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VICTIM SURVEYS CONDUCTED BY NATIONAL STATISTICAL OFFICES Australian Survey Experience

Submitted by Australian Bureau of Statistics*

I. BACKGROUND

1. National crime and safety information is used to inform government policies and objectives in two broad areas -community safety and the effective and efficient utilisation of public expenditures. Crime and justice objectives are closely linked with the general well-being of the community and programs are put in place to reduce the risks and impacts of victimisation and the effective apprehension and rehabilitation of offenders.

- 2. In this paper four surveys designed to meet these needs are discussed:
 - the ABS National Crime and Safety Survey (NCSS) which has been conducted in its current form since 1993

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- the ABS Personal Safety Survey (PSS) to be conducted in 2005. The PSS is based on the 1996 Women's Safety Survey (WSS) but extended to include a male component for the 2005 collection
- the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) in 2000
- the ABS General Social Survey (GSS) which was conducted in 2002.

3. Assault is measured in all of these surveys and analysis has shown a significant difference in results for this measure. This difference has been examined in detail in the ABS information paper: Measuring Crime Victimisation, Australia: The Impact of Different Collection Methodologies (ABS 4522.0.55.001) and this paper draws information and analysis from that document.

II. SURVEY OBJECTIVES

4. The NCSS provides a picture of crime trends (both reported to police and unreported) and the risk of becoming a victim of certain types of crime, and generally complements trends in crime recorded by police which can be influenced by changes in the willingness of people to report crime and police priorities and practices. The most significant use of NCSS requires a consistent measure of the prevalence rate of selected personal and household crimes, to support comparisons over time. The NCSS data also provides an indication of the levels of unreported crime and provides a measure of people's subjective perceptions of their own safety which is an important factor in any assessment of social well-being.

5. A list of the objectives of the NCSS is shown below:

a. To measure prevalence of the crimes of break and enter, robbery, assault, motor vehicle theft, and sexual assault.

b. To measure changes in crime rates and feelings of safety over time.

c. To compare results between jurisdictions.

d. To compare relevant survey estimates with recorded police crime statistics.

e. To obtain information on reporting (to police) behaviour.

f. To obtain information on victim and offence characteristics.

g. To identify the characteristics of high and low risk subgroups, and factors which affect risk of victimisation.

6. The PSS will provide much-needed data about the experiences of female and male victims and their outcomes that are not available in great detail in other collections, such as the NCSS. The 2005 survey will also enable analysis of the relative changes in women's personal safety over time, based on the comprehensive national benchmark provided by the WSS of 1996.

7. The objectives of the PSS are to:

a. provide information on people's safety at home and in the community and, in particular, on the nature and extent of violence against women and men in Australia.

b. inform public debate about violence against women and men.c. inform the further development and evaluation of policies and programs aimed at prevention and responses to violence.

8. The International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) is an international survey. It was conducted in 1989,1992,1996 and 2000 across a selection of industrialised and developing countries spanning all continents. The survey was conducted to monitor crime and perceptions of crime and criminal justice internationally in a standardised way, and to provide comparative information on the patterns, contours and effects of victimisation in both developed countries and the rest of the world.

9. The ABS General Social Survey (GSS) is a new multi-topic survey conducted for the first time in 2002 and expected to be repeated four-yearly. The survey was conducted to give social researchers the ability to cross-classify a broad range of social characteristics relating to the same person at a single point in time.

III. COMPARISON OF MEASURES OF ASSAULT

10. The following table presents data for the topic of assault which was collected in the surveys. It presents prevalence rates for a comparable scope of females aged 18 years and over.

Table 1: ASSAULT PREVALANCE RATES, Adjusted only for comparable respondent group (females aged 18 years and older)

Offence category	2002 NCSS	1996 WSS (a)	2000 ICVS	2002 GSS
Total population	7,309,200	6,880,500	6,790,319	7,327,000
(number)				
Assault victims	294,200	404,400	627,635	528,000
(number				
Assault victims	4.0%	5.9%	9.2%	7.2%
(prevalence)				
95% confidence	(3.7, 4.3)	(5.3, 6.5)	(7.8, 10.6)	(6.5, 7.9)
intervals (b)				

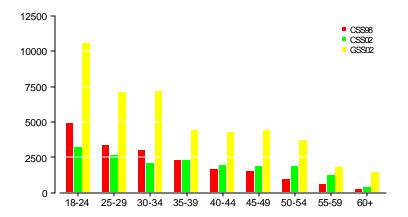
a) Includes all females who experienced an incident involving physical violence by either a male or female perpetrator.

(b) Confidence intervals used available RSEs which were based on full population of persons aged 16 years and over. Therefore, confidence intervals will be these figures or greater.

11. When adjusted to present results for similar concepts, the assault rates for the surveys are significantly different, except for GSS and ICVS. It should be noted that assault rates for NCSS 2002 were not statistically significantly different compared to those for NCSS 1998.

12. The NCSS and GSS collected common demographic data and an analysis was undertaken on the basis of these characteristics to determine if there were any

differences in sub-groups. There were no significant differences. As an example the following graphic depicts the spread of assault victimisation by age groups for both surveys:

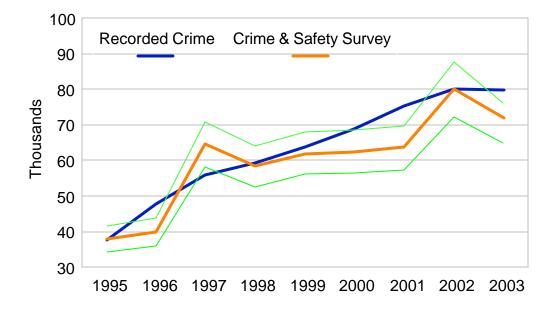


Graph 1: Use Physical Force or Violence against you (per 100,000)

13. In general the GSS and NCSS show that the victimisation rate for assault decreases as age increases. The GSS recorded consistently higher rates across all age groups and other breakdowns.

14. Another means of comparing results is to compare crime victimisation data from surveys and administrative sources, the following graph illustrates one such comparison :

Graph 2: Assaults Reported to Police, New South Wales (NSW)



15. The graph highlights the relationship over time between assaults reported in the Crime and Safety survey (NCSS is conducted annually in NSW) as 'reported to police' and crime victims recorded by NSW police.

16. While differences were observed in the rates of assault across different surveys, as these examples show, similar overall trends were observed, and the results were comparable with administrative data reported to police. A number of factors contributed to the differences in results. There were differences in the concepts measured in different surveys, as well as different survey designs and methodologies.

IV. DIFFERENCES IN SURVEY METHODOLOGIES

17. The following sections discuss the various elements of survey methodology and the differences. The table below summarises the impacts on assault victimisation rates of the various elements :

Table 2: Summary of Methodological Elements and Impacts

Methodological element	Assault victimization rates	
Scope of population sampled	Expected to impact: NCSS is persons aged 15 years or over; ICVS is persons aged 16 years or over; GSS is persons aged 18 years or over; and WSS is females aged 18 years or over.	
	When the scope was made comparable (females aged 18 years or over) there were still significant differences in results.	
Sample size and/or population variability	At the national level RSEs were comparable and all less than 25%.	
Response rates	There may be some non-response bias as response rates differed between all four surveys; however this is unable to be quantified.	
Respondent Errors	There may be some response errors between surveys, for example the WSS was the only survey designed for one-on-one interviews.	
Sampling Errors	All results weighted to represent population and therefore no impact on results.	
Question wording	Expected to impact but not quantifiable.	
Mode of survey	Expected to impact but not quantifiable: GSS and WSS were face-to-face, NCSS was a self administered questionnaire and the ICVS was a telephone interview.	
Survey context	Expected to impact but not quantifiable.	

Scope and Coverage

Inclusions are detailed in the above table.

Exclusions

The following persons are specifically excluded from the NCSS, WSS/PSS and GSS :

- .members of non-Australian defence forces (and their dependants) stationed in Australia
- .certain diplomatic personnel of overseas governments, customarily excluded from censuses and surveys
- .overseas residents in Australia
- .residents of special dwellings, such as hospitals, retirement villages, refuges, prisons, etc.

In addition, the NCSS also excludes members of the permanent defence forces.

18. For the ICVS, where persons selected as respondents were absent for the duration of the survey period, were incapable of responding, deaf, suffered from an illness or disability or were too old, another person in the household was selected.

Sample design and response rates

19. There are a number of differences in the design of these surveys which are due to differences in the aims and content of the surveys, the level of disaggregation and accuracy nee ded for analysis, and the costs and operational constraints of conducting the survey.

20. The proportion of non-respondents for the surveys under discussion ranged from 9% for the GSS, 22% and 24% for the WSS and NCSS respectively, through to 43% for the ICVS. Therefore, greater impact due to non-response bias is expected from the ICVS than the NCSS or WSS, and GSS is expected to have the least impact due to non-response bias.

NCSS

21. The NCSS is a regular survey (run in 1983, 1993, 1998 and 2002 to date) and expected to be conducted three-yearly in future. In 1983 the NCSS was completed by personal interviews. Since 1993 the NCSS has been a mail-back collection conducted as a supplementary survey to the ABS monthly Labour Force Survey. All persons aged 15 years and over within selected households are in the scope of the survey, with the exception of a separate module on sexual assault which is only enumerated for persons aged 18 years or over (1993 and 1998 was female only).

22. The NCSS is a supplement to the ABS Labour Force Survey. The NCSS includes private dwellings and excludes sparsely settled areas. A random sample of households is selected using a multistage, area based, sample design. All persons aged 15 years and over in the selected household are selected as respondents.

23. The NCSS 2002 was fully completed by 41,200 persons aged 15 years or over, achieving a response rate of 76%. The 24% of non-responses represented cases where potential respondents refused to participate in the survey, failed to mailback their survey form, or mailed back the form with a significant amount of missing data.

WSS/PSS

24. The Women's Safety Survey (WSS) was conducted by the ABS in 1996 and a repeat is planned for 2005 but with the coverage extended to include men as well as women. This survey will be known as the Personal Safety Survey (PSS). The WSS /PSS is an interviewer based survey in which one respondent, randomly selected per household and aged 18 years or over, is asked a series of questions by an ABS interviewer regarding safety in the home and the community .The majority of interviews are conducted face-to-face, however telephone interviews are available for respondents who do not wish to proceed with a face-to-face interview. The WSS /PSS covers private dwellings in urban and rural areas and excludes sparsely populated areas. Specific training and support is provided for interviewers, and therefore the size of the sample selected in rural and remote areas has been reduced due to interviewer costs. A random sample of households using an ARA selection methodology applied to men and women who are usual residents of the household.

25. The WSS was fully completed by 6,333 women aged 18 years or over, achieving a response rate of 78%. Full refusals accounted for 13% of the sample (1,038). A further 7% of the sample (579) were either unable to be contacted or unable to be interviewed due to language difficulties, death or illness. The remaining 2% of non-respondents were made up of those women who discontinued with the survey part way through. The effective sample size for PSS 2005 will be 12,700 women and 5,000 men.

ICVS

26. The ICVS is a telephone based survey (in Australia and most other countries) in which one respondent, randomly selected per household and aged 16 years and over, is asked a series of questions by an interviewer. The ICVS is a telephone survey using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CAI).

27. The ICVS was fully completed by 3,031 persons aged 16 years or over, achieving a response rate of 57% (as a proportion of eligible telephone numbers). However, it should be noted that the sampling was conducted in two stages. The first stage collected data from 2,005 persons aged 16 years or over, whilst the second stage consisted of an additional sample of 1,026 persons aged 65 years or over. The purpose of the older sample was to provide a large enough sample of older Australians to examine crime victimisation among this group. However, available data relates to the full sample of 3,031 respondents. Non-responses represented refusals, terminations, appointments not met and calls terminated due to language problems. There was no follow-up in this survey, and phone calls resulting in no replies or engaged numbers were considered ineligible contacts.

GSS

28. The GSS is an interviewer based survey in which one respondent, randomly selected per household and aged 18 years or over, is asked a series of questions by an ABS interviewer for each area of social concern. For the crime and safety topic the GSS questions asked about assault, break and enter and feelings of safety. The GSS involved a face-to-face personal interview using Computer Assisted Interviewing. Interviewers were required to make a number of attempts to contact a household and leave call-back cards before recording a non-response or non-contact. Interviewers were predominately female (around 90%).

The GSS was fully completed by 15,510 persons aged 18 years or over, achieving a response rate of 91 %. Follow-up was conducted by telephone (for interviews with less than three missing responses) or in person (for more than three missing responses).

Respondent Error

29.

30. Errors made may arise through ambiguous or misleading questions, inadequate or inconsistent definitions of terms used, by the complexity of questionnaire sequence guides causing some questions to be missed, by the use of long recall periods, or by respondent behaviors to particular types of questions or situations.

31. Respondent error may also occur due to respondents answering incorrectly to protect their personal integrity, their personal safety or to protect another person. For example, respondents may not have reported incidents they experienced, particularly if the perpetrator was somebody close to them, such as a partner or family-member. The WSS/PSS attempts to minimize this effect by conducting interviews alone with respondents. The NCSS involves leaving questionnaires to be mailed back, providing the possibility of respondents completing forms in private or in the presence of other persons, or even for a single member of the household to complete the NCSS on behalf of other in-scope respondents. The GSS conducted personal interviews with respondents, although there was no requirement for respondents to be interviewed alone and it is unknown what proportion of respondents were interviewed in the presence of a third party .The ICVS is a telephone based survey with no requirement for the respondents to be alone so, similar to the GSS and NCSS, it is unknown whether another person was present when the respondent completed the interview.

32. All surveys ask respondents to recall their experiences of victimization. An important element of this recall is the time period, the ABS surveys ask about experiences in the previous 12 months prior to interview (the WSS/PSS also asks about experiences in the last five years) data can be compared on this basis. The ICVS asked about experiences in 2000,1999 and the last five years respectively, and for publication purposes used the 1999 recall period. Therefore the recall period used for output of results is inconsistent between the ABS surveys and the ICVS, with the ABS surveys using a 0-12 month recall period and the ICVS using a 3-15 month recall period.

Sampling Error

33. Sampling error occurs in sample surveys because a sample, rather than the entire population, is surveyed. Various factors that can influence the size of the sampling error include sample design, sample size and population variability. The extent of this variability can be determined by calculating the relative standard error (RSE) of the estimates, which expresses the standard error of the estimate as a percentage of the estimate's value. The standard error is a measure of the variation among the estimates from all possible samples, and thus a measure of the precision with which an estimate from a particular sample approximates the average results of all possible samples. At the national level, RSEs for the assault victimization rates from all of the surveys was less than 25%.

Question Wording

34. Each of the surveys used a different introductory statement and different questionnaire format. NCSS

35. The NCSS is introduced as a crime and safety survey using the following statement:

"The purpose of this survey is to collect information about the perceived level of crime in the community, the incidence of selected crimes and whether they are reported to the police. This information will help with crime prevention and provide a basis for community education programs."

36. The survey collects data on safety followed by data on crime. Feelings of safety are measured at the beginning of the survey straight after a question relating to perceived neighborhood problems. The second part of the survey relates to experiences of crime and the reporting of incidents.

37. Three paper forms were used in past surveys to collect crime victimization information and the completion of the relevant form/s average 8 minutes per person (the average for victims only was 13 minutes).

• .Form A was completed by one member of the household and collects information on household crimes and personal crimes. These crimes are in the following order: break and enter, attempted break and enter, motor vehicle theft, robbery and assault.

• .Form B was completed by all other in scope members of the household (one .form per person) and collects information on personal crimes only (i.e. robbery followed by assault).

• .Form C was completed by all in-scope members of the household age 18 years or over (one form per person) and collects information on sexual assault only. Consideration is being given to merging Form C with Forms A and B for NCSS 2005.

WSS/PSS

38. The WSS was introduced to respondents as being about public safety using the following statement:

"The first questions in the survey ask about topics such as education and employment and there are some initial questions about personal safety issues such as 'walking alone in your local area at night'. The remaining questions in the survey ask about any experiences of aggressive or threatening behavior."

The WSS interviews averaged 50 minutes per household and collected information in two parts (it is expected that the PSS 2005 will follow a similar format):

• .A household form completed by any responsible adult within the household to collect basic demographic data. This allowed an in-scope respondent to be selected

• .A personal questionnaire for a selected in-scope respondent which included (in order) demographics, fear of violence and victimization (sexual violence followed by physical violence).

39. Since the WSS, which was conducted using pen and paper, the ABS has introduced computer assisted interviewing (CAI) and the PSS 2005 survey questionnaire will be developed using this methodology .This will remove the need for interviewers to navigate the complex sequence guides found in the WSS questionnaire.

ICVS

40. The ICVS is introduced by an interviewer as follows:

"Today we are conducting an important survey on behalf of the Australian Institute of Criminology, a federal government agency that conducts research into crime, its prevention and control. It is part of an international research project. Information obtained from the study will assist law enforcement agencies to better prevent crime in the future."

The ICVS interviews averaged 19 minutes per household.

GSS

41. The GSS was introduced to respondents as being a general social survey using the following introductory statement:

"This survey will collect important information on a number of aspects of life such as housing, education, work, health, family and community. This information is needed so that the living conditions, life styles and well being of Australians can be measured. Such information will help to improve the development, administration and evaluation of social policies, services and programs."

42. The GSS collected information in three parts and included information on selected topics such as crime and safety .The survey averaged 45 minutes per household. The crime and safety questions were about half way through the survey, in the eighth question module. Safety questions preceded the crime questions.

Mode Effects

43. Mode effect refers to the impact of the survey delivery method on the response to the survey. Different survey modes include self -administered questionnaires (e.g. mailback questionnaires), telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews. Modes can also be different within surveys (e.g. a mailback questionnaire that involves follow-up via telephone interview), and these are often referred to as mixed-mode surveys.

44. The mode of the survey is likely to have some impact on survey results although it would not solely explain the differences.

45. Self administered questionnaires (SAQ), the method used for the NCSS, allows respondents to look ahead and go back to earlier items and may therefore reduce the impact of question order. The likely occurrence of this cannot be quantified at this stage. Personal face-to-face and telephone interviews in the WSS /PSS, ICVS and GSS do not allow respondents this opportunity .

46. The GSS used Computer Assisted Interviewing (CAI) as the means of data collection

use this technology.

47. The involvement of an interviewer helps maintain respondent motivation, therefore, for interviewer based surve ys like the WSS/PSS, GSS and ICVS this may assist in keeping respondents focused on providing satisfactory answers rather than trying to find a way to complete the questionnaire as quickly as possible (Fowler, 1993).

objective when computers are used to collect data (Tourangeau & Smith, 1996). The PSS will also

48. In the mail back NCSS, there is more information that is given to the respondent, such as the inclusion and exclusion boxes that provide information for the respondent on what types of events to include or exclude for the questions. Generally for all of the surveys the definition of what to include or exclude as 'use force or violence against you' is unclear for the assault-related questions. Furthermore, respondents may attempt to accumulate a common ground based on previous information thereby using this information to determine the context of subsequent questions (Clark & Schober 1992).

49. Self administered questionnaires (such as the NCSS) allow respondents to change their answers. For example, in order to make their responses consistent with the title, some respondents may decide to go back and change their responses after being asked 'Do you consider this to be a crime?'. The quantitative impact of this on the NCSS victimization rates is not known, though it is expected to be minimal.

50. The NCSS questionnaire includes a number of prompts for inclusions and exclusions for main questions. This is necessary in a SAQ as the respondent does not have the presence of an interviewer to assist them. These prompts were developed over a number of iterations to cover the key issues related to the question. The WSS/PSS, ICVS and GSS questions are asked of the respondent by the interviewer without prompting which is normal practice for an interviewer based survey. The interviewer will only assist the respondent if asked about inclusions or exclusions and interviewer instructions and training cater for these circumstances. Within the NCSS there is a specific exclusion of incidents involving name calling, swearing, etc. which did not involve a physical threat. In the other surveys this is only stated by the interviewer if the respondent specifically asked, therefore these survey respondents may adopt a wider definition of assault than in the NCSS.

51. A final difference between self-administered questionnaires and personal interviews involves whether the questions are read to the respondent {auditory} or by the respondent (visual). The personal interview questions are presented aloud for the WSS/PSS, ICVS and GSS. When the questions are only read aloud, the respondent has less control over the pace of the interview and may be prone to 'primacy' effects, favoring options presented early in the list of permissible answer categories over those presented toward the end (Tourangeau & Smith, 1996).

Context Effects

52. Context effects occur when the preceding questions influence responses to subsequent questions (directional) or when the order in which the questions are administered affects the

correlation between the target and the context questions. Context effects are difficult to predict because of their subjective nature, with the impact varying for different people.

53. The NCSS is designed to focus on a narrower concept of crime than the other surveys. The NCSS is introduced as a crime and safety survey and respondents are able to refer to the purpose of the survey at any time to give them a context or framework to answer the questions (i.e. they may assimilate or contrast new information with the purpose of the survey at any time because the NCSS is a SAQ). Furthermore, the NCSS states that its purpose is about crime prevention and forming a basis for community programs. Respondents may only report assaults which they believe meet this purpose.

54. The WSS/PSS, ICVS and GSS are interviewer based surveys and introduce a more general concept of assault. The WSS referred to 'experiences of aggressive or threatening behaviour'. WSS used specialised procedures to ensure that respondents felt safe and to encourage respondents to report all incidents of aggressive behaviour rather than narrowing this to only crime reported to police.

55. The questions asked prior to the questions under analysis (i.e. questions asked prior to those on assault victimization) can impact on the response. The NCSS asks questions regarding robbery prior to questions regarding assault. Any element of force or violence (assault) that is associated with theft is designed to be counted as part of robbery in this survey, and therefore should be excluded from the assault counts. The NCSS asks about sexual assault after assault. Editing of the NCSS data excludes any sexual assault data for females aged 18 years or over from the assault counts. The WSS /PSS asks about sexual assault, and therefore any assault that was in a sexual context is designed to be excluded from the assault counts. The GSS may include both sexual assault and assault assault associated with robbery in the assault victimization data.

56. Therefore, the assault victimization figures from the NCSS should not include sexual assault or assault associated with robbery, and the WSS/PSS assault victimization figures should not include any sexually related assault experiences but may include assault associated with robbery.

V. CONCLUSION

57. The results of crime surveys can vary on many different levels and for a number of valid reasons. This paper has presented comparisons of four surveys to illustrate the nature and extent of differences between them :

- .National Crime and Safety Survey (ABS, 2002)
- .Women's Safety Survey (ABS, 1996)/Personal Safety Survey (ABS 2005)
- .International Crime Victims Survey (Australian component (AIC, 2000)
- .General Social Survey (ABS, 2002)

58. Each collection is produced for a specific purpose, such as the measurement of crime and safety across states and territories over time (e.g. NCSS), and while similar are measured, differences in results are due to a number of different factors, which include:

- .sample design and selection
- .scope and coverage

- .questionnaire format and content
- .survey procedure (mode and context)
- .response rate.

59. Any comparative analysis of crime victimization surveys needs to consider differences across this range of factors. A standardization of one common factor, for example question wording alone may not produce comparable results.

60. The ABS is currently considering the most appropriate methodologies for its future crime surveys, with the aim of ensuring continued collection of quality crime victimization statistics.

VI. LIST OF REFERENCES

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