

Individual risk factors

3.1 Introduction

So far in this report we have focused on *average* levels of victimization in particular countries, looking at how these compare with other countries, and over time. However, a wealth of victimological literature suggests that, *within* countries, some people will be more at risk than others. This chapter examines these differences in risk. It uses information collected in the ICVS about the respondent's personal characteristics (such as age and marital status), the income level of the household, and the size of the locality in which it is placed.

The variables used are regularly included in victimological risk analysis. Larger independent surveys with more risk-related variables allow more refined analysis of course. Nonetheless, the ICVS measures are among the key ones usually brought into play within the dominant, and closely related, theoretical perspectives on risk – which centre on lifestyle; routine activities; and opportunity structures (see, e.g., Felson, 1998; Van Dijk, 1994; Wittebrood and Nieuwebeerta, 2000). Between them, they highlight the following factors as heightening risks:

- *Where people live.* Those in more urban localities are assumed to live nearer to high offending populations. Also the daily routines of urban dwellers may leave targets less 'socially well guarded' and bring people into contact with each other in relatively anonymous settings. Urbanisation, too, may undermine social cohesiveness. The ICVS measure taken here is simply size of locality.
- *A risky lifestyle* – or more frequent self-exposure to criminal opportunities. This is measured here by an ICVS question on how often the respondent usually goes out in the evening.²⁹
- *Target attractiveness* – either of the individual and/or their belongings. This is measured here by household income.
- *Weak guardianship.* This assumes that risks are increased when many activities take place outside the home and when people are, for instance, frequently in the company of strangers. The analysis below employs marital status as a proxy measure of this (with those who are married assumed to be likely to stay at home more). The frequency of going out in the evening is also relevant, which is itself likely to be related to age.

²⁹ Other measures sometimes used for instance are the frequency of visiting pubs and clubs, or using public transport regularly.

Differences in risk are examined below in relation to various types of victimisation. These are divided into two main groups. The first is *property crime*: thefts of and from cars (labelled 'car thefts' for convenience); burglary; and so-called 'petty crimes' (car vandalism, bicycle theft, and thefts of personal property. The second group is *contact crime*: (robbery together with assaults and threats; and sexual incidents (asked of women only)). It should be borne in mind that within the property crime group, all offences with the exception of thefts from personal property are 'household crimes' about which the respondent answers on behalf of the household at large. Consequently, *individual* respondent characteristics, such as age and evening lifestyle, do not necessarily describe very well the dominant household type. (For instance a young, socially active respondent can be living with 'stay at home' middle-aged parents.)

3.2 The effects of individual risk factors on victimisation

Three analyses are presented below. The first (Table 7) shows straightforward prevalence risks of victimisation in terms of the available ICVS measures.³⁰ The second analysis (Table 8) presents a summary measure of the effects on risks of each *individual* risk factor (e.g., gender or age). The summary measure is expressed as an 'odds-ratio', which is explained more below. The third analysis (Table 9) takes account of the fact that some risk characteristics are themselves related to others (for instance, unmarried people are likely to be younger and to have a more socially active lifestyle). This final analysis, therefore, looks at the *independent* effect of any particular risk characteristic, net of its overlap with related characteristics. Table 7 shows that there were higher risks of victimisation, compared to the average, for:

- Those in the *largest conurbations* (of populations over 100,000). Differences were most pronounced in relation to car thefts and sexual incidents. For all ICVS crimes, those in the most urban areas have approaching double the risk of victimisation as those in the least urban areas.
- Households with *higher incomes*. The differences were most marked for car thefts, petty crime, and sexual incidents. This result on the face of it might seem at odds with conventional criminological wisdom that more socially deprived areas face higher risks of crime. The explanation is likely to be that the current analysis is a 'micro' rather than a 'macro' one (see, e.g., Ellingworth et al., 1997). In other words, it is looking at *individual* risks rather than *area* ones. In poorer neighbourhoods, households in general might have higher risk, but within (and

30 Each country is given equal weight in the analyses in this Chapter. This is to avoid countries with larger samples unduly influencing results.

Table 7 Differences in risks of victimisation in 1999: 2000 ICVS (16 countries combined)¹

	Crimes against property			All property crimes	Contact crimes		All contact crimes	Any crime
	Car thefts ² (owners)	Burglary and attempts	'Petty crimes' ³		Robbery, assaults & threats	Sexual incidents (women)		
	% victimised	once or more	in 1999					
Average risk	6.3	3.3	12.8	18.3	4.1	1.7	4.7	21.4
Town size								
<10,000	4.7	2.7	9.6	14.2	2.9	0.9	3.3	16.4
10-100,000	6.0	3.2	13.5	18.8	4.6	1.9	5.2	22.4
>100,000	8.8	4.2	15.6	22.6	4.9	2.6	5.7	26.2
Income ⁴								
Lower	4.7	3.1	10.0	14.3	3.6	1.4	4.2	17.4
Higher	7.2	3.5	14.7	21.1	4.4	2.0	5.1	24.3
Age								
55+	3.6	3.0	7.5	11.6	2.0	0.2	2.1	13.1
25-54	6.5	3.2	13.8	19.7	4.2	1.7	4.7	22.9
16-24	10.2	4.2	19.0	26.0	7.4	4.8	9.2	32.0
Going out ⁵								
Not often	5.1	2.9	10.4	15.1	3.0	1.0	3.4	17.5
Often	7.5	3.8	15.1	21.4	5.2	2.6	6.0	25.3
Married								
Yes	5.3	2.8	11.5	16.6	2.7	0.9	3.0	18.7
No	8.1	4.2	14.7	20.8	6.1	2.9	7.2	25.5
Education ⁶								
Lower	5.1	2.9	10.2	14.6	3.3	1.1	3.6	17.2
Higher	7.0	3.6	14.5	20.8	4.6	2.2	5.4	24.4
Gender								
Female	5.9	3.4	12.3	17.6	3.6	1.7	4.9	20.9
Male	6.7	3.3	13.2	18.9	4.5	na	4.5	21.9

1 Victimization percentages are computed after listwise deletion of cases. This means that if any information on a risk factor was missing (e.g. the respondent answered 'don't know', refused to answer, or the questions were not asked), the case was omitted from analysis. Average victimization risks may therefore differ somewhat from those mentioned elsewhere in this report. Switzerland is omitted completely.

2 Car thefts are thefts of and from cars. Motorcycle thefts are included in 'all crimes'.

3 'Petty crimes' covers car vandalism, bicycle theft, and thefts of personal property.

4 Those on 'lower' incomes have an income less than average in each country. Those on 'higher' incomes earn more than average.

5 The 'going out' variable is based on answers to a question about how many times people usually go out in the evening. Those counted as 'often' indicated to go out at least once a week or more. Those counted as 'not often' go out less frequently.

6 Those with 'lower' education are in the lower half of the educational distribution. Those with 'higher' education are in the upper half of the distribution.

outside them) more affluent households could be the most vulnerable (probably because they offer a greater abundance of 'criminal rewards').

- *Younger respondents* – particularly in relation to the two contact crimes, and car thefts.
- *Those who went out more frequently*. The differences here were most pronounced for contact crimes.
- Those who were *unmarried*, particularly again with respect to contact crime.
- Those with a *higher educational status*, particularly for sexual incidents. It cannot be ruled out that there is some 'response effect' in operation here, such that the more literate and numerate perform better at the task of remembering victimisation. More likely, though – and later results endorse this – is that higher educational status is itself related to other things, such as being younger and less home-bound.
- *Males*. For property crime, the differences were relatively slight, and this will reflect sampling procedure whereby either a man or woman could answer on behalf of the household. For robbery, the male: female difference was larger.

Table 8 presents 'odds-ratio' for any one particular risk variable, such as size of locality. An odds-ratio is (a) the odds of someone in a certain group (e.g., in the largest conurbation) being victimised as against them not being victimised, divided by (b) the odds for someone in the 'base' (or reference) group. In all cases, the base group has been taken as those at lowest risk. (In the case of size of locality, for instance, this is those in areas with less than 10,000 population.) The higher the odds-ratio, the stronger the effect of the particular risk factor on victimisation. The calculation of the odds-ratios is straightforward. Table 7 shows, for instance, that 5.2% of those who go out more frequently were victims of robbery and assaults and threats once or more in 1999. The risk for the less socially active is 3.0%. The odds-ratio – or the 'relative risks' for the socially active as against the rest – is computed as $[5.2 / (100 - 5.2)] / [3.0 / (100 - 3.0)]$: 1.77. Thus, the risk of robbery and assaults and threats is 1.77 times (or nearly 80%) higher for those who go out once a week or more as against those who go out less often.

By far the biggest differences in Table 8 emerge for sexual incidents, where the youngest women (aged 16-24) are 25 times more at risk than women aged 55 or older. Being younger also has a strong effect on risks of robbery and assaults and threats, and car thefts. Those who are not married face higher risks than those who are married – for instance by a factor of 2.3 for robbery and assaults and threats, and for women by a factor of 3.3 for sexual incidents.

Table 8 Uncontrolled effects of risk factors (odds-ratios) on victimisation in 1999: 2000 ICVS (16 countries combined)¹

	Crimes against property			Contact crimes			Any crime
	Car thefts ² (owners) % victimised	Burglary and attempts once or more	'Petty crimes' ³ in 1999	All property crimes	Robbery, assaults & threats	Sexual incidents (women)	
Town size (Base = <10,000)							
10-100,000	1.29	1.19	1.47	1.40	1.61	2.13	1.61
>100,000	1.96	1.58	1.74	1.76	1.73	2.94	1.77
Income⁴ (Base = Low)							
High	1.57	1.13	1.55	1.60	1.23	1.44	1.23
Age (Base = 55+)							
25-54	1.86	1.07	1.97	1.87	2.15	8.63	2.30
16-24	3.04	1.42	2.89	2.68	3.92	25.16	4.72
Going out⁵ (Base = Not often)							
Often	1.51	1.32	1.53	1.53	1.77	2.64	1.81
Married (Base = Married)							
Not married	1.57	1.52	1.33	1.32	2.34	3.29	2.51
Education⁶ (Base = Low)							
High	1.40	1.25	1.49	1.54	1.41	2.02	1.53
Gender (Base = Female)							
Male ⁷	1.15	0.97	1.08	1.09	1.26	-	-

1 The odds-ratios are based on prevalence risks in 1999 (% victimised once or more). 'Uncontrolled' means that each category (e.g., town size) is considered independently of any association with another category.

2 Car thefts are thefts of and from cars. Motorcycle thefts are included in 'all crimes'.

3 'Petty crimes' covers car vandalism, bicycle theft, and thefts of personal property.

4 Those on 'lower' incomes have an income less than average in each country. Those on 'higher' incomes earn more than average.

5 The 'going out' variable is based on answers to a question about how many times people usually go out in the evening. Those counted as 'often' indicated to go out at least once a week or more. Those counted as 'not often' go out less frequently.

6 Those with 'lower' education are in the lower half of the educational distribution. Those with 'higher' education are in the upper half of the distribution.

7 Comparing men and women on all contact crime is somewhat inappropriate since men were not asked about sexual incidents. The odds-ratio for men was 0.91.

3.3 Multivariate analyses

Multivariate analysis allows more sensitive measurement of which *particular* characteristics are important in determining vulnerability to crime. This is because, as said, it takes account of the overlap between different characteristics. Table 9 presents odds-ratios for individual risk factors, controlling for any overlap with others.

The main features of Table 9 are as follows:

- As one would expect, odds-ratios for particular variables are usually smaller than when they are considered in tandem with other variables than when they are not (i.e., as in Table 8). Nonetheless, most risk factors examined have odds-ratios larger than one in relation to most victimisation types. This indicates that each has some independent effects on risks. One main exception was that gender was relatively unimportant in relation to property crime, contrary to the earlier analyses.
- Two of the biggest changes in the profile of risks (when overlaps with other risk factors are taken into account) are in relation to the *frequency of going out* and *educational status*. A more socially active lifestyle still heightened risks, but much less so. This either suggests that 'lifestyle' *per se* is less important than basic social characteristics (such as being young, and an urban dweller). Or more probably, it indicates that cursory measures of lifestyle used in the ICVS and other victimisation surveys do not do justice to the nuances of exposure to risky situations. Having a *higher educational status* also seemed less important after other risk variables were controlled for. This is likely to reflect the fact, for instance, that younger people now have more educational qualifications.
- Net of other effects, *urbanisation* continued to be an influential risk factor. Risks of property crime, for instance, were 60% higher in the most urban areas compared to the least urbanised ones. The biggest reduction in the 'urbanisation effect', when other things were taken into account, was in relation to contact crime. This is likely to be because the highest risk victims according to Table 7 (e.g., young single people) more often live in the most urbanised areas.
- *Income* also continued to be of importance, although for sexual incidents it was less so when other risk dimensions were controlled for. This might well be because higher-income women more often live in more urbanised areas.
- *Being younger* also remained important. But it was rather less so having taken account of other variables (e.g., that the young go out more).
- *Being married* also still heightened risks, but again less so than when other things related to being married were taken into account. The differential in risks of sexual incidents for unmarried women, for instance, was much weaker after other factors were accounted for (e.g., simply being younger).

Table 9 Controlled effects of risk factors (odds-ratios) on victimisation in 1999: 2000 ICVS (16 countries combined)¹

	Crimes against property			Contact crimes			Any crime
	Car thefts ² (owners) % victimised	Burglary and attempts once or more	'Petty crimes' ³ in 1999	All property crimes	Robbery, assaults & threats	Sexual incidents (women)	
Town size (Base = <10.000)							
10-100.000	1.26	1.14	1.39	1.33	1.48	1.96	1.53
>100.000	1.81	1.43	1.58	1.60	1.47	2.51	1.57
Income⁴ (Base = Low)							
High	1.42	1.11	1.33	1.39	1.16	1.17	1.14
Age (Base = 55+)							
25-54	1.66	1.00	1.73	1.61	1.92	8.05	2.15
16-24	2.34	1.04	2.27	2.04	2.51	15.48	3.05
Going out⁵ (Base = Not often)							
Often	1.18	1.17	1.21	1.22	1.25	1.45	1.28
Married (Base = Married)							
Not married	1.27	1.47	1.15	1.18	1.99	2.40	2.00
Education⁶ (Base = Low)							
High	1.02	1.10	1.07	1.11	1.01	0.96	1.04
Gender (Base = Female)							
Male ⁷	1.10	0.96	1.01	1.02	1.19	-	-

1 The odds-ratios are based on prevalence risks in 1999 (% victimised once or more). 'Controlled' means that each category (e.g., town size) is considered controlling for associations with all other categories.

2 Car thefts are thefts of and from cars. Motorcycle thefts are included in 'all crimes'.

3 'Petty crimes' covers car vandalism, bicycle theft, and thefts of personal property.

4 Those on 'lower' incomes have an income less than average in each country. Those on 'higher' incomes earn more than average.

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6 Those with 'lower' education are in the lower half of the educational distribution. Those with 'higher' education are in the upper half of the distribution.

7 Comparing men and women on all contact crime is somewhat inappropriate since men were not asked about sexual incidents. The odds-ratio for men was 0.85.

We do not present here any analysis of whether the picture of differential risk is the same in each of the individual countries in the ICVS. Suffice it to say that the results were *broadly* similar across country, indicating that the contours of victimisation risk are relatively stable. Future reports on the 2000 ICVS will explore differences more specifically.