

Crime Victimization in West Virginia: Results from a State-Wide Survey

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Until, now, though the State of West Virginia has access to rich analyses of Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) data (e.g., Nolan, Haas, Lester, Kirby, & Jira, 2006), the state lacks reliable victimization statistics that can be generalized to the state-wide population. This is problematic for several reasons. First, as is widely known within criminological circles, most crimes never come to the attention of the police. Hence, UCR data greatly underestimate the extent and distribution of crime. Second, practitioners and policy makers require accurate data to determine resources necessary to effectively meet the crime and victimization needs of their communities. Hence, this report helps fill a major research gap by presenting the results of the West Virginia Community Quality of Life Survey (WVCQLS).

The WVCQLS was commissioned by the West Virginia Division of Justice and Community Services and the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Conducted by the Research Center on Violence (RCV) at West Virginia University (WVU), this telephone survey was launched in the summer of 2016. It is the state's first attempt to assess rates of crime victimization outside of official police statistics. It should also be emphasized that the WVCQLS survey was crafted in collaboration with community stakeholders (e.g., Foundation for Rape Information and Services) and includes a broad array of measures related to crime, fear of crime, and the overall quality of life in West Virginia communities. As well, the survey was twice distributed to a random sample of West Virginians over the age of 18 via cellular and land line telephones, but only data generated by the first administration are reported here. Subsequent reports, however, will feature data collected by the

Table 1. Demographics of Quality of Life Survey 2016 Compared to 2016 Census Demographics for West Virginia (n = 358)

	WVCQL (%)	2016 Census (%)
Sex *		
Male	42.29	49.50
Female	56.57	50.50
Education		
No High School Degree	6.59	14.70
HS Degree/Some College	65.90	65.70
Bachelor's Degree or higher	27.51	19.60
Race		
White	93.86	96.60
Non-White	6.14	3.40
Age		
Average	50.70	48.50

* Four respondents to the WVCQL Survey listed their sex as "other."

Major Findings

- For the first time in West Virginia history, self-reported victimization statistics were gathered by telephone surveys of West Virginia residents over the age of 18.
- The methodology introduced in this report, offers a valid approach for assessing crime victimization.
- This report extends the criminal victimization literature both outside of the official police statistics and in collaboration with community stakeholders.
- More than 38% of West Virginians have experienced a break in to their home, car, or garage at some time in their lives, more than 7% in the past year.
- Over 100,000 West Virginians have experienced some type of physical intimate partner violence in the 12 months prior to the survey.
- 1 in 5 West Virginians have experienced a form of stalking or harassment during the year preceding data collection.

second survey.

The principal investigators utilized a mixed method approach by including open-ended questions in the instrument and requiring the interviewers to take survey notes. Portions of this qualitative data are included throughout the report to contextualize specific types of victimizations and community experiences. Voices of victims are included in callout boxes in this report. These are victims' statements that have been paraphrased by researchers to protect the identity of respondents.

The population from which the sample was drawn includes individual residents of West Virginia over the age of 18 who have access to a telephone (N = 1,398,953).¹ Our random sample

¹ Our estimated population of WV residents (over 18 who have access to phones) was calculated using population estimates from the Bureau of Census (July 1, 2016 estimate) <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/WV#viewtop> and the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) The NCHS estimates that 3.9% of West Virginians 18 and older

includes 6,310 cell phone numbers and 3,554 land line numbers.² From June 2016 to May 2017, researchers from WVU’s RCV, called all 9,864 phone numbers. Only about 13% of the calls resulted in someone answering the phone (1,281). Of those that answered, nearly 30% responded to the survey (n=358). Table 1 compares the demographics of WVQL survey respondents to the 2016 Bureau of Census demographic estimates of West Virginia residents. It should be noted that our low response rate is not unorthodox and is in line with those of most other large-scale surveys (Pickett, Cullen, Bushway, Chiricos, & Alpert, 2018). In fact, according to a recent President of the American Association of Public Opinion Research, “the survey and polling business is in crisis...response rates have been falling for 30 years... Even high quality face-to-face surveys rarely reach a 70 percent response rate these days” (Tourangeau, 2017, p. 803). And, response rates for all types of surveys, including the WVCQLS, have declined (Pickett et al., 2018).

In the tables below, we sometimes include population estimates that are calculated by multiplying the sample percentage by the estimated population of West Virginia residents with phones.

Although they are not reported here, the confidence intervals for these estimates were calculated

according to this equation: $1.96 \sqrt{\frac{N-n}{N} \frac{P*(1-P)}{n-1}}$

In the above equation, N is the estimated population of residents in WV age 18 and older who have access to a phone (1,398,953), n is the sample size (the number of completed responses in each category), and P is the percentage of affirmative responses.

Crime Victimization

To obtain a valid annual estimate of crime, the WVCQLS first asked whether a particular incident EVER happened to you and then if it happened in the past 12 months. For example, for the crime category “break in,” the survey asks: 1) Did anyone EVER break into your home, car, or garage? 2) Did this happen in the past 12 months. In Tables 2 and 3, we present estimates of the number of WV residents over the age of 18 who ever experienced particular property and violent crimes and an estimate of people who experienced these crimes in the past 12 months.

Table 2. West Virginian’s Experience with Property and Violent Crime Ever

	# Sample	% Sample	Estimated Number	Estimated Rate per 1000*
Property Crime				
Break-in ^a	125	38.50	538,597	385.0
Objects Stolen Inside Home ^b	87	26.60	372,122	266.0
Objects Stolen Outside Home ^c	93	28.50	398,702	285.0
Pocket Picked ^d	23	7.00	97,927	70.0
Car, Bicycle, Motorcycle Stolen ^e	39	12.0	167,874	120.0
Violent Crime				
Robbery ^f	25	7.80	109,118	78.0
Assault ^g	45	14.00	195,853	140.0
Assault with a Weapon ^h	22	6.80	95,128	68.0

*See footnote 1 for method for estimating the population of West Virginians 18 or older who have a telephone as 1,398,953.

^a Break-in is defined as an incident where someone illegally breaks in to your home, car, or garage whether something is stolen or not.

^b Objects stolen inside the home includes thefts that occur during a break in or by someone with legal access to the home.

^c Objects stolen outside the home include anything stolen on your property but outside the home.

^d Pocket picked or purse snatched refers to thefts from your person—inside your pockets or purse—but not with force as in a robbery.

^e Car, bicycle or motor vehicle stolen includes the thefts of all forms of these conveyances.

^f Robbery is defined as mugging or robbing via stick up or threatening to hurt the respondent

^g Assault is defined as being beaten up, attacked, or hit with something

^h Assault with a weapon is defined as being knifed at, shoot at, or attacked with a weapon

have no phone, neither landline nor cell.

https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/wireless_stat_e_201602.pdf.

² The random sample of land line and cell phone numbers was provided by Marketing Systems Group <http://www.m-s-g.com/Web/Index.aspx>

Table 3. 2016 West Virginian's Experience with Property and Violent Crime Past 12 Months

	# Sample	% Sample	Estimated Number	Estimated Rate per 1000*
Property Crime				
Break-in ^a	25	7.67	107,300	76.7
Objects Stolen Inside Home ^b	18	5.50	76,942	55.0
Objects Stolen Outside Home ^c	19	5.85	81,838	58.5
Pocket Picked ^d	1	0.31	4,337	3.1
Car, Bicycle, Motorcycle Stolen ^e	6	1.84	25,740	18.4
Violent Crime				
Robbery ^f	3	0.94	13,150	9.4
Assault ^g	7	2.19	30,637	21.9

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^f Robbery is defined as mugging or robbing via stick up or threatening to hurt the respondent

^g Assault is defined as being beaten up, attacked, or hit with something

Voices of Victims

“Many instances of domestic violence are not reported to the police”

“Break-ins are a daily occurrence.” One woman had her car broken into three different times and they stole her radio each time”

long-term.” Table 4 provides estimates of the number of West Virginia residents over 18 who have experienced at least one incident of this type of IPV in the past 12 months.

Sexual Violence

Table 5 provides estimates for the number of West Virginia residents over the age of 18 who have been pressured or forced to have unwanted sex by current or former intimate or romantic partner.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to violence by a current or former spouse or partner in an intimate relationship. It involves physical and sexual violence. This section presents data on both types of IPV beginning with physical violence by an intimate partner

Physical Violence

The WVCQLS asked respondents to report how many times in the past 12 months did someone they were dating, or a spouse/partner, do the following things to you that were NOT done in a joking or playful manner? Dating relationship refers to “anyone with whom you have or have had a romantic or sexual relationship, whether short- or

Voices of Victims

“Molestation was part of my past”

“My partner threw stuff at me”

“I experienced sexual assault but don’t want to talk about it”

Table 4. 2016 West Virginian’s Experience with Intimate Partner Physical Assault Past 12 Months

	# Sample	% Sample	Estimated Number	Estimated Rate per 1000*
Shoved, shook, pinched, or scratched you, or pulled your hair.	12	4.1	57,357	41
Slapped you	12	4.1	57,357	41
Threw something at you that could hurt you.	13	4.4	61,554	44
Bent your fingers or twisted your arms.	5	1.7	23,782	17
Hit, punched, kicked or bit you.	12	4.1	57,357	41
Beat you up.	3	1.0	13,990	10
Burned you, choked you, or tried to strangle or suffocate you.	1	0.3	4,197	3
Used or threatened to use a weapon against you.	4	1.4	19,585	14
Total IPV Physical Assault *^a	24	8.2	114,714	82

* See footnote 1 for method for estimating the population of West Virginians 18 or older who have a telephone as 1,398,953.

^a Intimate Partner Physical Assault is defined as any of the following incidents within the context of an intimate or romantic relationship: shoved, shook, pinched, scratched, hair pulled, slapped, object thrown at the respondent, fingers bent back, arm twisted, hit, punched, kicked, bit, dragged by hair, thrown down stairs, thrown out of car, thrown around, beat up, burned, choked, strangled, suffocated, or had a weapon used or threatened to be used against the respondent.

Table 5. 2016 West Virginian’s Experience with Sexual IPV Past 12 Months

<i>In the last 12 months, how often have you had unwanted sex with someone you were dating or a spouse/partner because...</i>	# Sample	% Sample	Estimated Number	Estimated Rate per 1000*
you were pressured	4	1.43	20,005	14.3
you were slipped drugs and/or alcohol and couldn’t physically say no	2	0.71	9,933	7.1
he/she took advantage of you when you were physically unable to say no because you had too much to drink and/or used drugs	3	1.08	15,109	10.8
he/she threatened you with physical harm if you did not give in	1	0.36	5,036	3.6
he/she tried to physically force you, but you were able to escape it	1	0.36	5,036	3.6
he/she physically forced you to have sex	2	0.72	10,072	7.2
Total Sexual IPV	7	2.5	34,974	25

* See footnote 1 for method for estimating the population of West Virginians 18 or older who have a telephone as 1,398,953

BIAS MOTIVATED VICTIMIZATION

For the purpose of this study, bias motivated incidents are negative behaviors motivated at least in part by real or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, or political orientation. Table 6 provides estimates of the frequency of these incidents having occurred in the preceding 12 months.

Voices of Victims

“My wife was discriminated because of her Chinese origin and it ostracized us from most of the community and put us with other outcasts of this small town”

“I am Jewish and from Africa. I am worried about being targeted because of my race. I am more worried about verbal than physical assaults.”

Table 6. 2016 West Virginian’s Experience with Bias Motivated Offenses in Past 12 Months

	# Sample	% Sample	Estimated Number	Estimated Rate per 1000*
Personal property damaged	5	1.60	22,383	16.0
Personal property stolen	4	1.30	18,186	13.0
Had objects thrown at you	2	0.60	8,393	6.0
Been chased or followed by people intent on hurting you	4	1.30	18,186	13.0
Had verbal assaults directed at you	21	6.70	93,730	67.0
Been threatened with physical assault	6	1.70	23,782	17.0
Been threatened with unwanted sexual behaviors	4	1.30	18,186	13.0
Been verbally sexually harassed	9	2.90	40,570	29.0
Been touched sexually when you didn’t want to be touched	6	2.00	27,979	20.0
Been threatened with a weapon	2	0.70	9,793	7.0
Received offensive phone calls, letters, emails	8	2.20	30,777	22.0
Been unwilling exposed to racist, sexist, or other offensive on-line images	23	7.30	102,124	73.0
Bias-Motivated Violent Offense ^a	36	12.1	169,273	121.0
Bias-Motivated Property Offense ^b	9	2.9	40,570	29.0

* See footnote 1 for method for estimating the population of West Virginians 18 or older who have a telephone as 1,398, 953.

^a Bias-Motivated Violent Offense combines responses to 9 bias-motivated offenses reported in this table that are alleged to have occurred in the past 12 months and that are directed against a person, including 1) had objects through at you, 2) been chased or followed by people intent on hurting you, 3) had verbal assaults directed at you, 4) been threatened with physical assault, 5) been threatened with unwanted sexual behaviors, 6) been verbally sexually harassed, 7) been touched sexually when you didn’t want to be touched, 8) been threatened with a weapon, and 9) received offensive letters, phone calls, emails, etc. This category does not include “Being unwilling exposed to racist and sexist, or other offensive online images.

^b Bias-Motivated Property Offense combines responses to bias motivated offenses reported in this table that are alleged to have occurred in the past 12 months and that are considered property offenses, including 1) had personal property damaged and 2) had personal property stolen.

STALKING & HARASSMENT

The State (Section 61-2-9a) defines stalking and harassment as willfully and repeatedly following and harassing a person ostensibly in order to begin or restore a relationship. Table 7 presents the estimates of WV residents over 18 who have experienced examples of these behaviors in the year prior to the study.

Voices of Victims

“I was stalked for 6 months by a man I did not know. He followed me everywhere and would drive behind me and park his car. I was sexually touched against my will by a man who works in my apartment building.”

“My ex-husband use to physically assault me. Since leaving him, I now deal with him stalking me.”

“It is difficult to be a woman in some public places, such as a gas station, without having insulting catcalls or offensive things said to me.”

Table 7. 2016 West Virginian's Experience with Stalking & Harassment Offenses in Past 12 Months

	# Sample	% Sample	Estimated Number	Estimated Rate per 1000*
Someone watched or followed from a distance and spied on you with a listening device, camera or GPS	13	4.10	57,357	41.0
Someone approached you or showed up in places, such as your home, workplace, or school when you didn't want them to be there.	19	6.00	83,937	60.0
Someone left strange or potentially threatening items for you to find.	4	1.30	18,186	13.0
Someone sneaked into your home or car and did things to scare you by letting you know they had been there.	3	0.90	12,591	9.0
Someone left you unwanted messages, including text or voice messages (not including bill collectors).	19	6.00	83,937	60.0
Someone sent you unwanted emails, instant messages, or messages sent through social media apps.	28	8.80	123,108	88.0
Someone left you cards, letters, flowers, or presents when they knew you did not want them.	1	0.30	4,197	3.0
Someone made hurtful or inappropriate comments to you online that were not done in a joking or playful manner.	23	7.20	100,725	72.0
Someone spread rumors about you online, whether they were true or not.	17	5.40	75,543	54.0
Stalking/Harassment Composite	64	20.3	283,988	203

See footnote 1 for method for estimating the population of West Virginians 18 or older who have a telephone as 1,398,953.

SUMMARY

This is the first of several reports on various types of data collected by the WVCQLS. Again, this one presents statistics on crime victimization. The data reveal higher rates of all types of victimization than those found in the WV UCR. As well, some findings are consistent with data generated by similar surveys conducted elsewhere. For example, 8.2% of our sample reported experiencing physical variants of IPV in the year prior to the study, which is consistent with annual rates uncovered by studies specifically crafted to capture data on this problem (DeKeseredy, 2011).

However, all the data should be considered underestimates due to the ubiquitous problem of underreporting. Certainly, all types of victimization surveys suffer from this issues that contribute to

underreporting: embarrassment; fear of reprisal; memory error, reluctance to recall traumatic memories; and social desirability (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013).

However, every possible attempt was made to minimize underreporting. For example, following in the footsteps of some highly experienced violence against women survey researchers, we concluded ours with a supplementary open-ended question, which gave respondents an additional opportunity to reveal what happened to them. Sometimes, participants who are initially reluctant to report or those who could not initially recall their crime experiences will do so later on when probed using slightly different wording. Consider the narratives included in the body of this report. They give voice to survivors and add context to the quantitative data.

We also made efforts to minimize over reporting. For instance, we asked respondents experiences that occurred in two different time periods – ever and the past 12 months. Thus, we were likely to eliminate people who ever experienced victimization from estimates of victimization in the year prior to the study.

Still, it is difficult, if not impossible, to make precise comparisons with other major victimization surveys like the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) because of methodological differences, such as sampling and measurement. Even so, the data presented here are useful for purposes of policy and practice. They provide practitioners and law makers more accurate baseline data from which to determine the nature and extent of necessary resources. Prior to the study, the information available to all WV stakeholders was limited and did not tell us about crimes that may not come to the attention of criminal justice officials.

Future reports will include data on variations in victimization by socioeconomic status, on community context, perceptions of crime and police, and use of community resources. Though, we strived to help fill a major research gap in the state of West Virginia, the ultimate goal of this project is to enhance all West Virginians health and well-being. Please contact the authors of this report for more information on the data included in this report.

REFERENCES

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