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# CANADIAN URBAN VICTIMIZATION SURVEY

## Reported and Unreported Crimes

# Bulletin

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### ABOUT THE CANADIAN URBAN VICTIMIZATION SURVEY

Early in 1982 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. A random sample of residents who were 16 years of age or older were asked about their perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system, their experience of certain crimes, and the impact which criminal victimization may have had upon them.

Because of the relatively low incidence in any one year of some types of crimes included in the survey, 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 telephone interviews completed by Statistics Canada interviewers overall. Telephone interviews were used because the cost of interviewing in person for such a large survey was

prohibitive. Careful pretests in Edmonton, Hamilton and Greater Vancouver had proven that reliable data could be obtained through telephone interviews.

To maximize reliability of recall, respondents were asked to report on only those incidents which had occurred between January 1 and December 31, 1981. 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 that are of major concern to the general public. Crimes such as murder or kidnapping cannot be uncovered using survey techniques, and were therefore excluded. "Victimless" crimes and crimes committed against commercial establishments were also excluded from this survey.

The eight categories of crimes included in this survey are: sexual

assault, robbery, assault, break and enter, motor vehicle theft, theft of household property, theft of personal property and vandalism.

Incidents involving the commission of several different criminal acts appear in the tables only once, according to the most serious component of the event. For example, if sexual assault, theft of money and vandalism all occurred at the same time, the incidents 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 more serious crime occurred at the same time. Full definitions of the eight offence categories can be found in Appendix 1.

Future Bulletins in the series will deal with topics of general concern including elderly victims, victims of violence, break and enter offences, motor-vehicle thefts, vandalism, public perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system, and the social, environmental and seasonal factors which are related to risk of victimization.

### Reported and Unreported Crimes

This is the second Bulletin in the Canadian Urban Victimization Survey series, and it deals primarily with the gap which exists between the number of crimes experienced by victims, and the number which are subsequently reported to, or otherwise become known to the police<sup>1</sup>. Crime or "victimization" surveys were specifically designed to shed some light upon the so-called "dark figure" of crimes which

never come to police attention and never appear in police statistics as crimes "known" or "recorded." Victimization surveys have now evolved into extremely complex tools which can measure a great deal more than the extent of reported and unreported crime, but their original function has lost none of its importance or value, since to understand crime in our society, and to understand the dynamic functioning of the criminal justice system, complementary measures of the extent and distribution of crime are

required. This large scale victimization survey provides us with the first opportunity to describe crime in Canada from the perspective of the victim, and to understand something about how it is that victims themselves can enlarge our knowledge of crime and criminals.

Criminologists have long been aware that police statistics cannot measure

<sup>1</sup> The first Bulletin in the series, "Victims of Crime", is available from the Communication Division, Programs Branch, Solicitor General Canada, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P8.

the true extent and distribution of crime in society, however conscientiously or reliably the data have been collected. Although police statistics may reflect actual rates of some crimes such as homicide, we have learned from a variety of studies that such statistics represent only a small, but unknown fraction of other crimes. Among the most elusive are crimes in which there are no clearly defined victims, only co-conspirators. These "victimless" or "consensual" crimes (such as gambling, pornography, drug trafficking and the like) are rarely reported, nor do we have any other instruments which can reliably measure the incidence of such activities. Expert guesses provide the best estimates we are likely to have for some time to come.

Many other crimes go unreported because the victim is not aware that a crime has occurred. Much white collar crime and crime committed against bureaucracies is never detected, and we can only guess how often fraud and petty thefts go unnoticed. Again, we have no direct means of quantifying such crimes and must rely on the "best guess" method, on audit procedures, on secondary measures of profit and loss, on occasional detection through special law enforcement personnel or on inside informants.

Similar counting difficulties exist when victims are aware that they have been harmed in some way, but they do not define the incident as a criminal victimization warranting police notification or intervention. Family violence, and child abuse in particular, may often fall into this category of invisible, unreported crime.

Police statistics are very dependent upon reports received from victims or witnesses to the criminal event. Beyond the initial selection made by victims or witnesses of crimes, it seems inevitable that some informal "screening out" of events also occurs before reported incidents are recorded by the police as "known or reported crimes." The third, officially sanctioned screening out of incidents occurs when certain reported crimes are later deemed "unfounded" by police as the result of their initial investigations. Analyses of Uniform Crime Report statistical trends are usually based on the remaining "actual offences" data.

Police statistics are therefore incomplete because of the crimes which go unnoticed by victims, or unreported by victims or witnesses and because

police necessarily exercise some discretion in their own recording of events. These statistics are also sensitive to changes in victim and official definitions of events. We can expect, for example, that there will be an overall increase in the number of cases of child abuse and wife assault which will find their way into police statistics in the future, in large part because victims and criminal justice system personnel are now being assured that such violence will be treated by the justice system as a crime.

Victimization surveys cannot be used to uncover crimes that are hidden from victims, but they can be used to uncover crimes in which some personal injury, financial loss or other harm is experienced by victims, whether or not they report these events to police. For certain crimes, including the eight studied in this survey, victimization surveys can provide us with important alternative measures of crime from the perspective of the victim. They can help us understand and define the circumstances which inhibit disclosure of criminal victimization to the police, and they can help to round out our knowledge of crime and offender characteristics by "counting in" the many events which never come to police attention.

## Victimization and Official Crime Data<sup>2</sup>

The eight crime categories used in this report approximate, as closely as possible, the major crime classifications used by police when compiling Uniform Crime Reports. Furthermore, similar rules were used for classifying incidents according to the most serious component of each incident (see Appendix 1). Nevertheless, the following important differences remain between these two measures of crime:

- the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) data include incidents involving victims of all ages, whereas the victimization survey findings for personal offences are limited to persons aged 16 and older.
- the victimization survey covers a much narrower range of motor vehicle thefts and vandalism incidents than the Uniform Crime Reports, because the survey is restricted to incidents involving

private motor vehicles only, and private residences only, whereas the UCR data include thefts of commercial vehicles, and damage (vandalism) to commercial or other public property.

- it is not possible to distinguish theft of personal property from theft of household property in the UCR data.

It can therefore be seen that although it is tempting to compare the number of estimated crimes and reported crimes uncovered by the victimization survey with the number of crimes actually known to and recorded by police in the same seven cities, the measures used in each data set are not the same (despite the common names applied to the offence categories), and that direct comparisons are invalid.

Throughout this Bulletin we have used the findings of the victimization survey to derive the estimated number of incidents and the estimated proportion reported to the police. Respondents who had been the victims of one of the eight selected types of crime were asked whether the event had come to police attention, and if it had, how the police came to know about it. Incidents which victims said had come to police attention are referred to throughout the Bulletin as reported crimes (Table 1).

In the analyses which follow the victimization survey data reporting patterns and reasons for failure to report are explored in some detail. Unfortunately, we do not have comparable data on police recording practices to explain more fully the relationship between crimes reported to police, and crimes recorded by them.

## Some General Findings

The single most striking finding of this survey was that more than half of the estimated incidents (58%) never came to police attention, and only 3% of these were known because police were actually on the scene. More than four-fifths of the reports made to the police came from victims themselves, or from other household members (Figure 1).

By far the most common reasons given by victims for failing to report criminal incidents to the police were that the victimization was insufficiently serious (66%), or because victims believed that "police couldn't do any-

<sup>2</sup> The number of reported and known crimes recorded by police in the seven cities during the same year (1981) are given in Appendix 2.

**Table 1**  
**Estimated Incidents in Seven Cities**

Type of Crime	Estimated Incidents <sup>(1)</sup>	Per Cent Reported
Sexual Assault	17,300	38
Robbery	49,200	45
Assault	285,700	34
Break & Enter	227,300	64
Motor Vehicle Theft	40,600	70
Household Theft	417,200	44
Personal Theft	349,800	29
Vandalism	213,000	35
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,600,100</b>	<b>42</b>

<sup>(1)</sup> Please note that since the release of Bulletin Number 1, editing of the data tape has led to minor alterations in some estimated numbers. Incident rates have not been affected by these changes.

**Table 2**  
**Reasons Given by Victims for Failure to Report Incidents to the Police**

Reasons	Per Cent of All Unreported Incidents
<i>No Perceived Benefit</i>	
Too Minor	66
Police Couldn't Do Anything	61
Nothing Taken/Items Recovered	19
<i>Costs Outweigh Benefits</i>	
Inconvenience	24
Fear of Revenge	4
Concern with Attitude of Police or Courts	8
<i>Personal Reasons</i>	
Protect Offender	6
Personal Matter	13
<i>Reported to Another Official</i>	
	12
<b>Overall % Unreported</b>	<b>58</b>

Percentages do not add to 100% since respondents could indicate more than one reason for failure to report any one incident.

thing about it anyway" (61%)<sup>3</sup>. These reasons were cited most frequently by victims of all types of offences except sexual assault. A further 19% of the victim respondents failed to report incidents because nothing was taken, or the items were returned — in other words, where no material loss was incurred (Table 2; Figure 2). Clearly for such crimes as petty theft, purse snatching, vandalism and even assault,

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

there is often very little the police can do — through traditional law enforcement techniques — and victims perceived no real benefits in reporting.

Other reasons given for the failure to report crimes indicate that the costs of reporting were thought to outweigh the benefits. The specific reasons given ranged from simple "inconvenience" (24%) to "fear of revenge by the offender" (4%) and "concern with the attitude of police or courts" (8%). Although fear of revenge, and concern with the attitude of the police and

courts ranked low overall among reasons for failure to report, they were important deterrents for some victims. One-third of the non-reporting victims of sexual assault, and 21% of the female victims of non-sexual assault gave fear of revenge by the offender as a reason for their inaction. Further, 43% of the victims of sexual assault who did not report the incident gave as their reason concern about the attitude of the police or courts.

Many crimes went unreported because they were viewed as "personal matters" (13%); or because victims wished to protect the offender (6%). Twelve per cent of the victims who did not inform police of the incident, said they reported it to "another official" (Table 2). As more Canadians live more of their lives in "private settings" — from apartment buildings to shopping complexes — we may witness an increasing reliance on private security for crime control.

Finally, although we have no direct information from the survey, some victims may have failed to report crimes because of their own complicity or because they feared becoming involved with the criminal justice system for some other personal reasons. Such factors may account in some part for the very low reporting rates among young male victims of physical assaults.

In sum, the perceived seriousness of the crime is the major consideration victims make in deciding whether to report an offence, but other factors are also clearly relevant. Victims are unlikely to report incidents if they perceive that the disadvantages of reporting — in terms of embarrassment, inconvenience or fear of revenge — outstrip the advantages.

## Local Differences in Reporting Patterns

There was a 7 percentage point difference between the city with the highest crime reporting rate (Montreal: 45% reported) and the city with the lowest (Vancouver: 38% reported). Differences were much larger, however, for specific offences, suggesting regional differences in attitudes about particular crimes, and differences in perceived benefit to be gained from reporting. Table 3 shows the difference in reporting rates by offence category for each of the seven cities.

Greater Vancouver consistently ranked fourth or lower in terms of reporting rates for individual offences. Other cities showed more internal variation; for example, Edmonton had the lowest proportion of reported sexual assaults (15% reported), yet had the highest proportion of reported robberies and motor vehicle thefts.

Sexual assault is at once the most serious and the most rare of the offence types covered by the survey, and reporting rates for this offence varied the most from city to city. Montreal had by far the highest rate of reporting for this type of offence (50% reported). Toronto was next highest with a reporting rate of 40%, and Edmonton was lowest with only 15% of the incidents reported. The factors which affect reporting of sexual assault are complex and many cannot be captured in such a survey. Based on the survey results, however, the reasons appear to have less to do with the seriousness of the incident than with the perceived willingness or ability of police and courts to offer protection and support to victims.

Obviously, victims must exercise some discretion in their use of police, and one would expect and probably encourage them to define some incidents as problems to be "sorted out", rather than as crimes requiring the full weight of criminal justice intervention. But the large proportion of unreported sexual assaults and other serious incidents which never find their way into police statistics raise important questions for police managers and law enforcement policy makers.

## Reporting Property Offences

### Theft of Personal and Household Property

Theft and attempted theft of *personal property* usually occur without any direct contact between victim and offender, and, by definition never involve force or the threat of force (see Appendix I).

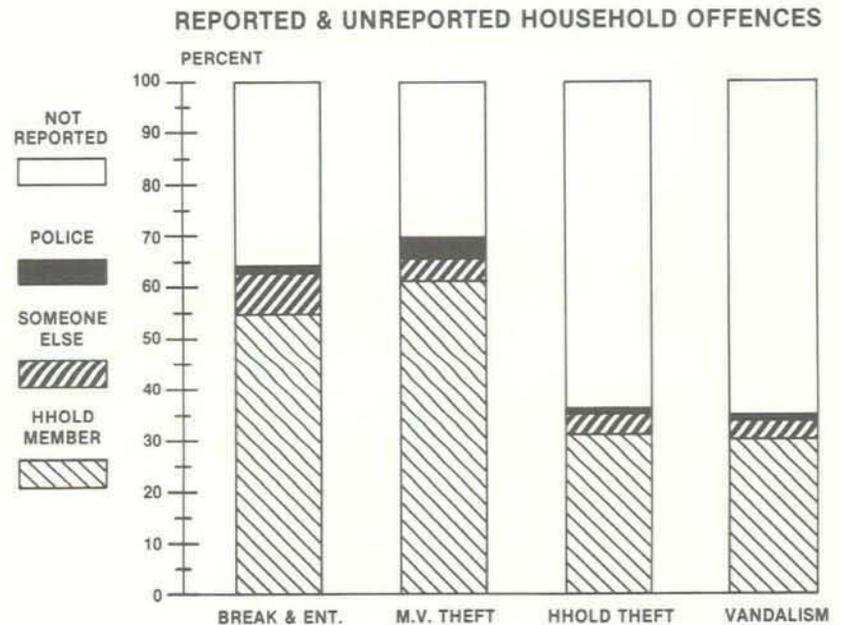
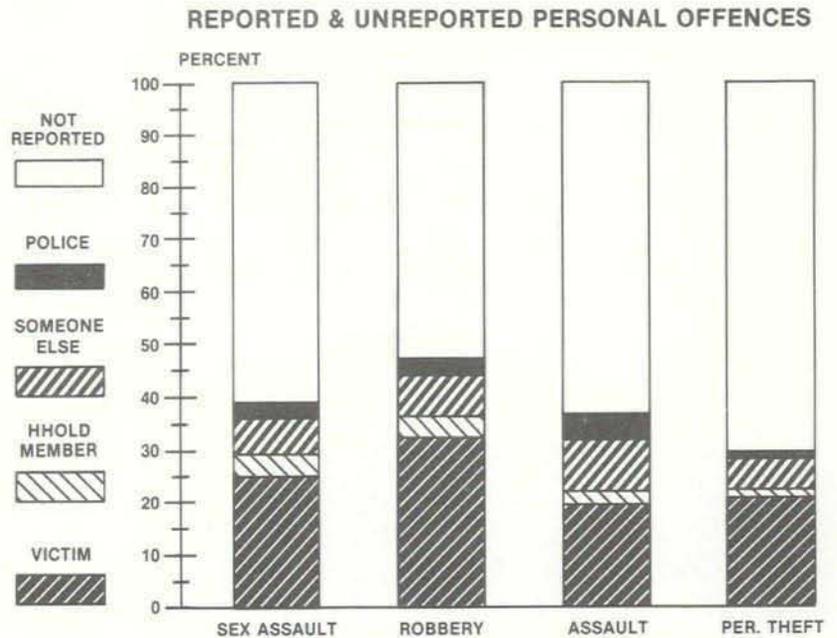
The risk of being a victim of theft of personal property (70 per 1,000 population) is seven times greater than the risk of being robbed (10 per 1,000 population). Women are more likely to be victims of personal theft than men.

In 94% of all personal property thefts some dollar loss occurred, and the proportion recovered by the police

or from insurance claims was low (29%) (See Table 4).

Only 29% of personal thefts were reported to police, and for attempted thefts the reporting rate fell to 20%. Female victims were slightly more likely to report theft of personal property (30%), than male victims (28%), but for both males and females, reporting rates for property offences increase substantially with age. Female reporting rates for theft of personal property increased from 11% for 16-17 year olds to 49% for those 65 and older.

FIGURE 1



Male rates increased from 7% at age 16-17, to 39% at age 40-49, declining slightly thereafter.

Twenty-seven per cent of those who did not report personal property thefts to the police did report them to another official — probably management or security personnel, indicating a desire to retrieve or reclaim property or to warn appropriate people that thieves were active without necessarily invoking police assistance or legal sanctions. In some instances it may also be easier or more convenient to report to other

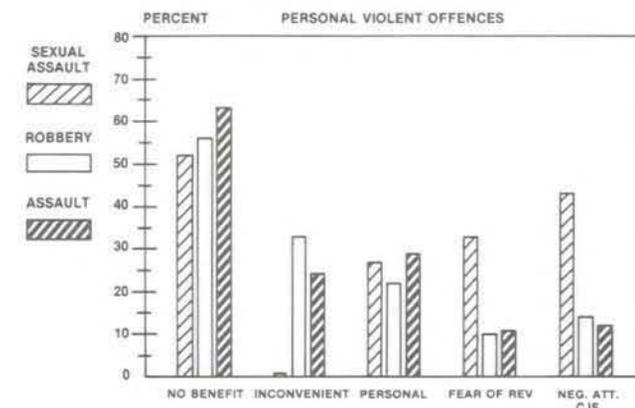
**Table 3**  
**Per Cent of Incidents Coming to Attention of the Police, by City**

	Per cent Reported in Seven Cities	Vancouver	Edmonton	Winnipeg	Toronto	Montreal	Hallifax Dartmouth	St. John's	Reported Range
Sexual Assault	38	32 (5)*	15 (7)	33 (4)	40 (2)	50 (1)	29 (6)	40 (3)	(15 - 50)
Robbery	45	43 (6)	46 (1)	42 (7)	46 (2)	45 (3)	45 (4)	44 (5)	(42 - 46)
Assault	34	34 (4)	32 (6)	23 (7)	36 (2)	39 (1)	35 (3)	33 (5)	(23 - 39)
Break & Enter	64	61 (7)	62 (5)	62 (4)	65 (3)	66 (2)	61 (6)	68 (1)	(61 - 68)
Motor Vehicle Theft	70	71 (6)	77 (1)	73 (4)	72 (5)	67 (7)	74 (3)	74 (2)	(67 - 77)
Household Theft	44	39 (7)	46 (4)	47 (3)	46 (5)	46 (6)	48 (1)	48 (2)	(39 - 48)
Personal Theft	29	29 (4)	30 (3)	25 (7)	30 (2)	31 (1)	28 (5)	26 (6)	(25 - 31)
Vandalism	35	29 (6)	39 (2)	38 (3)	37 (4)	36 (5)	40 (1)	27 (7)	(27 - 40)
Overall Percentage Reported	42	38 (7)	42 (4)	40 (5)	42 (3)	45 (1)	42 (2)	39 (6)	(38 - 45)
Overall Percentage Not Reported	58	62	57	60	58	55	58	61	

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

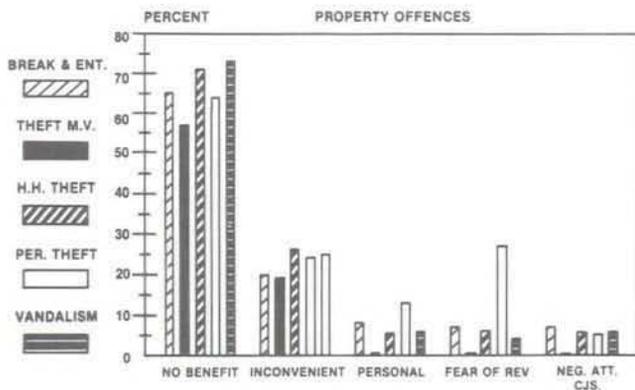
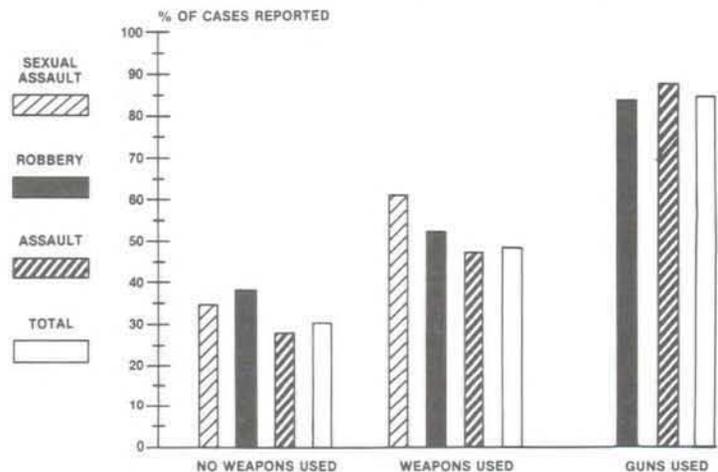
**FIGURE 2**

**GROUPED REASONS FOR FAILURE TO REPORT**



**FIGURE 3**

**PROPORTION OF VIOLENT OFFENCES REPORTED BY USE OF WEAPONS**



No Perceived Benefit includes: "Nothing taken or items recovered"; "Police couldn't do anything"; and "Too minor".

Personal reasons includes: "Protect offender"; and "Personal matter".

officials than to report directly to the police.

More than 417,000 thefts of *household property* were described by survey respondents, a rate of 172 incidents per 1,000 households. Reporting rates for both completed and attempted household thefts were higher than for theft of personal property (45% for completed household thefts; 35% for attempted household thefts) (Table 4).

Actual financial losses were suffered in 88% of the household theft incidents. The mean gross loss was higher than for theft of personal property, but recovery was also absolutely and proportionately higher, so that in the end, victims of personal theft were out-of-pocket an average of \$160, whereas victims of household theft were out-of-pocket \$144 on average (Table 4). The proportion of the dollar value recovered in household property thefts was 45%, only slightly higher than the 43% of value recovered in break and enter incidents (Table 5). That thefts of household property are reported more frequently than thefts of personal property probably reflects some consensus about the likelihood that police notification will result in the identification of the offender, in direct recovery of property, or in recovery through insurance.

Seventy-one per cent of those who failed to report household thefts said that the incident was too minor to bother. Identical proportions of non-reporting victims of household thefts and of personal theft (64%) gave as a reason their assessment that the police could not do anything about the incident — possibly because in both types of incident actual loss may have gone unnoticed for some time, or the victim may have been unable to say when or where the loss occurred. Finally, some victims may feel some sense of complicity or embarrassment that perhaps through their own carelessness they provided the offender with a tempting opportunity for theft.

### Motor Vehicle Theft

Motor-vehicle theft is the offence most likely to be reported to police in each of the seven cities. Seventy per cent of attempted and completed motor vehicle thefts were reported, and if only completed thefts are considered, 89% came to police attention. On the other hand, only 42% of attempted motor vehicle thefts come to police

**Table 4**  
**Comparison of Types of Theft**

	Household Property	Personal Property
Estimated number of incidents	417,200	349,800
Rates per 1,000	172 <sup>(1)</sup>	70 <sup>(2)</sup>
Percentage of incidents with dollar loss	88	94
Percentage reported to police	44	29
% Attempted incidents reported	35	20
% Completed incidents reported	45	30
Mean gross loss <sup>(3)</sup>	\$264	\$225
Mean recovery	\$120	\$65
Mean net loss	\$144	\$160
Percent of loss recovered	45	29

<sup>(1)</sup> Rate per 1,000 households.

<sup>(2)</sup> Rate per 1,000 population 16 and older.

<sup>(3)</sup> Includes only those incidents in which there was an actual loss.

**Table 5**  
**Economic Loss<sup>(1)</sup> and Recovery for Incidents Involving any Loss, by Type of Crime**

Type of Crime	Per cent Incidents with Dollar Loss	Mean Gross \$ Loss	Mean \$ Recovery	Mean Net \$ Loss
<b>Personal Crimes</b>				
Sexual Assault	32	291	25	266
Robbery	56	576	261	315
Assault <sup>(2)</sup>	18	261	37	224
Personal Theft	94	225	65	160
<b>Household Crimes</b>				
Break & Enter	67	1,142	487	655
Motor Vehicle Theft	72	3,512	3,053	459
Household Theft	88	264	120	144
Vandalism	73	224	92	132

<sup>(1)</sup> Economic loss in this instance includes costs due to theft and damage to property only.

<sup>(2)</sup> Loss in cases of assault is for property damage only.

attention. Clearly, completed motor vehicle thefts present the least ambiguous situation for the victim — there is usually clearcut evidence of loss, the value of the loss is high, and chances of financial recovery through insurance or by return of the vehicle are good, providing a report is made to the police.

Although mean gross dollar losses due to theft and damage were much higher for motor vehicle theft than for any other type of crime included in the

survey (\$3,512 as compared to the next most costly crime, break and enter at \$1,142), mean dollar recovery from motor vehicle theft was also very high (\$3,053). Mean *net* losses due to motor vehicle theft were \$459; for break and enter, mean net losses were much higher (\$655). Most, if not all insurance companies require that auto thefts be reported to the police before insurance claims are processed, and this alone likely provides a powerful incentive for reporting such crimes (Table 5).

**Table 6**  
**Reporting of Break and Enter Incidents by Crime Characteristics**

	Estimated Incidents	Per Cent of All Break and Enter Incidents	Per Cent Reported <sup>(1)</sup>
<b>All Break and Enters</b>	227,300 <sup>(2)</sup>	100	64
Forced entry, with theft	70,800	31	90
Forced entry, no theft	16,300	7	66
No force, with theft	51,200	23	64
No force, no theft	14,500	6	42
Attempted only, with force	57,700	25	44
Attempted only, no force	16,800	7	39

<sup>(1)</sup> In approximately 1% of cases it was not known whether the incident was reported to the police. Percentages are based on cases in which reporting status was known.

<sup>(2)</sup> Estimated incidents may not add to totals given due to rounding.

## Breaking and Entering

Breaking and entering or attempted breaking and entering was much more common (94 incidents per 1,000 households), than theft of a motor vehicle (17 per 1,000 households). In 67% of the break and enter incidents victims suffered some financial loss through theft or damage (Table 5). Average net loss for break and enter offences was four times as great as for theft of household property. At the time of the survey, little had been recovered and even after recovery through private insurance, average net loss was still high at \$655.

Few people would consider a break and enter incident or an attempted break and enter into their home to be a trivial event. Nevertheless, 36% of the break and enter incidents described to interviewers did not come to police attention. Reporting rates increased with family income, from 51% reported among the lowest income families (less than \$9,000 per year) to 69% for the highest income families (over \$30,000 per year). As with motor vehicle theft, a number of offence characteristics were strongly related to whether incidents were reported or not.

When there was evidence that entry into a dwelling had been forced, and when actual theft losses occurred, reporting rates were very high (90%). About two-thirds of the incidents were reported when there was evidence of forced entry but no theft occurred, or when there was an actual theft, but no

evidence that the entry was forced (Table 6).

All of this suggests that the desire for police protection against forced intrusion is as strong a reason for calling the police as is the hope that lost valuables will be regained through apprehension of the culprit or through other recovery means. When force has been used, victims are made to recognize that they are vulnerable, despite precautions they may have taken. The realization that offenders were sufficiently determined and skilled to gain entry to steal, must surely raise the possibility that other, possibly more dangerous intruders might also gain access.

## Vandalism<sup>4</sup>

Almost three-quarters of the victims of vandalism experienced financial loss, and even though for most (70%) the loss was less than \$100, the average gross dollar loss for all such incidents was \$224.

Only about one-third of all incidents of vandalism were reported to the police, most often because victims defined these incidents as "too minor", or because they believe that the police could do nothing about it anyway.

## Reporting Violent Crimes

The crimes which evoke our strongest fears are those involving violence or the threat of violence: sexual assault, robbery and assault. Although they are

relatively rare, they are also the most serious crimes included in the victimization survey. Why is it, then, that nearly two-thirds of these incidents never come to the attention of police?

The general findings described below should be seen as the broad brush trends which emerge when violent crimes are not distinguished by type, by whether they were attempted or completed, or by offender characteristics.

- **Violent crimes against females were more likely to be reported (46%) than violent crimes against males (34%).**
- **Reporting rates increased with age of the victim, from 34% when victims were under 25, to 55% when victims were 40 or older.**
- **Violent offences against unmarried victims of both sexes were less likely to be reported than offences against married, separated, divorced or widowed victims.**
- **The closer to home a violent crime occurred, the more likely it was to be reported, and violent crimes that occurred indoors were more likely to be reported than those which occurred outside.**

Half of all the robberies and assaults occurred in places other than the victim's home, place of work, or neighbourhood. About two-thirds of the robberies that occurred at or around home or work were reported; only one-third of those that occurred in the neighbourhood or elsewhere were reported.

Nearly half (47%) of the assaults in and around the home were reported, declining to 27% of those which occurred in "other" locations<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Unlike all other offences considered in this survey, vandalism cannot be divided into "attempted" or "completed" sub-categories. Because of the nature of the activity described as vandalism, attempts could only be described in some other offence terms, such as attempted break and entry, verbal threats (attempted assault), or trespassing. Additionally, because of the "seriousness hierarchy" used to assign events to crime categories, vandalism as here reported included only those incidents which were devoid of more serious elements. Thus, if theft and robbery occurred, or if break and entry and vandalism occurred, the incidents would be recorded in these tables as robbery or break and enter respectively.

<sup>5</sup> Due to low numbers, reporting by sexual assault victims could not be analyzed in such detail.

One is led to the conclusion that violence which is literally "close to home" is more disturbing to victims and is considered to be more dangerous or serious than violence or threatened violence in more neutral, often high risk areas, such as pubs or bars in downtown entertainment areas, that is, areas which can more readily be avoided.

**—Reporting rates increased with extent of injury suffered by victims.**

Reporting increased from 30% in violent incidents in which victims were attacked but where there was no injury, to 45% when injury resulted, 70% when victims received medical or dental treatment, and 76% when hospital treatment was required.

Not surprisingly, the more serious the injury suffered, the more likely it was that the incident was reported by another household member rather than by the victim. In other words, victims disabled through violent victimization are often dependent on others to assure that these offences came to the attention of police.

**—Reporting rates were not clearly related to either education level of the victim or to family income.**

## Weapons

Weapons were used in an estimated 122,100 incidents or 35% of the personal violent crimes. The most common types of weapons used were what the survey classified as "other weapons" (27%), including a range of articles, from cartons of eggs to screw drivers, not typically thought of as weapons. Knives were involved in 22% of the incidents; blunt instruments were the next most commonly used weapons (17%), followed by bottles (14%) and guns (used in 13% of the incidents involving any weapons, or 5% of all personal violent incidents).

Although there were no major differences among the seven cities in terms of likelihood that weapons would be used, there was a marked difference in the use of firearms. Guns were used in 20% of the robberies and 12% of the assaults in Montreal, but in only 4% of the robberies and 2% of the assaults in the other cities combined, pointing to a clear difference in local crime characteristics and offender styles.

Reporting was strongly related to the use of guns but was not so strongly related to the use of other weapons. Other crime and offender characteristics seemed to override the importance of weapons in the victims' assessment of the usefulness or need to report particular incidents (Figure 3).

## Robbery

Half of the estimated 49,200 robbery incidents were attempted robberies, and half were completed (an actual theft occurred). Most robberies were committed by strangers (82%), with a further 16% committed by acquaintances. Only 2% were committed by relatives, spouses or ex-spouses. Nearly half of incidents involving strangers were reported to police but only 29% of those involving acquaintances<sup>6</sup>.

Forty-seven per cent of the 21,600 robberies involving weapons were classified as completed, whereas 51% of the 27,500 incidents with no weapons were completed. Reporting was more strongly related to whether the robbery was completed or only attempted than to whether a weapon had been used. Table 7 shows that whereas 62% of completed robberies were reported, only 28% of attempted robberies came to police attention. Attempted robberies in which weapons were used were reported much less frequently (33% of incidents) than were completed robberies in which no weapon was used (54%). The presence of a gun, however, dramatically increased the likelihood that the incident would be reported to the police (83% reported).

As with all personal offences, robberies committed against female victims were more likely to come to police attention (53%) than those against male victims (36%). For both sexes, chances of reporting increased with the number of offenders involved in an incident, though for men, reporting still remained below 50%, even with multiple offenders.<sup>7</sup>

Some victims obviously choose to avoid criminal justice intervention for incidents that most people would judge to be quite serious. When asked why they did not report completed robberies even when weapons had been used, for example, victims gave exactly the same reasons as did those who did not report other, apparently less serious incidents: police couldn't do anything about it (60%); the incident was too

minor (48%); or, especially for young male victims, reporting was considered to be too inconvenient (32%).

## Assaults

Assault incidents ranged in seriousness from face-to-face verbal threats to actual attacks resulting in serious injury and hospitalization. Forty-eight per cent of the incidents were described as threats only, and in 52% of the incidents a physical attack occurred. Weapons were involved in 34% of the incidents but guns were involved in only 4% of the incidents (Table 8). Reporting rates increased slightly from 33% when threats were made to 36% when an actual attack occurred. If guns were used, reporting rates jumped dramatically to 87%.

Victims and offenders were more likely to be acquainted or related when an assault occurred than when a robbery occurred. Two-thirds of the assaults were committed by strangers, 29% by acquaintances, and 5% by relatives. Within this broad characterization of assaults, the experience of male victims and female victims was quite different. Only 27% of the assaults against males were by acquaintances or relatives, whereas nearly half of the assaults against women were committed by acquaintances or relatives (45%).

Reporting rates remained virtually unchanged regardless of relationships between victims and offender: 37% of incidents involving strangers were reported; 36% of incidents involving acquaintances; and 38% of those involving relatives.

Assaults against women were more likely to come to police attention (44%) than assaults against men (32%). Reporting rates increased steadily with the age of the victim from 32% for victim aged 24 or younger to 38% for victims 25 to 39, 51% for victims 40 to 64, and 57% for victims 65 and older. Reporting also increased with the perceived age of the offender.

<sup>6</sup> "Acquaintances" includes: known by sight only, casual acquaintance, well known, neighbour, and friend. "Relatives" includes any relative, spouse, or ex-spouse.

<sup>7</sup> Multiple offenders were involved in 56% of the robberies with male victims, but in only 34% of the robberies with female victims. When only single-offender incidents are considered, estimated number of incidents were very similar for males and females.

**Table 7**  
**Reporting of Robbery Incidents by Crime Characteristics**

	Estimated Incidents	Per Cent of All Robberies	Per Cent Reported <sup>(1)</sup>
<b>All Robberies</b>	49,200 <sup>(2)</sup>	100	45
<i>Completed Robberies</i>	24,000	49	62
No weapon	13,900	29	54
With a Weapon	10,100	20	73
<i>Attempted Robberies</i>	25,100	51	28
No weapon	13,600	28	24
With a weapon	11,500	23	33
<i>Incidents with No weapons</i>	27,500	56	39
<i>Incidents with Weapons</i>	21,600	44	52
Incidents with Guns	4,300	9	83

<sup>(1)</sup> In approximately 1% of cases it was not known whether the incident was reported to the police.

Percentages are based on cases in which reporting status was known.

<sup>(2)</sup> Estimated incidents may not add to totals given due to rounding.

**Table 8**  
**Reporting of Assault Incidents by Crime Characteristics**

	Estimated Incidents	Per Cent of All Assaults	Per Cent Reported <sup>(1)</sup>
<b>All Assaults</b>	285,700 <sup>(2)</sup>	100	34
Threats Only	137,900	48	33
Attacks	147,800	52	36
<i>Incidents with Weapons</i>	98,700	34	47
Threats	59,300	21	47
Attacks	39,500	13	47
<i>Incidents with Guns</i>	11,300	4	87

<sup>(1)</sup> In approximately 1% of cases it was not known whether the incident had been reported to the police.

Percentages are based on cases in which reporting status was known.

<sup>(2)</sup> Estimated incidents may not add to totals given due to rounding.

There seems to be a complex relationship between reporting behaviour and annual family income. Reporting rates for male or female victims in the lowest income bracket (less than \$9,000 annual family income) were virtually identical at about 42% of all incidents. Beyond this income level, trends were in opposite directions for each sex. Reporting rates increased to 50% of incidents for female victims in the \$30,000 and over income groups, but for males, reporting rates declined as income increased, to between 30 and 33% of all incidents.

The most common reasons given for failure to report assaults were again that the incident was too minor, or police couldn't do anything about it.

Although reporting increased with extent of injury, only 46% of the incidents in which victims were injured came to police attention, and less than two-thirds of the incidents in which victims stayed in hospital overnight came to police attention. A large proportion of the injured females who did not report (45%) and a smaller but still significant number of injured males (35%) explained that they did not report the incident because it was a personal matter which did not concern the police.

Of special concern is the fact that 36% of the injured females who did not report, mentioned "fear of revenge by offender" as their reason. Only 13% of the uninjured female victims of assault

gave this reason. In other words, if a woman is actually injured, fear of revenge is far more likely to inhibit her from reporting. Further, because most assaults against women are committed in private places (rather than, say, in public brawls), others are unlikely to be able to intervene on her behalf. Although reporting rates were not greatly affected by the closeness of the relationship between female victims and their assaulters, reporting of the incidents by witnesses other than the victim declined from 21% of incidents when the attacker was a stranger to 16% when the offender was an acquaintance, and to only 8% of incidents when relatives were involved. Thus, if the female victim of domestic assault does not report an incident, there is little likelihood that someone else will call the police to intervene. The victim who has suffered injury and fears revenge is therefore in a serious "Catch 22" situation - afraid to call the police, yet socially so invisible that others are rarely able to detect her plight, let alone alleviate it.

Males rarely cited fear of revenge as a factor which prevented them from reporting assaults to police. They were far more likely to find reporting too inconvenient, even when injured. Thirty-six per cent of injured males gave "inconvenience" as their reason for failing to make a report.

## Series Assaults

A very small proportion of assault victims suffer repeated attacks. When five or more very similar attacks occurred and the victims were unable to remember important details of each event, special coding and recording procedures were used. Such repeated or "series" incidents are the subject of much methodological controversy, but they are, nevertheless, an important part of the lives of some victims. In the present analysis, "series" assaults were counted as one incident, and counted in this way, they made up 5% of all assault incidents<sup>a</sup>.

Seventy per cent of the estimated 6,100 series incidents described by females occurred in and around the home and the remaining 30% were

<sup>a</sup> Series crimes are not included in the U.S. Crime survey estimate of incident rates. In the United Kingdom survey, on the other hand, series crimes are counted as separate incidents to a maximum upper limit of five.

divided fairly evenly between work, neighbourhood and "other" locations. Fifty-two per cent of the "most recent" incidents in each series remained unreported and, contrary to the general reporting pattern of other violent incidents, series assaults against women were *least* likely to be reported when they occurred in or near the home, pointing again to the invisibility of domestic assault.

The experience of male victims was quite different: 54% of the incidents occurred in "other" locations, only 23% at home, and 17% at work. Sixty-seven per cent of the series assaults against men were not reported and when they were reported the report was twice as likely to come from someone other than the victim himself. It may be the case that for many of these males, repeated assaults are viewed as an occupational or lifestyle risk to be endured.

## Sexual Assault

Although sexual assaults (including rape, attempted rape, and sexual molesting) occurred relatively infrequently, the consequences of such attacks are profound for victims and for their families. In about half of the 17,300 incidents attacked victims were molested; in one-quarter of the incidents victims were raped; and in one quarter rape was attempted. Female victims of attempted rape were more likely to report incidents than were victims of actual rape but overall reporting rates for all sexual assaults were low (38%), considering the very serious nature of the offence.

Analysis of reasons for failure to report incidents confirms many of the concerns which have already been noted by rape crisis workers — that women fear revenge from the offender (a factor in 33% of the unreported incidents) and, even more disturbingly, that they often fail to report because of their concern about the attitude of police or courts to this type of offence (43% of unreported incidents). Given the compelling nature of these assessments, it is not surprising that factors such as age, education, marital status or income of the victim should have shown a generally weak relationship to reporting or non-reporting of incidents.

In 60% of the incidents, offenders were strangers, in 34% acquaintances, and in 6% relatives or spouses. Con-

trary to non-sexual assault, reporting rates declined as closeness of victim offender relationship increased, from 45% in stranger incidents to 36% when victim and offender were acquainted to only 22% of all incidents when they were related.

For sexual assault victims, then, the ability of police to mitigate the dangerousness of the situation or to prevent recurrence may be in question, and for many there seems to be concern that police intervention would *compound* rather than alleviate the problem.

## Perceptions of Crime

Respondents were asked about their perceptions of crime levels and trends in their neighbourhood and in their city. A large majority thought the level of crime in their own neighbourhood was average (30%) or low (50%). Only 12% thought that the level of crime in their neighbourhood was high. Those who had been victims were somewhat more likely than non-victims to report that neighbourhood crime levels were high (18%) and they were also more likely to consider the crime problem in their neighbourhood to be "serious" (25% of victims, 13% of non victims). Victims who described the overall crime situation in their neighbourhood as "serious" were more likely to report incidents to the police than other victims. This tendency was most pronounced among victims of violent crime, but it was also evident among victims of theft, and to a lesser extent, victims of car theft and vandalism.

## Attitudes Toward Police

We have seen that the decision not to report crimes depends in part upon the victim's subjective assessment of anticipated police reaction and ability to "do something about it." Survey respondents were also asked to rate the job performance of their local police with respect to enforcing laws, promptness in responding to calls, approachability and provision of information on ways to reduce crime. Generally, victims and non-victims alike gave their police high ratings on all of the measures, although victims of violent crimes (especially sexual assault) gave less positive ratings. Two measures of police performance (and by implication, of respondent's attitudes toward them) were related to reporting patterns —

promptness in responding to calls, and approachability. Victims who reported incidents to the police assigned more favourable ratings in both areas of police performance than did victims who failed to report incidents. No doubt those most favourably disposed to the police are most likely to report incidents, and encounters with the police either maintain or enhance this positive regard.

Finally, in support of recent police initiatives, satisfaction with the job police do in supplying crime prevention information was highest for break and enter, and household theft victims — the target offences for many local crime prevention programs.

## Implications

While the survey has uncovered twice as many crimes as are reported to police, it has also shown that two-thirds of the unreported incidents were described by victims as "too minor" to warrant criminal justice system intervention. On the face of it, this exercise of discretion on the part of the victim seems to be reasonable and appropriate enough; not all criminal incidents will be reported and perhaps not all need be reported. Some of the less serious incidents can probably be handled or negotiated as effectively by the victim as by the police, and in some instances, referral to other social service agencies may be more appropriate than referral to the police. At the same time, as police become increasingly active in promoting community-based crime prevention programs as part of their strategy to deal with crime, we can anticipate substantial increases in reporting for many categories of crime.

Police-based and community-based victim service programs now address the needs and fears of victims in several Canadian cities by offering to conduct home security checks — for break and enter victims in particular — and by rendering advice or practical assistance in improving home security. Victims who receive such help are far less likely to feel impotent and fearful in the face of crime. Furthermore, police often report that victims who have had their own immediate needs attended to are better able to remember details of the incident, and to assist police with their investigative tasks.

A rather different conclusion is drawn from the data on violent crimes. The

survey uncovered many serious victimizations which went unreported, not because the victim perceived the incidents or consequences as being too trivial, but because the perceived danger or costs of reporting outweighed the advantages. In these circumstances it becomes imperative that other avenues of assistance are made readily available to victims, including safe places of shelter, medical attention and ongoing emotional support which may allow them ultimately to seek criminal justice system intervention and assistance, without fear.

Undoubtedly, improvements can be made in the attitude of police and courts toward the crimes of sexual and domestic assault, and there are major efforts at all levels of government to this end. Such changes are likely to be gradual and uneven across the country, however, and victim awareness of improvements may well lag months or even years behind the actual changes. Reluctance to use the criminal justice system for self-protection or for the prevention of attacks against other victims may therefore persist, giving added urgency to the need to develop a wide range of services and strategies to meet the needs of these particularly vulnerable victims.

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## Appendix 1

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### Definitions and Limitations

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The eight categories of crimes included in this survey are: sexual assault, robbery, assault, breaking and entering, 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 are 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.

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## Appendix 2

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# Number of Offences Recorded by Police in Seven Cities

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Sexual Assault	4,644
Robbery	15,830
Assault	37,764
Break & Enter (Residential)	78,387
Motor Vehicle Theft <sup>(1)</sup>	37,267
Theft	237,589
Vandalism <sup>(2)</sup>	90,195

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<sup>(1)</sup> This Uniform Crime Report category includes commercial vehicles.

<sup>(2)</sup> This Uniform Crime Report category includes public and commercial properties.

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