Victims and Property Victimization in Israel

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Property victimization has increased in recent years in Israel. Apartment burglary and car theft have become a major component in the Israeli public's concern about crime. This paper explores the hypothesis that characteristics of the crime target are central to understanding property victimization. The hypothesis is tested with data from the Third National Israeli Victimization Survey. For apartment burglary, it was found that the larger the number of rooms in the apartment, the higher the risk of victimization. For car theft, it was found that newer cars were more likely to be stolen than older cars. The results shed light on the prominence of property characteristics in the offender's decision-making process and target selection.

KEY WORDS: victimization; property crimes; opportunity theory; Israel.

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of criminal victimization has become a central issue in criminology, reflecting the recognition that the experiences associated with being a victim of a property or a personal crime can diminish the quality of people's lives (Skogan et al., 1991).

Experiencing a crime is associated with emotional, economic, and social consequences (Lurigio et al., 1991). Emotional consequences may include anger, fear, and loss of confidence in the criminal justice system (Karmen, 1990). Victims of crime face economic losses, such as having to cope without a car or some other object and spending time away from work to give evidence and complete insurance claims.

In recent years, victimization from property crimes has increased in Israel. In 1981, of all the households that experienced victimization, two-thirds were from property crimes (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1983). In 1990 the proportion of victimization from property crimes rose to 90% of all
the victimizations reported (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1993). The plight of crime victims led to organizational efforts to mobilize them for collective action. Victims demand increased rights and expanded services, and their activities include demonstrating at trials, lobbying for new rights, and setting up self-help groups to improve advocacy (Yanai, 1994).

Recent research conceptualizes victimization as the result of lifestyles and routine activities that differentially expose social groups to this experience. Factors associated with the characteristics of the victimized property are less emphasized. The purpose of this study is to identify factors related to property victimization risk in Israel. In particular, the study focuses on the differential effects of sociodemographic and property characteristics on car theft and apartment burglary.

2. BACKGROUND

Israel, where this study was conducted, is a multiethnic society. Approximately 83% of the population is Jewish and the remainder is Arab. Jewish immigrants have come to Israel in a sequence of waves. The first wave arrived at the turn of the century, mainly from European countries. Most immigrants from Asian and North African countries arrived in the second wave shortly after the establishment of the state in 1948. Thus, the Jewish population consists of various groups from different backgrounds and is divided almost equally between Jews of Asian and African origin and Jews of European and American descent.

Within the Jewish population, there are important socioeconomic differences. Jews of Western origin are considered to be more privileged, are overrepresented in positions of political power, engage in higher-status occupations, and receive higher income, on average, than the Jews of Asian African origin. The latter (many of whom arrived as refugees after statehood) are characterized by a traditional orientation; by limited education, economic resources, and occupational skills; and by large families (Lewin-Epstein and Semyonov, 1986). As a group, they have higher rates of delinquency and crime and are exposed to a more criminogenic environment (Hassin, 1992; Fishman et al., 1984).

Israel is a fast growing country. In the period between 1980 and 1990, the population increased by 20% (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1990). More noticeable are the changes in the standard of living. During the same period the proportion of the population living in large apartments (at least four rooms) increased from 18 to 33%, and the number of private cars increased by 100%, from 400,000 to 800,000 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1990).

Despite these changes, the proportion of households reporting victimization experiences did not change. In 1981 and in 1990, almost 27% of