THE MEASUREMENT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT: COMPARISON OF THE RESULTS OF THREE DIFFERENT INSTRUMENTS¹

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the results of three instruments developed to measure sexual harassment. Two instruments were used in the Dutch national victimization survey: an oral interview and a written questionnaire. Three issues will be discussed: (1) do both instruments produce the same victimization rates? (2) are the type of incidents mentioned similar? and (3) is the relationship between the answers on both instruments linked to socio-demographic characteristics? Results indicate that the written questionnaire produces higher victimization rates but that generally less serious incidents are mentioned. Secondly, information on the relation of victimization with educational level is presented. For this purpose, the results of the victimization survey (written questionnaire) are compared with another Dutch study measuring sexual harassment. As is found in the literature, a relation between victimization and educational level is found in the national victimization survey, but, in contrast to many results reported in the literature, no such relation was found in the Leiden study. The implications of these results are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

With the introduction of victimization studies much valuable information about crime and the circumstances in which it occurs became available. Though the information gathered by means of victimization studies is valuable and important, nonetheless some methodological problems remain. Gove *et al.* (1985) listed as problems: response bias (non-recall, backward and forward telescoping), sampling errors, interviewer effects and conceptual issues (compare also Skogan, 1981). Some of these problems will be discussed in this article within the narrower context of the measurement of victimization of sexual harassment.

In the 1984 Dutch victimization survey two different ways of gathering the same kind of information, namely an interview and a written questionnaire, were used. In *section two* of this paper the results of both instruments will be compared. Three issues will be addressed:

- (1) do both instruments produce the same prevalence (number of victims in the sample) and incidence rates (number of incidents mentioned by the victims)?
- (2) are the type of incidents mentioned similar in both instruments? and

- (3) is there a relationship between the answers on both instruments and the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents?

In *section three* attention will be paid to the relationship between sexual harassment and level of educational attainment. The results of the Dutch victimization study will be compared with the results of another study executed in Leiden by Ensink and Albach (1983).² In the victimization survey a relation between educational level and victimization was found, but in the Leiden one no relation appeared. The implication of these findings are discussed.

COMPARISON OF TWO INSTRUMENTS WITHIN ONE VICTIMIZATION SURVEY

In the Netherlands, victimization surveys have been conducted every two years since 1969 by the Central Bureau of Statistics jointly with the Research and Documentation Centre of the Ministry of Justice. They provide estimates of personal and household crimes. Since 1981 three questions on sexual harassment have been included in the first part of the interview. They concern sexual harassment on the streets and in other 'outside' public places, and exhibitionism. These questions have attracted criticism. One of the criticisms has been that many respondents will not mention incidents in which acquaintances or family members are involved because people usually do not associate this kind of incident with a 'crime'. As a result of these criticisms it was decided to add some extra questions on sexual harassment in the survey gathering information about 1983 incidents and to compare the results on both sets of questions. An additional written questionnaire was presented to a randomly chosen selection of the total sample. The original sample consisted of 10,931 respondents. 25% of them (males and females) were asked to fill in an anonymous additional questionnaire on sexual harassment. 90% of these 25% participated. As a result 2,469 respondents completed the first as well as the second set of questions. The respondents answering the questionnaire were similar to the total sample with respect to age, sex and marital status (see also Van der Heijden, 1985).

As a consequence for 1983 we have data stemming from one sample of persons answering questions collected with two different instruments. We were interested to see whether the results would differ on the issues mentioned above: prevalence and incidence of victimization, type of incidents mentioned and changes in mentioning victimization in relation to the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

The interview and the questionnaire differed on two major points. First the first series of questions was submitted orally by (mainly female) interviewers, the second set was a written questionnaire which was filled in by the respondent. The first series of questions will be referred to as the

'oral interview', the second set will be referred to as the 'written questionnaire'.

Secondly, with respect to 'sexual harassment' the definition of the two parts of the survey differed: in the oral interview a restricted definition of sexual harassment was used: the aim was to measure rape, attempted rape and sexual assault. In the written questionnaire another definition was used. Sexual harassment was defined as 'being confronted, against one's will, with sexual behaviour, regardless of its seriousness'. The written questionnaire dealt with sexual remarks, obscene phone calls, exhibitionism, rape, having been forced to undress, having been pinched, having been followed by someone, and other forms of sexual harassment.

Because of the differences in definition the wording of the questions in the two instruments differed. The wording in the two instruments was as follows (translated from Dutch):

In the oral interview:

1. *Has there ever been someone on the streets, in a park or somewhere else outside, who sexually harassed you?*
2. *Has there ever been someone in your own or somebody else's house, in a cafe or a bar, or in some other place (inside), who sexually harassed you?*
3. *By exhibitionism we mean the tendency of some people to show their genitals to strangers. Did somebody ever do this to you?*

In the written questionnaire:

1. *Has someone ever, against your will, sent you an unwanted letter or phoned you with sexual intentions?*
2. *Has someone ever, against your will, forced you to have sexual intercourse or made a serious attempt to do so?*
3. *Has someone ever, with sexual intentions, undressed you or forced you to undress yourself?*
4. *Has someone ever, against your will, and obviously with sexual intentions, seized you, pawed you or pinched you?*
5. *Has some ever, against your will, showed you his or her genitals?*
6. *Has someone ever followed you with sexual intentions?*
7. *Has someone ever, with sexual intentions, against your will, done other things to you than the above mentioned (for example: forced you into variations in sexual intercourse)?*
8. *Did someone ever, against your will, make sexual jokes and/or remarks about you or made gestures or whistle at you?*

Notice that in the oral interview the questions on sexual harassment were formulated in relatively general terms while in the written questionnaire the formulation of the questions was more specific and covered a wider range of incidents.

Scales used in the analyses

In order to be able to make a comparison several scales were formed of types of incidents which covered, as much as possible, the same range of

events. Two types of incidents will be discerned: 'exhibitionism' and 'sexual harassment'.

As the questions on exhibitionism were formulated in an almost identical way in the two parts of the survey the comparison of the results on both instruments can be made easily. The answers on both questions (in the oral interview and the written questionnaire) will be used as the 'exhibitionism scales'.

To measure victimization with respect to sexual harassment in the oral interview the answers on the variables sexual harassment 'inside' and 'outside' in the oral interview were added to form one scale ('sexual harassment interview').

For the written questionnaire two scales were constructed. To do so the line of reasoning was the following:

- First, in the oral interview, the wording (in Dutch) of the questions on sexual harassment emphasizes the presence of physical contact. Therefore it was decided that the questions about obscene phone calls and sexual remarks (from the written questionnaire) could not be included in the comparison with the oral interview.
- Secondly it was not clear whether respondents would consider question 6 on 'following' as sexual harassment as it was defined by the first oral interview. Therefore two scales were made. The first scale is the sum of the variables: rape (2), undressing (3), pinched (4), followed (6), and other sexual things (7). In a second scale 'followed' was left out. Generally the scale in which 'followed' is included was used.

Prevalence scales were constructed for the 'ever' time span (based on answers on the questions: 'have you ever...') as well as for the 'last year' time span. Information about the frequency of victimization was available for the incidents which occurred during the last year only. As a result four prevalence scales and two incidence scales are available for exhibitionism³ and six prevalence and three incidence measures are available for sexual harassment.⁴

Results of the comparison

The first question that will be addressed is whether the two instruments produce different prevalence and incidence rates.

Prevalence and frequency of sexual harassment

Prevalence figures for exhibitionism are almost identical in both questionnaires (ever: oral interview: 13.6% and written questionnaire: 13.9%; 1983: oral interview: 1.8% and written questionnaire: 1.9%). The frequency of incidents in 1981 is also practically identical (oral interview: 0.030; written questionnaire: 0.032).⁵

TABLE 1

Prevalence of sexual harassment according to the interview and the questionnaire methods; (percentages; N=2469)*

	Ever		1983	
	written quest.	oral inter.	written quest.	oral inter.
sex. harassment (with following)	(a) 15.5*		(d) 2.9***	
		(c) 11.1		(f) 2.1
sex. harassment (without following)	(b) 12.6**		(e) 2.3****	

* (a) versus (c): Mc Nemar test (for related samples): chi-square=48.7, $p < .001$

** (b) versus (c): Mc Nemar test: chi-square=6.3, $p < .01$

*** (d) versus (f): Mc Nemar test: chi-square=7.8, $p < .005$

**** (e) versus (f): Mc Nemar test: chi-square=0.8, n.s.

The prevalence of sexual harassment for the 'ever' scales is higher in the written questionnaire than in the oral interview (Table 1) especially when 'following' is included ($p < .01$). For the 1983 scales the increase in the prevalence rate for the written questionnaire is rather small, and does not reach statistical significance ($p > .05$) when 'following' is excluded. The frequency in 1983 however, does increase significantly in the written questionnaire (Table 2).

TABLE 2

Mean frequencies of sexual harassment (1983) according to the interview and the questionnaire (N=2469)

	written questionnaire	oral interview
	mean (1) (S.D.)	mean (2) (S.D.)
sex. harassment (without following)	0.111* (1.36)	0.039 (0.31)
sex. harassment	0.134** (1.46)	

* The difference between .111 and 0.39 is significant ($p < .01$)

** The difference between .134 and .039 is significant ($p < .001$)

We can conclude that, for sexual harassment, on the whole, the written questionnaire produces much higher frequencies and somewhat higher prevalence figures than the oral interview. For exhibitionism the results are practically identical for both instruments.

Characteristics of the incidents

The second question is whether the types of incidents mentioned are different between instruments. For each of the incidents reported in questions 1 to 8 of the written questionnaire, information on the following characteristics of incidents was available: (1) number of offenders, (2) whether the offender was known to the victim, (3) frequency of victimization (of the same type of offence), (4) the use of coercion, (5) whether the incident occurred inside or outside (which probably also correlated with whether more offenders were known to the victim), (6) whether or not the incident was reported to the police, and (7) seriousness of the crime (as described by the victim). Analyses were performed for rape, pinching, following and exhibitionism (for the other victimization experiences not enough responses were available to make analysis possible).

To be able to say something about the characteristics of the incidents mentioned in both parts of the survey the following steps were followed. First a selection was made of victims mentioning a particular incident in the written questionnaire.⁶ Secondly, when incidents were mentioned and described in the written questionnaire it was checked whether or not the victim (according to the written questionnaire) mentioned being a victim of sexual harassment in the oral interview. In this way information on exhibitionism in the written questionnaire was compared with the answer on the question on exhibitionism from the oral interview (mentioning or not mentioning exhibitionism). Information from the written questionnaire on rape (2), being pinched (4), and being followed (6) was compared with the results on the scale on sexual harassment according to the oral interview (mentioning or not mentioning sexual harassment).⁷

It should be kept in mind that the results should be interpreted with caution because the number of victims on which information was available was quite small (between 1 and 12).

It was not possible to investigate the relationship between the characteristics of the incidents (according to the written questionnaire) and whether or not victimization was mentioned in the oral interview. There was one exception: respondents who described rape as serious, did mention this crime in the oral interview, whereas incidents which were not very serious were not mentioned in the interview but only reported in the written questionnaire (see Table 3).

TABLE 3

Selection of victims of rape according to the written questionnaire who mentioned or did not mention being victimized by sexual harassment in the oral interview (in 1983).

	Seriousness of rape (questionnaire):	
	not very serious	very serious
Answer in interview:		
Did not mention sex. har.	5	1
mentioned sex. har.	—	5
N=	5	6

Fisher's exact test, $p < .01$

Socio-demographic variables and changes in categorization

In this section the relationship between the answers on both instruments and the socio-demographic characteristics of the victims will be examined. Most researchers tend to find relatively strong correlations between victimization and several socio-demographic variables (see for example Hindelang, 1978; Skogan, 1981). In the Dutch victimization survey, sexual harassment and exhibitionism was associated with sex, educational level, age and urbanization: being a woman, young, well educated and living in a large city was related to higher victimization rates than being a man, less educated, old and living in rural settings; income was unrelated to victimization (Junger, 1985).

It turns out that some respondents mentioned victimization in the oral interview but not in the written questionnaire. The opposite occurred as well. The question is whether these changes in answers are related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

The presence of this kind of interaction can be assessed using log-linear analysis (LLA; see Fienberg, 1980). As the name LLA indicates, the frequencies are separated using a parametrization of the linear model, well known from analysis of variance. The method is to see whether some sets of parameters are zero for all cells, indicating that these effects (corresponding with this set of parameters) are not important enough to be included in the model. A chi-square test shows whether a hypothesized model explains the relations found in the data. If the model does, the test values will be non-significant; if the model doesn't, it will be significant. As in analysis of variance, in LLA factors represent relations between two, three or more variables. In the present analyses we are interested in the presence of a three factor interaction.

For example, in the case of sexual harassment we can form a 2 by 2 table for the males and for the females (see Table 4).

TABLE 4

Log-linear models for sexual harassment

Models for sexual harassment	Ratio chi-square	df	p
[I Q] [S Q] [S I]	0,40	1	.53
[I Q] [A Q] [A I]	0,29	1	.59
[I Q] [U Q] [U I]	0,61	1	.43
[I Q] [E Q] [E I]	0,46	1	.50

Models for exhibitionism	Ratio chi-square	df	p
[I Q] [S Q] [S I]	1,4	1	.23
[I Q] [A Q] [A I]	0,12	1	.72
[I Q] [U Q] [U I]	0,68	1	.41
[I Q] [E Q] [E I]	0,002	1	.96

Abbreviations:

S = sex; A = age; U = urbanization level; E = educational level; Q = questionnaire; I = interview.

Codes:

Victimization: (in both instruments): 1 = victim; 2 = not victim

All socio-demographic variables have two categories

Sex: 1: man, 2: women;

age: 1: younger than 30; 2: 30 and older;

urbanization level: 1: communities with less than 100,000 inhabitants, 2: 100,000 inhabitants and more.

Educational level: 1: low (about nine years of formal education); 2: high (more than nine years).

Table 5 shows the number of victims/not a victim according to the interview and the questionnaire for women and men. If the interaction in the 2 by 2 table for the females is equal to that for the males, we do not need a three factor model to describe the relation between sex, victimization in the interview and victimization according to the written questionnaire. LLA permits us to assess if such an interaction is needed to explain the data.

As there are two victimization variables (namely sexual harassment and exhibitionism) and four socio-demographic variables, eight models were tested (Table 4).

The results show that no three-factor terms are needed to produce a model that fits the data ($p > .20$). Therefore it can be concluded that the changes in whether or not respondents are categorized as victims in the

TABLE 5

Prevalence of sexual harassment revealed in the interview and the questionnaire according to sex

	Women		Men		
written questionnaire	oral interview		oral interview		
	no	yes	no	yes	Total
no.	958	50	1061	17	2086
row %	95%	5%	98%	2%	
col. %	88%	21%	96%	44%	
yes	136	184	41	22	383
row %	43%	58%	65%	35%	
col. %	12%	79%	4%	56%	
Total	1094	234	1102	39	2469

oral interview and in the written questionnaire do not occur more often for particular socio-demographic groups. Educational level, age, sex, and urbanization level are not related to the way people change their responses, according to different methods used to interview them.

Conclusion and discussion

The results of two different measurement instruments given to one sample of the population have been compared on prevalence and incidence of victimization, type of incidents mentioned and changes in being categorized as a victim in relation to socio-demographic characteristics. The results show that for exhibitionism, there was no difference between the oral interview and the written questionnaire with regard to the prevalence rates and frequency. With respect to sexual harassment there was a small increase in the prevalence rate and a larger increase in incidence for the written questionnaire as compared with the oral interview.

The results suggest that incidents mentioned in the oral interview are more serious than those mentioned in the written questionnaire (Table 3). Thus the increase in victimization rates is probably a consequence of respondents mentioning more incidents which were, on average, less serious. No certainty can exist as to the causes of the differences which were found. However, the numbers of respondents available for these

analyses were small and caution is necessary in the interpretation of the results.

A possible explanation for this result is given by Schneider (1981). She concluded from a record-check that respondents remember serious facts better than less serious facts. It seems possible that respondents do not mind reporting to an interviewer relatively serious and 'embarrassing' crimes as an answer to a rather general question. When questions become more precise they do remember more – and probably less serious – events.

These results do not support the belief that written questionnaires might lead respondents to mention more embarrassing incidents than they would mention in an oral interview because more privacy is offered in written questionnaires.

Finally some respondents were categorized as victims in the oral interview and not in the written questionnaire or vice versa; these changes in categorization were not found to be related to socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. This suggests that using different types of measurement instruments will not lead to different types of conclusions in terms of the socio-demographic composition of the victim population.

THE VICTIMIZATION SURVEY AND THE LEIDEN STUDY

In this section the written questionnaire for the victimization survey will be compared with a study on sexual harassment that was done in Leiden. I shall first present some results found in the literature, in order to see which hypotheses might be generated as to the results of the analysis.

The relation between sexual harassment and educational level

The relationship between victimization and educational level and/or socio-economic status (SES) has been found in almost every victimization survey. It has been described as a 'peculiar result' which should not be taken for granted (see for example Sparks, 1976, 1981; Skogan, 1981; Van Dijk and Steinmetz, 1984; Gove *et al.*, 1985). The problem is that, according to officially recorded statistics, assaults occur more often in the lower socio-economic strata of society, whereas in victimization studies the relation goes in the opposite direction: respondents from the middle and upper classes have higher victimization rates for assaults.⁸

Skogan (1981) has called the education bias one of the 'major puzzles presented now by the data produced by the National Crime Survey'. He found a similar contradiction between the official data and the victimization surveys in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.

Two explanations have been offered, both of which assume that assaults are more common in the lower classes. The first possibility is that educated persons are 'better' respondents (Sparks, 1981; Skogan, 1981; Gove *et al.*, 1985). Sparks (1981) has described participation in a survey as a 'middle class' game which requires 'a certain amount of verbal fluency and a capacity for abstract conceptualization'. Memory problems might also influence the results in such a way that less educated respondents mention fewer of the incidents that have happened to them.

Another possibility is that there are different interpretations of certain incidents, and selection is related to educational level. It appears that the evaluation of violence is not always the same in different social classes (Sparks, 1976; Skogan, 1981). In the higher socio-economic strata there is less tolerance of violent events. Aggressive behaviour is more likely to be disapproved of and less likely to be acceptable than in the working classes. The idea is that this results in a differential labelling of incidents: respondents with a high SES will be inclined to define some violent incidents as 'crimes', and will mention them in surveys, whereas respondents with a low SES will not define such events as crimes and accordingly will not mention them in surveys. Several researchers have underscored the importance of the 'labelling process' in the measurement of victimization (see also Wolfgang and Singer, 1978; Shotland and Goodstein, 1983; Block and Block, 1984; Ruback *et al.*, 1984; Gove *et al.*, 1985). Several factors seem to influence this labelling process. According to Ruback *et al.* (1984) elements leading to ambiguity are the following:

- crimes that are discovered after they occurred are more ambiguous than crimes in which the victim is involved at the moment they happen.
- incidents occurring in familiar places are more ambiguous than those occurring in unfamiliar places.
- events involving acquaintances also lead to more ambiguity than those in which strangers are involved (Ruback *et al.*, 1984). Block and Block (1984) also mention the seriousness of a crime, and the extent to which the victim participates. More serious crimes are more likely to be seen as a 'crime': 'events in which the victim participated, whether actually provoking the offense, resisting an attempt, or simply being a friend of a family member, are less likely to be defined as a crime' (Block and Block, 1984).

Most of the elements mentioned above seem to make both assaults and sexual harassment particularly ambiguous crimes (as compared with property crimes): the offender is relatively often known to the victim, so a relationship exists between them (for example: employer and employee, (ex)partners, neighbors); the incidents do happen rather often in familiar places; they often are not very serious (in terms of injury and the amount of force which was used). Ruback *et al.* (1984) summarize the labelling problem as follows: 'Some crimes are inherently more ambiguous than

others. For example, determining whether or not an incident is a rape may be different when it occurs in the context of a dating relationship – particularly if the woman uses only a verbal protest, if she protests late in the course of sexual activity, and if the man applies minimal force (Shotland and Goodstein, 1983). One might speculate that victims who encounter or expect such judgments from others would tend not to label the event 'rape'. Sexual harassment, being usually defined as a rather broad concept, might be expected to lead to relatively large labelling problems, which could result in a strong relation with the educational level.

The Leiden study

The sample of the population of the Leiden study differs in several aspects from the victimization survey. Only women of 16 to 55 years old were interviewed in one middle sized city of approximately 100,000 inhabitants in the Leiden study, whereas in the victimization survey, the respondents formed a representative sample of the population of the Netherlands, men and women were interviewed and there was no upper age limit. In the Leiden study, information was gathered by means of a structured interview. The non-response rate was 30%, with 267 women completing the questionnaire. A broad definition of sexual harassment was used in the Leiden study, as in the written questionnaire of the victimization survey: 'sexual harassment is a violation of the physical integrity and/or autonomy which is related to the primary and/or the sexual characteristics of persons' (Ensink and Albach, 1983).

The questionnaire used in the Leiden study was rather different from the questionnaire and the interview schedule used in the victimization survey. In total 44 questions were asked about victimization through sexual harassment. The questions were divided into five sets according to the relation of the victim with the offender. The offender could be a family member, an (ex)partner, an authority figure (employers, civil servants, etc.), a known man or an unknown man.⁹ These five sets of questions were introduced by 17 examples of what the researchers meant by sexual harassment. Each sample was followed by several questions about how the women evaluated the incidents mentioned in the example. Thus, an extended 'warming up' phase preceded the victimization questions. In the Leiden study several items were similar to the variables in the victimization survey: 14 items could be assembled into categories resembling the variables of the survey. In total 44 items were available. The overall prevalence rate was 90%, but when the 14 items were used this rate dropped to 83.3%¹⁰ (see also Junger, 1985¹¹).

To enable a comparison between the victim survey and the Leiden study a selection was made from the total sample of the victimization

survey: only women between 16 to 55, living in the larger cities of the country (100,000 inhabitants and more) were selected. As a result 276 respondents remained and will be analysed in this section. Also for the sake of comparison the answers from the Leiden study were selected and grouped as to make the range of behaviour they cover as far as possible identical to the questions asked in the written questionnaire in the victim survey (see Appendix I for the list of items from the Leiden study and grouped according to the categorization of the victim survey).

Table 6 gives an overview of the prevalence of the variables included in the comparison.

TABLE 6

Prevalence (ever) of sexual harassment according to the Leiden study and the victimization survey (additional questionnaire (percentages))

	Leiden study	written questionnaire
Exhibitionism	36	29
Sexual remarks	51	50
Following	44	19
Rape	8	15
Undressing	5	6
Pinching	61	31
Total	83	64
N=	276	270

Some prevalence rates are almost identical in the two studies: sexual remarks (Leiden: 51%; victimization survey: 50%) and undressing (Leiden: 5%; victimization survey: 6%). Rape has a higher rate in the victimization survey (15%) than in the Leiden study (8%). Three types of sexual harassment are mentioned more often in the Leiden data: exhibitionism (Leiden: 36%; victimization survey: 29%); following (Leiden: 44%; victimization survey: 19%); and pinching (Leiden: 61%; victimization survey: 31%). The overall rate is 19% higher in the Leiden study (Leiden study: 83%; victimization study: 64%).

The differences which are found seem mainly to be influenced by the number and the specificity of the questions asked for each particular type of incident (for a discussion of these factors see also Schneider, 1981; Kalton and Schuman, 1982). In the Leiden study five questions were asked about 'pinching'. For 'following' an example was presented before asking the question. On these incidents the Leiden rates are much higher. Cowan et al. (1978) has also found that asking attitude questions before the

victimization items produces higher victimization rates. In the victimization survey there was an explicit question about rape which was not the case in the Leiden study. This could explain the higher rate for rape in the victimization survey. These results underscore the importance of asking direct questions. The American national criminal victimization survey, for example, asks for information about rape or attempted rape only when assault was previously mentioned by the respondent. The prevalence rates are considerably lower than in the questionnaire of the Dutch victimization survey or the Leiden study: 0.6% for attempted rape and 0.3% for rape (U.S. Department of Justice, 1986).

Victimization and educational level

As was expected, a relation between victimization and educational level was found in the victimization survey. Surprisingly this relation was not found in the Leiden study (see Table 7). The same analyses were also performed for the separate type of incidents (prevalence in the last year, following, undressing, rape, exhibitionism, sexual remarks, pinching). In the Leiden study no statistically significant relation was found ($p < .05$), whereas in the victimization survey they all reached statistical significance, except for the variable 'undressing'.¹²

TABLE 7

Victimization by sexual harassment (ever) and educational level according to the Leiden study and the victimization survey (written questionnaire, percentages)

Educational level	Leiden		Written Questionnaire	
	% victims	N	% victims	N
low	82.2	145	41.3	104
medium	85.0	60	72.1	86
high	83.1	71	89.2	74
total	83.3	276	64.8	264

Chi-square = 0.16; df = 2; $p = .92$ chi-square = 46.4; df = 2; $p < .001$

DISCUSSION

The reader should be warned that the studies used in the present analyses were not – as often is the case – designed to answer questions of a methodological nature. However – from the point of view of the

researcher interested in these problems – a comparison seemed to be potentially fruitful and so was tried. Our opinion is that the results are interesting but it is obvious that it would have been preferable if a truly methodological study had been conducted in which it would have been possible to control for the effect of oral versus written questionnaires, and for the precise wording of the questions. Researchers working on methodological questions will, alas, probably often be in the situation that comparison of data is difficult and only indirect evidence is available. At the same time it might seem worth trying to find out what conclusions might, carefully, be drawn. As a result some hypotheses will be formulated which seem to be justified in the light of previous research (as presented above).

In section 2 it was found that the written questionnaire produced slightly higher prevalence rates and much higher incidence rates. In contradiction with what might have been expected the results suggest that more but less serious incidents were mentioned in the written questionnaire in comparison with the oral interview. The relationship between mentioning or not mentioning sexual harassment in both parts of the survey appeared to be unrelated to socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

An explanation for these results might be that the wording of the questions (asking more specific questions) resulted in higher frequency rates, while the additional incidents were probably less serious.

In section 3 the relation between victimization and educational level was examined. In the victimization survey a positive relation was found. The absence of such a relationship in the Leiden study seems to be in contradiction with the results of most of the victimization studies (see also section 1). Skogan said about the relation 'if it is a methodological artefact rather than a reflexion of the 'true' assault rate, it is an extremely robust one' (Skogan, 1981). It appears, if we consider the present analyses, that this relation is not as inevitable as researchers seem to think. How can we explain this absence of a relation between victimization and educational level? The following explanation might be offered. As we saw in the introduction, when victims are confronted with a particular incident, a labelling process is usually started. A number of factors (seriousness of the incident, relation to the offender, and so forth) have been distinguished which influence the outcome of this definition process. Educational level probably plays a role in the evaluation of aggressive behaviour. The present analyses suggest that in the Leiden study the researchers measuring sexual harassment were less dependent on differences in the labelling process related to educational level. It also appears that it might be possible to improve the measurement of personal crimes within the framework of victimization surveys.

Several elements in the Leiden study, or the combination of them, could be responsible for this relative independence from any labelling process:

- The use of examples and of attitude questions preceding the questions about victimization is one of these elements. Through these techniques, the respondents are instructed what is relevant information for the researchers. Thus ambiguity of many incidents, particularly possibly the less serious ones, is reduced. Cowan et al. (1978) found that attitude questions increased victimization rates. They found that this resulted from an increase in respondents reporting less serious crimes. This is in accordance with the fact that less serious crimes are more ambiguous, which will probably result in a larger bias related to educational level.
- In the Leiden study the victimization questions were divided into five sets according to the relationship to the offender. As we saw in the introduction, the relation victim-offender is an important factor influencing the definitional process.
- A large number of questions were asked in the Leiden study. Victimization through sexual harassment or other personal crimes refers to a huge variety of events. Asking a few comprehensive questions might not be the best way to measure this whole range of events. The analyses in this article suggest that asking many and more specific questions might be a better method to record more information without (or with less) under-reporting among respondents with a relatively low educational level. In another field of criminology, much research has been done to develop an adequate self-report delinquency instrument. The problems facing delinquency researchers are similar: bringing the relations found in self-report studies between socio-demographic variables, like SES, and delinquent behaviour in accordance with the relations found in official data. In the first self-report studies a relatively small amount of questions was included (less than ten). In two recent studies more than 40 questions have been used (see Hindelang et al., 1981; Elliott and Ageton, 1981). Although some measurement problems remain, these new delinquency scales represent an important improvement in comparison with the older scales.
- Finally, some incidents are difficult to categorize when questions are formulated in terms of completed crimes. When 'an employer started to undress' should respondents mention this as an attempt to rape or to 'undress'? Many attempted crimes are difficult to categorize in the usual categories of the victimization surveys. It appears that it would be useful to develop methods to record this kind of event in order to improve measurement. The effects of several of the elements mentioned above, and eventually their combination, seem to reduce the education bias.

We suggest that future research on the methodology of victimization of personal crimes studies these effects with more care. Our analysis show that at least a reduction of the education-bias is possible in victimization surveys.

FOOTNOTES

1. I would like to thank Jan J.M. van Dijk, Richard L. Block and Wesley G. Skogan and Peter van der Heijden for their comments on previous drafts, Bernadine Ensink and Francine Albach for kindly providing their data, Frans Schachtschabel and Mariska Brouwers for their help with translating.
2. For more information on this Leiden study see Ensink and Albach (1983); and Junger (1985, 1987).
3. *Prevalence*: 'ever' and 'last year' for the oral interview and the written questionnaire; *incidence* during the last year for both instruments.
4. *Prevalence*: 'ever' and 'last year' for the oral interview and two scales for 'ever' and 'last year' (with and without following) for the written questionnaire; *incidence* during the last year: one scale for the oral interview and two scales (with and without following) for the written questionnaire.
5. T-value = -0.039; d.f. = 2465; p = .70.
6. This was done for the 1983 scales only because only in that case was additional information requested.
7. In doing this it was assumed that if the respondent mentioned being a victim of (for example) rape in 1983 in the written questionnaire and also mentioned an incident as sexual harassment during the oral interview (inside or outside the home), the respondent had the same incident in mind when answering questions in both instruments. Of course no certainty can be obtained on this point. More certainty could be obtained if respondents were selected who mentioned only one incident. Because of the small number of respondents this was impossible.
8. The presence of a measurement bias in relation to educational level has also been discussed in a rather different context, for example in research of prejudice (see Jackman, 1973).
9. Incidents with family members occurring when the woman was 18 years or older were added to the category 'known man'.
10. Variables that could not be used in the comparison included incidents that were probably attempts like: 'man was using a knife', and 'using moral pressure' or 'offering to help and expecting something in return'.
11. For more information about the construction of the different scales, interested readers are invited to contact the author.
12. Although Leiden has a large university the proportion of higher educated women is slightly less (26%) than in the survey (28%). Therefore this element could not have influenced the results.

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APPENDIX I:

Comparison with the Leiden study: categories of the victimization survey and the items of the Leiden study.

1. Sexual remarks and gestures (victimization survey) in the Leiden study:
 - a man made obscene gestures
 - a man made sexual remarks
 - he made sexual remarks
 - he made sexual allusions
2. Exhibitionism
 - A man showed his genitals.

3. Following
 - I was followed by a man.
4. Rape
 - pulled from a moped
 - my employer undressed himself
 - forced me to sexual actions
5. Pawing
 - a man pawed me
 - a known man harassed me - he harassed me sexual harassment

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