

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS FROM THE FIRST AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS SURVEY*

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During 1975 the Australian Bureau of Statistics conducted 18,694 interviews in randomly selected households throughout Australia to elicit information about whether respondents had been victims of crime during the previous 12 months. Earlier surveys by Wilson and Brown (1973) and Congalton and Najman (1974) pale into insignificance when compared with the monumental size of the sample in the Bureau of Statistics study.

While large victimization surveys undoubtedly provide more realistic estimates of crime rates than police statistics (except in the case of homicide), it would be foolish to gloss over the very considerable sources of error which inhere in victimization data. Both respondents and interviewers, no matter how well trained, can act upon quite idiosyncratic interpretations of what kind of behaviour constitutes a crime of a particular type. Even though the design of questions and the training of interviewers was geared to maximizing the correspondence between the legal definitions of crime categories and the likely social reconstruction of the categories which would take place within the interviews, it is difficult to overcome the discrepancy, for example, between lay typifications of what it means to be robbed and the legal definition of robbery. Quite apart from the innocent discrepancies between legal and lay conceptions of crime, it is likely that many respondents will have good reasons for wilfully concealing or exaggerating the extent of their victimization. For more trivial offences it is quite possible for the respondent to forget that they took place, and even for more serious offences it is likely that respondents will often forget whether or not the victimization took place during the previous 12 months.

In this paper we will present in terse summary form the main findings of the National Crime Victims Survey under two broad headings: "who are the victims", and "the nature of the offence". First, however, we must briefly sketch the methods used in the survey.

Methods

Sample

Dwellings for inclusion in the stratified multi-stage area sample were selected from all parts of Australia excluding the Northern Territory, rural regions, and locations with a population of less than 500 people. Of 10,500 dwelling sites

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originally selected, 9200 contained effective households, of which 8414 provided data for the survey. These households contained 18,694 persons aged 15 years and over, each of whom supplied some data. The remarkable household response rate of 91.5 % is only possible, of course, in a survey which has the legal authority of the Bureau of Statistics.

The Crimes

Interview data were gathered on all victimizations during the previous 12 months for 10 types of crime:

Break and enter: breaking into and entering a dwelling and then committing or intending to commit a crime in that dwelling.

Motor vehicle theft: stealing or illegally using a motor vehicle or using a motor vehicle without authorization.

Theft: stealing without threatening or using violence or force to any person or property.

Fraud, forgery, false pretences: all types of fraud, forgery, uttering (circulating any fraudulent document or money), falsification of records, false pretences and all offences involving false claims, deception, trickery, cheating or breaches of trust.

Rape and attempted rape: all rape, attempted rape and assault with intent to rape. Only females were asked about rape victimization.

Robbery: stealing which involves the threat or use of actual violence or force to a person or property.

Assault: unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting bodily injury.

Nuisance calls: Threats, abuses, indecent calls and other nuisance calls by telephone.

Peeping: Only females were asked if they had been spied upon by a "peeping Tom".

Indecent exposure: Only females were asked if a male had "indecently exposed" himself in front of them.

For all offences except motor vehicle theft an attempt counts equally with an actual offence. Thefts in connection with breaking and entering are only included in "break and enter".

Standard Error

With a sample of such magnitude problems of statistical inference loom less large than with most social science data. Nevertheless, with less common types of crime, marginals can become quite small. As a matter of policy the Bureau of Statistics will not make available raw data on the number of actual victimizations of each type within the sample. Instead we are provided with estimates weighted from the sample for the number of victimizations nationally. There can be no doubt that the Bureau's weighted national estimate is a superior statistic to the raw figure. The weighting procedure is such that raw figures from different geographical areas will be multiplied by different weights depending on the proportion of the population of the nation living in that area, and the response rate.

While the weighting procedure provides a superior statistic it does create some complexity for the social scientist who might be interested in calculating a conventional test of statistical significance. Tests of significance have not been

calculated for each comparison made in this paper. However, Table 1 provides the standard errors for survey estimates of the number of victimizations of each type.

TABLE 1
Approximate Standard Error Percent for Survey Estimates
of Numbers of Victimizations in Australia for 1975

	<i>Estimated number of victimizations</i>	<i>Standard error percent</i>
Break and enter	146500	8.5
Motor vehicle theft	62700	9.8
Robbery with violence	14200	18.6
Theft	609900	3.4
Fraud, forgery, false pretences	214100	8.6
Rape, attempted rape	7800	26.5
Nuisance calls	1612594	11.3
Peeping	127892	27.5
Indecent exposure	26366	15.1
Assault	191500	13.6

It can be seen from Table 1 that the survey estimate of the number of break and enter victimizations occurring in Australia during 1975 was 146,500. The approximate percent standard error on this estimate is 8.5%. This means that the standard error is 8.5% of 146,500; ie 12,500. Discounting non-sampling errors, there are therefore about two chances in three that the true number of break and enters in Australia during 1975 fell between 134,000 and 159,000; and about 19 chances in 20 that it fell between 121,500 and 171,500.

TABLE 2
Victimization Rates per 100,000 Population 15 and over by State

	<i>NSW and ACT</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>TAS</i>	<i>AUSTRALIA</i>
Break and enter	1693.6	1902.7	1452.6	1919.4	2189.2	1266.9	1768.8
Motor vehicle theft	943.0	644.2	626.3	540.6	784.7	669.3	757.0
Robbery with violence	247.1	130.6	105.0	72.4	333.5	69.1	170.9
Theft	7751.8	5695.6	5897.9	11639.4	8832.3	7792.5	7361.6
Fraud, forgery, and false pretences	3058.3	1780.3	2284.6	3342.6	3411.9	895.3	2584.2
Peeping	681.0	2172.6	594.7	4576.5	1955.0	289.5	1543.8
Indecent exposure	236.1	429.2	103.2	473.6	454.4	455.0	318.3
Rape, attempted rape	58.2	124.7	104.1	181.9	—	216.5	94.5
Nuisance calls	24826.7	17269.3	12616.1	17965.5	16449.6	16865.4	19465.6
Assault	2485.0	1297.3	2611.8	3077.2	3743.8	1840.3	2305.0

Who are the victims?

Which State has the Highest Victimization Rate?

Table 2 presents victimization rates per 100,000 non-rural population 15 and over by State. Western Australia experienced the highest rates for break and enter, robbery with violence, fraud, forgery, false pretences, and assault. New South Wales respondents reported the highest victimization rates for vehicle theft and nuisance calls, and South Australians for theft, peeping, indecent exposure and rape. The State by State breakdowns on rape should properly be ignored because of the high standard errors on these estimates. The lowest victimization rates were reported in Tasmania for four of the offence categories.

The surprisingly high survey estimates for crime rates in Western Australia were due entirely to the high rates reported in Perth. For all crime categories except theft and fraud, forgery, false pretences, victimization rates in Perth were at least twice as high as in the remainder of Western Australia. Standard error on capital city estimates is particularly low so one can have considerable confidence in such comparisons.

Vehicle theft is perhaps the most reliable of all crime categories for measurement purposes, so special emphasis should be placed on the vehicle theft trends. While New South Wales had the highest reported vehicle theft rate, New South Wales excluding Sydney had a lower car theft rate than the extra-metropolitan part of any other State. The high car theft rate in New South Wales was therefore due to an enormously high rate in Sydney (1248 per 100,000 persons) which was six times as high as the rate for the remainder of New South Wales. For all crime categories, rates were generally higher in State capitals than in areas outside the capitals (extra-metropolitan areas). Metropolitan — extra-metropolitan differences were least in Tasmania and South Australia. Intercity variations in crime rates is the subject of a separate paper by the authors entitled "Crime Victimization Rates in Australian Cities".

Sex of the Victim

It was generally the case that men were more likely than women to report that they had been victims of serious crimes. Table 3 shows that men have higher victimization rates for breaking and entering (largely because men were most likely to be nominated as the head of the household), vehicle theft, theft, fraud, forgery, false pretences, and assault. In the design of the schedule only women were eligible for rape, peeping and indecent exposure victimization. It was only on nuisance calls that the survey data showed a higher rate of victimization among women.

TABLE 3
Victimization Rates per 100,000 Population 15 and over by Sex

	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Break and enter	2851.9	715.3
Motor vehicle theft	1265.8	262.1
Robbery with violence	168.0	173.6
Theft	8854.8	5909.4
Fraud, forgery, and false pretences	4145.7	1065.4
Peeping	—	3045.4
Indecent exposure	—	627.9
Rape, attempted rape	—	186.4
Nuisance calls	10516.9	28170.7
Assault	3775.4	847.9

Age of the Victim

Table 4 presents victimization rates for different age groups. For most offence categories there is a curvilinear relationship between age and victimization, with the youngest and oldest groups having the lowest victimization rates. In the case of break and enter and motor vehicle theft this is obviously largely because the very young and very old are less likely to own cars or houses.

TABLE 4
Victimization Rates per 100,000 Population 15 and over by Age

	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 and over
Break and enter	155.1	2397.2	2164.8	2523.3	1778.6	1748.7	1409.1
Motor vehicle theft	418.7	1398.6	905.8	1262.5	865.1	436.4	55.1
Robbery with violence	77.2	534.3	54.1	163.1	159.8	160.5	97.8
Theft	6302.4	12603.2	11546.9	9148.9	6522.2	4427.3	2812.8
Fraud, forgery, and false pretences	860.8	3508.6	4818.3	4017.0	3217.6	1034.4	731.6
Peeping	1215.5	2562.9	932.9	1164.0	3713.3	1370.0	40.6
Indecent exposure	619.9	706.2	542.9	323.0	—	222.1	46.2
Rape, attempted rape	174.8	127.0	140.1	187.1	—	53.3	—
Nuisance calls	8612.0	18512.0	30671.3	27536.3	21634.7	19501.3	9246.7
Assault	3676.2	5792.4	1803.9	3205.0	759.9	1702.7	178.0

Indecent exposure and rape are the exceptions to this curvilinear pattern. Indecent exposure victimization is virtually a linear function of age. Old ladies are very unlikely to be victims of either indecent exposure or rape.

Social Class of the Victim

This question is the subject of a separate paper entitled "On Being Unemployed and Being a Victim of Crime" which shows among other things that the unemployed are more likely to be victims of crime than either high income or low income people who have jobs.

TABLE 5
Victimization Rates per 100,000 Population 15 and over by Marital Status

	<i>Never married</i>	<i>Now married</i>	<i>Widowed</i>	<i>Separated, Divorced</i>
Break and enter	1368.0	1661.4	1966.8	6162.3
Motor vehicle theft	880.5	771.8	72.6	1477.4
Robbery with violence	337.2	117.9	115.0	304.0
Theft	8598.6	7088.9	3752.7	15433.5
Fraud, forgery, and false pretences	1836.2	3011.5	338.9	5436.6
Peeping	1187.3	1312.1	2989.0	6542.5
Indecent exposure	747.8	203.6	—	480.4
Rape, attempted rape	133.0	64.4	53.1	323.9
Nuisance calls	7986.0	21348.4	1093.3	69206.8
Assault	4003.8	904.0	54.0	22109.3

Marital Status of the Victim

Table 5 demonstrates the quite remarkable extent to which people who were separated and divorced were likely on almost all crime categories to have greatly higher rates of victimization than people who were now married, never married, or widowed. The difference is most dramatic with respect to assault where separated and divorced people report an assault rate 24 times higher than that reported by people who were married at the time.

A further breakdown of this table by sex reveals that while for both men and women the separated and divorced respondents had higher victimization rates, the differences were more dramatic with respect to women. The assault rate, for example, was 47 times as high among the separated and divorced women as compared with married women.

Religion of the Victim

There were no consistent variations in victimization rates by the religion of the victim, apart from a tendency towards higher rates on some offences for respondents who reported having no religion. . . perhaps a consequence of insufficient prayer!

Education of the Victim

There were no consistent variations in victimization rates by the education standard which the victim had attained apart from a tendency for tertiary educated respondents to be more likely to be victims of break and enter, theft, and fraud, forgery, false pretences, and less likely to be victims of assault.

Country of Birth of the Victim

On all offences except break and enter and vehicle theft non-English speaking migrants reported lower victimization rates than respondents born in Australia or in an English speaking country. Even though native language interviewers were used wherever possible, one is led to expect that the migrant respondent might be confused by many of the questions and attach a very different meaning to them compared with native language speakers. For break and enter and vehicle theft non-English speaking migrants reported higher victimization rates.

Respondents born in Australia reported nearly identical rates to respondents born in other English speaking countries for all crimes except assault, where it was the latter who were more likely to be victims.

TABLE 6

Victimization Rates per 100,000 Population 15 and over by Residential Mobility

	<i>Residential Mobility</i>		
	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>
Break and enter	1515.0	1880.0	3482.0
Motor vehicle theft	545.0	1443.1	1444.0
Robbery with violence	136.5	308.1	276.6
Theft	6139.8	10760.5	12814.4
Fraud, forgery, and false pretences	2120.0	4928.8	3487.3
Peeping	1162.3	1668.5	3979.7
Indecent exposure	250.1	180.2	915.8
Rape, attempted rape	65.5	252.9	132.1
Nuisance calls	20186.5	22551.2	16424.4
Assault	2013.7	3116.1	3597.5

Residential Mobility of the Victim

A Bureau of Statistics composite variable was used to classify the respondent's residential mobility as high, medium or low, depending on how long he/she had lived at both the current and previous addresses. Table 6 shows that this variable was a good predictor of whether or not a person would be a victim of crime. For all crimes except indecent exposure and nuisance calls the respondents with the lowest residential mobility were those who were least likely to be victims of crime.

This probably reflects the fact that people who are long-standing residents of a neighbourhood are part of an established informal network of community controls against victimization. If a family is known in an area, people will look out for their house or their car while they are away and neighbours will keep a wary eye on strangers who come into the area and seem to pose a threat to the peace. As Jane Jacobs (1972: 41) has pointed out,

The first thing to understand is that the public peace — the sidewalk and street peace — of cities is not kept primarily by the police, necessary as police are. It is kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves, and enforced by the people themselves. In some city areas — older public housing projects and streets with very high population turnover are often conspicuous examples — the keeping of public sidewalk law and order is left almost entirely to the police and special guards. Such places are jungles. No number of police can enforce civilization where the normal, casual enforcement of it has broken down.

Satisfaction of Victim With Neighbourhood

For all 10 offences, respondents who indicated that they were generally not satisfied with living in their neighbourhood reported higher victimization rates, and in most cases these rates were higher by a factor of at least two: Table 7. It is possible to interpret this finding as consistent with the discussion in the last section, but a more parsimonious interpretation would be simply that people who are victims of crime while they are living in a particular neighbourhood become less satisfied with that neighbourhood as a direct result of their victimization.

TABLE 7

Victimization Rates per 100,000 Population 15 and over by Answers to the Question:
"Are you Generally Satisfied Living in your Neighbourhood?"

	<i>Satisfied with Neighbourhood</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Break and enter	1609.9	4083.1
Motor vehicle theft	766.5	1008.4
Robbery with violence	136.6	718.8
Theft	7254.3	13971.4
Fraud, forgery, and false pretences	2598.5	4937.4
Peeping	1592.5	3032.6
Indecent exposure	294.8	932.2
Rape, attempted rape	94.0	227.8
Nuisance calls	19639.9	36561.9
Assaults	2085.7	5353.8

Physical and Mental Health of the Victim

This is the subject of a separate paper by the authors entitled "The Mental Health of Victims of Crime" which shows that while physical health is not a good predictor of victimization rates, mental health, both self-rated and indexed by number of visits to a mental health professional, is a good predictor.

Firearms Ownership of the Victim

Owners of firearms reported higher victimization rates than non-owners for break and enter, motor vehicle theft, theft, fraud, forgery, false pretences, and assault. For all of these offences, owners of firearms who gave their reason for ownership as the "protection of self or household" evidenced higher rates of victimization than gun owners who gave other reasons for ownership.

The Nature of the Offence

For all of the tables in this section percentages have been calculated excluding the "don't know", "no answer" and "not applicable" categories. Because in many cases the number of respondents who did not know the answer to the question was considerable, the standard error on many of the following estimates is large, especially with respect to rape.

Time at Which Offence Occurred

Table 8 shows that robbery, motor vehicle theft and assault were offences which occurred overwhelmingly at night; while a more even distribution between day and night was evident with break and enter, theft, rape and nuisance calls. Nuisance calls was the only offence category for which more offences occurred during the day than at night.

TABLE 8

	Time at which Offence Occurred	
	<i>During the Day</i>	<i>During the Night</i>
	%	%
Break and enter	46	54
Motor vehicle theft	18	82
Assault	31	70
Robbery with violence	17	83
Theft	41	59
Rape, attempted rape	40	60
Nuisance calls	52	48

Location at Which Offence Occurred

From Table 9 it can be seen that while the majority of assaults and robberies occurred in public places, the majority of rapes and thefts occurred inside or near the home. Little confidence can be placed in the percentages for rape, however, because of high standard error.

TABLE 9

Location at which Offence Occurred

	<i>Inside or near own home</i>	<i>At work</i>	<i>Inside public area</i>	<i>Outside public area</i>	<i>In a motor vehicle</i>
	%	%	%	%	%
Assault	21	17	17	42	3
Robbery with violence	17	11	4	53	15
Theft	65	8	5	13	9
Rape, attempted rape	62	—	—	31	7

Number of Offenders

Table 10 indicates that where the number of offenders is known to the victim, it is motor vehicle theft and robbery which are most likely to be multiple offender crimes. Perhaps surprisingly, the percentage of offences which involved a single offender alone was highest (93%) in the case of rape. The standard error on this rape figure, however, is 31%.

TABLE 10

Number of Offenders

	<i>1 only</i>	<i>2 only</i>	<i>3 or more</i>
	%	%	%
Break and enter	59	30	11
Motor vehicle theft	26	42	32
Assault	50	21	29
Robbery with violence	30	45	25
Theft	55	27	18
Fraud, forgery and false pretences	83	13	4
Rape, attempted rape	93	7	—
Nuisance calls	90	6	3

Recognition of the Offender

Robbery is clearly the offence in the survey which is most likely to be perpetrated by a person who is a stranger to the victim. Table 11 Nuisance calls, motor vehicle theft, and break and enter are other offences which are highly likely to be perpetrated by strangers.

TABLE 11
Recognition of the Offender(s)

	<i>Knew at least one</i>	<i>All were strangers</i>
	%	%
Break and enter	38	62
Motor vehicle theft	32	68
Assault	48	52
Robbery with violence	16	84
Theft	56	44
Fraud, forgery and false pretences	69	31
Rape, attempted rape	57	43
Nuisance calls	21	79

Table 12 shows that it is with fraud, forgery, false pretences, rape and theft that the offender is most likely to be known to the victim; and robbery with violence and nuisance calls where the offender is least likely to be known. A family member or other relative is more likely to be the offender for assault victimizations than for any other type of offence.

TABLE 12
How Well the Offenders were Known to the Victim

	<i>Family member or other relative</i>	<i>Close friend</i>	<i>Acquaintance</i>	<i>Knew by sight only</i>	<i>Not known</i>
	%	%	%	%	%
Break and enter	3	2	24	8	63
Motor vehicle theft	3	9	15	5	68
Assault	21	4	12	11	55
Robbery with violence	6	—	10	—	84
Theft	1	10	32	13	44
Fraud, forgery, false pretences	4	6	49	10	31
Rape, attempted rape	—	17	40	—	43
Nuisance calls	5	1	10	5	79

Sex of the Offender

It is clear from Table 13 that the vast majority of victims were prey to a male criminal. The ratio of single male to single female offenders ranged upwards from a minimum of six to one in the case of theft and fraud, forgery, false pretences. It is particularly interesting that none of the respondents in the survey had been the victim of a female robber who acted on her own without the assistance of a male.

TABLE 13
Sex of Offender(s)

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Both male and female</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Break and enter	87	4	9
Motor vehicle theft	94	—	6
Assault	79	10	11
Robbery with violence	93	—	7
Theft	79	14	7
Fraud, forgery, false pretences	78	13	9
Nuisance calls	87	11	2

Conclusion

For most of the finding summarized in this article there is a considerable correspondence with the results of the American victim surveys sponsored by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (Gottfredson *et al*, 1978; Hindelang *et al*, 1978). A substantial degree of correspondence with the American findings also exists with respect to reportability rates and reasons for not reporting victimizations to the police. These topics are the subjects of two separate papers by the authors entitled "Victims of Crime and the Police" and "Crime Victimization and Reportability Rates: A Comparison of the US and Australia".

Where the Australian data does diverge from the American findings, however, is in the overall crime rate estimated from the victim survey. The last paper mentioned above shows how on all comparable offences except rape and motor vehicle theft the American rates are very much higher than the Australian rates. It may well be that the Australian crime problem is a miniature of the American crime problem, with the differences being in scale rather than content, and with the same kinds of predictors generally being useful in both cultural settings.

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