

U.S. Department of Justice
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Elderly Victims

by
Catherine J. Whitaker, Ph.D.
BJS Statistician

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Data from the National Crime Survey (NCS) show that between 1980 and 1985 the elderly, those age 65 and older, had the lowest victimization rates of any age group of the U.S. population age 12 and older. In a number of respects, however, crimes committed against the elderly are often more serious than crimes against younger people.

Major findings of this report include the following:

- Elderly violent crime victims were more likely than younger victims to face offenders armed with guns (16% vs. 12%).
- Elderly violent crime victims were more likely than younger victims to report that the offenders were total strangers (62% vs. 47%).
- The elderly were more likely than victims under age 65 to be victimized by a violent crime at or near their own homes (45% vs. 22%). Those 75 and older were the most likely of any age group to be victimized in this location (55%).
- About 46% of elderly victims of violent crime were attacked, and 29% were injured, about the same proportions as victims under 65.
- Among the elderly, violent crime victims age 75 and older were more likely to be injured and to receive medical care for their injuries than victims age 65-74.
- The elderly were less likely than younger victims to attempt to protect themselves during a crime incident (52% vs. 72%).

This report, based upon data from the National Crime Survey, examines the problem of crime against the elderly, including those crimes not reported to law enforcement agencies. It confirms earlier findings about the frequency of victimizations of elderly Americans--the elderly are victims of crime less often than are those in other age groups.

Nevertheless, as the report points out, crimes against the elderly are more serious in several respects and probably more frightening than crimes committed against younger people. In addition, we must be aware of the intangible effects of crime upon those who may be most vulnerable physically and economically.

This report can be of use to those who help the elderly to cope with the reality of crime. It provides valuable information to policymakers and researchers on crime and victimization in the United States.

Steven R. Schlesinger
Director

◦ Those age 75 and older had similar victimization rates to those age 65-74 for robbery and personal larceny with contact but lower rates for assaults, personal larceny without contact, and household crimes.

Victimization rates

The elderly were less likely than younger persons to be victims of crime. Teenagers and young adults under age 25 had the highest victimization rates. Older age groups generally had lower rates, and, for most types of crime, the elderly had the lowest rates of all. For example, the robbery rate for persons under age 25 was about 4 times higher than the rate for the elderly (11 vs. 3 robberies per 1,000 persons in each age group). The assault rate for those under 25 was about 17 times higher than the rate for the elderly. Persons age 25-49 had a robbery rate that was more than twice as high and an assault rate that was about 8 times higher than the comparable rates for the elderly.

The exception to this pattern of lower victimization rates for older age groups was personal larceny with contact (nonforceible purse snatching and pocket picking). The rate of this crime for the elderly was not measurably different from the rates for the other age groups.

◦ Among victims who reported financial losses, the elderly reported large losses (\$250 or more) about as often as did younger victims.

◦ Among the elderly, certain groups were more vulnerable to crime than others: Males, blacks, separated or divorced persons, and urban residents generally had the highest victimization rates.

Trends

The trends in crime rates against the elderly have generally been similar to the trends found for the U.S. population as a whole:

- Violent crime rates against the elderly declined in the 1980's; the 1985 rate was 50% lower than the rate for 1973, the first year of the NCS (figure 1).

- The rate of personal larceny with contact for the elderly has remained essentially unchanged since 1973. The rate for personal larceny without contact for the elderly peaked in the mid-1970's but has generally declined in recent years. For example, the 1985 rate was 30% lower than the 1976 rate.

- Elderly victimization rates for burglary and household larceny began to decline in the early 1980's. The 1985 rates for these crimes were the lowest since 1973 (figure 2).

- The rate of motor vehicle theft against the elderly has remained essentially stable since 1973. This finding differs from the trend for motor vehicle theft for the entire population, which has declined in recent years.

Characteristics of crimes against the elderly

It is often assumed that crimes against the elderly tend to be more serious and more frequently exhibit frightening characteristics than crimes

against younger people. These characteristics include facing an armed offender, a stranger, or an intruder in one's own home; sustaining serious injuries; or incurring substantial financial losses. Crimes against the elderly do, in fact, appear to be more serious than crimes against younger persons in some of these ways, and they are at least as serious in other respects.

Types of crime

About 6% of all the victimizations against the elderly were violent crimes, compared with 18% of the victimizations against those under 65 (table 1). A much higher proportion of the violent crimes against the elderly, however, were robberies. About 45% of violent crimes against the elderly were robberies, compared with 17% of violent crimes against teenagers and young adults and 18% of violent crimes against all victims under age 65. Robbery is often considered to be a more serious crime than assault because it includes both theft and force.

Personal larcenies with contact were a higher proportion of personal thefts against the elderly than those against younger persons. Because contact between the victim and the offender occurs during this crime, it potentially can escalate into a robbery. Thus, it is more serious than the other category of personal theft, larceny without contact.

The differences in the proportions of crime types experienced by different age groups may be related in part to differences in lifestyle, labor force participation, and income. Younger people may more often be in situations that place them at risk of assaultive violence, such as fights at school, in bars, or at neighborhood hangouts. Elderly persons are less likely to be in these places and may have lower assault rates as a result.

Also, criminal offenders may believe that the elderly are more likely to have large amounts of cash and are less likely and able to resist than a younger victim. As a result, the elderly may be more vulnerable to crimes such as robbery, purse snatching, or pocket picking, where economic gain is the primary motive.

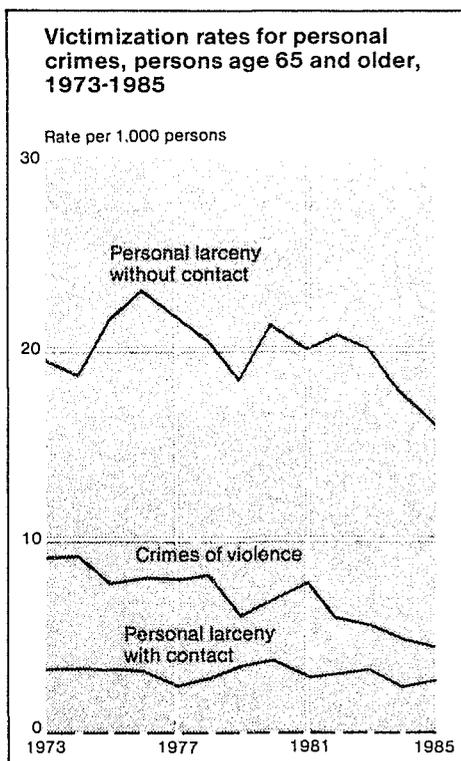


Figure 1

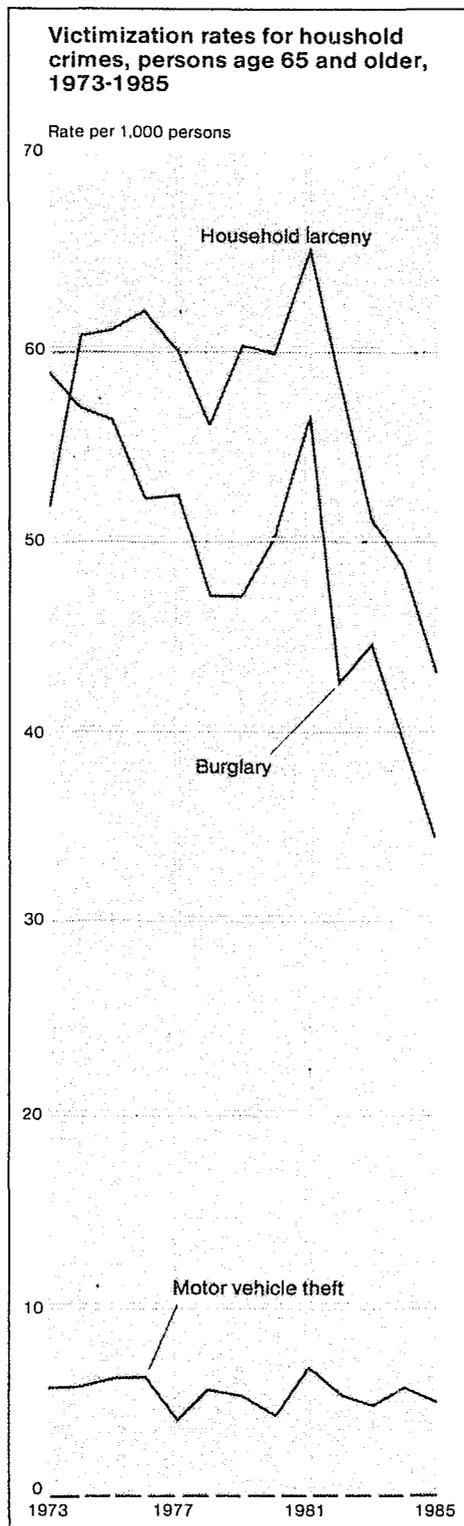


Figure 2

Table 1. Average annual victimization rates and number of victimizations, by age of victim and type of crime, 1980-85

| | Age of victim | | | |
|--|---------------|------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | 12-24 | 25-49 | 50-64 | 65 and older |
| Victimization rate | | | | |
| Crimes of violence | 67.5 | 34.0 | 11.3 | 6.0 |
| Rape | 2.0 | .8 | .1 ^a | .1 ^a |
| Robbery | 11.4 | 6.0 | 3.4 | 2.7 |
| Assault | 54.2 | 27.1 | 7.8 | 3.2 |
| Aggravated | 18.4 | 9.1 | 2.7 | 1.0 |
| Simple | 35.8 | 18.0 | 5.1 | 2.3 |
| Crimes of theft | 126.5 | 82.4 | 46.1 | 22.3 |
| Personal larceny with contact | 3.5 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 3.1 |
| Personal larceny without contact | 123.0 | 79.6 | 43.4 | 19.2 |
| Household crimes | 371.4 | 242.6 | 164.4 | 102.7 |
| Burglary | 144.3 | 86.9 | 59.4 | 44.0 |
| Household larceny | 196.8 | 136.5 | 92.3 | 53.7 |
| Motor vehicle theft | 30.3 | 19.3 | 12.7 | 5.1 |
| Number of victimizations | | | | |
| Crimes of violence | 3,429,700 | 2,703,500 | 375,300 | 154,200 |
| Rape | 99,000 | 65,600 | 4,600 ^a | 1,900 ^a |
| Robbery | 579,300 | 480,300 | 113,800 | 69,000 |
| Assault | 2,751,400 | 2,157,500 | 256,900 | 83,400 |
| Aggravated | 934,100 | 727,200 | 89,300 | 24,600 |
| Simple | 1,817,300 | 1,430,400 | 167,600 | 58,800 |
| Crimes of theft | 6,423,800 | 6,553,900 | 1,527,200 | 576,400 |
| Personal larceny with contact | 176,700 | 225,500 | 92,500 | 79,600 |
| Personal larceny without contact | 6,247,100 | 6,328,400 | 1,434,700 | 496,900 |
| Household crimes | 2,708,700 | 10,195,400 | 3,151,300 | 1,809,500 |
| Burglary | 1,052,300 | 3,651,300 | 1,138,300 | 775,100 |
| Household larceny | 1,435,600 | 5,733,900 | 1,768,800 | 945,300 |
| Motor vehicle theft | 220,700 | 810,200 | 244,200 | 89,100 |
| Number of persons in age group ^b | 50,792,400 | 79,549,900 | 33,091,500 | 25,811,700 |
| Number of households in age group ^b | 7,293,100 | 42,018,500 | 19,172,300 | 17,614,400 |

Note: The victimization rate is the annual average of the number of victimizations for 1980-85 per 1,000 persons or households in that age group. Detail may not add to total because of rounding.

^aAverage annual estimate is based on 10 or fewer sample cases; see Methodology.
^bAnnual average for 1980-85.

Table 2. Violent crimes: Presence of weapons, by age of victim, 1973-85

| Presence of weapon | Percent of victims | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| | Under 65 | 65 and older |
| Total | 100% | 100% |
| Unarmed offenders | 61% | 57% |
| Armed offenders | 39% | 43% |
| Gun only | 12 | 16 |
| Knife only | 10 | 9 |
| Other weapon only | 13 | 12 |
| Combination of weapons | 2 | 2 |
| Type of weapon not ascertained | 2 | 3 |

Note: Detail may not add to total because of rounding. Tabulations exclude crimes where the victims did not know if the offenders were armed.

Weapons

For victims who knew whether the offenders were armed, elderly victims were more likely than younger victims to face offenders armed with guns (16% vs. 12%) (table 2). However, there were no measurable differences in the overall proportions of victims in these two age groups who faced offenders armed with knives or other weapons.¹

Crimes by strangers

Elderly robbery victims were more likely than robbery victims under age 65 to report that the offenders were persons unknown to them, that is, total strangers (table 3). About 8 in 10 elderly victims were robbed by total strangers, compared with fewer than 7 in 10 victims under 65. However, the proportion of assaults committed by total strangers was not measurably different for victims in those two age groups.

¹Tabulations exclude 7% of violent crime victims under age 65 and 20% of elderly violent crime victims who did not know if the offender had a weapon.

Table 3. Relationship of offenders to victim in crimes of violence, by age of victim and type of crime, 1973-85

| Type of crime and age of victim | Percent of victimizations involving offenders who were: | | | | | | Relationship not ascertained ^a |
|---------------------------------------|---|----------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|------------------|---|
| | Total | Relatives | Well known, not relatives | Casual acquaintances | Known by sight only | Not known at all | |
| Crimes of violence^b | | | | | | | |
| Under 65 | 100% | 7% | 17% | 15% | 10% | 47% | 4% |
| 65 and older | 100 | 5 | 11 | 6 | 6 | 62 | 9 |
| Robbery | | | | | | | |
| Under 65 | 100 | 4 | 10 | 8 | 6 | 68 | 4 |
| 65 and older | 100 | 1 ^c | 4 | 2 | 2 | 82 | 9 |
| Assault | | | | | | | |
| Under 65 | 100 | 8 | 19 | 16 | 11 | 42 | 4 |
| 65 and older | 100 | 9 | 17 | 10 | 10 | 46 | 8 |

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% because of rounding. The closest relationship to any offender was used to classify multiple-offender victimizations.

^aIncludes responses of "don't know."

^bIncludes data on rape, not shown as a separate category.

^cEstimate is based on 10 or fewer sample cases; see Methodology.

Crimes occurring at home

Elderly violent crime victims were twice as likely to be victimized at or near their own homes than younger victims (45% vs. 22%) (table 4). This may be due in part to differences in lifestyle between the elderly and younger persons, who are more likely to spend larger portions of time at work, at school, or in other locations away from home and consequently have a higher likelihood of experiencing crimes in these locations.

Injury and medical care

Crimes against the elderly were similar to crimes against younger victims with respect to injury and medical care. There were no measurable differences between these age groups in the proportions who were physically attacked or injured, sustained serious or minor injuries, or received medical care or hospital treatment for their injuries (table 5).

Self-protection

Elderly violent crime victims were less likely to take self-protective measures than were younger victims (52% vs. 72%). A number of factors may influence a victim's decision whether to take self-protective measures, including the victim's physical strength, ability to fend off or evade a potential offender, and perception that protective actions will prevent injury or loss. In addition, crime victims may be reluctant to try to defend themselves when offenders are armed with a potentially dangerous weapon such as a gun or knife. The lower proportion of elderly violent crime victims who took self-protective measures is consistent with the greater likelihood that they will face offenders armed with guns.

Among violent crime victims who took self-protective measures, the elderly were less likely than younger victims to use or try to use physical force against the offenders (table 6). They were more likely than younger victims to try to get help or to argue or reason with the offender, and they were about as likely to resist without force or to take evasive action.

Table 4. Place of occurrence of personal crimes, by age of victim and type of crime, 1973-85

| Type of crime and age of victim | Percent of victimizations taking place: | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|---------|-----------|---------------|--|-----------|
| | Total | At home | Near home | On the street | In a commercial building or restaurant, on public transportation | Elsewhere |
| Crimes of violence* | | | | | | |
| Under 65 | 100% | 12% | 10% | 43% | 16% | 19% |
| 65 and older | 100 | 22 | 23 | 37 | 10 | 8 |
| Robbery | | | | | | |
| Under 65 | 100 | 11 | 8 | 55 | 13 | 12 |
| 65 and older | 100 | 21 | 18 | 45 | 11 | 5 |
| Assault | | | | | | |
| Under 65 | 100 | 12 | 11 | 40 | 16 | 21 |
| 65 and older | 100 | 22 | 27 | 32 | 9 | 11 |

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% because of rounding. *Includes data on rape, not shown as a separate category.

Table 5. Attacks, injuries, medical treatment, and hospital care received by violent crime victims, by age of victim, 1973-85

| Crime characteristics | Percent of victims | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| | Under 65 | 65 and older |
| Victim was: | | |
| Attacked | 47% | 46% |
| Injured | 30% | 29% |
| Serious | 6 | 7 |
| Minor | 24 | 22 |
| Received any medical care | 13% | 14% |
| Hospital care | 7 | 8 |

Note: Serious injuries are: broken bones, loss of teeth, internal injuries, loss of consciousness, rape or attempted rape injuries, or undetermined injuries requiring 2 or more days of hospitalization. Minor injuries are: bruises, black eyes, cuts, scratches, swelling, or undetermined injuries requiring less than 2 days of hospitalization.

Table 6. Self-protective measures used in violent crimes, by age of victim, 1973-85

| Self-protective measures ranked by seriousness* | Percent of victims | |
|--|--------------------|--------------|
| | Under 65 | 65 and older |
| Total | 100% | 100% |
| Used or brandished a weapon | 4 | 4 |
| Used or tried to use physical force | 33 | 17 |
| Tried to get help or scare offender away, argued or reasoned with offender | 30 | 48 |
| Resisted without force, including evasion | 27 | 23 |
| Other/not ascertained | 6 | 9 |

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% because of rounding. *Victims who reported more than one self-protective measure are tallied once in the most serious category of measure used.

Financial loss

Although there is a common perception that elderly crime victims sustain larger financial losses than younger victims, losses were similar and in some respects less severe for the elderly. Elderly crime victims were generally no more likely than victims under age 65 to sustain large net economic losses of \$250 or more (table 7). In fact, the economic consequences of burglary and household larceny may be more severe for younger victims. Elderly victims of these crimes were less likely than younger victims to report net losses of \$250 or more.

The financial impact of economic losses will be greater for victims in low-income households. For example, a \$250 net economic loss represents about 40% of the monthly income of a family earning \$7,500 a year but 12% of the monthly income of a family earning \$25,000 annually. Low-income elderly victims, however, do not suffer disproportionately from high economic losses (table 8). The elderly with low incomes were as likely as younger low-income victims to sustain large net economic losses when victimized by a violent crime or a personal theft; they were less likely to incur large net losses when victimized by a household crime.

Table 8. Victims with net economic losses of \$250 or more, by age of victim, family income, and type of crime, 1980-85

| Family income and age of victim | Percent of victimizations with a net loss of \$250 or more | |
|---------------------------------|--|------------------|
| | Personal crimes | Household crimes |
| Less than \$7,500 | | |
| Under 65 | 12% | 20% |
| 65 and older | 11 | 15 |
| \$7,500-14,999 | | |
| Under 65 | 13 | 21 |
| 65 and older | 11 | 18 |
| \$15,000-24,999 | | |
| Under 65 | 13 | 22 |
| 65 and older | 10 | 19 |
| \$25,000 or more | | |
| Under 65 | 13 | 24 |
| 65 and older | 18 | 25 |

Note: Income is that of all family members during the 12 months prior to the interview. Characteristics of the victim are used for personal crimes; characteristics of the head of household are used for household crimes. Percentages are based on crimes where there was a net economic loss of \$1 or more.

Table 7. Adjusted net economic loss, by age of victim and type of crime, 1980-85

| Type of crime and age of victim | Total | Percent of victims with a net economic loss of: | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------|---|---------|----------|---------------|
| | | Less than \$10 | \$10-49 | \$50-249 | \$250 or more |
| Crimes of violence | | | | | |
| Under 65 | 100% | 12% | 26% | 36% | 26% |
| 65 and older | 100 | 9 | 24 | 40 | 27 |
| Crimes of theft | | | | | |
| Under 65 | 100 | 17 | 36 | 34 | 14 |
| 65 and older | 100 | 15 | 37 | 36 | 12 |
| Household crimes | | | | | |
| Burglary | | | | | |
| Under 65 | 100 | 8 | 21 | 33 | 39 |
| 65 and older | 100 | 13 | 27 | 30 | 30 |
| Household larceny | | | | | |
| Under 65 | 100 | 16 | 36 | 35 | 13 |
| 65 and older | 100 | 24 | 40 | 26 | 10 |
| Motor vehicle theft | | | | | |
| Under 65 | 100 | 2 | 10 | 25 | 64 |
| 65 and older | 100 | 3 | 12 | 23 | 61 |

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% because of rounding. Age of head of household is used for household crimes; age of victim is used for crimes of violence and theft. Data exclude crimes where there was no net economic loss or the net loss was not known or ascertained. Data were adjusted to 1980 constant dollars using the Consumer Price Index. For definition of economic loss, see Methodology.

Certain aspects of the real cost of crime, however, are not measured by the NCS. For example, estimates of economic loss do not include increases in insurance premiums that may result from crime or the costs of security measures that victims may purchase in response to crime. It is not known if the elderly are more or less likely than younger victims to incur these types of costs. In addition, the actual impact of economic loss may vary among households that have similar incomes but different financial obligations.

Police reporting

Elderly persons were more likely than younger persons to report robberies and personal crimes of theft to the police (table 9). There were no measurable differences in reporting rates for other crimes.

Past studies have shown that as the seriousness of crime increases, people are more likely to report it to the police. The elderly's higher rates of police reporting are consistent with this finding. Certain aspects of crimes that are often viewed as serious, namely the higher proportions of violent crimes committed by strangers and by offenders armed with guns, are more prevalent among the elderly than among younger age groups.

Table 9. Police reporting rates, by age of victim and type of crime, 1973-85

| Type of crime and age of victim | Percent of victimizations | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| | Reported to police | Not reported to police |
| Crimes of violence* | | |
| Under 65 | 46% | 52% |
| 65 and older | 56 | 43 |
| Robbery | | |
| Under 65 | 53 | 46 |
| 65 and older | 69 | 31 |
| Aggravated assault | | |
| Under 65 | 54 | 44 |
| 65 and older | 55 | 43 |
| Simple assault | | |
| Under 65 | 39 | 59 |
| 65 and older | 42 | 57 |
| Crimes of theft | | |
| Personal larceny with contact | | |
| Under 65 | 34 | 65 |
| 65 and older | 42 | 57 |
| Personal larceny without contact | | |
| Under 65 | 25 | 74 |
| 65 and older | 30 | 69 |
| Household crimes | | |
| Burglary | | |
| Under 65 | 49 | 51 |
| 65 and older | 47 | 52 |
| Household larceny | | |
| Under 65 | 26 | 74 |
| 65 and older | 25 | 74 |
| Motor vehicle theft | | |
| Under 65 | 69 | 31 |
| 65 and older | 68 | 31 |

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% because of rounding and exclusion from the table of cases where police reporting was not known or ascertained.
*Includes data on rape, not shown as a separate category.

Table 10. Victimization rates of persons age 65 and older, by sex, race, and marital status of victim and by type of crime, 1973-85

| Type of crime | Victimization rates by victim characteristics | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|--------|-------|-------|----------------|---------|---------------|----------|------------------|
| | Sex | | Race | | Marital status | | | | |
| | Male | Female | White | Black | Married | Widowed | Never married | Divorced | Separated |
| Crimes of violence ^a | 9.3 | 5.5 | 6.4 | 12.8 | 5.5 | 7.0 | 9.4 | 20.1 | 31.6 |
| Robbery | 4.1 | 2.5 | 2.7 | 7.3 | 2.1 | 3.5 | 5.7 | 9.4 | 14.8 |
| Aggravated assault | 1.7 | .9 | 1.1 | 2.3 | 1.1 | 1.2 | 1.4 | 2.4 | 5.1 |
| Simple assault | 3.4 | 1.9 | 2.5 | 2.9 | 2.3 | 2.3 | 2.2 | 7.7 | 11.7 |
| Crimes of theft | 27.4 | 19.9 | 22.7 | 25.3 | 22.3 | 20.9 | 28.5 | 42.2 | 44.0 |
| Personal larceny with contact | 2.4 | 3.6 | 2.7 | 6.8 | 2.0 | 3.8 | 6.7 | 6.0 | 10.5 |
| Personal larceny without contact | 25.0 | 16.3 | 20.0 | 18.6 | 20.3 | 17.2 | 21.8 | 36.1 | 33.5 |
| Household crimes | 117.0 | 100.3 | 105.2 | 151.5 | 111.8 | 104.8 | 85.5 | 163.3 | 136.2 |
| Burglary | 48.4 | 48.0 | 46.0 | 70.7 | 43.6 | 50.4 | 45.4 | 75.1 | 76.1 |
| Household larceny | 62.0 | 48.7 | 54.3 | 73.0 | 61.6 | 50.4 | 36.6 | 80.4 | 58.1 |
| Motor vehicle theft | 6.6 | 3.6 | 5.0 | 7.7 | 6.6 | 4.0 | 3.5 | 7.7 | 2.0 ^b |

Note: Detail may not add to total because of rounding. Characteristics of victim are used for crimes of violence and theft; characteristics of head of household are used for household crimes. Victimization rates are average annual rates per 1,000 persons (households). ^aIncludes data on rape, not shown as a separate category. ^bEstimate is based on 10 or fewer sample cases; see Methodology.

Characteristics of elderly victims

Although the elderly have low victimization rates compared to those of other age groups, within the elderly population itself some groups were more likely than others to be victims of crime.

Elderly males generally had higher victimization rates than elderly females. For violent crime as a whole and for robbery, elderly males had victimization rates that were almost twice those for females. For personal larceny with contact, however, females had higher rates than males (table 10). Offenders may view elderly women as easier targets of this type of personal theft than elderly men. There were no measurable differences in the burglary rates for households headed by elderly males and those headed by elderly females.

Elderly blacks had higher victimization rates than elderly whites, except for the crimes of simple assault and personal larceny without contact where the rates for the two groups were not measurably different. For violent crime the black victimization rate was twice the rate for whites; for household crime the rate for blacks was about 1 1/2 times higher than for whites.

Elderly persons who were separated or divorced had the highest victimization rates. Their violent victimization rates were several times higher than the rates for married and widowed elderly persons, who had the lowest rates for nearly all categories of crime. The victimization rates for never-married elderly persons were generally similar to the rates for the widowed elderly.

Table 11. Victimization rates of persons age 65 and over, by location of residence, home ownership, and type of crime, 1980-85

| Type of crime and age of victim | Location of residence | | | Home ownership | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|-----------------------|----------------|------|
| | Metropolitan area | | Non-metropolitan area | Own | Rent |
| | Central city | Suburban area | | | |
| Crimes of violence* | 11.3 | 4.8 | 2.3 | 4.5 | 11.0 |
| Robbery | 6.2 | 1.7 | .8 | 1.7 | 6.0 |
| Aggravated assault | 1.5 | .8 | .6 | .8 | 1.5 |
| Simple assault | 3.5 | 2.2 | 1.3 | 2.0 | 3.4 |
| Crimes of theft | 31.9 | 22.1 | 14.8 | 19.2 | 33.2 |
| Personal larceny with contact | 7.7 | 1.9 | .6 | 1.9 | 7.2 |
| Personal larceny without contact | 24.3 | 20.3 | 14.2 | 17.3 | 26.0 |
| Household crimes | 132.0 | 91.3 | 89.4 | 106.8 | 91.0 |
| Burglary | 60.9 | 34.9 | 38.6 | 45.5 | 39.7 |
| Household larceny | 62.2 | 51.3 | 48.9 | 56.6 | 45.2 |
| Motor vehicle theft | 8.9 | 5.1 | 1.9 | 4.7 | 6.0 |

Note: Characteristics of victim are used for crimes of violence and theft; characteristics of head of household are used for household crimes. Victimization rates are average annual victimization rates per 1,000 persons (households). *Includes data on rape, not shown as a separate category.

Elderly residents in urban areas had higher victimization rates than the elderly in suburban or nonmetropolitan areas (table 11). Nonmetropolitan area elderly residents generally had lower victimization rates than suburban elderly; however, the rates of burglary and household larceny for these two groups were not measurably different.

Elderly renters had higher victimization rates than homeowners for personal crimes. Elderly homeowners, on the other hand, had higher burglary and household larceny victimization rates than renters. The two groups had similar rates of motor vehicle theft.

Elderly persons with lower family incomes (less than \$7,500 annually) had higher robbery victimization rates than the elderly with higher incomes (table 12). However, for personal larceny without contact, household larceny, and motor vehicle theft, low-income elderly had the lowest victimization rates. There was no clear relationship between family income and rates of victimization for personal larceny with contact and burglary.

The pattern of victimization rates among the elderly was generally consistent with differences in rates among the population as a whole. There were, however, two exceptions to this: the elderly who had never married and elderly homeowners.

Table 12. Victimization rates of persons age 65 and older, by family income and type of crime, 1980-85

| Type of crime and age of victim | Victimization rates by family income | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| | Less than \$7,500 | \$7,500-14,999 | \$15,000-24,999 | \$25,000 or more |
| Crimes of violence* | 7.5 | 5.3 | 5.4 | 4.1 |
| Robbery | 3.8 | 2.2 | 1.8 | 1.7 |
| Aggravated assault | 1.0 | 1.1 | .8 | .5 |
| Simple assault | 2.5 | 1.9 | 2.8 | 1.8 |
| Crimes of theft | 19.6 | 21.7 | 24.7 | 33.2 |
| Personal larceny with contact | 4.1 | 3.0 | 2.1 | 2.1 |
| Personal larceny without contact | 15.5 | 18.7 | 22.6 | 31.1 |
| Household crimes | 103.1 | 103.5 | 112.2 | 120.7 |
| Burglary | 49.3 | 40.6 | 40.3 | 48.4 |
| Household larceny | 50.6 | 57.8 | 64.3 | 63.4 |
| Motor vehicle theft | 3.2 | 5.1 | 7.7 | 8.9 |

Note: Characteristics of victim are used for crimes of violence and theft; characteristics of head of household are used for household crimes. Victimization rates are average annual rates per 1,000 persons (households). *Includes data on rape, not shown as a separate category.

Elderly never-married persons were generally less likely to be crime victims than elderly divorced or separated persons. For all age groups, however, never-married persons had the highest rates of personal theft, and they had violent victimization rates similar to the divorced or separated.

Elderly homeowners had higher burglary and household larceny rates than renters; for the entire population, the reverse was true.

Victimization rates for those age 75 and older

Patterns of victimization for those 75 and older varied from those for victims age 65-74 in several ways. Those 75 and older were less likely than the elderly under 75 years of age to be victims of assault, motor vehicle theft, personal larceny without contact, and household larceny (table 13). Rates of some of the more serious categories of crime, however, were relatively constant after age 65. Rates for robbery and for personal larceny with contact for these two groups did not differ. The difference in burglary rates, although statistically significant, was not large.

Crimes against those 75 and older were more likely than those against victims age 65-74 to contain some of the serious or frightening characteristics noted earlier.

Table 13. Average annual victimization rates and number of victimizations, by age of elderly victim and type of crime, 1973-85

| Type of crime | Age of victim | |
|--|------------------|---------------------|
| | 65-74 | 75 and older |
| Victimization rate | | |
| Crimes of violence | 7.6 | 6.1 |
| Rape | .1 ^a | .1 ^a |
| Robbery | 3.1 | 3.4 |
| Assault | 4.4 | 2.6 |
| Aggravated | 1.4 | .8 ^a |
| Simple | 3.0 | 1.8 ^a |
| Crimes of theft | 27.2 | 15.8 |
| Personal larceny with contact | 3.1 | 3.1 |
| Personal larceny without contact | 24.1 | 12.7 |
| Household crimes | 116.8 | 98.4 |
| Burglary | 49.4 | 46.4 |
| Household larceny | 61.2 | 48.3 |
| Motor vehicle theft | 6.2 | 3.8 |
| Number of victimizations | | |
| Crimes of violence | 112,900 | 53,500 |
| Rape | 800 ^a | 1,200 ^a |
| Robbery | 45,700 | 29,400 |
| Assault | 66,400 | 23,000 |
| Aggravated | 21,500 | 7,200 ^a |
| Simple | 44,900 | 15,800 ^a |
| Crimes of theft | 406,200 | 138,400 |
| Personal larceny with contact | 46,800 | 26,800 |
| Personal larceny without contact | 359,400 | 111,600 |
| Household crimes | 1,147,900 | 614,800 |
| Burglary | 485,300 | 289,700 |
| Household larceny | 601,300 | 301,500 |
| Motor vehicle theft | 61,200 | 23,700 |
| Number of persons in age group ^b | 14,936,500 | 8,758,100 |
| Number of households in age group ^b | 9,827,100 | 6,247,100 |

Note: The victimization rate is the annual average of the number of victimizations for 1973-85 per 1,000 persons or households in that age group. Detail may not add to total because of rounding.
^aAverage annual estimate is based on 10 or fewer sample cases; see Methodology.
^bAnnual average for 1973-85.

Table 14. Attacks, injuries, medical treatment, and hospital care received by elderly violent crime victims, 1973-85

| Crime characteristics | Percent of victims | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| | 65-74 | 75 and older |
| Victim was: | | |
| Attacked | 42% | 52% |
| Injured | 26% | 35% |
| Serious | 6 | 8 |
| Minor | 20 | 27 |
| Received any medical care | 11% | 20% |
| Hospital care | 7 | 10 |

Note: Serious injuries are: broken bones, loss of teeth, internal injuries, loss of consciousness, rape or attempted rape injuries, or undetermined injuries requiring 2 or more days of hospitalization. Minor injuries are: bruises, black eyes, cuts, scratches, swelling, or undetermined injuries requiring less than 2 days of hospitalization.

Elderly victims 75 and older were more likely than those 65-74 years old to be physically attacked during a violent crime (52% vs. 42%) (table 14). As a consequence of this, they were more likely than those under 75 to be injured (35% vs. 26%). Violent crime victims 75 and older were also more likely to receive medical care for their injuries (20% vs. 11%). A higher proportion of these victims received medical treatment at a hospital than elderly victims under 75, but this difference was not statistically significant.²

²When the proportion of injuries is computed as a percentage of those who were attacked, a higher proportion of those age 75 and older than of those age 65-74 were injured (67% vs. 61%). As a proportion of those injured, a higher proportion of those 75 and older received medical care. However, since these percentages are based on a small number of sample cases, standard errors are too large to report these findings as statistically significant.

Victims of violent crimes who were 75 and older were more likely to experience these incidents at home than were those under 75 (table 15). The proportion of this group of elderly victims who were robbed at home was twice as high as the proportion of the elderly under age 75 robbed at home (30% vs. 15%).

Among the elderly population, those demographic groups that were more likely to be victims of crime had higher victimization rates regardless of age. For example, males 75 and older had higher violent crime rates than females in this age group, as was true for elderly persons under 75 (table 16).

For violent crimes and personal larceny with contact, elderly members of the same group had similar victimization rates regardless of age. For example, males under 75 were as likely as males 75 and older to be violent crime victims.

There were, however, some exceptions to this pattern. Renters, persons whose annual family income was less than \$7,500, and divorced, widowed, or separated persons who were 75 and older had measurably lower violent crime rates than members of these groups who were age 65-74.

For household crimes and personal larceny without contact, those 75 and older generally had lower victimization rates than did those 65-74 for each of the demographic groups examined. Some exceptions, however, were found for burglary (table 17). Elderly heads of household had similar rates of burglary regardless of age for the following groups: males, homeowners, non-metropolitan area residents, those with family incomes of less than \$25,000, and married, widowed, divorced, or separated persons.

Table 15. Place of occurrence of violent crimes, by age of victim and type of crime, 1973-85

| Type of crime and age of victim | Percent of victimizations taking place: | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|---------|-----------|---------------|--|-----------|
| | Total | At home | Near home | On the street | In a commercial building or restaurant, on public transportation | Elsewhere |
| Crimes of violence* | 100% | 18% | 22% | 40% | 11% | 9% |
| 65-74 | 100 | 30 | 25 | 32 | 7 | 6 |
| 75 and older | 100 | 15 | 17 | 48 | 13 | 6 |
| Robbery | 100 | 30 | 19 | 39 | 8 | 4 |
| 65-74 | 100 | 20 | 25 | 34 | 9 | 11 |
| 75 and older | 100 | 28 | 32 | 25 | 7 | 8 |

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% because of rounding. *Includes data on rape, not shown as a separate category.

Table 16. Violent crimes: Victimization rates, by age of victim and selected demographic characteristics

| Selected characteristics | Age of victim | |
|--------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 65-74 | 75 and older |
| Sex | | |
| Male | 9.7 | 8.4 |
| Female | 5.9 | 4.8 |
| Race | | |
| White | 6.9 | 5.6 |
| Black | 13.5 | 11.5 |
| Marital status | | |
| Married | 5.7 | 5.0 |
| Widowed | 8.2 | 6.0 |
| Never married | 8.4 | 10.9 |
| Divorced | 22.7 | 12.1 |
| Separated | 37.0 | 15.2 |
| Location of residence | | |
| Metropolitan area | | |
| Central city | 12.2 | 10.0 |
| Suburban area | 5.6 | 3.5 |
| Nonmetropolitan area | 2.8 | 2.7 |
| Home ownership | | |
| Own | 4.7 | 4.1 |
| Rent | 13.2 | 8.3 |
| Family income | | |
| Less than \$7,500 | 9.0 | 5.7 |
| \$7,500-14,999 | 5.5 | 4.7 |
| \$15,000-24,999 | 6.0 | 3.8 |
| \$25,000 and over | 4.1 | 4.0 |

Note: Victimization rates are average annual rates per 1,000 persons. Rates by location of residence, home ownership, and family income are for 1980-85; rates by sex, race, and marital status of victim are for 1973-85.

Table 17. Burglary: Victimization rates, by age of victim and selected demographic characteristics

| Selected characteristics | Age of victim | |
|--------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 65-74 | 75 and older |
| Sex | | |
| Male | 48.6 | 48.0 |
| Female | 50.7 | 44.9 |
| Race | | |
| White | 47.3 | 44.0 |
| Black | 68.7 | 74.5 |
| Marital status | | |
| Married | 44.3 | 41.7 |
| Widowed | 51.8 | 49.0 |
| Never married | 50.2 | 38.0 |
| Divorced | 76.9 | 69.4 |
| Separated | 79.8 | 64.3 |
| Location of residence | | |
| Metropolitan area | | |
| Central city | 64.6 | 55.8 |
| Suburban area | 37.2 | 31.1 |
| Nonmetropolitan area | 37.6 | 40.1 |
| Home ownership | | |
| Own | 45.6 | 45.3 |
| Rent | 44.0 | 34.7 |
| Family income | | |
| Less than \$7,500 | 50.7 | 48.0 |
| \$7,500-14,999 | 41.7 | 38.5 |
| \$15,000-24,999 | 42.3 | 34.9 |
| \$25,000 and over | 52.5 | 36.6 |

Note: Victimization rates are average annual rates per 1,000 households. Rates by location of residence, home ownership, and family income are for 1980-85; rates by sex, race, and marital status of head of household are for 1973-85.

Methodology

The tables in this report include NCS data from the years 1980-85 or from 1973-85 when additional sample cases were needed for detailed tabulations. The NCS obtains information about crimes, including incidents not reported to the police, reported to interviewers by persons age 12 and older in a representative sample of households. The NCS measures attempted and completed incidents of rape, robbery, and assault; personal thefts with and without contact; and the household crimes of burglary, household larceny, and motor vehicle theft. The survey does not include murder and kidnaping or incidents that the victim may not recognize as crimes, such as fraud or con games.

The estimates in this report are higher than those in annual NCS publications because series crimes are included. Series crimes are three or more similar incidents which the victim cannot describe as separate incidents in detail. In this report these crimes are counted as one victimization, and the incident characteristics are those of the most recent event in the series.

Assaults that occurred during commercial crimes are classified in this report according to the procedures in effect prior to 1985. Completed assaults during commercial robberies are classified as robberies, and attempted assaults during commercial thefts are not classified as NCS crimes.

Economic loss

The NCS measures several different types of economic loss sustained by victims/households: property or cash stolen, property damaged, medical expenses due to injuries, and wages lost from work because of injuries, repairing or replacing damaged or stolen property, contacts with police, or court appearances. Victims are asked to provide the value of any property recovered and of insurance payments received and to indicate if damaged property will be repaired or replaced by someone outside of the household (such as a landlord). The dollar values are the victims' estimates at the time of the interview and do not include any losses, recoveries, or insurance payments that took place after the interview.

The data on net economic loss were obtained by summing the value of items stolen or damaged, medical expenses, and lost wages and subtracting the value of items recovered and insurance payments. If individuals outside the household paid in whole or in part the cost of repairing or replacing damaged property, an allocated proportion of the value of damaged property was subtracted. Where appropriate, net economic loss data were adjusted to 1980 constant dollars using the Consumer Price Index.

Reliability of comparisons

All comparisons presented in this report are significant at the 90% confidence level or above. Most comparisons are significant at the 95% confidence level, meaning that the estimated difference between values being compared was greater than twice the standard error of this difference.

Even though data in this report were collected over several years, some estimates, particularly for the elderly age 75 and older and for certain demographic groups of elderly victims, are based on a relatively small number of sample cases; these estimates will have comparatively large standard errors as a result. Caution should be used when comparing estimates not discussed in the text, since seemingly large differences may not be statistically significant at the 95% or even the 90% confidence level.

The data tables note when estimates are based on 10 or fewer sample cases. It is not possible to compute standard errors accurately for such estimates. Therefore, it is inadvisable to compare estimates based upon 10 or fewer sample cases to other small estimates.

More information on NCS estimation procedures can be obtained from Appendix III of Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1985 (May 1987, NCJ-104273).

Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Reports are written principally by BJS staff. This report was written by Catherine J. Whitaker. Richard W. Dodge provided statistical review, and Gertrude Thomas provided statistical assistance. The report was edited by Frank D. Balog. Report production was administered by Marilyn Marbrook, publications unit chief, assisted by Tina Dorsey, Jeanne Harris, Sara E. Smith, and Arlene F. James.

November 1987, NCJ-107676

The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the following program offices and bureaus: the Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

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