

Part II. Key issues for policy makers

Ch. II.A. How crime victimization data can be of use to policy makers

30. The nature, degree and consequences of criminal activity, as well as people's perceptions of their safety, are issues that influence directly and indirectly the quality of people's lives. Crime can take many forms and can have a major influence on the well being of victims, their families, friends and the wider community. Those most directly affected may suffer financially, physically, psychologically and emotionally, while the fear of crime itself can affect people and restrict their lives in many ways. Crime also can result in significant economic costs such as the provision of law enforcement services and corrective services as well as costs to businesses and householders either as a consequence of crime or implementation of preventative measures.

31. Increases in evidence-based policy-making and holistic approaches to social problems have driven demand for social indicators that support the measurement of progress, well being and social inclusion. Crime is no longer seen as a problem in isolation, and policy-makers, researchers and service providers now view crime as relational to other social and economic conditions. As such, statistics that relate only to the criminal justice system can provide a partial picture of crime in society.

32. As crime can have a significant economic and social impact, Governments invest heavily in the prevention of criminal activity and promote personal and community safety, including community confidence in law and order.

33. A sound evidence base is essential in the development of crime prevention policy and programs aimed at preventing or reducing crime, improving community safety and reducing fear of crime in communities. This evidence base can also be used to assess the effectiveness of crime prevention programs by Government.

34. National Crime Victimization surveys provide a valuable source of information to policy makers and can be used to understand the level and nature of both personal and household crime, as well as people's perceptions of safety in the community. Both actual and perceived risks of crime are indicators of community well-being. Depending on the size of the sample and budget available a range of questions can be answered from a survey of this type such as:

- Has the level of crime changed over time?
- What are the risks of becoming a victim?
- Have perceptions of safety changed over time?
- How much crime is reported to authorities and if it is not, why not?
- What are the characteristics of perpetrators of crime?
- Are crime prevention policies working?
- Is there a relationship between fear of crime and actual levels of crime?
- What is the impact on vulnerable groups in the community such as migrants, Indigenous people, the elderly or those with a mental illness?

35. Data from crime victimization surveys assist in designing and implementing crime prevention and treatment programs and provide a better understanding of population groups that are disadvantaged, have special needs or are over-represented in the criminal justice system.

Ch. II.B. Limitations of crime victimization surveys

36. No one source will provide a definitive measure of victimization in society. When a criminal victimization occurs, there are a number of ways in which this can be measured and a number of stages at which a measurement can be taken. Measurement can occur at the time a person perceives that they have been a victim of crime, when the crime is reported to the police and/or the laying of charges.

37. Crime victimization surveys are one such measure and can be valuable in that they ask people in the community directly about their experiences of crime. Counts of victims identified through surveys may not appear in official police statistics, as the crime may not be reported and/or recorded by police, therefore victimization estimates produced from surveys are likely to be greater than data sourced from police records.

38. However, crime victimization surveys are also subject to methodological issues and therefore cannot provide a definitive measure of the total number of illegal acts that occur in society. These surveys can only identify criminal incidents where there is an identifiable victim, therefore 'victimless crimes' such as drug offenses or consensual sexual acts are not identified. Some crime victimization surveys rely on, and accept a respondent's view as to whether an incident was a crime, whereas others may get an interviewer to make an assessment as to whether a respondent has been a victim of a crime, based on the respondent's answers to a set of questions about particular incidents. Responses may not necessarily match the legal definition of crime.

39. Although data from crime surveys are likely to elicit better disclosure of criminal incidents than data from police records, they can also be subject to undercounting as some victims may be reluctant to disclose information, particularly for incidents of a sensitive nature, such as sexual assault. Some criminal incidents are more difficult to measure as often they rely on a person realizing they have been a victim of crime. For example, personal fraud is aimed at deceiving people and a victim may never discover a fraud that was perpetrated against them, or they may discover the fraud long after it took place.

40. The accuracy of statistics is influenced by the ability of people to recall past victimizations. The longer the elapsed time period, the less likely it is that an incident will be recalled accurately. Surveys are also subject to sampling and non-sampling errors. Sample surveys can produce estimates for a population of interest, but these are still estimates and may be different from the true count which would be produced if the whole population was surveyed. Criminal offenses that are not as prevalent in the community will require large enough samples to be representative of the population, however, data for low prevalence offense types can still be subject to higher error rates than offenses that are more common. The accuracy of survey estimates is also influenced by the response rate.

41. These are some of the methodological issues that clients need to be aware of as the reliability and validity of estimates produced from crime victimization surveys vary. These issues are explored in more detail throughout this manual.

42. Sources: *Understanding crime data, Haunted by the dark figure*, Clive Coleman and Jenny Moynihan, 1996.

Ch. II.C. Which methodology should I use?

43. Measuring crime phenomena can yield different results depending on a range of factors:

- purpose of the collection
- source of the collection
- sample design and selection
- questionnaire format and content
- mode of the data collection and other survey procedures
- response rate

44. Decisions on the appropriate sample size, distribution and survey method are dependent on a number of considerations. These include the aims and content of survey, the level of disaggregation and accuracy at which the survey estimates are required, and the costs and operational constraints of conducting the survey.

45. Sources of crime data can vary on many different levels and for a number of valid reasons. Differences in any one of the elements above may influence the final estimates. These differences may not be an issue if the data that are produced are 'fit for purpose' to the client. Ultimately a client or the funding source of a survey needs to make an informed choice as to which methodology to use and this is often based on the costs and operational constraints of conducting a survey.

46. An Australian Information paper illustrated the differences in the measurement of crime from a range of Australian surveys, including the factors that were expected to have contributed to the differences between survey results. Not all of these factors however, could be quantified. Interested parties should consult: ABS Information Paper: *Measuring Crime Victimization, Australia: The Impact of Different Collection Methodologies, 2002, cat. no. 4522.0.55.001.*

47. The present victimization survey manual provides the reader with an array of information about the different methods used in the conduct of crime victimization surveys. This information will assist clients in determining what methods could be used and what issues need to be considered when making a decision to proceed with a crime victimization survey.

Ch. II.D. Relation between victimization surveys and other types of official crime statistics

48. Frequently there are headlines appearing in the news media that report on differing trends in crime depending on the source of data from which the reports are derived – police-reported statistics, often referred to as official crime statistics, or victim survey data. This apparent discrepancy can challenge the credibility and motives behind each data source and lead to questions concerning which, if either, set of crime statistics is correct.

49. The expectation that the police-reported crime statistics and victim surveys should produce similar figures lies in the belief that the two surveys measure the same phenomena, and are based on identical objectives, methodologies and populations when, in fact, they produce two distinct sets of crime indicators. It is important to be aware of the fundamental differences between these surveys to understand why measures based on these data sources can and do sometimes diverge, and why they should be seen as complimentary rather than mutually exclusive.

About police-reported statistics

50. Police-reported statistics are typically a census of all criminal offenses reported to, or detected by, the police and subsequently recorded as crimes. However, it has been well documented that only a small portion of all criminal events are reported to the police. To become “known to the police” a crime must survive a succession of victim and police decisions, including recognition by the victim that a crime has occurred, police notification, and, entering the occurrence into official police records. Each decision is based on individual perceptions of the circumstances surrounding the event and on the victim’s and/or witness’s cost/benefit analyses associated with reporting the crime. Costs include the time and trouble for a citizen to report a crime, and for a police officer to respond or to complete an investigation report. In addition, a “crime” may disappear or be re-defined at any point in the process, for example, as a result of recordkeeping failures, departmental reporting practices, or the decision by the victim or the police to drop charges.

Factors related to varying levels of police-reported crime over time and between countries

51. Research suggests that many factors are correlated to varying levels of police-reported crime at particular points in time or for specific regions. Shifts in the criminal justice system and societal responses to certain acts can have an important impact on the number of police-reported criminal incidents. The introduction of a new offense or a modification to an existing offense can impact the number of criminal incidents. Changes in enforcement practices or special targeted operations will impact the prevalence rates for certain offenses such as drug crimes, prostitution and impaired driving.

52. In addition, differences in the reporting structures of police services can influence the number of incidents recorded by police. Some police services maintain

call centers to receive and record criminal incidents, while others require victims to report crimes in person. The ease of public reporting can consequently impact whether a relatively minor criminal incident is collected by the police.

53. On the societal side, a change in the public's level of tolerance for certain criminal acts, such as spousal assault, can lead to a change in reporting rates to police and subsequent crime statistics for that particular offense. Similarly, changes in the victim's desire to involve police can also influence police-reported statistics. All of these factors can have an impact on crime and how it is reported by police thereby influencing police reported crime rates.

Why people report offenses to police

54. There are a number of reasons why victims of crime may choose to report to the police. Victims often report to the police out of a sense of duty, or because the victim wants the offender arrested or punished, or seeks protection from the offender. Some offenses are reported to the police because a police report is mandatory in order to submit an insurance claim for compensation.

55. Other factors that appear to influence police reporting of a crime may relate to the severity or seriousness of the offense, including whether the victim was injured, whether a weapon was present and whether the incident resulted in the victim having to take time off from their main activity because of the criminal incident.

Why people choose not to report offenses to the police

56. Victimization surveys have found that one of the primary reasons that an incident does not come to the attention of the police relates to the fact that victim felt the incident was not important enough. This suggests that the crime may have been too minor to warrant police involvement. Other reasons for not reporting include not wanting the police involved and feeling that the incident was a private or personal matter.

57. In addition, victims in some countries may not want to get involved with the police, either because they feel the police could do nothing to help, or because they fear the police would be biased. Still others fear publicity or news coverage that could result from police contact.

Counting rules

58. Counting rules vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. There are few standards to permit international comparability beyond a very limited range of offenses. However, many jurisdictions count offenses in the following manner:

- An offense must be recognized as such before it is recorded. For example, the police must have found evidence of an offense having been committed. Some jurisdictions count offending only when certain processes happen, such as an

arrest is made, ticket issued, charges laid in Court or only upon securing a conviction.

- Multiple reports of the same offense. Some jurisdictions count each report separately while others count each victim of offending separately.
- Where several offenses are committed at the same time, it is common for only the most serious offense is counted. Some jurisdictions record and count each and every offense separately while others count cases, or offenders, that can be prosecuted.
- Where multiple offenders are involved in the same act of offending only one act is counted when counting offenses but each offender is counted when apprehended.

These differences mean that even if the definition of a criminal event is the same, different jurisdictions may still produce different statistical counts for the same quantity of incidents.

About victim survey data

59. Victim surveys capture both criminal incidents reported to the police and those not reported to the police by randomly selecting a sample of the population and asking them directly about their experiences of criminal victimization. These surveys normally produce larger estimates of criminal incidents, and rely on respondents' recall and their ability to accurately report on details about the incident. Unlike police-reported statistics, these surveys can go beyond counting criminal incidents and often include questions about attitudes toward crime and the justice system, and they collect various socio-demographic characteristics to assess at risk populations

Disclosing victimization in a population survey

60. Given the sensitive nature of criminal victimization, there may be some reluctance on the part of victims to report victimizations to a general population survey. It is important for survey questions to be carefully worded and tested, and for survey interviewers to receive specialized training on how to deal with this sensitive subject matter. Interviewers first need have general awareness of issues surrounding victimization and to become familiar with the strategies and tools for dealing with issues which may arise during and after interviews with the survey respondents on the subjects of victimization and, for example, spousal abuse. Interviewers should reassure respondents of the confidentiality of the responses, and remain empathetic and non-judgemental.

Differences between victim surveys and police-reported data

Data Sources

61. The most basic difference between the two types of crime measurement is the method of data collection. Police-reported statistics obtain data from police

administrative records either at the aggregate or micro-data level. In contrast, victim surveys collect personal information from individuals about their victimization experiences, often through telephone or face-to-face interviews. The survey covers victims' total experience of crime at the micro-data level, including the impact of the crime on victims.

Coverage

62. Police-reported statistics usually collect information on all police-reported incidents from all police agencies. Though a comprehensive approach is taken, coverage of police-reported incidents is often less than complete with many jurisdictions not providing information or only limited information. In contrast, victim surveys may cover a sample of the population, but if well-designed this sample should be representative of the whole population and therefore allowing reasonable estimates to be calculated. Although police statistics and victim surveys cover the entire geographic area of the nation, victim surveys are not generally representative of the national population. For example, victim surveys do not include in sample very young children. Or victim surveys may exclude persons residing in institutions such as prisons, hospitals, care centers or military barracks. And depending on the mode of surveying, victim surveys may exclude from the sample individuals or households without land-line telephones or those who for various reasons may not be responsive to face-to-face contact.

63. Police statistics are typically collected and produced on an annual basis and include most types of criminal offenses, although not necessarily all of the less serious crimes. While some victim surveys are conducted continuously through the year (e.g., the United States' National Crime Victimization Survey), many victim surveys operate on a repetitive cycle basis, for example, conducted every two or three years and do not measure all types of crime. By their very nature, surveys of the general population do not collect information on homicides or crimes committed against businesses. In some instances, crimes against businesses are covered in specialized surveys of businesses. Moreover, information on consensual or "victimless" crime (i.e., drug use, prostitution, gambling), and corporate or white-collar crime, is typically not collected through victimization surveys, although it is feasible to collect indicators of such activity in this way.

Unfounded incidents

64. It is commonly assumed that all events that come to the attention of the police will be recorded in official crime statistics, but this is not always the case. Police exercise discretion in the formal recognition and recording of a crime. In some cases, it is discovered that no "crime" actually took place, and thus the original report is deemed "unfounded," is pursued no further, and is not included in the total number of "actual" offenses. Victimization surveys, on the other hand, typically use a set of screening questions to ascertain whether incidents fall within scope of the survey's crimes of interest. Nevertheless, the final count in a victim survey may include a number of victimizations that had been counted as having been reported to the police in a victimization survey that may be otherwise deemed "unfounded" according to

police classification rules. Some police statistics may also be revised after the first publication to account for reclassified cases.

Sources of error

65. It is important to recognize that all surveys are subject to error. Survey errors can be divided into two types: sampling and non-sampling errors. Because victim surveys are sample surveys, the data are subject to sampling error. Sampling errors are the difference between an estimate derived from a sample survey and the result that would have been obtained if the entire population had been surveyed. All other types of errors, such as coverage, response, processing and non-response errors, are non-sampling errors. While the size of the sampling error can be estimated, non-sampling errors are more difficult to identify and quantify. One important type of non-sampling error is the respondent's ability to recall relevant events and report them accurately to the interviewer. Errors may arise because respondents are simply unaware of such events, are forgetful of incidents, are unwilling to report a crime to an interviewer because of embarrassment or shame (e.g., where the victim and offender are related), or are unable to correctly place the incidents in time, either moving them into or out of the reference period. Other sources of non-sampling error include mistakes introduced by interviewers, the misclassification of incidents, errors in the coding and processing of data, and biases arising from non-response. These can be minimized through careful training and supervision, but can never be entirely eliminated.

66. While the above sources of error tend to apply to victimization surveys, other factors can influence official police-reported crime statistics. For example, changes and biases in victim reporting behavior, changes in police reporting and recording practices, new legislation, processing errors, edit failures and non-responding police departments affect the accuracy of police-reported crime statistics.

Table: Differences between police reported data and victim reported surveys in Canada	
Police Reported Data (Unified Crime Reporting)	Victim reported survey (General Social Survey)
Data Collection Methods:	
Administrative police records	Personal reports from individual citizens
Comprehensive coverage	Sample survey
100% coverage of all police agencies	Sample of approximately 25,000 persons using random digit dialling sampling technique
Data submitted on paper or in machine-readable format	Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI);

National in scope	excludes households without telephones National, but collection in Yukon and Northwest Territories only began in the 2004 cycle.
Continuous historical file: 1962 onwards	Periodic survey: Quinquennial since 1988
All recorded criminal incidents regardless of victims' age	Target population: persons aged 15 and over, excluding full-time residents of institutions
Counts only those incidents reported to and recorded by police	Collects crimes reported and not reported to police
Scope and Definitions:	
Primary unit of count is the criminal incident	Primary unit of count is criminal victimization (at personal and household levels)
Nearly 100 crime categories	Eight crime categories
"Most Serious Offense" rule results in an undercount of less serious crimes	Statistics are usually reported on a "most serious offense" basis, but counts for every crime type are possible, depending on statistical reliability.
Includes attempts	Includes attempts
Sources of Error:	
Reporting by the public	Sampling error
Processing error, edit failure, non-responding police department	Non-sampling error related to the following: coverage, respondent error (e.g., recall error), non-response, coding, edit and imputation, estimation
Police discretion, changes in policy and procedures	
Legislative change	

Comparing victim survey data and police-reported data

67. Joint publication of victimization and police-reported crime data with a clear statement of their appropriate uses can contribute towards informing the public about the full nature and extent of crime. Data from victimization surveys can be used to contextualize information from police-reported surveys. Alternatively, the two data sources can be used to test alternative hypotheses related to criminal activity. Neither

administrative statistics nor victimization surveys alone can provide comprehensive information about crime.

68. Because of the various conceptual and methodological differences between survey data and police-reported data outlined above, several “global” adjustments are required before making comparisons between the two sources of data. These adjustments include the following:

- Crimes measured in a victim survey that respondents said were not reported to the police should be excluded from the victim survey comparator.
- For comparison purposes, police or victim survey data should exclude any geographic areas that are not included in the other. Only those geographic areas common to both data collection efforts should remain.
- Police reports of “unfounded” incidents or incidents that are not considered actual incidents of crime that come to police attention should be excluded from official police statistics.
- Police data should be adjusted to account for any populations that are excluded from the victim survey (i.e. children under the age of 15)
- Only those crime incident types common to both sets of data should be included in the comparative analysis. For example, when comparing the two national crime sources in the United States, homicide should be removed from Uniform Crime Reporting Program (police data), and simple assault should be removed from National Crime Victimization Survey data.

69. An example of the process used by Canada to achieve comparability is found in Appendix A of Ogrodnik, L. & Trainor, C. (1997).

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Ch. II.E. Publication and dissemination

Scope and purpose

70. Publication and dissemination occurs when information obtained through a statistical activity is released to users. The form of the actual publication and dissemination can vary depending on resources and demand. Users may access the information via bespoke websites, internet-only publications, paper publications, microfiche, microdata file, telephone, facsimile, public speech and/or a presentation, as well as a radio and/or television interview. Often, multiple dissemination formats supporting one another are used for one publication. Publication should aim to cater for the variety of user needs, whether these are non-statisticians who may only require a high-level summary or professional analysts or academics who wish to carry out their own analyses of the results or re-interpret the raw data. Regardless of the format selected, the goal is to make the publication easily accessible to the user.

71. Despite the fact that dissemination occurs when information is released to users, the end statistical product must be taken into consideration at the beginning of survey development by considering the range of user needs and outlining clear objectives.

72. Objectives are the purposes for which information is required, stated within the context of the program, research problem or hypotheses that gave rise to the need for information. Users narrow down and specify more precisely the information needs, for example, by describing what decisions may be made based on the information collected and how such information will support these decisions. A statement of objectives provides subsequent users who have different objectives with the means to assess the extent to which a product from a statistical activity may meet their own needs. It is also an important means of communicating to (potential) users what they can expect from the products of a statistical activity and the degree to which they will want to be careful when their use of the data extends beyond that which the activity was designed to support.

73. A victimization survey's purpose should be communicated to stakeholders who participate in consultations to develop or change survey content, as well as to survey respondents. In Canada, the purpose of the victimization survey is that it is the only national survey to collect data on criminal victimization. The police only have information on crimes that are reported to them. Not all crimes are reported for a variety of reasons. The victimization survey collects information on all crime, regardless of whether or not it was reported to the police. At the same time, we can learn why some people chose not to report a crime to the police. This survey also collects much more detail about the crime incident and the impact of the crime on the victim than do police data.

74. It also becomes important to explain how the data will be used. In the case of victimization surveys, data from these are used to develop and evaluate programs and services to prevent and respond to crime and to support victims. Police departments, all levels of government, victim and social service agencies, community groups and researchers in universities use this information: to study perceptions of the level of crime around them and their attitudes toward the criminal justice system; to profile victims of crimes; and to study characteristics of criminal incidents.

75. To plan the survey in advance by sharing the objectives of the survey and the uses of the data often serves to legitimize the survey and ensure its impartiality and objectivity. Broadly speaking a survey should be able to develop, produce and disseminate reliable and objective information that satisfies and anticipates critical needs and sheds light on major public policy issues.

76. Accessibility of information refers to the ease with which users can learn of its existence, locate it, and import it into their own working environment. The dissemination objective should be to maximize the use of the information produced while ensuring that dissemination costs do not reduce the Agency's ability to collect and process data in the first place.

77. In determining what information products and services to offer, survey planners must liaise with clients, research and take careful account of client demands and monitor client feedback on the content and medium of their products.

78. Data accessibility can also be limited by language, especially for non-English countries since the availability of information is restricted to the country of origin's official language(s).

79. Major information releases should have release dates announced well in advance. This not only helps users plan, but it also provides internal discipline and, importantly, undermines any potential effort by interested parties to influence or delay any particular release for their benefit. The achievement of planned release dates should be monitored as a timeliness performance measure. Changes in planned release dates should also be monitored over longer periods.

80. These approaches are in line with the United Nations Fundamental principle of relevance, impartiality and equal access that states "...impartiality in compilation and release is achieved through the process being free from political interference in both the methodology adopted and what is released and when. In many countries this independence is enshrined in statistics legislation. Statisticians need to act professionally by the sound application of statistical methods, by openness about concepts, sources and methods used, and by avoiding partisan commentary.... to make information widely known and available on an impartial basis requires dissemination and marketing activities (including dealing with the media) to provide information in the form required by users, and release policies which provide equal opportunity of access. Sound statistical principles need to be followed with the presentation of statistics so that they are easy to understand and impartially reported".

Principles

81. There are several principles that should be kept in mind during publication and dissemination. An overarching principle is that this process must consider the users' needs. Needs are met by following particular guidelines to ensure that the information delivered to users is accurate, complete, accessible, appropriately priced, clear, user-friendly, timely and meets confidentiality requirements. Second, the method of dissemination should exploit technological advances allowing users access to the statistical information in a cost effective and efficient way. Third, dissemination should consider market expectations. These expectations are based on phenomenon such as feedback from previous clients, product testing or marketing activities.

Guidelines

82. Adhering to several guidelines will help ensure that these principles outlined above are achieved. First, it is important that the information disseminated be accurate. Obviously, preparation of data to be released from a statistical activity's source file involves many steps.

Released data must be verified to ensure that they are consistent with the source data. In the case of regrouped data or derived variables this means that one should be able to reproduce the same results from the source data. Second, the published and disseminated product should be relevant, timely, interpretable and coherent. And third, all rules concerning confidentiality of the data are followed. This includes suppressing data that may identify individual respondents. Failure to do so is unethical and can cause harm to any respondent inadvertently identified.

83. Before the formal dissemination, it is important to test the release of an electronic product. Doing so will reveal any problems in the release system which can be remedied prior to the actual release data. Once all problems are corrected, the actual release of the document should be smooth.

84. Provide measures of accuracy and data quality or, where possible, tools for their calculation (e.g., coefficient of variation, look-up tables, sampling variance programs) along with the disseminated product. Measures will include both the sample design, sample size and response rates achieved as well as indications of the confidence intervals around survey estimates and whether particular differences or comparisons are statistically significant. This information should also include, when possible, providing a telephone number and/or an e-mail address of a contact person who is knowledgeable about the survey for each release of information. This helps to ensure the proper use of the data when users have questions concerning concepts, definitions, approaches and methodologies.

85. All disseminated publications should provide documentation and metadata (information about the data source). This information should contain (as appropriate) descriptions of the data quality and the methodology used, including both sampling strategy, survey design and the questionnaire used, or details on how these can be obtained. Providing this information will help build trust in the findings and minimize the risk that users will reach inaccurate or inappropriate conclusions.

86. Finally, it is advisable that the disseminating agency disseminate items that are consistent in style and formatting to previously released data from the survey. Doing so maximizes the use and utility of research products.

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Ch. II.F. Elements for international comparability: Draft list of key topics

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