

BUENOS AIRES (ARGENTINA)

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The data collected refer to Buenos Aires, capital city of Argentina, situated on the right hand margin of the River Plate, covering an extension of 200 square kilometres². Its 2,962,403 inhabitants (1,621,362 females and 1,341,041 males) can be grouped as follows:

	Female	Male
0-14 years	279,227	286,557 (19.1%)
15-64 years	1,034,002	882,023 (64.6%)
65 and over	308,133	172,461 (16.3%)

The percentage referring to the third group shows that the population of this city has grown old; this is usually assumed when the percentage of 65 year old citizens exceeds 10%. On the other hand, the enormous difference between the number of female and males in this bracket indicates a significant male mortality rate.

It is important to note that 50.6% of the migrants from neighbouring countries are over 65, and only 5.3% are under 15 years of age.

In addition, the information provided by a survey on population and households carried out in 1991³, indicates a population density of 14,827.02 inhabitants per sq. km.

With regard to dwellings, the census quantified a total of 1,200,076 houses distributed as follows:

- 221,746 collective residences (elderly peoples' homes, orphanages, religious communities, boarding schools, barracks, hospitals and hotels); and
- 978,330 family residences (houses, apartments, tenant houses, hovels, etc.).

The questionnaire covered a sample of 1,000 households for a total of 3,196 people. An effort was made to keep a balanced percentage between the high and low status residential areas (14.1% and 12.9% respectively); the middle class residential area - which, in fact, constitutes the bulk of the urban horizon - completed the total with 73%. At the same time, in order to analyse the median income of the group, official figures were taken from the report of the Economic Statistical Institute for Latin America and Argentina (IIERAL)⁴, which has ascertained that the monthly median income *per capita* for the Federal Capital,

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² Data provided by the Military Geographic Institute.

³ This survey was conducted by the National Institute for Statistics and Surveys (INDEC), Series B, No. 1.

⁴ Prepared by the Mediterranean Foundation on the basis of data provided by the Argentine Federal Investment Council and by the World Bank.

minus tax, is US\$ 840 (September 1991). These values show that the income of 16% of the families is under the zzz limit and that of 37.5% is above the yyy limit.

The band between the upper and bottom 25% limits represents 48%.

General Paz Avenue marks the boundary between the Federal Capital and "el Gran Buenos Aires" (the suburbs). This segmented avenue runs from the northwest margin of the River Plate to the Riachuelo tributary in the southwest of the city. In order to represent all sectors of the Federal Capital, the existing municipal land division was sub-divided into 12 areas - 6 each for South and North - and one central area comprising the "City" (where Government, Parliament and Court activities evolve independently). These thirteen areas, representing "regions" with a homogeneous constitution, cover the whole city.

Field work commenced on 1 June and lasted approximately two months. The members of a dedicated and responsible group of university students of law and political science, trained by Mr. Manuel Leiras in field work and interviewing skills, had to pass an exam before being admitted to the team of interviewers. Data preparation and analysis were conducted by Ms. Brenda Bockett-Pugh.

Once the team was organised, the questionnaire was studied and the team required for the assignment established. Consideration was also given to the need of avoiding the risk of an interviewee's negative reaction when reminded of an offence, which could result in a refusal to co-operate or withdrawal from the interview.

It was therefore decided that during the first contact with the respondents questions would be carefully explained, (for approximately 15 to 27 minutes). In the case of contradictory responses, interviewers were instructed not to force a correct or specific response, but to accept the interviewee's spontaneous response. Consequently, no refusals or re-visits were registered. Refusal rate was high but, as decided at the outset, in such cases, another family was interviewed instead.

At this point it is important to mention that Buenos Aires citizens have rarely been exposed to surveys of such proportion and, therefore, are not familiar with such endeavours or proposals for the sole purpose of participating in the first Victimization Survey in Argentina.

To conclude, data obtained regarding religious affiliation provides the following figures: Catholic 682, Jewish 67, Evangelist 11, Protestant 1; Muslim 1; no religion 232.

Prevalence victimisation rates (5 years)

Data on the total sample in Table 1 reveals that over the last five years theft from cars is the first and most common offence with 24.9%. When related to responses of owners of cars, trucks or vans for private use, this value rises to 34.5%. On the other hand, motorcycle and bicycle thefts do not appear to be significant (7.9% and 11.4% respectively), but the percentages rise (to 24.6% and 16.6% respectively) and become more significant when based on responses related to the owners of motorcycles and bicycles.

It is also interesting to note that based on a total of 538 female respondents, sexual offences represent 19.1%. A slight tendency to avoid reporting the incident to the police was observed.

Prevalence victimisation rates (1 year)

From among the offences listed it would appear that, as in the case of Table 1 (prevalence victimisation - 5 years), vehicle-related crimes are also the most common offences during 1991, as well as being those showing the highest increase over that period.

Consumer fraud and corruption have been incorporated in Table 2. These offences are accountable for over one-third of the victims (34.4% and 32.8% respectively). The high rates of these two components clearly demonstrate the need to determine what induces such behaviours and, hence, to be in a position to combat the negative elements in this society.

Reported crimes

The high number of reported cases of theft of car (92.6%) and motorcycle (82.4%) contrasts with the number of reported cases of theft from the car (51.8%) if we observe that this was one of the most common offences in Tables 1 and 2, already commented on. In third place is burglary with 70.2%, which is a very high percentage when compared to burglary cases in Tables 1 and 2. Moreover, while attempted burglary maintains its relation to previous values, the percentage of reported cases drops almost to half. Sexual offences are not reported in the proportion that this crime occurs. This may be due to a number of reasons such as: inadequate education, prejudice, incomprehension on the part of society, or the lack of assistance and institutions to report to. It is also apparent that reported offences are not commented by the victims. Therefore, it is assumed that the value obtained is not real, and that it is, in fact, an element closely related to the "dark figures of crime". A prompt in-depth national investigation would be of crucial importance, in order to adopt a pertinent criminal policy that will provide for better prevention and suitable assistance to victims.

Reasons for not reporting

A brief comment concerning the police is called for when looking at the very high values presented in Table 4 concerning those cases in which the persons do not report the incident because: the police could do nothing/ lack of proof, or the police won't do anything about it. These values reflect the need for a study on this point.

A prevention policy, developed in other countries when their governments decided to actively intervene in this field, is being implemented by the local authorities with the active participation of citizens and the involvement of police.

Crime seriousness

On the one hand, theft of cars and motorcycles are considered to be the most serious, together with burglary and robbery. This was also the opinion of 76.9% of the female victims of sexual offences and of 55% of the victims of assault/threat. On the other hand, 41.8% of the victims of theft from car (which is the most common offence) did not consider this crime to be very serious, the reason for this being that, generally speaking, the stolen item could be replaced at not too high a

cost. During 1988-1991 an alarming number of thefts of cassette-players from cars parked in the street or in parking lots were reported daily.

Since car vandalism does not entail personal danger, 50.4% of the respondents did not consider it to be very serious. The same opinion was expressed with regard to theft of bicycle (57%) and personal theft (carried objects including "pick pocketing").

Crime prevention measures

Percentages presented in Table 6 show that, generally speaking, most of the population living in Buenos Aires do not take any measures against burglary. Only 25% declared to have their houses insured against burglary, and less than half of this percentage have had special door locks installed.

308 cases entrusted their houses either to security guards/caretakers or a neighbour (when absent for a couple of days or so). Two hundred and twelve respondents said that their neighbours kept watch anyway.

Regarding firearms, 26.4% gave an affirmative answer; out of these, 53% declared that the reason for possessing firearms was protection against crime.

TABLES

Table 1: Prevalence victimisation rates (5 years)*

	Victimisation rate (%)
Theft of car	13.6
Theft from car	24.9
Car vandalism	11.7
Theft of motorcycle	7.9
Theft of bicycle	11.4
(Owners)	
Theft of car	18.8
Theft from car	34.5
Car vandalism	16.2
Theft of motorcycle	24.6
Theft of bicycle	16.6
Burglary with entry	12.1
Attempted burglary	12.6
Robbery	16.9
Personal theft	23.8
Sexual incidents	19.1
Assault/threat	15.8

* Prevalence - percentage of respondents who have been victims of a specific form of crime once or more.

Table 2: Prevalence victimisation rates (1 year)*

	Victimisation rate (%)
Theft of car	5.0
Theft from car	10.4
Car vandalism	3.6
Theft of motorcycle	2.1
Theft of bicycle	3.6
(Owners)	
Theft of car	6.9
Theft from car	14.2
Car vandalism	4.8
Theft of motorcycle	7.0
Theft of bicycle	5.2
Burglary with entry	3.1
Attempted burglary	3.8
Robbery	4.6
Personal theft	7.7
Sexual incidents	5.0
Assault/threat	4.6
Consumer fraud	34.4
Corruption	32.8

* Prevalence - percentage of respondents who have been victims of a specific form of crime once or more.

Table 3: Reported crimes

	%
Theft of car	92.6
Theft from car	51.8
Car vandalism	20.5
Theft of motorcycle	82.4
Theft of bicycle	41.2
Burglary with entry	70.2
Attempted burglary	37.3
Robbery	43.1
Personal theft	15.5
Sexual incidents	45.6
Assault/threat	40.5

Table 4: Reasons for not reporting*

	Theft of car %	Theft from car %	Car vandalism %	Theft of motorcycle %	Theft of bicycle %	Burglary with entry %	Robbery %	Personal theft %	Sexual incidents %	Assault/ threat %
Not serious enough		18.5	29.5	20.0	14.9	16.0	21.0	23.9	4.0	13.9
Solved it myself	33.3	2.7	3.4		2.9		5.26	3.1	2.0	5.3
Inappropriate for police		6.4	9.0		2.9	4.0	1.7	7.9	12.2	2.1
Other authorities		4.6	3.4	10.0				1.0	2.0	2.1
My family solved it		0.9	1.1		2.9	8.0	2.6	5.8	4.0	1.0
No insurance		22.2	20.4	40.0	13.4	12.0	4.3	9.5		
Police could do nothing	66.6	37.0	19.3	30.0	32.8	20.0	38.5	41.4	28.5	31.1
Police won't do anything	33.3	38.8	29.5	30.0	41.7	44.0	31.5	32.4	34.6	27.9
Fear/dislike police		1.8	2.2		2.9	8.0	7.0	2.6	14.2	12.9
Didn't dare							0.8	4.7		
Other reasons		1.8				12.0	5.2	1.5	22.4	5.3
Don't know			3.4				0.8		4.0	2.1

* Percentages calculated on victims who said they had not reported the last incident of each type of crime to the police - multiple answers possible.

Table 5: Crime seriousness*

	Theft of car %	Theft from car %	Car vandalism %	Theft of motorcycle %	Theft of bicycle %	Burglary with entry %	Robbery %	Personal theft %	Sexual incidents %	Assault/ threat %
Very serious	67.0	21.7	14.6	66.2	8.8	65.2	49.1	16.9	76.7	55.0
Fairly serious	18.3	33.4	30.0	16.2	29.9	13.1	37.2	26.9	12.7	27.8
Not serious	12.6	41.8	50.4	13.6	57.0	9.0	15.2	42.9	8.8	19.0

* Percentage based on victims of specific crimes.

Table 6: Crime prevention measures*

	%
Installed burglar alarm	13.9
Installed door locks	47.8
Installed window/door grills	24.4
Maintain watchdogs	11.6
High fence	17.9
House has a caretaker	11.9
None of these	
Others	77.8
Ask somebody to watch home	30.8
Neighbours watch anyway	21.2
Possession of firearms	26.4
House is insured against burglary	20.9

* Percentages based on total sample of respondents.