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# Happiness and victimization: An empirical study for Switzerland

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## Abstract

This paper explores if, and to what extent, crime affects happiness, using data from the Swiss Crime Survey 2011. Given the lack of research on the relationship between victimization and quality of life, it attempts to close an important gap in the existing literature. Results show negative effects on life satisfaction of theft, attempted burglary and consumer fraud, as well as of crimes against the person. Contrary to expectations, detrimental effects on quality of life do not decline consistently over time.

## Keywords

Happiness, life satisfaction, victimization

## Introduction

Philosophers have dealt with happiness for centuries. It may even be argued that happiness is the major subject of philosophy. Philosophers have tried to define what a ‘happy life’ is and how happiness could be achieved (for example, McMahon, 2006). More recently, psychologists have tried to measure happiness empirically (for example, Diener et al., 1999; Gilbert, 2006; Kahneman et al., 1999), followed by sociologists and political

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scientists (for example, Lane, 2000; Veenhoven, 1993) as well as by economists. In this field, after some pioneering work by van Praag and Kapteyn (1973) and Easterlin (1973), the number of studies has increased dramatically (see, for example, the reviews by Dolan et al., 2008; Frey and Stutzer, 2002a; the books by Frey, 2008; Frey and Stutzer, 2002b; Layard, 2005; and the collections of articles by Dutt and Radcliff, 2009; Easterlin, 2002, 2010; Frey and Stutzer, 2013). The study of happiness can be considered a rare example of successful interdisciplinary research in the social sciences.

Subjective well-being is the scholarly term for the phenomenon of happiness. As this term is somewhat clumsy, we use, in line with the literature, the more attractive term 'happiness'.

Three basic types of subjective well-being may be distinguished. The short time reaction to pleasant experiences is affective. In contrast, *eudaimonia* captures the normative philosophical idea of a 'good and moral life'. *Life satisfaction* is an intermediate notion and is used in most studies, including the present one. It reflects the answers of individuals to the question: 'Taken overall, how satisfied are you with the life you lead?' It goes beyond immediate and affective reactions and has a cognitive element because individuals are asked to consider how they subjectively evaluate their life as a whole. The answers may be given on a scale from 0, when a person is totally dissatisfied with the life he or she leads, to 10, where the person is totally satisfied with life. The hundreds of surveys undertaken suggest that mankind is quite happy. Few people indicate that they are dissatisfied with their lives (that is, who score between 0 and 5). A large proportion of people proclaim that they are quite or even very satisfied with their lives, indicating a satisfaction level centring on 7, 8 and even 9.

Victimization research has been flourishing since the introduction of crime surveys in the 1970s. Theses about victimization risk have dominated the field for several decades, relating victimization to lifestyle (Hindelang et al., 1978). In addition to research on the circumstances of victimization, individual consequences have received attention. Studies have found long-lasting impacts from victimization in adolescence, such as socioeconomic disadvantages in adulthood (Macmillan, 2000; Macmillan and Hagan, 2004). Furthermore, crimes have a major and often persistent psychological impact on victims. Emotional reactions including feelings of helplessness, loneliness, fear and depression, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), are common (Frieze et al., 1987). Many analyses focus on violent crimes such as rape or sexual abuse, but few studies compare the consequences of crimes against the person and against property. Whereas the negative outcome of crime on psychological health has been documented widely, studies dealing with the impact on happiness and life satisfaction are rare. Negative influences of property and violent crimes on happiness have been identified for European, African and Asian countries, as well as for the United States.

This paper explores if, and to what extent, crime affects happiness. Given the lack of research on victimization and the quality of life, we attempt to close an important gap in the existing literature. We aim to find out whether the impact on happiness varies between different types of crimes. For that purpose, we first elaborate the concept of happiness more closely. In a next step, we analyse the influence of property crimes and crimes against the person. Then we test whether the impact of victimization on happiness is

reduced when controlling for fear of crime. Finally, we analyse whether the impact on happiness remains stable over several years, or whether there is a decline.

## Research overview

In studies conducted so far (for example, Dolan et al., 2008; Frey, 2008), happiness, as measured here, has been shown to be positively associated with age (people over 65 being generally more happy), gender (women being more happy), family constellation (people with partners and, among those, formally married couples being more happy), income, being employed (rather than unemployed), citizenship (in Switzerland) – probably because it entails greater stability of residence and political participation – and living outside major cities.

Studies looking at the outcome of crime victimization identify negative psychological problems. These are found not to vary between different types of crime (Frieze et al., 1987; Resick, 1987), even if the strength of appearance may differ (Kilpatrick et al., 1987). Most of the studies focus on violent crime, especially rape or sexual abuse. Only a small proportion of the studies concentrate on property crimes (for example, Maguire, 1980). However, studies focusing on the relationship between victimization experiences and life satisfaction are rare. The earliest study dates back to the 1990s. Denkers and Winkel (1998) identified statistically significant correlations between victimization, such as property or violent crime, fear of crime and happiness in a Dutch sample. Michalos and Zumbo (2000) investigated the impact of crime-related issues on the quality of life in a Canadian city. They found lower levels of happiness, general life satisfaction and quality of life among victims compared with non-victims. Cohen (2008), using the US General Social Survey, found that being burglarized reduces happiness.

In 2005, Powdthavee reported that victims in South Africa who experienced burglary, robbery or murder in their household 12 months prior to the survey reported a significantly lower perceived quality of life. Another South African study (Møller, 2005) found that perceived likelihood of victimization and concern about personal safety have greater negative influence on life satisfaction than actual victimization. Individual crimes against the person had greater negative influence on subjective well-being and feelings of personal safety than property and other household crimes. In 2010, Davies and Hinks reported that having been attacked in the previous 12 months decreases life satisfaction for households in Malawi.

Kuroki (2012) analyses the influence of robbery and burglary on well-being in Japan, using cross-sectional data from the Japanese General Social Survey (JGSS). He reports significant correlations between past burglary and well-being. Robbery, on the other hand, fails to be statistically significant after running ordered probit and OLS (ordinary least squares) regression models. More recently, Hanslmaier (2013) reports a negative impact of crime victimization and fear of crime on subjective well-being in Germany.

These studies are based on data from many diverse countries with very different cultural, political and economic situations, and especially with highly different crime rates. No firm conclusions can be drawn for Switzerland so far. In contrast to most of the studies reviewed here, this paper will consider, in relation to happiness, a larger variety of offences, including, beyond burglary and street crime, consumer fraud, credit card fraud

and identity theft. To our knowledge, no other studies have covered such a wide array of offences in the present context. The underlying aim of the following analyses is to contribute to this field and to find out whether different kinds of victimization have a different impact on happiness in Switzerland. Based on the results of studies conducted so far, we hypothesize that, overall, victimization reduces happiness. We assume that the impact varies between different crimes and expect that the impact on happiness is stronger for crimes against the person than for crimes against property.

In addition to controlling for socio-demographic variables found to influence happiness, special attention is given to fear of crime. Research into the influence of victimization experiences on fear of crime goes back to the 1970s (for example, Skogan, 1987). The victimization perspective implies that a person becoming the victim of a criminal act will develop a greater fear of the same crime than someone not experiencing such an incident. Moreover, owing to the greater fear of crime, further victimization experiences can be avoided. Even if the data do not allow us to identify the direction of causation, we expect a reduction in the impact of victimization on happiness when controlling for fear of crime.

Finally, we are interested in the time aspect. It is known that the negative psychological problems following criminal victimization disappear within a few months (for example, Norris and Kaniasty, 1992). The same has been reported for life satisfaction: Denkers and Winkel (1998) find a declining influence of property and violent crimes on life satisfaction within two months after the incident.<sup>1</sup> Looking at the entire lifespan, Hansmaier et al. (2013) find a linear declining impact of victimization on life satisfaction after 1 to 11 years and more. Based on these results we expect in our analysis that, the longer victimization dates back, the more its influence on happiness diminishes.

## **Data and methodology**

The data were collected within the 2011 wave of the Swiss Crime Survey. Since 1989, the Swiss Crime Surveys have usually been part of the International Crime Victimization Surveys (Van Dijk et al., 1990). In 2011, and apparently for the first time in the history of crime surveys, a question about life satisfaction was included. The 2011 survey used innovative interview methods, such as online interviews, on roughly half the sample (for details, see Killias et al., 2011). In addition to the national sample of 2000 interviews, booster samples with 500 interviews each were selected in 7 cantons and in 22 towns in Switzerland, leading to a total sample size of more than 15,700. The following analyses are based on the overall sample, which includes slightly more women and elderly people, as well as residents living in the area located between Berne and Zurich, than would be expected based on demographics. The data have not been weighted, however, since age and gender were controlled for in the analysis.

Careful research (in particular Diener, 2011; Diener et al., 2009; Kahneman and Krueger, 2006; Kahneman et al., 1999) suggests that the life satisfaction measure is reliable and valid in the sense that it is a good reflection of important aspects of subjective well-being. The measure correlates highly with behaviours and aspects generally associated with happiness, and at the same time is sensitive to varying life circumstances. Happy people smile more during social interactions, are more often rated as happy by

their friends and family, more often reveal positive sentiments, are more optimistic and more sociable, and enjoy better sleep. Although our life satisfaction measure may not be perfect, it compares favourably with other measures of aggregate states, such as the gross national product, which is well known to be deficient in some respects but which has been used extensively to capture the state of the economy.

Being measured on a scale ranging from 0 to 10, life satisfaction can be analysed through multiple regression techniques. Because the dependent variable (self-reported subjective life satisfaction) is restricted to values ranging from 0 to 10, this method produces results very similar to non-linear estimation methods, such as ordered probit analyses (Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Frijters, 2004). Therefore, many studies use the simpler OLS method, which offers a more straightforward interpretation.

Regressions using cross-sectional data capture statistical associations but not causality. However, panel data and experimental evidence usually allow the observation of causal relationships. Married people, for example, are happier on average than those without a partner, and having a partner increases quality of life. At the same time, happier people are more socially attractive and, therefore, are more likely to find a marriage partner (Stutzer and Frey, 2006). By looking at change in both variables over time, it is usually possible to assess the direction of causality.

Victimization was measured by asking about criminal incidents within the previous five years (covering the years 2006–2011), namely burglary (completed and attempted), theft of personal items, consumer fraud/identity theft, robbery, assault and sexual assault. Respondents were asked to locate reported incidents more precisely in time (and space). This allows reported incidents to be ordered by time of occurrence. Several concepts are used to assess fear of crime in the present context. In addition to the standard question about fear of crime at night in one's neighbourhood, three more questions covering cognitive and affective aspects of safety feelings were used here.<sup>2</sup>

In our analysis, we first test for possible correlations between single variables. In a second step, regression models without control variables allow us to test for multiple correlations. Finally, control variables found to be influential for happiness are included in the models. However, owing to limitations of space, not all of these results are displayed.

## Results

Considering first the general determinants of happiness, the patterns discussed above emerge in the expected way in our data, as Table 1 illustrates. These estimates are consistent with research on happiness in other economically developed countries (Dolan et al., 2008; Frey, 2008). The present measures can, thus, serve as a valid background for studying the influence of victimization on happiness.

The following analyses consider, first, the impact of property offences on life satisfaction. In the first two models, different sub-categories are taken into account, before all variables are combined in Model 3 (Table 2). Significant results are found for theft, attempted burglary and consumer fraud. According to Model 3, victims who experienced theft between 2006 and 2011 score 0.111 points lower on the scale of happiness than do non-victims. Experience of consumer fraud even lowers life satisfaction by 0.196 points.

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic, economic, political and cultural factors having an influence on life satisfaction.

Predictors (reference group)	Life satisfaction		
	Coefficient	t-value	Percent
Constant	7.220	77.070	
<i>Age (reference: 16–25 years)</i>			31.8
26–39 years	-0.112	-1.602	10.5
40–59 years	-0.122	-1.714	18.6
>60 years	0.321***	4.009	39.2
<i>Female (reference: male)</i>	0.151***	4.715	52.4
<i>Marital status (reference: single)</i>			21.5
Married	0.164**	3.011	58.6
Separated/divorced	-0.035	-0.661	9.0
Widowed	0.161*	2.444	5.4
In a relationship	0.023	0.355	5.0
Other	-0.534	-1.841	0.2
<i>Living situation (reference: alone)</i>			17.6
With partner, no child	0.249***	4.715	31.5
With partner, with child	0.224***	3.756	35.7
With parents	0.035	0.466	9.5
With other people	-0.017	-0.275	4.8
<i>Highest education level (reference: primary school)</i>			5.8
Secondary school	-0.043	-0.689	7.7
Vocational school	0.077	1.596	49.3
College	-0.015	-0.212	5.1
University of Applied Sciences	0.074	1.358	18.7
University	0.048	0.816	12.1
<i>Household income (reference: &lt; CHF 2500)</i>			4.7
2500–5000	-0.211***	-5.577	23.0
5000–7500	0.104**	2.773	25.4
> 7500	0.206***	5.545	33.2
<i>Employment situation (reference: full-time job)</i>			39.8
Part-time job	-0.050	-1.631	23.3
Unemployed	-1.234***	-14.468	2.0
Housewife/househusband	0.005	0.157	19.4
Retired/unemployable	-0.090*	-2.046	23.8
Student	0.043	0.667	5.7
<i>Residence status (reference: Swiss citizen)</i>			90.4
Residence permit (B)	-0.115	1.054	1.7
Resident (C)	-0.165**	-3.286	7.6
Other	-0.601*	-1.745	0.1
<i>Length of time in Switzerland</i>	0.101***	3.581	
<i>Region (reference: German-speaking)</i>			87.4
Italian-speaking	-0.283	1.779	0.5
French-speaking	0.002	0.054	12.1



**Table 1.** (Continued)

Predictors (reference group)	Life satisfaction		
	Coefficient	t-value	Percent
<i>Agglomeration type (reference: core city)</i>			33.6
Countryside	0.078*	1.101	25.0
Agglomeration	0.045	1.616	37.7
Single city	0.064	2.505	3.7
N			15,467
R <sup>2</sup>	.068		

Notes: Coefficients: OLS parameters of multiple linear regressions. Significance levels: \* .01 <  $p$  < 0.05, \*\* .001 <  $p$  < .01, \*\*\*  $p$  < .001. Categories for length of time in Switzerland: 0–5 years, 5–10 years, >10 years, always.

Although actual burglary does not seem to have an influence on life satisfaction in Switzerland – in contrast to most other studies – attempted burglary does have a statistically significant effect in the multiple linear regression models shown in Table 2: victims of attempted burglary score 0.115 points lower on the scale of happiness. A possible explanation could be that victims of completed burglary often receive insurance payments, whereas victims of attempts are less systematically reimbursed. In other studies (Denkers and Winkel, 1998; Michalos and Zumbo, 2000), completed and attempted burglary have not been distinguished, a fact that might explain why they found an overall effect on life satisfaction.

The second significant influence is consumer fraud ( $B = -0.196$ ). When looking at the frequency distribution for the question ‘How did this fraud take place? Was it to do with . . .’, the answer ‘something else’ (35 percent) ranks in second position after ‘shopping on the internet’ (40 percent). Only between 3.4 percent and 12.5 percent of interviewees became the victim of the other crimes mentioned (construction, building or repair work, work done by a garage, a hotel, restaurant or pub, a shop of some sort). The negative influence on life satisfaction can partly be explained by the ‘something else’ category, which covers all sorts of fraud experienced by the individuals.

In a next step, crimes against the person are analysed. In contrast to crimes against property, the negative influence on life satisfaction is stronger, especially for sexual offences. Victims of sexual offences rate 0.390 points lower on the scale of happiness, victims of robbery 0.286 and victims of assault and threat 0.231 ( $p < .001$  for all variables). When running the regression model including the control variables, the loadings are a bit lower ( $B = -0.301$ ,  $-0.237$  and  $-0.176$ , respectively). However, all three variables remain statistically significant at the 1 percent level (results not displayed). An influence of robbery on well-being has already been documented in the studies by Powdthavee (2005) and Davies and Hinks (2010).

### *The impact of victimization over time*

Taking a possible influence of time into account, we analyse the effect of victimization with one- and two-year prevalence rates for the years 2006–8, 2009 and 2010.<sup>3</sup> The

**Table 2.** Influence of victimization of crimes against property (experienced over five years) on life satisfaction.

Experiences of crime		Model 1			Model 2			Model 3 <sup>a</sup>				
		Percent (n)	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	t-value	t-value	
Constant		8.385	8.385	8.362	8.370	8.373	8.362	8.418	8.362	8.362	7.629	32.344
Vehicle theft	24.5 (3859)	-0.096**									-0.041	-1.427
Theft	15.5 (2442)		-0.146***								-0.111**	-3.403
Burglary	7.6 (1198)		0.007					0.035		0.740	0.009	0.195
Attempted burglary	7.0 (1097)				-0.114*						-0.115*	-2.411
Consumer fraud	4.7 (745)										-0.196***	-3.523
Credit/debit card fraud	1.5 (230)						-0.036				0.006	0.060
Identity fraud	0.6 (92)										0.015	0.095
R <sup>2</sup>		.001	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.003	.000	.000	.059	

Notes: Coefficients: OLS parameters of multiple linear regressions. Predictors: five-year prevalence rates (2006–11). Significance levels: \* .01 < p < .05, \*\* .001 < p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001.

a. Model 3 includes control variables (as in Table 1), not shown here owing to limitations of space.

results do not reveal clear trends. For theft and consumer fraud, we find a statistically significant improvement in life satisfaction after one and two years following the incident (Table 3). For attempted burglary, the negative impact was higher the more years back it happened. No consistent trend is found for vehicle theft. No significant influence on life satisfaction was found for burglaries, identity fraud and credit/debit card fraud for any of the years.

Concerning crimes against the person, sexual assault seems to have a long-lasting negative influence, with statistically significant coefficients for the years 2006–8 and 2010 (Table 4). In contrast, assault/threat and robbery negatively influence life satisfaction in a statistically significant way over the whole period.

These additional analyses suggest that there is indeed a difference in the influence of experiences of crime on life satisfaction according to the time when the victimization happened. Whereas most of the crimes against property have only a short time effect on life satisfaction, crimes against the person have a negative influence when they took place in the years 2009 or 2010. These results partly support findings for Germany, where significant influences of assault within the previous two years are found ( $B = -0.491, p < .01$ ), but no significant effects of theft on life satisfaction (Hansmaier et al., 2013).

### *The role of fear of crime*

The final step analyses possible influences of fear of crime. In order to see whether this 'hidden' variable reduces the influence of victimization experiences on life satisfaction we first use dichotomized variables. They show highly significant correlations between fear of crime and life satisfaction. Persons reporting satisfaction with their life feel more than 4 percent safer at night on the streets. Moreover, 2.8 percent of the happy people fear less for their family members and were 3.1 percent less afraid of becoming a victim during the previous 12 months ( $p < .001$ ).

To control for fear of crime, the items were included in the regression analyses. Although the influence on life satisfaction of experiences of crime varies over the years, fear of crime at night, fear for family members, concrete fear of becoming a victim of a street crime, and fear of a burglary are (highly) significant for all periods. People with fear of crime rate between 0.106 (fear of concrete victimization) and 0.181 (fear of crime at night) points lower on the happiness scale than respondents indicating low fear (five-year prevalence rates).

No clear single trend is visible for offences against the person over time. For both robbery and assault/threat, the process is curvilinear, with the highest negative impact on life satisfaction for the middle year, whereas the curve bends in the opposite directions for sexual offences, with the lowest impact in the year 2009 (Figure 1). However, not all values are statistically significant.<sup>4</sup> Although there is no obvious explanation for the inconsistent effect of time elapsed on life satisfaction following robbery and assault/threat, the paradoxical trend with respect to sexual victimization might be due to the fact that most incidents reported during interviews were rather trivial in nature and that previous incidents may have been more serious in nature. In the short term, they might have a stronger influence though.

**Table 3.** Influence of one- and two-year prevalence rates of crimes against property on life satisfaction.

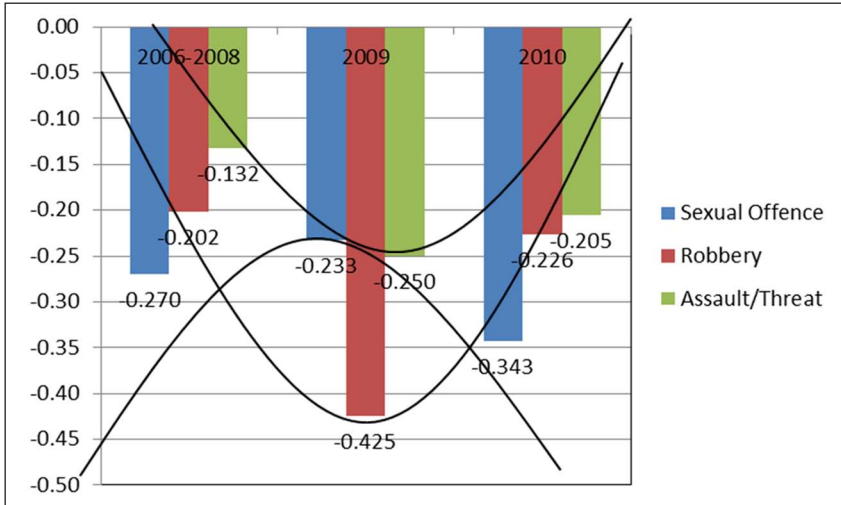
Experiences of crime	Life satisfaction								
	Percent (n)	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
		Coefficient	t-value	Coefficient	t-value	Coefficient	t-value	Coefficient	t-value
Constant		7.795	33.675	7.805	33.724	7.793	33.675	7.807	33.718
Attempted burglary 2006–8	3.6 (567)	-0.156*	-2.487						
Attempted burglary 2009	1.5 (231)	-0.127	-1.308						
Attempted burglary 2010	1.5 (234)	-0.060	-0.620						
Theft 2006–8	7.2 (1140)			-0.099*	-2.196				
Theft 2009	3.8 (599)			-0.087	-1.417				
Theft 2010	3.8 (603)			-0.151*	-2.474				
Vehicle theft 2006–8	12.6 (1982)					-0.037	-1.024		
Vehicle theft 2009	6.0 (950)					-0.124*	-2.483		
Vehicle theft 2010	5.5 (872)					-0.031	-0.595		
Consumer fraud 2006–8	1.5 (240)							-0.165	-1.735
Consumer fraud 2009	1.2 (193)							-0.166	-1.560
Consumer fraud 2010	1.6 (252)							-0.262**	-2.814
R <sup>2</sup>		.058		.058		.058		.058	

Notes: Coefficients: OLS parameters of multiple linear regressions. Significance levels: \* .01 < p < .05, \*\* .001 < p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001. Control variables (not shown here, as in Table 1): socio-demographic, economic, political and cultural factors.

**Table 4.** Influence of one- and two-year prevalence rates of crimes against the person on life satisfaction.

Experiences of crime	Life satisfaction					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Percent (n)	Coefficient	t-value	Coefficient	t-value	Coefficient
Constant		7.805	33.723	7.811	33.755	7.800
Robbery 2006–8	1.0 (165)	-0.202*	-1.777			
Robbery 2009	0.6 (98)	-0.425*	-2.872			
Robbery 2010	0.6 (92)	-0.226*	-1.437			
Assault/threat 2006–8	3.3 (523)			-0.132*	-2.029	
Assault/threat 2009	2.1 (334)			-0.250***	-3.064	
Assault/threat 2010	3.1 (495)			-0.205***	-3.044	
Sexual offence 2006–8	1.1 (180)					-0.270*
Sexual offence 2009	0.6 (93)					-0.233
Sexual offence 2010	0.7 (104)					-0.343*
R <sup>2</sup>		.058		.058		.059

Notes: Coefficients: OLS parameters of multiple linear regressions. Significance levels: \* .01 < p < .05, \*\* .001 < p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001. Control variables (not shown here, as in Table 1): socio-demographic, economic, political and cultural factors.



**Figure 1.** The influence of offences against the person over time on current life satisfaction (OLS values).

For offences against property, no trends over the three years are visible. Even if the coefficients are lower compared with the analyses above, all variables remain statistically significant. The only exception is having been a victim of attempted burglary in the years 2006–8, which no longer shows a statistically significant negative effect on life satisfaction. Attempted burglary may remind nearby victims of the vulnerability of their dwelling. If the ‘threat’ does not materialize over subsequent years, it might be that it loses its effect on happiness.

Looking simultaneously at fear of crime, no different trend in life satisfaction emerges over time. However, fear of crime has a larger and more consistent effect on life satisfaction.

## Discussion

Our study finds significant negative influences on life satisfaction of victimization experiences of crimes against property – theft, attempted burglary and consumer fraud – as well as for crimes against the person such as assault and threat, robbery and sexual offences. Comparing those influences reveals that those who experienced crimes against their person exhibit a lower score of happiness than those who experienced crimes against property.

Comparing these results with other studies in the field, two major differences appear: first, no influence of completed burglary was found (in contrast to attempted burglary), and, second, the impact of victimization does not decline consistently over time.

Other studies find a negative impact of burglary on life satisfaction (for example, Cohen, 2008, for the USA). Kuroki (2012) reports the same impact in Japan, where the poor seem more affected than wealthy people, who presumably can more easily afford

losses. These results suggest that the correlation between property crime and life satisfaction may be moderated by income. When controlling for income in Switzerland, people with a household income lower than CHF 2,500 were less happy with their life than the reference group (80.7 percent vs. 86.6 percent). This difference was not statistically significant though. There is, however, a significant influence of theft on life satisfaction among lower-middle-class respondents with household incomes between CHF 2,500 and CHF 5,000. This group of people is about 6 percent less happy if they become a victim of a theft than victims in the other income groups ( $p < .10$ ). These results support the findings of Kuroki (2012) that the impact of crime against property – either theft or burglary – on life satisfaction is more negative for poor people because the loss is felt much more deeply.

The inconsistent impact of victimization on life satisfaction over time may be owing to the fact that, in the present study, only effects in the short run (that is, over four years) have been considered. In contrast, Hansmaier et al. (2013), who considered a period of up to 10 years and beyond, find that the impact of victimization on life satisfaction declines over time.

Even if the results suggest a negative influence of victimization on life satisfaction, the direction of causation needs to be studied further. Given the cross-sectional character of our data, we cannot rule out a possible effect of life satisfaction on victimization. For example, research (Frey, 2008; Layard, 2005) suggests that happier people may go out more often in the evening, return home at later hours and engage in more risky activities, thus increasing their odds of victimization. Indeed, some of the studies reviewed above report lower effects of actual and, particularly, robbery victimization on happiness than fear of crime (for example, Møller, 2005). Denkers and Winkel (1998) report that victims of property and violent crimes were already less satisfied with life than non-victims before the incident occurred. Martin et al. (2008), who studied a student sample in grades 6 to 8, report that previous life satisfaction is consistent with risks of relational victimization (attempts to harm one's peer relationships). Intuitively, however, it seems less plausible that life satisfaction affects victimization, at least not in an adult population. Beyond this and given the well-known high rates of repeat victimization, one might also argue that low life satisfaction at time 1 might actually reflect (unmeasured) previous experiences of crime rather than suggest that low life satisfaction 'causes' (or attracts?) criminal victimization. For example, Norris and Kaniasty (1992) found that measures of distress disappeared after controlling for their pre-measured equivalents.

## Conclusions and outlook

Our study supports other research findings showing negative impacts of victimization experiences on life satisfaction. This is especially true for crimes against the person, such as sexual offences or assaults and threats. These influences remain significant after controlling for, among other variables, marital status or employment position, which have been shown in earlier research to have an impact on life satisfaction. However, fear of crime does not alter the findings. Time elapsed since victimization plays a role, but not consistently or to any greater extent.

Although studies of happiness can be found in various disciplines, research dealing with the outcome of victimization experiences and life satisfaction is rare. This paper intends to close this gap. Although some findings clearly need further elaboration, victimization seems to be an important contributor to (reduced) quality of life.

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## Notes

- 1 Respondents were interviewed one week, one month and two months following an incident.
- 2 The questions were: (1) 'How safe do you feel while walking alone in your area after dark?' (2) 'How safe are your family members, for example your children, in your area while walking alone after dark?' (3) 'During the last 12 months, have you experienced a situation where you were afraid of becoming a victim of a street crime, such as being robbed or physically attacked or seriously harassed?' (4) 'What would you say are the chances that over the next 12 months someone will try to break into your home?'
- 3 The structure of the questionnaire does allow the building of exclusive variables, excluding people who became a victim in several years. However, it is not possible to separate the years 2006 to 2008. As we are interested in the time-frame rather than the frequencies of victimization in single years, this circumstance should not seriously affect the analysis.
- 4 For robbery, only the rates for the year 2009 are significantly ( $p < .01$ ) different from those for years 2010 and 2006–8; for assault/threat, significant differences were found only for the years 2009 and 2010 compared with 2006–8 ( $p < .01$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

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