

PARTICIPANTS' VICTIM SURVEY

Hans van Grastek¹

Preface

The author of this article works at the market research agency Inter/View, located in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. He is responsible for the co-ordination and execution of the fieldwork in all countries participating in the 1992 International Crime (Victim) Survey (ICS).

Dr. Jan van Dijk, a member of the Working Group that initiated the ICS, invited Inter/View to participate in the Conference, partly to present a methodological paper (elsewhere in this issue), and partly to conduct a mini survey among the participants in the Conference.

The main aim of this participants' survey was to deepen the understanding of the ICS. Most of the participants are familiar with the theoretical aspects of the questionnaire. Some have monitored actual fieldwork. None of the participants know what it is like to "sit on the other side": to apply the ICS questionnaire to their own situation.

For this purpose, Inter/View transformed the CATI² version of the questionnaire into a self-completion version³; questions are prompted by computer, answers are typed in by the interviewee himself. The questionnaire is worded in English. Consequently, only English-speaking participants took part.

Transcript of the presentation

For two days now you have been invited to participate in a survey among the Conference attendants. First of all I would like to thank you for leaving the Conference room and taking the time to fill in the questionnaire.

The main aim of this project is to have you experience the feeling of what it is like to respond to a victim survey. How does the questionnaire apply to your own situation? Our day-to-day market research experience has taught us that the best way to test a questionnaire is through pilot interviews. Answering the questions yourself deepens your knowledge of the survey even more: what impact is the questionnaire likely to have on the respondents?

The questionnaire has been developed for CATI, and conducted by well-trained interviewers. Acknowledging the fact that you are pretty much involved, it was decided to let you answer the questionnaire yourself. Some slight amendments to the questionnaire were made in this respect: the introduction was changed, dummy questions were included to explain the different question types that occur in the questionnaire, etc.

¹ Director, Department of International Research, InterView B.V., Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

² Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing

³ In research terminology: CASI, Computer Assisted Self-completion Interviewing

I am about to present the results of the strangest survey I have ever performed in my market research career. One in which the fieldwork itself was more important than the results! On average you invested 18 minutes of your time, filling in the questionnaire, so the least I can do is share some of the results with you.

Results

The response was better than we would dare to dream of in a normal setting. Not a single respondent refused to participate, or was "unavailable during the fieldwork period". In total 61 persons took part, of whom:

- 54% came from industrialised countries,
- 30% from developing countries and
- 16% from Eastern and Central European countries

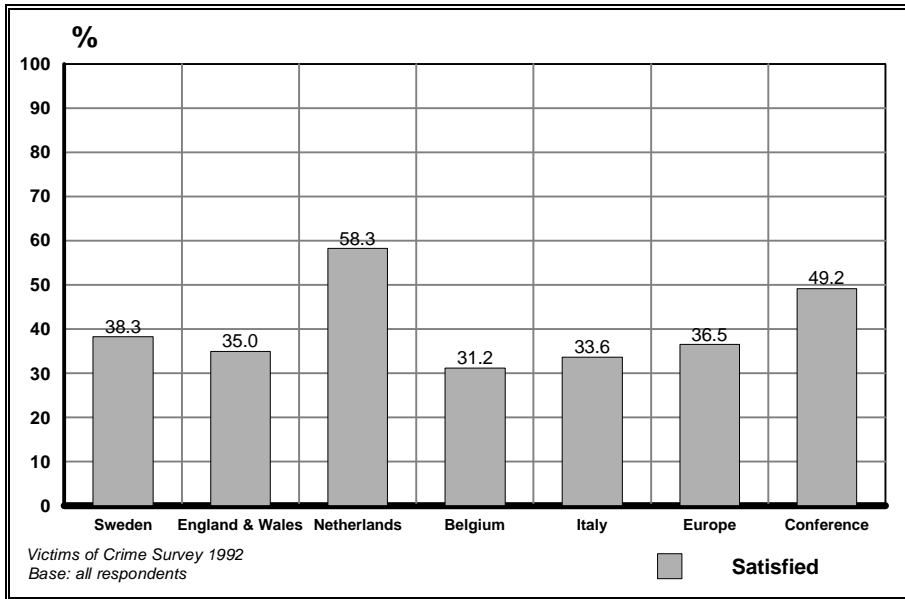
Overall you are to be pitied: in 1991 you were the victim of, on average, 2.8 crimes. The ICS average was 0.5.

How can we describe the average participant in this Conference? You are predominantly male (only 18% female) and slightly middle-aged; 47 years, whereas we found an average age of 44 in the ICS. You turn out to be "slow students"⁴. In the questionnaire, the educational level was measured with the question: "At what age did you finish your full time education?" Fifty-three percent of you fall into the 25 years and over category. In the ICS only 16% took more than 25 years to complete their full time education.

One of the questions in the survey is about the level of satisfaction with your income. I am proud to conclude that the Dutch are, in this respect, satisfied people.

Figure 1: Satisfaction with income

⁴ The presentation of the findings was informal.

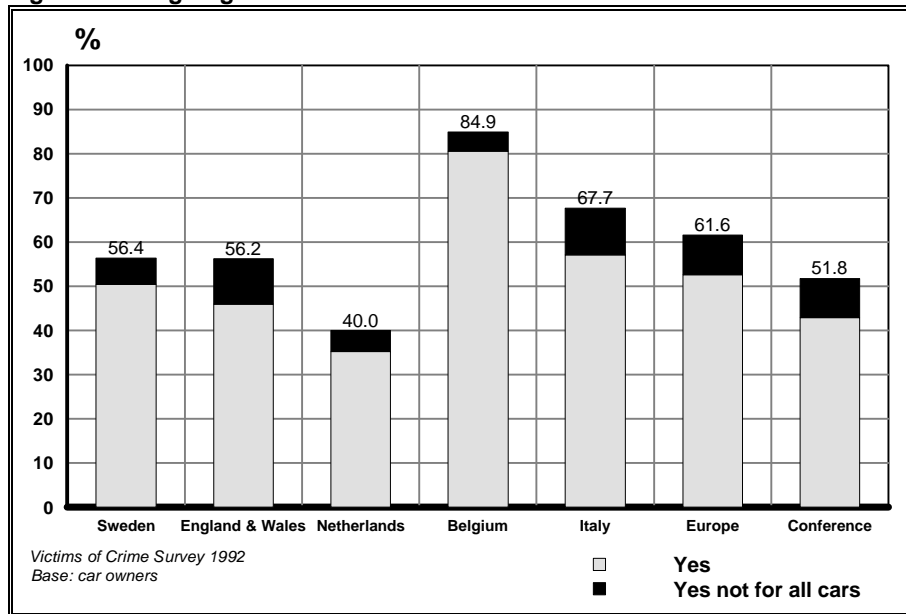


The first 6 bars in the figures refer to the results of the ICS. They serve as a bench mark for the results of the participants' survey, which are shown in the right-most bar. You seem to be pretty satisfied with yourselves. This may be caused by either the (high) level of your income, or a tendency to produce socially desirable answers on your part.

Please bear in mind that from a methodological point of view it is not correct to simply compare the outcomes of the various ICS countries with the results of the participants' survey. The former sample is representative on a number of aspects; region, income, sex, etc. The latter sample is rather distorted on these dimensions.

The country results are weighted to the population figures, people of 16 years or older. The Europe bar is corrected for country size. Larger countries have a higher impact on this overall score.

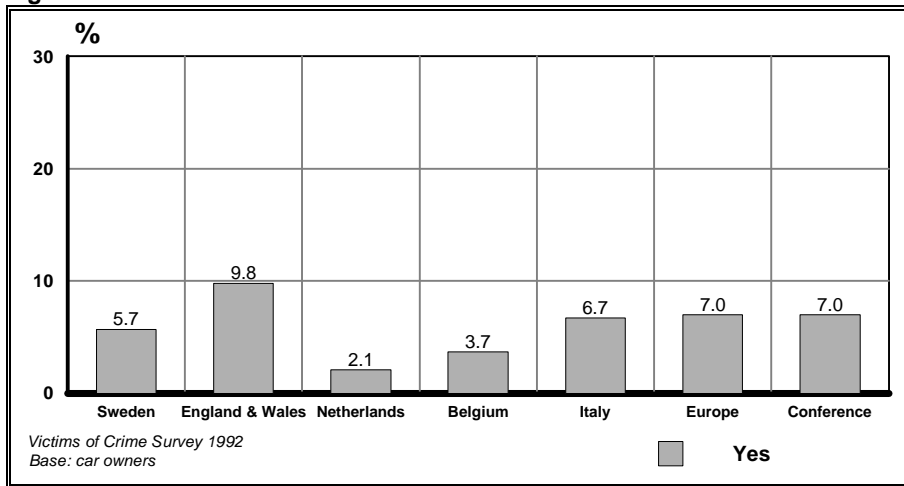
Figure 2: Car garage



The Dutch are satisfied with their income, but apparently they do not have enough money to build a garage. Looking at Figure 2 we see that they do not need a garage to protect their car against theft. Protection against the bad weather would be a better reason to park a car inside.

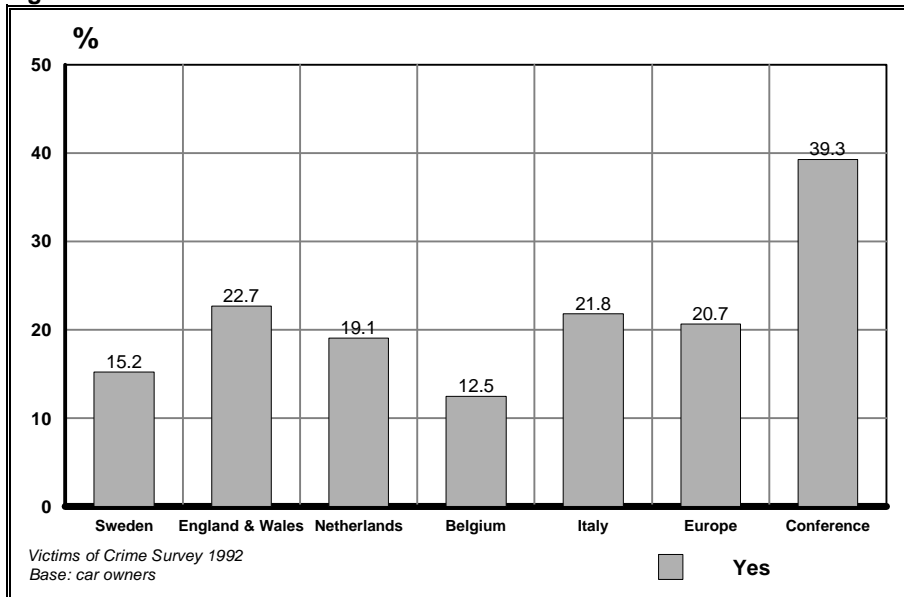
The next figures deal with the victimisation rates.

Figure 3: Theft of cars



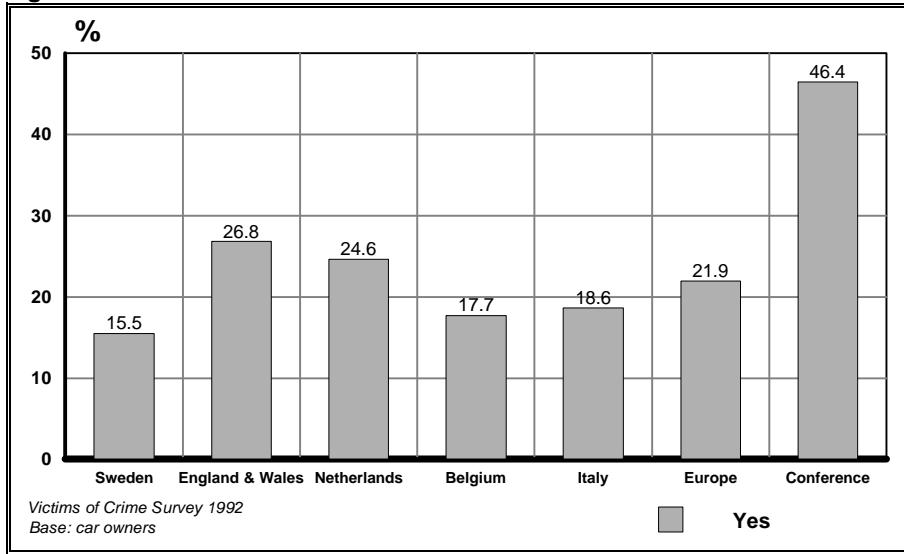
For theft of cars, the ICS crime rate is comparable with the outcome of the participants' survey.

Figure 4: Theft from cars



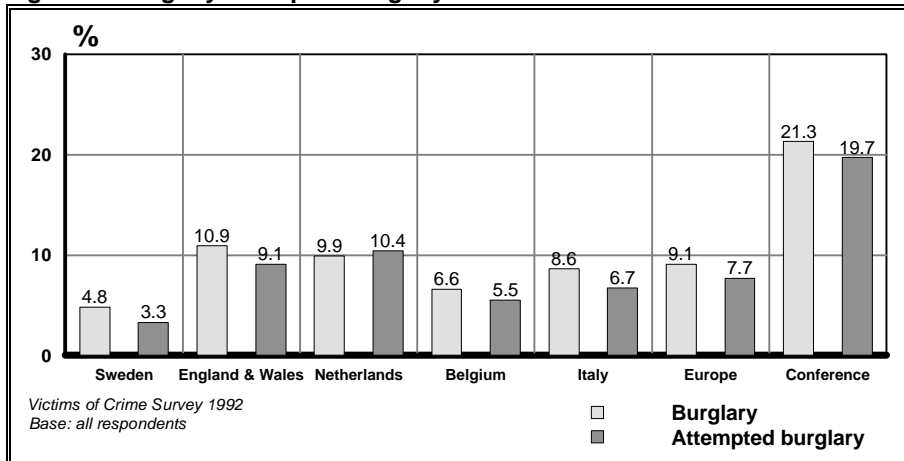
Theft from car rates are much higher for you. Probably you drive more expensive cars, with more gadgets that are attractive to steal.

Figure 5: Vandalism to cars



Higher vandalism rates are found as well. It could be that unsuccessful theft-attempts raise this figure.

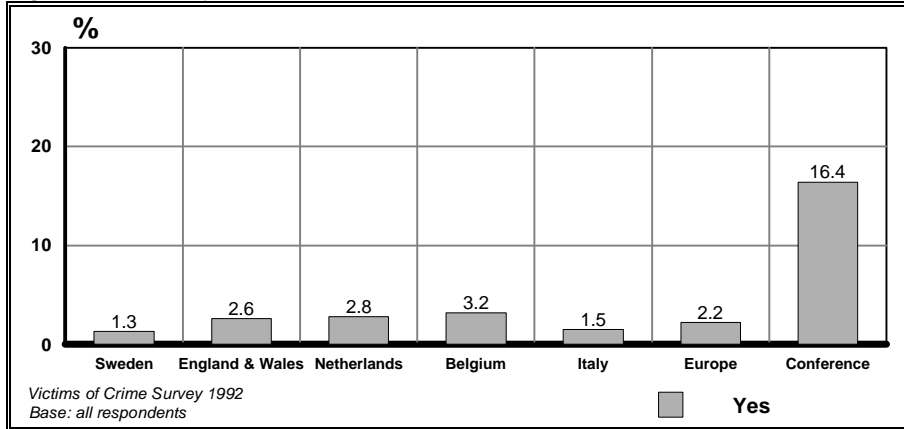
Figure 6: Burglary/attempted burglary



The Netherlands is the only country where there are more attempted burglaries than successful ones. Perhaps our burglars lack proper training. Your rates are above the average, probably due to the fact that your houses are more attractive looking.

Apparently, you yourselves look quite attractive as well, as robbery targets:

Figure 7: Robbery



And you are surrounded by collectors items:

Figure 8: Personal thefts

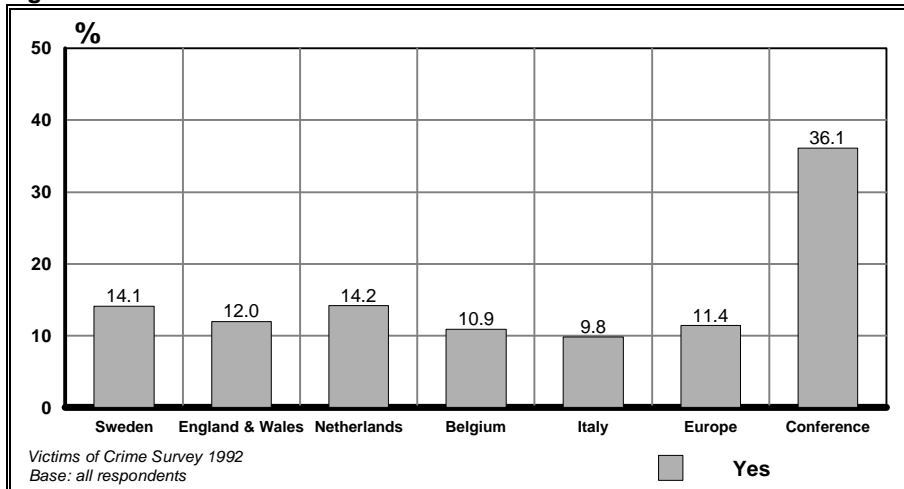
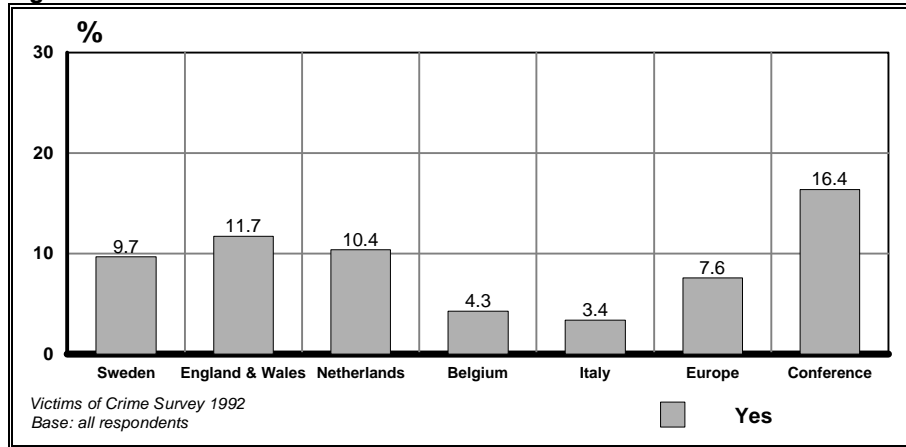


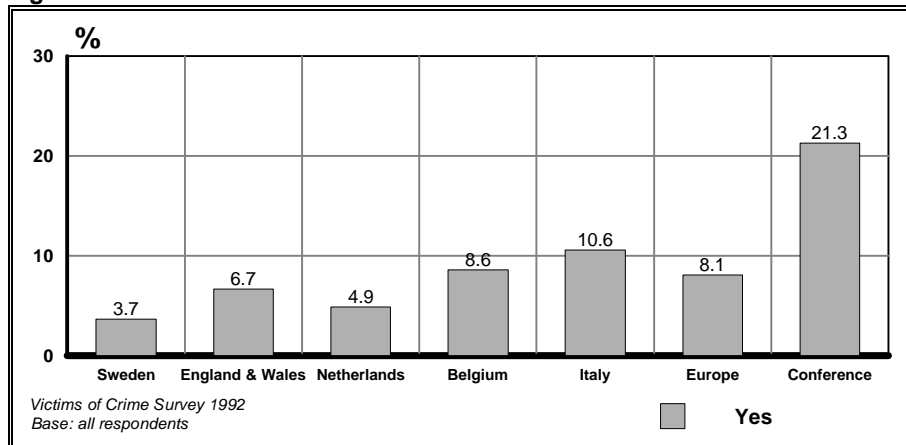
Figure 9: Assaults/threats



Compared with the European results, you have been assaulted twice as often. However, the difference is less striking, as compared with property-related crimes.

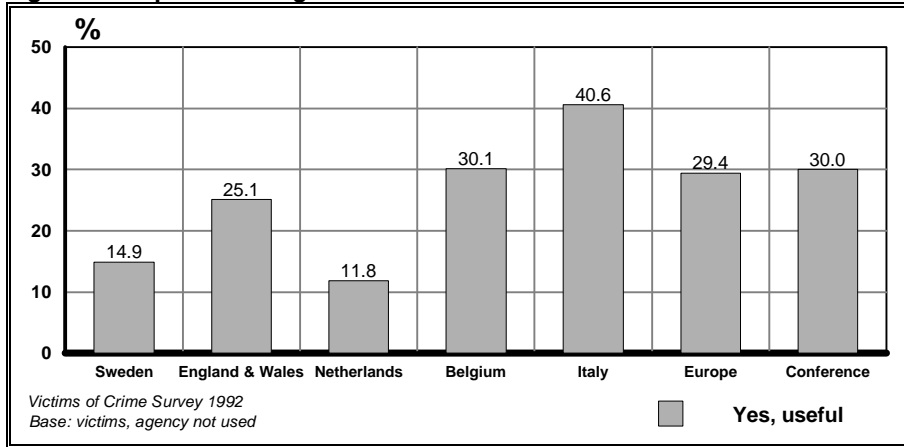
The so-called "education effect" might be an explanation here: people with a higher educational level have a better ability to formulate what has happened. Unpleasant experiences are more readily evaluated in terms of a crime, in this case an assault. To put it more bluntly: for those with less education, an assault is considered as being part of life.

Figure 10: Consumer fraud



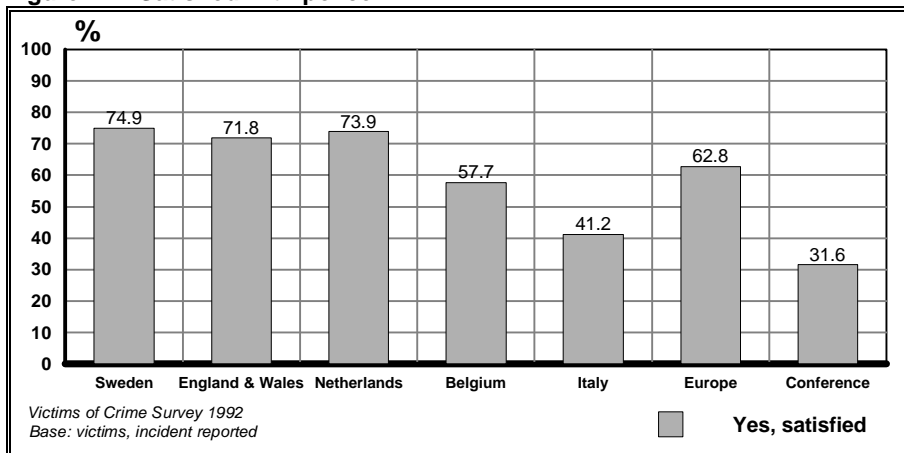
Here as well the high rates could be explained by the effect of education. Another explanation could be what I would like to call a "Robin Hood effect": suppliers are inclined to act fraudulently when dealing with the more affluent clients. The less well-off are served without a swindle.

Figure 11: Specialised agencies useful



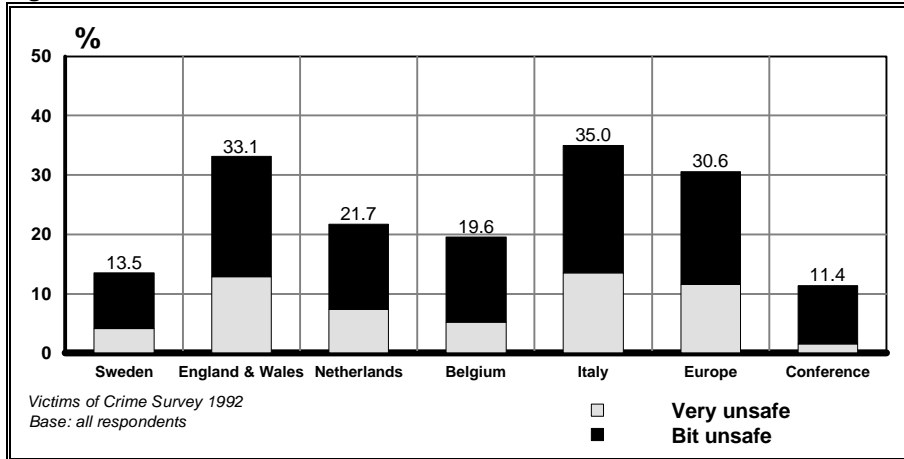
What about agencies for victim support? The Swedes and the Dutch are more of a "cut out the nonsense" kind. They tend to solve the problems without professional help. You find these specialised agencies as useful as the average ICS respondent.

Figure 12: Satisfied with police



The question about satisfaction with the police is only asked of those who reported a crime to the police (In the participants' survey only 19 persons). The choice is between satisfied or dissatisfied. You are less satisfied than the average European. Could it be that your expectations are too high?

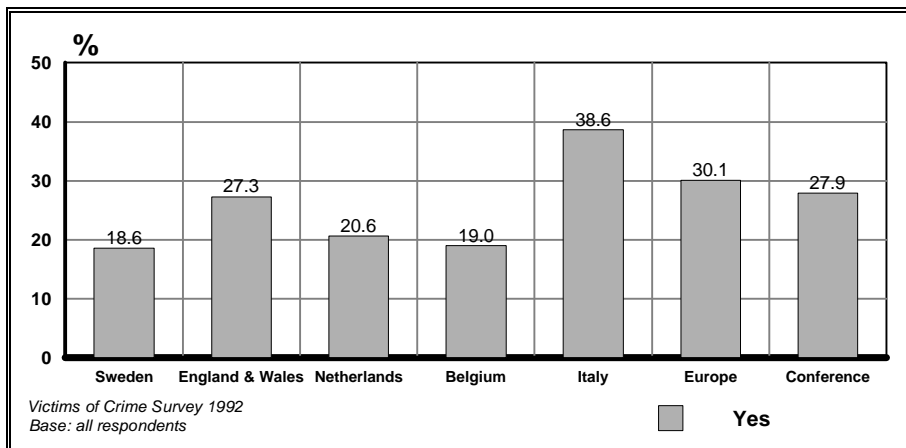
Figure 13: Feel unsafe after dark



How safe do you feel? Pretty safe, when you look at Figure 13. Either you are highly protected, you live in a safe area, or you are less affected by worrying stories in the Sunday papers.

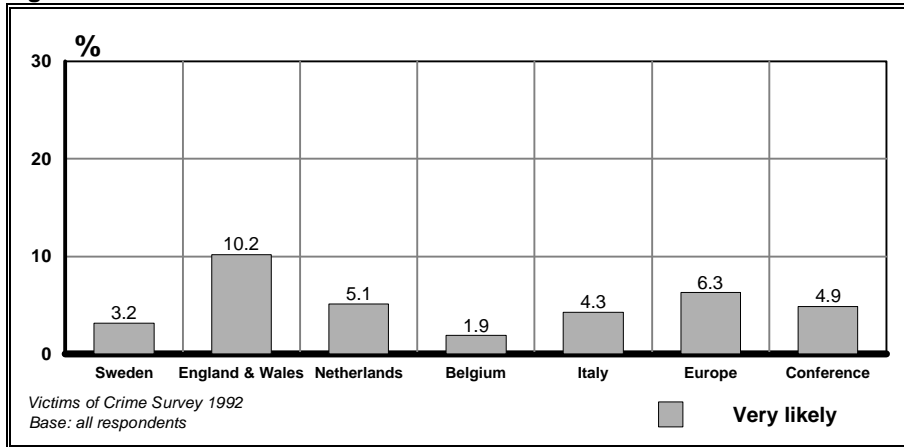
But this is not translated into actual behaviour when going out, as Figure 14 shows.

Figure 14: Avoid certain places



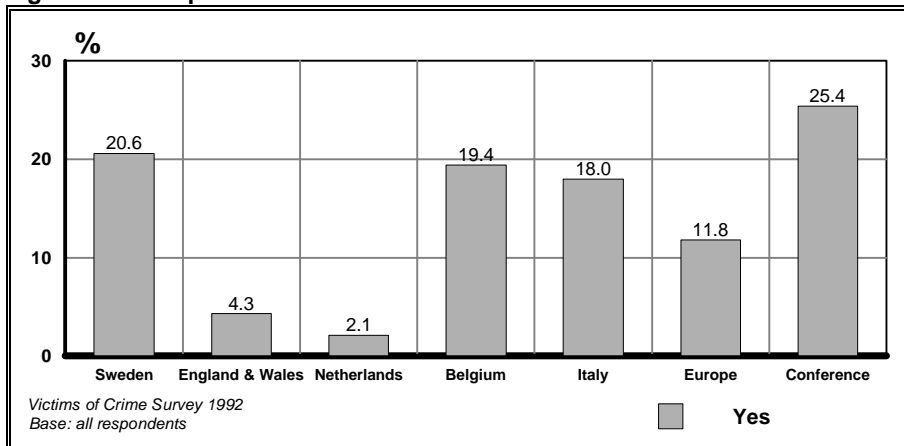
Here the question was: "Please try to remember the last time you went out after dark in your area for whatever reason. Did you stay away from certain streets or places for reasons of safety, or avoid certain people?"

Figure 15: Break-in chances



The break-in chances you mention compare with the overall results for Europe, although your burglary rates are higher!!

Figure 16: Weapon in household



The prevalence of guns in your households is much higher, but in Europe the guns penetration is relatively low, compared to the US for instance.

Figure 17: House not protected

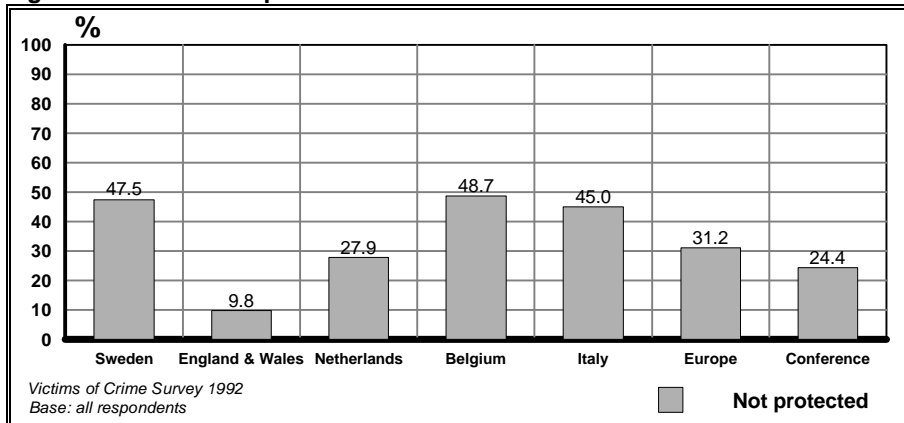


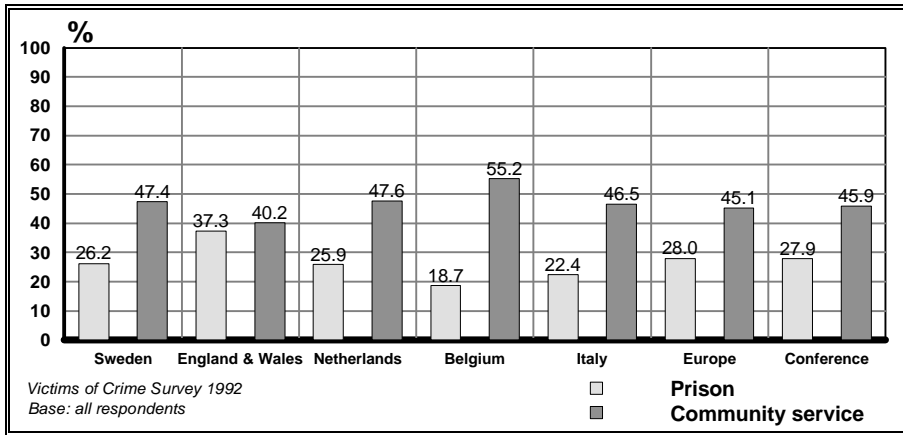
Figure 17 gives the percentages of households not protected.

Previously we saw that England & Wales have the highest burglary rates, the highest break-in chances and the highest proportion of protected houses.

In the participants' survey, 3 out of 4 respondents have a house that is protected by at least one of the following measures:

- 1) a burglar alarm
- 2) special door locks
- 3) special window/door grilles
- 4) a dog that would deter a burglar
- 5) a high fence
- 6) a caretaker or security guard

Figure 18: Sentence appropriate



Apparently the British are fed up with burglary: burglars should be put in jail. In other countries, community service is much more advocated.

Verbatims

We have added an extra question at the end of the participants' questionnaire, allowing you to enter your comments and suggestions. The scope of your remarks ranges from heart-warming compliments about the set-up of the participants' survey to suggestions about future improvements on the content and logic of the questionnaire. Most of the issues raised have been previously discussed in sessions of the Working Group, anticipating this second wave of the ICS. The main reasons for not implementing these ideas were comparability with previous research or budget constraints. A reconsideration might be appropriate for a subsequent wave.

Conclusion

Judging from the comments you made when filling in the questionnaire, we may conclude that the participants' survey proved its worth. Not only did it serve as an eye-opener in the sense of showing "how the questionnaire performs in a live setting", it also proves a useful extension of the theoretical knowledge about the survey and criminological questionnaires in general.

Respondents in the participants' survey have a high victimisation rate on a number of items:

- car-related crimes
- burglary
- robbery
- personal thefts
- consumer fraud

Did these high rates raise your interest in the field of criminology or is there a causal effect in the opposite direction?

Round Table:
Citizens and Criminal Justice

