

***Section Two:
Victim Surveys and
Methodology***

How can social science research best determine the needs of victims, the rates of victimisation and the precipitating factors in the perpetuation of victimisation? Misinterpretation of survey data occurs too often. Many pitfalls await the unwary. Clearly, methodology is an important concern for researchers in this area. Equally, the findings of those research projects that have been undertaken should be of interest to policy-makers. This section examines some of the themes which attend the process of undertaking research on victimisation. It reports the outcomes of selected national and international victim surveys.

In the first excerpt, from **Jan van Dijk**'s keynote address, the author gives an overview of the historical development and some of the findings of the two International Crime Surveys carried out. In seeking an understanding of victimisation, the surveys explored the needs of victims as well as their attitudes towards sentencing and their satisfaction with police work. Van Dijk concludes that the image of a vengeful victim is fallacious. He reports that victims are not unhappy with non-custodial alternatives in some situations. Acting out of informed self-interest, he concludes, victims may be seen as natural allies for governments who wish to sponsor improved 'situational' and community-based crime prevention strategies.

From the Ministry of Justice in The Hague, **Jo-Anne Wemmers** reports on a survey designed to measure the impact of the introduction of the 1986 Dutch Victim Guidelines upon the treatment of victims by police and criminal justice agencies in that country. She concludes that the consideration displayed by the authorities towards the victim goes much further towards satisfying victims than securing the outcomes desired by the victim. Victims appear far more likely to express dissatisfaction with the police failing to keep them informed than with the police failing to solve the case. She found that victims have realistic expectations and are more concerned about process than result. In the final analysis, the police were perceived as more effective in implementing the guidelines than prosecutors.

The last papers in this section are concerned less with the findings of their survey research and more with the process by which data are collected. **Per Stangeland**'s contribution on the effect of methodology on survey rates provides an insight into one of the hazards of social science methodology. His victim survey in southern Spain involved interviewing two independent samples by, respectively, face to face and telephone methods, about their victimisation experience. In the telephone interviews, he obtained a better response rate, while the face to face interviews showed higher crime rates. He concludes that there is good reason to be suspicious of research that attempts to compare findings that derive from different data collection techniques. The study also throws some light on the issue of non-response. Those who did not respond to the face to face interview were approached again, and asked to do the interview by phone instead. These initial non-responders reported less victimisation events than the main sample.

The paper by **Julie Gardner** on violence against women contrasted use of official statistics and victim surveys. Rather than favouring one over the other, Gardner proposes that the two sources of information can complement, rather than frustrate, each other, resulting in a picture more complete than one gleaned

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by surveys alone. She uses results of a survey of violence against women in Australia to illustrate her point.

These papers illustrate the difficulties associated with conducting surveys and interpreting accurately their results. They also show that the data collection techniques are not without their difficulties. Researchers who ignore these methodological challenges do so at their peril.