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Research Report

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Oregon Serious Crime Survey

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1987 Victimization Rates

As part of the ongoing victimization research conducted by the Crime Analysis Center, analysis of the 1988 Oregon Serious Crime Survey (OSCS) is well under way. In April, the 1988 survey was mailed out to a sample of 1,654 Oregonians 15 years and older. The names were drawn from the Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Division's drivers license file. Some surveys were non-forwardable. But of those that were delivered, 72.4% of the sample responded (n=1,072). That is a higher response rate than generally expected from a mailed questionnaire.

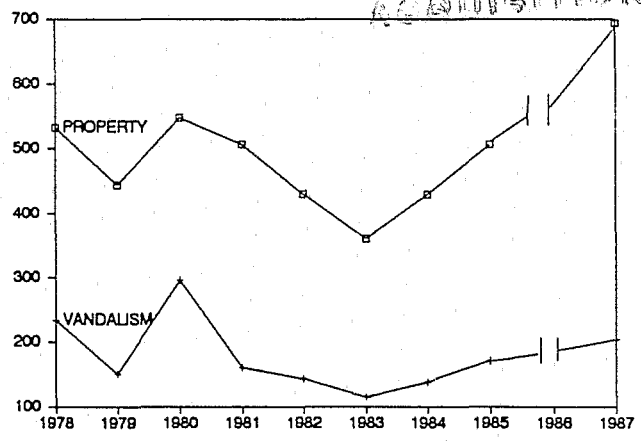
In order to use these responses to estimate victimization risk of Oregonians, the respondents must be representative of all Oregonians. That is, characteristics of the sample should be similar to known characteristics of the Oregon population. The most common indicators used to measure the similarity of the sample to the entire population are sex, age, race, income, education, and such. These 1988 respondents are representative of Oregonians 15 years and older with respect to these characteristics. Therefore, it is considered legitimate to generalize other responses of the sample to those of the entire population.

As in past surveys, respondents were asked to describe their own victimization experiences that occurred in the previous calendar year. In addition, there were questions about attitudes toward the criminal justice system and personal participation in crime prevention activities. This research report is the first in a series of three articles which describe and discuss findings from the 1988 survey. This article describes victimization rates during the 1987 calendar year.

Findings

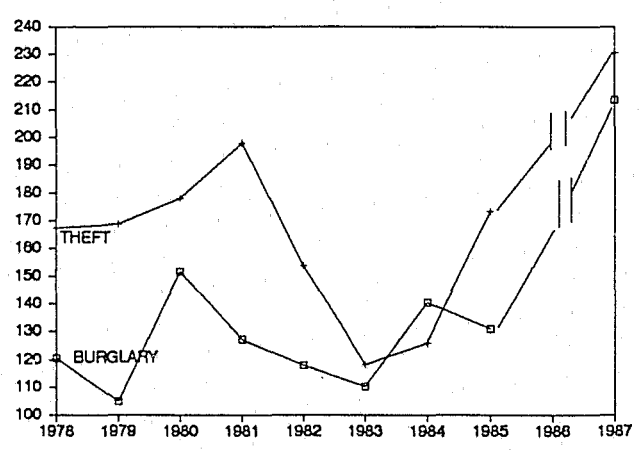
In 1987, 30.3% of respondents were victimized at least once during the calendar year. That is a 3.1% increase from the portion of respondents victimized in 1985. This increase may be due in part to greater numbers of respondents in the 15-24 year age range. Typically, this age group has a high risk of victimization.

Victimization Trends
Victimizations/1,000 Persons



Trends in property crime victimization from 1978 to 1987 (including burglary, theft, motor vehicle theft, vandalism, and attempts of each) demonstrate an upward shift between 1985 and 1987. (The OSCS was not administered for 1986 victimizations.)

Victimization Trends
Victimizations/1,000 Persons



Prior to 1987, the increases and decreases in vandalisms are mirrored in the increases and decreases of the more inclusive property crimes category. (The number of motor vehicle thefts is too low to be meaningfully shown separately. However, they are included in the combined category for property crimes.) The mirroring is not surprising considering that vandalisms are typically more frequent than either burglaries or thefts. Vandalisms and burglaries peaked in 1980 and thefts in 1981. However, fluctuations in burglary and theft are not as pronounced. (Note the difference in scale of the frequency of victimizations between the two figures; the Y or vertical axis ranges first from 100 to 700 victimizations per 1,000 persons while thefts and burglaries range from 100 to 240. Graphically, then, the fluctuations are magnified in the second figure compared to those in the first.) However, there are steep increases from 1985 to 1987.

Because these victimization rates were derived from only a sample of Oregonians, the rates are an *estimate* of the actual victimization rates for all Oregonians. That is, they are not exact. Representativeness (the similarity of characteristics of the sample to the population) helps limit the sources of error but that alone is not enough. It is also important to consider a range of values or rate estimates within which the true population rate is most likely to fall.

For an increase or decrease to be statistically significant, it has to be greater than the fluctuation due to sampling error. Typically, research findings report confidence intervals and T-values or Chi-square values. These research tools provide a standardized way to evaluate the extent of change in a specific rate. That is, they indicate how much change in the rate between samples (each year of the survey is a separate sample) must occur before a change in the population rate is indicated. It is easy to make intuitive judgments about very small or very large increases or decreases in numbers. (Changes expressed as percentages can be very misleading.) For example, if the robbery victimization rate were 15 per 1,000 persons in one year and 17 per 1,000 persons in the next, an increase of two robberies per 1,000 persons would generally not be considered as a big increase in risk. Incidentally, the percentage increase for this example is 13.3%. When change in victimization risk is expressed as a percentage, it may cause more alarm than warranted. The difference in reporting numbers versus percentages is more pronounced in low incidence offense categories--that is, in an offense category with a fairly low number of offenses per 1,000 persons. Some of the offenses more vulnerable to this distortion are murder, rape, robbery, and arson.

A more accurate way to evaluate the changes in victimization rates over time is to use one of the standardization methods that takes into account both the probability of victimization and the size of the sample. Some of the increases and decreases then will not be considered significant. That is, it is likely that a victimization rate with the same magnitude of difference could have been reported had another sample of Oregonians responded.

Turning to burglary in particular, changes in the burglary victimization rate from year to year are significant at only three points in time since the 1978 base year of the OSCS survey. Namely, significant increases in the burglary victimization rate occurred between 1979-80, 1983-84, and 1985-87.

1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987
120.6	104.9	151.7	127.2	118.2	110.4	140.6	131.0	213.6

None of the decreases from year to year were significant. Also, although the burglary victimization rate fluctuated between 1978 and 1985, the 1985 rate was not significantly different from the 1978 rate. That is, Oregonians were at no higher risk of burglary victimization in 1985 than they were in 1978. The 1987 victimization rate, however, is significantly higher than that of any previous survey year.

In addition to the OSCS, another estimate of burglary victimization is the number of burglaries reported to law enforcement agencies. These official statistics (reported in the Uniform Crime Reports published by the FBI) also fluctuate from year to year.

Year	National	Oregon	Rank
1980	1,668.2	1,748.4	12
1981	1,632.1	1,967.0	2
1982	1,484.5	1,789.7	7
1983	1,333.8	1,745.8	4
1984	1,263.7	1,823.3	2
1985	1,287.3	1,886.5	2
1986	1,344.6	1,966.7	3
1987	1,329.6	1,782.7	6

UCR data compiled by
Officer Clem Spenner
Local Source for UCR: LEDS

Officially, Oregon has ranked very high for burglary rates relative to the national average. Most of the change in rank is due to a decrease in the national average rather than large increases in official burglary rates in Oregon. In 1980 and 1983, the rates were very similar (1,748.4 and 1,745.8 respectively). However, the rank changed from 12 to 4.

There are many factors which make official rates different from victimization rates. These factors can be very complex and interrelated. However, an obvious factor is the rate at which victims report burglaries or attempted burglaries to the police.

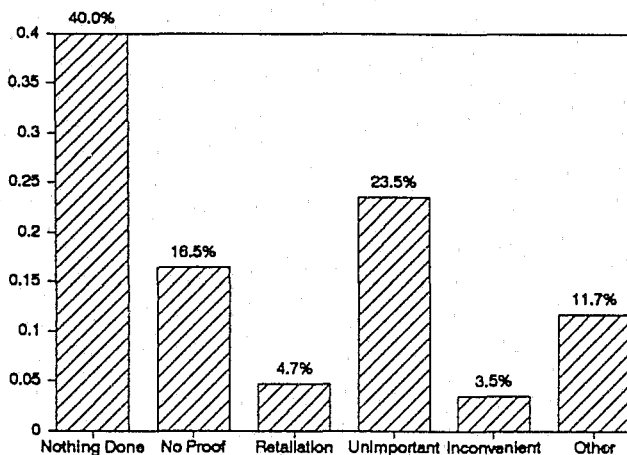
OSCS figures show that between 1985 and 1987 there has been a decrease in the percent of burglaries reported to the police. Most burglaries in 1987 were completed burglaries

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987
OSCS	60.4	59.8	57.8	56.3	61.9	67.7	51.5
NCS	51.3	51.1	49.3	48.7	49.4	49.7	52.0

in which something was stolen (of these burglaries, 65.7% were reported to the police).

The trend from 1980 to 1985 indicates that OSCS respondents have consistently reported burglaries to the police at higher levels than the national average (NCS: National Crime Survey). These higher reporting rates may help account for some (but not all) of the higher Oregon rate in the official statistics. The decrease in burglary reporting rate in 1987 clearly disrupts the reporting trend. The combination of both a decrease in the reporting rate (67.7% to 51.5%) and the increase in victimization rate (131.0 to 213.6) is reflected in the attenuated difference between the 1985 and 1987 official burglary rate for Oregon (1,886.5 and 1,782.7 respectively). That is, the official rate change appears smaller. (Also, even though a brief description of each crime type is given in the questionnaire, the crime category is determined by the individual respondent. When these are reported to the police, the crimes may be specified differently.)

Those burglary victims who did not report felt that either nothing would be done (40%) or that the crime was not important enough to report (23.5%). However, over one-



third of those who did report a burglary or attempted burglary to the police were generally dissatisfied (36.2%) with the law enforcement agency's response. Eighteen and one-tenth percent (18.1%) were very satisfied.

Examination of victimization rates for crimes against persons in the prior surveys was excluded because the age distribution of the sample showed too few respondents in the 15-24 year age range to make any reasonable victimization rate estimates. This particular age group has the highest risk of victimization for

Crimes Against Persons - 1987	
	Offenses/1,000
Robbery	22.4
Rape and sexual assault	38.2
All Assaults	278.0
Attempts-no weapon	125.9
Bodily force	95.1
Weapon	56.9

a number of person crimes. (This did not pose the same kind of problem for the burglary victimization rate estimates in prior surveys because they were on a per 1,000 households basis. Surveys in prior years were considered generally representative of Oregon households). For 1987 victimization estimates, the sample design was changed to ensure adequate numbers of respondents in all age groups.

Assaults account for the bulk of crimes against persons. Within that category, attempted assaults in which only bodily force was used account for the largest portion of assaults.

There is little information to indicate the severity of these assaults. Less than half of those who were assaulted (41.7%) indicated the extent of injuries sustained. Of this small subset of assault victims, 52.3% stated that the injury was "not serious at all." Another 41.6% estimated injuries as slight to moderate.

As with the extent of injury question, there was also a large percent of missing data (non-response of those who were assaulted) to the question of alcohol involvement at the time of the assault. Fifty-five percent (55%) responded that in approximately one-fifth of assaults, the assaulter(s) were under the influence of alcohol. A small portion of the respondents also indicated that the assaulter(s) were typically strangers.

These last three results are questionable because of high levels of missing data. Caution is necessary if coming to conclusions from information with large amounts of missing data. (Generally, more than 10-12% missing data is excessive.)

Lifetime victimization prevalence which is represented by the percent of the population who can expect to be victimized at least once during a lifetime is estimated at 61.8%. This is consistent with prior estimates of lifetime prevalence (see Craven, forthcoming).

These victimization rates estimate the risk of victimization which Oregonians face. However, fear of crime and perceptions about the effectiveness of the criminal justice system may impact the quality of life of Oregonians far more than the actual risks of victimization.

An examination of the attitudes of Oregonians about crime in general and the criminal justice system will be addressed in the next issue.

The sample is drawn such that these findings are representative of the state as a whole. A breakdown of the findings by county may be misleading. Representativeness at the state level does not mean that subsets of respondents are representative of the county or city of residence.

This research report was submitted by Diane Craven, Senior Researcher with the Crime Analysis Center.

Related Reading

Craven, Diane. *Profiling Crime Victims: Victimization Trends and Victim Characteristics in Oregon From 1977 to 1985, Phase One*, Salem, Oregon, Crime Analysis Center (April 1988)

Craven, Diane. *Profiling Crime Victims: Tracking Victims in Oregon From 1985 to 1987, Phase Two*, Salem Oregon, Crime Analysis Center (August 1988)

Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1987. A National Crime Survey Report. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (October 1988)

Oregon Law Enforcement Agencies Report of Criminal Offenses and Arrests. Law Enforcement Data Systems, Salem, Oregon, Oregon Executive Department (1987)

Uniform Crime Reports, 1986. U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (July 1987)

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