

Crime in Your Neighborhood:
A Comparison of England/Wales, the Netherlands,
and the United States¹

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ACQUISITIONS

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Summary

Americans often think that they are uniquely plagued with very high levels of criminal victimization. On the other hand, residents of other modern nations envision a wave of crime engulfing their once peaceful country. This paper presents a first effort at comparison across countries using victim surveys. The general scheme of analysis is presented in Figure A. In this report special emphasis is placed upon making crimes levels comparisons as statistically and methodologically equal as possible. Most of the analysis is on crime in the respondent's home neighborhood. These neighborhood incidents were chosen because of their relevance to crime prevention policy.

For this report, three data sets were analyzed: The Netherlands survey of victimization for crimes in 1984 (NECS), the England/Wales (British Crime Survey (BCS) survey for crimes in 1981, and the United States National Crime Survey (USCS) fielded in February 1985 and including a special victim risk survey. These surveys are analyzed because each includes several questions on neighborhoods and neighborhood crime.

Younger respondents (<16) were eliminated from the United States survey and comparisons are of prevalence per 1000 individuals or households rather than incidence. In other words, the question asked is how many respondents per 1000 were victims

of at least one robbery assault or threat in the reporting period, and not how many assaults were committed per 1000 respondents in the reporting year. Because prevalence rather than incidence is counted, all three surveys use the same rule for counting serial offenses--they are counted as one victimization.

The crimes chosen for analysis are those which are most comparable across surveys. The prevalence rates presented are not directly comparable to those in other reports because only crimes which fit a common definition for all three countries are included². All analysis was completed from the original data tapes and not from published sources.

Methodological problems have prevented direct comparisons between the USCS and other victim surveys. The most devastating of these is the US sampling design. The US design is a panel survey of addresses. Each address is reinterviewed seven times about crimes occurring in the last six months. The first interview at the address is considered to be a bounding interview. It serves only to delineate the time span of the reinterviews and is not included in calculation of crime rates. The British and Dutch surveys like most other victim surveys

²After completion of the BCS analysis, Pat Mayhew pointed to a problem of comparability of burglary statistics, both the Dutch and U.S. surveys include outbuildings. The English survey does not.

interview respondents only once about crimes occurring in the last year. There is no formal bounding survey. As has been previously shown, there is a very substantial fall off in estimated victimization from the bounding survey to the first reinterview of the US survey. However, for comparative purposes, the first survey is methodologically much more similar to the other surveys than the second and later follow ups.

Table One is an attempt to derive multipliers for the effect of bounding. For this table separate unweighted rates were calculated for bounded and unbounded surveys and a ratio of the bounded/unbounded was calculated. Six month rates were doubled to take into account the differing time span of the US survey. This procedure probably results in an overestimate of U.S. rates to the extent that forgetting is greater in one year than in six months. As can be seen in the table, the effect of bounding is not uniform across crimes. There is almost no bounding effect for vehicle theft, but for less serious crimes, assault/threat/robbery with no injury and illegal entry where nothing is stolen, unbounded rates are more than double bounded rates.

Using these bounding multipliers and weighted data, crime prevalence rates were then calculated for the United States (total) and compared to the Netherlands, and England and Wales in Tables 2,3, and 4. The results of these comparisons yield some interesting and surprising conclusions. The overall risk of

robbery/threat/assault is lower in the U.S. than in England or Holland. However, although standard errors are high, the rate of violence with injury (defined as professional medical attention) is higher in the United States. Murder is not included in any victim survey and that the rate of murder is much higher in the United States than in England or the Netherlands. While the overall rate of violence may actually be lower in the United States than in Holland or England, it is probable, the rate of serious violence is much higher.

Controlling for possession, thefts of parts, radios and packages from automobiles are much more prevalent in the Netherlands and England than in the United States. The burglary rate is much higher in the United States than in the other two countries. I had previously noted this difference and attributed it to daytime burglaries of unoccupied households. If both residential and commercial burglaries are compared, the differences are not so large. England/Wales has a much higher rate of motor vehicle than the U.S. or Holland. This difference is also reflected in official statistics and resists simple explanation.

Table Three, examines the location of crimes in the three countries. Burglary rates, which almost by definition must occur in the respondent's home neighborhood, are high in the United States. However, Americans are less threatened by theft from

auto's, probably because of shopping patterns. Dutch and American respondents are relatively less threatened by neighborhood violence than the english respondents. For other crimes, differences among the countries are not large.

Table Four, considers the relationship between urbanization and neighborhood crime in the three countries. While the measure of urbanization is different for each country, the effect is the same. Residents of big cities are much more likely to be victimized in their own neighborhood than residents of smaller places. However, the effect of urbanization especially for burglary, is less in the U.S. than the other two countries. Further analysis demonstrates that for residents of smaller communities in all three countries, crime is something which happens someplace else. For residents of larger cities, victimization is likely to occur near to home.

Table Five, examines the relationship between victimization experience and assessment of a neighborhood crime problem for England and Holland. In both countries, assessment of a neighborhood crime problem is strongly predicted by combining the victimization experience of the respondent with that of others known to the respondent and adding in urbanization of residence. For example, Dutch residents of rural areas who are unacquainted with any crime victim and are not themselves victims are unlikely to perceive a neighborhood crime problem.

Sixty-four percent perceive no problem. On the other hand, 7.5% of large city respondents with both direct and indirect victimization experience do not perceive crime as a problem in their neighborhood.

Further analysis of the Dutch survey indicates that this perception is strongly related to willingness to participate in neighborhood crime prevention. While, the same analysis can not be duplicated in the other countries analysis of victimization experience, fear of crime, and crime prevention behavior is possible. This is the next step in this comparative research.

Figure A
A Model for Cross Cultural Comparison
of Victimization Experience
Crime Concerns and Crime Prevention

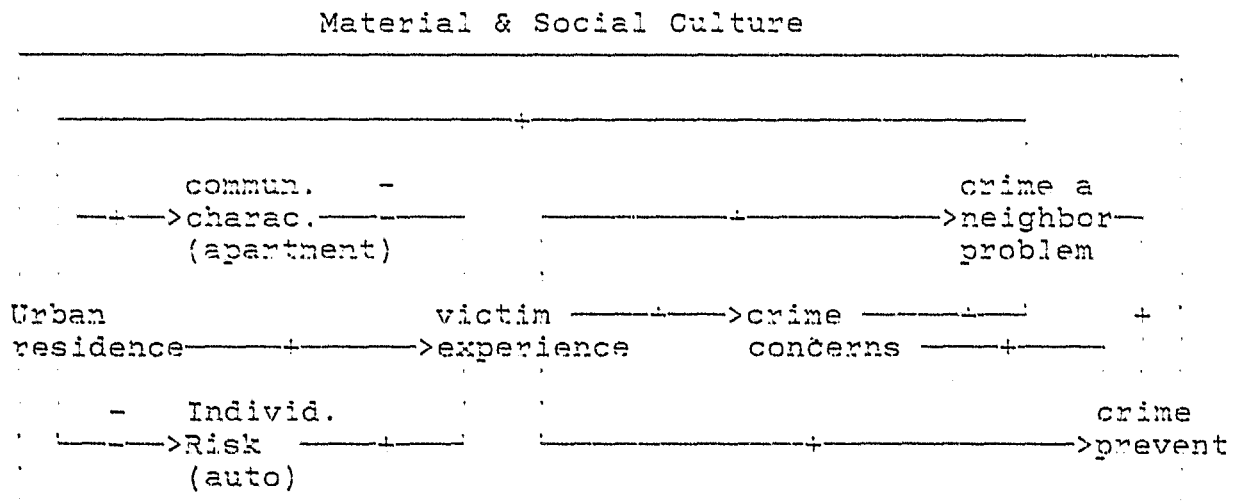


Table One
The Effect of Bounding on the United States
National Crime Survey¹

Unweighted Data
Age 16+

	Number bound	rate x 2	bound multi	=unbounded estimate
rob/assa/thr	225	24.8	2.01	49.8
with inj	37	4.1	1.50	6.2
no inj	188	20.7	2.11	43.7
thf fr auto*	419	50.8	1.27	64.5
Burglary	210	35.4	1.48	53.4
stolen	176	30.6	1.42	43.5
no stol	35	4.8	2.26	10.8
veh theft*	41	8.6	1.06	9.1
number of cases		persons	households	
bounded		18214	9081	
unbounded		4831	~2510	

* Corrected for motor vehicle possession

¹ These estimates are based on the surveys administered in February 1985 covering the previous six months. All addresses not included in the survey before and all households not surveyed before are considered to be unbounded.

Table Two

Victim of at least one crime (per 1000)
Netherlands, England/Wales, and
and The United States

	Netherlands		Eng/Wales	United States	
	1984	1981	1981	1984-1985	
				bound	total
rob/assa/thr	62	50	61	25	50
with inj	3	-	1	4	6
no inj	59		61	21	44
thf fr auto*	126	113	98	49	62
Burglary	24	19	25	45	65
stolen	19		20	38	54
no stol	4		5	7	16
veh theft*	3	2	28	10	11

* corrected for possession of a motor vehicle

Table Three

Victim of at least one crime (per 1000)
Netherlands, England/Wales, and
and The United States
by location

	Netherlands		Eng/Wales		U.S. Total	
	in	not in	in	not in	in	not in
	neig	neig	neig	neig	neig	neig
rob/assa/thr	16	46	35	30	22	30
with inj	1	2	-	1	2	5
no inj	15	43	35	29	20	25
thf fr auto*	59	63	61	40	33	33
Burglary	21		25		63	
stolen	18		20		50	
no stol	4		5		16	
veh theft*	3	2	15	13	5	6

* corrected for possession of a motor vehicle

Table Four

Victim of at least one neighborhood crime (per 1000)
 Netherlands, England/Wales, and
 and The United States
 by urbanization

Netherlands, 1984			
	rural	middle	large cities
rob/assa/thr	10	15	25
with inj		1	1
no inj	10	14	24
thf fr auto*	31	60	127
Burglary	13	19	36
stolen	11	17	30
no stol	3	2	6
veh theft*	2	4	5

England/Wales, 1981				
	rural	borough	metro	inner
rob/assa/thr	41	62	73	89
with inj			10	
no inj	41	62	63	89
thf fr auto*	76	102	113	178
Burglary	14	20	31	74
stolen	10	18	25	57
no stol	4	2	6	17
veh theft*	18	27	37	49

United States total, 1984-1985			
	non smsa	suburb	cen smsa
rob/assa/thr	12	22	31
with inj	-	1	5
no inj	12	21	26
thf fr auto*	24	29	51
Burglary	59	50	84
stolen	46	43	65
no stol	15	9	29
veh theft*	2	5	8

* corrected for possession of a motor vehicle

Table Five

Percentage Crime Not a Neighborhood Problem
by Victimization Experience
and Place of Residence

Netherlands 1984
Percent Crime Not a Neighborhood Problem

	no victim	know victim	self victim	self+ know
All resp	50.1	35.7	34.9	17.7
Residence				
rural	63.8	48.2	51.5	29.3
middle	36.8	31.7	31.5	18.0
large cit.	25.6	15.6	15.2	7.5

England/Wales 1981
Percent Burglary Not Very Common

	no burg. victim	know burg. victim	self burg. victim	self+ burg. know
All resp	63.5	43.5	35.5	20.9
Residence				
rural	75.1	57.2	55.2	42.7
borough	61.1	42.0	41.0	17.9
metro	56.6	34.0	24.6	16.5
inner	39.4	14.2	16.8	11.8