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University student safety

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This is a summary of the key research findings from a study of victimisation of students at seven higher education institutions in the East Midlands, undertaken in the Spring of 2002. Areas highlighted include safety issues and targeting crime prevention efforts.

Key points

- One-third of the student sample were victims of crime during the past year. Almost 12% were the victim of theft or attempted theft; 10% were the victim of burglary. Theft, criminal damage and burglary accounted for seven in ten crimes.
- Six in ten crimes were experienced by repeat victims – the most victimised 3% of students experienced over a quarter of all crimes.
- Just over 4% of students were stalked during the past year.
- Nearly 12% of students in private accommodation experienced a burglary compared with 5% of students who lived in university accommodation. Students who had been burgled were more likely to live in accommodation with fewer surveillance measures than those who had not.
- 60% of all incidents were not reported to the police.
- Students felt most fearful of having their property stolen on campus at night. They perceived the least risk and were least fearful of all forms of intimate partner violence.

Reducing student victimisation

- Crime prevention programmes and advice should be tailored to take into account student lifestyles. Universities should provide information to students about taking simple security precautions to help prevent them from being victims of the kind of property crime occurring where they live. Knowledge about local crime could help them decide where to live.
- Students should be encouraged, through campaigns sponsored by university security departments or the police, to purchase the most secure brands of portable goods and to mark their property.
- Private landlords should be encouraged to provide adequate security for student accommodation. University administered landlord accreditation schemes could assist with this process.

During the last few years, research in the UK has begun to focus on university students and their environments as persons and places for experiencing victimisation. The importance of safety and security issues on university campuses has been discussed in several reports, including the Home Office sponsored study (Campbell and Bryceland, 1998). Also a number of universities have been collaborating with local crime and disorder reduction partnerships to provide advice to students about preventing burglaries.

Students from seven higher education institutions across the East Midlands took part (this region was chosen due to the interest of the Crime Reduction Team of the Government Office of the East Midlands). The total number of students at each university ranged from around 1,000 to over 25,000, with most having around 14,000 students enrolled. Three of the campuses were in urban settings and four were in suburban locations.

Table 1 Rates of crime prevalence, incidence and repeat victimisation (n=315 respondents)

Crime type	Prevalence rate	Incidence rate	Incidents which were repeats	Incidents experienced by repeat victims
	% students victimised	No. of crimes per 100 students	%	%
Assault	5	7	29	43
Sexual offence	1	2	60	100
Robbery and theft from person	4	4	14	21
All personal crime	8	13	38	53
Burglary	10	11	11	23
Criminal damage	8	12	32	49
Theft and attempted theft	12	14	14	27
All property crime	26	37	29	51
All crime types	31	50	37	60

The questionnaire followed British Crime Survey (BCS) methodology (Kershaw et al., 2001) and asked about demographics, security issues, risk and fear of victimisation, perceptions of problems, lifestyle and crime prevention behaviour. Questions were also asked about the students' victimisation experiences over the past 12 months. Victim forms were also completed. Interviews were conducted during the Spring of 2002, with a response rate of 86%.

Of the total 315 students interviewed, 90% were undergraduates, of whom 61% were first and second year students. Just over half the respondents were aged between 18–21; 91% were single; 59% were women and 81% of the sample were white. As with national data, students' courses of study concentrated in the social sciences, business and education. 35% of the students lived in university accommodation; the remainder were in private accommodation.

Prevalence and incidence of victimisation

Table 1 shows the rates of victimisation prevalence, incidence and repeat victimisation by type of crime. Repeat victimisation includes both series incidents (similar incidents where the same thing was done under the same circumstances by the same person) and non-series repeat incidents. 31% of respondents reported being a victim of crime in the past 12 months (not including stalking).

Over a third of these victims were repeat victims (36%), that is, they had been victimised more than once during the previous 12 months. The 11% of students who were repeatedly victimised experienced 60% of all crimes. The most victimised 3% of students experienced over a quarter (26%) of all crimes (Table 2).

Personal victimisation

Personal crimes included assaults, robbery and sexual offences. Of the 8% of students who reported experiencing personal crime, 32% were repeat victims. The most victimised students (1%) experienced 38% of all personal crimes.

Property victimisation

Property crime included burglary, theft and criminal damage – victimisation was more prevalent (26% of students experienced a property crime) than for personal crime. About one in three (31%) victims of property crime were repeat victims. Repeat victims experienced over half of all property crime (51%). More than a third (37%) of property crimes were repeats. The most victimised 2% of students experienced 16% of property crime.

Specific crime types

Property crimes accounted for over seven in ten of all crimes experienced by students (Figure 1). Personal crimes comprised one in four of all incidents. Theft and attempted theft (12% of students) and burglary (10%) were experienced by more students than any other types of crime (Table 1). Nearly 5% of the students experienced assault and almost 4% had been robbed. Just over 4% of the students were stalked during the past year. Obscene or threatening phone calls or notes (62%) and someone loitering or following the victim (23%) were the most common behaviour reported.

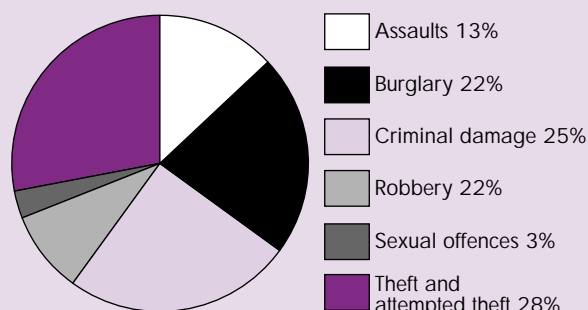
Comparison with BCS findings

The 2000 BCS found that 13% of those households headed by a student aged 16 to 24 experienced a burglary (Aust and Kershaw, 2000). This compares with 8% of all households in the 2001 BCS, where the head of

Table 2 Proportion of offences by number of times students were victimised

No. of times victimised	Personal crime		Property crime		All crime	
	Students (n=315)	Incidents (n=40)	Students (n=315)	Incidents (n=116)	Students (n=315)	Incidents (n=156)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
0	92	0	74	0	69	0
1	6	48	18	49	20	40
2	1	15	6	35	8	33
3 or more	1	38	2	16	3	26

Figure 1 Percentage of all incidents against students by crime type



the household was of the same age (Kershaw et al., 2001). Also, 12% of the students who lived in private accommodation in this research were the victims of a burglary. This is much higher than for all households in the BCS – 4% in the East Midlands (Kershaw et al., 2001). Note: the students represented in the BCS are only those who live off campus and numbers are small.

In the BCS, 20% of the male students and 7% of the female students aged 16–24 had been a victim of some form of violence in 1999. In the current research, there is a similar gender pattern – 14% of the males had been a victim of violence; almost 4% of the female students. This suggests that victimisation rates for East Midlands students are slightly lower than the national average (but the survey needs to be conducted across a wider number of universities to confirm this finding). For all adults the BCS shows that, 4% had been the victim of violence once or more in the East Midlands (Kershaw et al., 2001).

Victim characteristics and victimisation risks

The relationship between students' lifestyle and experience of personal victimisation (assault, sexual offence or robbery) and three types of property victimisation (burglary, theft and criminal damage) were explored.

Demographic characteristics

- A larger proportion of male than female students were victims of violence (14% versus 4%) and burglary (14% versus 7%).
- Students aged 22 and older were more likely to be victimised for theft (15%) than younger students (9%).

Proximity to crime

- Nearly 12% of the students in private accommodation were burglary victims compared with 5% of the students who lived in university accommodation.

Target attractiveness

- The average amount of money spent per week on non-essential items was not significantly related to experiencing any type of victimisation.

Exposure to crime

- Three times the number of students who had used drugs in the last month experienced violence (17%) compared with 6% of students who had not used drugs. There is a similar pattern between drug use and being burgled.

Just over 18% of students who had used drugs in the last month were burgled compared with nearly 8% of those who had not.

- 15% of those students who were members of a social club were burgled compared with 8% of those students who were not members.

Guardianship

- Students who had not experienced a burglary benefited from the presence of more surveillance measures, such as CCTV outside entrances, a porter or security guard on duty, and security patrols.
- Students who were not personal crime victims tended to adopt more types of behaviour to minimise risk such as carrying a personal alarm than students who were personal crime victims (see routine precautions section).

The nature of student victimisation incidents

Spatial and temporal characteristics

Student victimisation also occurred during academic vacations. Between one-fifth (criminal damage, burglary) and one-third (assault, robbery, theft) of the incidents happened during an academic break. Owing in part to the nature of the sample, most victimisation occurred off campus (78% of all incidents) although only 65% of the sample lived in private accommodation.

Different types of victimisation happened on different days of the week. Most incidents involving criminal damage (79%), robbery (64%) and burglary (62%) occurred during the week. Thefts had the same pattern as burglary. In contrast, assaults took place disproportionately on Friday and Saturday (70%), and all the sexual offences occurred during the weekend. The majority (80%) of incidents occurred between 6pm and 6am.

Victim losses

Items were stolen in 50% of the robberies and 42% of the burglaries. The 2001 BCS reports that 38% of burglaries were with a loss. The average total replacement cost of property stolen in this study was £440. The mean replacement value was highest for burglary (£906) and lowest for assault (£30). (This includes the value of all items stolen from the students' residence whether or not the item was owned by the respondent). Mobile phones were stolen in the largest proportion of incidents (18%), followed by cash (15%), stereo/hi-fi equipment, computer equipment, bicycles (each 10%), and CDs/videos/DVDs and clothes (each 8%). Property was damaged, defaced, or 'messed up' in 37% of the incidents – in all attempted theft cases, 92% of criminal damage and 41% of burglaries. The mean damage value was highest for attempted theft (£400) and lowest for robbery (£30). The most frequently damaged property was a car/van (41%), followed by something (doors, windows, walls) outside the student's residence (10%).

Reporting to the police and campus security

60% of all incidents for which the question was asked were not reported to the police – similar to the 2001 BCS with a 58% non-reporting rate for all incidents (Kershaw et al., 2001). All sexual offences and 92% of the robberies went unreported. The most commonly given reasons for not reporting were that the incident was too trivial or not worth reporting (65%), or the belief that there was nothing the police could do (25%).

Nearly 68% of on-campus incidents were not reported to the campus security department – 80% of the on-campus robberies, thefts and criminal damage were not reported. Only 3% of the off-campus incidents came to the attention of the campus security department.

Victim Support and other services

In 71% of the incidents, the victims reported not wanting any support or advice (this question was not included in the sexual offence victim form). Where they did receive support, the most commonly reported was information from the police (34%), talking with someone for moral support (29%) and information about security/crime prevention (26%). Among those who provided these services were Victim Support, campus security, student welfare and friends.

Perceptions of risk and fear of victimisation

Perceived risk and fear of victimisation at night on campus

The greatest risk at this time was theft from a motor vehicle and also bicycle theft. Students stated their greatest fear as being theft from, as well as, of a motor vehicle. On the other hand all students perceived the least risk and least fear for all forms of partner violence – being raped, stalked or physically attacked by a dating or intimate partner. Female students were significantly more likely than the males to be afraid of having their mobile phone stolen, of being mugged and robbed, of being raped or stalked by strangers or intimate partners, and of being physically attacked by strangers. The 2001 BCS found that young women were more likely to be very worried about being physically attacked than men (32% compared with 11%).

Perceptions of problems or disorders

Respondents were asked to evaluate the problems in the area where they lived. Over two-thirds of students in university accommodation saw burglary and people being drunk or rowdy in public places as problems. In private accommodation, over 60% perceived them as the same main problems as well as, mobile phone theft, robbery and theft from motor vehicles.

Routine precautions against crime

- 97% of students who owned a bicycle (n=60) and 97% who had regular use of a motor vehicle (n=92), locked their bicycle or vehicle, or took the front wheel off their bicycle when parking on or near campus.
- 96% of students used vehicle door locks. Use of devices

which involved financial outlay was lower: 39% commonly used alarms, 47% steering wheel locks and 49% immobilisers.

- Most students took precautions such as always locking the doors and windows to their premises but almost a third did not.
- 64% of students left lights on at night while they were away from their residences.
- 65% of students avoided darkly lit and isolated areas – 23% avoided going out after dark altogether.
- 92% of students usually carried a mobile phone for personal safety; of these, 80% frequently or always concealed their phone.
- 69% of students told someone where they were going and when they would be back; 69% did not leave their drinks unattended in public places whilst 55% asked others to watch their property.
- Just under a third of students (30%) asked someone to walk or drive them to their destination after dark on a frequent or consistent basis.
- Less than 1% of the student sample routinely carried any sort of weapon.

Security provisions in student accommodation

More students in university accommodation reported having different types of access control, surveillance and target hardening provisions than students who lived in private accommodation. To illustrate this, 36% of students in university accommodation reported that their current residence hall had a spy hole in the door compared with 18% of students in private accommodation. However, 53% of students living in private accommodation said they had security chain/bolts on the door compared with 18% of students in university accommodation.

Conclusions

Many university students are prone to types of criminal victimisation, for example burglary; and almost one-third of the students in this research had been victimised over a 12 month period. Some caution should be exercised with the results about the rarer crimes, e.g. stalking, due to the relatively small sample size of students. The keys to reducing student victimisation lies in targeted crime prevention information and better security in student accommodation.

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For a more detailed report see *University student safety in the East Midlands* by Rosemary Barberet, Bonnie S. Fisher, and Helen Taylor. (2003). It will be available on the Home Office RDS website <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/>

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