

UNODC-UNECE Manual on Victimization Surveys

Part I - Introduction

Ch. I.A. Purpose of the manual

1. The main purpose of the UNODC-UNECE Manual on Victimization Surveys is to provide basic information for developing national victimization surveys and to identify key issues to assist in decision making about survey approach, methodology, analysis and presentation of results.
2. The manual answers typical questions faced when designing and planning a victimization survey, such as: What are the minimum requirements for a victim survey? How frequently should victim surveys be repeated? How to organize a survey? What types of crime should be included? What period of time should be covered? What is the best sampling design? Do interviewing methods affect the comparability of results? How to select and train the interviewers? How to monitor and report on quality and survey limitations?
3. The questions above are particularly relevant for the countries that are in the process of developing victim survey programs for the first time and have limited experience in this field. In this manual, countries with extensive experience in designing national victim surveys share their knowledge and experience with the international community.
4. The manual is the first attempt to develop methodological guidelines at the international level for designing national victimization surveys. The ultimate goal of the manual is to improve the comparability of victimization survey results. 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 police, prosecution, court and corrections statistics and victim data collections.¹ It is stressed, however, that perfect comparability is not possible because victim surveys reflect the experiences of victimization as perceived by the victims, and these may vary across different cultural contexts.
5. The manual focuses on specific national victimization surveys but references are included when relevant to the International Crime Victim Surveys (ICVS – see paras 27-28). ICVS surveys play an important role in providing internationally comparable data while national victim surveys with their larger scope and sample size focus more closely on topics that may be of particular relevance in specific countries.

¹ See the report of the Joint UNECE-UNODC Meeting on Crime Statistics, held on 3-5 November 2004 in Geneva (<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/ces/2004/48.e.pdf>)

6. The manual will cover the end to end business process for developing, and conducting crime victimization surveys and disseminating information from these surveys. A summary is illustrated below.

Figure: CRIME VICTIMIZATION SURVEYS END TO END PROCESS

The following describes the major elements of the end to end process used to conduct household-based crime victimisation surveys.

<p style="text-align: center;">1. Examine Client Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify internal and external client needs (what are the policy/research questions that need to be answered?) • Prioritise information needs • Determine broad survey parameters, sample and technology • Determine broad output requirements • Identify data constraints and data quality requirements • Identify issues and risks • Obtain first stage approval 	<p style="text-align: center;">5. Transform Inputs into Statistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce aggregate estimates • Impute data • Identify and correct deviation anomalies • Identify and treat significant aggregate level anomalies • Identify and resolve outliers • Weight data • Validate weighted data • Confidentialize data
<p style="text-align: center;">2. Design and Test</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify and obtain more detailed data item requirements • Develop survey strategy • Define scope and coverage • Develop frame and sample specifications • Develop concepts (re-use or create, definitions, classifications, etc.) • Develop collection instrument • Determine testing and QA strategies • Test and evaluate concepts, definitions, questions, procedures, training, documentation, instrument and methodologies • Finalise data items, questions, collection instrument and collection procedures; specify derivations • Develop and test input and output systems/other systems or databases 	<p style="text-align: center;">6. Analyze and Explain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake special analysis • Compile clearance documentation • Analyze and write up key findings • Measure and explain comparability with other results • Produce relative standard errors and other reliability measures <p style="text-align: center;">7. Assemble and Disseminate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assemble statistical products (reports, web content, supplementary tables, etc.) • Draft manuscript • Obtain clearance to release survey information • Release products • Prepare media release to accompany the dissemination of main survey outputs
<p style="text-align: center;">3. Acquire Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare survey frame and sample • Select sample • Allocate interviewer workloads • Conduct interviews and field editing • Manage field operations • Resolve field queries • Capture responses and repair data • Extract management information about the collection process 	<p style="text-align: center;">8. Decision Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage client requests for information from the survey • Undertake customised consultancies to meet specific client needs • Produce special articles • Maintain links with key clients • Provide insight into the meaning of the numbers for key clients
<p style="text-align: center;">4. Process Inputs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean field data • Code selected items (for example, offence data) • Perform special coding (of diaries, paper forms, 	<p style="text-align: center;">9. Evaluate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the entire survey cycle • Document issues and improvements for next cycle

etc.) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify and treat significant unit record anomalies	
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7. This manual is the result of the joint effort of the following experts who composed the Task Force on Victim Surveys created by UNECE and UNODC:

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- Jodi-Anne Brzozowski (Statistics Canada)
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- Maria Giuseppina Muratore (Istat, Italy)
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- Beata Gruszczynska (Institute of Justice of Poland)
- Alison Walker (Home Office, United Kingdom)
- Jon Simmons Office for National Statistics, United Kingdom)
- Michael Rand (US Bureau of Justice Statistics)
- Kauko Aromaa (HEUNI)
- Joanna Goodey (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights - FRA)
- Sami Nevala (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights - FRA)
- Geoffrey Thomas (Eurostat)

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Ch. I.B. Quality assurance

9. Statistics Canada defines quality or "fitness for use" of statistical information in terms of six constituent elements or dimensions: relevance, accuracy, timeliness, accessibility, interpretability, and coherence (Statistics Canada, 2002c).
10. The *relevance* of statistical information reflects the degree to which it meets the real needs of clients. It is concerned with whether the available information sheds light on the issues that are important to users. Assessing relevance is subjective and depends upon the varying needs of users. The Agency's challenge is to weigh and balance the conflicting needs of current and potential users to produce a program that goes as far as possible in satisfying the most important needs within given resource constraints.
11. The *accuracy* of statistical information is the degree to which the information correctly describes the phenomena it was designed to measure. It is usually characterized in terms of error in statistical estimates and is traditionally decomposed into bias (systematic error) and variance (random error) components. It may also be described in terms of the major sources of error that potentially cause inaccuracy (e.g., coverage, sampling, nonresponse, response).
12. The *timeliness* of statistical information refers to the delay between the reference point (or the end of the reference period) to which the information pertains, and the date on which the information becomes available. It typically involves a trade-off against accuracy. The timeliness of information will influence its relevance.
13. The *accessibility* of statistical information refers to the ease with which it can be obtained from the Agency and understood by its users (who may not be statistically adept). This includes the ease with which the existence of information can be ascertained, as well as the suitability of the form or medium through which the information can be accessed. The cost of the information may also be an aspect of accessibility for some users.
14. The *interpretability* of statistical information reflects the availability of the supplementary information and metadata necessary to interpret and utilize it appropriately. This information normally includes the underlying concepts, variables, questions and classifications used, the methodology of data collection and processing, and indications or measures of response rates and accuracy of the statistical information.
15. The *coherence* of statistical information reflects the degree to which it can be successfully brought together with other statistical information within a broad analytic framework and over time. The use of standard concepts, classifications and target populations promotes coherence, as does the use of common methodology across surveys. Coherence does not necessarily imply full numerical consistency.
16. These dimensions of quality are overlapping and interrelated. There is no general model that brings them together to optimize or to prescribe a level of quality. Achieving an acceptable level of quality is the result of addressing, managing and balancing these elements of quality over time with careful attention to program

objectives, costs, respondent burden and other factors that may affect information quality or user expectations. This balance is a critical aspect of the design of the Agency's surveys.

Ch. I.C. History of victim surveys: Evolution and where we are today

17. Victim surveys were developed as a methodology quite late, and were part of the general growth of positivism and quantitative methods in the social sciences relating to the establishment of the nation state and the desire of modern forms of government to understand their population and environments, and to provide an evidence-base for the development of policy interventions.

18. Early social surveys, such as Henry Mayhew's 'London Labor and the London Poor' (1851) and Charles Booth's 'Labor and Life of the People' (1889-1903) involved interviewing their subjects about their social conditions and attitudes. The earliest known occasion that the collection of statistics on crime at the international level was considered was at the General Statistical Congress held in Brussels in 1853. The next known major effort was made at the International Congress on the Prevention and Repression of Crime, held in London in 1872. At these meetings a factor emerged which until relatively recently continued to remain in the foreground through all subsequent efforts, namely, the problem of comparability of definitions.²

19. Government measurement of crime initially focused on administrative sources, such as police and court statistics. The United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (also known as the 'Crime Trends Survey') was established in 1978 and aimed to conduct a more focused inquiry into the incidence of crime worldwide. This far-reaching world-wide study draws on administrative sources. To date, there have been ten surveys, covering the years 1970-2006.³

20. Government interest in looking beyond its own administrative sources to surveys of the population increased during the Second World War, reflected in the UK by the launch of the Government Social Survey. The Government Social Survey began life in the spring of 1941 as the Wartime Social Survey. It was originally part of the Ministry of Information's Home Intelligence Division and consisted of a handful of researchers, mostly recruited from the new field of market research.⁴ The early government surveys focused on health and economic questions, along with certain public attitudes. There were initial fears that government asking the public questions about their life and attitudes would be greeted with some suspicion, but these fears proved to be unfounded.

21. In the UK, the first Government Social Survey study relating to crime only occurred as late as 1972 (Durrant, Thomas and Willcock's 'Crime, Criminals and the Law') following a rapid and significant rise in the study of criminology in the preceding decade. Early criminological work, e.g. in the 1930s, focused on studies of offenders rather than victims, in order to better understand their motivations and the causes of offending. Within Government

² United Nations Crime and Justice Statistics <http://www.uncjin.org/Special/history.html>

³ <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/United-Nations-Surveys-on-Crime-Trends-and-the-Operations-of-Criminal-Justice-Systems.html>

⁴ Office for National Statistics (UK)

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compendia/SSD_Anniversary/SSD60AnniRD_v2.pdf

and in much public debate, discussion of crime was still reliant on the evidence from official statistics, principally those collected by the police.

22. During the 1960s criminologists began to understand the weaknesses in administrative sources and sought alternative methods which might provide a more accurate and informative description of crime problems. The first victimization surveys were carried out in the 1960s and 1970s, designed to examine what became termed the “dark figure” of crime i.e., crimes that were not reported to or recorded by the police. By the 1970s these surveys were also influenced by the growth of feminist theory, and later victimology, which emphasized the importance of victims’ views in relation to their victimization and the ‘invisibility’ in official statistics of certain types of crime, such as sexual offending and domestic violence. Early victimization surveys were mainly small-scale and experimental, for example a survey carried out in Britain in the early 1970s only covered three small areas in London (Sparks, Genn and Dodd, 1977).⁵

23. In addition to seeking to understand crimes not well identified by police statistics, these surveys were an important research tool to assist in identifying aspects of crime and victimization that could not be easily captured by the administrative sources. This additional information was thought essential to support the development of crime prevention strategies. Surveys also captured public attitudes in relation to crime. As the surveys matured and started to produce long-run time series, they increasingly became useful in the measurement of trends and influential both inside and outside government as a measure of success or failure in reducing crime.

24. The most important innovation with respect to victimization surveys was the launch in 1972 of the United States’ National Crime Survey, developed from work done by the National Opinion Research Center and the earlier President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. The purpose of this Commission was to investigate the nature and causes of crime in the United States and to recommend policies to address the crime. A key recommendation of the Commission was the implementation of a new source of crime statistics – a victimization survey. Pilot studies beginning in 1966 found significantly more crime than was captured in official police records. And, pilot studies demonstrated that self-report victimization surveys were a suitable method for identifying victimizations not reported to the police.

25. In 1975, the first ever crime victimization survey was conducted in Australia with the aim of providing information on a selection of personal and household crimes, including unreported incidents. Further surveys were carried out in 1983, 1993, 1998, 2002 and 2005. Crime victimization surveys will now be conducted on an annual basis in Australia to provide 'headline measures' about a select range of personal and household crimes. More in-depth measures about crime victimization are conducted on an irregular basis with the last of these surveys being conducted in 2005.

26. In 1981, the United Kingdom launched the British Crime Survey to better understand victimization in that country. The first BCS (1982) was carried out in England, Wales and also Scotland. Subsequently, Scotland carried out its own survey, as did Northern Ireland. Further surveys of England and Wales were carried out in 1984, 1988, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000 and 2001. Since April 2001, the BCS has become an annual fixture in that country.

⁵ Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs07/bcs25.pdf>

27. As victimization surveys became more widely adopted across the globe, it also became possible to use them for international comparative studies. However, the biggest problem in comparative studies remained the differences in definitions of crime between countries. The development of the International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS) in 1987 was aimed at addressing this weakness.

28. The first ICVS was launched in 1989 and the surveys were repeated in 1992, 1996, and 2000 and 2004/2005. Initially focusing on developed nations, with the involvement of UNICRI and UNODC surveys expanded to developing countries and Eastern Europe. More than 70 countries have carried out at least one survey over the years. Not only does this study now provide comparative data, but thanks to the longitudinal aspect it is also providing some data on trends in crime for a number of participants.

29. Victimization surveys are now an important tool in helping governments and their public to understand their crime problems and how better to address them. They are not without their critics however. Some point out that national averages lack some of the impact that a focus on specific local areas or problems can bring, or the weaknesses in a sample survey approach in addressing the rarer but more serious crimes. However, it is now widely recognized that administrative sources cannot provide a sufficiently reliable and comprehensive analysis of crime on their own.

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