ANSWERING THE QUESTION:
WHO GETS VICTIMIZED?
A Study of “Recidivist” Victims

by

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ABSTRACT: Despite efforts to control and prevent it, crime is still a serious problem, suggesting that policies aimed at criminals may not be having the desired effect. In order to best allocate scarce resources, policymakers must begin to turn their attention to victims. By understanding what makes a person more likely to be victimized, policymakers can identify high-risk groups and formulate policies that directly, and more efficiently, reach these potential victims and prevent crime. This study attempts to identify common characteristics of one particular subset of victims: so-called “recidivist victims,” or individuals who have been victimized more than once. Whereas a person who was victimized only once may simply have been in “the wrong place at the wrong time,” a person who has been victimized several times may possess some characteristics that make him or her a more attractive target to criminals. The “lifestyle” or “routine activities” framework formulated by sociologists and other researchers to explain personal criminal victimization is discussed and tested using an econometric approach. Some unexpected results indicate that the routine activities theory may not adequately explain an individual’s repeat victimization risk.

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Crime is an ever-present problem in America today. According to the National Victim Center (NVC), 38.4 million crimes were committed in the United States in 1995 (NVC Web page). In fact, the FBI estimates that a violent crime occurs about every eighteen seconds (ibid.). Of course, one could cite countless other studies and statistics that indicate the severity of America’s crime problem, but it would be unnecessary. Anyone who feels uncomfortable walking outside alone at night or using a secluded ATM understands the fear of being a victim. Despite decreasing crime rates and increased efforts to control and prevent it, crime continues to be a serious problem.

Unfortunately, most crime studies have focused on trying to understand what personal characteristics or social structures might lead someone to become a perpetrator of crime, not a victim. Due to the continued problem of crime, however, it is apparent that policies aimed at criminals are not having the desired effect. Thus, policy makers must turn their attention to the victims.

Too few researchers have attempted to answer a seemingly simple question: Who gets victimized? By understanding what makes a person more likely to become a victim of crime, policy makers can identify high-risk groups and formulate policies that directly, and more efficiently, reach these potential victims and prevent crime. If it is impossible to prevent some individuals from committing criminal acts, it may be more worthwhile to teach at-risk individuals how to better protect themselves from crime. Examples of such programs might include sponsoring crime prevention programs that educate the elderly to be wary of door-to-door salespeople or offering self-defense classes for women.
A significant number of victimization studies do address some types of crimes that are often aimed at specific groups such as women, children, or the elderly. This study examines one particular group of victims: So-called “recidivist victims,” that is, individuals who have been victimized more than once (Spelman, 1995, p. 366). Specifically, this paper seeks to understand why someone was victimized multiple times. Theoretically, someone who was victimized only once may simply have been in “the wrong place at the wrong time,” whereas a person who has been victimized several times may possess some characteristics that make him or her a more attractive target to criminals. First, previous theories that have been suggested by criminologists and other researchers to explain criminal victimization will be discussed. Next, some characteristics of victims that have been suggested by these theories will be tested using a limited dependent variable analysis to determine whether these characteristics really do influence an individual’s multiple victimization risk. Finally, policy implications of these findings will be discussed.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Most criminological theories attempt to explain why certain individuals decide to engage in illegal activities. Yet it is what insight these theories yield into an understanding of crime victims that is of main importance to the present study. In terms of the cultural theory, the existence of subcultures of violence “may prevent people and communities from being able to help protect themselves against crime or exert enough power to secure better law enforcement” (Elias, 1986, p. 93).

The structural theory, which explains that many perpetrators of property crimes, for example, are driven to steal because they are poor, is useful in that victims themselves are not to
be blamed for their own victimization. Victims, according to structural theorists, are only marginally responsible for their own victimization and, as a result, ought to hold the system as responsible for crime as the offenders (p. 91). Yet neither of these theories convincingly explains why some people are victimized and others are not.

During the past twenty years or so, however, sociologists and other researchers have formulated a new theory that attempts to explain personal criminal victimization. Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo (1978) laid much of the foundation for what is today known as the “lifestyle” or “routine activities” approach. According to their model, the likelihood that an individual will be victimized depends on the concept of “lifestyle” (p. 241). They define lifestyle as the “routine daily activities, both vocational activities (work, school, keeping house, etc.) and leisure activities” (ibid.). It is these everyday activities that unwittingly lead to victimizations, as criminal events often “result from likely offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians against crime converging nonrandomly in time and space” (Sherman, Gartin, and Buerger, 1989, p. 27).

This theory can be better understood by looking more closely at exactly how such routine activities result in the “nonrandom convergence” of criminals and potential victims. An understanding of such factors enables one to make inferences about the kinds of characteristics victims share. The following discussion is closely derived from that of Hindelang, et al. (1978, pp. 239-274):

In order to be a well-functioning member of society, an individual must adapt to certain role expectations and social structures. These role expectations and structural constraints differ among individuals according to each person’s combination of demographic characteristics, and they even vary over the course of one’s lifetime (p. 242). For example, in terms of role
expectations, there are certain behaviors that society deems to be appropriate for children, but not for adults. Similarly, structural constraints such as economic factors can change as one is promoted to a better-paying job.

As role expectations and structural constraints change, individuals and groups acquire new skills and attitudes that enable them to adapt to these new restraints. Among the adaptive skills and attitudes learned that have particular significance to this study, individuals acquire new attitudes and beliefs about crime, including the fear of crime. Further, “[o]nce learned, these attitudes and beliefs are often incorporated into the routine activities of the individual, frequently as limitations on behavior,” and thus can also “result in regularities in behavioral patterns” among people who share the same demographic characteristics (p. 244).

Thus, lifestyle differences are due to differences in individuals’ combinations of role expectations, structural constraints, and individual and subcultural adaptations. Differences in lifestyles, in turn, result in varying probabilities among individuals of “being in particular places at particular times and coming into contact with persons who have particular characteristics,” such as criminals (p. 245). This implies that there are certain people, places, and times that will have higher victimization risks than others.

Although demographic characteristics do not in themselves determine an individual’s “lifestyle,” they certainly are related to different probabilities of victimization. This is a result of the association between demographic characteristics and the role expectations and structural constraints ascribed to groups whose members share those characteristics (p. 246).

Age, for example, influences a person’s lifestyle in terms of association with others outside of the immediate family. As a child, most time is spent in the home or at school, but “by late adolescence, the activities of the child are by and large no longer within the institutional
control of family or school” (p. 247). As an individual gets older and gains stable employment, work takes over as a form of institutional control, hence the probability of victimization tends to decrease. Also, once an individual reaches the retirement years, mobility decreases and the number of interpersonal contacts decreases. Thus, older persons are less likely to become victims of crime simply because they are not available as potential victims (p. 248).

Gender also plays an important role in a person’s routine activities. Traditionally, males and females have been subjected to different forms of sex role socialization, with most females spending more time inside the home. Some argue that “as adolescents they are more closely supervised than males, and as adults they are more likely than males to assume housekeeping responsibilities” (p. 248). Whether this is true for most women today may be a topic of disagreement, but other than for crimes of rape and domestic violence, most data tends to agree that women are less likely than men to be victims of violent crimes (p. 136; Elias, 1986, p. 63, Kurtz, 1983, p. 55).

Marital and family ties also result in more time spent in the home for both men and women. As the number of at-home responsibilities increase, married persons can be expected to spend more time within the home than single persons, especially if children are present. Also, leisure activities outside of the home are more likely to take place with both partners present or with other married couples. Finally, because marriage creates a larger extended family, more time is likely to be spent with other family members (Hindelang, et al., 1978, p. 249). As a result of these factors, married persons are less likely to be alone in public, and thus can be expected to have lower rates of victimization than single persons.

Patterns of association can also be linked to income. Family income reflects an individual’s position in the economic structure, which is an important constraint on behavioral
options. Income is positively related to an individual’s flexibility to adjust one’s lifestyle to one’s wishes, including the ability to choose where one lives, the mode of transportation used, the proportion of time spent in public places, and the nature of leisure activities (p. 249).

Often, an “income-linked segregation” results in housing, transportation, and other patterns (ibid.). Thus, like income, race is closely connected to a person’s lifestyle. Although Hindelang and colleagues note that “[s]ome of the importance of race as an indicator of lifestyle derives from its association with family income,” they also admit that “whites and blacks of the same socioeconomic stratum live in quite different worlds” (p. 250). These differences are most apparent in housing patterns and educational and recreational opportunities. For example, whites are more likely to attend private schools, belong to private clubs, and live in more economically homogeneous areas than non-whites, hence the life chances and life experiences of these two groups are markedly different (ibid.).

From the above discussion, one can also infer that education levels will have an influence on a person’s lifestyle. Individuals with less than a high school education will be employed in different types of jobs than high school graduates. Examining the effect of labor stratification on crime rates, Crutchfield (1989) claims that neighborhoods comprised mostly of people employed in such “secondary sector” occupations have higher crime rates “not because they are composed of poor people, but because of the relatively large number of persons who have unstable employment and perhaps weak bonds to society through work. As a result of their uneven employment, they are frequently idle in a ‘situation of company’ that is conducive to crime” (p. 491). Although Crutchfield is referring to the effect on criminals, his statement is equally applicable to victims. Thus, individuals who have relatively low levels of formal education will
be more likely to be victims of crime because of the way education is believed to influence income and lifestyles.

This study will test whether certain factors influence an individual’s risk of repeated victimization in the directions suggested by the preceding discussion. It is expected that as income or age increases, and individual’s risk of crime will decrease. One would also expect individuals who are male, single, non-white, or who lack a high school education to have higher victimization risks because of the implications these factors suggest for one’s routine activities.

Several other variables that are not explicitly addressed in the routine activities approach also merit discussion.

It is widely believed that most victims of violent crimes are victimized by people with whom they are acquainted. Bard and Sangrey report that almost half of all assaults reported to the National Crime Survey in 1980 involved individuals who knew each other (1986, p. 175), while Elias estimates that three-quarters of aggravated assault victims know their attackers (1986, p. 58). This adds support to Hindelang, et al.’s theory that crimes are the result of offenders, victims, and lack of guardians converging nonrandomly in time and place, but because of the disagreement as to the exact extent of the victim-offender relationship, this study includes the relationship to the offender to determine how closely the data resembles this theory.

One might also expect residence within a highly populated area to contribute to an individual’s risk of being victimized. Sherman, et al. note that “[p]redatory stranger offenses, in particular, seem dependent on places where offenders converge with vulnerable victims and low surveillance” (1989, p. 47). Because the lifestyle hypothesis states that crime requires not only criminals and victims, but lack of guardians, it is reasonable to assume that in larger places,
where police have more responsibilities or where there are fewer police officers per capita, crime is likely to be more widespread. Also, in more densely populated areas, criminals have a greater pool of potential victims and can more easily disappear into a crowd and have a better chance of getting away (LaFree and Birkbeck, 1991, p. 76). Thus, incentives exist that may encourage criminal activity. For these reasons, this study examines whether place size, such as inclusion within a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) or central city, affects a person’s victimization risk.

Finally, this study includes two other variables that are believed to impact an individual’s multiple victimization risk: Whether the victim took action against the offender during the victimization, and whether the victim reported the crime to the police. Although not explicitly mentioned in the routine activities approach to crime victimization, these two variables are believed to be important for the following reason: Both variables can be thought of as proxies for measurements of how “tolerant” the victim is of crime.

This should NOT to be interpreted as a victim’s “taste” for crime; rather, some victims are less likely to fight back against an attacker or report a crime to the police if they believe such actions might result in further harm. This type of victim is believed to live in areas where, for one reason or another, crime is rampant and, therefore, the individual’s repeat victimization risk will be higher. Similarly, a victim who takes action during an attack or who reports the crime to the police may be perceived by the offender as an unsuitable future victim because the criminal’s chance of being caught increases.
**Model and Data**

In order to examine whether certain individual characteristics of crime victims correspond to those suggested by economists, sociologists and criminologists, victimization data is used to determine what characteristics, if any, make persons more likely to be victimized multiple times than others who are only victimized once. One of the biggest problems in studies of crime victimization, however, is the fact that a significant number of crimes go unreported to the authorities, thus underestimating actual crime rates. Data from police and FBI sources, for example, often encounter this problem (Hagan, 1997, p. 187). As a result, this study used data from the Census Bureau’s National Crime Survey (NCS), which is believed to contain a more accurate account of the actual number of victimizations experienced in the United States in a given year (DiIulio, 1996, p. 5).

Four regressions were run on the following equation:

\[ \text{ReVictim} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Y + \beta_2 \text{AGE} + \beta_3 S + \beta_4 M + \beta_5 \text{EDUC} + \beta_6 W + \beta_7 \text{RELN} + \beta_8 \text{MSA} + \beta_9 \text{CITY} + \beta_{10} \text{ACT} + \beta_{11} \text{POL} + \epsilon \]

Where the dependent variable is:

\[ \text{ReVictim} = \text{Recidivist Victim} (\text{ReVictim} = 1 \text{ if victim was assaulted more than once}; 0 \text{ if victim was only assaulted once}) \]

and the independent variables are:

- \( Y \) = income (a 7-point income scale was constructed in lieu of actual income in dollars due to the available data. For an explanation of the scale, see Appendix A),
- \( \text{AGE} \) = victim’s age in years,
- \( S \) = single (\( S = 1 \) if victim is not married; 0 if victim is married),
- \( M \) = male (\( M = 1 \) if victim is male; 0 if victim is female),
- \( \text{EDUC} \) = victim’s education in years (see Appendix B),
- \( W \) = white (\( W = 1 \) if victim is white; 0 if victim is non-white),
- \( \text{RELN} \) = relation to offender (\( \text{RELN} = 1 \) if offender was a relative, close friend, or other person known to victim; \( \text{RELN} = 0 \) if offender was a “stranger”),
- \( \text{MSA} \) = 1980 MSA status of residence (\( \text{MSA} = 1 \) if victim lived within a U.S. Census Bureau Metropolitan Statistical Area; 0 if victim lived outside of an MSA),
- \( \text{CITY} \) = central city of an MSA (\( \text{CITY} = 1 \) if victim lived within the central city of an MSA; 0 if victim lived outside of the central city, which includes places within the MSA but NOT within the central city of that MSA),
ACT = victim took action (Act = 1 if victim took action during victimization; 0 otherwise),

POL = crime reported to police (Pol = 1 if victim reported crime to police; 0 otherwise),

and ε = a stochastic error term.

Data was obtained from the National Crime Survey’s (NCS) Longitudinal File, 1988-1989, courtesy of the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. The file contains the responses of households participating in three NCS interviews and having at least one victimization during the time period July 1988 to December 1989. Interviews were conducted with all household members 12 years of age and older. If an individual reported multiple victimizations, a separate record was written for each observation.

After omitting all observations that were missing entries for the relevant variables, there were 614 observations remaining in the sample that was used for this analysis, 292 of which represent individuals who were victimized more than once. It should be noted that this survey includes crimes that were not reported to the police. In the sample used in this study, for example, more than half of all crimes were not reported to the police. Most variables, including the dependent variable, were qualitative in nature and thus had to be recoded into dummy variables (that is, variables that only have values of either 0 or 1).

Because the dependent variable in the model is represented by a dichotomous variable, a simple regression using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) cannot be used. With data points that fall on either 0 or 1, such as those here, a simple linear relationship is not present. Thus, a linear model such as OLS is inappropriate because error terms are no longer normally distributed and heteroskedasticity is likely to be a problem. Also, an OLS regression used in the presence of a dichotomous dependent variable could result in predicted probabilities greater than one or less
than zero, which are theoretic impossibilities. A final result of these problems is that commonly used goodness-of-fit measures are inappropriate.

Instead, a probit procedure is used here. By using a probit model, the predicted value of the dependent variable can be interpreted as the probability that the individual will be victimized more than once, given that individual’s characteristics. This avoids the bias of OLS and generates more efficient parameter estimates (of course, what matters most in this particular study is not the values of the parameter estimates themselves, but simply their signs, a point that will be discussed later).

Because of differences in categorical types of crime, two separate equations were estimated, sorting the sample data based on two types of crime: crimes against persons and crimes against property. The distinctions are important to the expected signs of the parameter estimates of certain independent variables in each regression. The category of crimes against property includes such crimes as robbery, burglary, pickpocketing, and other types of theft, while the category of crimes against persons includes the crimes of rape and assault (murder, also defined as a personal crime, is not considered here because the NCS is comprised of victim’s own accounts of criminal victimizations. Obviously, a murder victim cannot fill out a survey).

The independent variable regarding income, for example, is likely to affect these two types of crime differently. As an individual’s income increases, he or she can engage in consumption practices that make him or her more likely to be a victim of theft. That is, the more income a person has, the more “stuff” he or she has, which makes him or her a more attractive victim of property crime. However, according to the routine activities approach, as a person’s income increases, he or she presumably works in safer areas and can afford to live in better
neighborhoods. Thus, as income increases, one’s probability of being the victim of assault, for example, should decrease.

In testing this model, the expected signs of the parameter estimates are as follows:

\[ \text{ReVictim} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Y + \beta_2 \text{AGE} + \beta_3 S + \beta_4 \text{M} + \beta_5 \text{EDUC} + \beta_6 W + \beta_7 \text{RELN} + \beta_8 \text{MSA} + \beta_9 \text{CITY} + \beta_{10} \text{ACT} + \beta_{11} \text{POL} + \epsilon \]

For example, it is hypothesized that the variable for the victim’s relationship to the offender, RELN, should be positively related to a person’s probability of being victimized multiple times. That is, if the victim knows the offender, the victim is more likely to be victimized again. Similarly, the expected signs of each of the other variables conform to those discussed in the previous section.

**RESULTS**

The following results from the initial probit regressions were obtained:

**Personal Crimes:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>t-ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.72207</td>
<td>0.53179</td>
<td>1.35781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCOME</td>
<td>0.04416</td>
<td>0.04607</td>
<td>0.95850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>-0.01561</td>
<td>0.00600</td>
<td>-2.60044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SINGLE</td>
<td>-0.21349</td>
<td>0.25212</td>
<td>-0.84675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>0.25114</td>
<td>0.14888</td>
<td>1.68693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCAT</td>
<td>0.00767</td>
<td>0.03089</td>
<td>0.24831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHITE</td>
<td>-0.41320</td>
<td>0.19664</td>
<td>-2.10135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELN</td>
<td>0.07122</td>
<td>0.13917</td>
<td>0.51173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>-0.24016</td>
<td>0.18614</td>
<td>-1.29016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CITY</td>
<td>0.41473</td>
<td>0.16642</td>
<td>2.49200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTION</td>
<td>-0.07355</td>
<td>0.14735</td>
<td>-0.49918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLICE</td>
<td>-0.01870</td>
<td>0.12229</td>
<td>-0.15288</td>
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Pearson Goodness-of-Fit Chi Square=363.749  DF=351  P=0.308  N=363
Property Crimes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>t-ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>0.61486</td>
<td>-1.17800</td>
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<tr>
<td>INCOME</td>
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<td>AGE</td>
<td>-0.01786</td>
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<td>-3.58743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SINGLE</td>
<td>-0.13834</td>
<td>0.23109</td>
<td>-0.59866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>0.26994</td>
<td>0.18383</td>
<td>1.46844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCAT</td>
<td>0.04355</td>
<td>0.04120</td>
<td>1.05704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHITE</td>
<td>-0.07386</td>
<td>0.22827</td>
<td>-0.32358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELN</td>
<td>0.12127</td>
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<td>MSA</td>
<td>0.17021</td>
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<td>ACTION</td>
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<td>POLICE</td>
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<td>0.64792</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson Goodness-of-Fit Chi Square=241.340  DF=229  P=0.275  N=241

The overall fit of these regression equations is measured by the Pearson Goodness-of-Fit Chi Square statistic, which uses the standardized residuals to compare the observed probabilities to those predicted by the equation. Because the Goodness-of-Fit Chi Squares are not significant, we cannot reject the null hypothesis that at least one of the coefficients differs significantly from zero. Of course, considering that the observed values of most of the independent variables are either zero or one, this statistic has little meaning here. Instead, what is of concern to the present study is the sign and significance of each independent variable.

From these results, it is evident in the regression on personal crimes that the only variables that are significant are AGE, WHITE, and CITY (that is, the absolute values of their t-scores are greater than two), and all of these coefficients take on the expected signs. In the equation for property crimes, only AGE and ACT were significant variables. While the coefficient for age takes on the expected sign, that of the action variable did not. Because most of the significant variables had the expected signs, there is some validity to the routine activities
approach to crime victimization. However, in both equations, many variables that were expected to be significant (such as those for race, gender, and education) were not found to be so, suggesting that some problems with the data or models may be present.

Collinearity is one possible problem. First, collinearity between the MSA and central city variables may exist because information contained in the CITY variable is simultaneously contained in the MSA variable. This can result in inaccurate or imprecise parameter estimates and might explain why the MSA variable has a low t-ratio in both equations or why it has an unexpected sign in the personal crime equation. A common method for solving this problem is to omit one of the offending variables. But in regressions that omitted the central city variable, the t-ratio of the MSA variable fell even further toward insignificance, while in at least one regression that omitted the MSA variable (that of the property crime equation), the CITY variable became insignificant. Thus, collinearity between these two variables may not be the problem, so it is perhaps better to leave both variables in the model.

Instead, a theoretical explanation could exist that might account for these discrepancies. Theory suggests that the more people in an area, the more crime is likely to occur. This suggests that crime is positively related to location within an MSA and even more so within the central city of an MSA. However, a common migration trend has been for people to move away from central cities in favor of outlying areas. This may actually leave cities relatively unpopulated, especially at night (when people who work in urban areas leave for homes in the suburbs), when crimes are most likely to occur. Another related theory is that “white flight” has left mostly less mobile members of already economically disadvantaged minorities residing in the cities, populations which are believed to be more likely to be victims of crime, regardless of location.
As for the possible relationship between the ACT and POL variables, they may be collinear because those individuals who are more likely to take action during an attack may be the very same individuals who are more likely to contact police after the crime has occurred. When equations were estimated to include each of these variables separately the results were not greatly affected, hence collinearity between these two variables may not be a problem after all. This may be a theoretically valid conclusion, as it is uncertain whether the sort of people who take action during their victimization incident are the same sort of people who notify the police after the incident. A clarification of this relationship may be a suitable topic for future study.

Another interesting result to consider deals with the race variable, W. In the regression over personal crimes, W is significant and has the expected sign. That is, whites are less likely to be victimized more than once in crimes of assault or rape, which conforms to the lifestyles theory. However, this variable is insignificant in the regression over property crimes. Thus, although there are serious socioeconomic differences between whites and nonwhites, the model does not suggest that one group is more likely to be victimized multiple times in crimes such as theft. Of course, this may be due to some peculiarities in the sample data, in which over 80 percent of the sample was white. Although this figure may nearly approximate the percentage of whites in the general population, many studies show that blacks experience disproportionate rates of victimization. For example, in one Philadelphia study, while blacks were 39 percent of the city’s population, they were 78.5 percent of its murder victims (DiIulio, 1996, p. 7). Thus, it is generally believed that blacks typically make up a large proportion of crime victims, a fact that is not reflected in the data for this study.

Of the variables that were found to be significant and have the expected signs, AGE is the only one that is significant in both regressions. Thus, young persons can be expected to have
higher risks of multiple victimizations than older persons, a result that is supported by the lifestyles approach. In the personal crime regression, race and location within a central city of an MSA also conform to expected theory.

However, in the property crime regression, the variable measuring whether a person took action during the crime was significant, but had a sign that was the opposite of that predicted by the model. In other words, whether someone took action during a theft or other crime against property actually increased their likelihood of repeat victimization. However, again, this may be due to the nature of the crimes in the sample. Property crimes includes robbery, a type of theft which, by definition, requires that victims and offenders have direct interaction. However, burglary is also a property crime, but in this particular type of crime, the victim need not be present, which means the victim often cannot take action against the offender while the crime is occurring. Thus, this particular variable perhaps ought not to be included in a regression on the category of property crimes.

Interestingly, the regression on property crimes yields some interesting insight into the routine activities theory on crime. Comparing expected signs to those actually obtained (and ignoring significance levels), several variables, notably S, EDUC, ACT, and POL had signs contrary to those suggested by the lifestyle theory. I can think of no good reason why reporting the crime to the police makes someone more likely to be victimized again, however, the possible reason for the unexpected sign of the variable ACT was discussed above, and the others merit discussion as well.

The sign of the coefficient on the marital status variable was negative, suggesting that single persons are less likely to be recidivist victims than married persons, while the sign of the education variable was positive, which suggests that more education leads to an increased risk of
repeat victimization. For property crimes, these discrepancies can be reconciled when one considers socioeconomic factors that the routine activities approach overlooks. Namely, married couples and persons with higher levels of education are likely to earn higher incomes than single, less educated people. Hence, the more educated and the married will tend to have more “stuff,” making them more likely to be repeat victims of property crimes.

**DISCUSSION**

From the results obtained above, it is evident that the lifestyle/routine activities theory has some validity, but it does not conclusively explain an individual’s risk of repeat victimization. The only variable that was significant and had the expected sign in both regressions was that of age. A few of the other variables were significant in one regression or the other, and most of these had the expected signs. However, the insignificance and/or unexpected signs of the other independent variables leads one to question the validity of the lifestyle/routine activities theory of victimization, particularly how it relates to repeat victims.

Thus, rather than reducing crime by imploring victims to change their behaviors or activities, the structural factors that lead to crime might be addressed instead. Regardless of what policies are most easily implemented, it is clear that something must be done to control and prevent crime, as crime of any kind has far-reaching effects on both individuals and communities. Better policy depends on better analyses. However, until we have better victim survey methods and thereby a clearer understanding of both victims and criminals, we may never be able to definitively answer the question: “Who gets victimized?”
APPENDIX A:

Each unit of the income variable used in this analysis has the following value:

Y=1 refers to a respondent’s total family income that was less than $10,000;
Y=2: $10,000 to $19,999;
Y=3: $20,000 to $29,999;
Y=4: $30,000 to $39,999;
Y=5: $40,000 to $49,000;
Y=6: $50,000 to $74,999;
Y=7: $75,000 and over.

APPENDIX B:

The education variable used in the NCS had to be adjusted slightly for the purposes of this study. Values from 0 to 12 years correspond with the respondent’s highest level of education completed. Because years above 12 in the survey were given values that did not correspond to the respondent’s actual number of years in school, this study simply recoded observations with a reported value greater than 12 as 13. That is, anyone who reported at least some college was given a grade level value of 13.

Although this seems to discount the effect of varying levels of college education on victimization rates, it enables the effect of the independent variable Educ to be measured more accurately. Without this recoding, the variable Educ would have had to have been recoded as a dichotomous variable, simply representing whether a victim had a high school education (or some other arbitrary level of education) or not. It is my opinion that measuring education with a continuous variable provides more robust results than if it were measured with a dummy variable.
REFERENCES


