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International Crime Victim Survey 2005: Criminal Victimization in Istanbul Households

Galma Jahic^a*, Aslı T. Akdaş Mitrani^b

^a*Istanbul Bilgi University, Faculty of Law, Istanbul, Turkey*

^b*Doğuş University, Department of Psychology, Istanbul, Turkey*

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the nature of criminal victimization in Istanbul. Face-to-face interviews were conducted using the standard ICVS questionnaire to a randomly selected sample of 1242 householders. Five-year victimization rates were found to be the highest for burglary and attempted burglary. One-year victimization rates for these two types of criminal victimization were higher than those for other European cities. It was found that rates of reporting the offenses to the police in Istanbul were comparably lower than in other European cities. Fear of crime was found to be comparably higher. The findings from Istanbul were discussed in the light of the international results.

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Keywords: ICVS; criminal victimization; reporting; fear of crime.

1. Introduction

Crime is one of the most significant problems of contemporary societies. High rates of crime and violence result in fear amongst citizens, inflict trauma on victims, and the criminal justice systems often outcasts the perpetrators. Effect of crime spreads even further, as victims and their families suffer in the hands of the slow and inefficient criminal justice system, inducing secondary victimization. In that sense, entire societies are affected by crime and victimization. Research indicates that reactive policing strategies, that deal with crime after it occurs, are not as successful in crime prevention as proactive measures (Wilson & Petersilia, 2002). Proactive measures in crime prevention stipulate carefully planned and well implemented policies. Unfortunately, in most countries, reliable data on crime do not exist, which makes it hard to develop policies efficiently. Prevention policies developed without good knowledge of the situation “on the streets” tend to be based on biased and distorted picture of crime problem, relying solely on information about crime provided through media.

There are two traditional sources of data about crime: official statistics and victimization surveys (Maxfield & Babbie, 1998). Official statistics usually include incidences that have been reported to the police or resolved by the

* Galma Jahic. Tel.: +90-212-311-5171; fax: +90-212-253-8911.

E-mail address: gjahic@bilgi.edu.tr.

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police. Since most crime never actually gets reported to the authorities, a vast amount of crime is never reflected in the official statistics and databases. Victimization surveys, on the other hand, mainly focus on the prevalence and incidence of crime victimization amongst citizens, and aim to explore how victims are affected by the experience of victimization. Victimization surveys thereby allow researchers to “count” crime incidences, even if they were never reported to the police, and to gather in-depth information about the context in which the crime occurred, experiences of the victims, and victims’ reactions to crime. Findings which are based upon representative and reliable samples can be used to develop estimations about crime rates and the prevalence of a variety of crimes (Van Dijk & Shaw, 2001).

In many countries, official statistics about crime are published annually by law enforcement units. Turkey, however, is among the countries that have very limited data on the scope and nature of crime problem. National police does not have an extensive data collection and analysis strategy, and until now law enforcement agencies did not issue any significant or comprehensive reports on crime data, other than a very basic table of reported offences classified by the type of offence.² The only other potential source of information is the data collected in courts across the country by Ministry of Justice. Aggregate results are published annually by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TSI).³ Court data, however, do not include the cases that have eluded the criminal justice system. So far, no nationwide victimization surveys have been conducted yet. Further, in Turkey, scientific research on crime problem is scarce. Hence, when it comes to crime rates, crime characteristics and victim reactions to crime, the body of knowledge that exists in Turkey is very limited.

It is for these reasons that a victimization survey was long overdue in Turkey. This article reports main findings of a victimization survey (International Crime Victim Survey) that was conducted in Istanbul.⁴ International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS) is the largest international comparative research project on criminal victimization and crime rates. By now 5 waves of the project have been completed (1989, 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2005), and so far data from more than eighty countries has been accumulated.⁵ In order to ensure comparability of the data across countries, parallel research designs have been used: instruments used in different countries were kept identical, and sampling strategies similar. So far over 220,000 participants from all around the world were interviewed about their experiences of crime victimization, nature of their contact with law enforcement personnel, and their fear of crime. In ICVS 2005, 17 EU countries participated, in addition to several industrialized countries such as the USA, Japan, Canada, and New Zealand, many developing countries, and some Middle Eastern and African countries.⁶ Turkey, participated in the fifth wave of ICVS in 2005, with a sample of citizens from Istanbul. The objectives of the survey were as follows: 1) to acquire data on victimization rates, as an alternative to official statistics, 2) to determine the prevalence, incidence, nature and characteristics of various crimes, 3) to determine the victimization characteristics which are unique to different types of crimes, 4) to gather information about the citizens’ perceptions about safety, fear of crime and crime prevention measures, 5) to gather data on citizens’ attitudes and behaviours towards services provided by the police

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Total of 1242 participants, aged 16 or over were interviewed from a total of 1242 households in Istanbul. Half of the participants were women. Average age of the participants was 34.11. The sample of the households was derived as follows: 100 neighborhoods were randomly selected from a total of 670 neighborhoods of the Istanbul City

² See the Activity Reports published by the General Directorate for Security, which is the equivalent of the National Police; reports available at <http://www.egm.gov.tr/duyurular.asp> (in Turkish only).

³ See the website of the Ministry of Justice General Directory of Criminal Records and Statistics website at http://www.adlisicil.adalet.gov.tr/istatistik_2008/ist_tab.htm (in Turkish only)

⁴ For logistic reasons it was not possible to conduct research with a national sample; however almost one quarter of the country’s population lives in Istanbul, meaning that results regarding Istanbul should still be seriously considered.

⁵ See the ICVS website at <http://rechten.uvt.nl/ICVS/>.

⁶ See the final global report of the EU ICS and ICVS that was published in 2007 (Van Dijk, Van Kesteren, & Smit, 2007) for detailed information on ICVS 2005 methodology and participating countries.

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