

**INTERNATIONAL VICTIM SURVEY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE  
PROGRAMME: REFLECTIONS ON FUTURE AGENDA**

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The 1992 International Victim Survey is a most impressive exercise that has built on the pioneering work undertaken in 1989 and on pilot projects carried out before. It is particularly gratifying to note such a representative and wide coverage, including both developed and developing countries in various parts of the world. A debt of gratitude is owed to the Italian and Dutch Governments and to UNICRI for sponsoring this key initiative, and to the International Working Group (Jan van Dijk, Pat Mayhew and Ugljesa Zvekic) and the national team leaders for their productive work. Some years ago, when the possibility of a comparative international victimisation survey was first mentioned, it seemed an overambitious goal. There had, of course, been some studies involving a few countries, but nothing of this scope. That this comprehensive undertaking has become a reality is cause for satisfaction for us all, and particularly the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme that views this kind of collaborative empirical research as crucial for more informed and more appropriate policy-making, at both the national and international levels.

It is in line with recommendations of the Ministerial Meeting held last year at Versailles, endorsed by the General Assembly, which emphasised empirical evidence, including research findings and other information on the nature, extent and trends of crime, as an essential criterion in the determination of priorities. It is also consonant with the call of the new Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice for the regular collection, collation, analysis and utilisation of data in the improved management of criminal justice and related systems, and to more frequent world surveys of the patterns and dynamics of crime, including its transnational forms and criminal justice operations. The international victimisation survey will provide invaluable complementary input for the biennial reports to be published regularly, starting with 1994-95.

While the United Nations surveys include much detailed information on criminal justice policy aspects and possible crime correlates, they have some of the known limitations of official crime statistics. Estimates of the "dark figure" of crime, for certain conventional offences in target countries, can give a more complete picture, including further information for the development of social indicators and for decision-making, particularly on the incidence of offences, circumstances, impact, their victims and their reactions to the police, that can be used to improve service delivery in line with public expectations.

The United Nations General Assembly, in adopting the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power, endorsed by the

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Seventh UN Congress, held in 1985 in Milan (Res. 40/34), recommended *inter alia* that collaborative research be conducted at the international and regional levels on ways in which victimisation can be reduced and victims aided, and to promote information exchanges on the most effective means of so doing. The Declaration includes provisions designed to increase access to justice and fair treatment for victims, including the police, and other assistance and redress. The international victimisation survey's results can help to increase the sensitivity of criminal justice systems to victim needs, and the participation and co-operation of victims. Indeed, this is a continuing UN concern, and we hope to take it further at a meeting on victims, to be convened under the auspices of the International Scientific and Professional Advisory Council, in Oñati, Spain, next spring.

Criminal justice systems are all too often non-systems without a comprehensive framework, whose parts are not well-coordinated and sometimes operate at cross-purposes. The victim can provide a leitmotif running through the "system", complementary to its traditional focus on the offenders, and perhaps increasing its coherence. The survey can also help to elucidate the effect of government policies on victimisation risk, especially across urban populations, including differential policy effects on personal safety in both objective and subjective terms.

The results can thus foster more integrated approaches and help to operationalise the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme, as the new Commission and other United Nations fora have urged. The inclusion of developing countries is not only consonant with the goal of expanding the geographical coverage of the surveys, but also constitutes a useful form of technical co-operation, and of both national and international capacity-building. Other countries may want to join in future surveys, and technical assistance for this purpose by the United Nations, willing governments and experts, should be forthcoming.

The assembled data will also provide important input for the United Nations Crime and Justice Information Network and supplement the country profiles to be included in UNBIS (the UN Bibliographical Information Service). It opens up new possibilities in our common quest to learn more about crime and its victims so that we can adopt scientifically based policies that will reduce them both.

Among the further advantages of the survey are the diverse uses of its data. The disaggregated data can be presented in many more informative ways than simple national crime rates or age-specific rates included in most surveys. Most statistical series have not so directly addressed questions of the contextual factors of crime incidence. Secondary analysis of the data - as one distinguished expert has suggested - can shed light on the effects of socio-economic changes on victimisation rates, durable and non-durable repercussions of victimisation, including fear, prevailing attitudes and official responses. It has also been suggested that more work should be done to refine the methodology so as to increase the accuracy and comparability of the victimisation rate estimates across countries, and bases for finding predictor variables on models of crime and justice policies cross-nationally. Another approach would be to pool cases across countries with important common characteristics, and developing nation-types. Other elements of multilevel analyses might be prediction of the extent of crime-related loss, role of insurance in recovery, public demand for punishment, persistence of fear and factors involved in the decision to call the police.

Considering the laudable, meticulous work done, it is somewhat unfair to ask for more. But it is precisely because of what has been achieved that one can dare to suggest some further directions that might be followed in this work in the years to come.

The need for precise definitions and manageability of concepts, especially in the comparative perspective, and for the availability of information is fully appreciated. But it might be necessary to venture, in future victimisation surveys, beyond traditional, so-called "street" crime. Some initiatives have been taken in this respect but much remains to be done, especially internationally. More elusive offences might be included, such as fraud, corruption (bribery), other types of economic crime, environmental offences, certain kinds of organised crime, etc. This may require various kinds of indicators and contingency measures where direct information is not available.

Some of these crimes involve organisations as victims, or collective victims where the harm is spread over many persons who may not even know that they have been victimised. The ICS suggests that victimisation should not be regarded as a point but rather as a process. Problems of multiple or continuing victimisation may also call for comparative longitudinal studies not only of individuals but also of communities whose deterioration over time reflects the cumulative effect of victimisation upon the quality of life. By not restricting the field to offences of which the individual has direct knowledge and which constitute discrete events, the charges of bias in the choice of the criminality measured by most victimisation surveys could be counteracted and criminal phenomena, as well as criminal victimisation, viewed in a more comprehensive perspective.

The full impact of victimisation needs also to be assessed, including not only loss but also the harm suffered, which is less easily ascertained. Countries that compile *inter alia* crime damage statistics could integrate this information in multivariate analyses. These could include measures of "whole community harm", developed in some countries, which have also used indices of anxiety or fear indicating the safety level to be enhanced by police activity. Assessments of vulnerability to crime of various population groups, ecological areas, residential mixes, etc. can help in risk management which is becoming a science in itself.

These suggestions should not be misunderstood: if these possibilities are raised and their consideration in a cross-national context suggested, it is not to detract from the accomplishments - indeed, it is because they are so impressive that one dares to pose this further challenge. The scientific competence and ingenuity so abundant in the distinguished gathering of the Conference, and the impressive survey results, are an encouragement to look further still. It is certain that with the valuable help of all those present an ever new knowledge can be developed and a proper scientific footing given to the curtailment of victimisation and the prevention and control of crime.

