

Changing patterns of victimisation in Scotland 1993-2011

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Key points

- Victims can be divided into four groups according to the amount and types of crime they experience. We call these groups non-victims, one-off victims, household victims and personal victims.
- Non-victims experience very little of any type of crime. The probability of being a non-victim has increased from 76% in 1993 to 82% in 2010-11.
- Personal victims experience the most crime. The proportion of people who are personal victims has remained constant.
- Furthermore, personal victims have not seen the drop in the number of incidents of victimisation that the other three groups have.
- There is growing inequality in victimisation because personal victims are not being reached by the factors responsible for the overall crime drop that has occurred in Scotland.

Crime has been falling in recent decades in many Western democracies, and Scotland is no exception. But has everybody experienced the same drop in crime? Previous research identified a typology of victims, differing in the mix and total amount of crime they experienced (Hope and Norris 2013). In a similar analysis extended to examine changes over time, we find that, although crime has indeed fallen overall, not all groups of victims have seen a reduction in crime.

A typology of victims

We started by creating a typology of victims. This involved analysing 9 sweeps of the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey, conducted between 1993 and 2010-11, and examining people's experience of four types of victimisation: motor vehicle crime, household crime, personal theft and robbery, and assaults and threats (see box 1 for a description of these crime types).



Most victim groups have seen a decrease in vehicle crime. © Flickr, LoopZilla.

We found there were four typical groupsⁱ within the population who differed in terms of their likelihood of being a victim of crime, the number of crimes they had experienced on average and the types of crime that they had been victims of. The average number of incidents of any crime type per person for each victim group is shown, right of the line. The average number of incidents per person of each crime type is shown for each group, left of the line.

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The largest group (around 80% of people) were labelled **'non-victims'** because they were very unlikely to be a victim of any of the four crime types, although they did have a very small chance of experiencing crime.

The next largest group (a little less than 15% of people) were labelled the **'one-off victims'** because they were likely to experience just one incident of crime, on average, per year. Figure 1 shows that one-off victims were most likely to experience motor vehicle or household crimes, but had far less chance of being a victim of personal thefts and robbery, or assaults and threats.

Around 5% of people fell into a group labelled **'household victims'** because they were the most likely group to experience crimes such as housebreaking, thefts from home and household vandalism. They also had a reasonably high chance of being a victim of motor vehicle crime or assaults and threats, but very little chance of experiencing personal theft and robbery. The household victims, many of whom are likely to be repeat victims, experienced, on average, two incidents of crime per year.

By far the smallest group (only around 0.5% of people) were labelled **'personal victims'** because they were more likely to experience crimes against the person than any other group. Personal victims were the most highly victimised group, experiencing on average around 3 incidents of crime per year. This was the only group whose chance of personal theft and robbery was not low, and they experienced more than three times as many assaults and threats as the next highest group, the household victims. Personal victims also had a reasonably high chance of experiencing household crime, but they were unlikely to be victims of motor vehicle crime (it may be that this group has low motor vehicle ownership which would put them at a low risk for this type of crime).

How does victim group membership change over time?

Looking at change over time, we found that the chance of being a non-victim increased: 82% of people were non-victims in 2010-11, up from 76% in 1993. The chance of being a one-off or household victim decreased correspondingly: 17% of people were one-off victims in 1993, falling to 12% in 2010-11; and 6% were household victims in 1993, dropping to 5% in 2010-11.

Box 1: Crimes included in our analysis

Motor vehicle crime: Thefts and attempted thefts of or from motor vehicles and motor vehicle vandalism.

Household crime: Housebreakings and attempted housebreakings to dwellings or outhouses, theft inside or outside dwellings, and vandalism not to motor vehicles. Does not include fire-raising.

Personal theft and robbery: Theft from the person, other personal theft, and robbery.

Assaults and threats: Assaults, attempted assaults, and threats.

These findings suggest that the overall crime drop is partly due to an increase over time in people's chances of being in the non-victim group, and a decline in people's chances of belonging to the one-off or household victim groups.

However, there was no significant change in the probability of being a personal victim over time, which remained constant. Clearly, whatever factors are behind the crime drop, they have not reduced the proportion of people who experience the most chronic levels of crime.

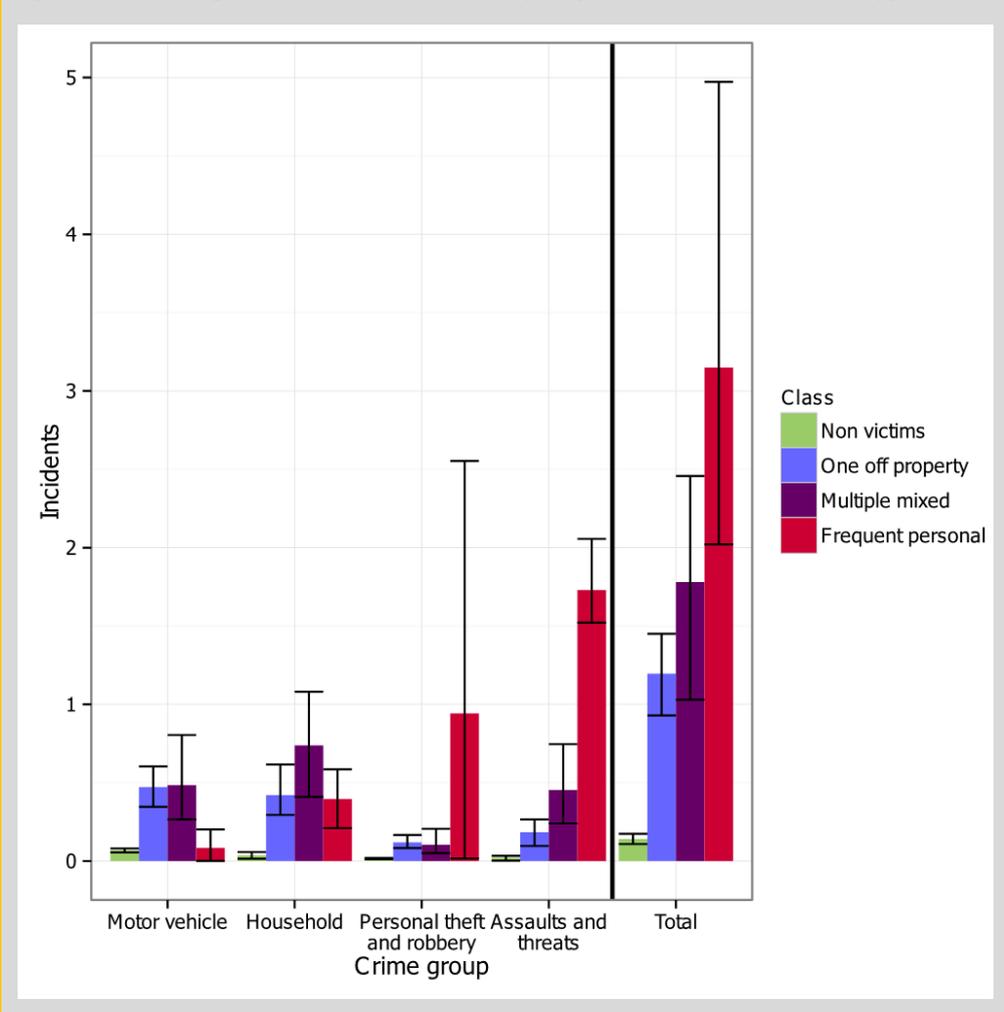
How does frequency of victimisation change over time?

To understand how frequency of victimisation changed over time we looked at total crime rates amongst each of the four victim groups. We found that non-victims, one-off victims and household victims all saw a reduction in the total number of incidents between 1993 and 2010-11.ⁱⁱ

Although the total amount of crime dropped for people in the first three groups, personal victims were not so fortunate. There was no evidence of any significant change in frequency of victimisation for this group. Thus, there was no evidence of any improvement in the experience of those who were most at risk of victimisation: neither a reduction in the proportion of people belonging to this group nor a reduction in the amount of crime this group experienced.

Accordingly, it appears that the crime drop has been driven mainly by a reduction in the amount of crime experienced by household and one-off victims, as well as an increase in the proportion of people who are non-victims.

Figure 1: Average number of incidents per person of each crime type for



1993 and 1996, but did not show any continued change after this initial drop. In 1993, the personal victims were most similar to household victims in terms of their risk of household crime, while from 1996 onwards their level of risk was more similar to those of the one-off victims.

For personal thefts and robbery, there was no consistent trend in terms of changing risk for any of the victim groups. Instead, there were a few particularly high or particularly low years for each group (but this differed from group to group).

For assaults and threats, there was evidence of an increase in risk for all four of the victim groups over the period from 1993 to 2010-11, although the increase tended

Has the risk of being a victim of specific crime types changed over time?

To determine the changing risk of specific crimes over time, we examined how experience of each of the four types of crime included in our analysis had changed within each of the victim groups.

Looking first at motor vehicle crime, we found that the probability of experiencing this type of crime had gradually decreased over time amongst the non-victims, one-off victims and household victims. Personal victims had seen a reduction in risk of motor vehicle crime between 1993 and 1996, but there is no evidence of any change after that. One-off victims and household victims were most at risk of motor vehicle crime overall, and both showed similar levels of risk and similar patterns of change over time.

There was also a decrease over time in the risk of experiencing household crime amongst the non-victims, one-off victims and household victims. Once again, the level of risk amongst personal victims declined between

to happen at different times for different groups. For the one-off victims and non-victims, the increase occurred between 2004 and 2006. For household victims, the increase occurred between 1996 and 2000 while, for the personal victims, the increase in risk occurred between 2000 and 2003. Personal victims, who already experienced the most assaults and threats, saw the largest rise in risk of this type of crime over time.

Conclusions

These findings suggest that, between 1993 and 2010-11, the overall likelihood of being a victim of crime in Scotland has reduced. Amongst those who were victims over this period, the frequency of victimisation also reduced, especially in terms of motor vehicle and household crime. However, the findings also show that there has been an increase in inequality of victimisation, with those at the highest risk of victimisation continuing to be at high risk compared to other groups in the population.

The crime drop we have witnessed in Scotland has been

largely driven by an increase in the likelihood of being a non-victim and a decrease in the likelihood of being either a one-off victim (mainly of property crime) or a repeat victim of household crime. However, for those with the highest likelihood of being a chronic victim of assaults and threats, the risk of victimisation has remained unchanged over this 20 year period.

Although the personal victims represent only 0.5% of the population, they experience a disproportionate amount of crime. In 2010-11, they experienced almost 5% of all crime, 12% of all personal thefts and robberies and 12% of all assaults and threats.

Whatever processes or policies have driven the crime drop, they have not impacted significantly on those at most risk of being chronic victims of personal crime, for whom the risk of assaults and threats has increased. Different strategies are needed to drive down victimisation amongst this group.

Although crime has reduced significantly amongst the one-off victims and household victims, there are still further gains to be made by targeting crime prevention activities at reducing motor vehicle and household crimes. Although the level of crime is lower than average amongst the one-off victims, they are by far the largest group of victims within the population and so further reductions here would significantly lower the overall risk of victimisation. Strategies aimed at this type of crime prevention may also benefit those who are victims of repeat household crime.

Further work will be undertaken to look in more detail at the characteristics of these victim groups to see what factors are associated with membership of each group. This will enable us to make further recommendations on crime prevention and

reduction strategies targeted at specific sectors of the population.

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Reference

Hope, T. and Norris, P. (2013) Heterogeneity in the Frequency Distribution of Crime Victimization. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 29(4) pp543-578

Endnote

i Note that we do not assign survey respondents to any one group: rather we estimate their probabilities of belonging to each of the groups.

ii Those who were in the 'non-victim' group still had a small chance of being victims of crime, but the total amount of crime against people in this group did decline over time.

iii. The graph has been updated (September 2015) to show results from an improved version of the analysis which incorporated all sources of uncertainty.



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