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**Session 3 – Invited paper**

**NATIONAL VICTIMISATION SURVEYS IN FINLAND**

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1. This paper discusses the background of the Finnish national victimisation surveys and the implementation of the studies. The presentation focuses on questions of the content of the survey: how violence, property crimes and fear are defined in the interview, and what methodological findings and problems have emerged in the surveys.
2. National victimisation surveys with a complex information contents, particular field work modes and routines, and a long "own" history are difficult to compare with those of other countries. Because of different contexts of the studies, a comparison of the responses to single questions purposing to operationalise the same problem may yield unreliable /non-comparable results. Consequently, no international comparisons of the results of the Finnish national victimisation surveys have been published.

**OECD background**

3. The OECD social indicator development program was initiated in 1970. The aim of the program was to create a comprehensive statistical information system of different areas of social life parallel to the indicators developed for economic development. One of the defined main

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social indicator areas was personal safety and judicial administration. The expert group of this section published a recommendation<sup>1</sup>, which presented a model to measure physical safety of the citizens with a detailed questionnaire outline. According to this recommendation, victimisation comprised

- injuries in traffic,
- at the workplace,
- at home,
- in sports and
- in other activities, and
- physical and sexual violence and threats of physical violence.<sup>2</sup>

4. Finland was the lead country of this working group, and the model was recommended to Statistics Finland, which was planning their first large national victimisation survey. The idea of measuring physical safety more broadly than by criminal victimisation only was adopted in this study, and the questionnaire was developed to contain the proposed OECD measuring instrument with two important additions. Victimisation to property crimes and, later on, questions on the fear of victimisation were developed.

5. The idea of describing the widely defined victimisation is ambitious. The survey results showed that the injuries are a much more severe risk to the physical health of the citizens than violence, and also caused considerably higher costs to the health sector. Similar studies with large samples were repeated in 1988, 1997, 2003 and with a smaller sample in 1993. A new survey will be carried out in 2006.

6. Despite many benefits, the survey based on the widely defined victimisation concept has disadvantages. The linking of different victimisation incidents has been done with the physical injuries caused by the incidence. This is a narrow contact surface because many criminal victimisation incidents do not result in physical injuries. Because of the physical injuries are of central interest to the injury survey, also in the violence section the injury oriented approach is emphasised. On the other hand, the health surveys nowadays often study the field of injuries, which include physical violence. In survey research, the interview always tends to be too long to the respondent, and consequently the injury questions are severely restricting the improvement (and enlargement) of the crime victimisation items.

### **Samples and modes**

7. The interviews of the Finnish national victimisation survey have been conducted by Statistics Finland. It has a highly qualified survey unit with 150-180 interviewers working in all areas of the country. The response rates in all Finnish victimisation surveys have exceeded 80 per cent.

8. The sample frame of the respondents has consisted of people living permanently in Finland, who were 15 – 74 years old (in the later surveys also a sub-sample of citizens over 74 years was added). The Finnish Population register has updated information of all permanent residents in the country, and it is possible for governmental and scientific studies to draw statistically representative samples of the population from the register. The sample of the first Finnish national victimisation survey was based on stratified cluster sampling, but in the latter sweeps a

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<sup>1</sup> Törnudd, Patrik (1982) Measuring victimisation. The OECD social indicator development programme. Special Studies No.6. Paris: OECD.

<sup>2</sup> Physical injury was the inclusion criterion in other injury (accident) categories except for traffic accidents. Similarly, in violence and threats, physical injury was not required.

sampling procedure comparable to simple random sampling (systematic sampling) was used. The sample sizes have varied between 5.000 and 15.000 persons depending on the financial resources.

9. The victimisation survey has been attached to the Finnish labour force survey. The labour force survey is a short, 5 minutes long interview, and yields important background information to the victimisation survey (e.g. occupation and employment). The interview mode was changed in 1997: paper questionnaires were replaced by a CATI application. The average total length of the interview has been 20 minutes.

10. The interviews were made by telephone, if the interviewer found the number of the respondent. If not, the interview was a face to face interview. Telephone ownership is thus not a property of the sampling frame, but a contacting possibility in the interviewing mode.

### **Content of the survey**

11. In the following three topics of the survey are discussed. The injury module and the background variables are excluded from the discussion. The topics are: the screening questions of violence, property crimes, and fear of crime.

12. **The violence** screening questions can be traced back to the first Finnish victimisation surveys (the first was published in 1971). Unlike in some other countries, the Finnish survey did not only pursue to describe the dark figure problem, i.e. concentrate on crimes punishable according to the penal law, but tried to assess the violations of personal safety in a more general sense. The items correspond in principle to the characteristics of criminal violence defined in the law, but this is not indispensable

13. The violence screening questions in the 2003 survey were following:

"Violence is often being discussed. I enumerate now some forms of violence. Have you, over the last 12 months, been in situations where someone you know or a stranger has:

- i). threatened you,
- ii). prevented you from moving or grabbed you,
- iii). pushed or shoved you,
- iv). hit you without causing physical injuries,
- v). hit you so that bruises or wounds were caused,
- vi). stabbed you with a knife, or attacked you with another weapon,
- vii). behaved violently towards you in some other way,
- viii). or has anyone you know or a stranger attacked you or touched you in a way you felt sexually offensive.
- ix). Take your time to consider. In violence and threats we have just discussed, the perpetrator may also be a partner, a family member or a close friend. So, in addition to the incidents we just discussed, has someone you know behaved violently towards you or threatened you over the last 12 months?

14. The response alternatives to each item were yes and no. If the response was yes, an additional question was asked: "How many times did this happen over the last 12 months?" This was done to assess the accumulation of different forms of victimisation.

15. The survey concentrates on physical violence and threats. Therefore, psychological violence is missing, similar to violence caused by social structures. These are difficult topics to measure. However, questions of for example different forms of harassment, molestation and bullying are included in other surveys, such as the Finnish violence against women surveys.

16. Items i)-vii) were the initial victimisation questions asked since the 1980 survey. The question set was completed in 1997 with item viii). The question was asked in 1997 of women only.

17. The screener question is crucial for classifying the respondents to victims or non-victims. If the screener question does not recognise the victimisation of the respondent, the victim is classified to non-victims, and the detailed follow-up questions of victimisation are skipped. On the other hand, it is possible that the respondent reports a victimisation event, which has not happened to him/her during the reference period. According to our experience, under-reporting is a far more severe problem than over-reporting. Especially the pace in the telephone interview (and the long item list) may leave too little time to restore the victimisation incident into a response.

18. It is possible to calculate an overall indicator of the items i) – ix), and a time series comparison of items i) – vii). Also separate comparisons of time series of physical violence and threats are possible. This gives, however, a very general picture of violence. “The everyday violence” kind of violence that takes place in certain circumstances, between certain population groups etc. Jeff Hearn<sup>3</sup> speaks of violences, meaning that there are many kinds of violence, each of which occurs in different situations and has different causes. The violence reported in the Finnish national victimisation surveys has been divided into different victimisation situations. In order to do this, the victims are asked the following detailed questions:

- a) Did the violence happen: 1) in gainful employment, at the workplace, 2) when commuting to or from work, 3) in voluntary work, 4) during leisure time activities, 5) at school or on the way to school, when studying, 6) on other occasions?
- b) In what kind of place did the violence happen? 1) own home, 2) other residence, 3) summer cottage, 4) on the yard of the house or in the staircase, 5) in school area, 6) at the workplace, 7) in a restaurant, bar or dancehall, also in the entrance area, 8) in a shop, hotel, station or in some other public building, 9) in a ship (on public area), 10) in a hotel room or in a cabin of a ship, 11) in a sports, music or other public event, 12) on street, road, pavement or other public place outdoors, 13) in a public transportation (train, bus, metro, taxi), 14) in jogging footpath, in parks, 15) in other places (Where?) [the response alternatives are not read out to the respondent]
- c) Was the perpetrator or some of the perpetrators for you previously: 1) fully unknown, 2) known only by sight or by name, 3) a temporary acquaintance, 4) an old friend, 5) a fellow worker, 6) a relative, 7) family member, 8) ex-spouse or partner, 9) other person, (Who?)?
- d) If c=7, an additional question was asked : Which family member? 1) husband, wife, 2) partner, 3) child, 4) mother or father, 5) other family member.

19. By combining the response categories of these two dimensions – the relation between the victim and the perpetrator, and the place of occurrence – it is possible to construct a typology of victimisations, which describe the common victimisation situations more closely:

- street violence (unknown perpetrator, public place outdoors)
- other stranger violence in public places (unknown perpetrator, public place indoors)

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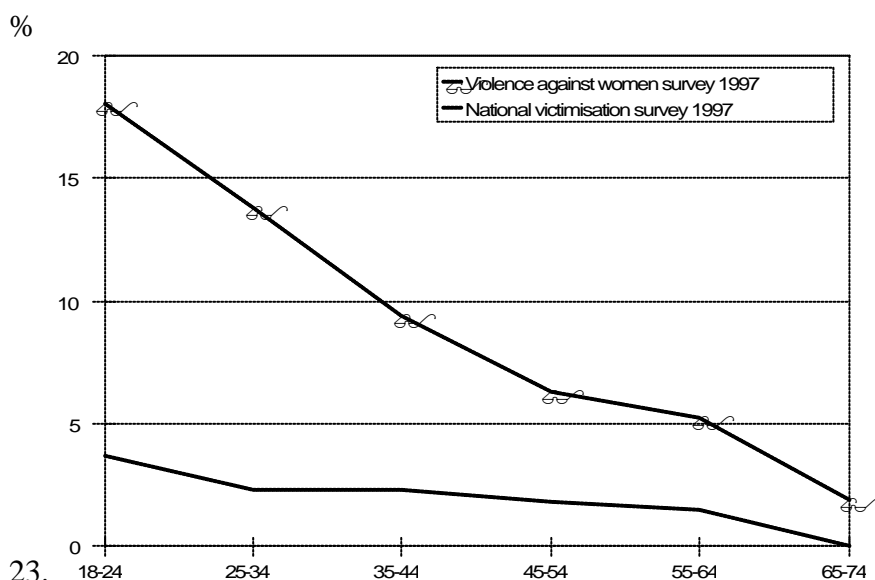
<sup>3</sup> Jeff Hearn (1998) *The Violences of Men*. London: Sage.

- work related violence (workplace)
- small group violence (perpetrator known, not family member)
- family violence / partner violence

20. The trends in different victimisation categories have been different, although the overall level of violence has been rather stable. The typology has yielded useful background information, for example, for violence prevention purposes. The idea of this kind of classification could be utilised also for other crimes (e.g. for household property crimes).

21. The relationship of the victim to the perpetrator may have influence on defining and reporting the violence in the interview. In comparing the results of the National victimisation survey with the Finnish violence against women mail survey, it was found that intimate violence was underestimated in the results of the National victimisation survey. One reason for the large difference presented in Figure 1. may be that the National victimisation survey concentrates on incidents, not the perpetrators like the Violence against women survey.

22. In spite of the concrete victimisation questions, some of the Finnish results have been difficult to interpret. Although the question items in the National victimisation survey and the Violence against women survey are partly different<sup>4</sup>, the large difference in results is hardly caused by the difference in wording of the items, but in the structure of the interview. In the National victimisation survey the incident was asked first (...has pushed or shoved you?...), and the follow-up questions specified the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. The Violence against women survey asked whether different perpetrator groups (one of which was the current partner) had used different forms of violence towards the respondent. Recognising of the perpetrator was probably facilitated by the mail mode, in which the respondent reads the questions and may think about the answer in peace.



23. *Figure 1. Female victims of partner violence and threats during the 12 months in different age groups in the Violence against women survey and in the National victimisation survey 1997 (% of women with a partner )*

<sup>4</sup> The Finnish violence against women survey had screener items concerning slapping, throwing with a hard object, beating the woman's head against something, strangling and attempting to strangle, which were missing from the National victimisation survey. On the other hand, item iii) (pushing or shoving) was missing from the Violence against women survey.

24. It is clear that depending on which results are chosen as the description of the situation of violence against women in partner relationships, the claims for crime policy suggested to cure the problem differ (e.g. need for prevention, new services, shelters).

25. Item ix) was added to the questionnaire to give an additional “stimulus” to the respondent to find, that also violence and threats in close relations are asked in the survey (and that also these kind of incidents are violence). In 2003, the addition of items viii) and ix) increased women’s victimisation to partner violence in all age groups, but the increase was on the average less than one percentage unit, so the improvement does not essentially decrease the gap between the results of the National victimisation survey and the Violence against women survey (Fig. 1.).

26. On the other hand, the National victimisation survey yielded higher prevalences for such violence, in which the perpetrator was unknown to the victim (typical incidents are street violence, and victimisation in restaurants and bright lights). This shows that both surveys were somewhat out of balance, the one biased in favour of stranger violence, the other of partner violence.

27. The context of violence in the survey is further described by the place and time of occurrence, , the person of the perpetrator, alcohol use, health consequences, the reason of violence, and details of reporting or not-reporting the violence to the police. Also a short free text description of the incident was recorded in the CATI questionnaire.

28. A particular feature in the Finnish national victimisation survey is, that the detailed follow-up questions are asked of three last incidents. In one of three cases the number of the victimisation events over the last 12 months exceeded three; thus, the three most recent cases do not fully cover all violence incidents of some victims. They do provide, however, a “sample” of the incidents of the “multiple victims”.

29. **The property crime** screener question was changed in the 1997 survey to correspond to the ICVS (International crime victimisation survey) property crime questions. The former form of the question defined the victim of property crimes according to general crime category:

- i) Over the last 12 months, has any property in your personal use:
  - been stolen
  - been a target for attempted theft
  - been deliberately damaged
  - been a target for attempted damage? [If yes, the number of incidents in each category]
- ii) [If the respondent had children under 15 years]: Has the property in personal use of your child under 15 years during the last 12 months:
  - been stolen
  - been a target for attempted theft
  - been deliberately damaged
  - been a target for attempted damage? [If yes, the number of incidents in each category]
- iii) [If the number of the members in the household was > 1]: Has the property in the shared use of the members of your household during the last 12 months:
  - been stolen
  - been a target for attempted theft
  - been deliberately damaged
  - been a target for attempted damage? [If yes, the number of incidents in each category]

- iv) Have the cheques of the members of our household been misused over the last 12 months? [How many cheques?]
- v) Have the credit cards (or charge cards) of the members of our household been misused over the last 12 months? [How many times?]

30. These questions were found problematic, because the general property crime categories are far from the goods actually stolen/damaged. "Has the property in your personal use been damaged?" sounds different from "Has your car been damaged?" The discussion here raises similar concerns as the one about the definition of violence.

31. A worse problem in the questions was caused by the fact, that an attempt was made to estimate the number of crimes from a person based sample to the household level. Correspondingly different weighting coefficients were applied to i) - iii). An additional problem was confronted when evaluating, which commodities were in the own use of the respondent, and which were in shared use. This distinction is socially changing depending on the increase of the purchase power of the citizens and the supply of new goods to the consumers. Consequently, the estimates for property crimes were found unreliable, and comparisons between the survey sweeps could not be made.

32. The ICVS questions on property crimes were easy to understand. They do not represent "all" property crimes the household may have been confronted with, but a set of common property crimes; the questions are also easy to understand in different cultures, although the focus of the question items is predominantly on vehicles.

33. The new property crime items were:

- i). Over the last 12 months have you or another member of your household had any of their cars, vans or trucks stolen? [If yes, how many times? – the ownership of vehicles is asked in advance]
- ii). Over the last 12 months, have you or have other members of your household been the victim of a theft of belongings or part of the car like car radio, mirror or wheel? [If yes, how many times?]
- iii). Over the last 12 months, have you or other member of your household had any of their cars, vans or trucks deliberately damaged? [If yes, how many times?]
- iv). Over the last 12 months, have you or other member of your household had any of their mopeds, scooters or motorcycles stolen? [If yes, how many times?]
- v). Over the last 12 months, have you or other member of your household had any of their bicycles stolen? [If yes, how many times?]
- vi). Over the past 12 months, did anyone get into your home without permission, and steal or try to steal something? [If yes, how many times?]
- vii). Over the past 12 months, do you have any evidence that someone tried to get into your home unsuccessfully? For example, damage to lock, doors or windows or scratches around the lock? [If yes, how many times?]
- viii). Next, I am going to ask you some questions about what may have happened to you personally. Things that you have mentioned already or which happened to other members of your household must not be mentioned here.

Personal property can be stolen in many ways. Such crimes are, for example, pickpocketing, theft of a purse, wallet, portable phone or clothing. Over the past 12

months have you been personally victim of these kind of thefts? [If yes, how many times?]

- ix). And have you or other member of the family during the last 12 months been victim of any other property crimes [than mentioned above]? [If yes, how many times?]

34. The list of items becomes as long and tiresome as the violence victimisation screener question. Compared to the ICVS the reference time is 12 months (5 years in the ICVS), the robbery screener [...has anyone stolen or tried to steal something from you by using force or threatening you... ] is missing, and item ix) is added.

35. The idea of adding item ix) is that the results would be comparable with the previous sweeps of the national victimisation survey although the screening questions were different; rough comparisons with earlier Finnish ICVS results and earlier National victimisation results could be possible.

36. Robbery as a crime category is problematic in the interview, because it contains at the same time features of violence and of property crime. In the Finnish national victimisation survey, robbery was separated from violence by the question asking about the purpose [=theft] of the violence. In Finland, requests for tobacco or money etc quite often precede the male victimisation.

37. The follow-up questions about the three most recent property crime victimisation events have been similar through the years. The item set contains questions of the place and time of the crime, a detailed classification of the goods [of course adding over time new products such as portable phones] stolen or damaged, police reporting, and reasons for not reporting and the estimate of the value of the lost or damaged property, and an estimate of the compensation received from different sources. The financial estimates of the total loss in different commodity categories have been proven unreliable and sensitive to variations, because of the weighting coefficients and the difficulties in estimating the monetary value to many consumer products and valuables.

38. As a conclusion of the property crime section in the Finnish national victimisation survey could be said that the results have been proven of less interest compared to the results of the of violence section. This may also have depended on the interests of the researchers. On the other hand, the results cover only a part of the volume of annual property crimes, because businesses and other corporate bodies are not included in the sampling frame. For example, an issue which has not been very far pursued as yet is how the adoption of protection measures relate to future victimisation.

39. **Fear of crime** was studied for the first time only in the 1988 survey. The fear or insecurity questions were copied from surveys conducted in other countries. The 1988 fear question set consisted of the following items:

- i). In the neighbourhood of your home, within a one kilometer radius, is there some area, where you do not want to walk alone late in the evening or at night? [yes, no, don't know]
- ii). Some people are sometimes concerned of falling victim to violence or property crime. How concerned are you of:
- that your house is burgled and something is stolen?
  - falling victim to violence in the evening outdoors?
  - [for women only]: falling victim to sexual harassment or rape? [the response

alternatives were read to the respondents: very concerned, somewhat concerned, not at all concerned]

- iii). Have you ever been concerned of a member of your family or a close friend falling victim to violence, when he/she is out in the evening? [very concerned, somewhat concerned, not at all concerned]
- iv). [if concerned in iii): On behalf of whom are you particularly concerned? [wife, husband, partner, parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, other members of the family, relatives, other friends]

40. In later surveys, questions of concern for violence inside the family, at the workplace, and - for men -the concern for victimisation to sexual harassment were added.

41. The questions yield rather high rates of concerned persons. For example in the 1990s more than half of the women were at least somewhat concerned of falling victim to violence outdoors. This kind of a definition of fear has been criticised, because the meaning, the intensity, and the frequency of the fear remain unclear.<sup>5</sup> Are these figures a reliable and useful indicators of the development of safety in the society?

42. Stephen Farrall has proposed a small revision to the questions to exclude the infrequent and minor cases. The following question set will be tested in the Finnish National victimisation survey in 2006. These questions are asked in the surveys in addition to the old questions:

- i). In the past year, have you ever actually felt fearful about the possibility of becoming a victim of crime? [yes, no]
- ii). [If yes]: on the last occasion, how fearful did you feel? [cannot remember, not very fearful, a little fearful, quite fearful, very fearful]
- iii). [if yes]: how frequently have you felt like this in the last year? [number of times classified]

43. Although the meaning of the fear still remains to be studied, fear (or concern) is limited to the time period of one year, and the frequency of the fear is asked. This, of course, gives the researcher the possibility to "reduce" the fear by choosing a convenient frequency as the threshold value. In spite of the new formulation of the question, the definition of fear or concern could be a topic that should be studied further in survey laboratories, using cognitive methods.

44. An interesting result in the 1988 survey (items iii & iv)) was that although men are less concerned of their safety outdoors, the difference is small when the concern for persons intimate to the respondent is studied: 50 per cent of men were in 1988 at least somewhat concerned for persons intimate to them falling victim to violence outdoors. This question has, however, not been repeated in the subsequent surveys.

45. In the 1988 survey, if the respondent answered yes to item i) , a sub-sample of respondents was asked for the reason why they did not want to walk outdoors alone late in the evening or at night. Half of the respondents gave a concrete population group as the reason (e.g. young people, alcohol users, sexual criminals, minorities and unemployed persons). Part of the respondents referred to undefined fear; in these cases, the respondent had some knowledge of or had heard stories that something violent or bad had happened in the area (13 % of cases). Every fifth

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<sup>5</sup> Farrall, Stephen (2004) Revisiting crime surveys: emotional responses without emotions? OR Look back at anger. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Vol. 7, NO.2, 157-171.

respondent told that the reason for not walking outdoors was fear of darkness with no connection to violence. Furthermore, 15 per cent of the respondents reported reasons completely different from fear of darkness and violence, like fear of the nature or animals (or rabies epidemic). So, more than every third respondent, who did not go outdoors in the evening had a reason, which was not related to violence or crimes.

## **Discussion**

46. Researchers in Finland have an advantage compared to many colleagues in other countries in one respect: Finland has a comprehensive population register of all citizens living in the country, and the number of unregistered immigrants is small. This register is also available for research purposes. It is possible to draw statistically representative samples from the register. This may also be a problem while international comparisons are made, if other countries have less accurate sampling frames. The question here is: should every country use an identical or the best possible sampling method available for them?

47. Another advantage in Finland is the positive survey research climate. The response rate is higher than in many other countries, if the best possible methods are used. The gap between the highest and the lowest response rates is, however, high. A low response rate is often detrimental to the results and weakens their credibility .

48. There has been discussion of the need of a total reform of the Finnish national victimisation survey. The present basic structure and contents of the survey is based on developing work carried out in the 1970s. This is a long time in the history of a social survey.

49. A severe problem in the implementation of the Finnish national victimisation survey has been its financial ad hoc nature. Statistics Finland stopped funding the survey after the 1997 study. Also for the previous sweeps of the survey, the financing came from several sources. Since the 2003 survey, the National Research Institute of Legal Policy has taken the responsibility for reporting the results, but the financing is still on a non-continuous basis.

50. How are the results of the victimisation surveys used in the Finnish society? In the 1980s the National victimisation survey was almost the only information source concerning the safety of the population. At that time, however, the demand for information was also smaller. In the 1990s safety changed into a commercial commodity, and competing private and governmental actors and views entered into the field. The strength of the Finnish national victimisation survey has been the long time series based on large and statistically representative samples.

51. Because violence is seen as a problem in Finnish society, the results of crime victimisation surveys are widely discussed in public. For example, topics like violence against women (also the difference described in Fig. 1. has been a subject to disputes for a long time), the increase of violence at workplaces, increasing willingness of the victims to report violence to the police, fear of crime and crime and media (e.g. the increase of violence news compared with the stable or decreasing violence rates) are often discussed by the administration and media; also Finnish violence prevention programs and projects have used the results. The discussion of victimisation to property crimes has been minor compared with the one concerning violence.

52. Victimization surveys have methodological generations.<sup>6</sup> These generations are much shorter in time compared to man's generations. The new generations bring along more effective tools to study violence; for example, the screening questions describe more precisely different forms of victimization. There have been efforts to develop extensively the Finnish national victimization survey, but the work has not been very intensive; only the most severe problems have been grasped. Therefore Finnish criminologists have high expectations concerning the attempts to develop a common European model for the crime victimization surveys.

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<sup>6</sup> Wallby, Sylvia & Myhill, Andrew (2001) New survey methodologies in researching violence against women. *British Journal of Criminology* Vol. 41, 502-522.