

Victimization Surveys: Recent Developments and Perspectives

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The development of victimization surveys started in the late sixties when the first modern-day² surveys of criminal victimization were carried out in the USA funded by the Presidents Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice (c.f. Sparks, 1981). The original intention of these pilot studies was to develop a measure of crime that would be independent of the decisions and definitions inside the criminal-justice system (Block and Block, 1984). Victimization surveys thus were seen as a means for overcoming the bias of police crime statistics and promising a solution to the problem of hidden crimes (dark figure) caused by unreported and/or unrecorded criminal incidents. Furthermore they were seen as a data source offering much more information on victims, offenders, and the consequences of criminal victimization than the police crime statistics.

In 1972 the first US National Crime Survey (NCS) was carried out and repeated annually ever since. This survey had a high impact and many countries followed the United States, using methods derived from the NCS (NCVS since 1991, see Bachman & Taylor, 1994). Today national victimization surveys have been completed in many countries, and in some of them, as for instance Great Britain (Mayhew and Hough, 1991; Mayhew and Maung, 1992) and the Netherlands (van Dijk, 1991) they have been carried out repeatedly, thus allowing analyses of national trends in victimization rates and reporting behavior. However, as Block (1993) has shown quite recently, despite the fact that all national victimization surveys have the same origin - the US National Crime Survey - comparisons of the results of victimization surveys of different nations are very

¹ A preliminary version of this paper has been presented at the Fourth Colloquium on Crime and Criminal Justice in Europe, 14 - 16 September, Romainmotier.

² As Richard Sparks (1981, p.2) noted, there have been accounts of some kind of victimization surveys in the 18th and 19th century in Denmark and Great Britain.

difficult due to differences in methods and range of crimes covered. Until 1989 there had been only some regional studies that allowed for crossnational comparison, as for instance the studies of Arnold, Korinek, and Teske (Teske and Arnold, 1991; Arnold and Korinek, 1991), who used similar questionnaires in large scale postal surveys about criminal victimization and attitudes towards crime in specified regions of Germany, Hungary and the USA. As Zauberman (1993) indicated, the great innovation of recent times was the International Crime Survey (ICS), which aimed at overcoming the aforementioned disparities of the national crime surveys, thus for the first time allowing for crossnational comparison. In 1989 the first standardised International Crime Survey (ICS) was carried out in fifteen different countries (van Dijk, Mayhew, and Killias, 1991)³. A second sweep followed in 1992 with thirteen participating industrialized countries (van Dijk and Mayhew, 1993). Furthermore the ICS questionnaire was used in comparable surveys in twelve developing countries. These international crime surveys for the first time provide an international overview of crime against individuals and their properties, and offer thereby a highly valuable complement to police crime statistics.

Besides these studies on national and international level, there have been local victimization surveys since the early beginning of the adaption of survey methods to the study of victimization. Following a typology proposed by Zauberman (1993) these local surveys can be grouped into two broad categories: Local surveys *out of necessity*, for which the restriction to the local level is mainly due to the lack of financial resources, and local surveys *out of choice*. The latter are subdivided into two types of research: The first comprises studies aiming at theoretical and/or methodological issues, preferring a smaller unit of research because parameters of the situation can be controlled more easily; the

³ It should be mentioned, however, that the International Crime Survey actually is a representative survey of national samples of individuals, and its core is a questionnaire concerning individual victimization experiences of the interviewees. As a matter of fact the ICS consequently is a victimization survey, and because of that the term "crime" survey seems to be somewhat inappropriate and misleading. The same applies to the British Crime Survey. The U.S. National Crime Survey has been renamed and since 1991 is labeled National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) (see Bachman and Taylor, 1994).

second type of local surveys is concentrated on providing policy-makers with an empirical tool for the diagnosis of the local crime situation, with respect to crime rates as well as attitudes towards the police and measures of personal safety; these latter kind of local victimization surveys is used for the evaluation of local interventions, as for example crime prevention programs on a community level.

As this very brief overview shows, victimization surveys today vary broadly in their scope and purposes. They have been executed at three different levels: At local/regional (community, city, or provinces), national, and international level. In addition to measuring victimization experiences and reporting behavior victimization surveys very often include questions about attitudes towards crime, crime control and punishment, about fear of crime, crime prevention and the satisfaction of crime victims with police and courts.

It is quite clear that it would be far beyond the scope of this article to give a complete overview and stocktaking of current victim survey research. This has already been done elsewhere (Kaiser, Kury, and Albrecht, 1991; del Frate, Zvekic, and van Dijk, 1993). Instead of this we will concentrate on some particular shortcomings with respect to the main objective of victimization surveys - to provide data about the amount of victimization and about the psychological and social consequences of victimization experiences - and recent research efforts made at the Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony (KFN) to overcome these weaknesses and shortcomings. These shortcomings refer to three main areas: Victimization experiences inside the family and other comparably close relationships, victimization of foreign residents, and crime against businessmen. With respect to the first area we will give a short description of the method and first results of a representative national victimization survey recently conducted in Germany. With regard to the victimization of foreign residents the research objectives of an ongoing qualitative research project will be outlined. Finally, the research design and methodology of a forthcoming survey on victimization of businessmen will be presented, particularly focusing on businessmen as victims of racketeering and administrative corruption.

Victimization in close relationships

Family violence has become a topic of growing public and political concern during the last two decades. In the United States, for instance, numerous projects aiming at prevention and deterrence of intrafamily violence have been set up (c.f. Sherman, 1992). Research on family violence has grown very fast since the seventies, and today, family violence researchers constitute an established interdisciplinary scientific community with their own specialized journals and conferences. Unfortunately, family violence research until now developed quite separately from criminology and victim survey research in particular (Hotelling, Straus and Lincoln, 1990).

While the results of family violence research were taken up by some criminologists, until very recently no systematic efforts were made, to integrate this development of theoretical reasoning and methodology into criminological victim survey research on the national or international level.⁴ This is surprising, taking into account that most behaviors labeled as family violence clearly meet legal definitions of certain criminal acts in most societies. At the same time, there are serious shortcomings of victimization surveys which have been mentioned repeatedly by numerous well known and recommended scholars in the field already for years. Several researchers and authors of review articles on victimization surveys have particularly stressed the fact that especially violent crimes committed by non-strangers are not identified reliably by victimization survey measures (e.g. Bachman & Taylor, 1994; Block & Block, 1984; Smith, 1994).

⁴ Only very recently the NCVS (formerly NCS) in its redesigned version tries to improve the measurement of domestic violence and rape (Taylor and Bachman, 1994). The British Crime Survey very recently also tried to integrate measures to improve the identification of victims of domestic violence by means of a victimization survey (Mayhew, 1994). It remains questionable, however, whether these methodological improvements will sufficiently solve the problem of underreporting of victimization by physical and or sexual violence at the hand of family members, because neither the interview setting nor the contextual characteristics of the interview questions, in particular their combination with crime-related questions, have been changed substantially (see Wetzels and Bilsky, 1994).

Already twenty years ago Biderman, for example, wrote that assaults "... in a high proportion involve as victim and offender family members, lovers, and others who have an ongoing social relationship to each other. ... 'crime' may not be the category of the mental card file under which that event is stored by the respondent and hence is not an event to which his memory associates when in the context of an interview about crimes, he is asked whether an event of a certain type happened to him." (Biderman, 1975, p.162). Similarly Sparks (1981, p.23) argued, that "many crimes by spouses, family members, etc., are not mentioned to survey interviewers". Recently Heidensohn (1991) supposed that the British Crime Survey might underestimate the rate of domestic assault in particular as a result of the interview setting which involved the possibility of interviewees and their assailant being in the same room at the time of the interview thus inhibiting the respondent to mention violent acts experienced within that relationship. Lynch (1993, p.173) commented on the same topic: "Many events that clearly satisfy the conceptual definition of crime are not regarded as such, because they are committed by intimates or acquaintances or because retribution is exacted instantaneously. These do not enter into the frame of reference when the respondent's mind is on crime".

Gottfredson (1986, p.261) noted, that a possible underestimation of nonstranger assaults in victimization surveys would in turn lead to an overestimation of the proportion of violent acts outside the home. Consequently the picture of the spatial correlates of violent victimization as painted by victimization surveys might be seriously distorted. Furthermore it seems very likely that the risk of violent victimization by nonstrangers is not distributed equally across the general population (Wetzels, 1993; Smith, 1994). More specifically, we hypothesized that especially rates of violence against women and elderly people are likely to be underestimated by conventional victimization surveys, and consequently that not only the spatial correlates of violent victimization, but also sociodemographic risk factors of violent crimes as revealed by conventional victimization surveys as, for instance, gender related differences of victimization

risks (see Smith, 1994) are clearly misleading⁵ .

In accordance with these statements survey research on family violence provides first empirical evidence that criminological victimization surveys seriously underestimate the amount of physical violence occurring between family members. The national family violence resurvey carried out by telephone interviews in 1985 yielded markedly higher incidence rates of physical violence between marital partners than the U.S. National Crime Survey. Straus and Gelles (1990) reported the incidence rate revealed by the National Family Violence Resurvey (NFVR) to be 73 times higher than the comparable NCS rate.⁶ This comparison, however, has to be treated with caution because different measures were employed in these two surveys. Nevertheless, because of positive results of validation studies of the measures used in the NFVR (the conflict tactics scale; see Straus, 1990), it seems unreasonable to attribute these discrepancies entirely to measurement error (i.e. overreporting in the family violence resurvey). Instead of this Straus and Gelles (1990, p.99) stated: "The most likely reason for this tremendous discrepancy lies in differences between the context of the NCS and the other studies. The NCS is presented to respondents as a study of crime, whereas the others are presented as studies on family problems. The difficulty with a 'crime survey' as the context of determining incidence rates of intrafamily violence is that most people think of being kicked by their spouse as wrong, but not a 'crime' in legal sense."

The aforementioned statements and the results of previous survey research on intrafamily violence point to the central role of the victim-offender relationship in studying violent victimization. Research on family violence up to now has used several categories of victim-offender relations. As Weis (1989) has pointed

⁵ Smith (1994) stressed the fact that these methodological problems of victim surveys lead to a particular underreporting of violent victimization experiences of female respondents to survey interviewers. Consequently there is a certain gender bias in the estimation of victimization risks by victim survey measures.

⁶ Smith (1994) reports similar results for Great Britain with respect to a comparison of victimization rates revealed by the British Crime Survey and the results of a local victimization survey concerning the amount of physical and sexual violence against women.

out, there are at least three different kinds of relationship which are treated under the more general heading of family violence: (1) Kin relationship, i.e. victim and offender are related through birth or marriage; (2) intimate relationship, i.e. victim and offender know each other in a close and personal way; (3) domestic relationship, i.e. victim and offender share the same household. While different legal criteria may apply to these forms of interpersonal relations, all of them share one central psychological feature: They are "close relationships" which differ from other relationships to acquaintances and strangers with respect to shared biographical experiences and a higher degree of mutual personal involvement.

It is of special importance for victimological survey research to know, that there are implicit and explicit social rules that guide and control social interactions in close relationships. These rules guarantee the protection of such close interpersonal relations against meddling from outside, thus being a necessary prerequisite of privacy and intimacy. Furthermore rules about the evaluation of acts within close relationships may considerably differ from social rules which are relevant in relationships to strangers and non-close relationships. Therefore similar events are likely to be interpreted quite differently when different social contexts (e.g. family vs non-family relations) are focused upon during an interview. From a cognitive psychological point of view different cognitive schemes and scripts of social events affect their encoding and subsequent retrieval. These cognitive schemes and scripts are particularly dependent on the relationship between the actors involved, i.e. victim and offender.

The psychological and social characteristics of close relationships have crucial consequences for the choice of the adequate method in surveying victimization experiences in close victim-offender relations as, for example, acts of physical violence between family or household members. First, special instructions are necessary to direct the interviewees' attention towards the focal interest of questioning, i.e. events experienced in close relationships. Otherwise cognitive schemes relevant for the recall and retrieval of the interesting events will not be activated. Second, the interview setting has to be designed in a way, that allows

the interviewees to give information about victimization experiences within close relationships without risking a violation of privacy, i.e. without endangering the relationship; this is to say that the interview process itself must correspond with the rules that are important for the relationship under study.

In the KFN-victim survey, which was realized in spring 1992, we tried to improve conventional interviewing in victim surveys by using an additional research kit for investigating violent victimization experiences in close relationships. Following a face-to-face-interview concerning criminal victimization and several attitudinal measures with respect to crime and personal safety, the interviewees received an additional drop-off-questionnaire together with an envelope and a seal. This questionnaire was introduced as a set of questions on family conflicts and problems. Having filled in the questionnaire in absence of the interviewer, the respondents sealed it in the unmarked envelope and handed it over to the interviewer⁷ who returned after about forty minutes. This procedure guarantees that the attention of the interviewees is directed towards the sensitive topic of victimization experiences in close relationships and indicates that the respondents' answers are treated anonymously and confidentially.

Two items in the conventional face-to-face-interview addressed victimization by assault without special emphasis on a particular victim-offender relationship. Respondents who reported at least one incident of assault with or without a weapon during the last five years were classified as victims of assault. In the additional drop-off-questionnaire two measures of victimization by physical violence comparable to the aforementioned screening questions concerning assault were included:

- The first measure was a translated and slightly modified version of the

⁷ The 1992 British Crime Survey, which asked a subsample of more than 7000 people to answer questions about drug use, employed successfully a fairly similar method (Mott and Mirrlees-Black, 1992).

conflict tactics scale (CTS), which is a widely used measure in research on family violence (Straus, 1990). The CTS was the measure used in the aforementioned U.S. Family Violence Resurvey which yielded tremendously higher incidence rates of assault in marital relationships than the NCS. It contains ten items with different acts of physical violence by family or household members. Subjects reporting to have experienced at least one of these ten violent acts during the last five years were classified as victims of physical violence by a closely related offender.

- The second measure was a one-item measure of assault (with or without a weapon). It was quite similar to the two items used in the face-to-face-interview, but explicitly restricted to victimization by closely related offenders. Here again, each respondent who reported having been assaulted by a family or household member during the last five years was classified as victim of assault by a closely related offender.

Furthermore, in face-to-face-interviews *reporting behaviour* for assault was recorded for every victim who indicated this to be the most serious incident within the last five years. In the drop-off-questionnaire, reporting behaviour was recorded for the last incident within the last five years which was mentioned according to the one-item measure. Every victim who indicated that the respective offender was a household member was asked whether this experience had been reported to the police.

A sample of 15771 persons aged 16 years or more being representative for the old and new federal states of Germany was surveyed. A subsample of 5851 participants of the face-to-face-interviews was also asked to fill in the drop-off-questionnaire. Only 2.4% of these subjects refused to participate, resulting in a very high response rate of 97.6% for the drop-off study ⁸, i.e. 5711 respondents,

⁸ The aforementioned self-report study on drug misuse which employed a written questionnaire after the main face-to-face-interview yielded a comparably high response rate of 94%. These encouraging results indicate, that the application of an additional, written questionnaire following oral interviewing might be an adequate method for research in other sensitive topics as well.

3255 of them being 16 to 59 years of age and 2456 respondents being 60 years or more.

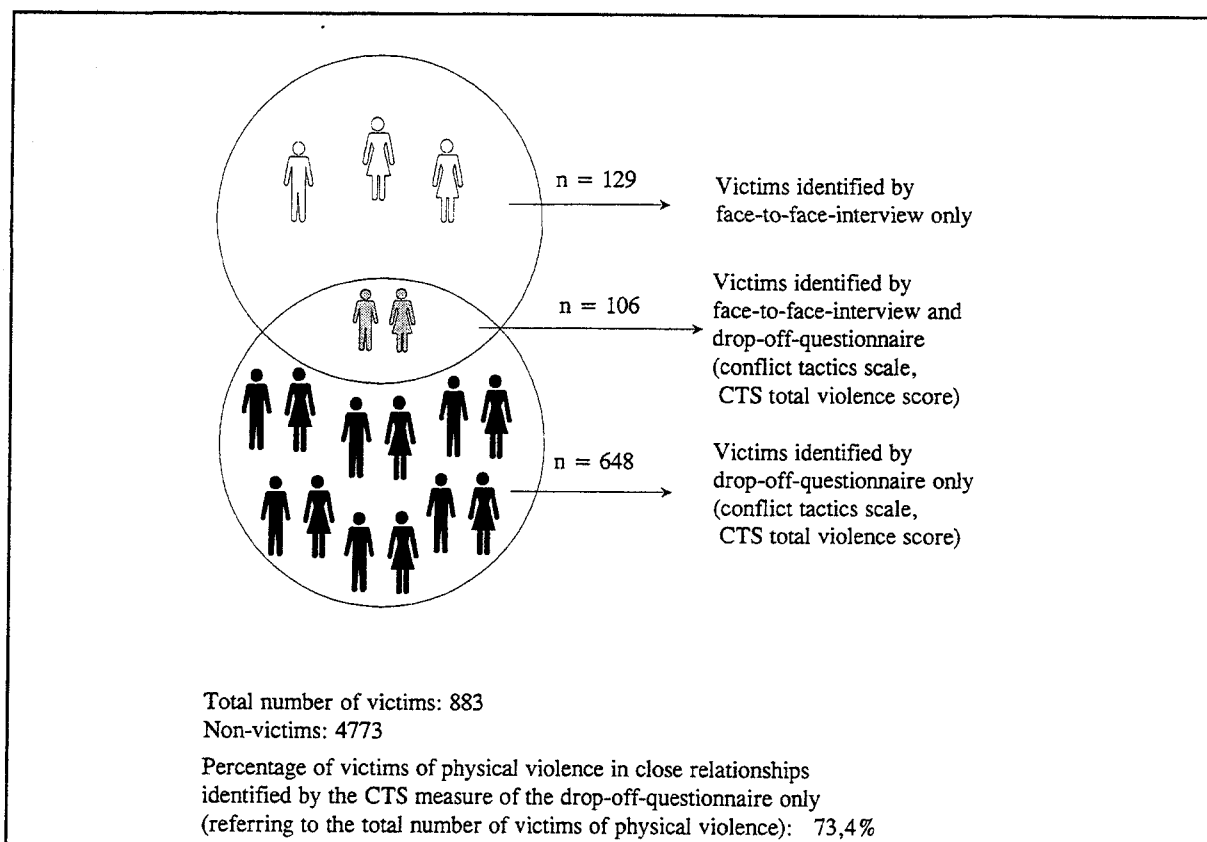


Figure 1: Identification of victims of physical violence by face-to-face-interview and drop-off-questionnaire

If differences in the social context of questioning (i.e. face-to-face-interview without any emphasis on a special form of victim-offender relationship vs drop-off-questionnaire with special emphasis on incidents in close relationships) were in fact irrelevant with respect to recall and willingness to report victimizing experiences in the survey, those respondents who reported that they have experienced at least one physical violent act by a closely related offender should have mentioned an assault in the face-to-face-interview, too. In correspondence with the statements cited above, however, a considerable number of such violent victimizations was only identified by the drop-off-questionnaire.

Figure 1 shows that 638 victims of physical violence, which were identified by the aforementioned CTS measure (here the total violence index) were not identified as victims of physical violence in conventional face-to-face-interviewing. This counts up to nearly three quarters (73.4%) of the total number of victims of physical violence identified in both parts of our study.

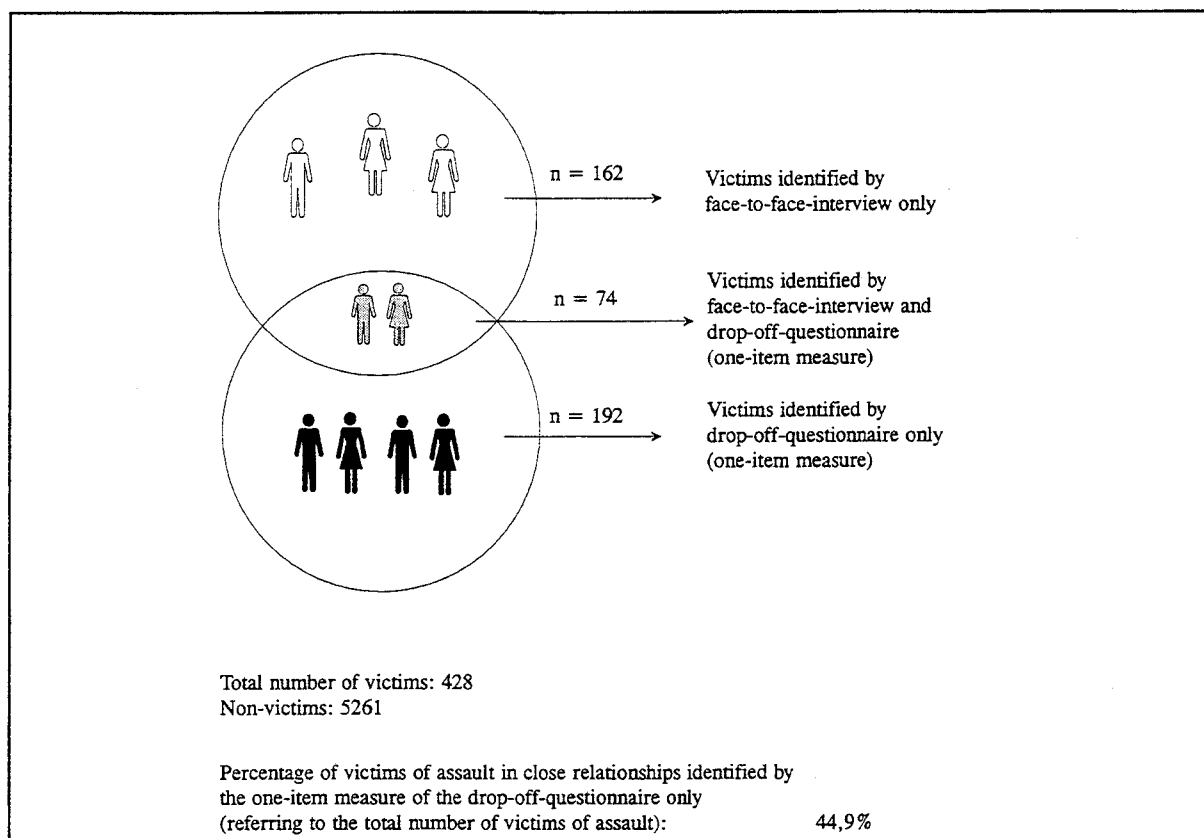


Figure 2: Identification of victims of assault by face-to-face-interview and drop-off-questionnaire

The possible objection, that this discrepancy is nothing but a methodological artifact resulting from different numbers of items was checked in a second step by means of the aforementioned one-item measure of assault in the drop-off-questionnaire. Victimization rates according to this measure were compared to the two-item measure of assault in face-to-face-interviews. As shown by figure 2, the additional number of victims identified by the one-item measure is in fact

lower than that identified by the CTS total violence index. Nevertheless, there is still a proportion of 44.9% of the total number of victims who were additionally identified by the one-item measure of the drop-off-questionnaire.

To test whether the underestimation of physical violence affects the estimation of victimization risks of women and elderly people in particular, we calculated the number of victims identified by both face-to-face and drop-off measures and compared the respective percentages of victims only identified by the drop-off measure with regard to sex, age and measure used. As can be seen from figure 3, there are clear differences in the rates of additionally identified victims by means of the drop-off-questionnaire with regard to sex and age. Furthermore, rates also differ depending of the type of measure used.

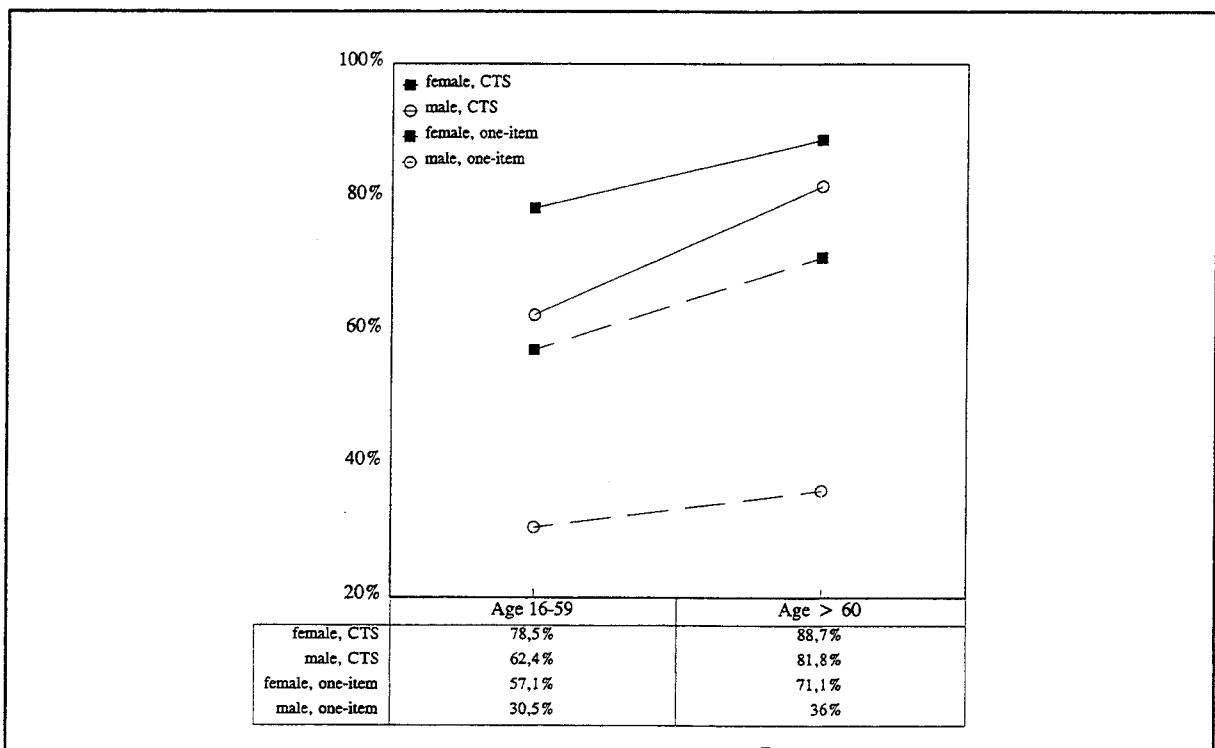


Figure 3: Victims additionally identified by drop-off-questionnaire by age, sex, and measure used

It is interesting to note that sex-related differences are more pronounced for the one-item measure. This is in line with results of previous research, which showed that the CTS total violence score, which was used here, typically yields very similar victimization rates for men and women. A closer look at the measures employed reveals that the one-item measure is less sensitive to minor forms of physical violence than the CTS (Wetzels, Greve, Mecklenburg, Bilsky and Pfeiffer, 1994, p.153). Thus, the greater differences with regard to sex revealed by the one-item measure indicate that victimization by physical violence in close relationships takes probably more often serious forms for women than for men.

Victimization risks are generally lower for women as compared to men if only the data derived from conventional face-to-face-interviews are taken into account. This result has been replicated several times by different victimization surveys (c.f. Gottfredson, 1986). In the KFN-survey the same results emerged when prevalence rates were computed on the basis of the face-to-face screening interview. The five year prevalence rate for assault, for instance, is 8.61% for men aged 16 to 59 years compared to only 4.3% for women of the same age group. However, when victimization experiences in close relationships as identified by the two drop-off measures are additionally taken into account, this difference is markedly diminished (men: 12.38%; women: 10.71%). This indicates, that for women a significantly greater proportion of victimization experiences takes place within close relationships. If the analysis is furthermore restricted to the one-item drop-off measure and to incidents committed by offenders living together with the victim in the same household, women below the age of 60 show a significantly higher prevalence rate of assault (4.2%) compared to men (3.0%), indicating that the home is a place of risk of violent victimization especially for women.

Finally we hypothesized, that most of the experiences of physical violence by closely related offenders which are not reported to survey interviewers in face-to-face-interviews but captured by the drop-off-questionnaire are not reported to the police either, thus forming the so called "double dark figure" of

victimization surveys and police crime statistics (c.f. Schneider, 1993, p.47). Our conclusions described below are based on empirical evidence of 175 victims of assault identified in face-to-face-interviews, and 145 victims of assault by household members, identified exclusively by the one-item measure in the drop-off-questionnaire.

Table 1: Reporting behaviour and dark figure estimates of assault

	reported	not reported	total	ratio of reported and not reported assaults
victims identified in face-to-face-interviews	61 34,9%	114 65,1%	175	1:1,8
victims identified by drop-off-questionnaire only	7 4,8%	138 95,2%	145	1:19,7
total	68 21,3%	252 78,8%	320	1:3,7

chi-square=42,73, df=1, p<.0001

While about one third (34.9%) of the assaults mentioned in face-to-face-interviews were reported to the police, the respective rate of those exclusively identified in the drop-off is only 4.8% (see table 1). Thus, if the dark figure of assault is computed on the basis of conventional face-to-face-interview data, we would end up with a ratio of 1:1.8 of reported to unreported incidents. If, however, victimizations in close relationships as identified by the drop-off-questionnaire were considered as well, this ratio would increase to 1:3.7. Consequently, the usual interview procedures of victimization surveys lead to a clearly underestimation of the amount of assaults which never becomes known to the police.

To summarize: Research strategies and interview techniques employed in most victimization surveys until today lead to a heavy underestimation of violent crimes, particularly physical violence. This underestimation is caused by the fact that victimization surveys are less likely to identify physical violent victimizations in close relationships despite the fact that the victimizing events do meet legal criteria of criminal law. This underestimation of violent victimization is disproportionately high for women and elderly people. Furthermore most of the violent incidents inside close relationships which are not reported to survey interviewers are not reported to the police either. Finally the results indicate that for individuals living in private households, the risk of physical violent victimization by family and household members - especially for women - is far greater than the risk of becoming a victim of violence by strangers or people known only peripherally. In this regard, both victimization surveys and police crime statistics paint a seriously distorted picture of the amount and the spatial and social correlates of violent crimes against individuals. As could be shown, the drop-off method combined with special instructions focussing on events in close relationships seems to be one means to overcome this shortcoming of previous victimization surveys, thus providing a possible way to paint a more accurate picture of violent crimes against individuals.

Victimization of foreigners

In the political and public debate foreigners were predominantly seen as potential and actual *offenders*. The criminological research up to now has mirrored this public perspective and was mainly concerned with offending by foreigners and their overrepresentation in police crime statistics. "The subject on the victimization risk (or victim vulnerability) of foreigners was given only peripheral attention by criminologists, although foreigners in general and migrant workers in particular should be regarded as a protection worthy and protection needing minority group in the society (...)" (Pitsela, 1991, p.245).

There are at least two arguments in favour of considering the victimization of

foreign residents in a host society. First, there is an empirical argument: Criminological studies have shown a considerable overlap between offender and victim populations, i.e. populations of foreign residents may not only contain more offenders but also more victims than the population of the host society. Additionally, the few victimization surveys which included a sufficient number of respondents from ethnic minorities indicate that the victimization rate of foreign residents is higher than that of majority groups (Albrecht, 1991 p.91). Obviously, the reunified Germany has experienced a growth of anti-foreigner violence. Second, there is a theoretical argument, which refers to the much weaker position of foreign residents in host societies. The lack of legal rights but also the lack of social resources makes the victimization of foreign residents more likely. Additionally, this weaker position may also influence their way of dealing with crime.

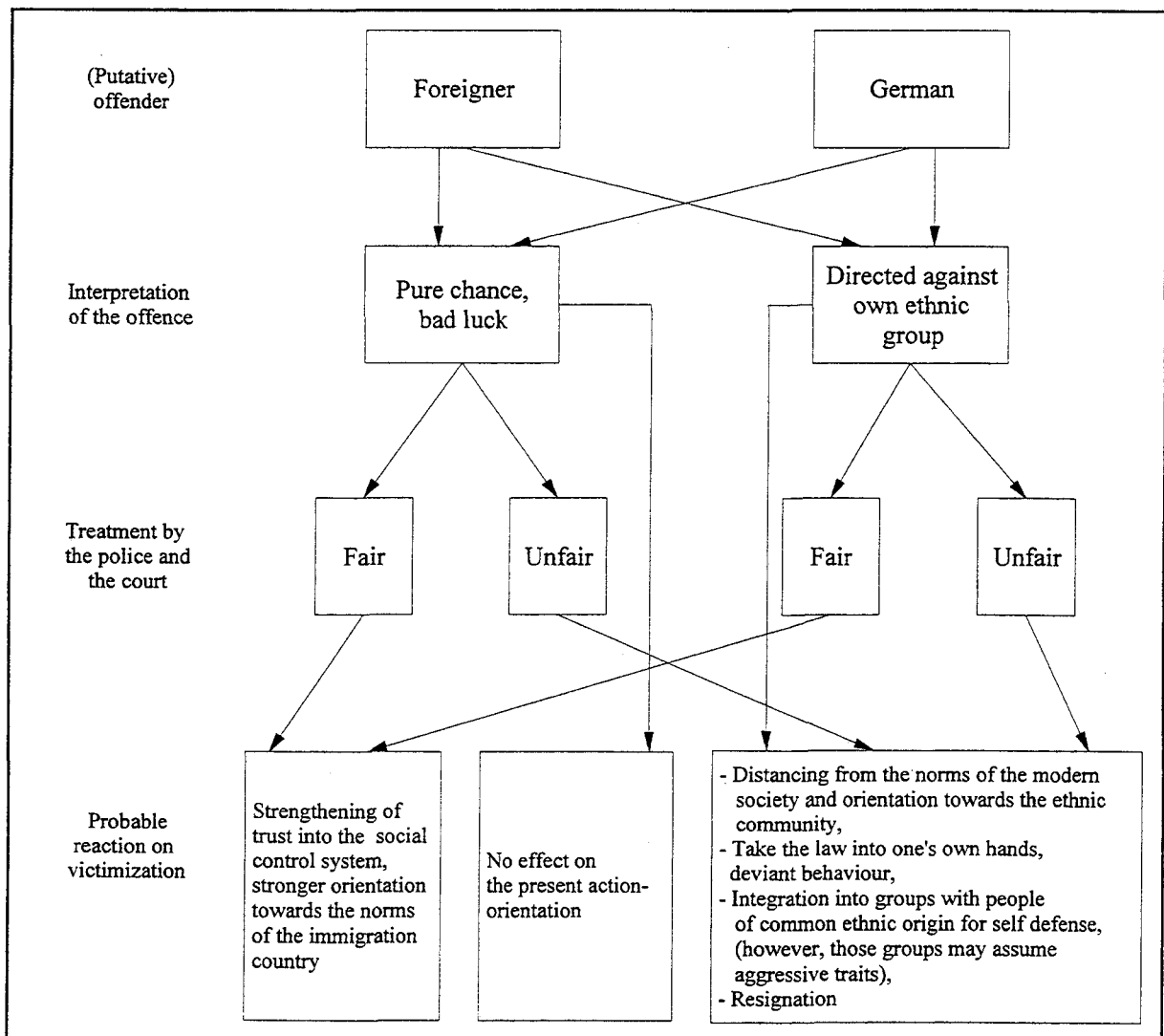


Figure 4: Possible reactions of foreign residents to victimization

According to our view, there are two main effects of the structurally different situation of foreign residents on their way of dealing with victimizations. First, foreign residents may deal differently with *criminal* victimizations, which are of focal concern in victimization surveys. A migrant worker might see a burglary not only as pure chance or bad luck, he might define it as directed against his own ethnic group. He may also evaluate the treatment by the police as unfair if he assumes differences in the treatment of Germans.

Figure 4 shows these possible reactions of foreign residents to crimes. Following this reasoning it becomes clear, that besides the evaluation of treatment by police and court, the process of interpretation of the offence is of crucial importance for the possible reactions to criminal victimization. Especially if foreign residents come to believe that a victimizing act was directed against them because they belong to a certain ethnic group, this may lead to a loss of trust in the host society.

Second, the subjective evaluation of incidences as victimizing experiences may be related to the marginalized position in society, i.e. foreign residents may define incidents in Germany as victimizing which Germans would not define as such. For example, the priority dismissal of foreign workers during a period of recession, the difficulties to find trainee positions for their children, insulting remarks and the imposing of subordinating forms of addressing, all this may be experienced and labeled as victimization.

Both effects, a different way of interpreting criminal offences and a broad range of experiences which can be seen as victimization, will also influence the consequences victimization has. Victimized foreigners may e.g. distance themselves from the norms of the host society and orientate themselves towards their ethnic community. In some cases this collectivistic orientation can lead to illegal self help, i.e. to take the law into one's own hands. But this can also be the outcome if the foreign victim is neither integrated into the host society nor into an ethnic community. Under these circumstances, however, resignation, fear, and other psychological problems are possible consequences. In broader