

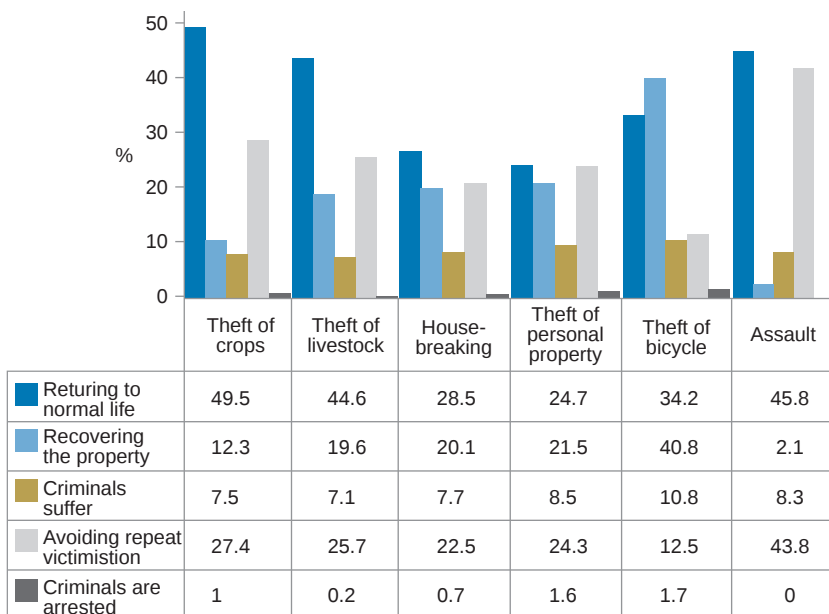
6. The response of victims of crime

The last set of questions put to victims of crime in Malawi explored briefly their response to their experience. Crime, in particular violent crime, can have a profound effect on individuals, and impacts directly on their emotional and often physical well-being. Therefore, experience of crime can initiate behavioural change in specific response to the experience, and usually in an attempt to avoid repeat victimisation.

Respondents to the survey were therefore asked what was important to them following the crime, and whether their behaviour changed as a result of their experience, and if so, how.

The most common response to being a victim of crime in Malawi is not revenge or retribution, but rather, the desire to get life back to normal again. This is indicated in Figure 28 below.

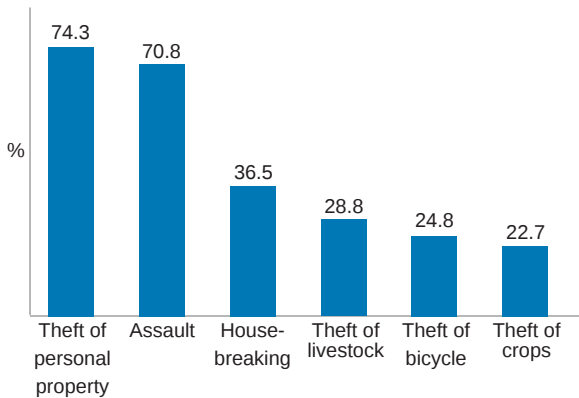
Figure 28 The most important need after the crime (for selected crimes)



The figure above indicates that, with the exception of bicycle theft, in which recovery of the property was most commonly reported to be the most important issue, the victims of crime mainly wanted to get things back to normal and to avoid being victimised again.

Given that avoiding repeat victimisation was so high on the list of priorities expressed by victims, it may be expected that most of them would have taken some specific steps in order to ensure that the experience was not repeated. The response of the victims of crime is outlined in Figure 29 below.

Figure 29 Percentage of victims who indicated they had changed their behaviour to prevent repeat victimisation



For victims of theft of personal property, the most common behavioural change was to begin keeping valuables in a safe place (34.5%) and to become more careful or alert when alone (25.1%).

For victims of assault, the most common behavioural change was to avoid certain places (32.8%) which they associated with vulnerability and to stop travelling alone (22.4%).

Victims of housebreaking who changed their behaviour mainly took steps to make their property more secure (32.5%), became more alert or aware (25%), and stopped leaving their house unattended or replaced their door locks (21.3%).

Theft of livestock victims indicated that they took specific measures to protect their livestock (50.7%) or also become more aware of what was happening around their stock (36.8%).

The majority of victims of bicycle theft who changed their behaviour, took measures to protect their (new) bicycle (65.6%), while over a third (34.5%) said they had become more aware of their potential vulnerability.

The majority of the victims of crop theft who said they had changed their behaviour (56.8%) also indicated that they had attempted to harden the target of the theft,³⁷ or had become more aware (28.4%).

However, a single assault victim, two robbery victims, eight crop theft victims, and three stock theft victims reported obtaining a weapon to protect themselves following their victimisation.

Two women victims of assault reported that they had become more respectful of their spouse to avoid repeat victimisation

The respondents who indicated that they had done something to avoid becoming victims of crime again, reported that they now felt more secure, or safer, at home or in their daily activities.

37 Target hardening includes measures such as alarms, security fences and any other physical measures to protect property or to inhibit offenders from accessing the property.