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Customer Satisfaction: Crime Victims' Willingness to Call the Police

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In 1967, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice initiated the first national survey of crime victimization. With the assistance of the National Opinion Research Center, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), and the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan, they interviewed individuals in 10,000 households and selected precincts in Washington D.C., Boston, and Chicago. The survey revealed that a substantial proportion of crime goes unreported—what has come to be known as the "dark figure of crime." The underreporting of crime was variable by offense

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type and, in some cases, relatively substantial: only 10 percent of auto thefts were unreported but over one-half (54 percent) of simple assaults never came to the attention of the police.

Given the wide range of changes in policing and efforts to increase citizens' reporting of crimes, we might expect that reporting patterns have changed considerably over time. A simple comparison of the results of this initial crime victimization survey and the most recent victimization data from BJS (Rand and Catalano 2007) suggests, however, no improvement in citizens' willingness to call the police after being victimized and even some rather notable depreciation. As the data in Table 1 indicate, while there have been only modest declines in the percentage of larceny and simple assaults reported to the police, for other offenses the declines are more substantial (e.g., the percentage of sexual offenses that go unreported has increased from 49 percent to 59 percent).[1]

Table 1: Percentage of crimes not reported to the police

	1967[a]	2006[b]
Robbery	35%	43%
Aggravated assault	35%	41%
Simple assault	54%	56%
Larceny	51%	56%*
Burglary	42%	50%
Auto theft	11%	19%
Sex offenses	49%	59%

[a] National Opinion Research Center survey for The President's Commission on Law Enforcement & Administration of Justice. *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society* (1967, 22).
[b] Rand and Catalano (2007).
*Average of theft and personal theft.

It is also noteworthy that BJS indicates that the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) non-response rate has steadily increased over the past decade (Rand and Catalano 2007). While it is not known how exactly this would affect these data, it may suggest that the current rates of non-reporting are underestimates since people who do not call the police after being victimized may be more reluctant to participate in a crime victimization survey.

Simply comparing the proportion of respondents who reported a crime to the police at two points in time is not a very sophisticated approach to the question of changes over time in citizens' willingness to call the police. Baumer and Lauritsen (2009), however, conducted a multivariate analysis of the long-term trends (1973–2005), based on the National Crime Survey (NCS) and NCVS data, in reporting crime to the police. In so doing, they argue that the comparison appearing in Table 1 and similar ones published by BJS (Hart and Rennison 2003; Rand and Catalano 2007) are misleading because they do not adjust for the redesign of the survey in 1992 and 1993; nor do they take into account differences across time in crime incident attributes that influence police notification (e.g., the presence of a weapon or injury to the victim), as well as victim characteristics that can increase the likelihood of police notification (e.g., age). After addressing these omissions in previous analyses, they found

[1] The recent BJS data include reports to the police by crime victims and third parties. It is not clear from the President's Crime Commission (1967) whether they included third-party reports in their estimation of the dark figure of crime. However, if third parties were not included in the initial victimization survey, this would suggest that underreporting of crime victimization is even more substantial today than it was forty years ago. With regard to the increase in the number of sexual assaults that go unreported, part of this may be attributed to the 1992 redesign of the NCVS survey, which resulted in capturing a wide range of sexual assaults rather than just rapes and attempted rapes.

that the reporting of violent crime decreased between 1973 and 1986 but increased after 1986. The overall increase, however, was not large, as the probability that a violent crime will be reported increased from .42 to .48 (from 1973 to 2005), and this appeared to be due primarily to the increased reporting of simple assaults and sexual assaults. The reporting of robberies actually declined. In the case of property crimes, reporting to the police increased from .28 in 1973 to .36 in 2005. The bottom line, then, is that even with these slight increases in reporting over time, the vast majority of crimes are still not reported to the police.

Why Should More Crimes Be Reported to the Police Today and Why is Crime Reporting Important?

Most of what we know about the effectiveness of police work has been published since the President's Commission (1967). An assessment of *The 1967 President's Crime Commission Report: Its Impact 25 Years Later*, with specific reference to the changes in police personnel and policing since that time, came to the following conclusions (Walker 1994, 32; see also Hickman and Reaves 2006). As salaries and benefits for police officers have increased, so too have recruitment standards, resulting in sworn officers having far more education today than in the past. Police forces are also far more diverse than they were in the 1960s, as racial and ethnic minorities comprise roughly one-quarter and women over 11 percent of full-time sworn officers. But even with these changes in the qualifications and composition of personnel, police work has not changed dramatically. In fact, Walker (1994, 33) maintains that "despite all the talk about community policing, the bulk of police services are delivered through traditional patrol work [and] patrol work is still driven by citizen calls for service."

As Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1988) argued, whether citizens report crimes to the police may be the most important decision in the criminal justice system because, in this role, citizens act as the gatekeepers and "mobilizers" of law. The impact of non-reporting can be seen in many domains ranging from police performance to crime prevention programs. Both problem-oriented policing and community policing (Goldstein 1990; Wilson and Kelling 1981) share a basic assumption, which is that there are serious limits to the crime control capacity of the police and police need information and cooperation from citizens. As Klinger (1997, 290) pointed out, crime victims are patrol officers' clients; patrol officers need citizens to help solve crimes. Beyond just helping to solve crimes, reported crimes can be seen as the "raw material for systematic planning, workload forecasting, and budget development by police and correctional agencies; non-reporting is then a potential source of resource misallocation." Finally, non-reporting can also threaten the validity of crime prevention programs (Skogan 1984, 115).

What, then, causes citizens who have been the victims of crimes to fail to report them to the police? The 1967 crime commission survey reported that the number one reason citizens failed to report crimes to the police was because they did not think the police could do anything. Today, relatively little is known about why citizens fail to report crimes, as most of what is known comes from the NCVS where the data are collected every six months but reported only annually and nationally. This makes it difficult to understand reactions to victimization at the local level.[2] There are, of course, some notable exceptions. Tjaden and Thoennes' (2000) national survey of violence against women included questions on whether individuals reported the violence they experienced to the police or sought medical help, as well as their general feelings of satisfaction with the outcome.

[2] Today, the primary reason people do not report crimes to the police is because they think it is a private or personal matter.

. . . little research has focused on the situational aspects of crime reporting, including the circumstances at the time of the attack and what alternative means of redress were available to the victim.

Macmillan and Kruttschnitt (2005) reanalyzed these data to examine women's experiences of violence over their lives and across their relationships. They found that women who had experienced the most violence (with different perpetrators at multiple stages in their life course) were the least likely to report their violence to the police; among those who did report being violently victimized, those with the most violent histories reported being very dissatisfied with the police response.[3] Unfortunately, we do not know why women who experienced so much violence in their lives chose not to report it to the police or why there was such widespread dissatisfaction with the police response among those who did report it.[4]

Beyond the practical reasons for increasing our understanding of citizens' willingness to report crimes to the police, there is also an important theoretical rationale. Donald Black (1983) has long argued that much of crime is just "self-help." Black observed that in many modern communities, law is unavailable to citizens. Specifically, people of lower-economic status (many minorities, the poor, the homeless, and known offenders) enjoy less legal protection, especially when they have complaints against social superiors and when conflicts erupt among themselves. Black argues that, to the police and other authorities, their problems seem less serious, less important than those of higher-status individuals. In these situations, where law is perceived by citizens to be absent, crimes are treated as grievances and responses to them as self-help.

Unfortunately, little research has focused on the situational aspects of crime reporting, including the circumstances at the time of the attack and what alternative means of redress were available to the victim. To address this omission and further our understanding of the factors that influence crime reporting (as opposed to self-help), we use a unique set of data that provides more information on the contexts and contingencies that influence crime reporting than can be gleaned from NCVS data.[5] We begin by examining the circumstances in which individuals consider an incident a

[3] Only 16 percent of the women who experienced what they called multifaceted-multirelationship violence reported their victimizations to the police, compared to 33 percent of the women who experienced relatively little or only isolated acts of violence and 28 percent whose violence was confined to parents and partners. Satisfaction with the police response showed a similar pattern: 47 percent of the women experiencing multifaceted-multirelationship violence reported being very dissatisfied, compared to 18 percent of those who experienced isolated acts of violence and 29 percent of those who encountered violence at the hands of their parents and partners.

[4] Tjaden and Thoennes (2000, 58) did report information on why women who were physical assault victims did not report these incidents to the police. Nearly all of the victims "said they did not think the police could do anything about their victimization" and 61.5 percent said the police would not have believed them; another third indicated that they did not want the police or courts involved. These findings, however, were not part of the Macmillan and Kruttschnitt data reanalysis, which grouped women according to their experiences of violence across time and over relationships.

[5] NCVS only asks respondents whether the crime was reported to the police and the reasons why it was not reported.

crime and worthy of mobilizing the police. In other words, we want to know how individuals who have been victimized and called the police differ from those who failed to notify the police. We also examine factors that influence their decisions, including offender, offense, and situational attributes of the incident. Finally, we focus on how individuals characterize the situations that led them to contact the police and their reactions to the responses they received from law enforcement.

Data

The data we are using to answer these questions are part of a larger, multi-site study of women offenders, called the Women's Experience of Violence Study. This study examines the personal, situational, and community-level factors associated with women's experiences of violence, both as offenders and victims, across three sites: Minneapolis, Minnesota, Baltimore, Maryland, and Toronto, Canada.[6] The data we report on here were collected in Minneapolis.

A racially diverse sample of 206 women was drawn from the female population incarcerated in Hennepin County Adult Detention Facility in Minneapolis. This is a short-term (post-sentencing) facility that houses both males and females in separate buildings. Because of high turnover rates and relatively short jail sentences, we were precluded from selecting a true random sample. Instead, women who were serving straight sentences (i.e., not weekend or "shock" sentences[7]) were selected from rosters of the total jail population based on the nearest approaching release dates. Trained interviewers (ourselves included) administered a semi-structured interview that was programmed on a laptop. Each interview took between one and one-half to six hours to complete (the average was three hours). The interview was based on a life-events calendar developed by Horney, Osgood, and Marshall (1995) and included information on women's incarceration and treatment experiences, living arrangements, routine and criminal activities, and intimate relationships in the thirty-six months before their current sentence. The interviews yielded extensive quantitative information from the life-events calendar and qualitative/narrative information on as many as eight violent incidents (each for both partners and non-partners, for both completed and avoided incidents of violence, potentially totalling thirty-two incidents) that occurred in the preceding thirty-six months. Demographic and criminal history information, including lifetime arrests and jail and prison terms, were also included. Much of the interview, however, focused on women's experiences as both offenders and victims of violence within the thirty-six month reference period. Finally, and importantly, in assessing the situational context of their violent experiences, we also asked women if the police or others were contacted when they experienced a violent incident and, if they were contacted, how satisfied they were with the police response.

In Table 2, we present the characteristics of the full sample (N=206) and the study sample (N=134) who reported one or more incidents of violent victimization.[8] We begin by describing the full sample. In terms of racial composition, 42 percent self-identified as being white, 31 percent black, and 20 percent American Indian; the remaining self-identified as being of mixed race or another racial group. The sample ranged in age from eighteen to fifty-nine years, with the average participant being thirty-five years of

[6] Candace Kruttschnitt was the principal investigator (PI) on the Minneapolis site; Sally Simpson was the PI on the Baltimore site; and Rosemary Gartner was the PI on the Toronto site. These three cities vary in a number of important ways (e.g., size, racial and ethnic composition, crime rates, drug markets, and availability of handguns) that likely have implications for understanding both the situational and community contexts of women's experiences with violence.

[7] Shock sentences are relatively short custodial sentences (usually for an alcohol-related offense) designed to deter the offender from subsequent unlawful behavior.

[8] The full sample was comparable to the total female jail population in Hennepin County at the time of the data collection in terms of both their demographics and criminal justice experiences.

Table 2: Sample characteristics, Women's Experience of Violence (WEV) Study, Minneapolis

		Full sample (N = 206)	Study sample (N = 134)
	Age, mean (SD*)	34.5% (8.8)	34.6% (8.7)
Race	White	41.5%	38.1%
	Black	31.4%	30.6%
	American Indian	19.8%	23.9%
	Mixed, other race	6.7%	6.7%
Education	Up to 9th grade	11.1%	10.4%
	10–11th grade	25.6%	24.6%
	High school/GED	33.8%	38.1%
	Some college	23.7%	22.4%
	College degree	5.3%	3.7%
Lifetime arrests	1 time	6.3%	2.2%
	2–3 times	15.0%	11.9%
	4–6 times	18.4%	17.9%
	7–10 times	15.5%	15.7%
	11 or more times	40.7%	51.5%
Convicting offense	Violent	5.2%	6.7%
	Property	26.0%	19.4%
	Drug	17.4%	17.9%
	Prostitution	18.4%	22.4%
	DUI/DWI	12.6%	11.9%
	Technical violation	15.0%	16.4%
	Other	5.0%	4.5%

Note: Figures may not round to 100% due to missing respondent data.
*Standard deviation

age. Over one-third of the women (37 percent) had less than a high-school education and almost all reported being arrested prior to their current offense. Women convicted of both drug- and alcohol-related offenses (including driving under the influence and prostitution) comprised almost one-half of the full sample.

When we compare the study sample (or those women who reported victimizations) to the full sample, we find they are also quite comparable. There is no difference in their mean age, and the proportional representation of the different racial groups and education levels is quite similar. In terms of criminal justice histories, the only difference appears to be that the full sample of women contains more individuals for whom this was their first arrest and the study sample contains more women with extremely long arrest records (i.e., eleven or more prior arrests). This may not be surprising since it is well known that offenders have an increased risk of being victimized. There is also some variation between the full sample and the study sample in offense of conviction. Relative to the full sample, the study sample contains fewer property offenders and more prostitutes.

We are using these Minneapolis data to get an idea of how women who report being victimized to the police differ from those who fail to report the incidents, as well as their rationales for their actions. As Baumer and Lauritsen (2009) noted, there has been a general failure among scholars and policy makers to consider the factors that are associated with non-reporting and the reasons why citizens often opt out of reporting being a crime victim. It is also important to note that these women would not have a high likelihood of being included in the NCVS since the sampling strategy used for the NCVS excludes institutionalized (jailed/imprisoned) individuals, despite their increased vulnerability to victimization. Many of these women had very risky lifestyles that involved illegal activities that would increase their likelihood

of being targeted for violence; and, of course, involvement in these illegal activities will also increase their probability of non-reporting (Skogan 1984, 123). We take this into consideration in the subsequent analysis. We turn now to see what the incidents of victimization looked like among the 134 women who reported such experiences.

Findings

Collectively, these women reported 313 incidents of victimization in their prior thirty-six months on the street. As shown in Table 3, slightly more than one-half (53 percent) of these victimizations involved a partner or ex-partner, and the majority of incidents involved a physical assault (63 percent) where the victim made no attempt to attack her opponent, even in self-defense. Although not shown here, these assaults usually involved hitting and slapping and no injury to the victim; no weapon was used in three-quarters of the incidents. The offenders were most likely to be black and in the same age cohort as the victim (i.e., in their thirties). Because most of these incidents involved either a current or former intimate partner, it may not be surprising to find that they were disproportionately likely to occur indoors and involve both the respondent and her opponent using drugs/alcohol. Less than one-third of the incidents involved no alcohol or drug use.

Among the 313 recorded victimizations, only 18 percent (N=56) resulted in a call to the police.

Finally, and of particular import, is the question of what proportion of these incidents were reported to the police. Among the 313 recorded victimizations, only 18 percent (N=56) resulted in a call to the police. Because this is a sample of offenders, we would expect a lower percentage of victimizations reported to the police than is found in NCVS data but these results indicate a far more dramatic rate of underreporting than we anticipated. Hart and Rennison (2003) found that, on average, over the period 1992–2000, 49 percent of violent victimizations recorded in the NCVS were reported to the police. Our results are closer to those of Tjaden and Thoenness (2000) who found only 27 percent of reported physical assault victimizations and 17 percent of intimate rape victimizations resulted in a call to the police.

Who Calls the Police?

If such a small proportion of violent incidents results in reports to the police, we need to understand how the incidents and the women involved in them differ from those that do not get reported. Table 4 shows the characteristics of women who did and did not call the police. These data suggest that there are relatively few demographic and background factors that differentiate women who call from those who do not call. The majority of white women call the police when victimized, whereas blacks and American Indians avoid calling the police. Another difference appears in education. Victims who report having less than a high-school education are significantly less likely to contact the police than victims with twelve or more years of schooling. Two other factors are worth noting in Table 4. Routine activities theory (one of most important explanations we have for patterns of victimization) suggests that the more nights an individual goes out, the more they increase their chances of being victimized. Our data indicate that while this

Table 3: Incident characteristics, Women's Experience of Violence (WEV) Study, Minneapolis (N = 313)

		N	Percent
Type of incident	Partner	168	53.7
	Non-partner	145	46.3
Relationship	Stranger	58	18.5
	Acquaintance	43	13.7
	Friend	13	4.2
	Relative	7	2.2
	Current spouse/partner	121	38.7
	Ex-spouse/partner	46	14.7
	Other	3	1.0
Primary nature	Robbery	23	7.3
	Sexual assault	40	12.8
	Assault, respondent victimized	198	63.3
	Assault, respondent attacked back	52	16.6
Number of opponents	1	291	93.0
	2 or more	21	6.7
Injury	Yes	104	33.2
Race of opponent*	White	72	23.0
	Black	174	55.6
	American Indian	28	8.9
	Mixed, other race	16	5.3
Age of opponent*	12–20 years	10	3.2
	21–29 years	62	19.8
	30–39 years	116	37.1
	40–49 years	80	25.6
	50 and over	22	7.1
Opponent used weapon	Yes	81	25.9
Opponent substance use*	Alcohol	65	20.8
	Drugs	70	22.4
	Both	82	26.2
Respondent substance use	Alcohol	116	37.1
	Drugs	127	40.6
Location of incident	Indoors	180	60.8
	Outdoors	116	39.2
Respondent called police	**Yes**	**56**	**17.9**
	No	**257**	**81.1**

Notes: Figures may not round to 100% due to missing data. In cases maked with an *, percents reported include only those incidents with a single opponent.

may be true, it has no bearing on the response to victimization. Women who did and did not call the police after being victimized spent, on average, relatively the same number of nights out. Additionally, and somewhat surprisingly, current criminality (as indicated by whether women were on probation/parole at the time of the victimization) also appears to be unrelated to calling the police. This finding, however, should be interpreted with caution since, as you will see, some women indicated to us that their involvement in illegal activities influenced their decision to not contact the police.

Table 5 provides data on how the characteristics of the victimization incident varied with reporting behavior. Incident characteristics appear to be more important than personal characteristics in determining whether a violent act is reported to the police, and the factors that suppress and amplify reporting largely confirm what others have found (Hart and Rennison 2003). One notable exception, however, pertains to incidents involving partners or ex-partners. Analyses of the NCVS data, which focus on intimate partner violence (Rennison and Welchans 2000), revealed that between 1993 and 1998 about one-half of all victims of intimate partner violence reported it to the police. Aggregating incidents involving partners and ex-partners (N=179), we find only 17 percent of these cases are reported to the police (not shown in Table 5). In addition, when incidents involve family members as the initial aggressors, the police are less likely to be called. What appears to increase the likelihood of reporting is when the incident involved multiple opponents and the respondent was injured.

Finally, because these simple bivariate calculations tell us nothing about the relative and net importance of these various factors on reporting victimizations, we estimated a series of logistic regressions of the relationships among respondent, opponent, and incident characteristics on the likelihood of contacting law enforcement (N=313 incidents).[9] The results of these models appear in reduced form in Table 6.

Table 4: Differences between respondents who called police and those who did not

		Women who called police (N = 41)	Women who did not call police (N = 93)	
Age (mean)		33.3	35.1	
Race	White	50.0%	33.3%	*
	Black	25.0%	33.3%	
	American Indian	15.0%	28.0%	
	Other	10.0%	5.4%	
Education	Less than HS	22.5%	40.9%	*
	HS/GED	45.0%	35.5%	
	More than HS	32.5%	23.7%	
Nights out per week (mean)		2.4	2.5	
On probation/ parole	Yes	56.0%	58.0%	
Employed	Yes	25.0%	23.7%	

*Indicates significant difference, $p < .05$ two-tailed t-test

[9] Because of non-independence in the model (i.e., some women reported multiple incidents of victimization), we calculated robust standard errors using the cluster function in Stata 9.

Table 5: Differences between incidents involving police and those with no police involvement

		Incidents involving police (n = 56)	Incidents with no police involvement (n = 257)	
Multiple opponents	Yes	14.3%	5.1%	*
Relationship to victim	Stranger	25.0%	18.9%	
	Acquaintance	20.8%	13.6%	
	Friend	2.1%	4.9%	
	Relative/family member	0.0%	2.9%	*
	Current intimate partner	43.8%	41.2%	
	Ex intimate partner	8.3%	17.3%	*
Opponent race	White	28.6%	23.9%	
	Black	62.5%	61.6%	
	Other	12.5%	14.9%	
Respondent attacked first	Yes	5.5%	14.2%	*
Opponent had weapon	Yes	33.9%	24.1%	
Respondent injured	Yes	46.0%	30.0%	*

* Indicates significant difference, $p < .05$ two-tailed t-test

In earlier models, we controlled for respondent characteristics, such as race, age, whether the victim was employed during the month in which the incident occurred, and the number of nights the victim spent out each week. None of these characteristics were significantly related to the likelihood that law enforcement would be contacted after a violent incident. As shown in Table 6, only one respondent characteristic is significant: education. Each increase in a woman's level of education increases the odds that law enforcement will be contacted by 48 percent. In earlier models, we also examined a number of opponent characteristics that previous research suggests are important determinants of individuals' willingness to contact law enforcement (e.g., race, age, weapon use). None of these were significant.

By contrast, incident characteristics appear to have a strong and significant effect on the likelihood that the police will be called after a violent event. Incidents in which a respondent made any physical attack or attempted attack against her opponent, even in self-defense, were 86 percent less likely to involve police contact. However, other factors increased the likelihood that the police would be called. These include attacks that involved multiple opponents/offenders and those in which the respondent was injured. Perhaps most interesting is that the relationship between the victim and offender had no significant effect on calling the police. Whereas the bivariate results suggested that an attack by a partner/ex-partner reduced the likelihood of calling the police, once the characteristics of the incident are controlled, this relationship is washed out, suggesting that the severity of the attack may trump any hesitancy on a woman's part to report an assault by her partner to the police.

Help Seeking

Finally, we examine women's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their calls for help and their personal narratives about their experiences, including their explanations for why they did not call the police. Only about one-quarter (26 percent) of the

Table 6: Logistic regression coefficients of the relationship between respondent, opponent, and incident characteristics on likelihood of contacting law enforcement

	Odds Ratios	Robust SE**	
Respondent characteristics			
Level of education	1.514	0.287	*
Incident characteristics			
Respondent attacked opponent	0.184	0.137	*
Multiple offenders	3.046	1.589	*
Respondent injured	1.861	0.636	^

* p < .05, ^ p < .10
** Standard errors

victims sought help of some kind but, of those who did, the largest proportion (18 percent) called the police. How satisfied were they with the police response to their requests for help? Over one-half (54 percent) reported being "somewhat" or "very" satisfied with the police response, but what about the 46 percent who reported some dissatisfaction with the law enforcement response? As can be seen in Table 7, the most common complaint was that the "police didn't do enough or follow through" (40 percent).

The personal narratives provide some context and a deeper understanding of these (and subsequent) categorical responses. A common depiction of police failure to "follow through" or, in the view of the respondent, "do enough" involved the police breaking up an incident but refusing to make an arrest or acknowledge the victim's desire to press charges. In the following case, the police not only ignored the victim's efforts to press charges but also threatened her with arrest if she did not drop the issue.

> . . . We got to the corner and I went to go to work . . . I took off running and he caught me two blocks away . . . we are outside Pizza Shack where police eat and then he threw me down and kicked me . . . I got up and started running again and when I got to the next block the cops pulled up and told him to go back to Bloomington Avenue . . . I told them I wanted to press charges and they told me that there was no assault . . . I told them that there was and they kept telling me that there was no assault and if I kept it up they would put me in jail.

Related to this rationale, but perhaps of even greater concern, were instances where women described calling the police for help but receiving no response at all. Police refusing to assist the victim is the second most common reason for dissatisfaction with the law enforcement response (20 percent). The following example comes from notes an interviewer took when a woman related reliving her own prior victimization as a result of hearing her neighbor being beaten by her boyfriend, and her subsequent attempts to get some help from the police for her neighbor:[10]

> She talked about an incident that happened in North Minneapolis. She heard her pregnant neighbor getting beat up by her boyfriend and called the cops. They drove around the house and said it was a loud radio. She called back and said that they needed to come and help the woman. They came back and walked around the house, didn't even come in the apartment. About two hours later, she heard it again and didn't even bother calling since the cops wouldn't come. She said she couldn't do anything else. "I lived that nightmare that she was living that day; the cops did nothing for her and they did nothing for me. It's senseless to even call them sometimes. She was so loud; I remember that day like it was yesterday." She was living in a primarily black neighborhood with mostly white cops.

Similarly, another woman who called the police, and solicited a neighbor to call as well, after being punched in the face, tries to understand why they never showed up:

[10] Interviewer notes are referenced here because she was not relaying an instance of her own victimization within the thirty-six month recall period.

Table 7: Responses to victimization, Women's Experience of Violence (WEV) Study, Minneapolis

		Incidents (N)	Percent
Sought formal help[a]	Law enforcement	56	17.9
	Legal assistance	4	1.3
	Counseling	5	1.6
	Social services/advocates	17	5.4
Satisifaction with police[b]	Not at all satisfied	26	46.4
	Somewhat satisfied	17	30.4
	Very satisfied	13	23.2
Explanation for (dis)satisfaction	Police intervened, opponent arrested	8	22.9
	Police didn't do enough or follow through	14	40.0
	Police arrested respondent or respondent got into trouble	4	11.4
	Police refused to assist respondent	7	20.0
	Other	2	5.7
Why formal help not sought[c]	Didn't need help	135	56.7
	Didn't want anyone to know	43	18.1
	Fear of opponent	11	4.6
	Didn't know where to go	5	2.1
	Police wouldn't do anything	8	3.4
	Own illegal behavior	23	9.6
	Code of silence/no snitching	13	5.5

[a] Respondents may have sought assistance from multiple sources.
[b] Includes only those respondents who sought assistance from law enforcement.
[c] Includes only those respondents who did not seek formal help.

> Well, it was a money situation. I didn't give my friend the money she wanted, twenty dollars, and I kept saying I didn't have it and she said that she would come over if I didn't give it to her. Then she and her friend and her sister came over one day and tried to get me out of the house to beat me up. They punched me on the side of the face and I tried to fight back . . . I called the police but they never came. I don't know why; maybe it was the neighborhood. We called them three times, too, and they said "okay we'll send an officer right out there; we got your report three hours ago." We even had a next-door neighbor call and they still didn't come. [to interviewer] You think it was the neighborhood? That's what we thought.

These comments reflect the concerns of women who sought help from law enforcement and help us understand why they were dissatisfied with the response they received. What they do not address, however, is why three-quarters of the women who had been victimized failed to call the police. As shown in Table 7, the most common reason these women gave for not calling the police was simply because they did not feel they needed any help (57 percent). In many cases, this is because they were engaging in "self-help" to resolve their problems. Consider, for example,

the response of the following woman after she had been raped.

> I didn't report this to the police because I was trying to find someone to pay to either hurt or kill him. The two times I tried to set this up he was not home. That was the only reason I didn't report it. I should have reported it. There would have been enough semen or fluids and hair. The way this went down, I knew he had done this before. . . .

The second most common reason for not calling the police, although far less common than engaging in some form of self-help, is the respondent did not want anyone to know about the incident (18 percent).[11] We found that this often occurred because of women's involvement in illegal activities, particularly drug use and sales.

> We (me and Eddy) went to Porter's for a steak dinner. I took him out. Then we were going to go to Sunny's at Chicago and Lake, our favorite bar. It was so crowded we had to park at KFC and had to walk. So we went to the bar and drank quite a bit and Eddy bought us some crack—about 100 bucks worth. So we had some drinks. We go to leave and we get into the parking lot. He hit the door lock button, I got in. I saw him stop before he got in and he was talking to this black kid. Then I heard him say, "It's alright pimp, hold on," and I saw him pull off his gold necklace, which he really liked. I opened up the door and said, "What are you doing? We already have some shit." I thought he was trading his jewelry for drugs. He said, "Listen, baby, he has a gun." So I reached in and gave him 120 bucks from my purse. Eddy had a whole lot of money that night but he forgot to ask Eddy for the money. Eddy gave him all his jewelry and then he ran off back behind the dumpster. We thought about calling the police but we wanted to get home and we had crack.

. . . the most common reason these women gave for not calling the police was simply because they did not feel they needed any help (57 percent).

Women also took account of their prior illegal activities in their decision making, and the presence of outstanding warrants clearly mitigated their desire to contact the police after being assaulted.

> We were over at his mom's house. He hit me with the screwdriver in the head. It wasn't bleeding too bad and I think I had a problem but I didn't go to no police or no hospital because I had a warrant out for me, and it was Thanksgiving and I wanted to go get me some food, you know.

Conclusion

The dark figure of crime, or the incidence of unreported crime, was established over forty years ago by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. It was sizeable then (representing one-half or more of sex offenses and simple assaults) and it remains sizeable today, suggesting that the important changes that have occurred in policing have not produced any substantial changes in citizens' willingness to reduce this figure. Although sophisticated analyses of NCS and NCVS data reveal significant changes in the reporting of sexual assaults and domestic assaults, the gains are modest: "In most cases, more than half of the crimes experienced by Americans are not conveyed to law enforcement officials"

[11] This is similar to what Hart and Rennison (2003) reported from NCVS data where 20 percent of respondents indicated that they did not call the police because it was a "private or personal matter."

(Baumer and Lauritsen 2009, 33). Moreover, these findings are based on the best-case scenario because they are derived from a representative sample of individuals living in households. Although the households are varied, and include low-income public housing, mobile homes, and motel housing units, they systematically exclude individuals who have the highest probability of being victimized: homeless individuals and incarcerated individuals. Our findings indicate that by excluding incarcerated individuals, official estimates of the dark figure of crime are seriously biased (see also Dugan and Castro 2006). The extent of this bias is especially important today since the incarcerated population in this country has swelled to over two million (Sabol, Minton, and Harrison 2007).

As we have seen, many offenders have been victimized (and often repeatedly) and they are reluctant to call the police because of their own involvement in illegal activities. But what is perhaps more surprising, given the role citizens play in helping law enforcement solve crimes, is the police failure to respond when they are called or to do anything when they show up. This, of course, is not a new phenomenon as it was documented in the first national survey of crime victims, which reported that police failed to respond to calls for assistance in 23 percent of cases and failed to write up the incident in 25 percent of cases. The advent of mandatory arrest in domestic violence cases may have altered this pattern somewhat but, as we have seen, women are still reluctant to call the police when they are involved in an assault and they fight back or if they have a criminal record. If women remain fearful of reporting domestic violence instances, our understanding of and our ability to more effectively address this problem will remain woefully inadequate.

We could conclude, as Skogan (1984) did many years ago, that the net result of ignoring the non-reported crimes is to maintain the police focus on more serious crimes, since the non-reported cases often involve less serious injuries and smaller financial losses. As the no-snitching movement demonstrates, however, such a stance may be shortsighted because it has serious implications for citizens' confidence in the police and their willingness to help the police in solving crimes. Community policing, after all, rests on the notion that law enforcement is a local activity and its success rests not merely on making arrests but also on responding to the needs of local residents, even those who are known offenders (see also Rose and Clear 1998). Should not, then, improving citizens' willingness to contact the police when they have been victimized, regardless of their offending histories, be encouraged? The payoffs could be substantial, including not only greater confidence in the police but also a reduction in what Donald Black (1983) refers to as "self-help" or rough justice, which just perpetuates more crime.

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