

FEAR, CONCERN AND CRIMINAL VICTIMISATION IN THE ÎLE-DE-FRANCE REGION

Marie-Lys POTTIER, researcher (CESDIP), Philippe ROBERT, director of research (GERN) and Renée ZAUBERMAN, researcher (CESDIP) have been conducting quantitative surveys of victims of criminal offenses¹ for several years. The present paper presents the main results of a victimisation survey conducted in the Île-de-France region in 2001.

The Île-de-France Regional Council has requested that its Institute for urban planning and development (IAURIF) create an Observatory on Security in the region. This new scheme is to be based on surveys of security and victimisation, repeated every three years. The IAURIF has signed a contract with the CNRS for the completion of the first survey by the CESDIP team specialised in this type of research.

Both the broad range of questions asked and the size of the sample make this survey one of the largest of its kind ever conducted in France.

The two facets of feelings about crime²

One may fear crime for oneself or one's dear ones (this is fear of crime), but one may also view it as a serious social problem (this is concern with security). The two may overlap, but this is not necessarily the case. To take another example, one may fear unemployment for oneself, but one may also view it as a major societal problem without feeling any direct personal threat.

At the beginning of 2001, 39 % of the people questioned in Île-de-France wanted the government to make security its highest priority. No other social problem mentioned in the survey got as high a score. However, if we add up those who ranked unemployment first and those who placed poverty first, the total for these problems – 50 % – represents the highest score.

During the same period, the Figaro-Sofres barometer found exactly the same figures for France as a whole. One month later, 33 % of those surveyed by Agoramétrie claimed to *entirely agree* with the idea that *one no longer feels safe*.

"Concerned" people are characteristically elderly, have a low educational level, profess definitely right-wing political positions (or refuse to locate themselves on a right-left axis), and live in a neighbourhood they dislike (with vandalism, groups of young people hanging out, etc.). Conversely, the fact of having been a crime victim or not hardly affects their degree of concern.

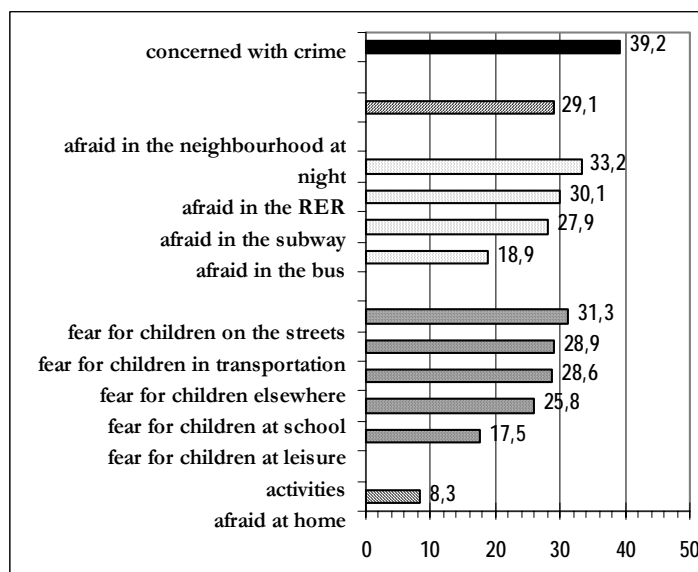
Fear, on the other hand, varies with the context. Few people claim to be afraid at home, more are afraid to go out alone in their neighbourhood at night. There is also a sort of gradual progression of fears, especially in public transportation, starting with buses, then trains, then the subway, and culminating with the RER (the regional super-subway). Another remark is the high level of fear for one's children.

Technical note

The questionnaire lists nine types of victimisation (violence by an intimate, sexual violence, other violence, theft of personal property, burglary, car theft, theft from a vehicle, cycle theft) experienced in 1998, 1999 or 2000. Aside from the annual number of incidents in each category there were questions on the circumstances and the repercussions of the incident, the recourse used by victims, their opinions and attitudes, their concern with security, their fear of crime, their neighbourhood and life style and last the social, professional and demographic characteristics of the individuals questioned and of their household.

The sample was representative of the Île-de-France population over age 14 : 10,504 people were questioned by telephone between January and February 2001, following random selection of households (quotas for age, sex and occupation were constantly checked all along the interviewing campaign), then of one individual per household, in each *département*.

Figure 1. Concern with security and fear of crime



Exposure to a risk of crime has a much more direct influence on fear than on concern with security. People who have been victims, especially of violence, are more fearful than the others, but the impact of exposure depends on how vulnerable one feels. Women are more apt than men to feel threatened when they are alone on a street, elderly people fear the consequences of an attack more than young people do, and people living in a "difficult" urban area are more apprehensive of the risk of victimisation.

Victimisations

The victimisations studied may have been a personal experience or have affected the entire household. For *personal victimisation* : at least once during the years 1998, 1999 or 2000, - 0.7 % of inhabitants of the Île-de-France region over age 14 claimed to have been the victim of sexual violence. One out of three cases involved rape or attempted rape.

¹ ZAUBERMAN R., ROBERT Ph., 1995, *Du côté des victimes, un autre regard sur la délinquance*, Paris, l'Harmattan. ROBERT Ph., ZAUBERMAN R., POTTIER M.L., LAGRANGE H., 2001, Measuring crime : police statistics and victimisation surveys (1985-1995), *Revue Française de Sociologie*, 42, 133-174. ZAUBERMAN R., ROBERT Ph., POTTIER M.L., 2000, Risque de proximité ou risque lié au style de vie. Enquêtes et évaluation de la sécurité urbaine, *Les Cahiers de la Sécurité intérieure*, 42, 193-220. See also ROBERT Ph., ZAUBERMAN R., POTTIER M.L., LAGRANGE H., 1999, Victimisation surveys and police statistics (1985-1995), *Penal Issues*, 10, 16-18.

² ROBERT Ph., POTTIER M.L., 1999, Feelings about crime : fear and concern, *Penal Issues*, 10, 9-11. ROBERT Ph., POTTIER M.L., 2002, Are feelings about crime changing?, *Penal Issues*, 13, 15-17.

- 1.1 % were victims of violence by an intimate living with them. Some victims had been attacked more than once during these three years, whence the frequency of severe consequences of this violence. This is the category in which we find the most clear-cut physical damage.

- 6.7 % had been victims of another sort of violence. But in 40 % of cases this was confined to insults or threats, and in 14 % to a threatening attitude. Furthermore, in over half of cases (55 %), this was actually a robbery (26 %) or attempted robbery (29 %).

- 7.9 % of those questioned had experienced at least one theft (not violent, in this case), and in one fourth of these it was a simple attempted theft.

For *household victimisation*,

- 9.5 % of Île-de-France households mention a burglary – actually a simple attempt in nearly one case out of two.

- 14.9 % mention at least one theft or attempted theft (in 2/3 of cases) of a car. But this figure rises to 18.6 % if only car-owning households are considered.

Thefts of objects in or on a vehicle – attempts in one case out of four – affected 18.8 % of households (and 23.4 % of households with a vehicle).

Deterioration, and sometimes even destruction of vehicles was experienced by 18.9 % of households (and 23.57 % of those with a vehicle).

Last, cycle thefts – or attempts, in one case out of five – affected 8.9 % of households (but 19.2 % of those possessing at least one cycle).

Figure 2. Percentages of victims in the population (prevalence)



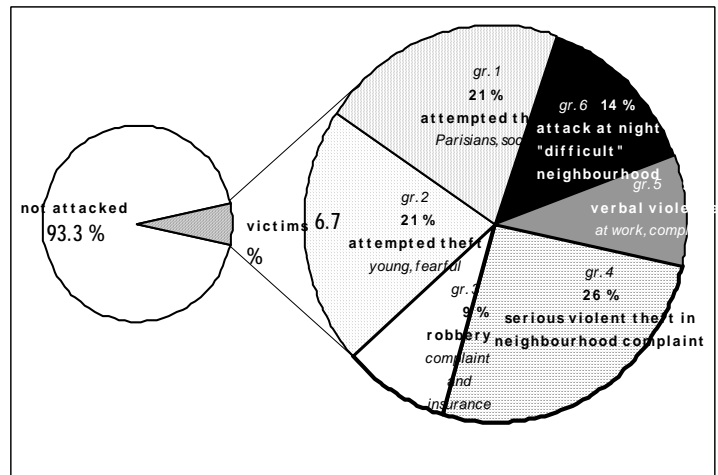
There are victims and victims

There is no typical profile of the victim of a theft, an attack or a burglary

- for each category, several types may be found depending on the characteristics of the event, the type of person, the way the victim reacts and where he or she lives...

To illustrate this fact, we will take a look at victims of violence (as a reminder : 6.7 % of the population).

Figure 3. A typology of victims of violence



Analysis shows that victims of violence fall into several categories. First it delineates two profiles for attempted robbery, one for attempts on ageing people with a relatively high social status (gr. 1), the other affecting young people (gr. 2). Next it elicits two groups of predatory attacks, with a difference between victims who resort to both the police and their insurance company (gr. 3) and those who only turn to the police (gr. 4). Last, we find two sorts of violence pure and simple : quarrels connected with people's work (gr. 5) and violence in problem neighbourhoods (gr. 6).

The same analysis may be applied to each type of victimisation, and consistently shows a specific patterning of victims' profiles (which cannot be described here).

Now let us return to the entire survey population :

Territories

In as highly diversified a region as Île-de-France, do fear of crime and victimisation vary in different locations ? A combination of variables pertaining to location, social and economic status and housing and opinions on the quality of the immediate neighbourhood (noise, cleanliness, tranquillity, etc.) was used to class respondents.

- First we find two completely **Parisian** groups, very similar with respect to educational and social and professional level, with a very active social life and relaxed attitude structures. But one is concentrated in the rich *arrondissements* of southern and south-western Paris, the other in northern, north-eastern and central Paris. The former group has rightist leanings – it also contains the most people practicing a religion – the latter tends towards the left.

- The next group is located entirely in the **first ring suburbs** ("*petite couronne*"). Its members tend to live in residential neighbourhoods which they find very convenient. They are rather well educated, with a good socio-professional status, and have relaxed attitudes.

- A large fourth group is practically exclusively located in the **second ring suburbs** ("*grande couronne*"). Typically, they reside in the new towns, mostly in single homes located in the residential areas. These are poorly developed but problem-free areas. This is a group of respondents in which the educational and occupational level is lower (blue collar workers are over-represented). They tend to be less serene than the above types, with more than average proportions of moralistic respondents, concerned with crime.

- Another group includes respondents living in suburban districts (first or second ring) with "**problem**" **urban areas**... typically, low-income housing developments. They

find their neighbourhood to be saturated with problems. Their socio-economic status is low, with an over-representation of blue collars and immigrants.

- The last little group contains those respondents who refused to give their address when interviewed. Actually, their profile is rather similar to the latter group, with low-income housing developments, and "problem" neighbourhoods, but they are older and live either in Paris or in a near suburb.

Fears, concern and environment

There is no doubt that fear of crime, and even concern with security are more prevalent in the group living in problem suburban neighbourhoods.

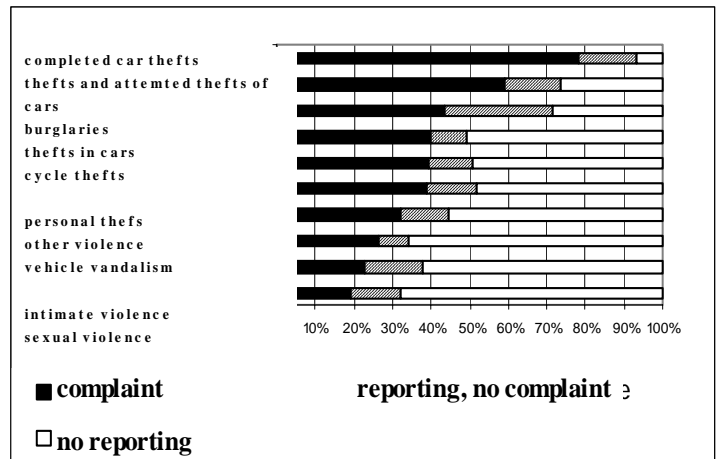
But the picture is far more complex where victimisation is concerned. This same group definitely experiences heavy victimisation, especially with respect to motor vehicles. But the most exposed groups are those who live in Paris : the group living in the south-south-western *arrondissements* suffer more violence (except by intimates), thefts and burglaries ; while the north-north-eastern and centre group has high levels for all offences (except violence among intimates). Generally speaking, the groups from the first and second ring suburbs are under-victimised (except for burglaries, in the latter area). Last, the group of people whose precise location is unknown have a slightly above average victimisation rate, at least for physical violence and motor vehicles crime.

This analysis corroborates the idea that the structure is two-sided : on the one hand, there is a Parisian type of victimisation connected with the big-city life style of its inhabitants, while on the other hand there is a kind of victimisation typical of problem suburbs. The latter is attended by serious fears and great concern with safety, and is linked to an environment in which people feel relegated because they do not have the wherewithal to go elsewhere. This is not the case of Parisian victimisation, which represents one of the risks, so to speak, of living in an environment that is quite advantageous in many other respects.

Recourse

Victims of property offences tend more to turn to the police or the gendarmerie than victims of violent offences. Victims of sexual violence hesitate to resort to these institutions because they are afraid of undergoing another trying experience ; people whose attacker was an intimate often decide not to bring a third party into a private relationship ; in the other cases of violence, few instances are sufficiently clear-cut as to justify reporting. However, even the complaint rates for property offence victimisations seem to be low on the whole in this study. This is often because many instances were simple attempts, and secondarily because people often resorted to simply calling the police, which does not entail a formal complaint procedure.

Figure 4. Reporting to the police



In case of personal victimisation people rarely turn to their insurance company, not only if they are attacked, but even in case of a theft. For household victimisations – burglaries, offences involving motor vehicles – the pattern for claims filed is quite similar to that for complaints, but figures are consistently slightly higher. The rates immediately climb of course when we look at completed victimisations only. In any case, insurance never replaces public responsibility for enforcing security ; it simply accompanies it for some kinds of property offences.

Be this as it may, both institutions – one public, the other private – only take care of a small fraction of all of the victimisations found in this study. Elucidated cases represent between 2 and 13 % of victimisations, and reimbursements are made in 6 to 52 %. However, these comprehensive figures often conceal much higher ones which come to light when we exclude simple attempts and focus on the most serious cases (violence causing incapacity to work, for instance).

Victimisation survey and police statistics

The primary objective of an observatory on security is to compare information on offending produced by various sources, and principally, by victimisation surveys and administrative data.

Generally speaking, the figures found in police and gendarmerie statistics are much lower than the estimates derived from our survey. What accounts for this difference ?

Let us take the example of violence, ordinary or perpetrated by an intimate.

If we look at the overall figures, police findings contrast with the survey figures in a ratio ranging from one to more than

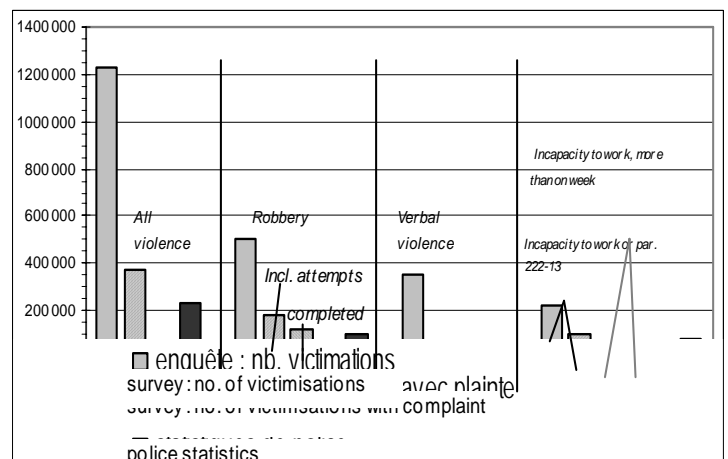


Figure 5. Violence : comparison between the survey and statistics

five (1 to 5.3). This gap does not stem entirely from the victims' slight propensity to inform the police. Police statistics do not count all of the attacks for which the victims claim to have filed a complaint. Many of these are probably simple minor offences³ and as such excluded from public tallies.

The difference is almost as striking for robbery (1 to 4.8). Here too, it is not simply due to people's not filing complaints. The explanation is simple : if only completed thefts are considered, the police figures come very close to the number of cases for which victims claim to have filed a complaint. In other words, it is as if attempts, even those reported by the victims, were not recorded by the police, or at least not under the heading "robbery".

Now, if we look at verbal violence the difference between the official figures and the estimates produced by the survey is at its height (1 for 8.4), but this is almost entirely accounted for by the very low proportion of complaints.

For the most serious violence – having caused an incapacity to work for a long enough period to be labeled a moderately serious offence⁴ – cases of assault recorded by the police are much *more frequent* than those found by the survey. This surprising finding is due to a clause in the Criminal Code (par. 222-13) which authorises the justice system – and therefore its statistics – to consider violence with no work incapacity a moderately serious offence when it is accompanied by aggravating circumstances (attacking a vulnerable person, attacking one's parents or spouse, group attacks, threatening to use or using a weapon, premeditated violence, etc.). If all of the cases embraced by this clause are added to the survey estimates, the differential with police statistics is entirely accounted for by the reporting rate.

³ *Contraventions* in the nomenclature of the French Criminal Code.

⁴ *Délits* in the nomenclature of the French Criminal Code.