

Incorporating crime in household surveys: a research note

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SUMMARY: This paper discusses how to incorporate questions about crime into household surveys, drawing on the authors' experience of designing and implementing a module on crime, violence and physical insecurity in a household survey in the city of Dinajpur in Bangladesh in 2002. The paper discusses issues of design, such as determining survey objectives and the questions that follow from these, involving knowledgeable local partners, determining sample size and designing the questionnaire (and the role of consultations and focus group discussions as well as pre-testing). Then it reports on the findings which highlight the multifaceted nature of crime, the number of people affected (one in six interviewees had been a victim of crime in the 12 months preceding the interview), the role of mastaans (local strongmen) in crime, people's lack of confidence in the police and the legal system (in part because of the lack of official action against perpetrators), and crime's direct and indirect costs.

I. INTRODUCTION

STUDIES ON THE causes and consequences of crime in low- and middle-income countries are limited in number and, often, in scope. Some studies have a fairly tight focus, reporting mainly crime rates and attitudes towards, or beliefs about, crime.⁽¹⁾ Others explore connections between crime rates and economic inequality or policing.⁽²⁾ Some attempt a broader perspective, and relate crime and violence to social, political and economic conditions, but frequently find themselves limited by data.⁽³⁾

Studies that use a more comprehensive framework, such as a sustainable livelihoods approach, to structure data collection and analyses offer the possibility of greater insight. A livelihoods framework, for example, can conceptualize relationships between physical security (crime and violence) and deprivation and other components of livelihood security at the household level.⁽⁴⁾

Many of the more holistic studies use primarily qualitative techniques to uncover these relationships,⁽⁵⁾ although quantitative household surveys are another way. With quantitative data, analysts can explore and empirically test relationships between the variables, recording type and prevalence of crime, and relating it to the characteristics of the household, the individual or the geographic area.

Governments and the World Bank often carry out such quantitative surveys to construct national poverty profiles. The Living Standards

Measurement Studies (LSMS) are among the best known and most accessible of this type.⁽⁶⁾ Although the LSMS are national surveys, many NGOs use similar surveys to assess community needs or evaluate projects. Unfortunately, quantitative household surveys rarely include sections on crime, although they could do so fairly easily. The recent LSMS for Guatemala included such a section, for example.⁽⁷⁾ For their study of social exclusion and factors affecting intergenerational transmission of poverty, Verner and Alda⁽⁸⁾ included a series of questions on household and community violence in a short survey conducted among youth in poor urban neighborhoods of Brazil.

Using an example from Bangladesh, this research note describes one experience with incorporating issues of crime into a broad, quantitative household survey. It aims to shed light on how to introduce the issue of crime into quantitative surveys, and why it is worth doing so.

II. A CASE STUDY: INCORPORATING CRIME INTO HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS

CARE, THE INTERNATIONAL NGO, began the SHAHAR project (Supporting Household Activities for Health, Assets and Revenue) in the late 1990s to improve urban livelihoods in Bangladesh. One of the cities where SHAHAR worked was Dinajpur, a medium-sized city of about 270,000 people in the northwestern region of Bangladesh.

Working in collaboration with CARE staff, partner NGOs and a Bangladeshi consulting firm, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) conducted a household survey in 14 slums in the city of Dinajpur, in July and August 2002. These slums were CARE geographic areas of intervention, and had a population of around 16,000 people, about 60 per cent of the overall slum population of Dinajpur.

This survey had two main purposes: it responded to the reporting requirements of the donor, USAID, for a baseline survey; and it provided additional data for other studies that were part of the research collaboration on urban livelihoods between CARE and IFPRI. The basic questionnaire, based on a livelihoods framework,⁽⁹⁾ included data on household composition, education and training courses, employment, savings and credit, household consumption and expenditure, assets, food security, maternal and child anthropometry, mother and child care, coping strategies, social networks, participation in and perception of governance, housing quality, environment and sanitation, and women's social status.

a. Determining objectives

Many surveys are designed with insufficient attention to how the information will be used, a basic concern that should guide what questions to include and exclude from a survey. SHAHAR supported four principal interventions: credit groups, nutrition and health education, infrastructure, and community development committees. Given the reputation of slums for illegal and violent activity, CARE worried about the potential impacts of crime on livelihood security and the effectiveness of SHAHAR's programmes. Yet, while anecdotes about crime in the slums were rife, few studies or statistics existed in Bangladesh to back up perceptions. Certainly, no figures were available for Dinajpur.

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7. Guatemala, Government of (2000), ENCOVI (Encuesta de Condiciones de Vida), Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Guatemala, <http://www.worldbank.org/lmsms/country/guat/gt00docs.html>

8. Verner, D and E Alda (2004), "Youth at risk, social exclusion and intergenerational poverty

dynamics: a new survey instrument with application to Brazil", World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3296, World Bank, Washington DC.

9. Frankenberger, T, M Drinkwater and D Maxwell (2000), *Operationalizing Household Livelihood Security: A Holistic Approach for Addressing Poverty and Vulnerability*, CARE, Atlanta.

CARE determined that it would focus on the prevalence and types of crime in these project communities, and how much they cost the household financially.

Incorporating a module on crime into the survey meant that analysts would not only be able to report the answers to these questions but could also study them in relation to other factors, such as community location or income.

b. Involving knowledgeable partners

Although IFPRI was responsible for setting up and supervising the work, it was essential to involve local partners who knew the area. At the time of the survey, CARE was already in partnership with local NGOs, and had worked for about a year in these communities. CARE and local partners were familiar with community leaders, and the main issues related to crime in the communities. Local contacts could ease the entry of enumerators into the communities, provide insight into the situation, and suggest appropriate topics and phrasing of questions.

IFPRI also contracted a local data-management firm with extensive experience in household surveys to conduct interviews. The data-management firm was familiar with how to collect information from households efficiently, ethically and in a trustworthy manner, and with how to deal with any problems that might arise in the field.

c. Determining sample size

The sample size for a survey depends primarily on the study objectives, the unit of analysis, the sampling method and the desired statistical power for the analysis. In a multi-variable survey, a particular variable of interest also needs to be chosen. The calculation of the sample size took these factors into account, and also adjusted for the number of households that might decline to take part, may have moved or otherwise be unavailable at the time of the survey. Researchers selected 610 households for interview. Enumerators actually collected information from 585 households, well above the number needed to maintain the desired statistical properties of the sample.

Researchers calculated the sample size for the 14 communities as a whole, considering them as one unit representing the "most vulnerable urban slums". Findings were therefore representative only at this level, not at the level of the individual community. To obtain representativity at the level of the community would require making sure that "enough" households from *each* community were sampled. Practically, this might require calculating a separate sample for each community, and in any case would greatly increase the number of households needed to be surveyed. That level of representativity was not necessary for this study. This information might interest municipal authorities or community residents and leaders, however, so sample size should reflect the unit of analysis of greatest interest to key stakeholders, and should balance the requirements of statistical power against resource constraints.

d. Designing the questionnaire

Researchers administered a structured questionnaire in Bangla to households selected from the sampling frame (a household census of all

communities). They developed a first draft of the crime module by referring to the available literature on crime in urban areas in low- and middle-income countries. Researchers then shared the overall questionnaire, and the questions and research hypotheses for each module, with colleagues at an internal seminar. CARE staff then further reviewed and refined the draft.

Various hypotheses concerning crime emerged from these consultations, and thus guided the development of the module on crime. These included:

- crime affects a large number of households in the community;
- expenditures for protection or losses from crime are substantial;
- criminal activities originating in the slums spill over into other neighbourhoods and increase the social stigma attached to slum dwellers;
- criminal activity is related to social disunity, low levels of education, and lack of community participation, stable governing structures and employment;
- a significant proportion of households earn income from illegal activities; and
- households benefit from the “protection” provided by local strongmen (known as *mastaans*), but suffer from economic loss, loss of community cohesion and poorer mental health.

Clearly, a quantitative household survey could not answer all these questions fully. A more in-depth study of crime would need additional ethnographic and sociological study, probably using qualitative techniques. But by paying attention to the questions of interest, the survey could include a number of questions to test these hypotheses.

As part of the questionnaire design, a small group of supervisors, enumerators and researchers conducted a series of focus groups to explore potential responses to, and perceptions of, survey questions. The teams structured the focus groups around the questions in the draft module, but allowed the discussions to be open-ended. The teams asked about the prevalence and nature of crime and violence in the communities, how residents dealt with crime and violence, and the level of interaction and trust they had in the community as well as more formal mechanisms of justice, including local leaders, the police and the courts. The teams held separate sessions with men and women to capture any differences between them in terms of interactions with, or perceptions of, crime.

Information from these discussions helped modify the structure and flesh out the coded responses of the quantitative survey. The conversations revealed, for example, that most residents used traditional local mechanisms for justice (*shalish*), not formal ones. The initial survey had focused much more on trust and interaction with the police and the courts. The revised version reframed questions to ask more about local systems of justice.

The entire questionnaire was later pre-tested in the field. This pre-testing helped enumerators to spot problems with respondents’ understanding and with the organization, flow and timing of the survey. Minor changes were made as a result of the pre-testing.

e. Collecting and inputting the data

A team of 12 enumerators and two supervisors collected the data. Enumerators had years of experience in household data collection and underwent a one-week training session to review and discuss each question in the survey. These discussions, which included those who had

Figure 1: Survey module on crime, violence and physical security

In the past 12 months, has anybody in this household been a victim of any of the following crimes?											
Type	Code	Did it occur in the household in the past 12 months? Yes.....1 No.....2	Who was the victim? Member ID if the person was a member but is not now, put 55 If the whole household was a victim, put 66	Who did it? (Code-1)	To whom was it reported? (Code-2)	What actions were taken against the perpetrator? (Code-3)	After it happened, did the victim receive medical treatment? Yes.....1 No.....2	Who paid for the medical treatment? (Code-4)	How much did the treatment cost? Taka	Other than medical cost, what was the cost of the loss? Taka	What measures did the household take to prevent future incidents? (Code-5)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Severe beating	01										
Acid thrown on the body	02										
Theft	03										
Mugging / robbery	04										
Rape / attempted rape	05										
Murder	06										
Attempted murder	07										
Kidnapping / abduction	08										
Arson	09										
Other 1 (specify)	10										
Other 2 (specify)	11										
Code-1: Who did it? Household member: USE MEMBER CODE		Code-2: Reported to whom? Nobody1 Police.....2	Code-3: Actions against perpetrator No action1 Reported to police/filed police case/GD.....2 Beat perpetrator.....3 Community action4 Threatened perpetrator5 Other (specify)6	Code-4: Who paid? Household member1 Neighbour/community 2 NGO3 Government4 Perpetrator5 Other (specify)6	Code-5: Preventive measures No measure taken1 Informed police.....2 Informed ward commissioner ..3 Engaged community leader for protection4 Engaged community <i>mastaan</i> for protection5 Other (specify)6						
13. How safe do you feel in terms of your physical security (crime, violence) in this community? Not safe at all..... 1 Not safe..... 2 Fairly safe..... 3 Safe..... 4 Very safe..... 5											

participated in the exploratory focus groups, often led to modifications in the questions. This process ensured that the enumerators were comfortable with and fully understood the aim of each question. They could also explain the survey to respondents, and obtain quality responses by probing as necessary. Enumerators collected all the information directly from the respondents, except for anthropometric measurements and a hygiene spot check (which were done by trained enumerators).

The entire survey was about 30 pages long and took approximately two hours to complete. The module on crime was only one page long, with 11 multi-component questions. The module asked about type of crime, the victim, treatment, reporting and interactions with the justice system (Figure 1). The module took about 10 to 15 minutes to complete but, with the exception of a general question on perception of personal security, was only administered if anyone in the household had been a victim of crime in the previous 12 months.⁽¹⁰⁾

The enumerators administered separate questionnaires to male and female respondents. In the overall survey, some modules were the same for both men and women and some were for only one or the other. The purpose of asking some modules of only one or the other was to get information from the respondent thought most likely to answer accurately (asking only women about household food expenditures, for example). The purpose of asking the same module of both men and women was to elucidate any gender-based differences in response (level of participation in politics and awareness of media, for instance). Both the male and female questionnaires included the same module on crime. Some answers might differ (on self-perception of physical security, for instance), and others should have been the same (the amount and type of crime occurring in each household, for example).

10. One to two hours is standard for these types of household surveys. No contacted households refused to participate in the survey. Adding a module of this length, which not all households will answer, is unlikely to cause an undue burden on households or increase the number of refusals.

III. FINDINGS: A PROFILE OF CRIME AND VIOLENCE

THE SURVEY CONFIRMED that crime is a highly complex, multifaceted and not uncommon phenomenon in the slums. It revealed a wide range of types of crime, including kidnapping, rape, acid attacks, theft and robbery, drug-related violence, *mastaan*-induced violence and political violence. Assuming that respondents are more likely to under-report crime (Box 1), the findings most likely indicate the minimum level of crime in the communities.

Box 1: Banu and Rahima: inhabitants inhibit harmony

Banu and Rahima were two sisters who had moved recently into a tiny one-room shanty in Baluadanga. The two sisters generally stayed at home and seemingly did nothing for a living. When asked about their source of income, they claimed that they received money from the village where the rest of their family lived. The slum dwellers were not fully convinced, but they just let things be. However, neighbours would often see men hovering around the house very late into the night, which made the residents even more suspicious. Soon, it was discovered that these men were taking drugs such as *ganja* and Phensidyl inside the girls' home, and that some even spent nights there. Later, it turned out that these two girls sold themselves for a living. However, they had links with "powerful" men in the area, and attempts to expel them from Baluadanga proved to be in vain. The two continued to live there, but residents feared them and their protectors, and were unwilling to reveal either their names or addresses to outsiders.

Table 1: Community distribution of crime and violence

Community	Share of crime (%)	Share of population (%)
Lalbagh	12	8
Chawlia Patti	7	9
Baluadanga	13	8
Daptari Para	18	3
Uttar Gosaiपुर	8	5
Shersa Para	1	4
Jogen Babur Math	2	6
Sabji Bagan	1	1
Rajbati	4	4
Kuli Basti	3	2
Dhibi Para	3	3
Kabiraj Para	2	10
Sweeper colony	11	15
South Balubari	17	22

a. How much? What kind? Where?

Sixteen per cent of households, or about one in six, in these communities were affected by some form of crime in the 12 months prior to the survey. The breadth of the survey allowed an analysis of whether the level of crime in these communities was associated with socioeconomic factors, such as household income or education. Interestingly, it was not, although crime did concentrate in certain geographical areas (Table 1).

Although, for reasons noted above, figures for each community cannot be precise, the wide disparities between slums do give some insight. Over one-third of all crimes occurred in only two sites: Daptari Para and South Balubari. South Balubari, however, also had 22 per cent of the population of the survey area, while Daptari Para had only 3 per cent. The crime rate, then, appeared to be much higher in Daptari Para, and in Lalgbagh and Baluadanga. Interestingly, these three communities are adjacent to one another, and appear to form a sort of crime belt. The study did not explore the reasons for this, but it certainly merits further investigation. Perhaps surprisingly, the sweeper colony (a colony of low-caste Hindus basically considered outcasts, whose traditional employment is cleaning latrines) is thought commonly to be a centre of crime, but it did not exhibit a particularly high crime rate. However, some might argue that the sweeper colony remained a source for crime elsewhere.

Theft and muggings accounted for more than half (about 56 per cent) of all crime in these areas, but violent crime was also prevalent (Figure 2). In fact, severe beatings represented about one-quarter of all crime. Rape, attempted murder, arson and kidnapping together represented less than 5 per cent of reported crime.

b. Who are the victims? Who are the perpetrators?

Despite the rather common occurrence of crime in these areas, overall only 10 per cent of men and women said that they did “not feel safe” in their communities. Interestingly, feelings of insecurity were higher among

Figure 2: What kind of crime?

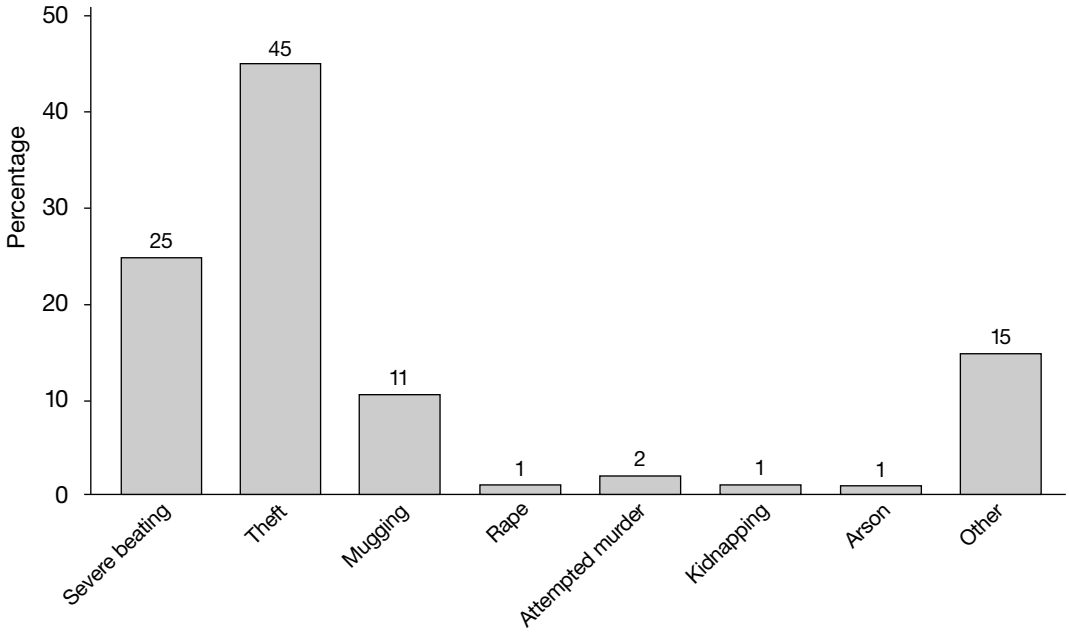
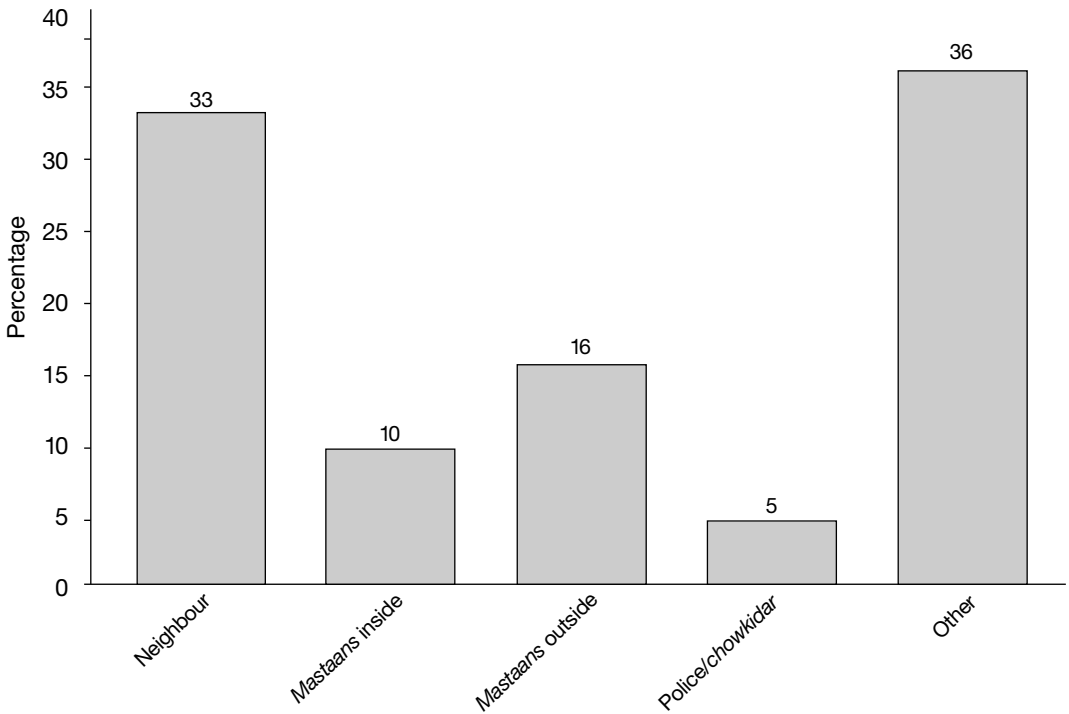
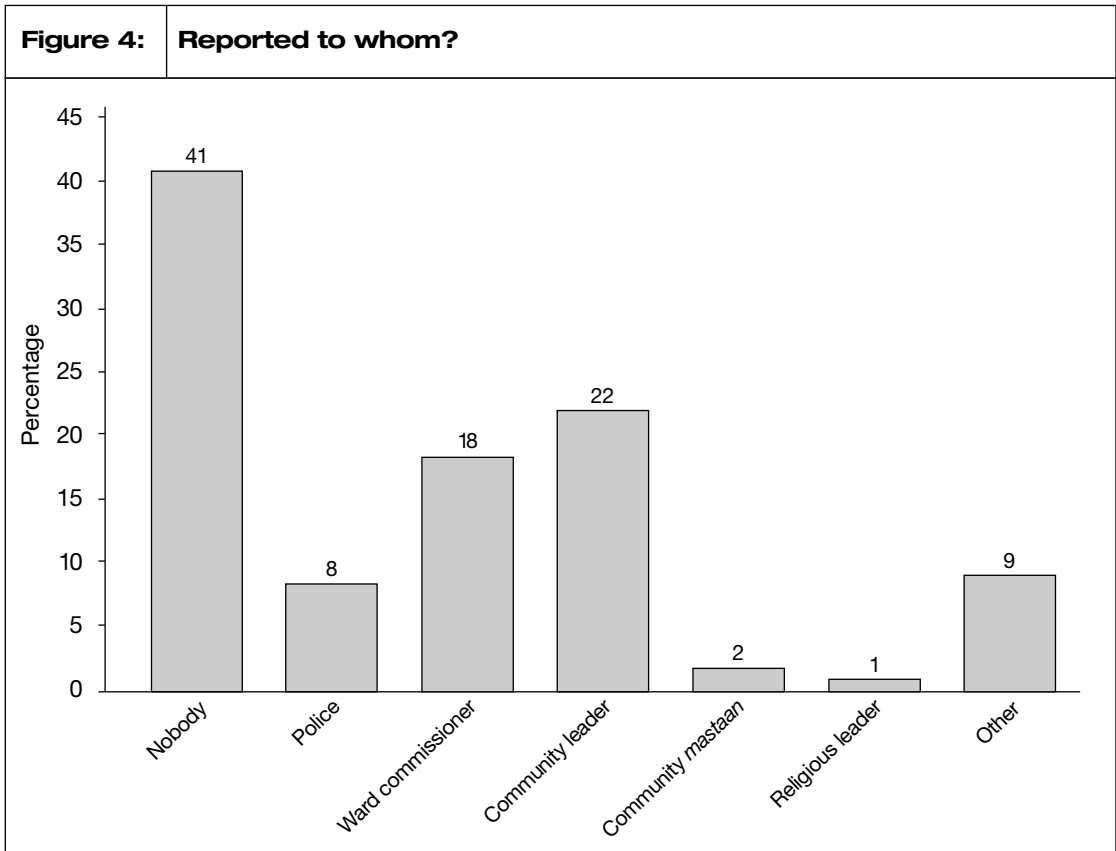


Figure 3: Who did the crime?

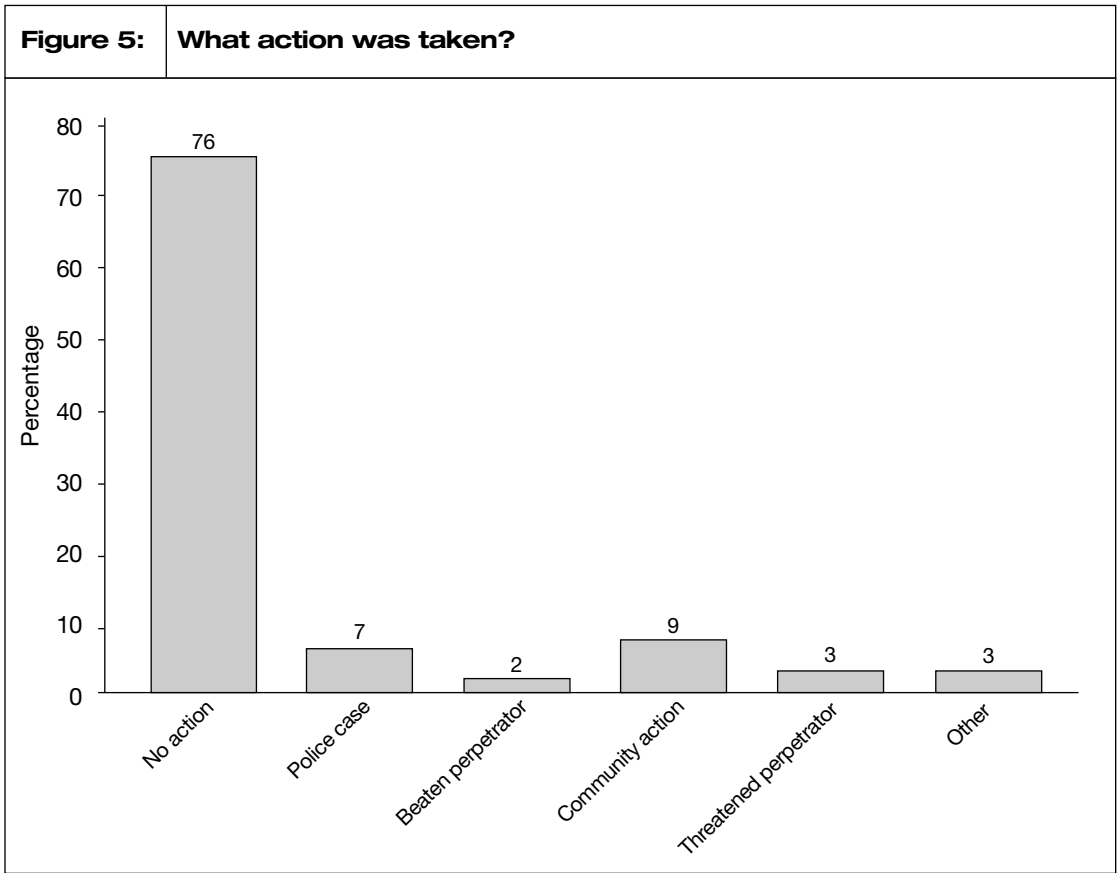




men than women: only 7 per cent of men said that they felt “very safe”, while 34 per cent of the women did so. In fact, men were victims of crime more often than women were. Of crimes that affected individuals (as distinct from those that affected the whole household, such as theft), males were the victim in 63 per cent of cases and females in 37 per cent. Women may be less the target of the types of crime reported here because they are less likely to move about alone outside the household, and are often accompanied by a husband, brother or another female. In addition, certain kinds of crime, such as those generated by *mastaan* activity, do afflict men more than women. And these are the kinds of crime captured in this survey. Although adults were victims 80 per cent of the time, adolescents and children were the target in one of every five crimes.

Victims could often point out a perpetrator (Figure 3), as severe beatings composed one-quarter of all crimes. Of course, in some cases, this may only be a suspicion (for example, crimes blamed on forces outside the community). Victims believed that neighbours committed one-third of crimes and that *mastaans* committed another quarter.

Combined with the prevalence of crime, these statistics suggest a high level of social discord, and demonstrate the control of the *mastaans* over community life. These *mastaans* are ubiquitous in the slums of Bangladesh, exerting their influence over land allocation, also collecting rents from squatters or protection money from local businesses, or running illegal schemes. Victims believed that *mastaans* from other communities were actually responsible for more of the crimes and violence than *mastaans* within



the community. They also believed that security personnel contributed something to the insecurity of the area: victims accused the police, guards and watchmen of crimes in more than 5 per cent of cases.

c. Is there justice?

Only six of every ten victims reported the crimes (Figure 4). This is not surprising, given that residents believed that the security forces themselves were not trustworthy. The very low degree of trust and confidence in the police was evident from the fact that only 8 per cent of cases were reported to the police. About 22 per cent of the victims reported the crimes to the community leaders; this reflected the fact that almost 90 per cent of the respondents had a moderate to high level of confidence in the community leaders (excluding religious leaders), a statistic obtained from another section of the survey on governance and social capital. Eighteen per cent of the victims lodged complaints with the ward commissioner.⁽¹¹⁾ Interestingly, some lodged complaints with the community *mastaans* as well, perhaps reflecting the existence of illegal organizations or informal protection groups to deal with crime.

The lack of official action taken against perpetrators undermines any attempt to establish formal investigative or judicial authority (Figure 5). The police took action against the perpetrators in only 7 per cent of incidents, less than one in ten. Perpetrators went fully free over 75 per cent of the time. In other instances, individuals or communities themselves acted (Box 2).

11. Ward commissioners are elected officials who represent defined districts within the municipality on the municipal council. They often exert significant control over activities within their ward. As such, in a sort of patron-client relationship, the poor may feel that they have greater possibility of achieving redress through the ward commissioner than through the police, which is a more formal system to which the poor may not have easy access.

Box 2: Jamila and Alamgir: an opportunist's assault

Shamsher Ali was a rickshaw puller. He and his beautiful wife, Jamila Khatun, lived together in their shanty in Baluadanga. Alamgir was a local strongman in the area. He had been having his way by bullying, threatening and even beating up people in and around Baluadanga. Should he happen to set his eyes on any good-looking woman, he would do his best to physically assault and rape her. During the day, Alamgir moved around the locality looking for prospective targets. Women in Baluadanga avoided coming out of their homes lest they come under Alamgir's gaze. Complaints to the police yielded no action against the influential Alamgir.

One night Alamgir targeted Jamila. It was after nine in the evening, and Jamila, tired from the day's work, had gone off to sleep. Her husband was yet to return home. Taking advantage of this, Alamgir sneaked into Jamila's home after cutting open the rickety bamboo door. Then he lay down quietly next to Jamila. The unsuspecting Jamila first thought it was Shamsher, but when she realized her folly, she screamed for help. With most people retired for the day, no one heard her. In a bid to save herself from shame and humiliation, she picked up a sickle and tried to attack him. Alamgir, however, managed to escape. The next day, there was a *shalish* meeting and it was decided that Alamgir would be forbidden to enter Baluadanga in the future. He has escaped arrest so far. For the past months no one has seen him, as he now stays away from the gaze of Baluadanga.

The local community acted in about 9 per cent of cases, while individuals themselves beat or threatened the perpetrators in 5 per cent of cases. When individuals act alone, outside formal or informal systems of justice, this can only further undermine any notion of a "rule of law."

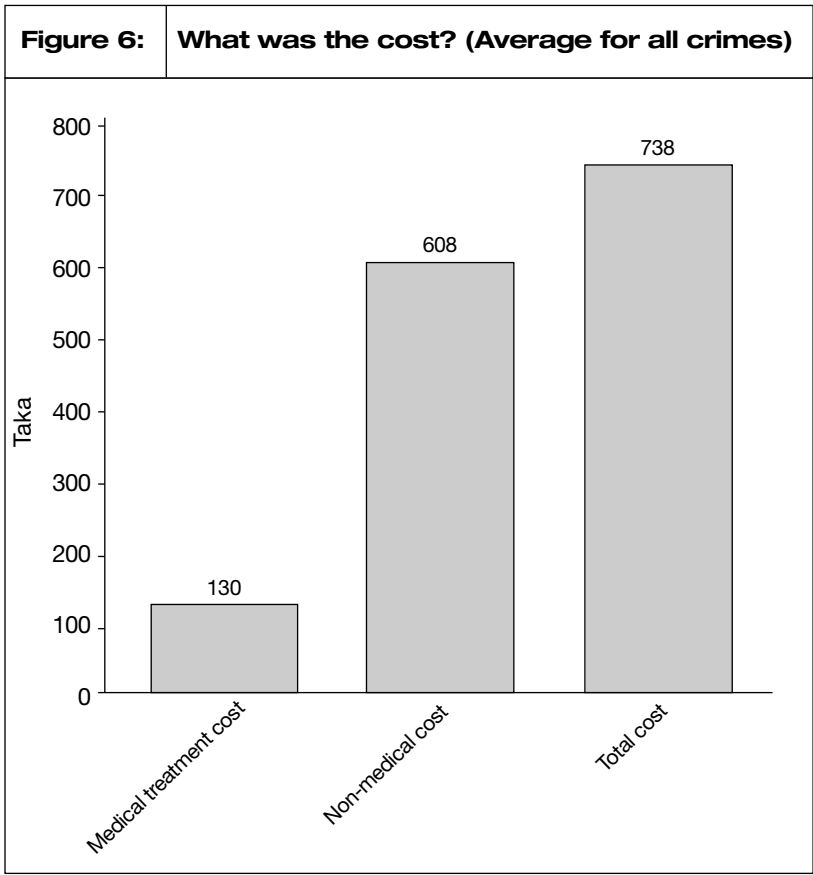
The statistics indicate that, in most cases, the poor do not get justice. Their interaction with formal security forces and legal institutions is practically non-existent. Questions remain as to whether this is because the police and legal systems are ineffective, or because they are corrupt, or simply because they are not present. In any case, justice in these communities still revolves around individual relations: with the neighbour, with the *mastaan*, or with the ward commissioner, not around some established "system of law."

d. How much does it cost?

Crime and violence impose external costs on others – costs that are not generally reimbursed. Although the study did not attempt to value all direct and indirect (or all tangible and intangible) costs, it did ask about costs incurred explicitly as a result of a crime, dividing expenses into medical and non-medical categories.

The average cost of medical treatment for the victims of the two attempted murders was Taka 22,000 (about US\$ 380). The cost for the victims of a severe beating was Taka 2,146. For women who were raped, the medical cost was Taka 1,000. Non-medical costs appeared to vary with the nature of the crime. The non-medical cost for those who were severely beaten was Taka 154 and for rape Taka 7,000. Non-medical costs included items such as repeated trips to the police station and to other officials to lodge complaints, and expenses incurred because of additional visitors to the household. The average cost as a result of theft was Taka 1,826, and Taka 2,234 for mugging. On average, the total financial cost of crime and violence in affected households was Taka 738, with 82 per cent of that (Taka 608) on non-medical costs (Figure 6).

The actual average cost of crime for each household was thus relatively small compared to an average overall yearly income of Taka 41,688. But these costs are not easily absorbed or spread over time. Although average



costs are only about 5 per cent of average annual expenditure, they represent 64 per cent of an average month's expenditure. In addition to the overall mental and physical distress, these costs come as a shock to the household, causing further economic problems with cash flow or the purchase of basic needs.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

THE INCORPORATION OF a module on crime and violence into a more general household survey can be a small investment with large returns. Local surveys could improve on available police statistics. In many low- and middle-income countries, the collection system is unreliable and incomplete. Residents often do not trust the police or expect action from the police or judicial system. Consequently, they never report the crime. At best, the police statistics report a minimum level of crime. Household surveys are likely to be more accurate.

In addition, incorporating a module on crime into a national or local general survey would allow researchers, development practitioners and other interested parties to link crime with other aspects of lives and livelihoods in greater depth, and to uncover the strength and magnitude of relationships and causes. As shown here, findings can also highlight institutional weaknesses. In combination, this information can improve the design of programmes and policies. With careful planning and encourage-

ment, this information could also feed back into community systems for monitoring and action.

Some lessons from the review include the following:

- *Develop the survey around the need for information and mechanisms for action.* What information is needed? By whom? Why? When? How can it best be communicated to them? In this instance, by the time the Dinajpur information was available (about 10 months after survey planning began), the senior staff member most interested in the impact of crime on livelihoods had moved on. Researchers did hold a series of seminars to convey the results of the crime module to journalists, community leaders, municipal authorities, local NGO partners and CARE staff in Dinajpur, and community leaders asked for a presentation of the results at the community level. But crime was not one of SHAHAR's previously identified areas of intervention, and this made it difficult for SHAHAR staff to follow up on the request; at that point, no community or municipal mechanisms were prepared to act on the information. Without a mechanism to shape action in response to the findings, the findings themselves had little impact on local action. Of course, other analysts can still use these data in other studies, generating new insights useful for development practitioners and policy makers outside these communities.
- *Determine the appropriate level of analysis.* Because of the sampling strategy, the information is only representative at the level of the 14 communities as a whole. A different approach to sampling could allow for information to be representative at the level of each community. More realistically, however, the community could establish its own tracking or reporting mechanism, with this survey simply serving as an incentive to start one. Community development committees (later established by CARE in these sites) or local NGOs or CBOs could collate statistics and use them for planning interventions to improve physical security.
- *Work closely with knowledgeable partners.* The crime level reported in the survey is almost certainly a lower limit, but with qualified enumerators and introduction to the community by trusted organizations, responses are probably reasonably accurate. Obtaining fully reliable statistics on more subtle or embarrassing issues, such as smuggling or domestic violence, would probably require more time in getting to know respondents and gaining their confidence than is usually possible with standard household surveys.
- *Complement, shape and integrate with additional information.* Researchers should have knowledgeable partners but should also do background work before designing the survey. This can involve reviewing secondary information, holding discussions with residents, community organizations and authorities, and pre-testing the survey. Complementing the quantitative survey with qualitative information is essential both for questionnaire design, as noted above, and for more in-depth interpretation of findings.

