

Penal Issues

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Victimisation and Police Statistics in the Île-de-France Region

The CESDIP has a long history of research on victimisation and insecurity, including surveys conducted directly by the Centre, such as the city surveys discussed in the December 2006 (Questions Pénales, XIX.5) edition of Penal Issues, as well as secondary analyses on data provided by national and the regional public agencies. In this issue, **Philippe ROBERT**, **Renée ZAUBERMAN**, **Sophie NEVANEN** and **Emmanuel DIDIER** discuss their analysis of data from a survey conducted by the Institut d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région Île-de-France (IAURIF) in the Île-de-France region in 2003¹.

The present paper concentrates on three of the many distinctive contributions of surveys on victimisation and insecurity: the unequal distribution of victimisation within the population; holding the sort of victimisation constant, the variety of victims' profiles; and last, the comparison of survey findings with the more traditional source of measurement of crime, namely police statistics.

Victims, Non-Victims

Crime does not affect evenly any given population; we have constructed a typology, dividing our sample into several groups of victims, according to the specific pattern of victimisation they experienced². This typology may be outlined as follows:

Half of the population had practically not suffered **any** of the types of victimisation included in the questionnaire: this is perhaps the most spectacular finding in the survey.

These **unaffected** people were older than the rest of the sample: they more often lived alone and were retired. Women and other « economically inactive » people were over-represented, as were those with a privileged, city-centre environment either in Paris or in the inner suburbs. On the whole, this group is characterized by a life style that exposes its members to few risks, which is probably why it is exempt.

The rest of the sample suffered victimisations, but not evenly so. There are definitely different profiles for victims.

One fourth of the sample had mostly experienced **vehicle crime**, with very few personal victimisations or burglaries.

Here we find an above-average number of 3-5 members households, living in residential areas and in the outer suburbs (Essonne, Yvelines and Val d'Oise *départements*). There is a slight over-representation of men, and of ages 25 to 50, as well as of executives, members of the higher intellectual professions, middle management and office workers. There is also an over-representation, in this group, of respondents who are afraid for their children or who feel they live in a bad neighbourhood.

One sixth of the sample is mostly affected by **personal victimisation** – violence and thefts without violence – and thefts of motorbikes. These two types of victimisation mostly affect young people, and precisely the 15 to 30 year-old group, which is over-represented here, along with students, people living alone or who live in apartment houses (but not subsidised housing) and in the city centre. This group, more than the rest of the sample, contains executives, members of the higher intellectual professions, people affected by personal fears, and also respondents who feel they live in a bad neighbourhood.

Technical note

The questionnaire asks about nine types of victimisation (violence by an intimate, sexual violence, other violence, theft without violence, burglary, car theft, theft from a car, vehicle vandalism, cycle theft) experienced in 2000, 2001 and 2002. Aside from the number of incidents per year in each category, there are questions on the circumstances and the repercussions of the incident, the types of recourse to which victims resorted, their opinions and attitudes, their concern about safety, their fears with respect to becoming a victim, their neighbourhood and lifestyle, and last, the demographic, and socio-economic characteristics of the interviewees and of their household.

The sample was representative of the population of the region over age 14 (random selection of telephone numbers, and monitoring during the survey for sex, age and activity quotas). 10,522 respondents with a landline in the Île-de-France region were questioned in early 2003, following random selection of telephone numbers in each *département*, with no more than one person per household.

¹ This is the second survey in a program calling for periodical surveys, demanded by the Île-de-France Regional Council of its Institute for Urban Planning and Development of the Paris Île-de-France region (IAURIF). The CESDIP had been asked to conduct the first survey in 2001 (POTTIER M.L., ROBERT Ph., ZAUBERMAN R., 2002, *Victimisation et insécurité en Île-de-France : les résultats de la première enquête (2001)*, Paris-Guyancourt, IAURIF-CESDIP ; POTTIER M.L., ROBERT Ph., ZAUBERMAN R., 2002, *Insecurity and Victimization in the Île-de-France Region, Penal Issues*, XV, 2, 1-4). The survey has been repeated since, in 2005.

² Using an ascendant hierarchical classification.

Table 1: Typology of all victims and non-victims (2000-2001-2002)

victimisation (%)	1 unaffected	2 vehicle crime	3 personal violence	4 burglarised	Total
ordinary violence	0,00	1,70	32,72	7,05	5,95
violence by an intimate	0,63	1,45	1,46	0,89	1,00
sexual violence ³	0,63	0,92	1,52	0,78	0,86
non-violent theft	0,00	1,38	52,03	9,73	8,98
burglary	0,00	0,00	0,64	100,00	8,59
car theft	0,00	40,81	7,31	19,8	13,72
theft from car	0,00	50,05	13,28	22,48	17,33
vehicle vandalism	0,00	47,61	21,16	25,73	18,12
cycle theft	0,00	7,26	28,34	9,73	7,01
% of the sample	49,71	26,83	14,96	8,5	100,0

Read: 1.70 % of members of group 2 (26.8 % of all respondents) were victims of violence.

Last, a small group – a scant tenth of the sample – is composed of respondents who suffered **burglaries**. They also suffered an above average number of vehicle crimes and personal victimisations.

There is an over-representation of people living in residential areas, executives and members of the higher intellectual professions, and of people who find their environment comfortable, but also, to a lesser extent, of those who feel it is disadvantaged. This is a classical finding: burglary is predominantly a risk for the affluent (or relatively affluent), but it also affects residents of less privileged areas. Fears for oneself and for one's children are more frequent here than in the rest of the sample.

The 2001 survey had uncovered a similar contrast between respondents with low exposure to victimisation and others who are intensely exposed. It had also shown a contrast, among the latter, between those who are mostly exposed to vehicle crime and those who mostly experience personal victimisation, but no group systematically exposed to burglaries emerged.

Now that we have this overall picture, we may show that each sort of victimisation includes a series of very different victim profiles. This will be illustrated by the highly sensitive case of violence; the other cases may be found in the overall report published on the CESDIP web site⁴.

Three distinctly different groups are to be found among the approximately 6 % of victims of violence. The first contains over half of them, and represents people who took no action: the victim did not report the incident to the police or the *gendarmerie*, did not fill out any insurance claim, and did not consult any legal aid or victims assistance scheme.

The fact is that the harm was slight: more than elsewhere, these are cases of attempted violent theft, or of verbal violence by a single person, unarmed and unknown to the victim. Incidents in public transportation (especially on the way to work or school) are more frequent than for other violence, whereas violence in one's neighbourhood or workplace is less frequent. Effects on the victim's health are exceptional.

This first profile involves minor violence suffered by young people, who are over-represented, as are students.

A second, very small group (slightly over ten percent) involves completed violent thefts actually committed. Their victims tend more – more often than for assaulted people as a whole – to inform the police or the *gendarmerie*, and above all, their insurance company. True, the proportion of serious material damage is at its utmost here (49 % as against 15 for the entire group). There is also an inordinate proportion of violence having entailed a certifi-

more students and more people over 60 than victims of violence as a whole.

In short, these are serious thefts with violence, which led victims to resort to recourse of all sorts.

A last group, representing one third of these victims, characteristically reported the violence to the police or the *gendarmerie*, with the intention of having their assailant punished. Conversely, they did not turn to their insurance company. Also, the acts involved were, more frequently than for violence as a whole, violent thefts, often perpetrated by several assailants, sometimes known to the victim, and possibly even armed. There is also an above-average frequency of violence in the workplace or in schools. Aside from reporting to the police, there is also an unusually high percentage of recourse to a victims' assistance programme or to some outside help to surmount the shock.

The latter profile is characterized by recourse to the police and by the desire to have the assailant punished.

The 2001 typology defined six groups of victims of violence, rather than the present three groups, but the logic of the distribution is the same, in the last analysis: violent thefts, which are reported to the police and to insurance companies, serious violence leading to the filing of a complaint, and attempted thefts causing little harm.

Behind this typology of victims, some features of the violence itself emerge:

- as for its seriousness: a large proportion of violence is of low intensity (56 % are simply threats, insults or threatening attitudes...), often among young people;
- as for its nature: a majority (56 %) of violent acts are in fact violent thefts (27 %) or attempted thefts (29 %);
- as for reporting: respondents tend most to call in the police for the minority of cases of definite violence.

Victimisation Surveys and Police Statistics

The recall period of the 2001 survey covered the years 1998, 1999 and 2000, while the 2003 one covered 2000, 2001 and 2002. The latter two years correspond to an enormous – and fleeting – concern with safety, following the 9/11 Twin Towers attacks and in the general context of the war on terrorism, followed by an election campaign in which safety and feelings of insecurity have been hot issues. Nonetheless, the two surveys show that victimisations and victims' reporting behaviour were extremely stable. Prevalence and incidence rates⁵ and declined slightly for all kinds of victimisation except for sexual violence and thefts without violence, which rose somewhat. All in all, the picture of victimisation in the Île-de-France region hardly changed from one survey to the next. Vic-

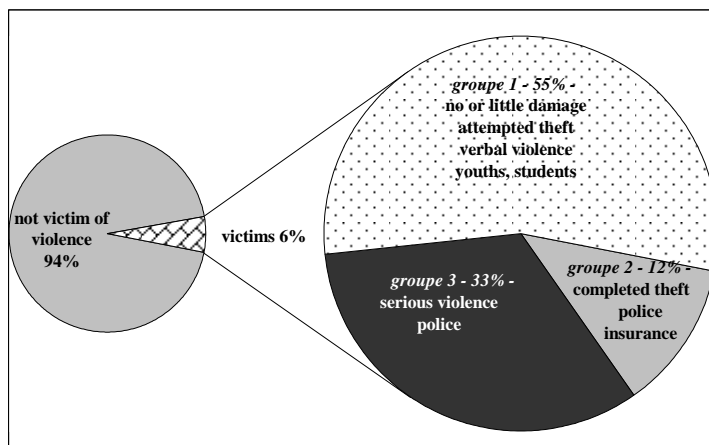


Figure 1: Profiles of victims of violence

³This group includes a very few instances of violence by an intimate or of sexual violence, which, although possibly serious, are so far below the average frequency for the sample as a whole that they do not make any statistically significant difference.

⁴http://www.cesdip.org/rubrique.php?id_rubrique=11.

cate of incapacity to work for at least 8 days. In fact, these victims tended more than the other victims of violence to claim that their health had suffered, and they also tended more to consult a lawyer or a legal counsellor. This group includes both

⁵The prevalence rate measures the percentage of the population in terms of **individuals** (or households) affected at least once in the reference period. The **incidence** rate measures the number of incidents endured per 100 respondents during the reference period: it is the product of the rate of prevalence multiplied by the average number of incidents of a same type per victim (or repeated victimization).

Table 2: Île-de-France victimisation and feelings of insecurity surveys (2001, 2003) ; rates of prevalence, incidence and reporting (complaints)

	Prevalence		Incidence		Complaint rate	
	2001	2003	2001	2003	2001	2003
ordinary violence	6,67	5,95	10,10	9,72	31,95	31,79
violence by an intimate	1,13	1,00	2,82	2,16	22,68	23,81
sexual violence ⁶	0,74	0,86	1,10	1,19	19,23	17,78
non-violent theft	7,93	8,98	9,66	11,31	38,77	37,46
burglary	9,52	8,59	11,59	10,40	43,70	43,69
car theft	14,85	13,72	22,12	20,48	58,84	58,68
theft from car	18,80	17,00	28,05	25,61	40,10	39,35
vehicle vandalism	18,91	17,63	31,15	30,64	26,23	26,47
cycle theft	8,88	7,01	11,37	8,72	39,12	36,31

Table 3: Île-de-France surveys on victimisation and feelings of insecurity (2001); a comparison between survey findings and police statistics

	2001			
	Incidence (1)	reported incidence (complaints) (2)	police records (3)	ratio (1)/(3)
all non-sexual violence	1 231 407 [1 173 211–1 289 602]	368 924 [327 795–410 052]	231 981	5,3
violent theft	505 727 [466 674–544 779]	177 762 [164 035–191 489]	105 341	4,8
verbal violence	356 591 [323 503–389 679]	63 753 [50 523–76 982]	42 289	8,4
violence TIW >8 days	62 487 [48 395–76 578]	45 139 [20 606–69 671]	84 351	0,7
sexual violence	89 148 [72 342–105 953]	18 354 [14 894–21 814]	22 538	4,0
non-violent theft	1 208 205 [1 124 861–1 291 549]	445 314 [413 843–476 785]	527 398	2,3
burglary	498 099 [471 063–525 134]	214 638 [203 036–226 341]	232 516	2,1
car theft	979 451 [943 887–1 015 015]	578 015 [557 027–599 003]	198 258	4,9
theft from car	1 225 924 [1 187 549–1 264 298]	490 370 [475 020–505 719]	477 267	2,6
vehicle vandalism	1 389 094 [1 349 273–1 428 915]	361 545 [351 181–371 909]	261 471	5,3
cycle theft	167 894 [151 564–184 223]	94 404 [85 221–103 584]	55 019	3,1

Table 4: Île-de-France surveys on victimisation and feelings of insecurity (2003); a comparison between survey findings and police statistics

	2003			
	Incidence (1)	reported incidence (complaints) (2)	police records (3)	ratio (1)/(3)
all non-sexual violence	1 032 086 [948 954–1 097 217]	302 307 [281 164–323 450]	312 388	3,3
violent theft	422 414 [386 278–485 549]	151 765 [138 782–164 748]	169 228	2,5
verbal violence	526 327 [475 388–577 267]	118 320 [107 828–128 812]	50 900	10,3
violence TIW >8 days	48 155 [30 702–65 608]	39 737 [25 581–53 893]	92 260	0,5
sexual violence	98 845 [81 034–116 656]	17 651 [14 470–20 831]	19 482	5,1
non-violent theft	1 272 244 [1 187 757–1 356 730]	448 667 [419 378–477 956]	543 940	2,3
burglary	327 961 [305 498–350 245]	150 893 [140 596–161 189]	160 871	2,0
car theft	883 324 [849 126–917 522]	520 819 [500 655–540 982]	189 435	4,7
theft from car	1 122 477 [1 085 220–1 159 734]	428 951 [414 713–443 189]	464 660	2,4
vehicle vandalism	1 369 345 [1 329 772–1 408 468]	347 254 [337 206–357 302]	264 358	5,2
cycle theft	143 578 [128 449–158 706]	78 626 [70 341–86 910]	57 321	2,5

timers' behaviour, measured by the rate of reporting, shows even greater stability.

In this context, it is particularly instructive to compare survey findings and official police statistics, so as to determine whether the same stability is found in the police's statistical handling of reporting as in victimisations and victims' behaviour, or whether, conversely, we find modifications corresponding to concern about safety.

⁶ This group includes a very few instances of violence by an intimate or of sexual violence, which, although possibly serious, are so far below the average frequency for the sample as a whole that they do not make any statistically significant difference.

One would intuitively expect police records to be lower than the survey-based estimates. One would think that people do not report as many victimisations to the police as they actually experience, and that is what is in fact what is shown in **Tables 3** and **4**⁷.

A single case defies this rule, and that is, the most serious violence: the number of

⁷ Incidence rates have been translated here into estimates in absolute numbers, to enable comparison with police records. They are presented within a confidence interval – that is, between a minimum and a maximum – but are subsumed in the median figure between the two boundaries.

cases of assault and battery found in police statistics is much higher than the surveys' figure for violence entailing an total incapacity to work (TIW) for at least 8 days. However, this surprising finding is explained, as we have shown elsewhere⁸, by a number of legislative modifications, which have considerably extended the definition of deliberate assault and battery to include all sorts of violence with lesser physical consequences. Police statistics have therefore become inappropriate for the measurement of definite physical violence and trends therein.

Aside from this special case, the excess revealed by the 2001 and 2003 surveys may vary considerably depending on the offence: figures between two and three times higher than police figures for simple thefts⁹, burglaries, thefts from cars, thefts of motorbikes and violent thefts (in 2003 only); but up to five times higher for car thefts, vehicle vandalism, all violence (at least in 2001), sexual violence (in 2003); last, up to 8 times (in 2001) and even 10 times (in 2003) higher for verbal violence (threats, insults, etc.).

This disproportion between the two sources hardly varies from one survey to the next for most categories (thefts, burglaries, all sorts of vehicle crime). It even decreased for all violence and for violent theft, as if police data had succeeded, there, in catching more of the incidents possibly entering this category. Conversely, the disproportion grew for verbal violence and for sexual violence.

Accounting for the gap between the two sources

French police statistics count police reports, which is to say records transmitted to the Public Prosecutor's Office. A police report may record a complaint lodged by a victim. We must start, then, by looking at the tendency of the latter to lodge complaints.

Respondents who claim to be victims of one sort or another are therefore asked whether they reported the incident to the police and more specifically whether this reporting actually was a formal complaint, or whether it was no more than notification. By multiplying the incidence rate found in the survey by the percentage of complaints lodged, we find the incidence of victimisations resulting in a complaint, or *reported incidence*. Normally, police records should be of the same magnitude as the latter. Were that true, it would merely corroborate the usual conclusions: police recording of crime affecting directly a victim, such as violence, thefts and burglaries, depends essentially on reporting by this victim and very little on proactive policing.

However, police records and reported incidence only rarely coincide: for sexual vio-

⁸ ROBERT Ph., ZAUBERMAN R., 2006, *Insécurité et traitement policier des victimations*, in COLLECTIF, *Une criminologie de la tradition à l'innovation : en hommage à Georges Kellens*, Bruxelles, Larcier, 147-169.

⁹ For example, the 527,398 simple thefts recorded by the police and the gendarmerie are 2.3 times less than the 2001 survey's estimated 1,208,205 thefts.

lence in both surveys, for thefts from cars in the 2001 one, for all non sexual violence and for burglaries in the 2003 one, police figures fall within the boundaries of the confidence intervals for reported incidence. In every other instance, police counts are either higher or lower. Police « underrecording » is the most frequent state of affairs: this is so, in both surveys, for verbal violence, car thefts, vehicle vandalism, and motorbike thefts, and also, in the 2001 survey, for all non-sexual violence and violent thefts.

This means that although the victim believed she/he had formally lodged a complaint this was obviously not the case, since it left no trace in police statistics. Most probably a number of cases were only recorded in the simplified form of the *police docket*, which leaves a trace of the event with the police and gives the victim a receipt, but does not include it in statistics, since it involves no transmission to the Public Prosecutor's Office.

In the comparison with the 2003 survey, the deficit in police figures disappeared for all non-sexual violence and for violent thefts. It would seem that in those years police recording practices have developed which increased the visibility of violent acts. No such change in recording practices is seen for thefts of cars or motorbikes, on the other hand, or for vehicle vandalism.

The explanation is more laborious in the converse situation, where police counts exceed reported incidence. This is the case for simple thefts in both surveys. In the 2001 survey it is also so for burglaries, and in the 2003 survey for violent thefts and thefts from cars.

Is this due to the exclusion from our surveys of victimisations for minors under age 15, along with those occurring in the Île-de-France region but affecting non-residents who may have lodged a complaint in the area where the victimisation happened? There is no reason why this explanation would apply to these victimisations and not to those discussed previously. Nor does one see why that mechanism would apply for some years and not for others. These « missing values » do not seem to have an important weight in our comparisons.

Can these be situations in which police proactivity added further to the recording of complaints lodged by victims? According to the survey, cases in which the police was aware of the victimisation independently of the victim's notification are extremely rare, although slightly more frequent in the most recent survey, possibly indicating some effort, however minimal, at proactivity. One may of course imagine that in some cases the police may be informed of a case without the victim's knowing it, a rather unlikely hypothesis, at least for burglaries.

One may suppose that the traditional reticence to establish a police report for simple attempted theft (violent thefts or thefts from cars) has been replaced by a policy of much more systematic recording. This hypothesis is insufficient, however, since the

magnitude of police records exceeds the reported incidence.

Another possibility is recourse to the *clearing of the books*, consisting of imputing some earlier, unsolved cases to a suspect, and possibly, generating a police report for each of those cases.

Be this as it may, these four hypotheses all point in the same direction. Aside from thefts of vehicles, the 2003 survey suggests a tendency to systematically record complaints for property offences. This finding also corroborates the one mentioned above: for property offences as well as for violence, there is every indication of a deliberate will to produce the highest possible figures, using one means or another.

Is this effort attended by a real improvement in police results? Our surveys include a question put to the victim on the clearing up of the case. The responses obviously depend on the information available to the respondent. One may well imagine that some cases are cleared up unknown to the victim, because the police did not link the affair, when it was finally detected, with the victim's earlier complaint. However, this line of reasoning cannot apply to thefts of registered property (such as cars), and it is hard to imagine for burglaries and above all, for personal violence. Moreover, this indicator of *clear up (or detection) to the respondent's knowledge* has the advantage of avoiding the effects of any changes in administrative practices, and enabling comparisons.

Table 5 shows a definite drop in clear ups – according to respondents – for all ordinary violence and a definite increase in the clear up of sexual violence (but the latter group is very small). For the rest, there is a very slight increment for non-violent thefts and car thefts, thefts from cars and vehicle vandalism, and a drop, but also very slight, for burglaries and cycle thefts. In none of these cases is the change statistically significant. In all, to the knowledge of respondents, the efficiency of the police remains very much the same, except for violence, but the improved detection of sexual violence does not mask the serious deterioration for ordinary violence. One can hardly read this indicator as showing a definite improvement in police handling of offending crime a direct victim.

Table 5: Île-de-France surveys on victimisation and feelings of insecurity (2001, 2003); detection rates to the respondents' knowledge

	2001	2003
ordinary violence	40,62	30,71
sexual violence	46,67	68,00
non-violent theft	6,73	7,44
burglary	9,51	8,33
car theft	7,43	8,97
thefts from cars	4,92	5,11
vehicle vandalism	8,71	12,63
cycle theft	8,86	8,31

Stricter recording, on the other hand, may have affected public discourse on crime and insecurity, inasmuch as police statistics constitute the main quantitative reference for politicians, the administration

and journalists. The stagnation, or slight decline, in victimisations in the Île-de-France region may very well not have been taken into account in public debate over safety, then. This shows what, in this context, is at stake with the command of quantitative information about crime.

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