

EFFECTS OF SURVEY CONDITIONS ON VICTIMIZATION RESPONSE AND RESPONSE QUALITY  
IN SURVEYING SCHOOL CRIME

David L. Bayless, Research Triangle Institute

This methodological study examines relations between various survey conditions and data outcomes in a Congressionally mandated study of violence and vandalism in schools, titled the "Safe School Study." More specifically, it addresses the question of whether, and if so, to what extent, certain survey methods affect rates of incidents reported by school principals and proportions of students reporting being victimized and their risk of a response error. Five questions posed in the paper, and the relevant findings are as follows:

1. Are principals likely to record more incidents at school when their reporting period is one week rather than one month? We found that there was no significant difference in the rate of incidents reported by principals on a weekly or monthly basis.
2. Do group-administered Student Questionnaires (SQ's) or face-to-face Student Interviews (SI's) yield more accurate information on student victimization? A Post Interview Check (PIC) validation study indicates that the interviewer method produces more accurate results for attacks and robberies. For theft, there was no significant difference between percentages obtained by the two methods.
3. Are characteristics of field representatives (interviewers) related to the proportions of students reporting victimization experiences? None of the characteristics examined in this paper significantly affected the victimization percentages derived from either the Student Questionnaire or the Student Interview.
4. Are interviewer characteristics related to victimization reports when student characteristics are taken into account? Interaction between interviewer and respondent characteristics was significantly related to victimization percentages for robberies and attacks reported in the Post Interview Check but not for thefts. For example, among those interviewed by whites, a *higher proportion of nonwhite* than white students reported being attacked. But of those interviewed by nonwhites, a *higher proportion of white students* reported being attacked.
5. What factors account for the discrepancy between victimization rates obtained from the Student Questionnaire and those from the Student Interview? Among the reasons cited by students for these discrepancies, recall problems ranked first, difficulty understanding the questions ranked second, and time telescoping ranked third.

Requests for a copy of the complete paper describing the methodology study should be addressed to: Dr. David L. Bayless, Research Triangle Institute, P.O. Box 12194, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina 27709. In addition, the report describing the methodology and findings of the Safe School Study are also available.