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## Research Report

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## Oregon Serious Crime Survey

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ACQUISITIONS

### Attitudes About Crime

This is the second in the most recent series of research reports about crime in Oregon. The reports analyze data collected by the Crime Analysis Center from annual administrations of the Oregon Serious Crime Survey (OSCS). For 1987 data, responses from 1,072 Oregonians 15 years and older whose names were drawn from the Department of Transportation Motor Vehicles Division driver's license file were analyzed. The sample was determined to be representative of Oregonians statewide and thus it is reasonable to generalize their responses to those of the entire population (15 years and older). In the first research report, 1987 property crime victimization rates of Oregonians were compared to those in prior calendar years (1978 to 1985) and victimization rates for crimes against persons were reported for 1987. This second research report examines Oregonians' attitudes about crime and their perceived risk of future victimization.

#### Fear of Crime

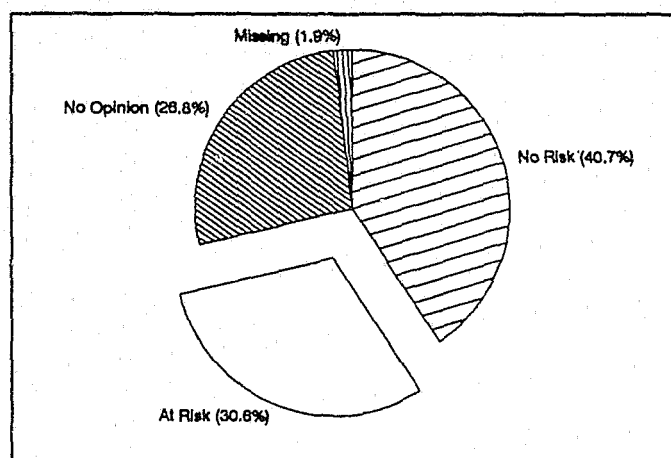
For crime victims, fear often is the largest and most enduring legacy of their victimization (Moore and Trojanowicz, 1988). A previous OSCS study in which respondents were tracked and recontacted after a two-year interval reported that "...fear of crime seems more widespread than the actual victimization risk. Of the 24.4% of (1985) respondents who feared victimization (during 1987), nearly two-thirds of them were not victimized; that is, their fears were unfounded..." (Craven, August 1988). The report also demonstrated that for some respondents, the fear of crime decreased over time. Many of those who were fearful in 1985 but were not victimized were less fearful in 1987 (55%). Also, some of those who were victimized were not afraid of future victimization (36%). The difference between these two groups and their relative fear of future victimization suggests that there are factors other than victimization experience alone that may influence the fear of crime.

#### Major Findings

- Most respondents (68%) do not fear personal (or household) victimization in 1988.
- Those who have been victimized within the past 12 months are twice as likely to fear future victimization than those who were not recently victimized.
- 1985 victims, as a group, had higher victimization rates two years later than did non-victims.
- Victims report higher percentages of victimization among their friends and relatives than do non-victims.
- Victims perceive crime rates to be increasing even if they are in fact stable or declining.
- Drugs were most frequently listed as a serious community problem.
- Almost half of the respondents believed that drugs in their community have become more readily available. However, 41% to 73% of respondents do not know the availability of specific drugs.
- Fear of crime should be treated as a separate phenomenon from victimization risk.
- Fear reduction strategies may be successful even if the crime rate is unaffected.

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

### 1988 Perceived Victimization Risk



Generally, most Oregonians (68%) express no fear of victimization in 1988 (41% did not consider themselves at risk for any kind of victimization and 27% had no opinion about victimization risk--and thus by implication were not fearful). About one-third of the respondents felt at risk for some type of victimization during the 1988 calendar year.

Respondents who were crime victims in 1987 were twice as likely to feel at risk for victimization in 1988 than those who were not victims (49% to 24%). Although 50% of the respondents who felt at risk were victimized during the previous year, there were many more non-victims than victims in the sample. Therefore, and not surprisingly, the fear of crime is more heavily concentrated in the group that was victimized. A relevant question is whether the heightened or prolonged fear of victimization felt by persons previously victimized is real or unfounded. That is, are there some Oregonians who have consistently higher victimization (or revictimization) rates than others, or is their fear of crime generated or enhanced by other factors?

#### 1987 Victimization per 1,000

	1985	
	Victim (n = 180)	Non-victims (n = 515)
Burglary	188.9	91.3
95% C.I. +/-	57.2	24.3
Theft	333.3	126.2
+/-	68.7	29.0
Vandalism	350.0	141.7
+/-	69.7	30.1

Source: Excerpt from "Profiling Crime Victims: Tracking Victims in Oregon From 1985 to 1987, Phase Two," Craven (August 1988) p.6.

The previously cited OSCI two-year study also stated that "1987 property crime victimization rates for those victimized

in 1985 were significantly higher than those of 1985 non-victims. In fact, 43.9% of the 1985 victims were revictimized in 1987."

These data suggest that the fear of crime among a certain group is substantiated by higher victimization rates. Although admittedly, since there was no measure of the seriousness of those victimizations, part of the higher victimization rates may be a reflection of a sensitization to crime among 1985 victims. That is, "the (previously) victimized respondents...(may tend) to report minor thefts and vandalisms which 1985 non-victims would not ordinarily report (either due to the perceived trivial nature of the offense or the offense was trivial enough to be forgotten)."

However, there is a general consensus among victims and non-victims alike about the likelihood of certain types of victimizations occurring during the next calendar year. Those who believe they will be victimized in 1988 list burglary, theft or vandalism as the crime most likely to be committed against them.

Fear can be contagious also, i.e., knowledge of the victimization experiences of friends and relatives may spread or enhance the fear of crime. (This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as secondary or vicarious victimization.) In this current study, close to one-third of the respondents said they didn't know whether any of their friends or relatives had ever been victimized and almost half estimated that 25% of their friends or relatives had been victimized. However, those respondents who were victimized themselves reported somewhat higher percentages of friends and relatives who were victimized.

#### Victimization Among The Friends and Relatives of Those Who Fear Crime

	Victims (n = 154)	Non-victims (n = 171)
0%	- 0 -	1.8%
25%	40.3%	54.4%
50%	24.7%	18.1%
75%	18.2%	6.4%
100%	3.2%	0.6%
Don't Know	13.5%	18.7%

#### Crime in the Community

Perceived risk of personal victimization may play an important part in perceptions about community level of victimization risk. During 1987, 56% of Oregonians perceived crime in the community to be increasing while 28% thought it stayed at about the same level. However, if the respondents are separated into two groups (those who were victimized in 1987 and those who were not), 68% of those victimized believed that crime in the community was increasing while only 52% of the non-victims believed it to be increasing. Recent victimization experience, then, seems to affect perceptions about changing levels of crime in the

community. This is consistent with the findings of an earlier study which stated, "...property crime victims perceive community crime levels to be increasing (regardless of whether the actual victimization rate increased or decreased..." during that same period); see Craven, April, 1988.

Respondents also were asked to list the three most serious problems in their community. Responses included specific types of criminal offenses (theft, burglary, vandalism, motor vehicle theft, robbery, assault, rape and sexual assault, and

Most Serious Community Problems					
	1st		2nd		3rd
Drugs	32.7%	Theft	13.8%	Vandalism	13.8%
Burglary	18.9%	Burglary	12.4%	Theft	12.4%
Theft	8.9%	Drugs	11.1%	Burglary	11.1%

child abuse) and more global concerns sometimes purported to be causes of crime (drugs, alcohol, unemployment, poverty, aspects of home environment, and gangs). Prison overcrowding, early release of offenders, and lack of police protection also were mentioned as serious problems. The response "drugs" was listed most frequently among the three most serious community problems (43.8%) followed by burglary (37.7%) and theft (31.7%). Even though drugs were perceived to be a serious community problem, few respondents could estimate the availability of drugs within their own communities.

Drug Availability in the Community		
Type of Drug	Don't Know	Readily Available
Heroin	73.2%	0%
Cocaine	52.0%	24.2%
Marijuana	40.7%	46.0%
Amphetamines	55.6%	26.4%

However, in response to the more general question of the change in availability of all drugs in the community (within the past year), respondents seemed somewhat more confident of their opinions. Almost half of the respondents (45%) believe that drugs have become more readily available.

Community Availability of Drugs	
Increased	45.1%
Stayed About the Same	20.1%
Decreased	3.0%
Don't Know	31.8%

## DISCUSSION

Most of these expressed attitudes about crime and victimization are not surprising. However, the interplay among victimization rates, fear of crime and other related attitudes is not as straight-forward as may be expected. While fear of crime is associated with victimization, other factors may be more fear producing. Fear of crime, as well

as victimization risk, is not evenly distributed across the population. In fact, groups of people who are most fearful are not necessarily those with the highest victimization rates. Elderly women, who are most afraid, are least frequently victimized. Young men, who are least afraid, are most often victimized (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981; Moore and Trojanowicz, 1988). That is, the relationship is inverse; a greater level of fear may be associated with decreasing victimization risk. Past victimization also impacts levels of fear as does hearing about the victimization of others.

Both personal and second-hand sources of information appear to affect attitudes about crime and victimization risk. Personal victimization, obviously, is the most direct source of information. Vicarious victimization is a more indirect or secondary source. Information derived from public sources, such as the news media, is even more indirect. Evidence of attitude formation from public source information may be demonstrated by the view that drug availability in the community is increasing. Yet, large numbers of respondents are personally unaware of the availability of specific drugs in their communities. The latter seems to tap attitudes formed from more personally acquired knowledge and points out the potential discrepancy between beliefs and knowledge acquired through personal experience.

Fear of crime is perhaps best treated as a separate phenomenon from victimization risk. This more clearly defined distinction between the two is being articulated. New programs are being implemented in a number of large cities (in relation to crime control strategies of law enforcement agencies). In the past, law enforcement agencies considered a general strategy of crime reduction as paramount. Reduction in fear of crime was viewed as a secondary outcome of a crime reduction strategy. However, evidence is mounting that separate strategies (one for crime reduction and one for fear reduction) may show greater success in enhancing the overall quality of life. Increased foot patrol and increased officer participation with citizen groups have been initiated in a number of cities. Preliminary assessments of efforts targeted for fear-reduction in Houston, Minneapolis, Newark, Brooklyn, and other cities indicated that both fear reduction and crime reduction may be effected (Sherman, 1986).

In Oregon, recent programs of State Police presence on Tri-Met in Portland and city police on the downtown transit mall in Salem may serve to reduce fear of crime regardless of the programs' measure of success or failure in crime reduction. The implication for program evaluation is that separate outcome measures need to be developed to assess both the impact on crime and the impact on the fear of crime.

Fear of crime is not totally unproductive, however. That is, there are both negative and positive social consequences of the fear of crime. Fear may prompt caution, thus reducing criminal opportunities. The next report in this series will address the crime prevention activities of Oregonians.

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## Related Reading

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

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Sherman, L., *Neighborhood Safety*, Crime File Study Guide, National Institute of Justice (1986).

Skogan, W., Fear of Crime and Neighborhood Change, in A. J. Russ, Jr. and M. Tonry, *Communities and Crime, Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, University of Chicago Press, V8:210 (1986).

Skogan, W. and M. Maxfield, *Coping With Crime: Individual and Neighborhood Reactions*, Sage Publications V124:7477 (1981).

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