

Introduction

1.1 Background to the International Crime Victims Survey

The International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) is now the most far-reaching programme of fully standardised surveys looking at householders' experience of crime in different countries. This chapter starts by looking at the rationale for the ICVS, and how it has developed. It then explains the methodology of the surveys conducted in 2000 in the 17 industrialised countries with which this report deals. Along the way here, it assesses the technical limitations of the survey, arguing that these need to be set against the value of the information the ICVS has provided.

The ICVS was set up to serve three main aims – and they remain as pertinent now as when the project started.

- *To provide an alternative to police information on levels of crime.* Offences recorded by the police are problematic for comparing crime in different countries. First, victims report the vast majority of incidents the police know about, and any difference in the propensity of victims to report undermines comparisons of the amount of crime counted by the police in different countries. Secondly, there may well be differences in the amount of reported crime which is actually recorded by the police in different countries. Thirdly, official police statistics vary because of differences in legal definitions, recording practices and rules for classifying and counting offences. These limitations are well-established (see, e.g., Council of Europe (1999) for a recent illustration).
- *To harness crime survey methodology for comparative purposes.* Over the past 20 years a number of countries have developed 'crime' or 'victim' surveys to assess national or local crime problems. They ask representative samples of the general public about selected offences they have experienced recently, whether or not they reported what happened to the police. For the offences they cover, then, they provide a 'truer' picture of how many people are affected by crime than the more filtered count from police statistics. For comparative purposes, though, these independently organised surveys are of limited use. The number of countries with appropriate surveys is limited, and comparisons are difficult anyway because of differences in survey design and administration, the types of victimisation measured, how exactly victimisation is asked about, and many other factors. A crucial feature of the ICVS is the use of a fully *standardised* questionnaire, as well as carefully controlled data management and analysis procedures.

Moreover, as the intention was to repeat the ICVS over time, it promised additional information in trends in crime in different countries.

- *To extend information on who is most affected by crime.* By collecting social and demographic information on respondents who take part, the ICVS also aimed to assess how crime risks vary for different groups, in terms of age, income levels and so on. Police statistics, generally speaking, provide little in the way of documenting the characteristics of victims. Moreover, with its cross-national perspective, the ICVS allows us to see how far the determinants and consequences of victimisation are the same in different jurisdictions, or whether country differences are evident.

1.2 The ICVS to date

The ICVS has been organised by an International Working Group of criminologists with expertise in victim survey methodology. The group was set up in 1987.¹ Additional national co-ordinators in each country have been responsible for the conduct of fieldwork, and where necessary for ensuring a sound translation of the questionnaire. (A list of national co-ordinators is in Appendix 1, paragraph 1.) In the main, each industrialised country has met its own survey costs, with much of the administrative overheads borne by the Dutch Ministry of Justice. The technical management of most of the surveys in industrialised countries has been carried out by InterView-NSS, a Dutch survey company. They sub-contracted fieldwork to survey companies in the participating countries, maintaining responsibility for the questionnaire, sample selection and interview procedures. The data from the surveys have been integrated and processed by researchers at Leiden University.

There have now been four main rounds of the ICVS in industrialised countries. Table 1 shows which countries have participated.

- *The 1989 sweep.* The first round of the ICVS took place in 1989, giving a measure of crime in 1988 (since respondents are principally asked about their experiences in the year preceding the interview). It covered 15 industrialised countries. These were mainly in Western Europe, but also covered Japan, Australia,

1 The Working Group has changed somewhat over time. The initial Group comprised Jan van Dijk (overall coordinator) of the Dutch Ministry of Justice, Pat Mayhew (of the British Home Office), and Martin Killias (University of Lausanne). Since the second sweep, there were two additional members: Ugljesa Zvekic and Anna Alvazzi del Frate, both of the United Nations Interregional Criminal Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) in Rome. For the fourth (2000) sweep of the ICVS, Gerben Bruinsma and Paul Nieuwebeerta of the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Criminality and Law Enforcement (NSCR) in Leiden joined the Working Group. John van Kesteren of the Leiden University has been in effect a 'de facto' member of the Working Group for some time, having had responsibility for managing the ICVS data.

Table 1 National ICVS surveys in industrialised countries

	1989	1992	1996	2000
Australia	•	•		•
Austria			•	
Belgium	•	•		•
Canada	•	•	•	•
Catalonia (Spain)				•
Denmark				•
England & Wales	•	•	•	•
Finland	•	•	•	•
France	•		•	•
Germany (West)	•			
Italy		•		
Japan ¹	•	•		•
Netherlands	•	•	•	•
New Zealand		•		
Northern Ireland	•		•	•
Norway	•			
Poland ²		•	•	•
Portugal				•
Scotland	•		•	•
Spain	•			
Sweden		•	•	•
Switzerland	•		•	•
USA	•	•	•	•

1 Not all data are available for Japan.

2 Results for Poland were not reported in the report of the third ICVS in industrialised countries.

the USA and Canada. Key findings from the first sweep are reported in Van Dijk et al., 1990.

- *The 1992 sweep.* The second survey was in 1992 (measuring victimisation in 1991). Thirteen industrialised countries took part, including Czechoslovakia (see Van Dijk and Mayhew, 1992). At the same time, UNICRI (United Nations Interregional Criminal Justice Research Institute) in Rome started ICVS-compatible face-to-face surveys in non-industrialised countries. (For the most part, these surveys were at city level because elsewhere sampling frames were often inadequate, fieldwork was more difficult, and some of the victimisation questions (e.g., relating to car crime) less relevant.) UNICRI was keen to sensitise local governments to the dimensions and extent of crime in their urban areas,

especially as police data on crime was often poor.² (Key results are in Alvazzi del Frate et al., 1993, and Zvekic and Alvazzi del Frati, 1995.)

- *The 1996 sweep.* The third survey in industrialised countries was in 1996 (measuring victimisation in 1995). Twelve countries took part, eleven of them having taken part at least once before (see Mayhew and Van Dijk, 1997).³ In tandem, city surveys in other parts of the world expanded further (see, e.g., Alvazzi del Frate, 1998, Hatalak et al., 1998, and Zvekic, 1998).
- *The 2000 sweep.* The fourth round of surveys in industrialised countries was in 2000 (measuring victimisation in 1999). Seventeen countries took part, fourteen of them having taken part at least once before. Alongside, there was further development of city surveys in non-industrialised countries. Table 2 in Appendix 1 shows the countries in which city surveys have been carried out to date outside industrialised countries.

At the time of writing, then, the ICVS had been conducted over a period of 12 years in 24 industrialised countries, with more than one sweep in many of them. Over a slightly shorter time span, there have also been surveys in 46 cities elsewhere around the world. All told, there have been about 140 singular surveys of the ICVS around the world. These have involved interviews with over 200,000 respondents, of which 110,000 were interviewed in industrialised countries.

Outside the management of the Working Group, the ICVS questionnaire has also been used in several other countries. We estimate that about 10 to 15 countries have done 'ICVS-type' surveys over the years where the ICVS questionnaire was used – albeit with possible changes in sampling procedures, survey administration, and precise wording of the questions.⁴

1.3 The content of the ICVS

The ICVS is similar to most crime surveys of householders with respect to the crime it covers. It is confined to counting crimes against clearly identifiable individuals, excluding children. (Crime surveys cannot easily cover organisational victims, or victimless crimes such as drug abuse.) For the crimes it covers, the ICVS asks about incidents that by and large accord with legal definitions of offences. In essence, it accepts respondents' accounts of what happened – or at least the accounts they are prepared to give to interviewers. In this respect, it applies a broader definition of

2 Surveys in developing countries and East and Central Europe were mostly funded by the Dutch government, the UK Home Office, and the United Nations on an ad-hoc bases.

3 Malta also had a national surveys in 1996, although no results were presented in the main 1996 survey report (Mayhew and Van Dijk, 1997).

4 Some items of the ICVS questionnaire have also been included in the Eurobarometer in 1996, at the request of the European Commission's Secretary General (INRA, 1996).

crime than the police – who, if incidents are reported to them, are likely to filter out those which may not be felt to merit the attention of the criminal justice system, or meet legal or organisational demands for reasonable evidence.

Respondents are asked about eleven main forms of victimisation. Household crimes (such as burglary) are those which can be seen as affecting the household at large, and respondents report on all incidents known to them. For personal crimes, they report on what happened to them personally. Respondents are asked first about their experience of crime over the last five years. Those who mention an incident of any particular type are asked when it occurred: in the current year (2000), in the last year (in this case 1999), or before that. Those who reported incidents in 1999 were asked how many times it had occurred. All those who said they had been victimised over the five-year period were asked a number of follow-up questions about what happened – whether the police were notified for instance. These questions were posed in relation to the ‘last incident’ if there had been more than one victimisation of a particular type. A few other crime-related questions are also included, asked of all respondents. They cover for instance, concern about crime, attitudes to the police, and what respondents would recommend as a sentence for a recidivist burglar. An overview of the main topics covered in the 2000 ICVS is in Table 2. Because of the longitudinal aspect of the ICVS, changes to the questionnaire have been a minimum. The most important change to the questionnaire for industrialised countries are:

- In 2000, an additional ‘screener’ question was added for assaults and threats. Respondents who, at the first screener question, said they had not been victimised were asked again if they have been attacked or threatened by someone they know. Since these incidents can be identified, it is possible to compare data from 2000 to previous sweeps.
- A question about consumer fraud was added in 1992 to broaden the base of crimes counted.
- Respondents were asked about their experiences of ‘street level’ corruption in the 1996 and 2000 sweeps. This was mainly to set the experience of those in industrialised countries alongside countries elsewhere, where corruption at street level is a greater problem. (For consumer fraud and corruption, respondents were simply asked about their experiences in the last year; they were not asked how often it occurred.)

A summary of the ICVS questionnaires and any changes between them is given in Appendix 3. This also shows the 2000 questionnaire in full. The English versions of the 1989, 1992, 1996 and 2000 questionnaires are available on the internet:

<http://www.icvs.nscr.nl>.

Table 2 Overview of questions asked in the ICVS

Victimisation in last 5 years	When (last year)	How often (last year)	Where	Reported to the police?	Details of report ^a	Reported to others?	Victim support	Seriousness	Additional crime specific questions
<i>Household crimes</i>									
Theft of car	•	•	•	•				•	.b
Theft from car	•	•	•	•	•			•	
Car vandalism	•	•	•	•				•	
Motorcycle / moped theft	•	•	•	•				•	
Bicycle theft	•	•	•	•				•	
Burglary	•		•	•	•		•	•	.c
Attempted burglary	•		•	•				•	
<i>Personal crimes</i>									
Robbery	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	.d
Theft of personal property	•	•	•	•				•	.e
Sexual incidents	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	.f
Assaults / threats + second screener	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	.f
<p>a Details of reports to the police are: why did you report; why did you not report; were you satisfied with the way the police dealt with the matter; why were you not satisfied.</p> <p>b Was the car recovered</p> <p>c Was something stolen; value of property stolen; was something damaged; value of damage</p> <p>d Was anything stolen; number of offenders; whether offender known; whether weapons used; what weapon.</p> <p>e Whether pickpocketing</p> <p>f What happened; was it considered a crime; number of offenders; whether offenders known; who was offender; was weapon used; what weapon</p>									
<i>Other offences</i>									
Consumer fraud	Last year (no 5 year data)			Type of fraud	Reported to police, other reports				
Corruption	Last year (no 5 year data)			Who was corrupt	Reported to police, other reports				
<i>Items on police, prevention and protection</i>					<i>Attitudes towards crime</i>				
Do police do a good job in local area					Perceived likelihood of being burgled				
Are the police helpful					Feelings of safety outside after dark				
Recommended sentence for burglar, and length of prison detention					Feelings of safety at home after dark				
Firearm ownership, type of firearm and reason for ownership					Causes of juvenile crime				
Security measures against burglary									
<i>Personal and household information</i>									
Age	Income level								
Gender	Satisfaction with income								
Household size	Marital status								
Town size	Social (going out) behaviour								
Type of house									
Vehicle ownership									
Occupation									
Years of formal education									

Table 3 Overview of methodology of the 2000 ICVS in industrialised countries

	Sample size	Response rate	Method*	International co-ordination
Australia	2,005	58	CATI	NSCR – Leiden Univ
Belgium	2,402	56	CATI	Interview-NSS
Canada	2,078	57	CATI	Interview-NSS
Catalonia (Spain)	2,909	73	Telephone	NSCR – Leiden Univ
Denmark	3,007	66	CATI	Interview-NSS
England & Wales	1,947	57	CATI	Interview-NSS
Finland	1,783	77	CATI	NSCR – Leiden Univ
France	1,000	45	CATI	Interview-NSS
Japan	2,211	74	Face-to-face	NSCR – Leiden Univ
Netherlands	2,001	58	CATI	Interview-NSS
Northern Ireland	1,565	81	Face-to-face	Interview-NSS
Poland	5,276	78	Face-to face	NSCR – Leiden Univ
Portugal	2,000	56	CATI	Interview-NSS
Scotland	2,040	58	CATI	Interview-NSS
Sweden	2,000	66	CATI	Interview-NSS
Switzerland	4,234	65	CATI	NSCR – Leiden Univ
USA	1,000	60	CATI	Interview-NSS

* CATI is Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing.

1.4 The methodology of the ICVS 2000 in industrialised countries

Fieldwork

Fieldwork for the ICVS 2000 in eleven of the industrialised countries was organised by Interview-NSS, who sub-contracted interviewing work to survey organisations in each country albeit maintaining standardisation of the questionnaire and procedures. Fieldwork in the other six countries was organised by the national co-ordinators working closely with the University of Leiden to ensure standardisation. After fieldwork was completed, data from all surveys were checked by the University of Leiden, and merged into a single database.

Table 3 summarises how the 2000 ICVS was organised. It also shows sample sizes, the response rate, and mode of interview (there are further details below). Appendix 1 gives details of the national co-ordinators, and the agencies that provided funding.

Sampling procedure

In each country, a regionally well spread, random sample of households was taken. (In the case of countries using telephone interviews, this was by means of variants

of random dialling to landlines.) Within each household, one randomly selected respondent aged 16 or more was questioned.⁵

Sample sizes

To keep costs in check and encourage as full participation as possible, samples in all sweeps of the ICVS have been relatively modest by the standards of most national crime surveys. In the 17 surveys in industrialised countries in 2000, most had samples of 2,000 (see Table 3), although there were larger ones in Poland, Switzerland and Denmark, and smaller ones in the USA and France. The decision to accept relatively modest samples was carefully made. It was considered unrealistic to assume sufficient countries would participate if costs were too high (especially as some countries had their own national victimisation surveys). The value of the ICVS rests on the breadth of countries participating; this would have been considerably reduced if costs had been higher.

Modest sample sizes produce relatively large sampling error, but for straightforward comparisons of national risks, samples of 1,000 or more suffice to judge broad variations in levels of crime across country. (There is further discussion of statistical significance in Chapter 2.) Modest samples, however, restrict the scope for analysing issues about which a small proportion of the sample provides information.

Mode of interview

Most surveys in the 2000 ICVS were done by telephone. Interviewers used computers from which they read the questions and recorded answers – a procedure known as computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI).⁶ Telephone interviewing, and the CATI variant of it, has been increasingly used in victimisation surveys – for example, in Canada, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the USA, and England and Wales. For the ICVS, CATI was accepted as a sound technique for countries where telephone penetration is high. Cost is a major consideration. As important, though, is that CATI allows much tighter standardisation of questionnaire administration (see Killias, 1993).

In three countries, interviews were done face-to-face. In Poland and Northern Ireland, low telephone penetration was the reason for this. Face-to-face interviewing in Japan was chosen as the language is very visually oriented, and response cards offering choices of answer are particularly appropriate (Hamai, 2000).

5 Respondents were generally selected by the Troldahl-Carter method. No substitution of the selected respondent was allowed.

6 Up to five attempts on different times of the day were made to reach respondents. Those who made a 'soft refusal' were called back after about two weeks. Interviewers judged whether refusals were 'soft' or 'hard'.

One issue, for countries using telephone interviewing, is whether there is bias because non-telephone owners are omitted. At the time of the 2000 sweep, telephone penetration in the countries taking part was high. It was slightly lower in some countries at the time of the first ICVS. This allowed the possibility of bias both as regards counting victimisation and measuring attitudes over time. It is impossible to say for definite whether this was the case, but levels of telephone ownership in the 1989 ICVS did not relate to the experience of different crimes in any consistent way (Van Dijk et al., 1990). It is also the case that the characteristics of non-telephone owners (most of which will be related to income) may be more akin to those of respondents with whom it is harder to achieve a personal interview (cf. Aye Maung, 1995).

Another methodological issue is whether telephone interviews produce different results from face-to-face (personal) interviews. Methodological work has generally shown little difference in responses to telephone and face-to-face interviews (see Leeuw and Zouwen (1988) for a review of 28 studies). With respect to crime victimisation, Smith (1989) has argued that telephone interviews provide a higher degree of confidentiality and minimise interviewer effects for sensitive topics. The more general consensus is that the two modes produce similar results, as long as the same standards of fieldwork are applied.⁷

Response rates

Where telephone interviewing was used in the 2000 ICVS, the response rate was on average 66%. The lowest response was in France (45%), and the highest in Finland (77%). In the three countries where face-to-face interviews were done, responses rates were 81% (Northern Ireland), 78% (Poland), and 74% (Japan). Overall, the 2000 ICVS had a reasonably high response rate of 64%.⁸ Response rates in all four sweeps of the ICVS are in Table 1 in Appendix 1.

A methodological issue, then, is how far respondents who are successfully interviewed differ from those who refuse to co-operate, or who cannot be reached. A related issue is to what extent cross-national variability in response levels upsets comparability. The issues are not straightforward. First, good (or poor) response may simply reflect survey company performance, saying little about the nature of those who are (or not) interviewed in terms of crime risks. Second, response rates may also reflect the willingness of those in different countries to be interviewed by

7 Tests in the context of the ICVS have produced mixed results about the 'productivity' of telephone versus personal interviews, but they have not provided any overriding strong evidence that victimisation counts are affected by interview mode. It cannot entirely be discounted, however, that some differences in results across country reflect differences in the acceptability of being questioned by phone.

8 This is much higher than the average response rate for the first sweep in 1989 and similar to the response rates in 1992 and 1996. Furthermore, the differences between countries in response rates are somewhat smaller.

phone (or face-to-face). Again this may be of little relevance in terms of the characteristics of those who are or who are not interviewed.

Third, though, there is the possibility that when response is low, bias is introduced. The effect could be in two opposing ways depending on whether low response is due to high non-contact rates, or high refusals rates.

- Where low response is due to high rates of *non-contact*, people are omitted who may be more liable to victimisation because they are residentially more unstable, or simply away from home more. Victims therefore could be *under-represented*, with the effect that victimisation risks in countries where non-contact is high is understated. The ICVS does not, however, allow a good test of contact rates and measured victimisation, since the meaning of non-contact with random digit dialling is diverse. Studies outside the victimisation field, though, indicate that non-contacts to telephone surveys register higher on 'negative' social indicators such as ill-health (e.g., Groves and Lyberg, 1988). Sparks et al.'s (1977) London crime survey, too, found that those who had reported crimes to the police were more difficult to locate for interview than those who did not report a crime.
- Surveys with low response rates due to high rates of *refusals*, on the other hand, may simply pick up people 'with more to say' (refusers having 'less to say'). On this view, victims would be *over-represented*, with the effect that victimisation risks in countries where refusal rates are higher are overestimated relative to those where response is better. A challenge to this comes from a test made in the context of the 1996 British Crime Survey. In this, people who said they did not want to be interviewed were pressed by interviewers to give some very short answers about the extent of their victimisation over the last year. (Most agreed to do so.) Comparing their 'crude' victimisation rates with those of respondents who agreed to be interviewed showed no consistent difference (Lynn, 1997).

As a test with the ICVS, leaving aside the distinction between refusals and non-contact, overall response rates in 54 sweeps were correlated with overall victimisation rates. There was a very slight tendency for risks to be lower in surveys with higher response rates, but the result was statistically insignificant ($r=-0.19$; ns). It cannot be ruled out, though, that response effects work differently in different countries (such that a low response rate in one country influences the victimisation count in a way that does not occur in another). But the burden of the ICVS evidence is that countries with low response levels have neither inflated or deflated counts of victimisation relative to other countries.

Weighting

Results in this report are based on data which have been weighted to make the samples as representative as possible of national populations aged 16 or more in

terms of gender, regional population distribution, age, and household composition. The weighting procedures in the 2000 ICVS are the same as in previous sweeps. Details are in Appendix 1.

Response error

Crime surveys are prone to various response errors. For one, certain groups (e.g., the better educated) seem more adept at remembering and articulating incidents of victimisation. Second, and more important, respondents may forget to report less serious incidents, or they may 'telescope in' the more serious incidents which happened outside the period they are asked about – although in the ICVS, this telescoping effect should be reduced by asking about experience over the past five years. Third, some people may fail to realise an incident is relevant, or may be reticent to talk about some incidents, for instance sexual incidents, or those involving people they know. On balance, the ICVS will undercount crime for these reasons. It will certainly only measure crimes that respondents are prepared to reveal to interviewers.

There is no way of knowing whether response errors are constant across country. The tendency to forget more trivial incidents of crime may be relatively universal, as may 'forward telescoping' of more salient incidents. Some types of differential 'response productivity' may also be constant, at least within the industrialised world. However, whether respondents differ across countries in preparedness to talk to interviewers about victimisation is possibly more questionable. Cultural sensitivity may apply most to some forms of assaults, and to sexual incidents (Travis et al., 1995; Koss, 1996). It may also be that respondents in different countries have different cultural thresholds for defining certain behaviours as crime (cf. Bruinsma et al., 1992). For industrialised countries, one might optimistically contend that common cultural and legal backgrounds, and the globalisation of markets and mass media information, result in fairly universal definitions about most conventional crimes (e.g., Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). Certainly, the ICVS shows that victims in industrialised countries hold strikingly similar views about the relative seriousness of different offence types about which they are asked (see Van Dijk and Van Kesteren (1996), and the analysis in Chapter 2).

1.5 Outline of the report

This report presents an overview of the key findings of the 2000 ICVS in the 17 industrialised countries that took part. Reference is made to results from earlier sweeps, if available and where appropriate. Results from other industrialised countries not participating in the 2000 ICVS are generally omitted in discussion, but they are included in the tables in Appendix 4.

Chapter 2 presents rates of victimisation for the main offence categories, and for all offences together (the overall rate of victimisation). There is some discussion of how the general profile of crime in different countries differs, taking account of varying rates of victimisation for different offences. An assessment is also made of how the seriousness of victimisation differs, using victims' own ratings of seriousness. The chapter ends with trends over time in those countries that have participated before.

Chapter 3 looks at how victimisation varies for different groups – e.g., those in larger conurbations as against smaller ones, and for younger respondents as against older ones. The picture is presented for all countries combined.

Chapter 4 looks at reporting to the police: how reporting levels vary for different offences; how reporting varies between countries; why offences were generally not reported; and why they were. Satisfaction with the police response when a crime was reported is also considered, as is whether victims got help from a specialised Victim Support agency, and if they did not, whether they would have liked help. Mention is also made of general attitudes to the police.

Chapter 5 deals with concern about crime. It looks at differing perceptions of the likelihood of being burgled, and at feelings of safety on the streets and at home. It also presents some findings about the precautions people take against crime, and about how those in different countries vary in the sentence they recommend for a 21 year old recidivist burglar.

Chapter 6 concludes with a discussion of the key findings.