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# CANADIAN URBAN VICTIMIZATION SURVEY

## Victims of Crime

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# Bulletin

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### Introduction to a New Bulletin Series

As part of my Ministry's efforts to meet the rights and needs of the victims of crime, we undertook a survey which went to the community – to the people themselves, to ask about their victimization experiences and responses to crime. More than 61,000 Canadians in seven urban centres across the country were interviewed in this process – probably the largest survey of this kind ever undertaken in Canada. Current crime statistics are based on reported crimes, or on police interventions or on results of prosecutions, and are often contradictory. They are all deficient in providing a true insight into actual criminal activity in Canada.

This Canadian Urban Victimization Survey provides us with an excellent source of information about the victims of certain crimes, the risks and impact of victimization, the extent and distribution of reported and unreported crime in our communities, and about public awareness of, and participation in, crime compensation and crime prevention programs.

This is the first in a series of Bulletins, based on the victimization survey results, which will be published by my Ministry over the coming months. This first Bulletin provides general information on victimization rates, the extent and distribution of crimes and the reasons victims gave for failure to report crimes to the police. Future Bulletins will

deal with topics of particular concern to my Ministry: elderly victims; victims of violence by intimates and victims of violence by strangers; break and entry offences; motor vehicle thefts, vandalism; public perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system; measurement of crime and victimization; and the social, environmental and seasonal factors which are related to risk of victimization.

Some early results from the survey have already been included in the Report of the Federal/Provincial Task Force on Justice for Victims of Crime. It is my hope that by publishing these specialized Bulletins we will make the survey results easily accessible to a wide variety of audiences concerned with the provision of services to victims, with effective policing, and more broadly, with the control and prevention of crime.

Victimization surveys provide us with a vital new perspective on the complex nature and consequences of crime. I am confident that these reports will prove to be more than simply provocative. They will, I am sure, inform our efforts to provide humane, equitable, effective justice and the continuing debates about how best to achieve these objectives.

Bob Kaplan, P.C., Q.C., M.P.  
Solicitor General of Canada

### Victims of Crime: Preliminary Findings of the Canadian Urban Victimization Survey

Until recently, little could be said with confidence about which Canadians were most likely to be victimized by crime or even how many were victimized. Crime statistics such as the Uniform Crime Reports give virtually no information on the victims of crime nor on the incidence of crimes not reported to the police.

Early in 1982, however, the Ministry of the Solicitor General with the assistance of Statistics Canada conducted a victimization survey in seven major urban centres: Greater Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax-Dartmouth, and St. John's. The Canadian Urban Victimization Survey provides the most extensive information yet produced concerning the extent of reported and unreported crime during 1981, the risk of criminal victimization, the impact of crime, public perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system and victims' perceptions of their experiences.

To develop a methodology for conducting victimization surveys in Canada, three major pretests were conducted. The initial pretest was conducted in Edmonton and had, as its primary purpose, a comparison of personal and telephone interviewing techniques. The results of the Edmonton study indicated that data collected over the telephone were comparable to data obtained by the far more costly method of in-person interviews. The second pretest was conducted in Hamilton to test and to refine

the telephone interviewing procedures. This research led to the telephone interviewing procedures used in the final pre-test, the Greater Vancouver Victimization Survey (1979). Highlights of the findings from this pretest are available from the Communications Division of the Ministry of the Solicitor General.

During January and February of 1982, Statistics Canada interviewers conducted telephone interviews with a large sample of residents<sup>1</sup> aged 16 and older in the seven urban centres. People under 16 were not interviewed, nor were their personal victimizations reported by others. To maximize reliability of recall, respondents were asked to report on only those incidents which had occurred between January 1 and December 31, 1981.

Because of the very low incidence of some types of crime (such as sexual assault), very large samples are required to ensure that enough cases are "caught" to be statistically representative of all actual cases in the community under study. Sample sizes ranged from 6,910 in one city to 9,563 in another, with more than 61,000 interviews completed overall. Costs of such a large survey would have been prohibitive if face-to-face interviewing methods had been used. On the basis of these interviews, statistical estimates were made for the general population 16 and over in the seven cities. These statistically derived estimates for the population are used throughout this report.

Victimization surveys can provide information about most, but not all types of crimes which are of major concern to the general public. Crimes such as murder, kidnapping, and "victimless" crimes cannot be captured using survey techniques, and were therefore excluded. Crimes committed against commercial establishments were also excluded from this particular survey.

The eight categories of crimes included in this survey are: sexual assault, robbery, assault, break and entry, motor vehicle theft, theft of household property, theft of personal property and vandalism. These offences are ranked in descending order of seriousness. Full definitions of the eight offence categories can be found in Appendix 1.

Incidents which involved the commission of several different criminal acts

appear in the tables only once, according to the most serious component of the event. Thus for example, if sexual assault, theft of money and vandalism all occurred at the same time, the incident would be classified in these tables as sexual assault. An incident would be classified as vandalism (least serious on the hierarchy) only if no other crime which is higher on the seriousness scale occurred at the same time.

Analyses in this report are based on the general offence categories outlined above. At a later date it will be possible to make more refined distinctions between and within offence categories according to other factors such as: whether the incident was only attempted or completed; amount of damage, injury or financial loss incurred; type of weapon used; response of victims; location and time of offence; number of offenders; number of victims; characteristics of offenders; characteristics of victims.

## Uniform Crime Reports and Victimization Surveys

One of the persistent problems faced by law enforcers, policy makers and researchers alike has been the inability to determine accurately the incidence and distribution of crime in the community. Although Uniform Crime Reports now provide national police statistics which are based upon standardized definitions of crimes and standardized counting procedures, a significant gap is still known to exist between the number of crimes recorded in these reports, and the number which actually occur.

We know that there are regional and inter-category variations in victim and witness reporting practices, and in police recording practices, but until now no serious attempt has been undertaken to measure these differences in Canada.

Data obtained from victimization surveys provide an important complement to official police statistics because the issue of the so-called "dark" number of actual crimes is addressed directly. Victims are asked to describe both reported and unreported incidents in which they have been victimized, and to give their reasons for non-reporting. Such information allows us to examine variations in reporting rates, allows some measure of how victims define incidents, and generally provides us with a better understanding of the functioning of the criminal justice system from the

perspective of the victim than has previously been possible.

As mentioned earlier, certain crimes such as murder or white collar crime cannot be captured using survey techniques and are therefore omitted, and the range of victims is similarly restricted. In the present survey, for example, incidents involving victims who live outside the survey area, victims who have no telephones or victims who are under 16 years of age are excluded. Similarly, our data include crimes committed against residents of the seven urban centres wherever these crimes may have occurred, but do not include crimes against non-residents (tourists or commuters) which may have occurred while they were in the city, or crimes which have been committed against businesses or public property.

## Risk of Victimization

For the year 1981, there were more than 700,000 personal victimizations of people over 16 (sexual assault, robbery, assault, and theft of personal property), and almost 900,000 household victimizations (break and enter, motor vehicle theft, theft of household property and vandalism) in the seven cities surveyed (see Table 1). Fewer than 42% of these incidents had been reported to the police (Table 2). Quite simply, a large number of Canadians were victimized, many more than Uniform Crime Report statistics would indicate.

Most of these incidents, it should be noted, did not involve those offences which evoke our greatest fears. There were relatively few sexual assaults or robberies, for example. Far more frequent were thefts of personal property (i.e. without contact), and assaults. Similarly, theft of household property was the most frequent of household offences, followed by break and enter and vandalism, with relatively few motor vehicle thefts.

While in the public consciousness crime is generally equated with violence, in the **experience** of Canadians, crime is rarely violent. Canadians are far more likely to be victims of crimes against property than crimes against the person.

This is not to suggest that the experience of victimization is therefore typically a painless one with little lasting effect. A good deal of research, for example, has shown that many of the victims of break and enter in particular experience some form of crisis reaction quite apart

<sup>1</sup> The survey excluded commercial and institutional telephones. For a detailed discussion of the methodology used, consult the forthcoming report from the Ministry of the Solicitor General, "Measuring Crime and Victimization".

**Table 1**

Seven Cities

**Incident Rates****Personal Offences**

Population aged 16 and older in seven cities = 4,975,900  
 Males = 2,357,000  
 Females = 2,618,900

Type of Incident	Estimated Incidents	Rates per 1000 Population 16 and older		
		Total	Males	Females
- All personal incidents	702,200	141	154	129
- All violent incidents	352,300	70	90	53
- Sexual Assaults	17,200	3.5	0.8	5.8
- Robbery	49,400	10	13	7
- Assault	285,700	57	79	39
- Personal Theft	349,900	70	66	74

**Household Offences**

Total households in seven cities = 2,424,900

Type of Incident	Estimated Incidents	Rate per 1000 Households
All household incidents	898,400	369
Break and Enter	227,400	94
Motor Vehicle Theft	40,600	17
Household Theft	417,300	172
Vandalism	213,100	88

**Table 2**

Seven Cities

**Number of Incidents of Selected Types and Proportion not Reported to Police**

Type of Incident	Estimated Incidents	Percent of Estimated Incidents	Percent Unreported	Percent Reported
Sexual Assault	17,200	1	62	38
Robbery	49,300	3	55	45
Assault	285,700	18	66	34
Break & Enter	227,400	14	36	64
Motor Vehicle Theft	40,600	3	30	70
Household Theft	417,300	26	56	44
Personal Theft	349,900	22	71	29
Vandalism	213,100	13	65	35
TOTAL	1,600,500	100	58	42

**Who are the Victims?**

When incidents are divided into the two general categories of personal offences and household offences it is possible to calculate rates per thousand population or per thousand households. Table 1 and Figure 1 show that about 70 incidents of personal theft per thousand population aged 16 and older occurred in the seven cities studied, and that the more serious the type of incident, the less likely it was to occur. Sex differences are considerable for each category. Not surprisingly, women are about seven times more likely than men to be victims of sexual assault (including rape, attempted rape, sexual molesting and attempted sexual molesting), but they are also more likely than men to have their personal property stolen (theft of personal property). Men are almost twice as likely as women to be victims of robbery or assault (Figure 2).

Risk of victimization is closely tied to age. Contrary to popular belief, however, elderly people are relatively unlikely to be victimized by crime. Those under 25 had the highest rate of victimization in all categories of personal offences, and these high rates decline rapidly with increasing age after this point (Figures 3 and 4). In fact, the actual sample counts of sexual assault and robbery incidents for those over 60 were so low that estimated numbers and rates are unreliable.

The relationship between income and victimization is more complex. As one might expect, the higher the family income of urban residents the more likely they will experience some form of household victimization or personal theft. Furthermore, there may be differences among income groups in their levels of tolerance for and awareness of some types of incidents. For example, higher income residents may be more sensitive to and angered by incidents of vandalism than are lower income residents. However, lower income individuals are as likely or more likely than others to suffer a personal violent victimization - sexual assault, robbery or assault (Figures 5 and 6; Tables 3 and 4).

Lifestyle is also an important component of overall risk of victimization. One measure of lifestyle which is strongly related to risk is number of evening activities outside the home each month. As Table 5 and Figure 7 show, there is a strong relationship between number of activities outside the home and rates of assault, robbery, and theft of personal property, and a less dramatic, but still

from the suffering caused by their actual material loss. This invasion of one's home often produces a heightened concern about and fear of crime more generally.

positive relationship shown for rates of sexual assault.

When we examine the categories of people most likely to be victimized, many popular myths are exploded. Using the victimization data we can draw a profile of the victim of crime against the person: young unmarried male, living alone, probably looking for work or a student, and with an active life outside the home<sup>2</sup> — not very different from the profile we might draw of the offender. Significantly, the young male victim expresses little concern about or fear of crime, even after he has been victimized.

### Reported and Unreported Crimes

As was mentioned previously, more than half of the incidents described to interviewers (58%) were never brought to the attention of the police. Combining results from the seven cities we find that the crime **most** likely to be reported was theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle (70% reported), and the crime **least** likely to be reported was theft of personal property (29% reported) (Table 6). Females had a higher reporting rate than males for sexual assault, robbery and assault, and generally speaking those 65 and over were also more likely to report incidents than younger victims.

The most common reasons given for failure to report an offence were that the incident was "too minor" (mentioned in two-thirds of the incidents in which no report was made); that "police could do nothing about it anyway" (61%); and that "it was too inconvenient" to make a report or victims "did not want to take the time" (24%) (Table 7)<sup>3</sup>. For many, we have learned, the criminal justice system seems too complex or confusing and perhaps the prospect of becoming part of the process — as a witness for example, seems intimidating, potentially costly in time and money and inconvenient more generally. But the problems go beyond financial cost and inconvenience.

When reasons for non-report are analysed by offence category it becomes clear that the pattern of reasons

<sup>2</sup> These and other factors of risk will be the topic of a later report.

<sup>3</sup> Percentages do not add to 100 since victims could give more than one reason for failure to report any one incident.

Table 3

Annual Family Income	Rates per 1,000 Population			
	Sexual Assault	Robbery	Assault	Personal Theft
Less than \$9,000	7	13	61	61
\$9,000 – 14,999	4	15	78	70
\$15,000 – 19,999	4	14	60	72
\$20,000 – 24,999	3*	9	57	77
\$25,000 – 29,999	1**	7	52	66
\$30,000 – 39,999	3*	6	62	80
\$40,000 or more	2*	12	69	94

\* The actual count was low (11 to 20), therefore caution should be exercised when interpreting this rate.

\*\* The actual count was very low (10 or fewer), therefore extreme caution should be exercised when interpreting this rate.

Figure 1

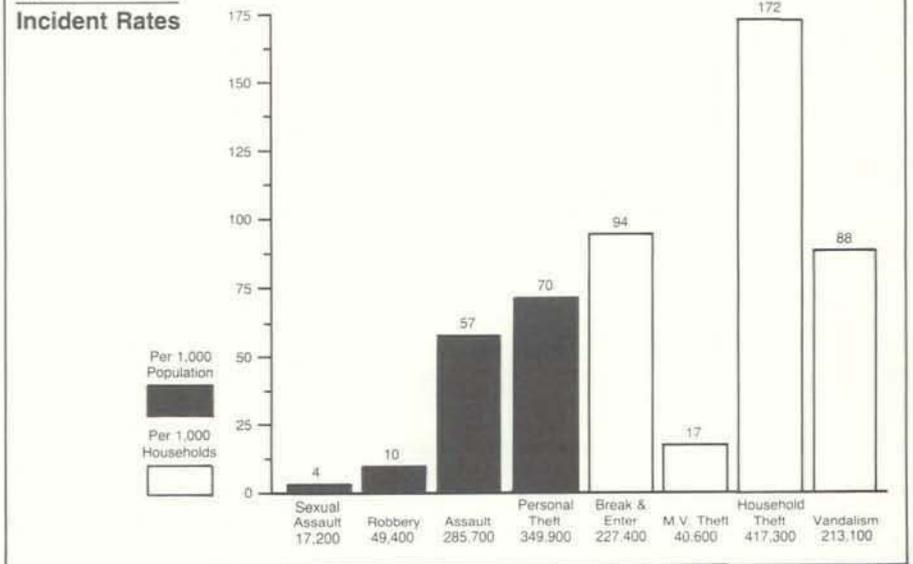


Figure 2

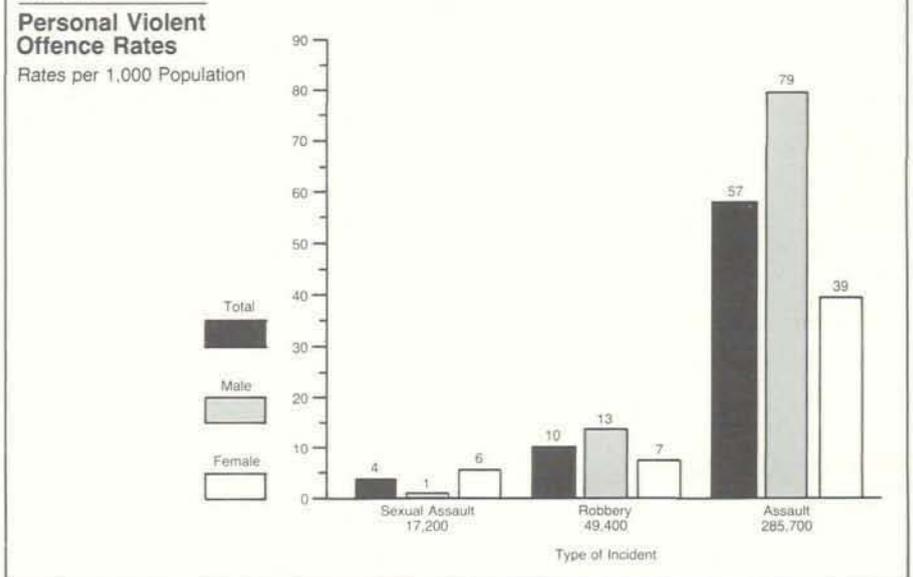


Table 4

Annual Family Income	Rates per 1,000 Households			
	Break & Enter	Motor Vehicle Theft	Household Theft	Vandalism
Less than \$9,000	83	8	99	41
\$9,000 – 14,999	104	16	150	71
\$15,000 – 19,999	103	19	176	90
\$20,000 – 24,999	99	23	225	108
\$25,000 – 29,999	99	23	208	123
\$30,000 – 39,999	103	22	229	120
\$40,000 or more	113	20	241	128

Table 5

Evening Activities	Rates per 1,000 Population			
	Sexual Assault	Robbery	Assault	Personal Theft
1 – 9	2	5	21	34
10 – 19	3	6	38	54
20 – 29	4	10	59	88
30 or more	5	20	119	118

Table 6

## Proportion of Unreported Incidents by Type of Crime in Seven Cities

	Vancouver	Edmonton	Winnipeg	Toronto	Montreal	Halifax-Dartmouth	St. John's	Seven Cities	Range	% Diff.
Sexual Assault	68 (5) <sup>(1)</sup>	85 (7)	67 (4)	60 (2)	50 (1)	71 (6)	60 (3)	62	(50 – 85)	35
Robbery	57 (6)	54 (1)	58 (7)	54 (2)	55 (3)	55 (4)	56 (5)	55	(54 – 58)	4
Assault	66 (4)	68 (6)	77 (7)	64 (2)	61 (1)	65 (3)	67 (5)	66	(61 – 77)	15
Break & Enter	39 (7)	38 (5)	38 (4)	35 (3)	34 (2)	39 (6)	32 (1)	36	(32 – 39)	7
Motor Vehicle Theft	29 (6)	23 (1)	27 (4)	28 (5)	33 (7)	26 (3)	26 (2)	30	(23 – 33)	10
Household Theft	61 (7)	54 (4)	53 (3)	54 (5)	54 (6)	52 (1)	52 (2)	56	(52 – 61)	9
Personal Theft	71 (4)	70 (3)	75 (7)	70 (2)	69 (1)	72 (5)	74 (6)	71	(69 – 75)	6
Vandalism	71 (6)	61 (2)	62 (3)	63 (4)	64 (5)	60 (1)	73 (7)	65	(60 – 73)	13
Total	62 (7)	58 (4)	60 (5)	58 (3)	55 (1)	58 (2)	61 (6)	58	(55 – 62)	7

(1) Numbers in brackets indicate the rank-ordering of cities within offence categories. A "1" indicates the city with the lowest percentage of unreported incidents, and a "7" the city with the highest percentage.

given by sexual assault victims varied from the average in some important respects. The most common reason given by sexual assault victims for failure to report was that police could not do anything about it (52%), but this was closely followed by 43% who cited concern about the attitude of police or courts towards this type of incident. Overall, this reason for failure to report (concern about attitude) was given by only 8% of victims.

Fear of revenge by the offender was also exceptionally common among victims of sexual assault. One third cited this as a reason for non-report. Overall, considering all offences, only 4% of non-reporting victims gave this as a reason for their inaction. For female victims of non-sexual assault, fear of revenge by the offender was mentioned by 21% of those who failed to report the incident (Table 8; Figures 8 and 9).

Predictably the majority of unreported incidents were those we might classify as less serious – involving no injury and little material loss. Indeed most victims cited the minor nature of the incident as their reason for non-reporting. Nevertheless, a significant amount of serious crime – even incidents which resulted in physical injury – was also unreported. For example, two thirds of the women who had been raped failed to report the incident to the police.<sup>4</sup> Here, concern about the attitudes of those within the criminal justice system is a major inhibiting factor. Similarly, women assaulted – particularly by intimates – are likely to report fear of revenge as a reason for failure to report.

Finally, the data reveal that victims were most likely to report incidents which resulted in significant financial loss – rather than those which resulted in pain, injury and fear. For many, it would seem, reporting crimes is less an act of justice (or even revenge) than a far more utilitarian act – seeking redress, recompense or recovery.

### Fear of Crime

Although only 5% of the residents in the seven urban centres felt unsafe walking alone in their neighbourhood during the day, and 40% felt unsafe doing so after dark, women and the elderly were far more likely to express fears about their night-time safety. Fifty-six percent of women said they felt unsafe walking alone in their own neighbourhoods after dark (compared to 18% of the men), and even more significantly, 89% of the elderly (males and females combined) felt unsafe walking alone after dark.

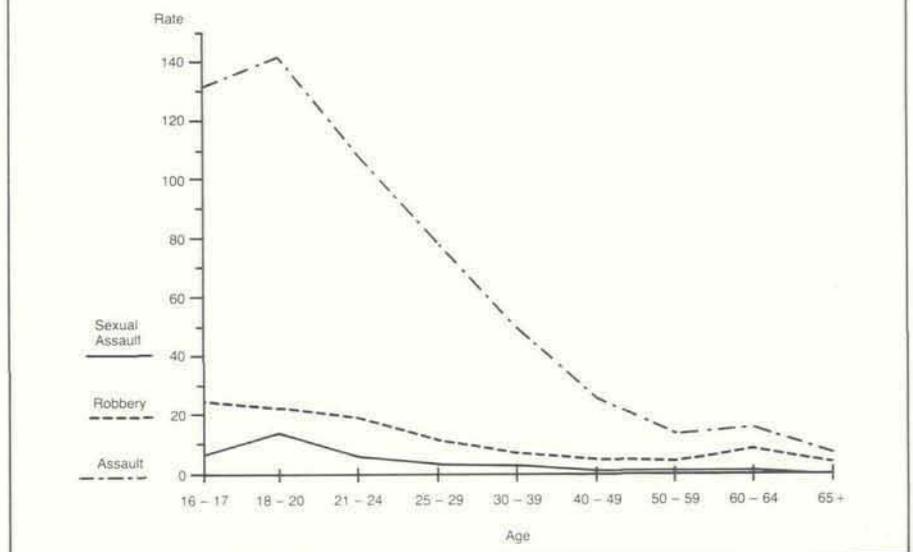
Fear of sexual assault no doubt feeds much of the more general fear women express. A full 65% of those who had been victims of such assault in the past year felt unsafe walking alone after dark, and 11% even felt unsafe during the day. While the rates of sexual assault were relatively low when compared to other offences (about 6 per 1,000 females), the emotional consequences of such an offence obviously merit special attention.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, women were somewhat more likely to report attempted rapes than completed rapes. The moral stigma many rape victims fear (and experience) may not apply to the same extent to victims of attempted rape. Reporting may therefore be less stressful for attempted rape victims than for victims of completed rape.

Figure 3

### Personal Violent Offence Rates by Age Category

Per 1,000 Population



For sexual assault and robbery, actual counts for those 60 and older were very low (10 or fewer), therefore, extreme caution should be exercised when interpreting these rates.

Figure 4

### Personal Theft Rates by Age Category

Per 1,000 Population

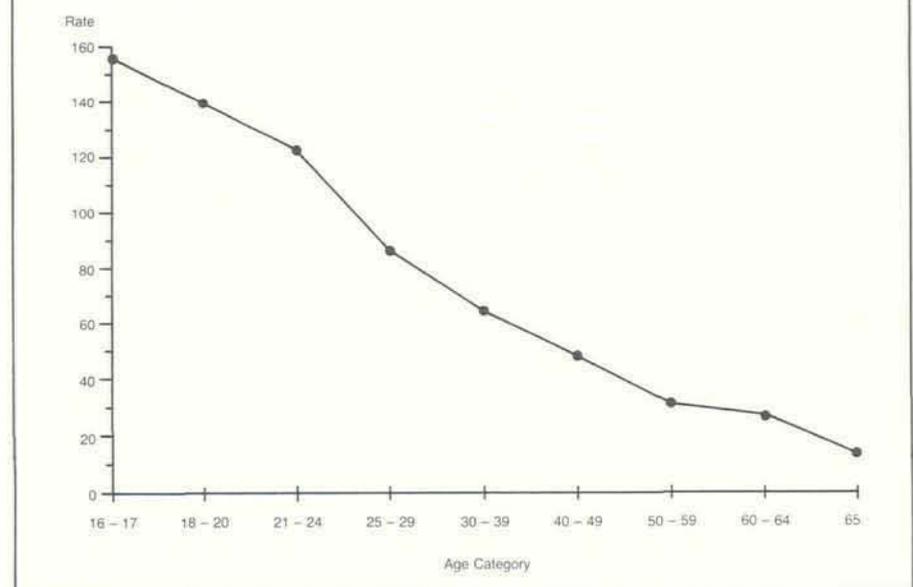


Figure 5

**Personal Offence Rates by Family Income**

Per 1,000 Population

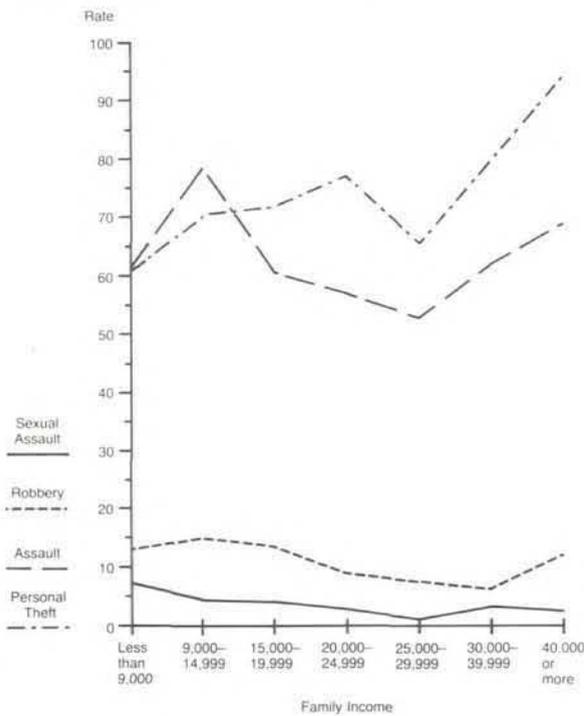


Figure 6

**Household Offence Rates by Family Income**

Per 1,000 Households

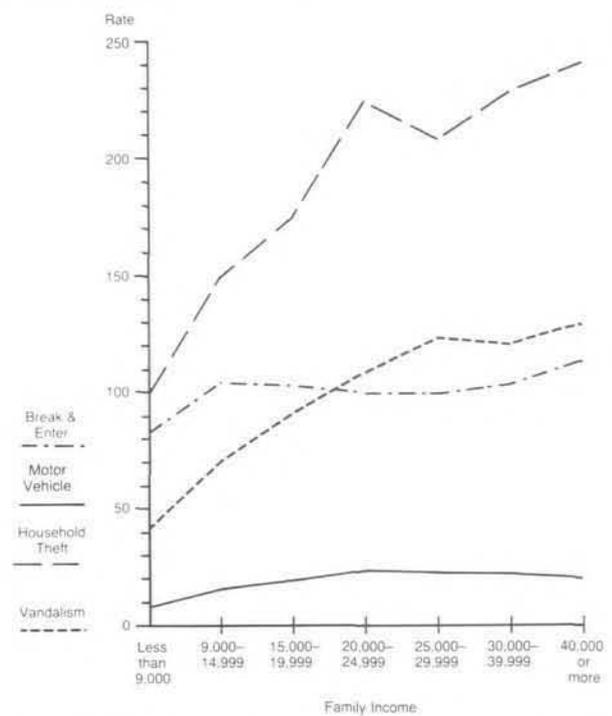


Table 7

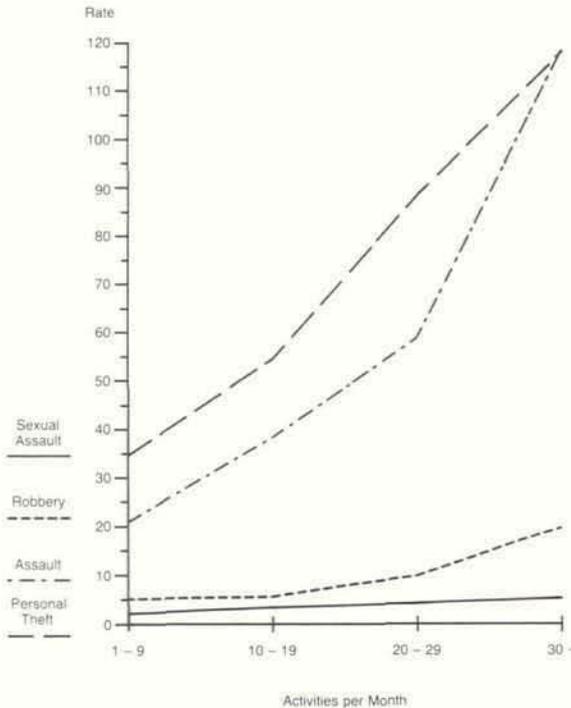
**Reasons Given for Failure to Report Incidents to the Police by Offence Category**

	Sexual Assault	Robbery	Assault	B&E	Theft M.V.	H.H. Theft	Per. Theft	Vandalism	Total	%
Nothing Taken	33	47	28	42	51	8	6	28	179,000	19
Police Couldn't Do Anything	52	54	51	58	57	64	64	69	564,000	61
Fear Revenge	33	10	11	3	**	1	2	2	40,000	4
Protect Offender	16	9	16	5	**	3	5	3	60,000	6
Too Minor	26	56	63	65	56	71	62	73	606,000	66
Inconvenience	**	33	24	20	19	26	24	25	224,000	24
Personal Matter	27	22	29	8	**	7	13	6	123,000	13
Reported to Another Official	**	**	7	7	**	7	27	4	109,000	12
Negative Attitude of Police	43	14	12	7	**	7	5	6	75,000	8
Overall % Unreported	62	55	66	36	30	56	71	65		
Number Unreported	11,000	27,000	185,000	81,000	12,000	227,000	243,000	136,000	921,000	58

Columns do not add to 100% since respondents could indicate more than one reason for failure to report any one incident.  
 Numbers may not add to totals given due to rounding.  
 \*\* The actual count was too low to make statistically reliable population estimates.

Figure 7

**Personal Offence Rates by Average Number of Evening Activities Outside the Home per Month**  
Per 1,000 Population



**Helping the Victims of Crime**

We are now beginning to gain a better understanding of the real extent and distribution of criminal victimization in Canada, and with this will come an increasing ability to allay some of our most unrealistic fears, and to direct attention to the most pressing needs of victims. The Canadian Urban Victimization Survey confirms the general trends found in police statistics – that most crime is directed against property rather than against persons, and that serious crimes are relatively rare.

Although a great deal of crime goes unreported, most often these are crimes victims themselves perceive to be too minor. Nevertheless, as we look more closely at the experience of victims, we also learn about the vulnerability of particular categories of victims, and the victims of particular kinds of crimes. Many direct victims, in need of help and services, never come into contact with the criminal justice system. With greater sensitivity in handling cases more will no doubt report incidents. But criminal justice system reform **itself** will not help those who fear revenge or reprisal by the offender or who seek to protect their physical or financial security, or that of their children by failing to report offenders who are also husbands and fathers. These issues will be the topics of future reports based on the results of the Canadian Urban Victimization Survey.

Figure 8

**Percent of Non-Reporting Victims Citing Fear of Revenge by Offender**

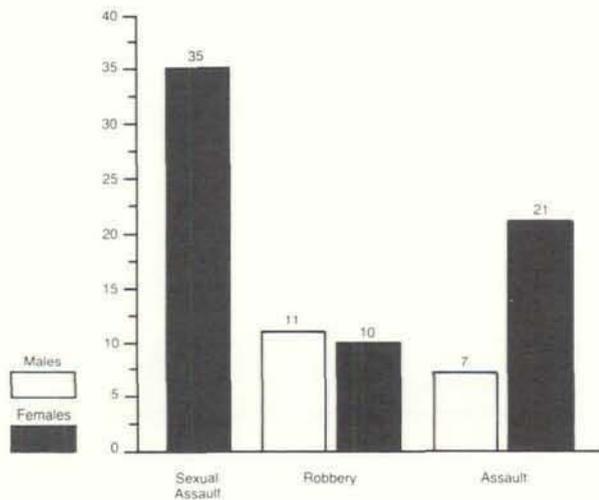


Figure 9

**Percent of Non-Reporting Victims Citing Concern about Attitudes of Police and Courts Towards this Type of Incident**

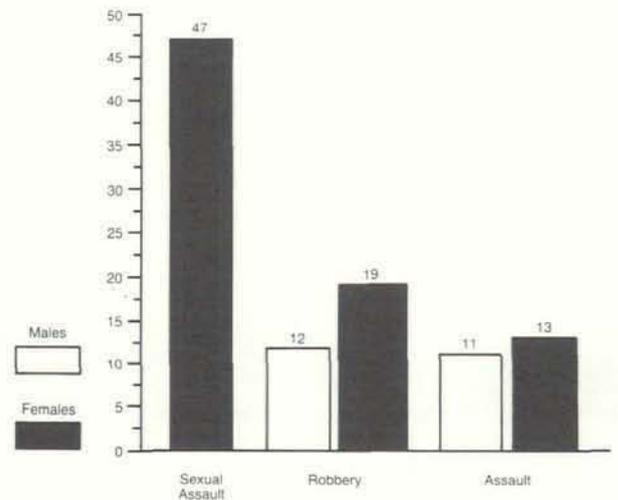


Table 8

### Reasons Given for Failure to Report Personal Violent Incidents by Type of Incident and by Sex of Victim

	Sexual Assault	Robbery	Assault
	%	%	%
<b>Fear of Revenge by Offender</b>			
All	33	10	11
Males	**	11	7
Females	35	10	21
<b>Concern with Attitude of Police or courts to this type of incident</b>			
All	43	14	12
Males	**	12	11
Females	47	19	13
TOTAL Incidents	17,200	49,400	285,700
Incidents Not Reported	11,000	27,000	185,000
% Not Reported	62	55	66

\*\* The actual count was too low to make statistically reliable population estimates.

## Appendix 1

### Definitions and Limitations

The eight categories of crimes included in this survey are: sexual assault, robbery, assault, break and entry, motor vehicle theft, theft of household property, theft of personal property and vandalism. These offences are ranked in descending order of seriousness.

1. Sexual assault includes rape, attempted rape, molesting or attempted molestation, and is considered the most serious crime.
2. Robbery occurs if something is taken and the offender has a weapon or there is a threat or an attack. The presence of a weapon is assumed to imply a threat. Attempted robberies are also included in this offence category.
3. Assault involves the presence of a weapon or an attack or threat. Assault incidents may range from face-to-face verbal threats to an attack with extensive injuries.
4. Break and enter occurs if a dwelling is entered by someone who has no right to be there. "No right to be there" differentiates, for example, between a workman who is in a dwelling with the permission of the owner and steals something, and someone illegally entering the dwelling to take property. The latter would be classified as a break and enter as he attempts to enter a dwelling if there is some evidence of force or knowledge of how the person tried to get in.
5. Motor vehicle theft involves the theft or attempted theft of a car, truck, van, motorcycle or other motor vehicle.
6. Theft or attempted theft of household property.
7. Theft or attempted theft of money or other personal property (not household property).
8. Vandalism occurs if property is damaged but not taken.

Incidents which involved the commission of several different criminal acts appear in the tables only once, according to the most serious component of the event. Thus for example, if sexual assault, theft of money and vandalism all occurred at the same time, the incident would be classified in these tables as sexual assault. An incident would be classified as vandalism (least serious on the hierarchy) only if no other crime which is higher on the seriousness scale occurred at the same time.

The **Canadian Urban Victimization Survey Bulletin** is produced by the Research and Statistics Group and the Communication Division, Programs Branch, Ministry of the Solicitor General, under the authority of the Hon. Bob Kaplan, P.C., Q.C., M.P., Solicitor General of Canada. It is available free from the Communication Division, Programs Branch, Solicitor General Canada, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P8.

Cat. No. JS 42-18/1-1983

ISBN 0-662-52807-7