

**CALIFORNIA CRIME VICTIMS'**

# VOICES

*Findings from the First-Ever Survey of California  
Crime Victims and Survivors*



CALIFORNIANS  
FOR **SAFETY** AND **JUSTICE**

[SAFEANDJUST.ORG](http://SAFEANDJUST.ORG)



# *Table of* **CONTENTS**

Executive Summary.....	4
Who are California Crime Victims/Survivors?.....	6
What are the Reporting Practices of Crime Victims/Survivors?.....	10
What is the Impact of Crime on Victims/Survivors?.....	12
How Effective are Existing Services for Crime Victims/Survivors?.....	14
What are the Attitudes of Victims/Survivors Towards California’s Justice System? .....	16
What Do Crime Victims/Survivors Think About Public Safety Realignment?.....	19
Do the Views of Victims/Survivors Differ from Those of Other Californians? .....	20
Conclusion and Recommendations .....	21
Methodology, Existing Data and End Notes .....	22

# Executive SUMMARY

In the public debate on how to design a criminal justice system that serves the needs of California's communities and makes them safer, the perspectives of victims and survivors of crime are essential.

Safety and justice for victims involves holding individuals who commit crimes accountable, as well as stopping cycles of crime and repeat victimization. Victims also need pathways to recovery, including information and support to overcome the physical, emotional and financial consequences of crime.

For the last several years, California's overall crime rates have been lower than they were for the prior three decades.<sup>1</sup> However, the concentration of many types of crime means some communities continue to be deeply impacted by crime. Despite changing crime trends, criminal justice remains a major annual expenditure at both the state and local level. Prison overcrowding has also led the state to make significant changes to its justice system in the last few years. In this context, understanding the experiences and needs of people who are victimized by crime will help improve our public safety and justice strategies and investments.

Historically, there has been a severe lack of data on who California's crime victims are, what they need to recover from crime and their opinions about our state's justice priorities.

To begin filling this gap in research, **Californians for Safety and Justice commissioned the first-ever survey of California crime victims.** David Binder Research fielded the California Crime Victims Survey in April 2013, polling more

*Survey findings reflect a different perspective than commonly understood about the views of California crime victims. These views are not always reflected accurately in the media or around state policy tables.*

than 2,600 Californians who were broadly representative of California's population with respect to race, ethnicity, age and gender. Of those, 500 identified as having been a victim of crime in the last five years, and these respondents answered 61 questions regarding their experiences and perspectives.

This report describes the findings of this survey and points to opportunities for further research and reforms to improve victim recovery. Among the findings, it may be surprising to some that California victims – even when profoundly impacted by their experience with crime – overwhelmingly favor a system that focuses on rehabilitation rather than incarceration. **Survey findings reflect a different perspective than commonly understood about the views of California crime victims. These views are not always reflected accurately in the media or around state policy tables.**<sup>2</sup> The following is a brief summary of the key findings in this report.

## KEY FINDINGS

-  One in five Californians acknowledges having been a victim of crime in the last five years. Half of these acknowledge being a victim of a violent crime.
-  Two in three of these crime victims acknowledge having been victims of multiple crimes in the past five years. African Americans and Latinos are more likely to have been victims of three or more crimes in the past five years.
-  Victims of violent crime are more likely to be low-income, young (especially under 30), and Latino or African American.
-  Two in three crime victims report experiencing anxiety, stress and difficulty with sleeping, relationships or work. Half of these felt that it takes more than six months to recover from these experiences.
-  Four of the five services available to crime victims tested – including assistance with accessing victims’ compensation and navigating the criminal justice process – were unknown to the majority of victims. Of those who had used the services, nearly half found them difficult to access.
-  When asked about California’s rates of incarceration, more victims say that we send “too many” people to prison than “too few.”
-  Victims want a focus on supervised probation and rehabilitation by a two-to-one margin over prisons and jails.
-  Victims prefer investments in mental health and drug treatments by a three-to-one margin over incarceration.
-  Three in four victims believe that prisons either make inmates better at committing crimes or have no impact at all. Only a small minority believes that prisons rehabilitate people.
-  Sixty-five percent of California crime victims support the 2011 Public Safety Realignment law that shifted responsibility and funding for people convicted of nonviolent, non-serious offenses from the state to counties.



The following report includes more findings and provides some supplemental information from national surveys to illuminate who is impacted by crime and what those individuals need. It is the first in a series of research reports Californians for Safety and Justice aims to produce about California crime victims and survivors.

# WHO *are California* **CRIME VICTIMS/SURVIVORS?**

In our survey, **one in five Californians** acknowledged having been a victim of **crime in the last five years**. Virtually all had been victims of property crimes, most on more than one occasion.<sup>3</sup> Half of those surveyed also acknowledged having been a victim of a violent crime.<sup>4</sup>



## EXPERIENCE WITH PROPERTY CRIMES (% OF CRIME VICTIMS)

	All Crime Victims	Female	Male	White	Latino	Asian American*	African American*	Victim of Single Crime	Victim of Multiple Crimes
Property Theft	82%	81	83	81	82	79	79	75	86
Vandalism	55%	57	54	54	56	53	47	33	64
Identity Theft	54%	60	48	53	53	45	64	35	62
Burglary	39%	39	39	39	39	47	32	26	45

## EXPERIENCE WITH VIOLENT CRIMES (% OF CRIME VICTIMS)

	All Crime Victims	Female	Male	White	Latino	Asian American*	African American*	Victim of Single Crime	Victim of Multiple Crimes
Stalking	34%	40	29	35	39	19	18	13	40
Robbery	25%	27	23	23	28	19	27	11	28
Assault	21%	21	22	21	25	14	18	9	24
Rape*	9%	15	4	8	10	5	12	3	9
Murder of Family Member*	11%	13	10	4	18	5	29	7	13

\* small sample size

These findings are consistent with those of other surveys: According to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) and the Uniform Crime Report for California (which collects information only on reported crimes), in 2011 property crimes occurred and were reported to the police about six times more often than violent crime.<sup>5</sup>

The NCVS data indicate that, nationally, over a six-month period:

- Latinos, African Americans and American Indians were significantly more likely than whites to have been victims of a violent crime;
- Men were more likely than women to have been a victim of violent crime in the last six months;<sup>6</sup> and
- Individuals from 18- to 24-years old were much more likely to have been violently victimized than any other age group.<sup>7</sup>

Demographic groups experience different types of crimes with varying frequency. For example, women are much more likely than men to be a victim of violent crime perpetrated by someone they know. Men, on the other hand, are assaulted by strangers much more frequently than by known perpetrators.<sup>8</sup> **African Americans are much more likely than whites to be victims of homicide, accounting for half of all homicide victims nationally in 2005**, according to the Uniform Crime Report.<sup>9</sup>

The survey also underscores how much victimization impacts certain California families and communities more than others:

- Over half of crime victims had a friend who had been victimized in the last five years.
- Two in three had a family member who had also been a victim of crime.
- Eight in 10 people who were not crime victims also did not have friends or family who had been victimized.

## My house had been broken into before,

so when my son and I returned home one night and noticed something was wrong, my heart sank.

Then we began to notice what was missing. What would have been simply “property” to the burglars were incredibly important, personal items to my family.

A bicycle I bought as a ticket to some freedom when raising two children — and that I rode 130 miles to raise funds for Multiple Sclerosis (which my brother has). A necklace I wore almost every day. A laptop with countless hours of work — personal and professional.

But I fell to my knees in horror when I noticed a leather pouch in my bedroom missing. In it were the ashes of my late sweetheart, who had died two years earlier from cancer. The feeling of loss and violation was unbearable; it was all I had left of him.

As a musician, Ron had used that pouch for his saxophone every day for 40 years, but the teens who stole it may have thought it contained drugs.

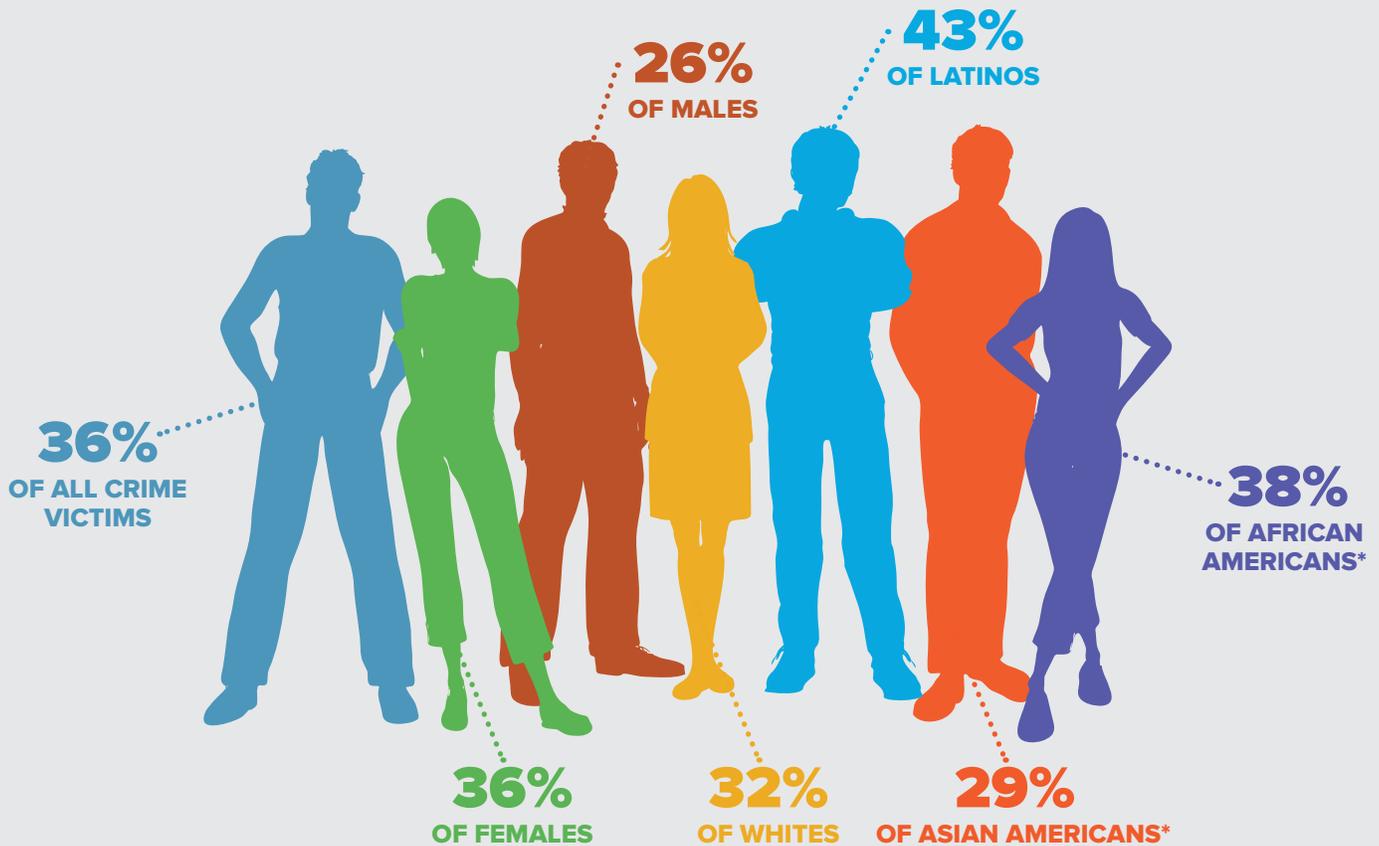
It’s just so senseless — things of so little value to the burglars but of such great consequence to the robbed.

I know that some people who do this are in the grip of drugs, poverty, desperation or simply don’t understand the damage they’re causing. They must be held accountable.

Incarceration is not always the answer; I was able to face the young man who robbed me in court — and feel strongly that him hearing my story and pain is what could lead to real change. That’s the value of including the voice of the victim in our justice system’s attempts to prevent future crimes.

-Susan

## VICTIMS OF THREE OR MORE CRIMES



\* small sample size

### WHO IS REPEATEDLY VICTIMIZED

Survey results, coupled with NCVS and Uniform Crime Report data, demonstrate that victimization is not randomly distributed throughout the population: **Some victims experience victimization regularly, others experience it occasionally, and the large remainder do not experience it at all.**

The survey found that **two in three of all crime victims acknowledged having been victims of multiple crimes in the past five years.**

According to national data, the strongest predictor of victimization is having previously been a victim of crime.<sup>10</sup> This is known as repeat victimization. People who are repeatedly victimized are more likely than other crime victims to suffer mental health problems such as higher levels of depression, anxiety and symptoms related to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).<sup>11</sup>

The California Crime Victims Survey, with its long five-year reference period, captured people who are regularly

victimized, as well as a broader cross-section of those who occasionally experience crime. The number of people who acknowledged having experienced any crime in the last five years was roughly in proportion to California's general population in terms of race, ethnicity and age. The survey showed the impact of certain demographic characteristics on an individual's likelihood of being violently victimized is starker: Having higher income, education levels and being white were factors that made it less likely one has been a victim of violent crime.

Other surveys have shown the risk of victimization for an individual occupying one of the at-risk categories (young, male or African American) is significantly lower than for someone fitting a combination of these attributes (young, male *and* African American).<sup>12,13</sup>

In terms of repeat victimization, the California Crime Victims Survey showed Latinos and African Americans are more likely than whites to have been victims of three or more crimes over a five-year period. Asian Americans were slightly less likely to have been victimized on three or more occasions than whites.<sup>14</sup>

## Being a “victim of crime” is not a label that comes naturally for me.

Sadly, part of the reason is that so many other people I know have experienced crimes. It's the rule, not the exception.

When I was 10, my older brother Oscar — a father figure — was shot and beaten to death near our South Central Los Angeles home. No one ever told me what happened. We mourned and tried to move on, but it shattered our family in many ways.

I was bitter as a teenager. I drank, tried drugs and acted out in destructive ways. I saw the same ripple effect with friends and neighbors — mostly young men of color — when they and their families experienced crimes.

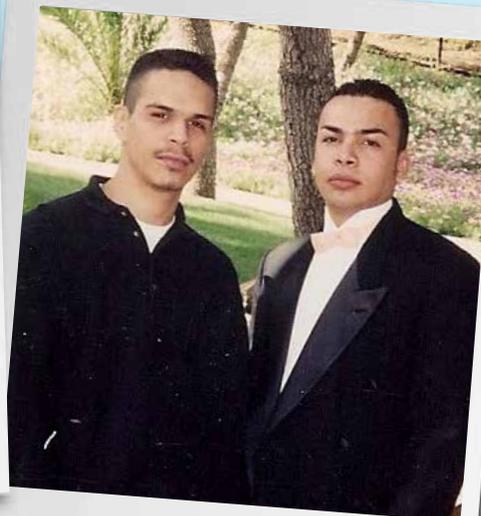
I eventually cleaned up and rebuilt my life, which helped me withstand the murder of another brother last August. Gilbert, 41, was shot and killed trying to stop a man from entering a wedding party uninvited.

While such tragedies rock families, too many communities in California just “live” with crime — violent acts but also burglaries, drug dealing, vandalism and more. These communities feel abandoned by lawmakers, law enforcement and the media.

Even though these communities experience the lion share of crime, they do not receive the lion share of attention or resources. Hopefully a better understanding of who really is affected by crime — and how this affects the rest of California — can lead to policies that *prevent* crime.



DAVID



DAVID AND GILBERT

# What are the REPORTING PRACTICES OF CRIME VICTIMS/SURVIVORS?

National data indicates that victims frequently do not report crime to the authorities. According to NCVS, about half of all known violent crimes — excluding homicides but including aggravated assault, robbery and sexual assault — go unreported to police and other law enforcement.<sup>15</sup> A substantial portion of violent crime (including approximately one in five serious violent assaults) is reported by bystanders, relatives or acquaintances, not the victims.<sup>16</sup>

According to NCVS, people are even less likely to report certain property crimes (e.g., motor vehicle theft, burglary and theft), and nationally about three-fifths of these crimes go unreported.

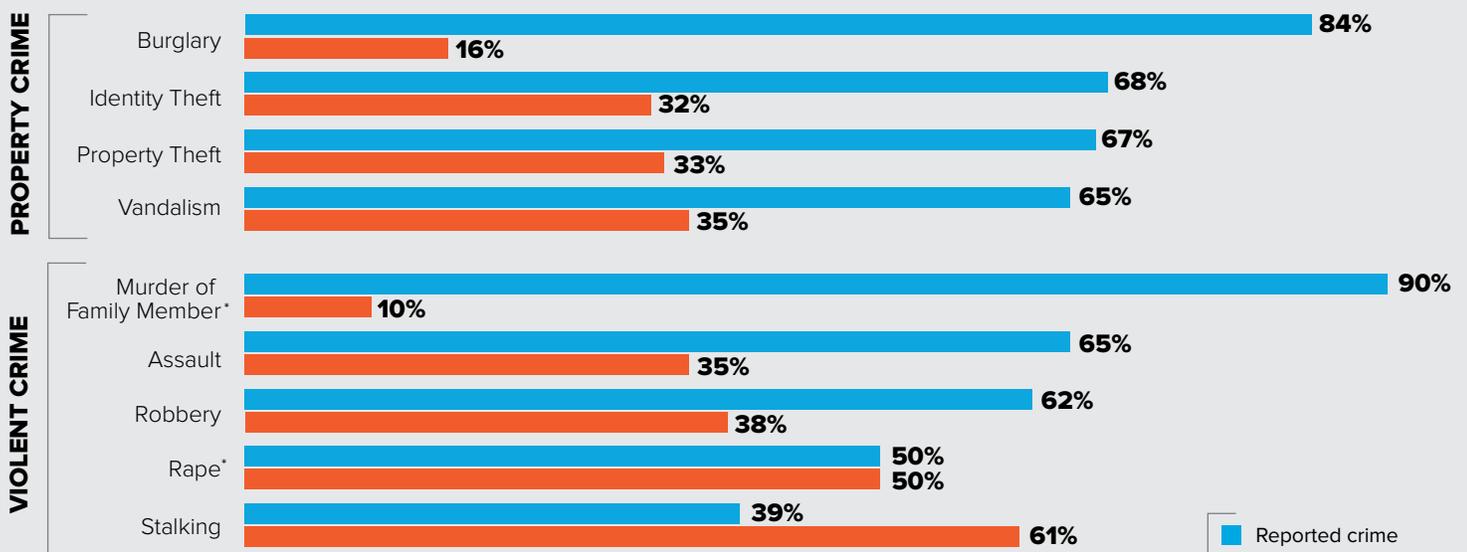
According to the California Crime Victims Survey, many survivors also said that they did not report crimes that they experienced to the police. Victims of stalking and rape were most likely to say that they did not report, while victims of residential burglary were most likely to report the crime.

Those who reported crimes said that they were motivated to prosecute the person responsible and to prevent future crimes, as well as to create a record for insurance purposes. Those who did not report crimes were reluctant to inform the authorities mostly because they struggled with the time and effort required to report, especially if they were doubtful that the police could or would do anything.

Women were more likely than men to report crimes, and African Americans were the ethnic group most likely to report. Asian Americans were least likely.

The higher level of reporting among African-American respondents (compared to whites) is consistent with the 2007 NCVS report “Black Victims of Violent Crime” that states: “Violence against black victims was more likely than violence against white victims...to be reported to police. Among black victims, robbery and aggravated assault were the violent crimes most likely to be reported.”<sup>17</sup>

## CRIMES RESPONDENTS DID, DID NOT REPORT TO POLICE



\* small sample size

**Everyone knows that if a woman is raped** or a young child is sexually abused, a serious crime has taken place. But many such crimes go unreported – for various reasons.

I know first hand. When I was four, a male caretaker in my New York apartment building sexually assaulted me multiple times. At the time, I didn't understand what was happening, let alone how to verbalize it. By the time I told my parents – at age 30 – the man responsible was long gone.

Then, at age 22, what started as a normal night out with a male friend ended in a rape. I was in shock, and feelings of shame and fear kept me from telling anyone – better to just move on, avoid him and act like it never happened.



I understand that many people wonder why I wouldn't pursue justice for these crimes – for myself and to prevent other such victims – but survivors of such crimes face many conflicting, complicated emotions and choices in the midst of their trauma: guilt, shame, fear and the reluctance to relive the trauma in police and court depositions. Add to this cultural differences, shame and stigma, and under-reporting becomes more understandable.

If we're to increase reporting rates, we need a justice system that is culturally competent and sensitive to the needs of survivors. Community organizations can be valuable partners, and public awareness of these crimes must evolve so that the survivors feel more empowered to share their stories, heal within communities and prevent their attackers from committing new crimes.

## WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO REPORT THIS CRIME TO THE POLICE?



# What is the **IMPACT** of **CRIME** **ON VICTIMS/SURVIVORS?**

Regardless of their demographic characteristics or whether they reported their crime, most California victims are deeply impacted by crime in their communities:

- Less than one in three say that they live in an area where they feel very safe.
- Only one in five victims of violent crime believe they are very safe where they live.
- Nine in 10 survivors of crime say their quality of life is affected by crime in their area.
- One in four victims said they are “very affected.”

Being victimized can be a traumatic event and often has a significant impact on victims’ long-term health and wellbeing:

- **Two in three California crime victims reported experiencing anxiety, stress and difficulty with sleeping, relationships or work after the crime incident.** These impacts are disruptive to daily life, can have long-term health impacts and are often symptomatic of trauma.

*Two in three California crime victims reported experiencing anxiety, stress and difficulty with sleeping, relationships or work after the crime incident.*

- Half of these respondents said that it takes more than six months to recover from being victimized by crime.
- One in five victims of violent crime said it takes longer than two years to recover.
- One in four survivors said they missed work as a result of the crime incidents. Of those who missed work, the average number of days missed was 11.<sup>18</sup>

*Nine in 10 survivors of crime say their quality of life is affected by crime in their area.*



## **I'll never forget July 24, 2004. It was a terrible, terrible day that changed me more than any event in my life.**

That was the day I lost my only child, Roger, in a triple homicide in San Francisco. He was my life – my family – so both were decimated when his life was taken.

I was not prepared for the grief I experienced in the aftermath of his murder. I tried to be strong, but hopelessness drowned my mental and emotional wellbeing. I thought of suicide regularly, and I saw no path to recovery. I felt alone.

Then, in 2005, the District Attorney's Office referred me to the Trauma Recovery Center, a joint venture between San Francisco General Hospital and the University of California, San Francisco, that combines multiple services for survivors of crime under one roof. There I participated in individual grief counseling, a support group for mothers who lost a child to gun violence, and marital/family counseling.

The Trauma Recovery Center saved my life. My ability now to work full time and be a loving, present wife, grandmother and family member is due to receiving the proper supports after the trauma of a violent crime.

I know many victims and survivors aren't as fortunate. They feel lost after the crime and don't know about or don't know *how* to access services that could help them recover from depression, financial hardship, struggles with alcohol or drugs, and more. The impact of crime may be hidden, but it is real — and so too must be the effort to reduce the trauma.

# HOW EFFECTIVE ARE EXISTING SERVICES

## for Crime Victims/Survivors?

Despite the fact that many California crime victims experience stress and trauma after the crime – and endure a long period of recovery – many do not pursue or receive support from state- and community-based victims services programs.

The problem is not that services are unavailable; California state government, local governments and community organizations offer a broad array of support and services to assist victims. The services offered and the capacity of service providers vary by county, but across the state, survivors can access counseling, referrals, orientation to the justice system, and financial assistance with costs stemming from the crime, among other services.<sup>19</sup>

It appears a big challenge lies in victims’ awareness of and ability to access such services. The California Crime Victims Survey indicates that **the majority of crime victims are unaware of the full array of available services.**

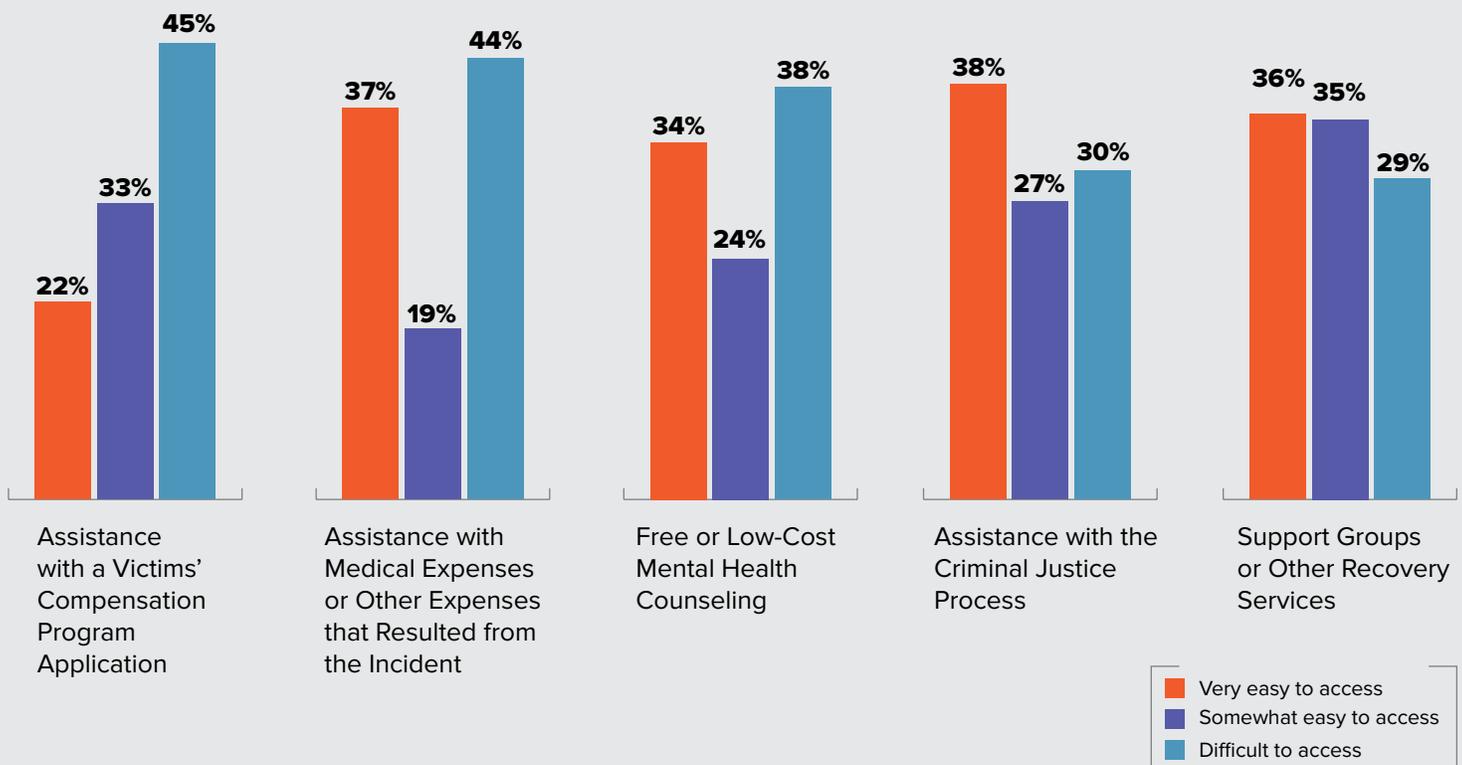
- Two in three were unaware they could get assistance to complete an application for the victims’ compensation program administered by the Victims Compensation and Government Claims Board.
- Sixty-five percent were unaware of assistance available for expenses incurred as a result of crime.
- The majority were unaware of assistance with the criminal justice process and with accessing mental health counseling.
- Only “support groups” were recognized by a majority of crime victims.

### UNAWARE BUT INTERESTED IN SERVICES (% OF CRIME VICTIMS)

	Assistance with Applying for Victims’ Compensation	Help with Expenses	Assistance with Criminal Justice Process	Mental Health	Support Groups
<b>Total</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>17%</b>
White	31	30	26	19	14
Latino	35	30	31	26	18
Asian American*	26	18	32	16	16
African American*	35	38	24	29	32
Experience Anxiety and Stress	37	32	29	26	18

\* small sample size

## ACCESSIBILITY OF VICTIMS SERVICES



Nearly one in three crime victims said they were interested but unaware of the victims' compensation program application and assistance with medical or other expenses, as well as assistance with navigating the criminal justice process in general. Another 22 percent were interested in mental health counseling, and 17 percent were interested but unaware of support groups.

Nearly twice as many victims, if aware of recovery services, would seek out most services.

### AWARENESS AND INTEREST IN SERVICES BY DEMOGRAPHICS

Crime victims in all demographic groups lack exposure to victims' services – and are interested, to varying degrees, in some of those services:

- Younger victims and Latino and African-American victims are more likely to be unaware but interested in victims' compensation assistance.
- Younger victims and African-American victims are more likely to be interested in help with expenses.

- Latinos and Asian-American victims are more likely to be interested in help navigating the criminal justice process (possibly due to language or other access issues).
- Younger victims are more interested in mental health services.

### DIFFICULTY ACCESSING SERVICES

Of the crime victims who used any type of victims' services, nearly half say it was difficult to access the services. The victims compensation program application was most frequently described as difficult (45 percent), followed closely by assistance with expenses (44 percent), mental health counseling (38 percent), and assistance with the criminal justice process (30 percent) and support groups (29 percent).

# What are the ATTITUDES of Victims/Survivors Towards California's **CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM?**

In addition to collecting information about crime victims' experiences with crime, the recovery process and accessing services, the California Crime Victims Survey also asked about their perspectives on California's criminal justice priorities generally.

California's justice system is facing a time of significant transition. Decades of increased investments in state prisons and increased rates of imprisonment led to lawsuits and

recent policy changes to reduce prison overcrowding. In 2011, California lawmakers implemented Governor Brown's "Public Safety Realignment," which shifts responsibility for managing individuals convicted of specified non-serious felonies from the state prison system to county jails and probation.

**In 2005, I was a conservative, gun-owning, mother of two** who was married to a police officer. My views on the criminal justice system were simple: It was us (the good guys) versus them (the criminals, who needed to be locked up).

That summer, my husband Dan responded to a disturbance call. Some guys were drinking, and Dan took their licenses. One of them was on probation and afraid of going back to prison, so he pulled a gun and shot and killed my husband.

The shooter was soon caught and convicted, and I was as angry as I was grief-stricken. For a while, I really fell apart. I was depressed and neglected the needs of my children.

I eventually pulled myself together, but the entire experience opened my eyes. I saw the criminal justice system – how we, in California, try to keep our communities safe – in a new light. I realized how poorly we're doing in preventing crime and the high cost of that failure.

I learned that we have to fight the temptation to just punish out of a sense of vengeance – and instead think about what actually prevents people from committing crimes. That means more effective forms of accountability that better serve victims – and taxpayers.

People are surprised to hear a police widow express such views, but I firmly believe that we all must re-examine how we invest our criminal justice dollars if we're to prevent tragedies such as Dan's from happening again and again.



Dionne

Decades of increased prison rates and subsequent policy shifts have been accompanied by a highly politicized debate about the best way to protect public safety in California. In the State Capitol and the media, victims of crime are at times portrayed as focused on maintaining high prison rates.

Given the large impact of anecdotal victim voices on public safety debates, this survey sought to discern the perspectives of a representative group of crime victims.

### PRIORITIZING APPROACHES TO SAFETY OTHER THAN INCARCERATION

Perhaps to the surprise of some, the California Crime Victims Survey found that the overwhelming majority of California victims prefer investing in probation and rehabilitation, prevention, health and education over spending more on incarceration.

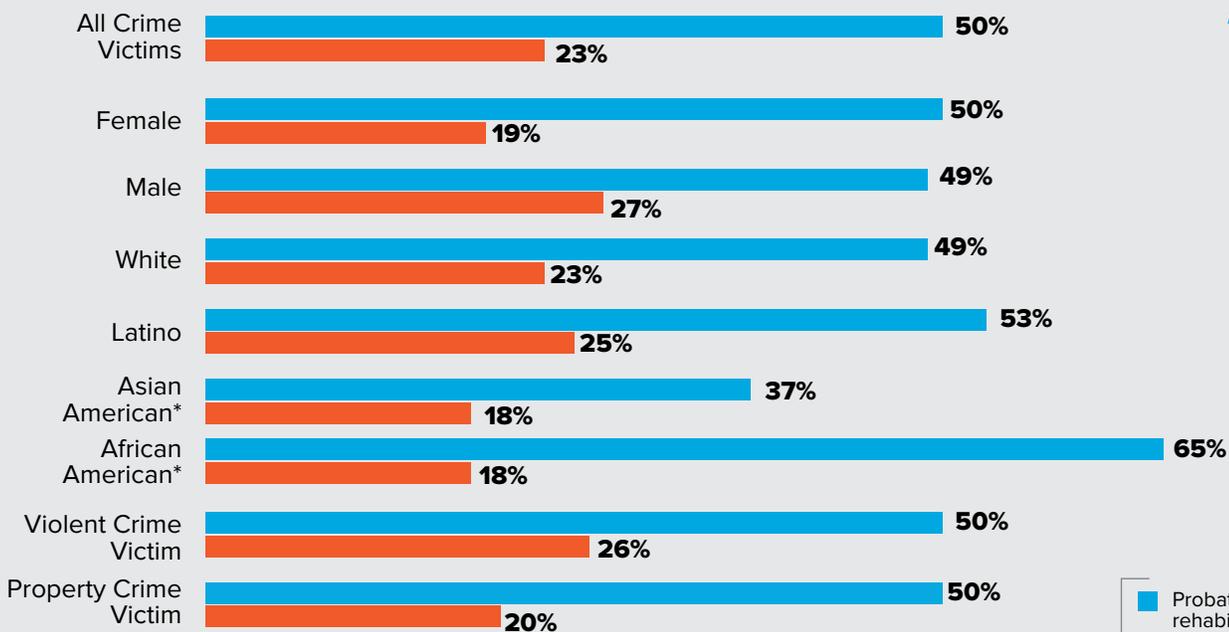
As for where the state *should* prioritize resources within the criminal justice system, **by a margin of more than**

**two to one victims want the state to focus on providing supervised probation and rehabilitation programs instead of more prisons and jails.** African Americans, Latinos and lower-income victims are more likely to prefer probation and rehabilitation, but **no demographic groups prefer additional investment in prisons and jails.**

Seven in 10 victims support directing resources to crime prevention versus towards incarceration (a five-to-one margin). Women, younger victims, African-American and Latino victims, lower-income victims, and victims of multiple crimes are all especially likely to believe that California should spend more on prevention.

Seven in 10 victims also prefer a focus on health services (e.g., mental health and drug and alcohol treatment) over prisons/jails. Similarly, women, younger victims, African Americans and Latinos, lower-income victims and victims of multiple crimes are more likely to prefer prioritizing health services over incarceration.

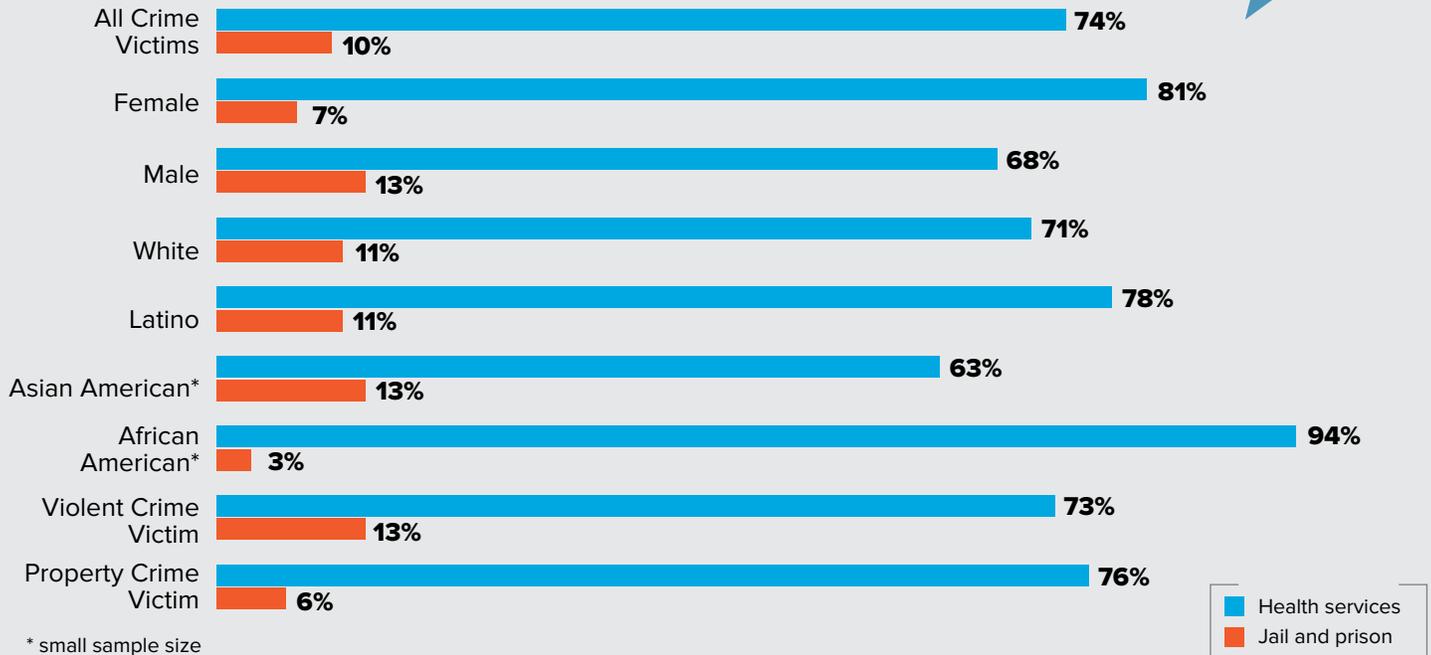
*Do you think that California should focus more on sending people to jail and prison or more on providing supervised probation and rehabilitation programs?*



\* small sample size

■ Probation and rehabilitation  
■ Jail and prison

*Do you think that California should invest more in health services like mental health and drug and alcohol treatment or invest more in jails and prisons?*



By an overwhelming margin (three to one), crime victims believe that California should invest more in education than in prisons. Women, younger victims, Latinos and African Americans, lower-income victims and victims of multiple crimes are even more likely to support investment in education over prisons. However, this preference is universal across demographic groups: No more than 15 percent of any major demographic group prefers an investment in prisons.

White victims and men are relatively more likely to believe that investing in incarceration should be prioritized, but they still favor investments in probation, prevention, health and education by margins of about two to one.

### AWARENESS OF PRISON OVERCROWDING

When asked about the number of people being sent to prison, many victims either have no opinion or do not

know whether California spends “about the right amount.” However, **most victims in California believe that we send too many people to prison.**

### Victims also do not see incarceration as providing significant rehabilitative potential.

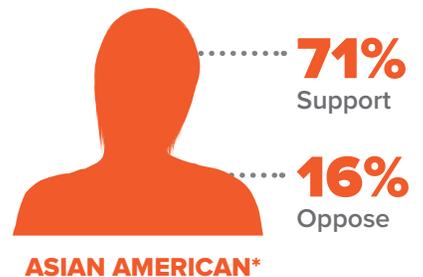
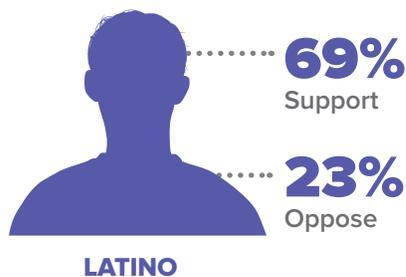
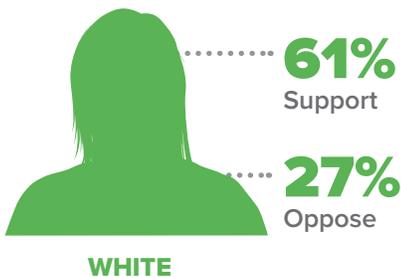
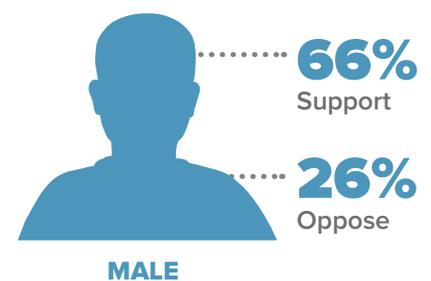
A majority believe prisons make prisoners better at committing crimes, and only a small minority believe prisons help reduce future crime. There are some differences among different demographic groups:

- Male, white and/or higher-income victims tend to most strongly believe that prison makes prisoners better at committing crimes.
- Women, younger victims, and African-American and Latino victims are more likely – but still unlikely – to believe that prison rehabilitates people in prison.

# What do VICTIMS/SURVIVORS THINK OF PUBLIC SAFETY REALIGNMENT?

After the crime victims in the survey were presented with the following short explanation of California's Public Safety Realignment law, a strong majority (65 percent) voiced support for the legislation:

“*Legislation known as Public Safety Realignment was passed two years ago. It shifted responsibility and funding for nonviolent, non-serious offenders from the state prison system to the county jails and probation in order to reduce overcrowding in California state prisons.*”



\* small sample size

# Do the **VIEWS** of Victims/ Survivors

## **DIFFER FROM THOSE OF OTHER CALIFORNIANS?**

*The high level of support expressed for Realignment (among all demographics) is consistent with the 69 percent of California voters who said they supported Realignment in a November 2012 survey.*

The high level of support expressed for Realignment (among all demographics) is consistent with the 69 percent of California voters who said they supported Realignment in a November 2012 survey by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates.

That survey, which consisted of 1,301 telephone interviews in English and Spanish with California voters who participated in the November 2012 election, also found that three in four voters believed that counties should focus more on crime prevention versus expanding their jail capacity now that they have more responsibility under Realignment.<sup>20</sup> Survey respondents specifically voiced strong support for crime prevention that included services for mental health and substance abuse. This result echoes the strong support of crime victims for focusing resources on crime prevention and substance abuse and mental health treatment.

### **VICTIMS SUPPORTED THREE STRIKES REFORM IN NOVEMBER 2012**

In the November 2012 election, California voters by a two-to-one margin approved Proposition 36, which mandated that mandatory sentences of 25 years to life under the state's

Three Strikes Law be reserved for individuals whose third "strike" is a serious or violent felony.

Respondents in the California Crime Victims Survey that reported how they voted in November **supported Proposition 36 by a greater margin than did California voters as a whole.** Victims of violent crime were even more likely than victims of property crime to support the reform of Three Strikes.

### **OTHER SHARED VIEWS ON IMPROVING THE SYSTEM**

Support voiced by California crime victims in the survey also mirror what other voters have said in recent polls. In the post-election poll in November 2012, 62 percent of voters said California spends too much on prisons, and 86 percent agree that more resources should be dedicated to preventing crime rather than funding more prisons and jails.<sup>21</sup>

In a survey of California voters in the summer of 2012, seven in 10 favored probation terms for low-risk people over jail sentences, which echoes victims' support for such alternative sanctions as well.<sup>22</sup>

# CONCLUSION *and* RECOMMENDATIONS

The California Crime Victims Survey, supplemented with national data and research on victimization, provides a new, more complex picture of who California crime victims are, what they need, and what they believe about criminal justice issues. This picture differs from common portrayals of California crime victims in the media and policy debates.

About one in five Californians has been a victim of crime in the last five years. This group is more likely to be male and lower income. Slightly more than one-third of California crime victims have been victimized more than three times in the last five years. This group of repeat victims is more likely to be African American or Latino.

California crime victims are greatly impacted by crime, suffering from stress and trauma, and often taking a long time to recover. Yet many are not aware of the services that are available to help in their recovery – or find that those services are difficult to access.

Opinions about criminal justice policy among California crime victims are consistent with the views of the state's general population: Rehabilitation, education, health and community programs are favored over incarceration, and there is support for the Public Safety Realignment shift in responsibility from state to local justice systems for individuals convicted of non-serious felonies.

The survey data point to a few policy recommendations:

**1. More data and research on California crime victims** is needed to formulate effective justice policy that is responsive to victims' experiences. The topics of repeat victimization, reporting, and outreach and accessibility of victims services (among other topics) are areas where more data can inform smart justice strategies. It is clear that community and demographic differences impact all three of these topics. Effective policy solutions will require a deeper and more nuanced qualitative understanding of the diversity of victimization experiences. In addition, this survey only surveyed adults. Polling victims

under age 18 will provide a more complete understanding of victimization in the state. Although surveying minors presents certain challenges, additional survey methods and interview techniques might reap more complete information about crimes that are particularly stigmatized and under-reported, such as rape, sexual assault and family violence.

**2.** This data indicates a strong need for **additional community outreach about victims' services.**

Many victims in California experience a long road to recovery, suffering from anxiety and depression, among other difficulties, yet they are unaware of services that could help them. This can be addressed, in part, by devoting additional resources to both broad-based and targeted outreach to better inform victims and the public.

**3. Streamlined victims' services** could address findings in the survey that show the difficulty many victims experienced when accessing services. California should review the obstacles to accessing services and design supports that are easier for victims and survivors to use. Reducing barriers to victims' access include considerations such as location – or co-location – of services, language barriers, proximity of different types of services, cultural competency of the services providers, and more.

**4. Advance public policy that more clearly aligns with victims' priorities.** The notion that California crime victims oppose reforms that reduce reliance on incarceration in favor of treatment, probation and crime prevention is false. In fact, victims strongly support a shift in priorities. Lawmakers should consider how their stances on public safety policy priorities can better reflect victims' preferences for **investments in supervised probation and rehabilitation programs, crime prevention, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and education**, over-investing additional resources in incarceration. The state and counties can look to replicate best practices already in place for each of these approaches in other states and California counties.

# METHODOLOGY,

## EXISTING DATA *and* END NOTES

### EXISTING DATA ABOUT VICTIMS

There are various sources of information about who crime victims are and about their experiences. Californians for Safety and Justice drew on two primary sources to inform the development of the David Binder Research survey and this report. First, the largest and most comprehensive source of data on trends and features of crime victimization in the United States is the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Administered by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCVS has surveyed members of tens of thousands of households every six months since 1973 about their experiences with crime over the preceding six months. While NCVS provides a wealth of statistics, those statistics are not currently broken down by state, leaving a gap in terms of information specific to California crime victims.

Second, the Uniform Crime Report (UCR), compiled annually by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, provides information from more than 18,000 city, university and college, county, state, tribal and federal law enforcement agencies about crimes that have been reported to the police. While it does not capture crime that is not reported and contains information about victimization that is mediated by a third party, the UCR nevertheless provides useful and detailed data about yearly trends in victimization in communities across the country, including within California.

### CALIFORNIA CRIME VICTIMS SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Californians for Safety and Justice commissioned the survey described in this report to fill in gaps in knowledge around the experience of crime victims in California in particular. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish by David Binder Research in April 2013. The survey reached respondents both by telephone – landlines and mobile phones – and online. This research methodology was designed to ensure the inclusion of harder-to-reach demographic groups such as younger Californians and those representing more diversity. This survey represents the opinions of the broadest representation of the full diversity of Californians of all ages 18 and up, geographies and racial and ethnic groups. The survey is not necessarily representative of the national origins, or income and education levels of California's general population.

Of the more than 2,600 Californians surveyed, 500 self-identified as having been a victim of a crime within the past five years. The specific crimes asked about were robbery, burglary, theft (including identity theft), assault, rape, vandalism, stalking and murder of an immediate family member. The overall margin of error is 1.1 percent, while the margin of error for crime victims is 4.4 percent.

In order to generate a large enough sample of victims to draw reliable conclusions from the survey, we used a longer reference period than NCVS or the UCR, asking people whether they had been a victim of crime in the last five years. For reasons relating to the social stigma of being a crime victim and associated data collection challenges, it can be difficult to identify sufficient respondents in victimization research. Extending the reference period is one solution. With a longer reference period, it can be more difficult for people to recall with accuracy when certain crimes occurred. For example, a person may mistakenly report that their home was burglarized within the last five years, when in fact it was burglarized six years ago. Because this survey is intended to principally to provide information about the experiences, needs and beliefs of crime victims – and not to extrapolate crime rates in the state – this problem is less of an issue than it would be for a government survey like NCVS. CSJ concluded that a larger pool of respondents was critical for the specific research questions in this report.

Another common challenge in victimization research is reluctance of people to discuss their victimization with a researcher. Just as many crimes are not reported to the police, some crime is not reported to researchers. Like NCVS and other victim surveys, the California Crime Victims Survey likely does not capture the total number of crimes experienced by those surveyed. While David Binder Research informed people that the information would be kept confidential and would be used for research purposes only, we believe that respondents have likely under-reported their victimization in this survey, particularly with respect to violent crime, including sexual assault. Fifteen percent of online crime victim respondents acknowledged having been a victim of rape or attempted rape in the last five years, while only 2.4 percent of telephone crime victim respondents acknowledged the same. This suggests that respondents may have been less inclined to acknowledge having been raped in a live telephone conversation.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Lofstrom, Magnus. "Just the Facts: Crime Trends in California," Public Policy Institute of California, September 2012.
- <sup>2</sup> Building on the key information gathered in the California Crime Victims Survey, more data and analysis is needed to understand the complex dynamics of victimization in our state. A more in-depth report on crime victims in California, supplemented by additional data, is in development with the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law & Social Policy at the University of California, Berkeley School of Law.
- <sup>3</sup> Survey respondents were asked if they had experienced the following in the last five years: a) Someone stealing or trying to steal anything that belongs to you; b) Someone breaking into or trying to break into your home; c) Someone vandalizing your property; or d) Someone using or trying to use your personal information, credit card or other accounts without your permission. Respondents who answered yes to at least one of these were coded as victims of property crime. Respondents may have also been a victim of additional property crimes (e.g., commercial burglary and arson) that were not asked about, meaning the total number of respondents who had experienced some property crime may actually be higher.
- <sup>4</sup> Survey respondents were asked about whether they had experienced the following in the last five years: a) Someone taking or trying to take something from you, using force or the threat of force; b) Someone injuring you with a weapon or physical force; c) Someone forcing you or trying to force you to have sex with them; d) Someone following you, spying on you or sending you unwanted email, texts, phone calls or other correspondences; or d) Someone killing an immediate family member. Respondents who answered yes to at least one of these were coded as victims of violent crime. Respondents may have also been a victim of additional violent crimes (e.g., sexual assault and kidnapping) that were not asked about, meaning the total number of respondents who had experienced some violent crime may actually be higher.
- <sup>5</sup> Truman, Jennifer L., Ph.D.; Planty, Michael, Ph.D. "Criminal Victimization, 2011," Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, NCJ 239437, October 2012.
- <sup>6</sup> Some subsets of violent crime disproportionately affect women; for example, women are much more likely than men to be a survivor of sexual violence.
- <sup>7</sup> Truman and Planty, 2012 (see above). Demographic information on victims of property crime is not available from NCVS because that data is calculated by household rather than by individual respondent.
- <sup>8</sup> Kilpatrick, Dean G.; Acierno, Ron. "Mental Health Needs of Crime Victims: Epidemiology and Outcomes," *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2003.
- <sup>9</sup> Harrell, Erika, Ph.D. "Black Victims of Violent Crime," *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report*, U.S. Department of Justice, August 2007.
- <sup>10</sup> Weisel, Deborah Lamm. "Analyzing Repeat Victimization," Center for Problem Oriented Policing, 2005.
- <sup>11</sup> Kilpatrick and Acierno, 2003.
- <sup>12</sup> Sampson, R.J.; Lauritsen, J.L. "Violent victimization and offending: Individual-, situational-, and community-level risk factors." In Reiss, A.J.; Roth, J.A. (eds.), *Understanding and preventing violence*, Vol. 3, National Academies Press, 1994.
- <sup>13</sup> Likely because of the relative size of the California Crime Victims Survey sample - the same intersectionality effects observed in the NCVS data were not identified as statistically significant in the data on California victims.
- <sup>14</sup> American Indians were not surveyed in sufficient numbers in the California Crime Victims Survey to draw a conclusion about their rates of victimization.
- <sup>15</sup> According to the NCVS, from 1994 to 2010 the percentage of serious violent crime (e.g., rape or sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault) that was not reported to police declined overall from 50 to 42 percent. "Victimizations Not Reported to the Police, 2006-2010," *NCVS Special Report*, NCJ 238536, August 2012.
- <sup>16</sup> Hart, T.C.; Rennison, C. "Reporting Crime to the Police, 1992-2000." *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report*, U.S. Department of Justice, 2003.
- <sup>17</sup> Harrell, 2007.
- <sup>18</sup> The data indicate that a small group of people miss a significant amount of work as the result of victimization, creating a high average number of days missed. There is a larger group of people who miss just a few days of work, making the median amount of work missed three days.
- <sup>19</sup> California Penal Code 13835.5 makes it mandatory for these services to be offered through victim/witness assistance centers (VWACs) in every county, which in some communities may work in conjunction with community-based providers. Unfortunately, VWACs have experienced major budget cuts, and, according to a 2012 report, in the majority of counties they lack adequate financial support to carry out the minimum rights and services mandated by law. Warnken, Heather, J.D., LL.M. "Violence Against Women Needs Assessment Program," California Crime Victims Assistance Association, in collaboration with the California District Attorneys Association and the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy at the University of California, Berkeley School of Law, February 2012.
- <sup>20</sup> "Memo on Post-Election Perceptions of Proposition 36 and Potential Future Criminal Justice Reforms," Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates, November 12, 2012.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Tulchin Research, 2,750 California voters, May 2012.



CALIFORNIANS  
FOR **SAFETY** AND **JUSTICE**

[SAFEANDJUST.ORG](http://SAFEANDJUST.ORG)