



# UNODC

United Nations Office  
on Drugs and Crime

## Training course on Victimization Surveys for the Asia-Pacific Region

*29 May – 2 June 2017*

*Pattaya, Thailand*



Center of Excellence in

**STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON GOVERNMENT,  
CRIME, VICTIMIZATION AND JUSTICE**



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## Module #: 1: GETTING THE RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS ON-BOARD

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# Crime screening overview

- “The function of the screen questions is to facilitate, in ways convenient for the interviewer, the oftentimes difficult recall and reporting by the respondent of happenings that fall within the scope of the survey.”
  - U.S. National Academy of Sciences, in “Measuring Crime”
- There are many strategies to crime screening. To be effective, they must:
  - Focus respondents to the types of crimes measured by the survey.
  - Help respondents recall whether they experienced any of the measured offenses.
  - Exclude to the extent possible out of scope events.



## Crime screener format examples

Screener formats vary across different surveys:

- ICVS, Italian Citizen Safety Survey: Use modules of questions for each measured offense followed by a few questions on the circumstances of each incident.
- ENVIPE (Mexico), NCVS (US), and BCS (England and Wales): Use a series of focused questions. After all screening, an extensive incident report is filled for each offense uncovered in the screening.



# Crime screener wording examples

Crime screener wordings vary across surveys

- Examples of household burglary screening questions:
- **ICVS:** Over the past five years, which is since 2004, did anyone actually get into your home/residence without permission, and steal or try to steal something? Not included here are thefts from garages, sheds or lockups. Please take your time to think about it.
- **BCS:** During the last 12 months, that is [since the first of ^DATE^] has anyone GOT INTO this house/flat without permission and STOLEN or TRIED TO STEAL anything?



## Recall and memory issues

- ❑ Respondents often need help in remembering events that they have experienced.
- ❑ Respondents may fail to remember the details of these experiences.
- ❑ Respondents may misremember details concerning incidents of crime they have experienced.
- ❑ Respondents may also not understand the purpose or scope of a survey and therefore not provide relevant information.
- ❑ Respondents may be reluctant to report their experiences.



## Crime definitions

- Victimization surveys generally try to approximate legal crime definitions.
- However, legal definitions are not universally understood.
- Therefore, victimization surveys should use behavioral components of crimes to define offenses:
  - Four elements can be used to define commonly measured offenses:
    - Physically injured or attempted to
    - Forced or threatened force
    - Entered household or attempted to
    - Took property
  - Robbery= theft of property and force or threat of force.
- The global standard for behavioural descriptions of crime is the ICCS!



# Strategies for assisting victims in screening

- Structured cues
- Concrete examples
- Memory cards
- Different frames of reference
  
- All strategies designed to:
  - Focus respondents to the types of crimes measured by the survey.
  - Help respondents recall whether they experienced any of the measured offenses.
  - Exclude to the extent possible out of scope events.



# Methodological issues related to crime screening and measurement

- Length of reference period
- Telescoping
- Measures of crime
  - Crime counting
  - Crime classification
  - Repeat/multiple victimization
- Sensitivity issues

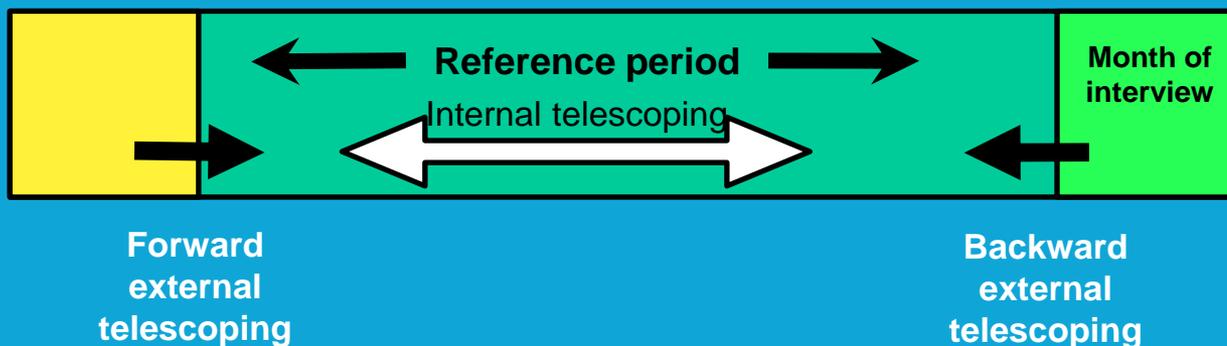


## Length of reference period & telescoping

- Reference period: the time period for which respondents are asked to report any victimizations they have experienced.
  - Most surveys use one year as the primary reference period.
- Shorter reference periods encourage more accurate recall.
- Shorter reference periods are less cost effective.
  
- Regardless of reference period length, all estimates affected by telescoping, the displacement of memory of events in time!

# Telescoping

## Internal and external telescoping



Forward external telescoping can result in overestimates of crime



## Techniques used to reduce telescoping

- Calendars: Help respondents accurately place events in time.
  - Some calendars use “anchors”, identifying key dates
- Bounding
  - Double/ Triple reference period.
  - Excluding first interview data (used in NCVS, a panel survey)



# Crime measures used in victimization surveys

- Absolute measures of the extent of crime
  - Number of crime events
  - Number of victims
- Prevalence measures
  - Percentage of the population experiencing one or more crimes during the reference period
- Incidence measures
  - The rate of occurrence of offenses during a given time period expressed as a rate per specified number of population
- Other measures
  - Victimization rate. Used in NCVS. Is defined as the count of crimes as it affects one individual victim
  - Crime Density. Used in Italian Citizen Safety Survey. Is defined as the number of incidents of a particular crime divided by the number of victims of that crime during a specified period.



# Crime counting

Survey designers must account for the complexities of crime events

Crimes may involve:

- Multiple victims
- Multiple offenders
- Multiple offenses
- Individuals and businesses
- Crimes may not be discrete events

Methods vary:

- Record details of all incidents
- Record details of most recent (or most serious) incident



## Repeat/multiple victimization 1

- Repeat victimization: experiencing more than one crime of the same type or by the same offender during the survey reference period.
  - Examples: domestic violence, workplace violence
- Multiple victimization: more than one person being victimized during the same incident. Victims may be victims of the same or different crimes.
  - Example: 2 people robbed, one raped during the same crime



## Repeat/multiple victimization 2

- Repeat victimization is an issue for surveys that require incident reports for all incidents and those producing crime incidence estimates.
- Respondent may not be able to accurately count number of times victimized
- Respondent may not be able to accurately remember the details of every incident
- Obtaining details of many incidents can place unreasonable time burden on respondents



## Repeat/multiple victimization 3

- Survey methods for addressing repeat victimization:
  - Series protocol: For large number of similar incidents, obtain information about the most recent
  - Capping: Fill incident reports for a specified number of crimes.
  - Both the series protocol and capping can affect estimates of crime.



## Sensitivity issues

- Some crimes may be sensitive to respondents
- Developing protocols that specifically acknowledge and address sensitive crimes can increase reporting of these offenses.
- Surveys should be designed to protect safety of respondents.
- Protocols should be developed to assist respondents who become upset during the interview

### ICVS question on sexual attacks:

Now a rather personal question. People sometimes grab, touch or assault others for sexual reasons in a really offensive way. This can happen either at home, or elsewhere, for instance in a pub, the street, at school, on public transport, in cinemas, on the beach, or at one's workplace.

Over the past five years, which is since 2005, has anyone done this to you **personally** (not anyone else in your household)? Please take your time to think about it.



## Key Messages

- Crime screening is a key component of victimization surveys
- Strategies must be developed to reduce potential biases associated with recall
- Key methodological issues related to crime screening need to be understood when designing questionnaires
  - Crime Counting
  - Screening vs. classifying crime
  - Telescoping and memory issues
  - Repeat/ multiple victimization
  - Sensitivity of some offenses & interview situations
- While crime screening strategies can vary, there are best practices that have been developed to address methodological issues related to the process



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There are no right answers to wrong questions  
*Ursula K. Le Guin*



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# Thank you! Questions?

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