.S. (both 83%). Respondents in Australia and Poland were least likely to feel safe (64% for each).
- Satisfaction with police performance is quite high, particularly in the U.S. and Canada. 89% of Americans and 87% of Canadians felt the police were doing a very or a fairly good job at controlling crime in their area (highest among 13 countries).
- When asked to decide on a sentence for a two-time burglar, most people in 8 countries, including Canada, preferred a non-prison sanction. Leading the way were France (84%) and Finland (79%). Canada came in at 52%.
- Canadians do appear to have grown more punitive in their attitudes towards sentencing over time, as have people in 7 other countries.
- * In 2000, a majority of households in 11 of the countries used at least 1 type of security measure. Poland was the exception, where only 40% of households used one of these devices.

The ICVS thus provides a great deal of information on victimization, but provides the added value of placing Canada's experiences in a broader international context.

Victimization Surveys: A Critique

* Advantages of victimization surveys compare to UCR statistics:

-Respondents asked about theoretically relevant issues

-Weed out public decisions not to report

-Weed out police decisions not to record

-Improve estimates of crime and victimization

* Problems:

-Victims have to know they have been victimized

-Standardized survey questions can be interpreted differently

-Dishonesty in responses

-Faulty memories of respondents

-Giving most socially desirable answers

-Limiting offences inquired about affects outcome

-Selection of respondents

-Large samples needed/ inflates cost

* Again, we must see these as useful constructions, to be used with other sources