
No. 023

July 2022

Trends & Policies in Criminal Justice

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Korean Crime Victim Survey in 2020

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Abstract

This Trends & Policies in Criminal Justice (TPCJ) report outlines the findings on crime victimization, vulnerability factors, and public perception toward crimes as shown in Korean Crime Victim Survey in 2020 published by the Korean Institute of Criminology and Justice (KICJ). In 2020, the number of violent crime victims reached a new height since 2012, whereas victimizations by property crimes continued its downward trajectory from previous years. Women were found more likely to be victimized across all types of crime. Ineffective police activities and the absence of official social control were identified as factors exacerbating vulnerability to crimes. Most of the surveyed crime victims were satisfied with how they were treated by the police. However, among victims of property crimes, the number of respondents satisfied with policing did not greatly differ from that of dissatisfied respondents.

Keywords

Crime victimization, Violent Crime,
Property Crime, Korean Crime Victim
Survey

Introduction

The Korean Institute of Criminology and Justice (KICJ) conducts the National Crime Victim Survey biannually to investigate the extent and nature of both reported and unreported crime victimization cases, analyze factors that affect vulnerability to criminal victimization, and gain deeper understanding of public perception and attitude toward crimes. First conducted in 1994 under the title, National Survey on Crime Victimization in 1993, the survey continues today as the National Public Safety Survey. This issue outlines the main findings of the 2021 survey on crime victimizations experienced in 2020. The full report in Korean is available on the KICJ website (<https://bit.ly/3yiVnan>) and DBpia (www.dbpia.co.kr).

Method

- Survey Overview

The survey uses two questionnaires: the basic questionnaire and the incident-based questionnaire. The basic questionnaire inquires each respondent's household composition, relationship with neighbors and the neighborhood, daily activities, and personal safety measures. It also includes questions on the respondent's personal background (such as length of residency, educational level, and average monthly household income) and screening questions to verify the respondent's experience with crime victimization in 2020. The incident-based questionnaire asks respondents who experienced victimization in 2020 about time and date of the incident, its location, mode of crime, physical injury, reaction and response to crime, property loss, psychological damage, offender profile, report to police, and case status.

For the purpose of the survey, crimes were grouped into two categories: crimes against individuals and crimes against households. Crimes against individuals were sub-categorized into violent crimes (robbery, assault, sexual violence, and harassment) and property crimes (fraud, theft, and criminal damage). Crimes against households were divided further into crimes involving burglary (robbery by housebreaking, theft by housebreaking, criminal damage by housebreaking, and simple housebreaking) and crimes unrelated to burglary (theft of motor vehicle and criminal damage to motor vehicle).

The questions are basically a replication of those used in Korean Crime Victim Survey in 2018. However, several questions and answer choices have been modified to more effectively identify the current status of crime victimization and protect the respondents' privacy. Key changes to the questions are the following:

- Added 'harassment' to the list of crimes.
- Replaced 'sexual harassment' with 'sexual violence' to widen the scope of sexual crimes that the questionnaires cover.
- Added the phrase "at risk of (being victimized by a crime)" to each question on crime victimization to cover attempted crimes.
- Added a question on online activities.
- Introduced subcategories of occupational status.

• Sampling Design and Survey Method

The target population consisted of all households residing in the Republic of Korea as of the reference date (9th August 2021) and their household members aged 14 or older (21,468,397 households, and 46,010,703 household members). People residing in collective residences (prisons, military camps, care homes, etc.) were not included in the target population.

The target population was sampled using stratified sampling and systematic sampling. 610 enumeration districts were selected using stratified sampling. Then, the target households were selected in the enumeration districts using systematic sampling.

From 11th August to 22nd October 2021, a door-to-door survey was conducted using the Tablet PC Assisted Personal Interview (TAPI) approach. A total of 13,772 household members aged 14 or older from 6,708 households participated in the survey. The survey results were adjusted with design weights, non-response weights, and post-stratification weights to improve the representativeness of the samples and the findings.

Main Findings

• National Status of Victimization by Crimes Against Individuals

The estimated number of 14-or-older persons victimized by violent crimes or property crimes in 2020 was 1,609,770. The percentage of victims was 3.50%, showing a slight decline from the 2018 ratio. Specifically, in 2020, the number of violent crime victims reached a new height since 2012 at 309,205. The percentage of violent crime victims had been on the rise since 2014: 0.33% in 2014, 0.36% in 2016, 0.54% in 2018, and 0.67% in 2020. Meanwhile, the number of property crime victims in 2020 was estimated at 1,300,565, and the percentage of property crime victims continued its downward trend from 2016: 3.11% in 2016, 3.09% in 2018, and 2.83% in 2020.

Longitudinal Comparison of Individual Victimization

Category			Year				
			2012	2014	2016	2018	2020
Overall crimes	Number of victims (est.)		1,709,632	1,524,293	1,617,001	1,653,877	1,609,770
	Percentage of victims (est.)	(%)	(3.98)	(3.46)	(3.46)	(3.63)	(3.50)
Violent crimes	Number of victims (est.)		295,121	144,374	169,109	245,873	309,205
	Percentage of victims (est.)	(%)	(0.69)	(0.33)	(0.36)	(0.54)	(0.67)
Property crimes	Number of victims (est.)		1,476,663	1,360,697	1,451,045	1,408,004	1,300,565
	Percentage of victims (est.)	(%)	(3.44)	(3.09)	(3.11)	(3.09)	(2.83)

<Main Findings on Victimization by Violent Crimes>

The following outlines the main findings on violent crimes against individuals.

- 67.3% of violent crime victims were women, whereas 86.1% of the perpetrators were men.
- Victims in their 20s occupied the largest share of violent crime victims (31.8%), while perpetrators in their 50s (20.9%) and 30s (20.6%) together made up the majority of violent crime perpetrators.
- Violent crimes mainly occurred at home (30.5%), crowded commercial districts (25.0%), and residential areas and adjacent streets (18.7%).
- 73.3% of victims reported that they took measures to protect themselves. They viewed their active responses positively, reporting that their response to crimes helped them mitigate the damage or evade the situation.
- 59.8% of victims affected by violent crimes experienced helplessness, loss of confidence, and depression, while 47.9% reported panic attacks or shocks induced by fear, and 33.2% felt alone and isolated.

<Main Findings on Victimization by Property Crimes>

The following outlines the main findings on property crimes against individuals.

- In 2020, the majority of property crimes occurred at home (35.8%) or crowded commercial districts (28.1%). 22.6% of property crime victims experienced online criminal offenses.
- Women (54.9%), people in their 50s (24.4%) and 40s (21.5%), and service and sales workers were more likely to experience property crimes. Also, people with higher monthly income were found to be more exposed to property crimes.
- 52.0% of property crime victims suffered from depression. In addition, 76.1% of victims reported that the crimes eroded their trust toward others.

• National Status of Victimization by Crimes Against Households

Longitudinal Comparison of Household Victimization

Category		Year				
		2012	2014	2016	2018	2020
All	Number of victimized households (est.)	484,646	431,604	382,309	430,327	576,108
	Percentage of victimized households (est.) (%)	(2.68)	(2.31)	(1.99)	(2.10)	(2.68)
Burglary	Number of victimized households (est.)	300,726	243,377	221,320	305,123	240,284
	Percentage of victimized households (est.) (%)	(1.66)	(1.30)	(1.15)	(1.49)	(1.12)
Others	Number of victimized households (est.)	183,920	190,396	160,989	125,204	335,824
	Percentage of victimized households (est.) (%)	(1.02)	(1.01)	(0.84)	(0.61)	(1.56)

The estimated number of households affected by crimes increased since 2016 and reached 576,108 in 2020. The percentage of victimized households also increased from 1.99% in 2016 to 2.10% in 2018 and 2.68% in 2020. The number and percentage of households affected by crimes involving burglary declined between 2018 and 2020, from 305,123 and 1.49% to 240,284 and 1.12%, respectively. On the other hand, the number of households affected by crimes unrelated to burglary in 2020 was 335,824, exhibiting the highest number since

2012 and a significant increase from 2018. The percentage of the affected households more than doubled as well from 0.61% in 2018 to 1.56% in 2020.

<Main Findings on Household Victimization>

The following lists the main findings on victimized households.

- In 2020, around 570,000 households (2.68% of total households in Korea) experienced victimization, 4.87% of which were victimized twice or more.
- Most of the crimes occurred at home, parking lots, residential areas, or adjacent roads.
- Households located in small or mid-sized cities comprised the largest share of the respondent households at 42.6%, while those in Seoul accounted for the lowest percentage at 4.6%. However, Seoul recorded higher percentages of victimization of single-member households and households living in rowhouses/multi-household housing than other regions.
- The findings suggest that households were more likely to be victimized when the head of the household was a woman (53.1%), in their 40s or 50s (28.0% and 23.1%, respectively), or employed in the service or sales sector (39.0%).
- With regard to emotional changes after victimization, about three out of five respondents reported that the crimes eroded their trust toward others.

• Vulnerability Factors

In this survey, we identified factors affecting vulnerability to crimes at the local community level, the household level, and the individual level.

– Characteristics of Local Communities and Crime Victimization

Among the respondents who reported lack of social interactions among neighbors and physical disorder in their areas, 3.16% experienced victimization by property crimes, which is about 0.5% higher than the percentage of victimized respondents living in other areas (2.68%). The likelihood of victimization by violent crimes was higher in areas with weaker relationships among neighbors. Ineffective police activities were also found to increase the likelihood of victimization by violent crimes. To summarize, weak relationship among neighbors and physical disorder were found to increase vulnerability to both property crimes and violent crimes. Also, physical disorder and ineffective police activities were found to be the main factors that increased vulnerability to burglary.

– Household and Individual Characteristics and Crime Victimization

Regarding home security measures, the survey questionnaire included eight questions that asked whether the respondents had installed special locks, security windows, video interphones, alert systems, security cameras, or external lights within a 20-meter radius, had used access cards, and had had their homes guarded by security. More than half of the respondents answered ‘yes’ to all questions except for those on access cards and alert systems. The questionnaire also included four questions on harmful or crowded environments near the respondents’ homes, which asked about the existence of adult entertainment districts, redevelopment or rebuilding project sites, factory districts, or large traditional markets within a 100-meter radius. However, these questions were not included in the analysis as the percentage of positive answers was below 10%. Vulnerability factors on the household level included the payment of monthly rent and the lack of security systems. Vulnerability factors on the individual level included being a woman, getting home late almost every day, wearing luxurious clothes, and engaging in online activities (use of instant messaging applications, email, and online shopping).

<Main Findings on Vulnerability Factors>

The following outlines statistically significant findings on the relationship between crimes and local, household, and individual characteristics.

- Weak ties among neighbors and physical disorder were counted among the factors affecting vulnerability to property crimes. The finding persists when adjusted for other vulnerability factors including rent arrangement (monthly rent), gender (women), age (50s), and marriage status (widowed or divorced). The findings also suggest that frequent wearing of luxurious clothes may attract crimes.
- More vulnerability factors were found for violent crimes, including ineffective police activities and lack of official control.
- The survey also identified vulnerability factors for violent crimes related to online activities such as online gaming and frequent use of social network services and emails. The use of instant messaging, email, and online shopping were identified as vulnerability factors for both property crimes and violent crimes.
- Vulnerability factors specific to burglary included ‘unoccupied housing unit’ and ‘monthly average household income between KRW 1 and 2 million.’ Other factors included physical disorder, ineffective police activities, and low-security environment.
- The findings highlight the importance of addressing physical disorder, as the single factor affects vulnerability to all types of crimes.
- Vulnerability factors of property crimes and violent crimes, except for burglary, included weak ties among neighbors, physical disorder, monthly-rent households, lack of home security, being a woman, late return home, and wearing luxurious clothes. The findings also confirm that, in Korea, women are more exposed to crimes. While late return home itself serves as a precondition for crimes, we need to consider the effect from factors that are distinct from but related to later return (occupation, exposure to physical disorder, etc.). Further analysis is required to explain why people paying monthly rents are more likely to be victimized.

- Crime Reporting and Police Response

- Reporting of Crime Victimization

Reporting of Crime Victimization to Police (Unit: %)

Crime		Reported	Not reported
Violent crimes	Robbery	70.4	29.6
	Assault	32.9	67.1
	Sexual violence	0.0	100.0
	Harassment	18.0	82.0
	Mean	19.0	81.1
Property crimes	Fraud	19.7	80.3
	Theft	27.6	72.4
	Criminal damage	0.0	100.0
	Mean	20.4	79.6
Crimes against households	Robbery by burglary	100.0	0.0
	Theft by burglary	27.2	72.8
	Criminal damage by burglary	56.2	43.8
	Simple burglary	13.9	86.1
	Other crimes against households	25.2	74.8
	Total	27.2	72.8

Regarding the reasons behind the intention to report, 51.6% of the respondents who reported violent crimes to the police answered that they did so “to have the perpetrator arrested and punished,” while 22.2% and 21.6% of them chose “to recover from loss (damage)” and “to prevent similar incidents.” As for property crimes, the largest share of respondents chose “to recover from loss (damage)” (34.0%), followed by “to have the perpetrator arrested and punished” (33.7%) and “because it is right to do so” (15.0%). Lastly, the primary reason for reporting crimes against households was “to have the perpetrator arrested and punished” (41.3%), followed by “to recover from loss (damage)” (29.0%) and “to prevent similar incidents” (26.9%).

Meanwhile, among the respondents who did not report their crimes to the police, 45.1%, 48.4%, and 70.4% of the victims of violent crimes, property crimes, and household crimes, respectively, answered that they did not

report the crimes because the damage was not serious. The second and third most common reasons for not reporting violent crimes were “the incident was resolved in other ways or between the involved parties” (13.5%) and the respondent’s belief that “the police would do nothing about it” (11.6%). In particular, unlike the other two groups of crimes, more than 5% of violent crime victims did not report their crimes because they would be “ashamed and embarrassed if others knew about the incident.” As for property crimes, 13.1% and 12.5% of the victims chose “there was no evidence” and “the perpetrator is someone I know” as the reason for non-reporting, respectively. Lastly, the second and third most common reasons for not reporting household crimes were “there was no evidence” (17.5%) and “the police would do nothing about it” (5.6%).

– Satisfaction with Police Response

Across all three categories of crime (violent crimes, property crimes, and household crimes), more than 80% of the respondents who reported their crimes answered that the police had responded to their reports (86.8%, 80.1%, and 87.2%). 62.3% and 62.6% of respondents who experienced violent crimes and property crimes, respectively, answered that police officers had visited the site of crime to investigate. The percentage was markedly higher for victims of household crimes at 81.4%.

Satisfaction with Police Response to Crime Victimization Report (Unit: %)

Crimes	Highly satisfied	Slightly satisfied	Neutral	Slightly dissatisfied	Highly dissatisfied
Violent crimes	13.3	65.8	13.4	3.8	3.7
Property crimes	13.1	14.7	44.2	13.9	14.1
Crimes against households	13.4	23.4	33.7	23.3	6.3

As for satisfaction with police response, 79.1% of violent crime victims reported being satisfied with how the police handled their crimes, which far outweighed the percentage of victims not satisfied with police response (7.5%). On the other hand, the percentages of satisfied and dissatisfied respondents were similar for property crime victims (27.8% and 28.0%). 36.8% of household crime victims were satisfied with police response, which was slightly higher than the percentage of dissatisfied victims (29.6%).

<Main Findings on Crime Reporting and Police Response>

The following outlines the main findings on crime reporting and police response.

- Among victims of violent crimes, the percentage of victims who reported their crimes was the highest for robbery victims (70.4%), followed by victims of assault (32.9%) and harassment (18.0%). None of the sexual violence victims reported their crime incidents.
- As for property crimes, 19.7% of fraud victims contacted the police, which was only surpassed by the percentage of theft victims who contacted the police (27.6%). None of the victims of criminal damage to property reported their crimes.
- Examining the responses by crime type, 27.2% of household crime victims reported their crimes, followed by property crime victims (20.4%) and violent crime victims (19.0%). The findings on the reason for reporting crimes show that the largest share of victims who experienced violent crimes or household crimes selected “to have the perpetrator arrested and punished,” whereas “to recover from loss (damage)” topped the list for victims of property crimes.
- Across all categories, the percentage of non-reporting respondents were two to four times higher than the percentage of victims who reported their crimes. The most common reason for non-reporting was “the damage was not serious” in all categories.
- The property crime category showed the lowest percentage of respondents who answered that the police responded to their reports (80.1%). The percentage of respondents who answered that the police resolved their cases was the lowest among property crime victims (3.9%), as was the share of respondents who were provided with information by the police regarding the progress of their cases (75.6%).
- The findings on satisfaction with police response indicate that victims of violent crimes were the most satisfied with police response, whereas the percentage of dissatisfied victims were slightly higher than that of satisfied victims in the property crime category. The police were four times more likely to fail to arrest perpetrators of property crimes than violent crimes. All victims of household crimes reported that all or some of the perpetrators were arrested.

• Perception and Fear of Crime

– Perception of Crime and Affecting Factors

Prospect of Future Crimes (Unit: %)

Question	Greatly decline	Slightly decline	No significant change	Slightly increase	Greatly increase
Overall crimes in Korea	0.5	8.3	45.3	41.7	4.2
Crimes in neighborhoods	1.1	13.8	69.1	15.2	0.8

45.9% of the respondents projected that crimes would slightly or significantly increase after 2020. However, a similarly large share of respondents (45.3%) answered that there would be no significant changes to crime trends. 69.1% of the respondents answered that there would be no significant changes in crimes in their neighborhoods, whereas 16.0% expected an increase and 14.9% expected a decline in crimes.

<Main Findings on Fear of Crime>

The following outlines the main findings on perception and fear toward risk of crime victimization.

- A high percentage of the respondents projected that the overall crime rate would increase in Korea, while expecting little change or a decline in crimes in their neighborhoods.
- The perception of future crime in neighborhoods was lower in areas with stronger relationship among neighbors, more engagement among neighbors, and more active police presence. The perception of future crime was higher in areas with higher levels of physical and social disorder.
- The respondents were more concerned about crimes occurring outside their homes than at home, and crimes against their spouses (significant others) or children than crimes against themselves. By type of crime, the respondents were the most concerned about 'theft' and 'assault' in the property crime and violent crime categories, respectively.
- Women exhibited more fear of crime than men across all categories of crime. Fear of crime was higher among respondents in their 20s and unmarried respondents.
- The average score for fear of crime was the highest among full-time homemakers in all categories, except for violent crimes.
- Fear of crime varied depending on housing type and occupation. The respondents living in *officetels*¹⁾ or studio apartments reported the average highest score, and the respondents living in *jeonse*²⁾ were more fearful of crimes than those with other housing arrangements. Fear of crime also increased with income level.
- Women were more engaged in crime prevention activities, with full-time homemakers showing extensive engagement in both passive and active prevention activities. In addition, the average score for prevention activities increased with higher exposure to media content and rumors about crimes.
- The average score for passive prevention activities was the highest among respondents earning KRW 1 to less than 2 million, while the average score for active prevention activities was the highest among the respondents earning KRW 3 to less than 4 million and those earning KRW 4 to less than 5 million.

1) A term used in Korea for multi-purpose buildings with residential and commercial units.

2) A term used in Korea for deposit-based rental housing.

The Korean Institute of Criminology and Justice (KICJ) was founded in 1989 as the only national crime and criminal justice research institute in Korea.

The KICJ conducts proactive interdisciplinary research to formulate and implement evidence based policies for improved national crime prevention and criminal justice system.

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