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MANUAL ON VICTIMIZATION SURVEYS

COUNTRY COMMENTS

Note by the secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present note summarizes the comments by countries and international organizations on the draft *Manual on Victimization Surveys*, resulting from the electronic consultation conducted by the secretariat in April/May 2009.

II. SUMMARY

2. A total of 28 replies were received in response to the request for comments on the Manual: from 27 countries and Eurostat. The following countries replied: Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, France, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States.

3. All countries and Eurostat supported the endorsement of the Manual. Six among them suggested some changes to the text which are summarized in part IV.

III. GENERAL COMMENTS

4. There were many favorable comments about the potential usefulness of the Manual and many countries congratulated the task force on the quality and usefulness of their work.
5. The United States highlighted the valuable contribution of the Manual to the international literature on survey research by covering the basics of survey methodology and providing references to technical information. There are a number of subject specific issues, that are necessary to consider before conducting a victimization survey, and there are few sources of information on these topics. This Manual is seen to fill that role. The examples of methods used by a variety of nations and surveys provided in the Manual will be of assistance by informing on what other countries have implemented. Nations with a variety of infrastructure and societal characteristics can draw useful information from the Manual. The language is purposefully non technical to make it accessible to policy makers and officials who may not be statistically sophisticated.
6. There were comments suggesting the Manual will be of particular use to Eurostat's victimisation survey that is planned for 2013. It also is of particular relevance to countries that have had no experience or only limited experience with crime victimisation surveys.

IV. COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC PARTS OF THE MANUAL

7. The comments that follow relate to the content of the Manual. They were provided by six countries (Australia, Chile, Lithuania, Poland, New Zealand, and Sweden). All of these countries strongly recommended that the Manual be endorsed and emphasized that their suggestions were about minor improvements. Two of them, Australia, the Chair of the Task Force and Poland, a member of the Task Force were involved in developing the Manual.

Comments by Australia

8. Paragraph 15 seems out of place. It may have been useful to have a preface at the start of the manual that discusses the broader international goals of improving crime victimisation statistics. This will provide some context to what this manual is about and how it fits into the other work associated with improving crime victimization statistics. The first sentence of para 15 fits in neatly with para 14, but the rest is more about the international goals around this subject matter. Para 15 also provides a link to the joint UNECE-UNODC meeting back in 2004 and Australia think it would also be useful to link in any identified future work from the 2008 UNECE-UNODC crime victimisation meeting. Rather than saying in para 15 - 'the ultimate goal of the manual is to improve the comparability of victimization survey results' perhaps it should say that 'the manual can be used to better understand issues of comparability of victimization survey results and is a tool that could assist countries to improve the comparability of both national and international crime victimization surveys at the an international level over time.'

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

- **Add a “Preface” as the first page**, before the index and Chapter 1, with **the following text:**

“This manual is the first attempt to develop methodological guidelines at the international level for the design of victimization surveys. The manual provides a comprehensive source of information for developing national victimization surveys and will be particularly useful for those countries who may be embarking on a survey of this type for the first time. The ultimate goal of the manual is to improve the comparability of victimization survey results. The manual provides a minimum dataset of suggested key topics for inclusion in national crime victimization surveys that will further facilitate international comparability of crime survey results.

The manual does not attempt to be prescriptive about which methods to use, but rather illustrates examples of the types of methodologies available, including the pros and cons of the various methods. It also illustrates the experiences encountered of countries with extensive experience in designing national crime victimization surveys. These examples will assist people to make informed choices to suit their particular circumstances.

This is the first step toward the broader long-term objectives of improving the international comparability of crime statistics in general and developing an integrated system of victim data collections alongside police, prosecution, court and corrective services statistics [keep footnote 1 and add second footnote on outcomes of 2000 UNODC-UNECE Meeting on Crime Statistics]. The manual has been endorsed by the Conference of European Statisticians.

The manual on crime victimization surveys has been developed through joint effort by the UNECE-UNODC Taskforce on crime victim surveys and comprised the following members:

<Insert the names and countries from paragraph 19 of the manual>

The UNECE and UNODC express their sincere gratitude to the experts listed above and their respective institutions as well as Angela Me, Anna Alvazzi Del Frate, Steven Malby and Philip Davis (UNODC) and Paolo Valente (UNODC) for their kind cooperation in the development of this manual.”

- **In Chapter 1, section A “Purpose of the manual”:** move the first sentence of paragraph 15 to the end of paragraph 12; delete the rest of paragraph 15 and paragraphs 19-20

Comments by Chile

9. The list of countries whose surveys were analyzed [in the UNECE-UNODC Inventory of victim surveys] was not provided.

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

A list of countries who participated in the UNECE-UNODC inventory could be provided at the end of Appendix D.

Comments by Sweden:

10. Due to the lack of tangible guidelines, the manual will be hard to use as a tool to improve the comparability of victimization survey results. In order to achieve this objective the manual

should be supplemented with some kind of a “check list” with minimum requirements and a best code of practice. Because it is impossible to give the same guidelines to all the countries that plan to develop their own surveys, the frame of the list could be adjusted according to their prerequisites. For example industrial countries vs. developing countries.

11. Sweden also proposes that more attention is paid to the fact that worldwide more and more people are using so called pre-paid mobile phone cards that can affect the size of dropout rate due to the fact that respondents cannot be reached (paragraph 394–395). This affects both the sampling frame as well as the percentage of answers.

12. Paragraph 660–666 could be complemented with information that one way of managing refusal is to avoid, when feasible, words as victim and victimisation and instead use words such as for example exposed to crime.

Response by the Chair of the Task Force:

13. Issue: Inclusion of a Checklist - The manual cannot be too prescriptive in terms of setting minimum standards or best practice as the conduct of any survey will depend on a number of factors including the desired outcomes and resources available.

14. Issue: Use of pre-paid mobile phone cards - Chapter F- Survey Sample Frames, section b: sampling method (page 125), section c: sample size (iv) non-response (page 126) and Survey Modes: b) telephone interviews (page 133) of the manual discusses the issue of contact of respondents via mobile or telephone in depth therefore no further change is required.

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

Paragraph 664: Interviews conducted via the telephone....The initial presentation read by the interviewer must be carefully constructed. **Add the following text:**

“Appropriate use of language in the questionnaire and the interviewing process are vital in minimizing non-response and managing refusals. The language needs to be tailored to a particular country/culture and this should be tested prior to the conduct of a survey”.

Comments by Lithuania:

15. Lithuania mentioned a few topics that seem to be important and should be described in the Manual in detail:

16. Taking into account the complexity of the survey subject, it is very important to mention that the concept of a criminal act as such is always closely related to the historical and cultural traditions of a particular society and commonly (but not always) treated in line with the national law. Moreover, some differences in the approach to the same incident could be determined by the socioeconomic status of the respondent and his/her living conditions. For example, in case a stolen thing is not valuable enough in order to start an official police investigation, is it a theft or not? Another example, corporal punishment for children in some countries or ethnic groups could be treated as a common educational measure, while in others – as unacceptable violence, etc. These aspects should be analysed very carefully and described in the Manual in order to get

internationally comparable data and to facilitate the interpretation of results.

17. The Manual could be supplemented by wider recommendations on the calculation of indicators as well on other important factors of the survey: advantages and disadvantages of the time frame that is measured (for example, calendar year vs the last 12 months back from the yesterday; impact of the season in case the survey is carried out in different periods of the year or during the whole year; possible problems of different measurement periods related to the comparison of the annual administrative statistics and the survey results, etc.).

Response by the Chair of the Task Force:

18. The crime types and crime categories are sufficiently dealt with in chapter IV – Counting offences and victims. Suggest minor change to international comparability section.

19. The reference period and frequency of enumeration are well covered in the manual.

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

- **Add the text following to page 20** – Elements for international comparability: draft of key topics **Paragraph 72: 2nd last sentence:**

“Comparability does not depend exclusively on the questionnaire, but is also affected by a countries culture and its perception of what it deems to be a criminal offence. In some countries what may be deemed to be a serious criminal incident may be considered minor in some countries, while in others this same incident may be considered not to be criminal at all. An international standard classification of offences may assist in further improving international comparability in this area. Comparability is also affected by a number of other methodological issues. These are discussed in section IV.1 of the manual.”

- **Add the following text to page 20 paragraph (c):**

“Police data should be adjusted to account for any populations that are....., crimes against corporate or business victims and adjusted, if possible, so that the data refer to the same reference period.”

Comments by New Zealand:

Introduction

20. Box 1 (page 10) contains a list of countries with the most victimisation surveys; it states that specific surveys on violence against women and non-national surveys were not included; and that New Zealand has reported *three* such surveys.

21. Just to be precise, New Zealand has one national victimisation survey, which was originally called the NZ National Survey of Crime Victims (NZNSCV) and carried out in 1996 and 2001, which was then re-named to be called the NZ Crime and Safety Survey (NZCASS), in 2006.

22. By July 2009, the fourth victimisation survey will be at the analysis stage, and a new,

multi-purpose survey that contains a module on safety and security (the General Social Survey) will be operational.

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

Page 10 Box 1 – delete New Zealand from list of countries with most victim surveys.

23. In the past, New Zealand has also participated in two sweeps of the International Crime Victims Survey.

Section D – Limitations (p12)

24. This section fails to mention the impact of screener questions. Since these operate like memory prompts to the respondent, they can have an effect of increasing or decreasing the rates of various crime types reported. We think this is worth noting at the outset.

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

Page 13, paragraph 46 add the following sentence before the last sentence:

“Screener questions may also influence responses and can have an effect of increasing or decreasing the rates of various crime types reported.”

25. Paragraph 44 states: “Whereas some crime victimization surveys accept the respondent’s view as to whether an incident was a crime, others may use *the assessment of the interviewer* based on answers to a set of questions about the occurrence of particular incidents.”

26. We find it unusual—and probably unacceptable that an interviewer can make a judgement about whether a given incident is a crime or not. For the New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey we use legally trained people to ascertain whether a set of answers meets the criteria that the New Zealand Police would use to press charges. In this way, we are able to provide a consistent measure between surveys, and between a small number of professional coders who have all been trained in the same way.

Response by the Chair of the Task Force:

27. No change recommended. It is not unusual to rely on a persons interpretation of whether they were a victim of a crime or not and not all countries will be in a position to assess a response against a countries criminal code.

Methodological Issues

Section C – Quality Assurance (p30)

28. It seems surprising that *reliability* is not mentioned here. The ability of a question to elicit an accurate and meaningful response every time it is asked (i.e., between participants and over time) should be mentioned, we think.

Response by the Chair of the Task Force:

29. No change recommended. The purpose of this section is to describe in very broad terms the 6 dimensions of quality to users of statistics and is not meant to provide an assessment of all aspects of quality in the conduct of the survey, such as questionnaire design, frames, etc.

Section F- Survey Sample Frames (p40)

30. This section all makes good sense. However, there does not appear to be a discussion about how *response rates* are reported. So, since the enumeration process may be carried out in different ways, at least the way that the response rates are presented should make it very clear to the consumers of the final reports how the sampling was done, how vacant dwellings were dealt with, and the extent to which all residences were opened up, etc.

31. As a separate but related issue, the number of times that the interviewer tried to access a specific respondent does not seem to be mentioned here. We are aware that this can make a significant difference to response rates.

Response by the Chair of the Task Force:

32. No change recommended. The reporting of response rates are more appropriately discussed in the Dissemination and Ethical considerations chapters. Discussion of response rates is contained throughout the manual.

Paragraph 84 (p28).

33. This alludes to the comparability of surveys over time. We feel that stabilising the methodology and core questions of victimisation surveys should be mentioned and emphasised within the manual because achieving this will assist robust comparisons of crime estimates over time. Numerous changes to the design and methodology in each of the first three New Zealand Crime and Safety Surveys affected the ability to make robust comparisons of crime estimates over time.

34. Of course, we appreciate that this mandate needs to be balanced by a survey that is sufficiently rigorous to collect valid and reliable information—something that we achieved with the 2006 NZCASS, and have repeated with the 2009 NZCASS.

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

Add to the end of para 84 the following text:

“In order to ensure comparability over time the methodology and a core set of questions should remain constant”.

Counting Offences and Victims

Paragraph 299 (p89)

35. It is interesting to see an attempt here at unpacking the question of ‘breaking and entering’ which is no longer part of the definition of burglary in this country. It is perhaps useful to remind readers that the legal definitions of crimes will vary by country, and that the legal definitions provide the key focus for the development of questions around criminal victimisation.

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

Add to para 283 the following text:

“The experience of the respondents represents the crucial part of victim surveys. Household surveys may deal with a wide range of offences. It is important to note that the legal definitions and offence types will vary from country to country. The legal definitions of offences within a given jurisdiction will provide the key focus in the development of questions around criminal victimization. This chapter illustrates the range of offence types that could be included as part of a crime victimization survey.”

Table 8 (p114).

36. This table contains a list of household surveys that are included victimisation modules. Given the timeframe for New Zealand's new General Social Survey (operational by June 2009) and for the publication of the manual, we recommend that the General Social Survey be added to the table. This survey is administered by Statistics New Zealand.

Response by the Chair of the Task Force:

37. No change recommended. Any updates to this table would require significant consultation with each of the countries surveyed and this would delay the release of the Manual.

Questionnaire Design

6. Sequencing questions (p157-158)

38. Paragraph 526: - The advice here is different to what we do – i.e., the recommendation to ask about non-intimate partner violence before asking about partner violence for better communication and more complete interviews.

39. The New Zealand Crime & Safety Survey asks the sensitive partner violence questions in the second half of the survey, so there is a lead up to it. However, the section itself starts with the most severe incidents, as a way of getting past these first. This pattern is also used for the violence by people well-known, and then sexual victimisation. Generally, we find that people are happy enough to keep going to the end of the sexual victimisation, once they have got past the more difficult questions.

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

Add the following sentence to the end of paragraph 526:

“Placement of questions will vary across different countries. It is important that questions are fully tested prior to deciding on placement as these can influence a persons response to the survey.”

Pre-testing (p189)

40. We didn't see any reference to surveys that are done repeatedly, so perhaps this section on pre-testing is more relevant to newly established questionnaires?

Section C. Language and cultural considerations

41. The notes on cultural differences and protocols to follow if a specific cultural group is to be included in the survey (p184-186) suggest approaches well beyond what we do. The suggestions here are excellent, and provide good guidance for the future.

Additional comment

42. Interestingly, the chapter does not go into the incident selection process in the questionnaire except briefly in relation to managing repeat victimisation (p168). However, this section was rather confusing, and led us to think that some surveys may ask about all incidents, or have a very different structure around the use of screener questions. Interestingly a general outline of a questionnaire was not provided—but perhaps this is because there is so much variation between surveys.

Response by the Chair of the Task Force:

43. No change recommended. There is huge variation across countries therefore it is not possible to provide a general outline.

Ethical Considerations

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

Add last sentence to para 824:

“These ethical issues should form part of interviewer training.”

44. The section generally covers the normal ethical requirements. However, there is no reference to researcher safety and perhaps there should be. Sometimes the language becomes dogmatic – reads like it's written by a committee.

Comments on specific aspects.

45. Paragraph 827 states “the researcher must avoid embarrassing or harming the respondent in any way.....” This is too dogmatic a sentence – certainly one should try not to do this but in

this type of survey in particular this might happen and you have to have ways of mitigating any harm. Paragraph 839 recognises that respondents may react to some questions and that “it is not possible to avoid all such situations”. So it seems to contradict the previous requirement.

46. Paragraph 827 last sentence seems to indicate that some victimisation surveys might not be voluntary. Suggest they include something about these types of surveys needing to be voluntary.

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

In paragraph 827 replace the 2nd last sentence with the following text.

“Change the words ‘must avoid embarrassing or harming the respondent’ to ‘mitigate against embarrassing or harming the respondent.’”

47. Paragraph 835 first sentence – ensuring interviews are conducted away from other household members. Certainly this is preferable but in some cultures this may not be appropriate. Also, it depends on which family member and the wishes of the respondent.

48. Paragraph 837 first sentence – very dogmatic isn’t it that researchers must try not to do this and there should be suitable training for the interviewers.

Response by the Chair of the Task Force:

49. No change recommended. Introduced change at the beginning of the chapter above.

50. Paragraph 849 – doesn’t cover the need to develop research protocols to cover situations where the threat self harm or harm to others is discovered.

Response by the Chair of the Task Force:

51. No change recommended. Covered in para 833 last sentence.

52. Paragraph 853 second sentence. We suggest you change the word “often” to “may be”.

Response by the Chair of the Task Force:

53. No change recommended.

54. Paragraph 854 Sentence starting “Respondents will be more....” The word “abused” is inappropriate. Sentence starting “The public as well as.....” It’s impractical to have to present *everything* that one must know to interpret the results. Isn’t it sufficient information to be able to interpret the results.

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

Replace in para 854. 2nd sentence the words ‘they are not abused by survey researchers’ by ‘if they are treated with respect by researchers.’ Replace in the 3rd sentence text ‘honest and present everything one must know’ by ‘honest and provide sufficient information to interpret the results.’

Interviewing

55. Paragraph 636: partial non response can also be due to respondent fatigue, especially if the survey is long.

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

Add in paragraph 636 to the last sentence after ‘...and may result from items the respondent feels are personal or too sensitive (e.g. income)’ new text:
“fatigue due to the questionnaire being too long”

56. Paragraph 652: Suggests you have a toll free number for people to call for the survey queries etc and to reorganise appointment times and another number (not toll free) for people to call to clarify legitimacy of the survey. We have one toll free number from sponsoring institution which functions for general queries about the survey and for clarification about legitimacy. A second toll free number is answered by the fieldwork company to change appointment times, and also answer general survey queries. There could be a danger in having a non toll free number that people may call to clarify the survey legitimacy as the cost of calling may put people off.

57. Paragraph 663: In addition to taking precautions when interviewing minority ethnicities, for sensitive surveys, it can be beneficial to offer interviewers of the same gender to the respondent (e.g. female interviewer for female respondents).

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

Add in paragraph 664 new sentence before 4th sentence:
“Arrangements for same sex[] interviewers may mitigate against some of these issues.”

58. Paragraph 681: Mentions in victimisation surveys can get self defensive answers or refusals due to the nature of the survey. This is where methodologies such as CASI can be valuable in face to face surveys, as it provides for a higher degree of confidentiality than normal CAPI measures.

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

Add the following sentence at the end of paragraph 681:
“Methodologies such as CASI[] can be valuable in face to face interviewing as it provides for a higher degree of confidentiality[] than normal CAPI measures.”

59. Paragraph 698: This is mentioned later, but I also think it is important to mention it here, that care should be taken if the proxy is a spouse of the respondent in victimisation surveys.

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

Add in the 2nd sentence in paragraph 698:

“For a victimization survey, the proxy respondent....a close relationship to the designated respondent, except in the case of surveys that specifically deal with family and domestic violence.”

Selecting interviewers section:

60. It can also be beneficial to have interviewers of different ethnicities (as mentioned earlier) who are able to speak different languages, within the interviewer teams.

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

Add the following sentence at end of paragraph 706:

“There is also some benefit in using multilingual interviewers when dealing with respondents who have language difficulties.”

61. Paragraph 712: Should also take into consideration role playing.

Proposal for amendment in the Manual:

Add to paragraph 712 part (d) Preparing materials: questionnaire guide, interviewers manual, design of role plays,.....

62. Paragraph 719: Interviewers need to have guidelines in place on what to do for victimisation surveys if the respondent appears to be at risk of harm in their household. This point is mentioned later, but I also feel it is important to acknowledge it here as well.

63. Box 53: Our experiences have shown us that it is important to have the sponsoring Institute at the interviewer trainings for victimisation surveys. They are best placed to stress the importance of the survey, its purpose to the interviewers and also to make sure that questions are being answered as they had intended.

64. Role playing: again, important not just for IVAWS, but also for victimisation and surveys with a sensitive subject matter.

Comments by Poland:

65. Poland had a comment on the item dealing with proxy respondents. In their opinion it would be profitable to put more attention to the role of proxy respondents in children interviewing. Children very often and easily become objects of crimes and surveying this group of victims is an important and simultaneously difficult question. Therefore the issue of children interviewing and the role of proxy respondents in such cases should be specially taken into account in the Manual.

Response by the Chair of the Task Force:

66. The proxy section in the manual is fairly comprehensive. If the issue is about the use of proxies to answer on behalf of children, then further advice as to what additional material is required is sought. If the issue is about ensuring that young children are not excluded in crime victimization surveys as the number of victims would be underestimated, then examples and experiences of countries who do survey young children in their crime victimization surveys would be required.

V. PROPOSAL

67. In view of the general support by countries and organizations to the endorsement of the Manual, **it is proposed that the Conference endorses the *Manual on Victimization Surveys*, subject to the inclusion of the amendments indicated above.**

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