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The Criminal Victimization of Children and Women in International Perspective

Jan Van Dijk

Abstract In this article we will present an overview of the results of the national and international crime victims surveys regarding the distribution of victimization according to age and gender with a focus on violent crime. The results show a consistent inversed relationship between age and criminal victimization by all types of crime. Children are by far the most at risk to be victimized by criminal violence of all age groups. The violence is in large part committed by parents or other caretakers. The relationship between gender and victimization is less straightforward. Men are more exposed to various types of non-sexual violence by strangers, including homicide. Women are more exposed to sexual violence. Exposure to non-sexual violence by intimates is less strongly gendered than sexual violence by intimates according to the results of dedicated surveys on domestic violence among males and females. Cross-national analyses suggest that violence by intimates against females is most prevalent in countries where gender equality is low. However, self-reported victimization rates of violence against women by intimates are also relatively high in countries where gender equality is the highest, such as Scandinavian countries. This paradoxical result seems due to increased sensitivity to acts of less serious violence among female respondents in the latter countries. The various findings concerning the distribution of victimization risks across age and gender are interpreted with lifestyle-exposure theory and feminist perspectives on violence.

1 Introduction

Various theoretical models have been developed to explain how the differential vulnerability of individuals to criminal victimization is determined by their lifestyle or “routine activities” (Hindelang et al. 1978; van Dijk and Steinmetz 1980). In this victimological perspective gender and age are associated with victimization risks

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because of structural differences in routine activities of age and gender categories. According to the three factorial risk model designed by van Dijk and Steinmetz (1980) risks are determined by (a) economic or psychological attractiveness of persons as targets of crime; (b) proximity to offenders due to residence or lifestyle; and (c) a lack of social and/or practical protection against crime. To the extent that these three risk factors are related to age and gender, criminal victimization can be expected to be age and gender-related as well.

The link between gender and criminal victimization has been the subject of a specific theoretical perspective. In seminal publications feminist scholars have argued that norms condoning violence against women flourish in male dominated societies (Brownmiller 1975; Dobash and Dobash 1979). In this perspective, women and girls can be expected to be vulnerable for violence by men, especially in countries where gender inequality is most pronounced. In several policy documents of the United Nations violence against women is projected as an expression of gender inequality (United Nations 2006).

An important breakthrough in the gathering of empirical knowledge on criminal victimization is the conduct of large-scale sample surveys on experiences of crime, such as the National Crime Victims Survey of the USA (NCVS), the England and Wales Crime Survey (formerly British Crime Survey) and the Dutch Security Monitor. The considerable sample sizes of these surveys, often consisting of ten thousands of respondents or more, allow for disaggregation of victimization risks for various subsets of the population including gender and age categories. In some countries these disaggregated results of general victimization surveys are supplemented by data from surveys on violence against women (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000), violence between intimates (van Dijk et al. 2010) and on the criminal victimization of children (Finkelhor et al. 2005; Alink et al. 2011; Baier et al. 2006). In addition, results are available of standardized international surveys such the International Crime Victims Surveys (ICVS), the International Violence against Women Survey (IVAWS) and the Violence against Women surveys of the Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union (FRA 2014).

In this article we will present key results of the national and international surveys just mentioned regarding the distribution of victimization according to age and gender with a special focus on violent crime. We will discuss how these results relate to lifestyle-exposure theory and to the feminist perspective. In the final paragraph we will discuss some policy implications for crime prevention and victim assistance

2 Victimological Risk Analyses: Gender and Age Gaps

Data from general victimization surveys can, as said, shed light on demographic and other social characteristics that may act as risk-enhancing or reducing factors. The oldest and most cited national survey is the National Crime Victims Survey (NCVS) of the USA which has been repeated annually since 1973. In the more

Table 1 Rates of violent victimization by demographic characteristics of victims, 2004, 2012 and 2013, USA National Crime Victims Surveys (NCVS); Bureau of Justice Statistics 2014

Victim demographic characteristic	Number of victims ^a			Prevalence rate ^b		
	2004	2012	2013	2004	2012	2013
Total	3,478,620	3,575,900	3,041,170 [†]	1.4%	1.4%	1.2% [†]
Sex						
Male	1,925,560	1,917,390	1,567,070 [†]	1.6%	1.5%	1.2% [†]
Female	1,553,060	1,658,520	1,474,090 [†]	1.3	1.2	1.1 [†]
Race/Hispanic origin						
White ^c	2,474,200	2,186,520	1,860,870 [†]	1.5%	1.3%	1.1% [†]
Black/African American ^c	475,090	598,100	430,380 [†]	1.7	1.9	1.3 [†]
Hispanici/Latino	373,740	592,230	540,130	1.2	1.5	1.3
American Indian/Alaska Native ^c	34,840	27,980	38,310	3.4	1.9	2.8
Asian/Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander ^c	55,750	105,990	57,300 [†]	0.6	0.8	0.4 [†]
Two or more races ^c	65,010	65,080	114,190 [†]	3.7	2.0	3.6 [†]
Age						
12–17	714,180	617,820	545,370	2.8%	2.5%	2.2%
18–24	800,770	716,360	527,410 [†]	2.8	2.3	1.7 [†]
25–34	624,510	712,600	604,500 [†]	1.6	1.7	1.4 [†]
35–49	885,990	785,440	684,150 [‡]	1.4	1.3	1.1
50–64	393,700	582,760	566,990	0.8	1.0	0.9
65 or older	59,480	160,930	112,760 [†]	0.2	0.4	0.3 [†]
Marital status						
Never married	1,964,120	1,894,560	1,626,980 [†]	2.5% [†]	2.1%	1.8% [†]
Married	891,720	966,420	738,410 [†]	0.7	0.8	0.6 [†]
Widowed	45,230	71,370	74,880	0.3	0.5	0.5
Divorced	384,980	465,360	405,420	1.8	1.8	1.6
Separated	180,110	164,500	171,630	3.9	3.3	3.3

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2004, 2012, and 2013

[†]Significant change from 2012 to 2013 at the 95 % confidence level

[‡]Significant change from 2012 to 2013 at the 90 % confidence level

^aNumber of persons age 12 or older who experienced at least one victimization during the year for violent crime

^bPercentage of persons age 12 or older who experienced at least one victimization during the year for violent crime

^cExcludes persons of Hispanic or Latino origin

recent, redesigned sweeps the measurement of violence also covers violence by intimates and family members. The most commonly used breakdowns of the NCVS results are those of gender, ethnicity, age and marital status. Table 1 shows results for victimization by violent crime of three sweeps of the survey (2004, 2012 and 2013) (BJS 2014).

The first finding that catches the eye is that in the USA victimization by violence has gone down between 2004 and 2013. The results of breakdowns furthermore

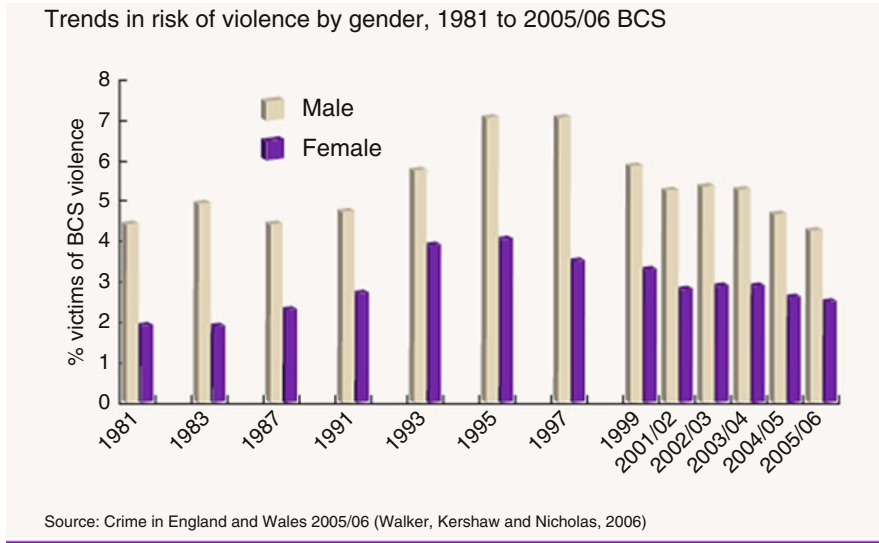


Fig. 1 Trends in risk of violence by gender, 1981 to 2005/2006, British Crime Survey (BCS)

show that men are consistently more at risk to be victimized by violent crime, especially by serious violent crime than women. The picture of the age distribution shows a linear decline with growing age. Children between 12 and 17 years and young adults (18–24) are more at risk than any other age group. Since 2004 the age gap seems to have narrowed somewhat. Ethnicity appears to be systematically related to victimization risks as well. Indian Americans are more at risk across the board and black Americans seem more exposed to serious violence than whites. Marital status seems also relevant with the status of being married acting as protective factor.

We will first revisit the hypothesis of a gender gap in victimization by violent crime found in the USA. This we will do first by looking at the results of several sweeps of one of the largest and oldest European crime survey, the England/Wales Crime Survey, formerly British Crime Survey. Figure 1 shows results over a period of 25 years (Jansson 2006).

The data from the BCS indicate a curvilinear trend in violent victimization peaking around 1997, just as in the USA. Similar trends have been observed across the Western world (van Dijk et al. 2013). The hypothesis of a gender gap is fully confirmed. The gender gap proves to be even larger than in the USA, with male citizens possessing risks twice as high as those of females. Over the years the gender gap appears to have narrowed somewhat in England/Wales.

The third major national general survey to be consulted on the distribution of victimization across various demographics is the Dutch Security Monitor of the Central Bureau of Statistics (2014) which used a sample of 145.000 respondents of 15 years and older in 2013. Table 2 presents findings concerning the demographics gender, age and ethnicity as well as sexual orientation.

Table 2 Victimization risks of different population groups in The Netherlands; Security Monitor, CBS, The Netherlands

	Violence	Property	All crime
Gender			
Male	2.9	13.5	20.1
Female	1.9	13.9	19.4
Age			
15–24	4.1	19.8	25.9
25–44	3.1	14.8	22.2
45–64	2.0	13.0	19.2
65+	0.9	8.6	12.2
Ethnicity			
Dutch	2.4	13.0	19.0
Other white	2.4	14.2	20.6
Non western	2.7	18.5	24.2
Sexual orientation			
Gay	3.9	19.3	26.7
Lesbian	4.1	18.1	27.1
Bi male	4.6	16.1	22.0
Bi female	2.2	15.1	20.4
Hetero m	3.0	13.4	20.4
Hetero fem	2.0	14.5	20.3

The results regarding the links between age and gender and victimization by violent crime are mostly in line with those from the USA and the UK. Males are more often victimized by violent crime in the Netherlands, as elsewhere, and victimization by violent crime is inversely correlated with age. Risks for property crime are the same for both sexes. Age is inversely related with age for property crime as well.¹ Persons of non-Western origin are more likely to be victimized by any crime.

Uniquely, the latest Dutch national survey allows breakdowns of victimization risks according to sexual orientation. Gays and lesbians are more exposed to both violent and property crimes than heterosexual males and females respectively. An elevated risk also holds for bisexual males but not, or less so, for bisexual females.

So far we have discussed the breakdowns of results from the three largest national surveys on criminal victimization in the world. The International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS), a standardized survey conducted since 1988 six times in altogether over 80 different nations, allows a replication of such risks analyses for a larger selection of nations (van Kesteren et al. 2014). The data from the first three rounds in 1989, 1992 and 1996, covering 54 countries from all world regions, were

¹ In recent versions of many general victimization surveys questions have been added on victimization by internet-based crime. These surveys show that victimization by internet-based crime such as viruses and cyber bullying is most prevalent among the youngest age group (16–24 years) and decreases with age (e.g. Smith et al. 2006).

Table 3 Controlled effects of risk factors (odds ratios) on victimization in 1999; ICVS 2000 (16 Western countries combined)

	Property crime	Contact crime	Sexual crime (women)	Any crime
Age (base = 55+)				
25–54	1.61	1.92	8.05	1.72
16–24	2.04	2.51	15.48	2.31
Gender				
Male	1.02	1.19	n.a.	0.99
Town size (base = <10.000)				
10–100.000	1.33	1.48	1.96	1.39
> 100.000	1.60	1.60	1.51	1.64
Married (base = married)				
Not married	1.18	1.99	2.40	2.29
Going out (base = not often)				
Often	1.22	1.25	1.45	1.23

analyzed using a multivariate analysis to determine how relevant social characteristics influence victimization risks independently of each other (van Dijk 1999b). The results of this multivariate analysis showed that the known risk-enhancing factors age and gender operated in all regions in roughly the same way. Young age was found to be a strong universal risk-enhancing factor. However, the age gap was found to be significantly larger among populations of developed countries than those of developing countries. Victimization by any crime was found not to be gender-related. Other universal risk enhancing factors were found to be high income and an outgoing lifestyle.

Multivariate analyses were made of the controlled risk effects on victimization by different types of crime in the data from 16 Western nations participating in the 2000 ICVS. Included were the demographics age, gender, town size, marital status, and lifestyle (frequency of going out in the evening) (van Kesteren et al. 2000). The results are expressed as odds ratios. An odds ratio is the odds of someone in a certain group (e.g. young age) as being victimized by any crime, divided by the odds of someone in the base group with the lowest risk (55+). In this example the risk of those of young age is 2.31 times higher than of the base group. Results are presented in Table 3.

The results of this multivariate analysis show that being young increases the risk of victimization, especially for contact crimes (threats, assaults and robberies) and sexual crimes (women only). Seniority acts as protective factor against victimization across the board. These results confirm that young people are most at risk. The age factor proves to be the most powerful determinant of victimization risks, independently of other factors. The results concerning gender differentiation are mixed. Risks to be victimized by any crime are roughly equally divided. Risks to be victimized by contact crime (threats, assaults and robberies) are somewhat elevated for men, as also shown by national surveys. The second most important risk factor is the size of one's residence. Inhabitants of large cities are most at risk. An

independent risk factor for victimization by contact crime is the status of being single. The frequency of going out at night was found to explain a considerable amount of victimization, especially for sexual crimes. As in the USA, marital status is relevant in the sense that single persons are more at risk. In a subsequent multivariate analysis of data of the ICVS 2005 Van Kesteren included ethnic status. Being a non Western immigrant was found to be an independent risk-enhancing factor across the Western world (van Kesteren 2006).

By and large, the results of multivariate analyses of international victimization data confirm that across the world being young is a major risk factor for victimization by any type of crime and that males run higher risks of victimization by violence. The age gap is also evident in the distribution of homicide. Homicide appears universally to victimize predominantly (young) males. WHO homicide data show the risk for homicide to be the highest for young males (19.4 per 100,000) and young adult males (18.7) (WHO 2002). Risks for females are significantly lower in all age groups (4.5 on average).

In the ICVS, the questions on victimization by sexual incidents (physical harassment, attempted rape or rape) are only put to female respondents.² In an analysis of results from all world regions victimization by serious sexual incidents was combined with victimization by non-sexual violence. The use of this comprehensive index of violence reversed the direction of the gender gap: females appeared now to be somewhat more at risk of victimization by violence than males (van Dijk 1999a). In Europe and North America males continue to show higher rates of victimization by violence than females. But in the other regions, the difference goes in the other direction. In Africa, South-Central America and Asia, the percentage of women victimized by any kind of violence is 50 % or more above that of males. In Asia, female victimization by violence is even twice as high as male victimization (van Dijk 1999a). The stereotypical notion that Asian countries are low on violence must be qualified with respect to gender. For Asian women the risks of being violently victimized by either non-sexual or sexual violence are not much lower than for women in Western countries.

3 Dedicated Surveys Among Children

Comprehensive surveys in the tradition of the NCVS apply minimum ages of 12 or 16 years. The ICVS uses samples of 16 years and up. This implies that no data are collected on victimization of young children. In recent years bespoke surveys have been designed to measure various forms of criminal victimization of young chil-

²Pilot studies had shown that very few male respondents mention serious incidents of sexual victimization and that the item caused problems for the interviewers in some countries.

dren. In the USA a bespoke survey was conducted among young children between 2 and 17 (Finkelhor et al. 2005). The victimization rates were found to be much higher than those found in the NCVS among young people and adults. The study confirms the pervasive exposure of young people to violence, other crime, maltreatment, and other forms of victimization as a routine part of ordinary childhood in the United States. More than one half of this nationally representative sample had experienced a physical assault in the past year, more than 1 in 4 a property victimization, more than 1 in 8 a form of child maltreatment, 1 in 12 a sexual victimization, and more than 1 in 3 had been a witness to violence or another form of indirect victimization. Only a minority (29 %) had no direct or indirect victimization. Among children victimization risks go up between 2 and 7 and stay more or less at the same level thereafter.

A dedicated survey has been carried out in 2000 in Germany among 11,000 teenagers between 14 and 16 years of age about their experiences with domestic violence. Seven percent of the sample reported to have ever been beaten by parents. Eight percent had seen violence between their parents, usually but not exclusively by their father against their mother (Baier et al. 2006). German children of divorced or separated parents reported on average even higher percentages (30 %). Significantly higher percentages of violence against mothers were reported by children of immigrants, 9 % among Greeks, 32 % among Turks, 25 % among immigrant families from Yugoslavia and 20 % among Russians. The percentages of immigrant families experiencing such violence was higher to the extent that they had resided longer in Germany, suggesting growing tensions between spouses after a longer exposure of women to German norms and values concerning gender equality.

In the Netherlands special victimization surveys have been carried out at the national scale among schoolchildren from 12 to 17 years in 2006 and 2010 (Alink et al. 2011). The questionnaire used was largely based on the internationally tested Parent Child Conflicts Tactics Scale designed by Straus et al. (1998). The report on the 2010 survey among 2000 respondents focuses on acts of physical child abuse by parents, ignoring violence by siblings or peers. The results show that 9 % of Dutch children have experienced physical abuse by parents in the course of last year considered criminal by Dutch official standards (excluding e.g. simple acts of slapping). The percentage of Dutch schoolchildren who felt to have been exposed to parental violence of any kind was twice as high. As in Germany, children of divorced parents were more at risk, as were children of non-Western immigrants. After controlling for education and social-economic status the enhanced risks among children from traditional migrant communities such as Turks and Moroccans disappeared. The enhanced risks among children of new immigrants groups, consisting of asylum seekers, persisted after such controls had been entered.

Although the results from the three countries where such bespoke surveys have been conducted cannot be compared due to differences in focus and measurement tools, the results indicate that young children are significantly more at risk to be

victimized by violence than any other age group.³ In all three nations physical abuse by parents makes up a large part of the victimization by violence of children. These results confirm the general pattern emanating from general surveys that risks to be criminally victimized decrease linearly with age.

4 Bespoke Surveys on Violence by Intimates

In several countries special in depth surveys using very extensive questionnaires with many prompts to assist the respondent in remembering and reporting incidents have been carried out on violence against women, including sexual violence (for an overview see Kangaspunta and Haen Marshall 2012). Such dedicated surveys on violence against women aim to collect information on a wider range of violent acts, specifically also those committed by husbands or other intimate partners. They consequently show higher violent victimization rates among women than the general national victimization surveys or the ICVS (Kangaspunta 2000). Such surveys, once pioneered in Canada, have now been carried out in 70 or more countries across the world.

Globally, on average, an estimated 30 % of women have been victimized by male partner violence at least once in their lifetime (WHO 2002; United Nations 2006). One in ten women has been a victim of intimate partner violence in the course of last year. In a majority of cases women are victimized by both ordinary violence and sexual violence by the same intimate(s).⁴

The violent victimization rates just mentioned go far beyond those found in general surveys and have raised awareness of the pervasiveness of violence against women. It has become clear that general victimization surveys fail to measure the full extent of partner violence. Since the first generation of these bespoke surveys were conducted exclusively among females, the question remains whether partner violence only victimizes women or also men. In the National Violence against Women Survey of the USA from the late 1990 ties male respondents were included. The results show that 1.3 % of surveyed women and 0.9 % of surveyed men reported experiencing such violence in the previous 12 months (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). In The Netherlands a stand alone survey on sexual or non-sexual violence by intimates was carried out in 2010 among a national sample

³ In England/Wales a module attached to the national crime survey interviews young children between 10 and 15 years old about crime with a questionnaire that mirrors the one used for adults (Smith et al. 2006). No questions are asked about violence by parents. The experimental results show that 6.9 % of children aged 10–15 had experienced a violent crime in the last 12 months. Boys were around twice as likely as girls to have been victimized (9.5 and 4.1 % respectively). Around 3.1 % of adults had experienced a violent crime in the last year.

⁴ Special surveys on sexual attacks in the USA confirm the pervasiveness of sexual violence against women. In the USA nearly 1 in 5 (18.3 %) women and 1 in 71 men (1.4 %) reported experiencing rape at some time in their lives (Black et al. 2011).

Table 4 Incidents of physical and sexual violence in the domestic sphere; results of Dutch violence by intimates survey (van Dijk et al. 2010)

	Males	Females
Hitting with object	7	7
Hitting/biting/stumping	17	17
Threatening with knife	7	6
Wounding with object	2	2
Throwing object	17	18
Destruction property	21	20
Taunting/belittling	18	25
Rape	1	7
Coerced intercourse	3	17
Coerced sexual acts	1	9

of both females and males (van Dijk et al. 2010). The results of the survey can be used to revisit the hypothesis of the gender gap in victimization by partner violence with more comprehensive and detailed data recently collected through a bespoke, gender-neutral survey. Table 4 presents some key results.

The results show that for most types of victimization by non-sexual violence in the domestic sphere there were almost no differences between men and women. Women, however, were five times more likely to have been victimized by sexual violence. Of all forms of violence measured, women made up 60 % of the victims. In the British Crime Survey a self-completion questionnaire module on intimate violence has been added since 2004. Overall, 2.2 % of men and 2.7 % of women in current or former relationships reported experiencing force by partners in the last year (Home Office Bulletin 2008). The finding that partner violence victimizes considerable numbers of males in the USA and that among the Dutch and British populations non-sexual violent victimization by partners is almost as prevalent among males as among females raises doubts about the general applicability of feminist theories on violence against women.⁵ Although women are definitely much more exposed to sexual violence than men, victimization by acts of physical violence by partners seems at least in Western countries not to be an unambiguously gendered phenomenon.

5 Cross Country Comparisons of Violence Against Women

A powerful test regarding the feminist hypothesis of a relationship between structural gender inequality and victimization by violence against women is whether such violence is more prevalent among societies where power inequalities between

⁵ In Denmark questions on partner violence have been included in the National Health Interview Surveys since 2005. In the 2010 NHIS 1.5 % of women and 0.5 % of men reported having been exposed to physical partner violence in the last year. The Danish findings indicate a decrease of partner violence against women and an increase of partner violence against men in recent years (Helweg-Larsen 2012).

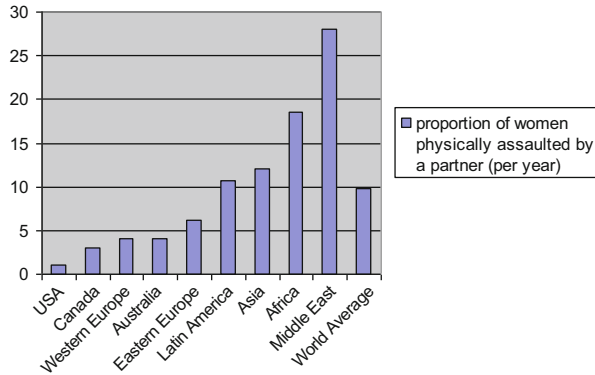
males and females are most pronounced. Cross-national datasets are ideally suited for such analysis. In the United States, Yllö correlated scores on a status of women index with domestic physical violence against women using the nation's various states as unit of analysis (Yllö 1983). The results showed a curvilinear relationship between gender equality and victimization by domestic violence. Victimization rates were, in line with the hypothesis, highest in states where women were the most unequal, as expected. However, more surprisingly, relatively high rates were also found in American states where the status of women was the most equal.

Although the measurement of victimization by violence in the ICVS is limited, this standardised survey allows inter-country comparisons of the levels of victimization of women by both sexual and non-sexual violence at the global level. Analyses of ICVS data on violence, including sexual violence, against women have shown that the level of such violence shows a complex relationship with measures of gender equality. The highest rates of violence against women are found in developing countries where the social position of women is relatively weak. Among developing countries a negative relationship was observed between various measures of gender equality and victimization by sexual violence (Alvazzi del Frate and Patrignani 1995). However, in an analysis of global ICVS data, Kangaspunta (2000) found that in countries which stand at the top end of the gender equality scale, e.g. countries such as the USA, Canada, Finland and New Zealand, women report somewhat *higher* proportions of (relatively minor) sexual incidents than the average (Kangaspunta 2000). This finding suggests that the most "liberated" women are more likely to perceive sexually motivated incidents as criminal behavior than women in nations with greater gender inequality. This result resembles that of Yllö on the curvilinear relationship between gender equality and self-reported domestic violence among American states.

In another secondary analysis of the data of the ICVS 2000, Yodanis (2004) looked at the relationship between measures of gender inequality and victimization by violence and sexual violence separately among 27 Western nations. Her results show a correlation between gender inequality and the prevalence of victimization by sexual violence but no correlation between inequality and prevalence of victimization by non-sexual violence. Taken together, secondary analyses of global ICVS data on violence against women offer qualified support to the feminist hypothesis regarding the epidemiology of such violence. Violence against women of any type is most prevalent in developing nations where gender inequalities are most pronounced. Among developed nations the linkage between gender equality and violence against women is less clearly in evidence. No such relationship was found for non sexual violence and the one for sexual violence seems to be curvilinear rather than linear at the global scale.

Bespoke surveys on violence against women produce more comprehensive data on violence against women than the ICVS. Such surveys have, as mentioned, been carried out in 70 or more nations. Although such surveys yield better data on domestic violence, these data can, for lack of standardization, not be reliably used for comparative purposes. Stand alone victimization surveys on violence against women use divergent definitions of violent behavior against women. Some

Fig. 2 Percentages of women 15 years and older victimized by violence from intimate partners over the last 12 months of world regions; sources: independently run, dedicated surveys of violence against women in 72 countries (source: United Nations 2006; Van Dijk 2008)



questionnaires include non-physical sexual harassment others do not, or to a lesser extent. Since the methodologies used vary within world regions as much as across regions, a comparison of rates of world regions can yet give a tentative insight in the epidemiology of violence against women across the world. Figure 2 presents an overview of regional rates of women victimized by intimate partner violence over the last 12 months according to non-standardized, dedicated VAW surveys.

The regional rates for intimate partner violence show huge variation around a mean of ten. Rates are the lowest in the USA, Canada, Western Europe and Australia (less than 5 % victims). The highest rates are found in Africa (18 %) and in the Middle East (Egypt/Palestina:28 %). Given low overall rates of crime and violence in the Asian region, the medium high rates of intimate partner violence among Asian nations (12 %) is also striking.

In order to develop better comparable information on violence against women, a standardized International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS) has been executed in ten mainly developed countries by an international consortium of researchers (Johnson et al. 2008). In 2005 the WHO published results of another standardized international survey on violence against women carried out in ten developing countries, unfortunately using a different questionnaire than the IVAWS (WHO 2005). Lifetime prevalence rates for partner violence in the latter study were 61 % in Peru (province), 49 % in Ethiopia (province), 47 % in Tanzania (province), 43 % in Brazil (province), 42 % in Bangladesh (province), 41 % in Samoa, 34 % in Thailand (province), 31 % in Namibia (city), 23 % in Serbia (city) and 13 % in Japan (city). In most cases women experiencing physical violence had also been sexually abused. Although their results are not strictly comparable, the two standardized surveys on violence against women confirm that male violence against women is more prevalent in developing countries than in developed ones. In all countries where standardized surveys were carried out in both provincial areas and cities, prevalence rates were also found to be higher in provincial areas than in cities. Available evidence from these bespoke surveys, then, suggests that violence against women by partners is more prevalent in less developed countries where women possess lower social status, especially in rural areas of such countries

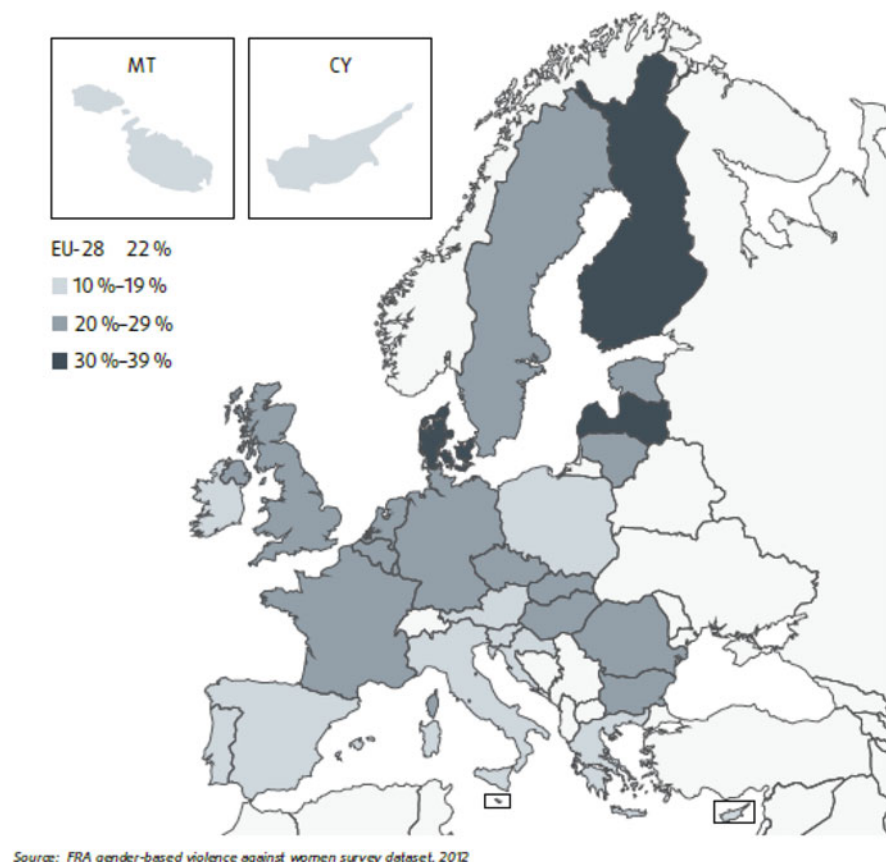


Fig. 3 Physical and/or sexual partner violence since the age of 15, EU-28 (%)

Within the European Union, a fully standardized survey on violence against women was conducted in 2012 among the 28 member states ($n = 42.000$). Out of all women, who have a (current or previous) partner, 22 % have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by this partner since the age of 15. Figure 3 depicts the distribution of partner violence across the 28 EU-countries.

The mean prevalence rates of the EU are much lower than those found in developing countries in the WHO overview just cited. But, unexpectedly, the results show that within the Union partner violence against women is most prevalent in Denmark (32 %), Finland (30 %) and Latvia (32 %). Nations with the next highest prevalence rates are Sweden (28 %) France (26 %), and the Netherlands (25 %). Since these European countries are consistently rated as those with the highest measures of gender equality, these results fly in the face of the feminist hypothesis. Equally counter-intuitive from a feminist perspective are the relatively low rates of Spain (13 %), Poland (13 %) and Hungary (13 %). The FRA authors themselves caution that inter country difference in victimization, even when measured through

a dedicated survey, cannot be taken at face value. Noting the high rates in Nordic countries, they stress that “*gender equality could lead to higher levels of disclosure about violence against women*” (FRA 2014).

Taken together the analyses of the relationship between gender equality and victimization by violence and domestic violence at the macro level show mixed results. From a global perspective the results show an inverse relationship between gender equality and violence against women: violence is most prevalent in countries where the status of women in society is relatively low. This is found in analyses of ICVS data as well as in analyses of data from bespoke surveys on violence against women. However, there are important complications. Among Western nations the linkage with gender equality seems limited to sexual violence as shown by Yodanis (2004). Violence by intimates against women generally tends in the European Union to be higher precisely in nations where the status of women is most equal to that of men. From a global perspective, the cross-sectional relationship between gender equality and violence against women can be graphically described as a long downward slope with a jump at the very end: rates of violence fall considerably with rising equality but the relationship changes direction among the group of countries with the highest values on gender equality. As discussed, an analysis of USA data on gender equality and partner violence against women revealed a similar ski jump-shaped curve.

In line with Kangaspunta (2000) and the researchers of FRA just cited, we interpret the high rates of self-reported victimization by violence in countries such as Finland, Sweden, Denmark and The Netherlands as an artifact of heightened sensitivity to (less serious) acts of sexual or non sexual violence. The paradoxical findings that victimization rates for violence against women show a curvilinear relationship with gender equality should remind us that rates of victim-reported victimization are determined by two independent factors, the acts of violence perpetrated against respondents and the perceptions of these acts by them. With rising gender equality acts of violence against women seem to go down while simultaneously heightening the sensitivity to such acts.

There is some evidence from repeated bespoke surveys in Western nations that over the past 10 years rates of violence against women have stabilized or have even gone down in a selection of Western countries (Kangaspunta and Haen Marshall 2012). Since it seems unlikely that women in these countries have recently become *less* sensitive to violence, the latter result suggests that acts of violence against women have actually dropped. Considering the continued political drive towards more gender equality in these countries, the downward trend of violence against women in Western nations points at a negative relationship between increasing gender equality and violence against women over time. In cross-national comparisons this linkage seems to be somewhat masked by differential sensitivities to violence.

6 Conclusion and Discussion

In this article we have looked at the distribution of victimization risks along the dimensions of age and gender. We will sum up and discuss the findings concerning the age and gender links respectively.

Our findings on age point at a clear and universal inverse relationship between age and criminal victimization for almost all types of crime. According to general victimization surveys risks are universally the highest among the age group of 17–24 years, medium high among adults and the lowest among seniors. Bespoke surveys among young children show that victimization risks reach already relatively high levels at the age of five. The data on high risks of children of victimization by peers and maltreatment by parents are an important supplement to the existing data based on ordinary victimization surveys. They reveal that young children of both genders are more exposed to violent victimization than any other age group. Most tellingly, bespoke surveys among schoolchildren in three Western nations (USA, Germany and the Netherlands) indicate a 1 year prevalence of victimization by parental violence of 10 %. An obvious and pressing research priority for the international crime prevention and criminal justice community would seem the conduct of standardized victimization surveys among school children across the world.

According to the three factorial risk model developed by van Dijk and Steinmetz (1980) victimization risks are, as mentioned, determined by (a) economic or psychological attractiveness as target; (b) proximity to offenders; and (c) a lack of social and/or practical protection against crime. The age-victimization link can to some extent be explained in these terms. First of all, children and adolescents nowadays possess more stealable valuables such as expensive clothes and electronics, than ever before. This explains the new phenomenon of school yard extortion and robbery. More than ever before children and young adults in developed countries have become an attractive target group for acquisitive crime. Secondly, children and young people run high risks because of their proximity to potential offenders. Children are at risk to be victimized in their own homes by dysfunctional parents and siblings. They cannot escape these offenders without running away from home. Older children and young adults are confronted with inescapable offenders in their school environment. Schools are dangerous places for the simple reason that offending universally peaks around the age of 15. The elevated risk of victimization of teenagers mirrors their risks of offending. At a later age, teenagers and students further enhance their proximity to offenders by frequenting the hazardous environment of the night life industry and visiting dubious websites. Thirdly, children and mid adolescents are, in line with the stereotypical images of a victim, physically vulnerable for attacks from older peers and adults. In many cultures violence against children is under certain circumstances still socially condoned as pedagogic tool. Children are expected to undergo such violent punishment passively. Young people also tend to be more risk taking and therefore less inclined to apply preventive measures against criminal victimization. These factors

together explain the high exposure of the youngest age groups to criminal victimizations of all sorts.

In our presentation of results of risk analyses we have in passing highlighted some other independent risk factors for criminal victimization besides age, namely ethnicity, marital status (being single), sexual orientation, and lifestyle (extent of leisure time spent outdoors). Ethnicity can act as risk enhancing factor for two reasons. Members of ethnic minority groups tend to live in neighborhoods where more potential offenders reside. They are in addition targeted by offenders with racist motivations. The phenomenon of hate crimes also explains the above average risks of gays and lesbians to be victimized by violent and other types of crime. Finally, the lifestyles of persons in stable families shields them against encounters with strangers. In contrast a non marital status increases proximity to potential offenders, e.g. in the night life industry.

The findings regarding the gender gap in victimization are, as discussed, less straightforward. Risks to be victimised by property crimes are not very different for males and females. Men tend to be more often car owners than women: this explains higher levels of victimization by car-related crimes among men. This is evened out by a somewhat higher exposure of women to theft in public transport. The findings on victimization by violent crime are, as discussed, mixed. According to ordinary victimization surveys young males are significantly more at risk of violence, including lethal violence, by strangers than young females whereas young women are more at risk of sexually motivated attacks. These findings concerning violence in the public domain can also be tentatively explained by our risk model. In a macho culture males are more attractive targets of violent attacks than females to achieve status among peers. Also young males are more likely to spend time in the proximity of potential offenders (other young males). Among young males, victims and offenders show much overlap (Wittebrood and Nieuwbeerta 1999). At the same time, prevailing macho values of chivalry may offer females a measure of protection against attacks by male strangers. On the downside macho values makes young women an attractive target of indecent assaults and other sexual attacks.

Bespoke surveys about violence against women provide more comprehensive and reliable data on violence, especially acts committed by intimate partners. These surveys have revealed extraordinarily high levels of victimization by both sexual and non-sexual violence by intimates among women. Globally, one in three women experience such victimizations during their lifetime and one in ten in the course of last year. Informed by feminist theories, the ubiquity of violence against women has often been portrayed as a manifestation or consequence of gender inequality. The latest versions of these bespoke surveys conducted among samples of both males and females, such as the Dutch and British surveys have complicated the issue. These surveys confirm the gendered nature of sexual violence: females are more at risk than males to be sexually attacked. But these surveys also suggest that physical violence in the domestic sphere victimizes men and women in almost equal measure. Violence between intimates can therefore not be exclusively attributed to gender inequality and/or patriarchal value systems. The understanding of the high prevalence of violence between intimates in countries such as The Netherlands

and England and Wales apparently requires other theoretical perspectives besides standard feminist theory.

In order to further explore the links between structural gender inequality and violence at the macro level, we have examined available cross-national datasets. The results of this analysis are ambiguous as discussed. Analyses of the ICVS datasets show that female respondents of developing countries where women possess a relatively low social status, report the highest rates of victimization by violent offences, especially sexual offences. However, the rates of violence against women by intimates are also relatively high in some developed countries where gender equality is more advanced, such as some parts of the USA and several North European countries. In many countries dedicated surveys have been conducted on violence against women, employing specially designed methodologies. To the extent that these surveys are comparable, they confirm that violence against women is most prevalent in developing countries, where gender equality remains comparatively low. Violence against women appears to be more prevalent in rural areas than urban ones. The available evidence from these specialised surveys suggests that violence by intimate partners can indeed be understood as an expression of gender inequality. However, within the European Union the highest rates of victimization by domestic violence are recorded in North European nations where gender equality is comparatively well established. This paradoxical result does not in our view necessarily refute feminist perspectives. It may well be caused by the fact that female respondents in the latter countries hold stricter opinions about what constitutes an act of violence against them than women in less gender equal countries. Increased gender equality, then, seems to have a dual impact on self-reported victimization rates. While gender equality reduces actual violence on the one hand, it increases sensitivity to violent acts on the other. This dual impact should be examined in more detail in future studies on the measurement of victimization by violence against women. Preferably such studies should be carried out with gender neutral samples in order to obtain a more comprehensive insight in the root causes of domestic violence against both genders.

Our overview of research findings on the elevated risks of violent victimization of children and young people underlines the urgent need of more programs of violence prevention. Surveys among children as pioneered by Finkelhor et al. (2005) have revealed staggeringly high prevalences of violent victimization among children. Replications of these surveys in developing nations may reveal even higher prevalences due to traditional modes of parenting. The rampant victimization of children has obvious humanitarian and health implication. It is also a root cause of violence itself. Several studies have found links between direct or indirect childhood experiences with domestic violence and violent offending at later stages in the life cycle (National Crime Prevention 1999; Cicchetti and Valentino 2006). The phenomenon of second generation effects is so common that it has been dubbed the “cycle of violence”. The high percentages of teenagers who have experienced domestic violence as a child among second-generation German immigrants deserves mentioning in this respect (Baier et al. 2006). A recent Dutch study showed that 60 % of a representative sample of young males of Moroccan descent

had been exposed to domestic violence (Lahla 2013). Problems of violent crime among migrant communities and elsewhere cannot be effectively addressed if no action is taken against widespread practices of child abuse and other forms of domestic violence. Evidence-based approaches of early intervention in at risk families such as Parent-child Interaction Therapy (Thomas and Zimmer-Gembeck 2007; Juffer et al. 2008) should be widely implemented as a form of prevention against violent crime. In this framework suitable arrangements should be created for the provision of non-stigmatizing support for victims of child abuse and for mid-adolescent victims of crime. A qualitative study in Belgium into the criminal victimization of mid-adolescents detected widespread victim blaming by peers and parents and a lack of suitable avenues for support or redress (Vijnckier 2012).

Dedicated surveys on violence against women have raised the awareness of the world community of the seriousness of violent victimization of women by partners. In a report of the World Health Organization on the economic dimensions of interpersonal violence the total costs of intimate partner violence in the USA is estimated at \$12.6 billion (WHO 2004). Child abuse is estimated to result in annual costs to the economy of \$94 billion or 1 % of the gross domestic product of the USA (WHO 2004). Results on developing countries are scarce but costs of intimate partner violence have been estimated by the WHO to amount to 2 % of the GDP in Chile and 1.6 % in Nicaragua.

The latest versions of these surveys, such as the Dutch survey of 2010, have taught that such violence affects many (young) men as well. This new generation of partner violence victimization surveys will hopefully raise awareness of the pernicious consequences of domestic violence for both genders. Special services for female victims of domestic violence should not be just expanded but also be supplemented by similar services tailored to the needs of male victims.⁶

Five Questions

1. How can it be morally justified that innocent children remain the population group most frequently victimized by serious violent crime ? Why is the promotion of responsible parenting not a priority of crime prevention policies?
2. Isn't it time to address school safety worldwide, e.g. through a Global Programme of the United Nations?
3. Why are standardized international surveys on victimization by common crime, child victimization and partner violence not more widely promoted?
4. Isn't it time to break down taboos on recognizing young men as possible victims of various forms of violence including partner violence and human trafficking?
5. Isn't it time to upgrade the United Nations Declaration of Victims Rights of 1985 into a UN Convention?

⁶ In the Netherlands shelter facilities for male victims of domestic violence were provided for the first time in 2008 (Nanhoe 2011). In most other countries such services are still rarely available. The belated provision of services for male victims of crime may well have been the result of a cultural taboo concerning male victimization by intimate partners (Nanhoe 2011).

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