

# OFFICE OF JUSTICE SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

CRIME AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN NEW YORK STATE:  
A Survey of Public Opinion

Volume I: Crime, Neighborhood Safety and Responses to Crime

115585

DIVISION OF  
CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE  
SERVICES



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NEW YORK STATE  
MARIO M. CUOMO, GOVERNOR

# **CRIME AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN NEW YORK STATE: A Survey of Public Opinion**

## **Volume I: Crime, Neighborhood Safety and Responses to Crime**

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*December 1988*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This is the first time a public opinion survey has been undertaken by a State criminal justice agency. While the Division of Criminal Justice Services was responsible for the preparation of the survey instrument and the data analysis, Fact Finders, Inc. adapted the instrument for use in a telephone survey and conducted the actual survey. The technical expertise provided by Fact Finders, Inc., a survey research firm with experience in telephone surveys, helped to ensure the success of our first public opinion survey.

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# CONTENTS

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	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME</b>	<b>3</b>
	Perceptions of State and Neighborhood Crime	4
	Sources of Information About Crime	5
	Neighborhood Victimizations and Perceptions of Crime	6
	Summary	8
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>PERCEPTIONS OF NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY</b>	<b>9</b>
	How Safe Did People Feel in Their Neighborhoods?	10
	Who Felt the Least Safe in Their Neighborhoods?	11
	Where Did People Who Felt the Least Safe Live?	12
	Neighborhood Victimizations and Perceptions of Neighborhood Safety	16
	Seriousness of Neighborhood Crime and Perceptions of Neighborhood Safety	18
	Perceptions of Law Enforcement and Neighborhood Safety	20
	Summary	21
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>RESPONSES TO CRIME</b>	<b>23</b>
	Securing Property and Self-Protection	25
	Neighborhood Crime Prevention	28
	Summary	30
	<b>NOTES</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>RESEARCH METHODS</b>	<b>A-1</b>
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>TABLES</b>	<b>B-1</b>

# INTRODUCTION

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Over the past decade numerous public opinion surveys have examined perceptions and attitudes toward crime and the criminal justice system. These surveys have consistently found that crime was believed to be among one of the most important problems facing our nation.<sup>1</sup>

While most public opinion surveys do not probe the underlying assumptions that form these perceptions and attitudes, they provide important indicators of public concern or satisfaction with existing policies and practices. As a result, the information gleaned from these surveys has become an important source of information for policy-makers, practitioners, and academics in the field of criminal justice.

Given the important role that public opinion should play in the development of policies and programs, New York State undertook its first public opinion survey in the area of criminal justice. During October and November of 1987, 1,000 people randomly selected from throughout the State participated in a telephone survey which examined their perceptions and attitudes toward crime, the criminal justice system, and other criminal justice issues. This report is the first volume in a series of publications that present the findings from this survey.

Volume I focuses on perceptions of crime and neighborhood safety and on responses to crime. Whether people believed that crime had decreased, increased, or stayed the same during the year prior to the survey is examined in Chapter 1. This chapter also explores where people get most of their information about crime and the criminal justice system and whether or not being a victim of crime was related to people's perceptions of changes in the level of criminal activity. Chapter 2 explores how safe people felt in their neighborhoods and how perceptions of neighborhood safety were related to demographic characteristics, the level of urbanization, neighborhood environment, victimization, and satisfaction with local law enforcement. Chapter 3 examines the types of measures people took to protect their property and persons during the year prior to the survey and whether or not they were aware of neighborhood crime prevention programs. Research methods are presented in Appendix A.

The remaining volumes of this report explore the public's perceptions and attitudes toward the criminal justice system (i.e., law enforcement, the courts, and the State's prison system) and juvenile justice. Awareness of child abuse and abuse of the elderly in the home is also examined.

**Chapter 1**

**PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME**

## PERCEPTIONS OF STATE AND NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME

While most people in New York State believed that crime had increased in the State during the twelve months preceding the survey, the majority believed that there had been no change in the number of crimes committed in their own neighborhoods.

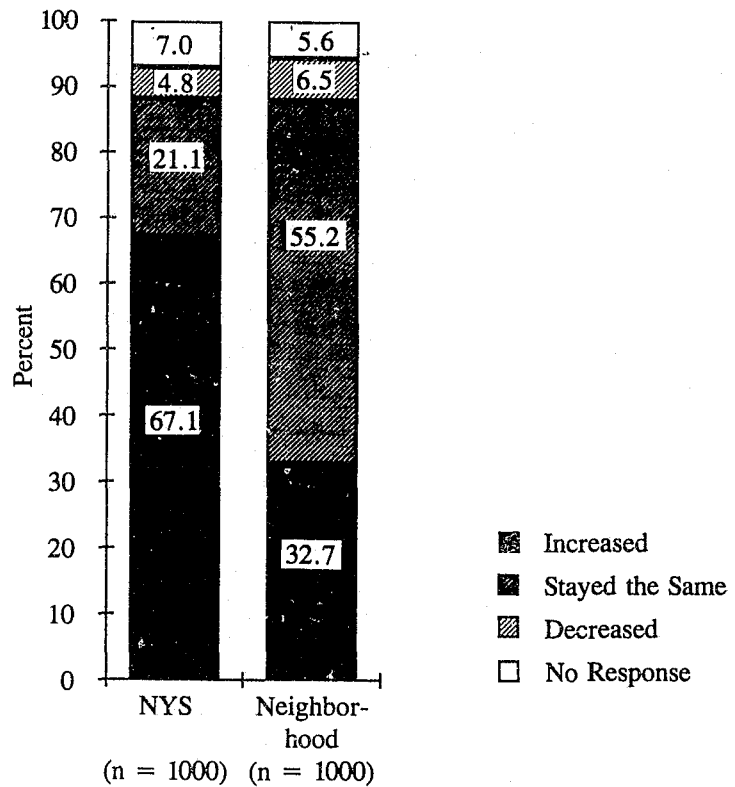
- Two-thirds, 67.1 percent, of the respondents believed that crime had increased statewide, while over one-half, 55.2 percent, believed that the number of crimes committed in their own neighborhoods had stayed the same.

- Only a few of the respondents thought that crime had decreased either statewide (4.8 percent) or in their own neighborhoods (6.5 percent).

While it was not possible to determine how accurate respondents' information was regarding changes in the number of crimes committed in their own neighborhoods, those who thought that the number of crimes committed in New York State had increased were correct. Crime has been increasing slightly statewide since 1985. After dropping steadily from 1982 through 1984, the number of crimes known to the police rose 0.4 percent in 1985, 3.1 percent in 1986, and 3.6 percent in 1987.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to note that surveys conducted nationwide have found that even during years when crime was decreasing, a substantial proportion of people continued to believe that crime nationwide had increased.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, research has also found that people, including those who live in high crime areas, generally believe the problem of crime is worse outside of their own neighborhoods.<sup>4</sup>

“During the past year, do you think the number of crimes committed has decreased, stayed the same, or increased in the State? ...in your neighborhood?”



Because research suggests that perceptions of crime may be shaped in part by people's sources of information about crime and their personal knowledge and experiences,<sup>5</sup> this survey inquired about people's primary sources of information about crime and the criminal justice system. The relationship of victimization to perceptions of neighborhood and statewide crime was also examined.

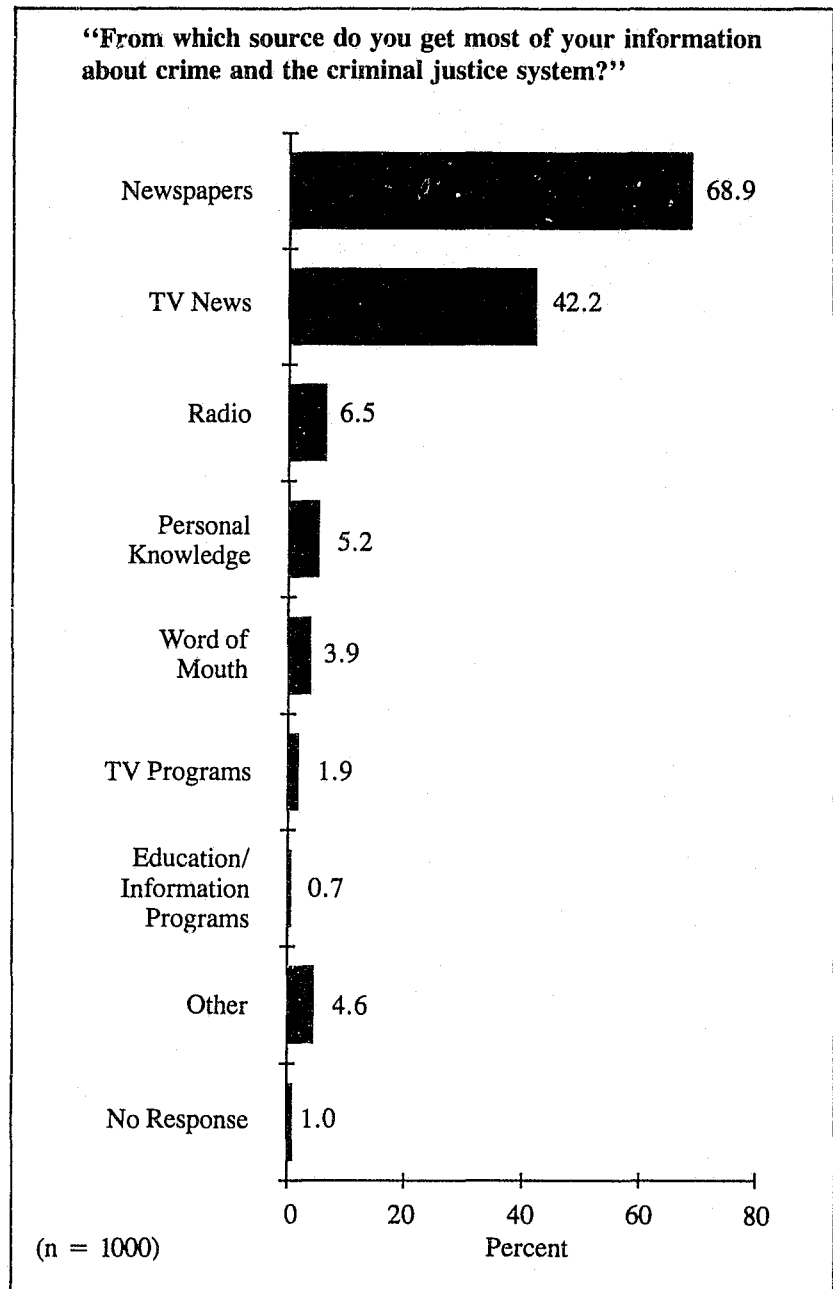
## SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT CRIME

New York State residents relied primarily on newspapers and television news programs for their information about crime and the criminal justice system.

*In an open-ended question, survey respondents were asked from which source they obtained most of their information about crime and the criminal justice system. Some respondents gave more than one source.*

• Almost all of the respondents, 97.0 percent, acquired most of their information through newspapers and/or television news programs. Over two-thirds, 68.9 percent, received much of this information from the newspapers, with a somewhat smaller proportion, 42.2 percent, reporting that TV news was an important information source.

The news media's ability to influence public perceptions by the intensity of its coverage of crime is well documented.<sup>6</sup> Understandably, the media tend to focus on the more sensational or violent crimes which occur infrequently in most neighborhoods. As a result, people may have somewhat distorted and exaggerated perceptions of the frequency and seriousness of crimes, particularly those committed outside their neighborhoods. Past studies suggest that the print and electronic media, not victimization or fear of victimization, form the public's beliefs about the larger crime problem (i.e., nationwide or statewide).





## NEIGHBORHOOD VICTIMIZATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME

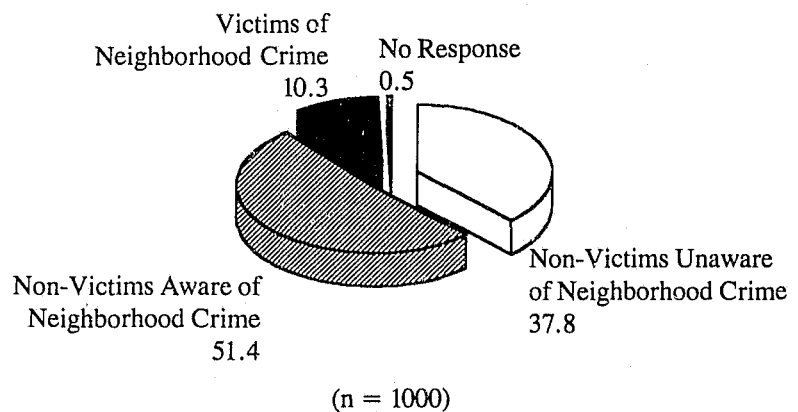
One out of every ten households in the State had at least one household member who had been the the victim of a crime committed in his or her neighborhood during the year prior to the survey.

Survey respondents were asked if they or members of their households had been the victims of crime committed in their neighborhoods during the twelve months prior to the survey. In order to determine if the awareness of crime, by itself, was associated with perceptions of neighborhood crime, respondents were also asked if they knew of any crimes that had been committed in their neighborhoods during this same period.

For the purpose of this report, the term "victim" refers to survey respondents who were the victims of neighborhood crime or who resided in households where at least one member had been the victim of a neighborhood crime.

● One-tenth, 10.3 percent, of the respondents reported that at least one household member had been the victim of a neighborhood crime. One-half, 51.4 percent, did not report any neighborhood victimizations of household members but were aware of crimes committed in their neighborhoods. Finally, 37.8 percent did not report any neighborhood victimizations of household members nor were they aware of any neighborhood crime.

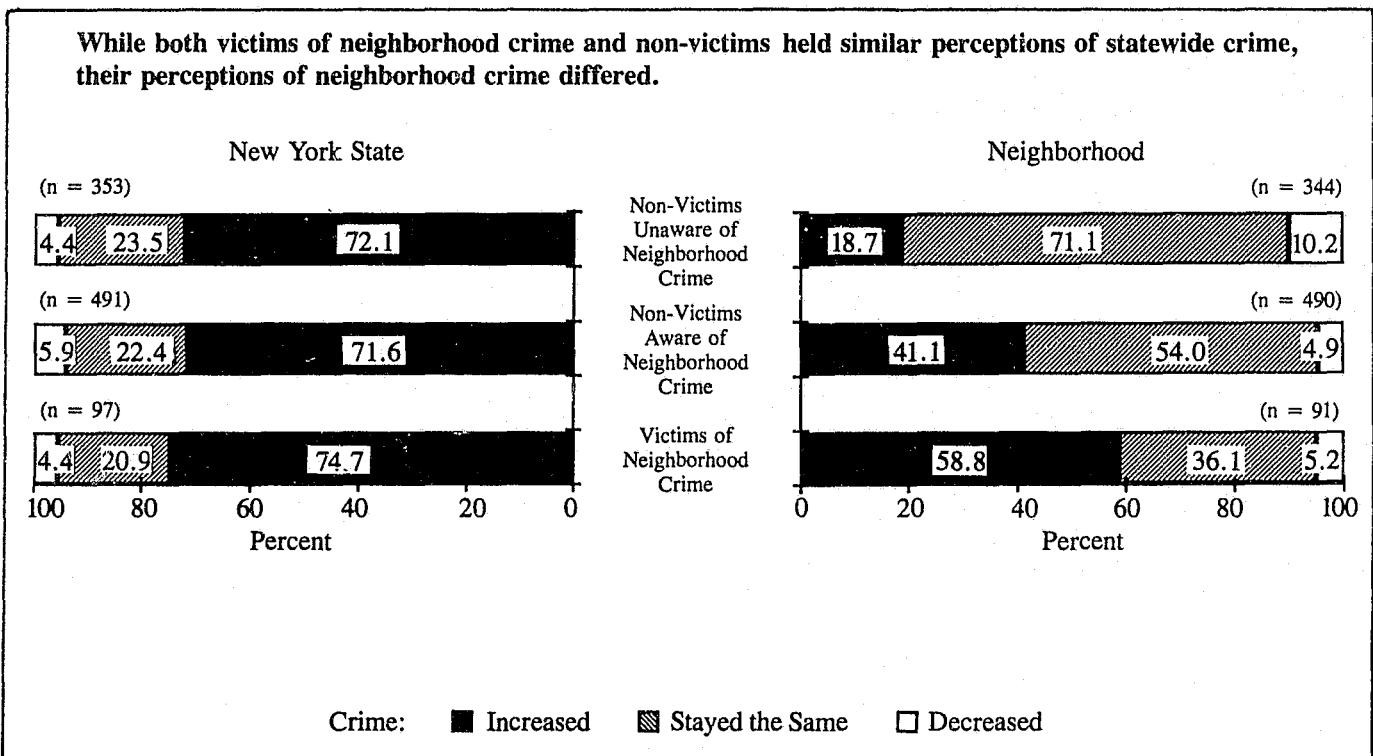
“During the past year, have you or any member of your household been the victim of a crime committed in your neighborhood? If not, have you seen, read, or heard of any crimes being committed in your neighborhood during this same period?”



**NEIGHBORHOOD VICTIMIZATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME - *continued***

**Victimization was related to perceptions of neighborhood crime but not to perceptions of statewide crime.**

- Roughly three-quarters of both victims and non-victims believed that crime had increased in New York State (74.7 percent of victims and 71.8 percent of *all* non-victims).
- Victims of neighborhood crime were more likely than non-victims to believe that crime had increased in their neighborhoods (58.8 percent of victims versus 31.8 of *all* non-victims).
- Non-victims who were aware of neighborhood crime were more likely to believe that neighborhood crime had increased than non-victims who were not aware of any neighborhood crime (41.1 percent versus 18.7 percent, respectively).



## SUMMARY

---

New York State residents were much more likely to believe that crime had increased statewide rather than in their neighborhoods during the twelve months preceding the survey. This finding is not unusual. Research has found that people generally believe the problem of crime is worse elsewhere.

Almost all of the respondents, 97.0 percent, reported that their primary source of information about crime and the criminal justice system was the news media, i.e., television news programs and/or newspapers. Studies suggest that the print and electronic media, not victimization or fear of victimization, form the public's beliefs about the larger crime problem (i.e., nationwide or statewide).

While victimization was not related to perceptions of statewide crime, it was related to perceptions of neighborhood crime. Victims of crimes committed in their own neighborhoods were more likely than non-victims to believe that neighborhood crime had increased. Furthermore, non-victims who were aware of crime committed in their neighborhoods were more likely than non-victims who were unaware to believe that neighborhood crime had increased.

**Chapter 2**

**PERCEPTIONS OF NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY**

## HOW SAFE DID PEOPLE FEEL IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS?

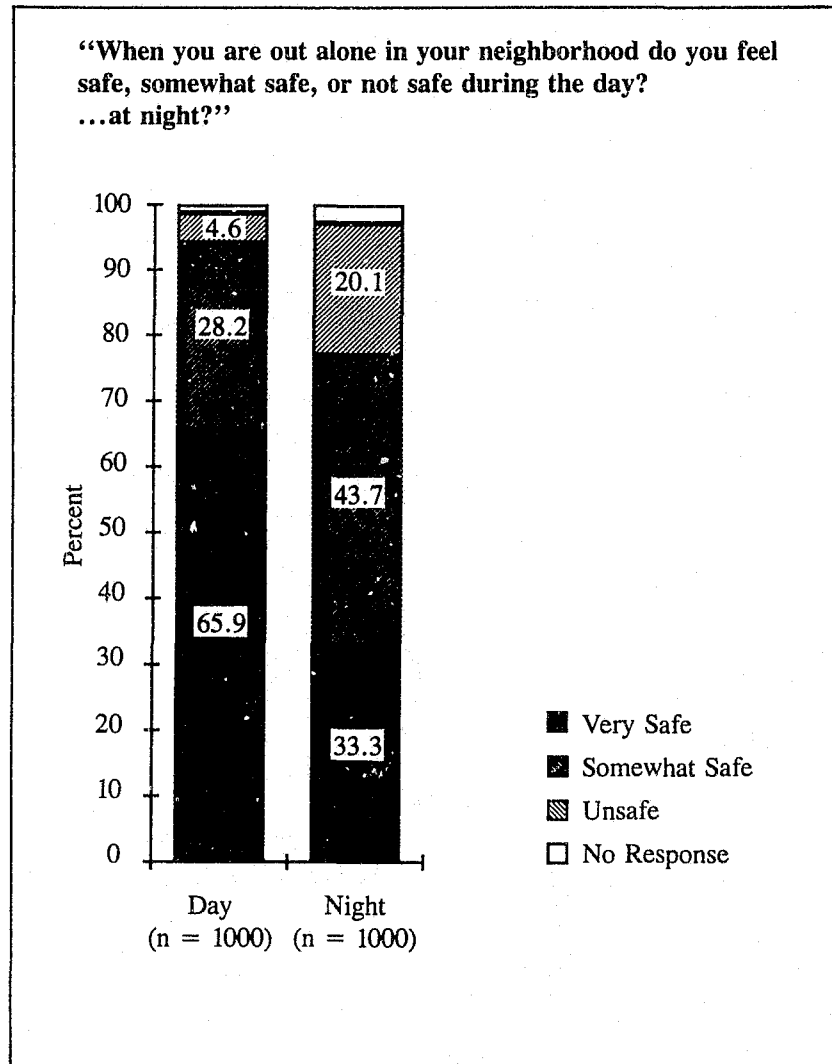
The vast majority of people felt relatively safe out alone in their neighborhoods both during the day and at night. Those who did not feel safe were more likely to feel unsafe at night.

- Almost two-thirds, 65.9 percent, of the respondents felt "very safe" out alone in their neighborhoods during the day, and 28.2 percent felt "somewhat safe." Only 4.6 percent of the respondents reported that they felt "unsafe."

- One-third, 33.3 percent, felt "very safe" out alone in their neighborhoods at night and 43.7 percent felt "somewhat safe," while 20.1 percent reported feeling "unsafe."

New York State residents did not appear to feel any less safe in their neighborhoods than people nationwide. In 1986, the Media General/Associated Press Poll also found that 20 percent of the people nationwide felt unsafe out alone at night on the streets where they lived.<sup>7</sup>

The remainder of this chapter examines how respondents' feelings of safety out alone at night in their neighborhoods was related to demographic characteristics, urbanization, the neighborhood environment, and victimization, along with perceptions of the seriousness of neighborhood crime and the performance of local law enforcement.



**WHO FELT THE LEAST SAFE IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS?**

Demographic characteristics were associated with how safe people felt out alone at night in their neighborhoods.

- Females felt less safe than males. One-half, 49.0 percent, of the males felt "very safe," but less than one-quarter (22.2 percent) of the females felt as safe. One-quarter (25.6 percent) of the females reported feeling "unsafe," but only 14.8 percent of the males felt "unsafe."

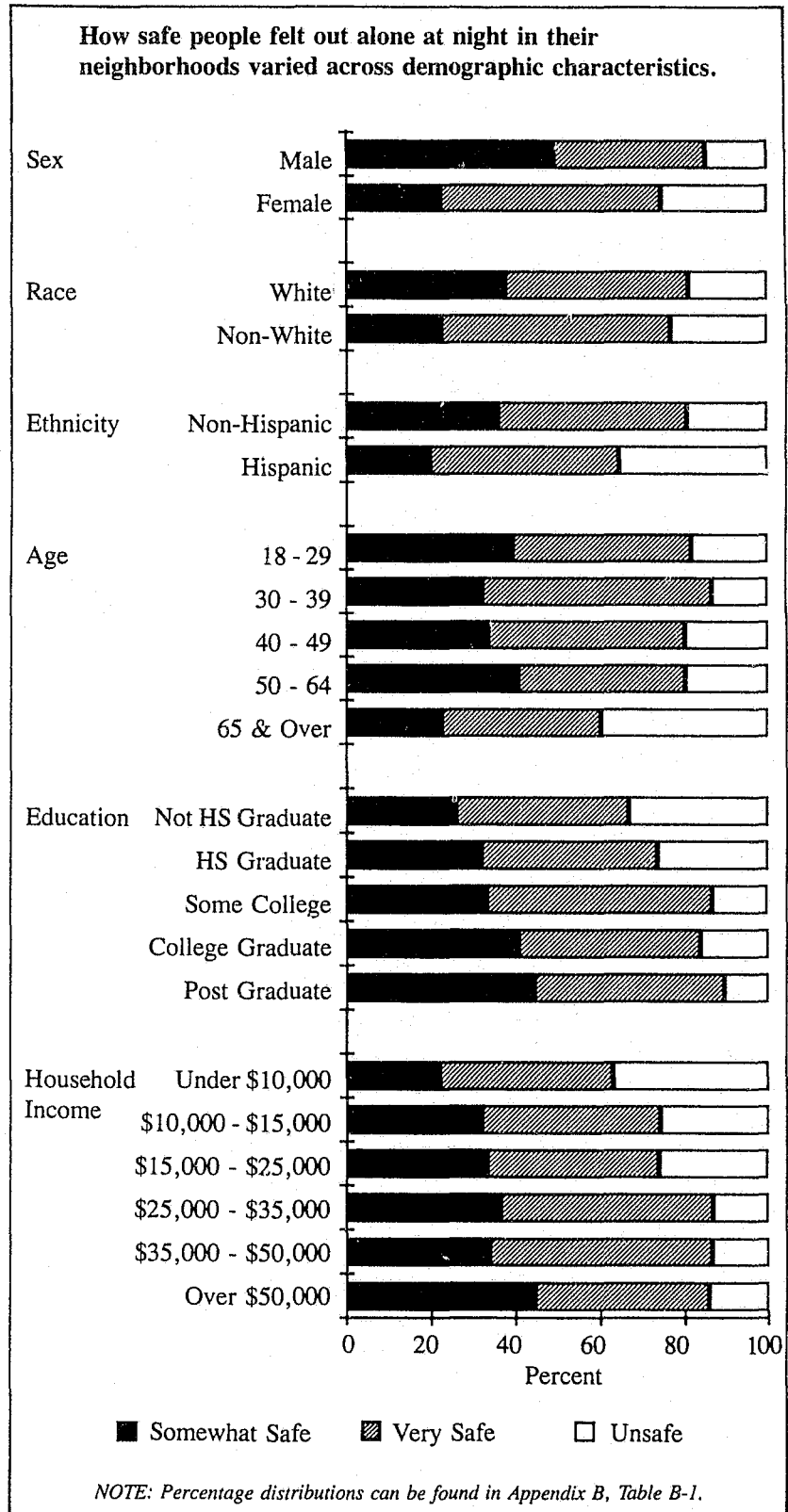
- While whites were more likely than non-whites to feel "very safe" (37.8 percent and 22.4 percent, respectively), roughly one-fifth of both whites and non-whites felt "unsafe" out alone at night.

- Over one-third, 35.4 percent, of the Hispanics felt "unsafe," while only one-fifth, 19.3 percent, of the non-Hispanics expressed a similar level of fear.

- Respondents who were 65 years of age or older were more likely to feel "unsafe" (39.9 percent) than respondents in other age groups (from 13.4 percent for those aged 30-39 to 20.0 percent for those aged 40-49).

- Respondents with a high school education or less were more likely to feel "unsafe" than those with at least some college education. For example, one-quarter (26.6 percent) of those with a high school diploma felt "unsafe," while only 13.3 percent of those with some college education felt "unsafe."

- Respondents with incomes above \$25,000 were less likely to have felt "unsafe" than those with incomes below this amount. For instance, 37.0 percent of those with incomes under \$10,000 reported feeling "unsafe," while only 14.3 percent of those with incomes over \$50,000 expressed a similar degree of fear.



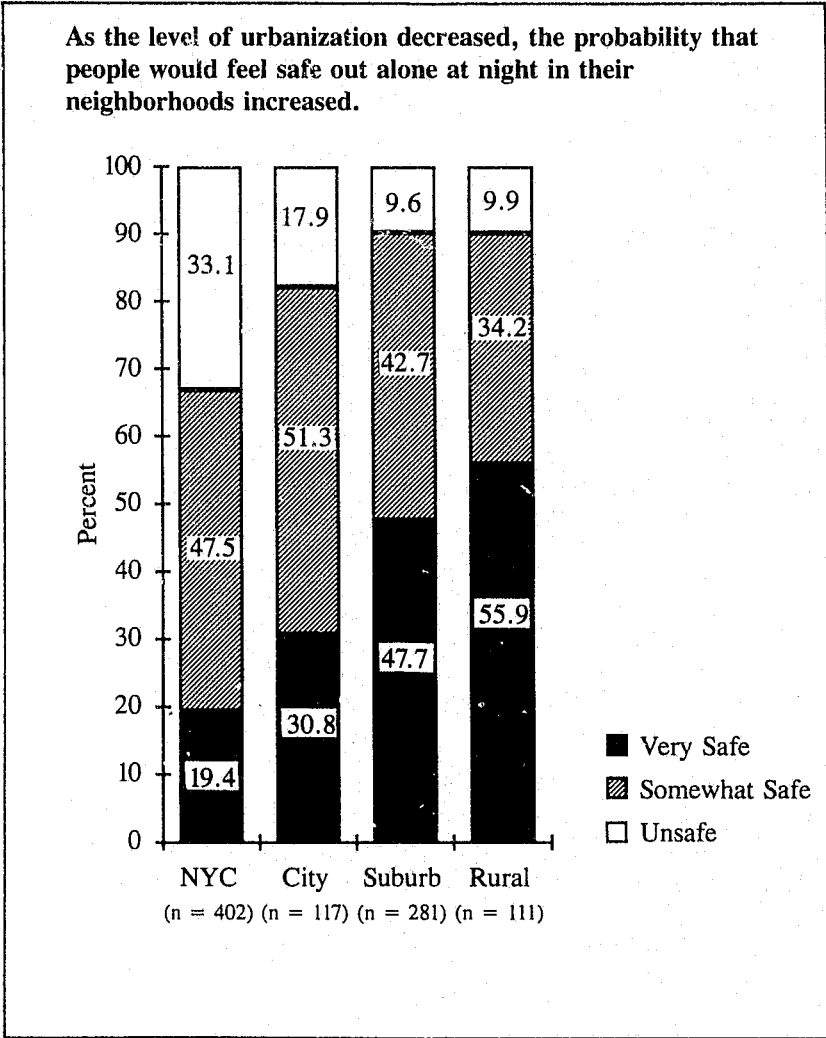
**WHERE DID PEOPLE WHO FELT THE LEAST SAFE LIVE?**

People who lived in New York City felt less safe out alone at night in their neighborhoods than those who resided elsewhere in the State.

Respondents were asked if they lived in a city, suburban or rural area. For the purpose of this analysis respondents were grouped into four categories: New York City (all respondents who lived in the five boroughs of the City) and city, suburban or rural areas (all respondents who lived outside New York City).

- While 33.1 percent of the New York City respondents felt "unsafe" out alone in their neighborhoods at night, only 12.0 percent of the non-New York City residents reported feeling "unsafe."
- As the level of urbanization reported by respondents who lived outside New York City decreased, the proportion of those who felt "very safe" increased. Only 30.8 percent of the respondents who reported living in cities felt "very safe," while 47.7 percent of those who lived in the suburbs and 55.9 percent of those who lived in rural areas felt "very safe."

The disparity in perceptions of neighborhood safety between New York City respondents and respondents who lived elsewhere in the State was not unexpected given the City's unique demographic make-up and its high crime rate. In 1987 there were 90.3 crimes in New York City per 1,000 residents, while the crime rate for the remainder of the State was 37.9.<sup>8</sup> The proportion of non-New York City respondents who felt unsafe, 12.0 percent, was less than that reported in a 1986 survey conducted in Ohio -- a state with demographic characteristics similar to upstate New York -- which found that only 16 percent of Ohioans felt unsafe out alone in their neighborhoods at night.<sup>9</sup>



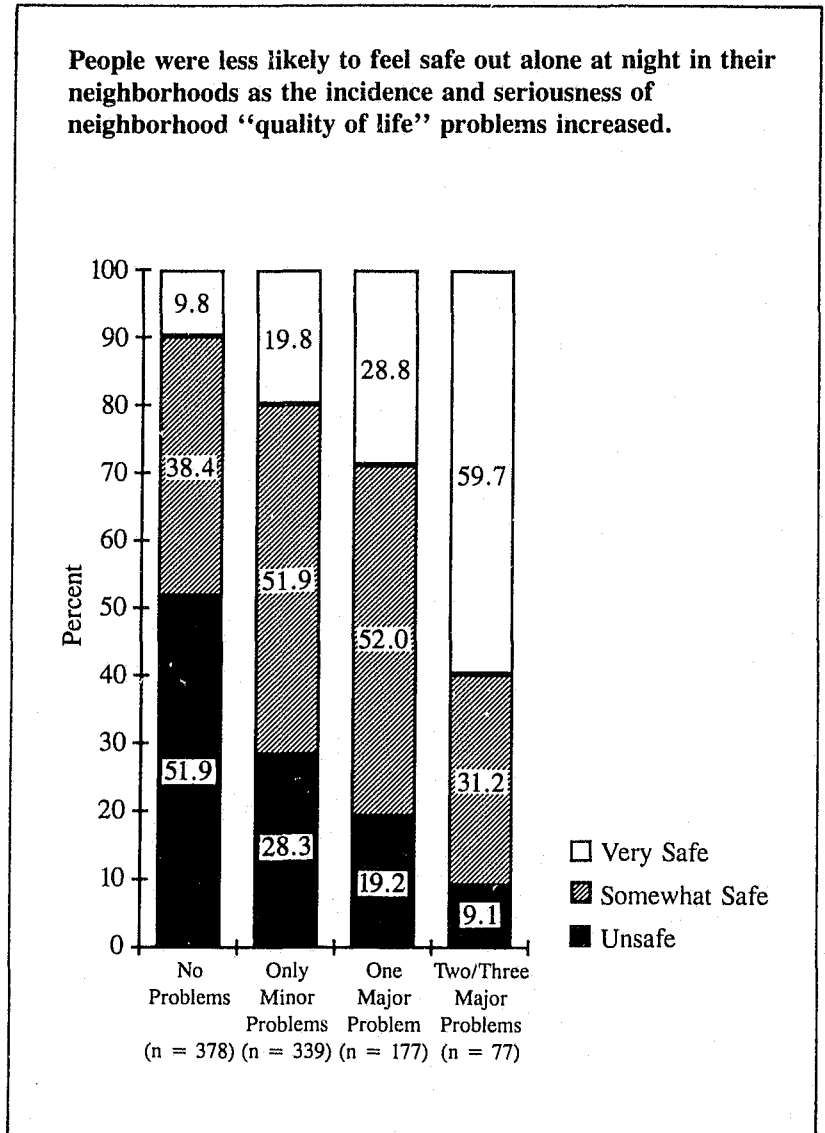
WHERE DID PEOPLE WHO FELT THE LEAST SAFE LIVE? - continued

The likelihood that people felt "unsafe" out alone in their neighborhoods at night increased as neighborhood "quality of life" declined.

The measurement of the quality of neighborhood environments was based on respondents' perceptions of the incidence and seriousness of three problems: groups of youth hanging out on the streets, deteriorating houses or buildings, and homeless people wandering the streets. These problems acted as environmental cues or indicators of neighborhood "quality of life."

- Only 9.8 percent of those living in neighborhoods with no problems felt "unsafe," while 59.7 percent of those living in neighborhoods with two or three major problems felt "unsafe."

The incidence and seriousness of neighborhood "quality of life" problems appeared to be reliable indicators of the degree to which respondents were likely to feel unsafe out alone in their neighborhoods at night. As the perceived quality of the environment decreased, the proportion of respondents who felt unsafe increased.



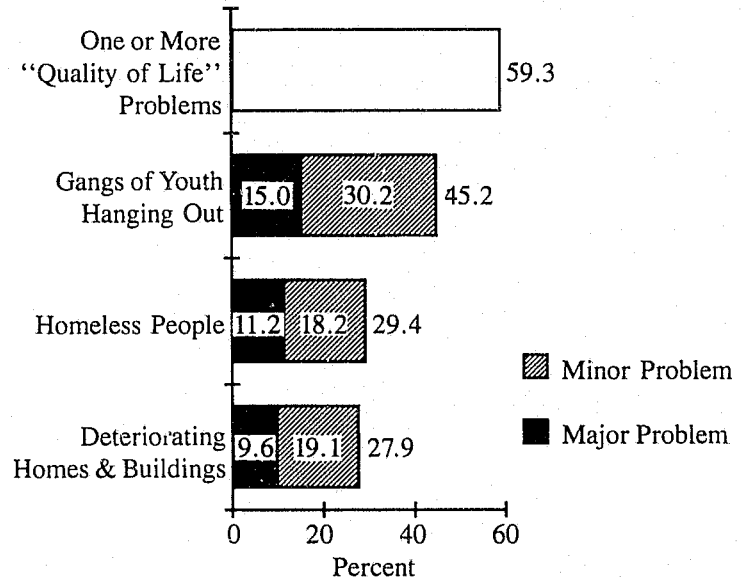


WHERE DID PEOPLE WHO FELT THE LEAST SAFE LIVE? - continued

Three-fifths, 59.3 percent, of New York State residents have at least one neighborhood "quality of life" problem.

● Altogether, 59.3 percent of the respondents reported at least one neighborhood "quality of life" problem. Almost one-half, 45.2 percent, of the respondents reported groups of youth hanging out on the street were a problem. Fewer respondents reported that homeless people wandering the street were a problem or that deteriorating buildings or homes were problems (29.4 percent and 27.9 percent, respectively).

Groups of youth hanging out on the streets was a neighborhood "quality of life" problem for almost one-half of the people across the State.



NOTE: Percentages sum to more than 59.3 percent because some respondents reported more than one "quality of life" problem.

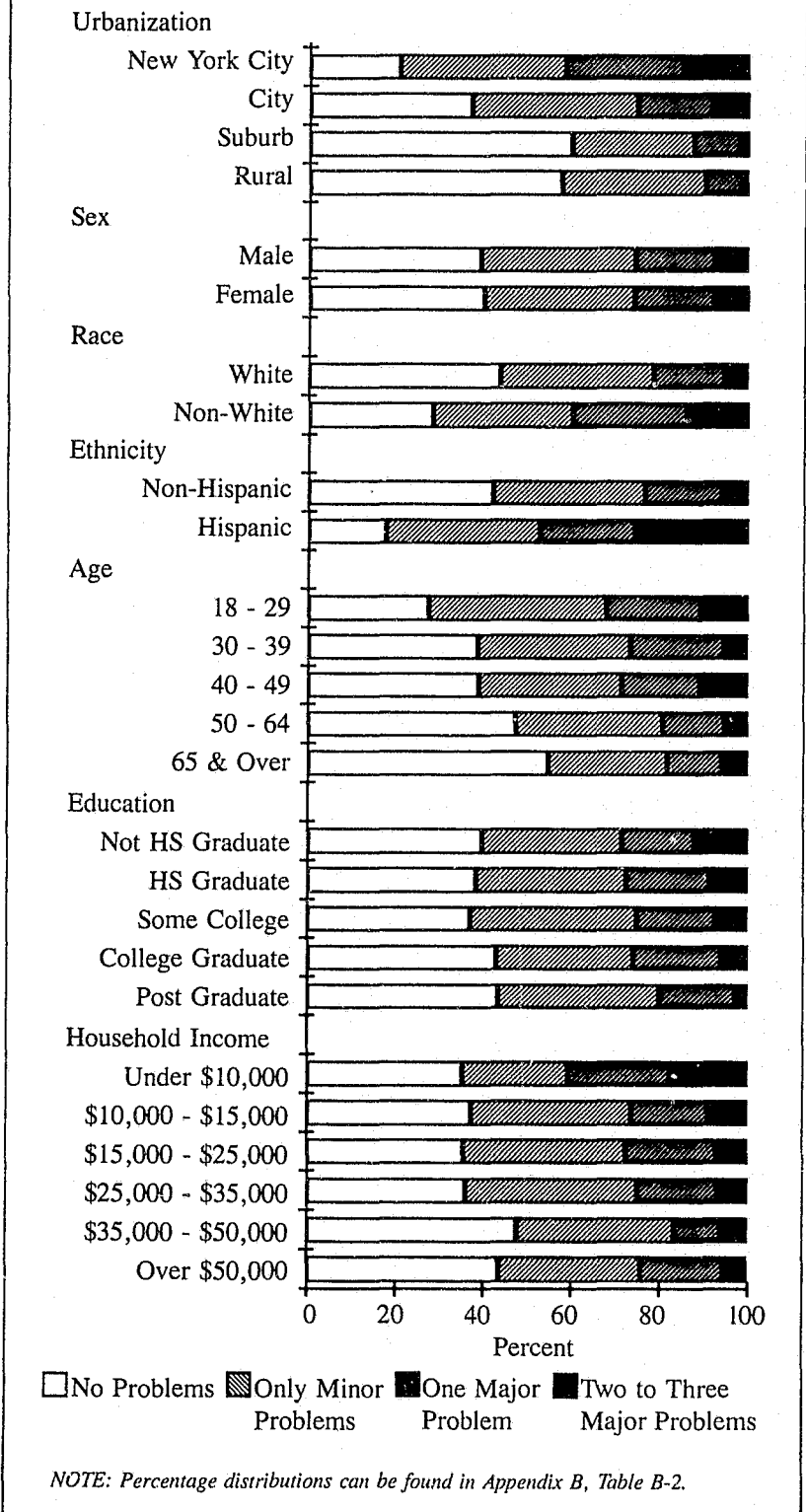
**WHERE DID PEOPLE WHO FELT THE LEAST SAFE LIVE - continued**

The level of urbanization, race, ethnicity, age, and household income were associated with neighborhood "quality of life."

- Respondents who lived in cities reported at least one major "quality of life" problem more often than those who lived in suburban or rural areas. For instance, 41.7 percent of the New York City respondents reported major problems, while only 12.5 percent of those who lived in suburban areas reported major problems.
- Non-whites were more likely to live in neighborhoods with major "quality of life" problems than whites (40.0 percent versus 21.5 percent, respectively).
- Almost one-half (47.4 percent) of the Hispanics reported living in neighborhoods with major problems, compared to less than one-fourth (23.4 percent) of the non-Hispanics.
- Respondents who were under 50 years of age were more likely to live in neighborhoods with major problems than those 50 years of age or older. For instance, 32.1 percent of the respondents 18 to 29 years of age reported at least one major "quality of life" problem, while only 18.4 percent of those 65 years of age or older reported major problems.
- Respondents with household incomes under \$10,000 were more likely to live in neighborhoods with major "quality of life" problems than those with incomes above this amount. For example, 40.7 percent of those with household incomes under \$10,000 reported at least one major problem, while only 26.5 percent of those with household incomes from \$10,000 to \$15,000 reported one major problem.

The sex and educational background of respondents were not related to neighborhood "quality of life."

The likelihood of people living in a neighborhood with "quality of life" problems varied across some demographic characteristics.



**NEIGHBORHOOD VICTIMIZATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY**

The likelihood of neighborhood victimization increased as neighborhood "quality of life" declined.

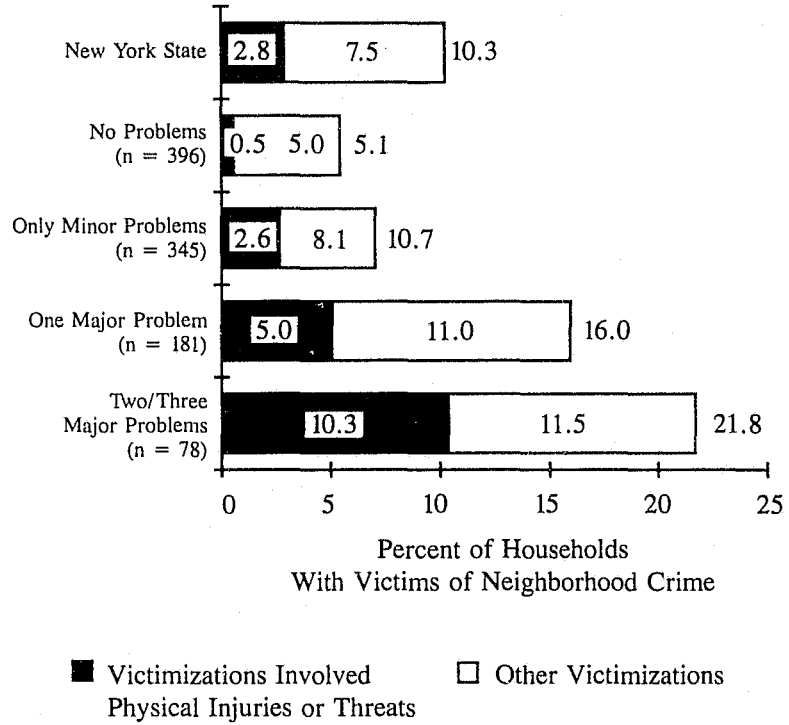
Survey respondents were asked if they or members of their households had been the victims of crime committed in their neighborhoods during the twelve months prior to the survey. In order to determine if the awareness of crime, by itself, was associated with perceptions of neighborhood crime, respondents were also asked if they knew of any crimes that had been committed in their neighborhoods during this same period.

For the purpose of this report, the term "victim" refers to survey respondents who were the victims of neighborhood crime or who resided in households where at least one member had been the victim of a neighborhood crime.

- As neighborhood "quality of life" decreased, the number of households that reported neighborhood victimizations increased. Only 5.1 percent of the households in neighborhoods with no problems reported victimizations, while 21.8 percent of those in neighborhoods with two or three major problems reported victimizations.

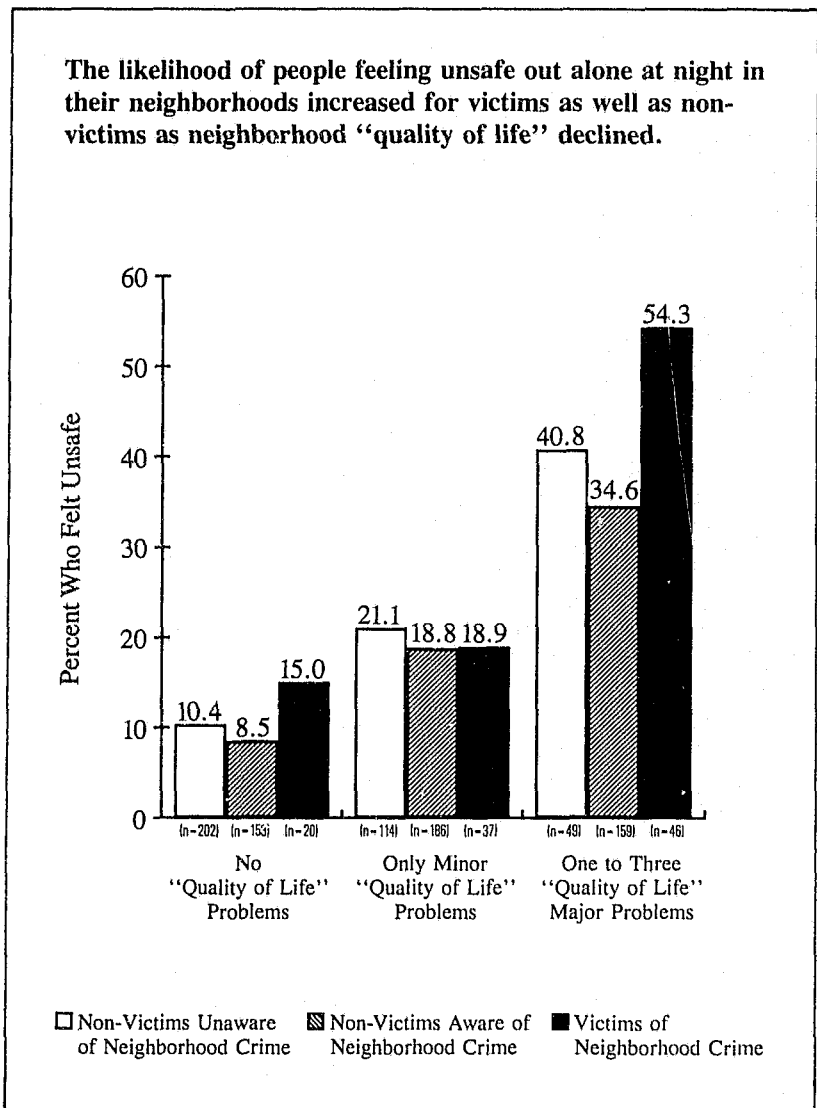
- Only one in ten of the victimized households in neighborhoods with no "quality of life" problems reported victimizations that involved physical injuries or threats, while one in two of the victimized households in neighborhoods with two or three major problems reported these type of victimizations.

The probability of victimization, including victimization that involved physical injuries or threats, increased as the incidence and seriousness of neighborhood "quality of life" problems increased.



Neighborhood "quality of life" appeared to be more strongly associated with perceptions of neighborhood safety than victimization.

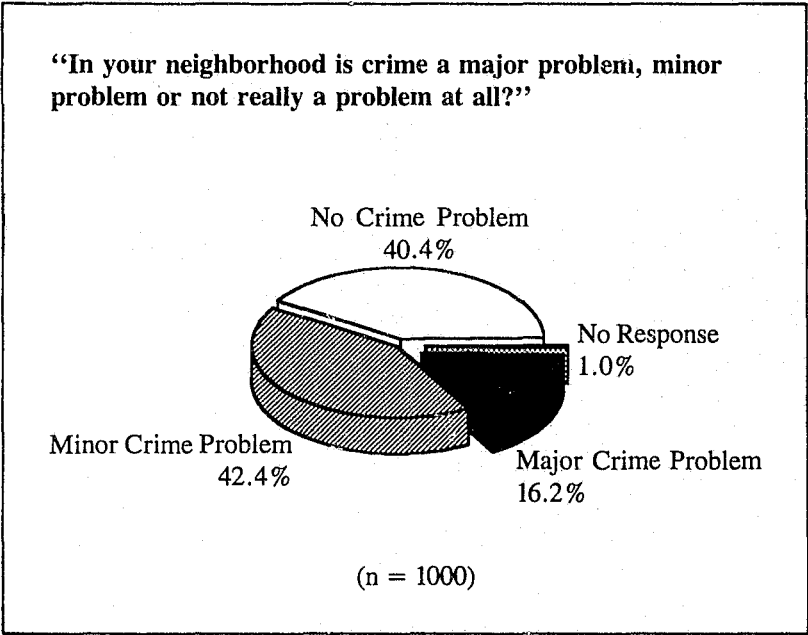
- Only those victims who lived in neighborhoods with major "quality of life" problems were more likely than non-victims to feel "unsafe."
- The likelihood of respondents feeling "unsafe" out alone at night in their neighborhoods increased for both victims and non-victims as neighborhood "quality of life" declined. For example, the percentage of non-victims who were unaware of neighborhood crime but felt "unsafe" in their neighborhoods rose from 10.4 percent in neighborhoods with no "quality of life" problems, to 21.1 percent in neighborhoods with only minor problems, to 40.8 percent in neighborhoods with major problems.



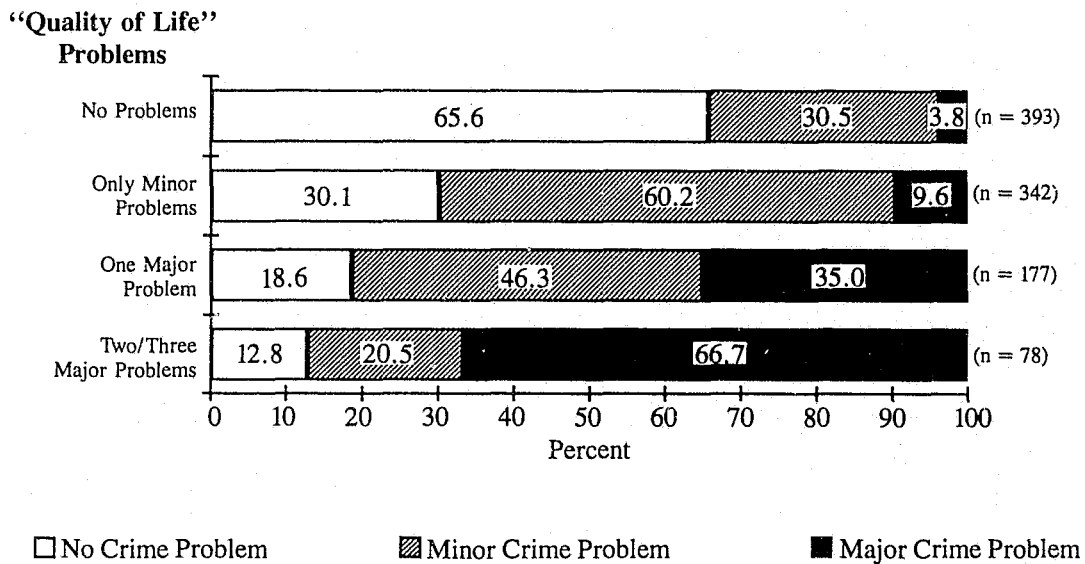
**SERIOUSNESS OF NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME AND PERCEPTIONS OF NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY**

As would be expected, the perceived seriousness of neighborhood crime was related to neighborhood "quality of life."

- Forty (40.4) percent of the respondents did not consider crime to be a problem in their neighborhoods. Crime was reported to be a minor neighborhood problem by 42.4 percent of the respondents and a major neighborhood problem by 16.2 percent.
- Respondents who did not report any neighborhood "quality of life" problems were much less likely to feel that crime was a major problem in their neighborhoods than those who reported two to three major problems (3.8 percent versus 66.7 percent, respectively).



**The perceived seriousness of neighborhood crime increased as neighborhood "quality of life" declined.**

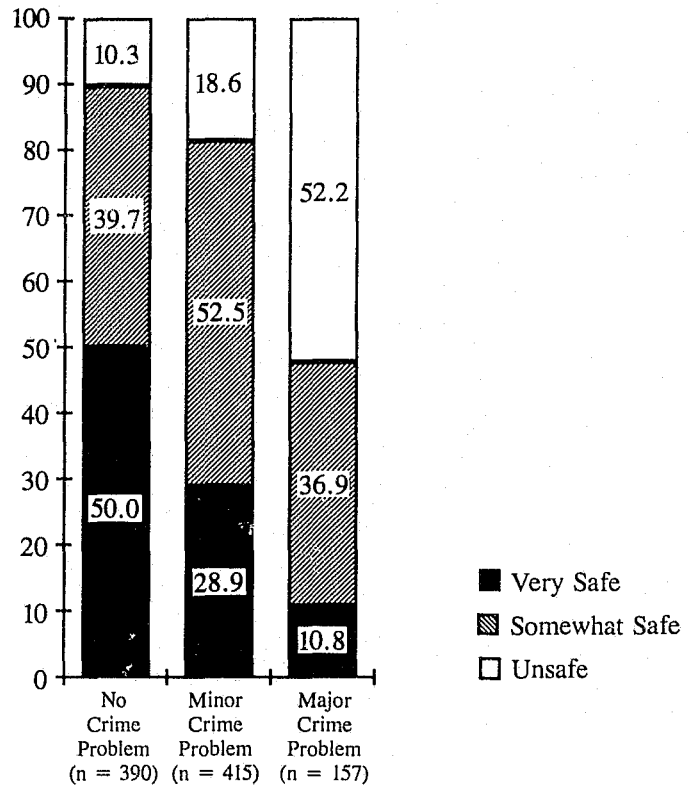


Not all people's feelings of safety can be explained by their perceptions of crime.

• One-half, 52.2 percent, of those who believed that crime was a major problem in their neighborhoods reported feeling "unsafe," while only 18.6 percent of those who thought that it is a minor problem and 10.3 percent of the respondents who reported that crime was not a neighborhood problem reported feeling "unsafe."

Not all people's feelings of safety can be explained by their perceived seriousness of neighborhood crime. It has been suggested that factors such as a lack of community/neighborhood cohesiveness may also be related to anxieties about neighborhood safety. <sup>10</sup>

The probability of people feeling unsafe out alone at night in their neighborhoods increased as the perceived seriousness of the neighborhood crime problem increased.



**PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AND NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY**

People who believed that the performance of the local police was good or excellent were more likely to feel safe out alone in their neighborhoods at night than those who thought performance was poor or fair.

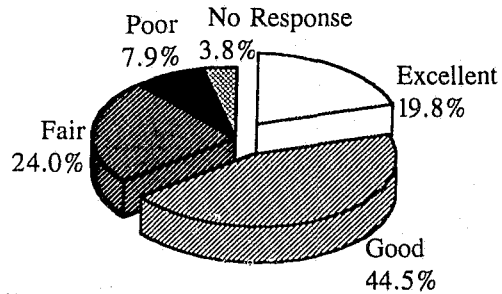
- One-fifth, 19.8 percent, of the respondents thought that the overall performance of their local law enforcement agencies was "excellent," and 44.5 percent felt that performance was "good." One-quarter, 24.0 percent, of the respondents stated that performance was "fair," and only 7.9 percent felt performance was "poor."

- Only 7.8 percent of the respondents who believed local police performance was excellent felt "unsafe" out alone in their neighborhoods at night, while almost one-half, 46.7 percent, of those who thought performance was poor felt "unsafe."

- Respondents who believed that local police performance was either good or fair were much more likely to feel "somewhat safe" (46.0 percent and 51.7 percent, respectively) than "safe" or "unsafe."

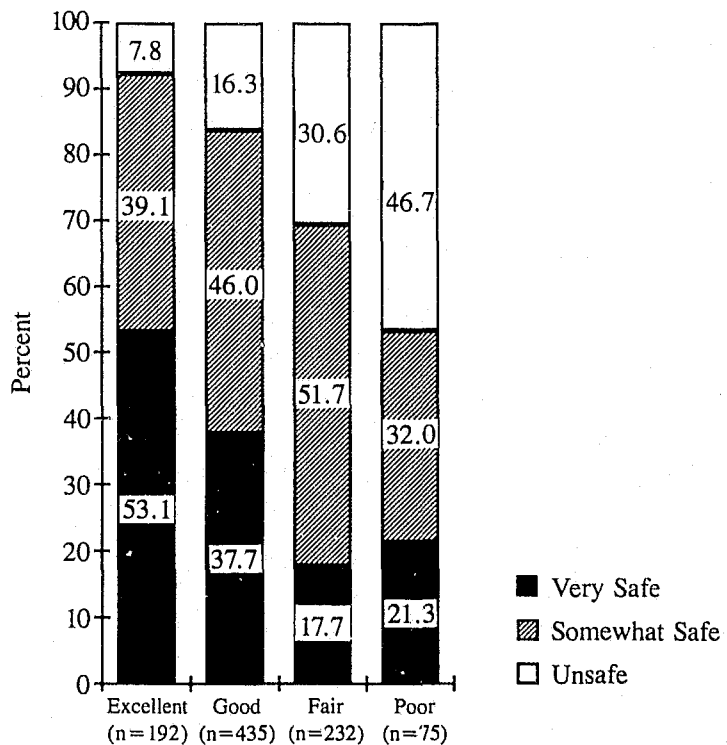
(A more extensive discussion of respondents' perceptions of the performance of local law enforcement agencies will be presented in Volume II of this series of publications presenting survey findings.)

**"Would you rate the overall performance of your local police department as excellent, good, fair or poor?"**



(n = 1000)

**People who were satisfied with the performance of local law enforcement were less likely to feel unsafe than those who were not satisfied.**



## SUMMARY

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The majority of people in New York State felt relatively safe out alone in their neighborhoods both during the day and at night. Perceptions of neighborhood safety were related to demographic characteristics, urbanization, the quality of neighborhoods, and perceptions of local police performance and the perceived seriousness of neighborhood crime.

Females, non-whites, Hispanics, and those 65 years of age or older felt less safe out alone at night in their neighborhoods than males, whites, non-Hispanics and those under 65 years of age. People with no more than a high school education as well as those with incomes below \$25,000 were also more likely to feel unsafe than people with more education or income.

People who lived in New York City were less likely to feel safe out alone at night in their neighborhoods than those who lived elsewhere in the State.

Neighborhood "quality of life" was in large part indicative of the volume and seriousness of neighborhood crime. As the number of neighborhood "quality of life" problems increased, victimization and the perceived seriousness of neighborhood crime also increased. People in 5.1 percent of the households in neighborhoods with no "quality of life" problems had been victims of neighborhood crime, while people in 21.8 percent of the households located in neighborhoods with two or three problems had been victims. Furthermore, only one in ten of the households with victims located in neighborhoods with no problems reported victimizations that involved physical injuries or threats, while one in two of the victimized households in neighborhoods with two or three problems reported these type of victimizations.

To some extent, perceptions of neighborhood safety were associated with neighborhood victimizations. However, neighborhood "quality of life" was more strongly associated with perceptions of neighborhood safety than victimization. Victims in neighborhoods with no neighborhood "quality of life" problems or only minor problems did not feel any less safe than non-victims. Only those victims who lived in neighborhoods with major problems were more likely to feel unsafe than non-victims.

Finally, people who thought that local police performance was good or excellent were more likely to feel safe out alone in their neighborhoods at night than those who felt performance was only poor or fair.



**Chapter 3**

**RESPONSES TO CRIME**

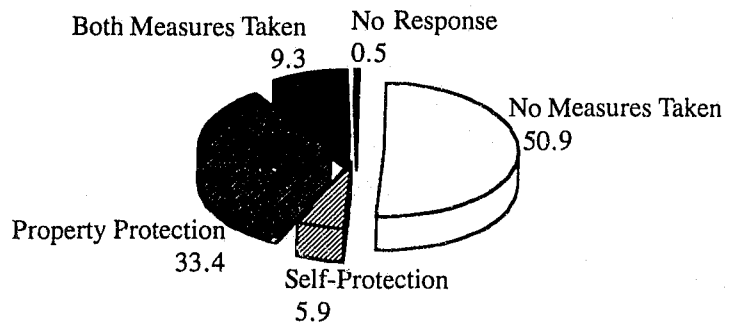
## SECURING PROPERTY AND SELF-PROTECTION

New York State residents were more likely to have taken steps to secure property than to protect their persons.

*In an open-ended question, survey respondents were asked what measures they had taken during the past year to secure their homes and to protect their persons. In some instances, they reported that more than one measure had been taken.*

- Almost one-half, 48.6 percent, of the respondents took at least one measure to secure property or to protect themselves. Only 9.3 percent took both types of measures.

One-half of the people in New York State took steps to secure property or to protect themselves during the twelve months preceding the survey.



(n = 1000)

**SECURING PROPERTY AND SELF-PROTECTION - continued**

- Measures to secure property were taken by 43.0 percent of the respondents, while only 15.2 percent reported that self-protection measures such as learning self-defense techniques had been taken.

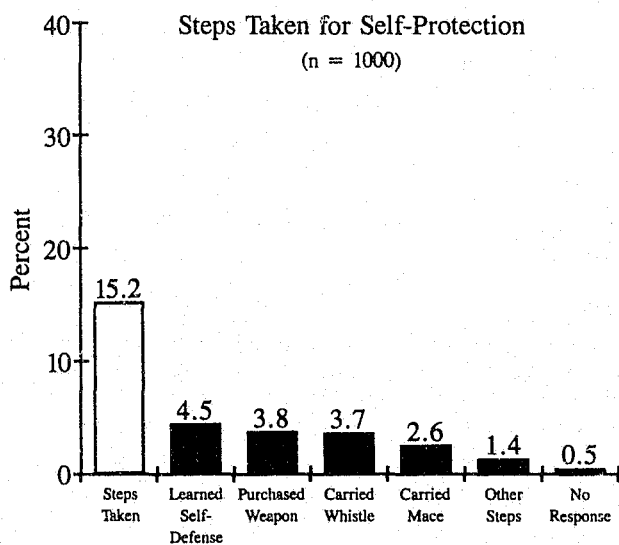
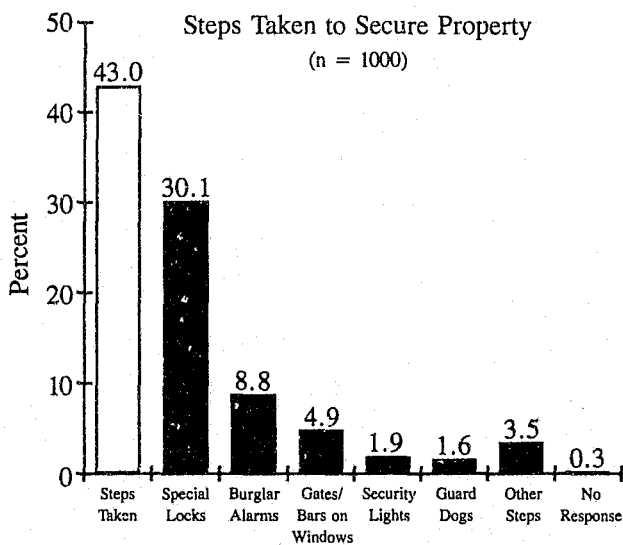
- The measure taken most frequently by respondents to secure property was the installation of special locks (30.1 percent). Burglar alarms were installed by 8.8 percent of the respondents, gates or bars were installed on windows by 4.9 percent, while security lights, guard dogs, or other unspecified measures were taken by even fewer respondents (1.9 percent, 1.6 percent, and 3.5 percent, respectively).

- There was little variation in the proportion of respondents who reported taking various self-protection measures. Only 4.5 percent of the respondents reported learning self-defense

techniques, 3.8 percent purchasing a weapon, 3.7 percent carrying a whistle, and 2.6 percent carrying mace. Other unspecified measures were taken by 1.4 percent of the respondents.

Respondents were more likely to have taken precautions to protect property than to protect themselves. This is understandable when one considers that property crimes are reported much more frequently than personal crimes. The property measure taken the most often -- installing special locks -- was relatively easier and less expensive than most other measures that respondents reported taking. These responses were consistent with past research which has also found that measures to protect property were taken more frequently than measures for self-protection and that measures taken were more often easy and inexpensive.<sup>11</sup>

**“In the last year, have you taken any steps or measures to secure your home and property? ...to protect yourself from criminal activity?”**

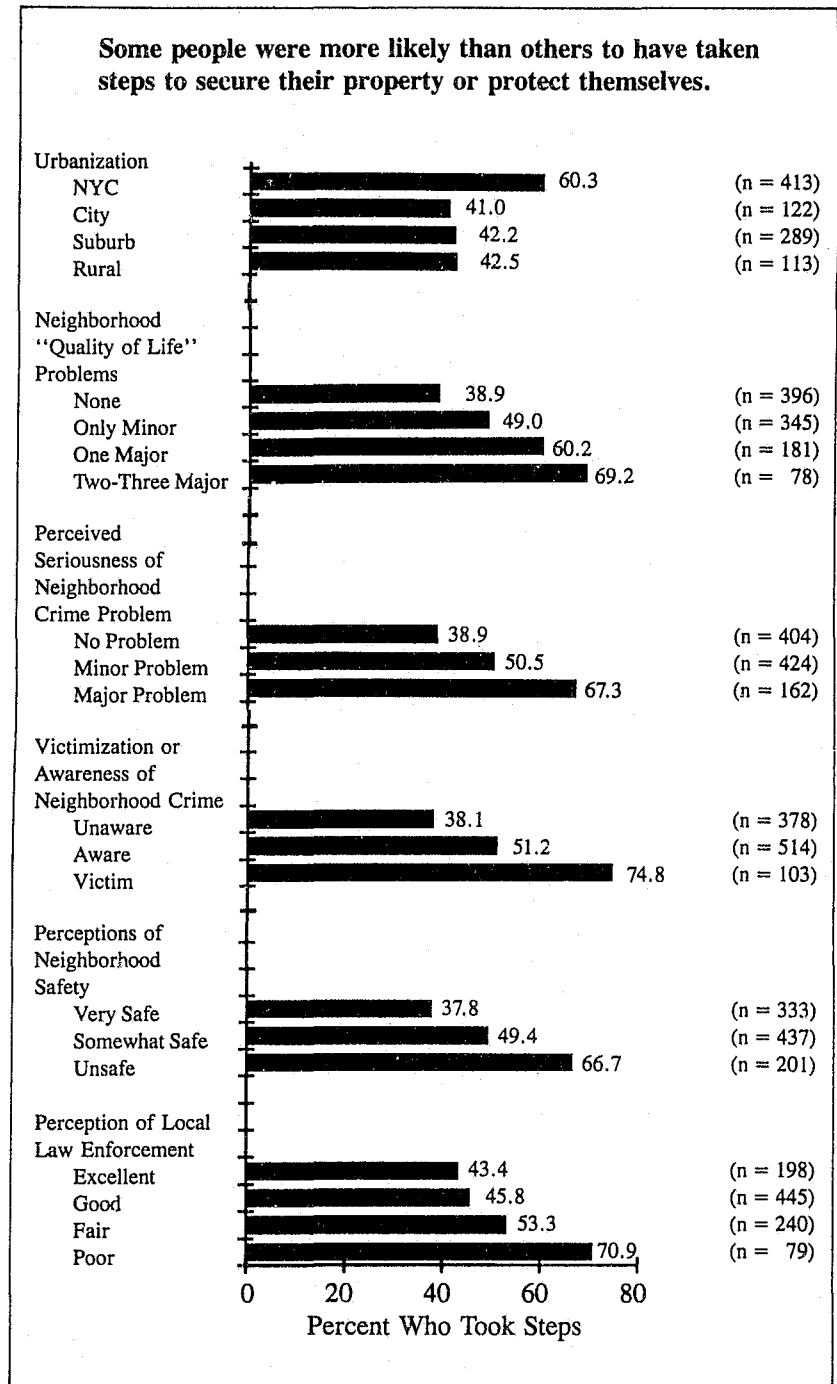


*NOTE: Percentages sum to more than 43.0 percent for "steps taken to secure property" and to more than 15.2 percent for "steps taken for self-protection" because some respondents reported that more than one step had been taken.*

**SECURING PROPERTY AND SELF-PROTECTION - *continued***

New York City respondents were more likely to have taken some precaution than those who lived in other areas of the State. The likelihood that measures were taken also increased as the number and seriousness of neighborhood "quality of life" problems increased. Victimization and awareness of neighborhood crime along with perceptions of both neighborhood safety and the seriousness of the neighborhood crime problem were associated with the likelihood of whether or not respondents had taken precautions to protect property or person. Those who thought that the performance of local law enforcement agencies was poor were also more likely than others to have taken some measure.

Respondents' sex, ethnicity, age, educational background, and household income did not appear to be related to whether or not they took measures to secure property or to protect themselves. However, non-whites were more likely to have taken measures than whites (57.8 percent versus 46.3 percent, respectively).



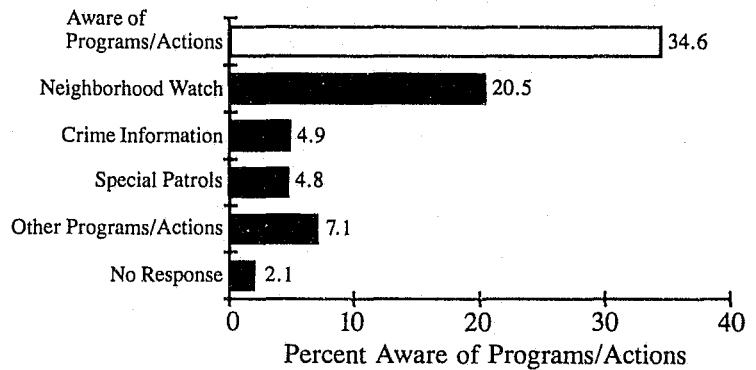
## NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME PREVENTION

One-third of the people in New York State were aware of crime prevention programs or actions that had been taken in their neighborhoods to reduce crime.

*In an open-ended question, survey participants were asked what programs or actions, to their knowledge, had been taken in their neighborhoods to reduce crime. In some instances, they reported that more than one program or action had been taken.*

● Respondents were most familiar with neighborhood watch programs (20.5 percent). Far fewer were aware of crime information programs such as neighborhood meetings for the discussion of strategies for the prevention or reduction of neighborhood crime (4.9 percent), special patrols (4.8 percent), or other unspecified programs or actions (7.1 percent).

**“To the best of your knowledge, have there been any programs or actions taken in your neighborhood to reduce crime?”**



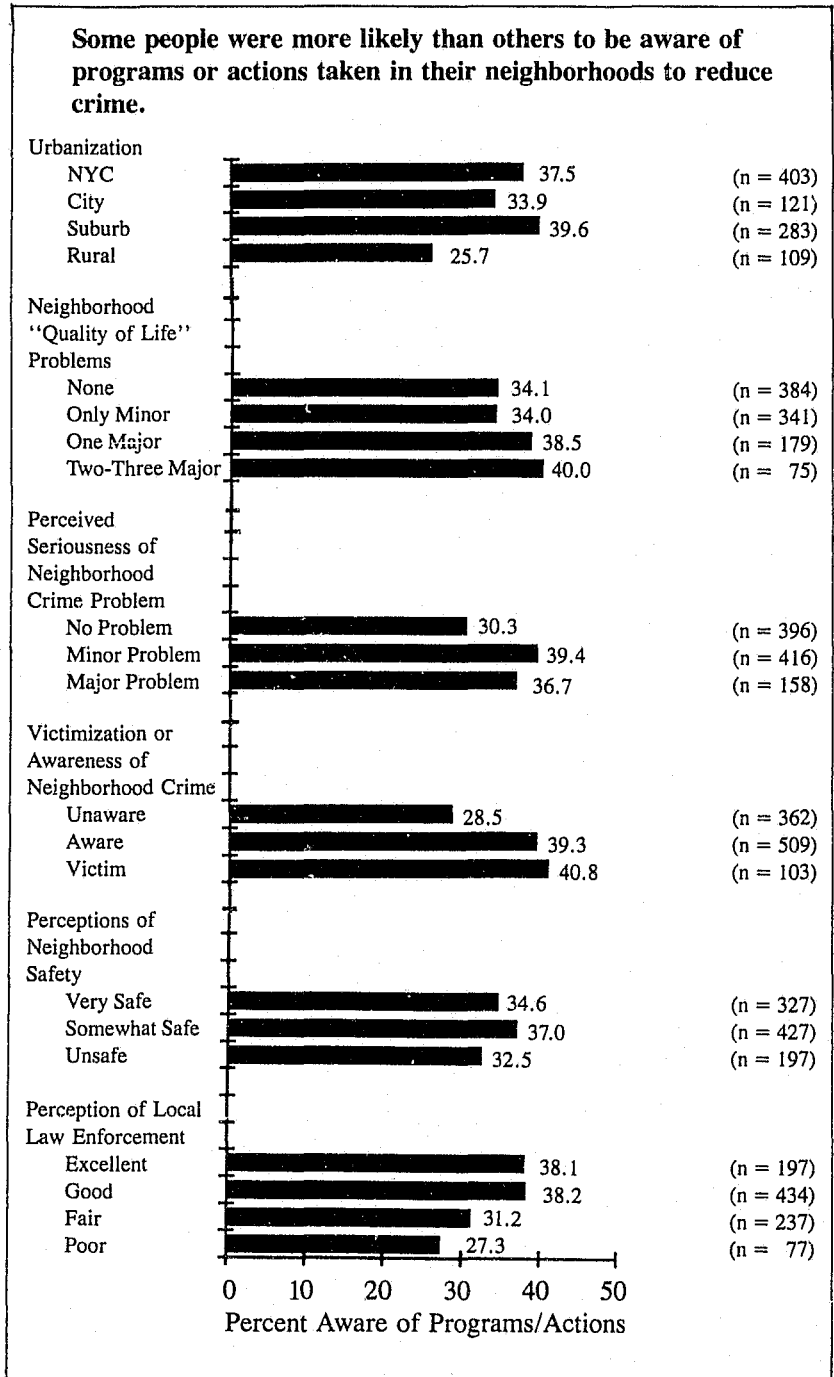
*NOTE: Percentages sum to more than 34.6 percent because some respondents were aware of more than one program/action.*

**NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME PREVENTION - continued**

Respondents who lived in rural areas were less likely to be aware of these programs or actions than those who lived in more populated areas. People who believed that crime was a problem in their neighborhood were more likely to be aware of these efforts than respondents who did not think that crime was a neighborhood problem. Similarly, respondents who were aware of neighborhood crime through the experience of victimization or through other sources of information were more likely to be aware of these efforts than those who were not aware of neighborhood crime. Finally, those who believed the performance of local law enforcement agencies was good to excellent were also more likely to be aware of these actions than those who thought performance was poor or fair.

Surprisingly, perceptions of neighborhood safety were not related to respondents' knowledge of crime prevention efforts. Furthermore, there was no relationship between neighborhood "quality of life" and awareness of crime prevention measures.

Respondents' sex, race, ethnicity, educational background, and household income were not associated with respondents awareness of neighborhood crime prevention efforts. However, respondents 18 to 29 years of age were less likely to be aware of these efforts than those 30 years of age or older (27.6 percent versus 37.8 percent, respectively).



## SUMMARY

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The survey found that the perceived threat of crime motivated many individuals to take measures to protect both themselves and their households. During the twelve months prior to this survey, people in New York State were more likely to have taken measures to secure property rather than to protect themselves. People who lived in New York City took these measures more often than those who lived elsewhere in the State. Measures were also taken more often by non-whites than whites. The quality of neighborhoods, the perceived seriousness of the neighborhood crime problem and victimization, along with perceptions of neighborhood safety and local law enforcement were also associated with whether or not people had taken measures to protect property or self.

One-third of the people living in New York State were aware of programs or actions that had been taken in their neighborhoods to reduce crime. Age, victimization, the perceived seriousness of neighborhood crime, and the level of satisfaction with the performance of local law enforcement agencies were all associated with the likelihood of peoples' awareness of such actions. Surprisingly, awareness of these programs or actions was not related to perceptions of neighborhood safety or neighborhood "quality of life." Because citizen participation and cooperation are invaluable law enforcement tools in fighting crime, these findings suggested that additional effort is warranted on the part of local law enforcement agencies and community groups to increase public awareness and involvement in crime prevention efforts.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Jamison, K. M. & Flanagan, T. J. (Eds.). Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics - 1986. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1987), p. 72.
- <sup>2</sup> New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) System.
- <sup>3</sup> Jamison, K. M. & Flanagan, T. J. (Eds.). Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics - 1986. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1987), p. 75.
- <sup>4</sup> For discussion see --

McIntry, J. "Public Attitudes Toward Crime and Law Enforcement," In R. L. Henshell & R. A. Silverman (Eds.), Perception in Criminology, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).

Skogan, W. G. "On Attitudes and Behaviors," In D. Lewis (Eds.), Reactions to Crime, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1981).
- <sup>5</sup> For discussions of the impact of information sources on perceptions see --

Quinney, R. Q. "Public Conceptions of Crime." In R. L. Henshell & R. A. Silverman (Eds.), Perception in Criminology, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).

Skogan, W. G. "On Attitudes and Behaviors," In D. Lewis (Eds.), Reactions to Crime, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1981).
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Jamison, K. M. & Flanagan, T. J. (Eds.). Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics - 1987. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1988), p. 140.
- <sup>8</sup> New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) System.
- <sup>9</sup> Knowles, J. J. Ohio Citizen Attitudes Concerning Crime and Criminal Justice. Governor's Office of Criminal Justice Services, Bureau of Research and Statistics, (Columbus, Ohio: February, 1987) p. 18.
- <sup>10</sup> For a discussion of factors associated with perceptions of neighborhood safety see --

Garofalo, J. "The Fear of Crime: Causes and Consequences." Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, (Summer 1981) 72(2):839-857.

Sacco, V. F. "An Exploratory Analysis of the Conceptual Meaning of Perceptions of Crime." Canadian Journal of Criminology, (July 1982) 24(3):295-306.
- <sup>11</sup> For discussion see -- Skogan, W. G. "On Attitudes and Behaviors," In D. Lewis (Eds.), Reactions to Crime, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1981).



# APPENDIXES

## Appendix A

### RESEARCH METHODS

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This public opinion survey was conducted in the Fall of 1987 and was partially funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Interviews were conducted by Fact Finders, Inc., a survey research firm with experience in telephone surveys.

#### Questionnaire Design

The survey instrument was developed by the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). Several survey items were abstracted from surveys that had been conducted nationally or in other states. The draft survey instrument was revised and adapted for a telephone survey format by Fact Finders in consultation with DCJS. Twenty-five interviews were conducted during the pilot test on October 15, 1987. The final draft of the survey was translated by Fact Finders, Inc. into Spanish for administration to non-English speaking Hispanics. Copies of the questionnaire are available upon request.

#### Sample

Method. Interviews were conducted with 1000 non-institutionalized New York State residents 18 years of age or older during the Fall of 1987, utilizing "random digit dialing" to randomly select households for inclusion in the survey. The survey sample was stratified to proportionately represent the population in each of the State's 62 counties based on 1980 census data. Sample telephone numbers were redialed up to 10

separate times in an effort to gain contact or a disposition for each randomly selected telephone number. If a non-working or business number was encountered, a substitute random number was generated. Once contact had been made with a valid household, a probability selection method known as "next birthday selection" was employed to randomly select one adult from a multiple adult household. If the randomly selected respondent was not available, interviewers scheduled a callback. Up to five separate callbacks were attempted to gain an interview with each random respondent. It should be noted that approximately five to seven percent of the households in New York State that did not have telephones were not represented in this survey; this segment of the population might possess different attitudes and experiences than those found in this survey's sample.

Representativeness. The demographic characteristics of the survey respondents were compared to estimates of these characteristics in the population of New York State residents (see Table A-1). These estimates, which were provided by the New York State Department of Economic Development, were derived from the March 1987 Current Population Survey conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Census. The survey sample matched the population very closely. There were no statistically significant differences between the sample and population estimates for sex, race, ethnicity, age, or household income. People who did not attend high school were slightly under-represented, while those who

attended college for one to three years or for four years were slightly over-represented. The data were not weighted to compensate for these discrepancies.

#### Data Collection

Fact Finders, Inc. conducted interviews during the weekday hours of 4 - 9 PM and weekend hours of 10 AM - 6 PM on October 26 through November 13, 1987. Two staff interviewers were also employed weekdays from 10 AM - 4 PM to conduct daytime callbacks. In conducting the interviews, a total refusal rate of 20.8 percent was encountered with three-quarters of all refusals occurring in the New York City greater metropolitan counties (New York City boroughs, Westchester, Rockland, Nassau, and Suffolk counties). The overall completion rate of 79.2 percent of this survey's probability sampling is comparable to other statewide surveys conducted by Fact Finders and other research companies.

#### Analysis

A systematic procedure was followed to establish the significant subgroup response patterns that are identified in this report. For each item, it was first determined whether or not a significant overall relationship existed between the subgroup categories and the item response categories. Given the existence of such a relationship, difference of proportion tests were then used to examine subgroup differences across selected item categories. Only differences that were significant

TABLE A-1

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE vs.  
NEW YORK STATE 1987 POPULATION ESTIMATES<sup>1</sup>

	Sample	NYS 1987 Population Estimates		Sample	NYS 1987 Population Estimates
<b>SEX</b>			<b>EDUCATION</b>		
Male	44.1%	46.5%	None to Eighth Grade	4.5%	13.4%
Female	55.9	53.5	High School: 1-3 Years	9.7	7.8
<b>RACE</b>			High School: 4 Years	34.0	36.3
White	81.3	83.7	College: 1-3 Years	21.8	15.4
Black	10.1	12.4	College: 4 Years	16.4	7.9
Other	8.7	3.9	Post Graduate	13.6	10.7
<b>ETHNICITY</b>			<b>INCOME</b>		
Hispanic	9.9	10.8	Under \$10,000	12.2	13.9
Non-Hispanic	90.1	89.2	\$10,000 to \$15,000	13.7	7.8
<b>AGE</b>			\$15,000 to \$25,000	17.5	18.3
18 - 29	25.6	27.2	\$25,000 to \$35,000	19.8	16.0
30 - 39	24.2	21.2	\$35,000 to \$50,000	16.8	18.7
40 - 49	15.9	15.9	Over \$50,000	20.0	25.3
50 - 64	18.9	19.2			
65 & Over	15.4	16.6			

<sup>1</sup> New York State Department of Economic Development (from the March 1987 Current Population Survey conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Census).

at the 95 percent confidence level were highlighted.

"No response/no opinion/don't know" responses were included in the overall sample analysis but were generally excluded from the analysis of subgroup responses except where they comprised a substantial portion of the responses or their exclusion altered the interpretation of survey findings.

**Sampling Error**

All surveys are subject to sampling error. The size of the sampling error varies with the size of the sample from which inferences to the population are made. The sample design and probability methods employed in constructing this statewide sample ensured statistical sampling error ranges, in theory, of plus or minus 1.9 to 3.1 percentage points (95 percent confidence interval) when inferences are based on the responses of all 1000 respondents. The sampling error for inferences drawn from subgroups are presented in Table A-2. For example, a reported percentage of 70 percent for a subgroup that includes 500 respondents is subject to a sampling error of plus or minus 4.0 percentage points, assuming a 95 percent confidence interval. In other words, 95 out of 100 cases will fall within the range of 66 percent to 74 percent.

Table A-2  
Sampling Error  
(95 Percent Confidence Interval)

Reported Percentage	Sample Size				
	1000	750	500	250	100
10 or 90	1.9	2.1	2.6	5.1	5.9
20 or 80	2.5	2.9	3.5	5.0	7.8
30 or 70	2.8	3.3	4.0	5.7	9.0
40 or 60	3.0	3.5	4.3	6.1	9.6
50	3.1	3.6	4.4	6.2	9.8

## TABLES

TABLE B-1  
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS  
BY PERCEPTIONS OF NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY

	How Safe People Felt Out Alone At Night In Their Neighborhoods (Percentage)			(n)
	Very Safe	Somewhat Safe	Unsafe	
<b>SEX</b>				
Male	49.0%	36.2%	14.8%	439
Female	22.2	52.3	25.6	532
<b>RACE</b>				
White	37.8	43.3	18.9	773
Non-White	22.4	54.3	23.3	129
<b>ETHNICITY</b>				
Non-Hispanic	36.0	44.7	19.3	859
Hispanic	19.8	44.8	35.4	96
<b>AGE</b>				
18-29	39.4	42.2	18.5	249
30-39	32.2	54.4	13.4	239
40-49	33.5	46.5	20.0	155
50-64	40.7	39.5	19.8	177
65 & Over	22.5	37.7	39.9	138
<b>EDUCATION</b>				
Not H. S. Graduate	25.8	40.9	33.3	132
High School Graduate	31.9	41.6	26.6	320
Some College	33.3	53.3	13.3	210
College Graduate	40.6	43.1	16.3	160
Post Graduate	44.4	45.1	10.5	133
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>				
Under \$10,000	22.0	41.0	37.0	100
\$10,000 - \$15,000	31.9	42.2	25.9	116
\$15,000 - \$25,000	33.3	40.5	26.1	153
\$25,000 - \$35,000	36.4	50.3	13.3	173
\$35,000 - \$50,000	33.8	52.7	13.5	148
Over \$50,000	44.6	41.1	14.3	175

Note: Percentages may not add to 100.0% due to rounding.

TABLE B-2  
 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS  
 BY NEIGHBORHOOD "QUALITY OF LIFE"

Demographic Characteristics	Neighborhood "Quality of Life" (Percentage)				(n)
	No Problems	Only Minor Problems	One Major Problem	Two-Three Major Problems	
<b>LEVEL OF URBANIZATION</b>					
New York City	20.6%	37.8%	26.9%	14.8%	413
City	36.9	37.7	17.2	8.2	122
Suburb	59.9	27.7	10.4	2.1	289
Rural	57.5	32.7	8.8	0.9	113
<b>SEX</b>					
Male	39.2	35.1	18.1	7.5	441
Female	39.9	34.0	18.1	8.1	559
<b>RACE</b>					
White	43.6	34.8	16.1	5.4	793
Non-White	28.1	31.9	25.9	14.1	135
<b>ETHNICITY</b>					
Non-Hispanic	42.1	34.5	17.5	5.9	886
Hispanic	17.5	35.1	21.6	25.8	97
<b>AGE</b>					
18-29	27.4	40.5	21.4	10.7	252
30-39	38.5	34.7	21.3	5.4	239
40-49	38.9	32.5	17.8	10.8	157
50-64	47.3	33.3	14.0	5.4	186
65 & Over	54.6	27.0	12.5	5.9	152
<b>EDUCATION</b>					
Not H.S. Graduate	39.6	31.7	16.5	12.2	139
High School Graduate	38.3	34.1	18.9	8.7	334
Some College	36.9	37.9	17.8	7.5	214
College Graduate	42.9	31.1	19.9	6.2	161
Post Graduate	43.3	36.6	17.2	3.0	134
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>					
Under \$10,000	35.2	24.1	23.1	17.6	108
\$10,000 - \$15,000	37.2	36.4	17.4	9.1	121
\$15,000 - \$25,000	35.5	36.8	20.6	7.1	155
\$25,000 - \$35,000	36.0	38.9	18.3	6.9	175
\$35,000 - \$50,000	47.7	35.6	10.7	6.0	149
Over \$50,000	43.5	32.2	18.6	5.6	177

Note: Percentages may not add to 100.0% due to rounding.