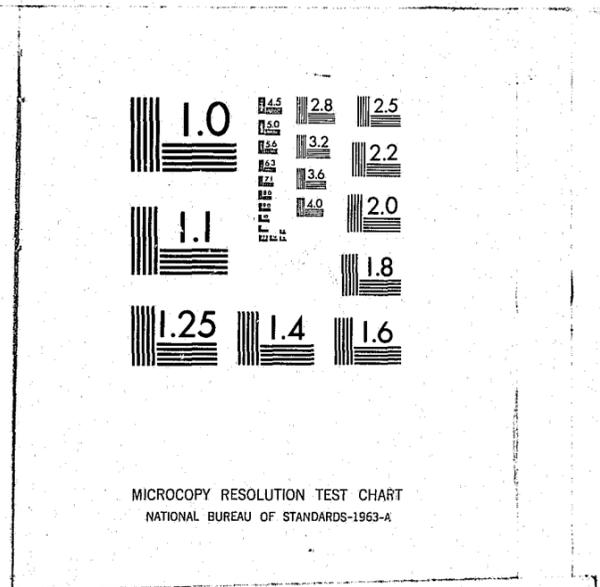


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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE

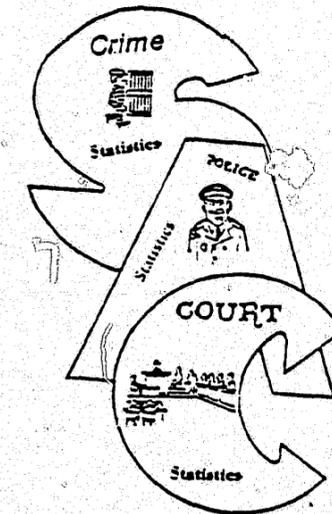
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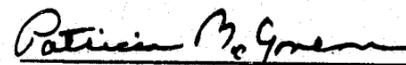
Statistical Analysis Center

Massachusetts Committee on
Criminal Justice

July, 1978

FORWARD

"Criminal Victimization in Massachusetts - 1976" is the most recent report of the Statistical Analysis Center of the Massachusetts Committee on Criminal Justice. Victimization surveys such as the one analyzed in this report are one of our most important sources for certain types of criminal justice information. While survey results for the entire United States have recently been published by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, this report contains the only available analysis of the Massachusetts data. I hope you find it useful and informative. If you have any questions or desire more information, please feel free to contact the Statistical Analysis Center at (617) 727-1498.


Patricia McGovern, Executive Director
Committee on Criminal Justice

PREFACE

The author would like to thank those people who assisted in the preparation of this report. Technical advice on the analysis and interpretation of data was provided by Carolyn Shettle, Director of the Statistical Analysis Center. Research Associates Robert Patrician and Stephen Perry also provided assistance. Paulette Jones was responsible for the preparation of graphs and charts for the report. Barbara Reinhart and Nancie Mossman typed the report and readied it for publication. Without their assistance this study could not have been carried out.

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SUMMARY

According to the most recent National Crime Survey, approximately 12% of Massachusetts residents reported they were victims of one of the following types of personal crimes during 1976: rape, robbery, assault, larceny. Additionally, 23% of Massachusetts households were victims of either larceny, burglary or auto theft.

- 2.8% of Massachusetts residents were victims of violent crimes and 8.9% were victims of personal theft.
- Almost one quarter of all Massachusetts households experienced an incident of theft.
- Most crimes were not reported to the police. Only about one third of personal crimes and one half of household crimes were reported.
- The most common reason for not reporting crimes was that the victim felt that the crime was not important.
- The risk of being victimized varied considerably among individuals. The following groups were relatively likely to be victims of personal crime: (1) persons under 35, (2) blacks, (3) males, and (4) low-income individuals..
- Households which consisted of four or more people or which were headed by an individual who was young or black were more likely to be victimized than other households.
- 79% of all personal crimes were committed by someone who was a stranger to the victim.
- According to victim descriptions, the proportion of offenders who were either (1) young, (2) black or (3) male was considerably higher than would be expected from their proportion in the general population.

I. INTRODUCTION

This report examines the results of the Massachusetts portion of the most recently released National Crime Survey. This survey, conducted annually by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, asked a representative sampling of United States residents about the extent to which they or members of their households, had been subjected to various crimes.¹ This approach was designed to provide more detailed information than is available from more traditional sources of crime rate data,² and to answer questions such as "Who is most likely to be victimized by certain types of crime?" and "What proportion of crimes are not reported to the police and why?".

II. CRIMES INCLUDED IN THE SURVEY

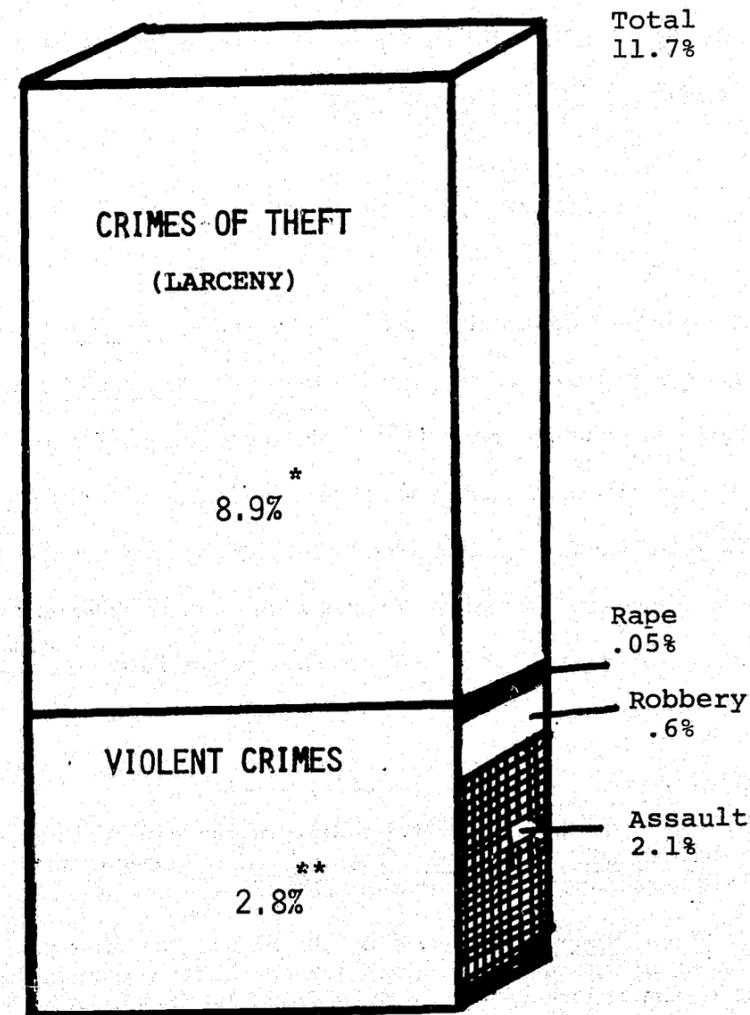
The survey breaks down crime into two types: (1) personal crime in which individuals are the victims, and (2) crimes in which households are victimized. Personal incidents made up approximately 14 percent of all incidents reported. The crimes included are limited to those which are amenable to study by the survey technique. Thus, for instance, murder is not included, and neither are white collar crimes (such as fraud) or "victimless" crimes such as drug abuse or prostitution. The following crimes are used in our analysis of the victimization data:

¹For a more detailed explanation of the nature of the victimization survey, see Criminal Victimization in the United States - 1973, U.S. Department of Justice, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, 1976.

²The Uniform Crime Reports, published by the FBI, is the most-used source of information on crime rates. These rates are not directly comparable to those obtained from victimization surveys - each source of data has its own strengths and weaknesses. For a more detailed discussion, see the appendix to this report.

FIGURE 1

INDEX OF PERSONAL CRIMES
PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS VICTIMIZED



*Standard error = 2.1
**Standard error = .38

Personal Crimes

Crimes of Violence: Rape, Assault, Robbery

Crimes of Theft: Larceny

Household Crimes*: Burglary, Larceny, Motor Vehicle Theft

III. THE EXTENT OF CRIME

A. Personal Crimes

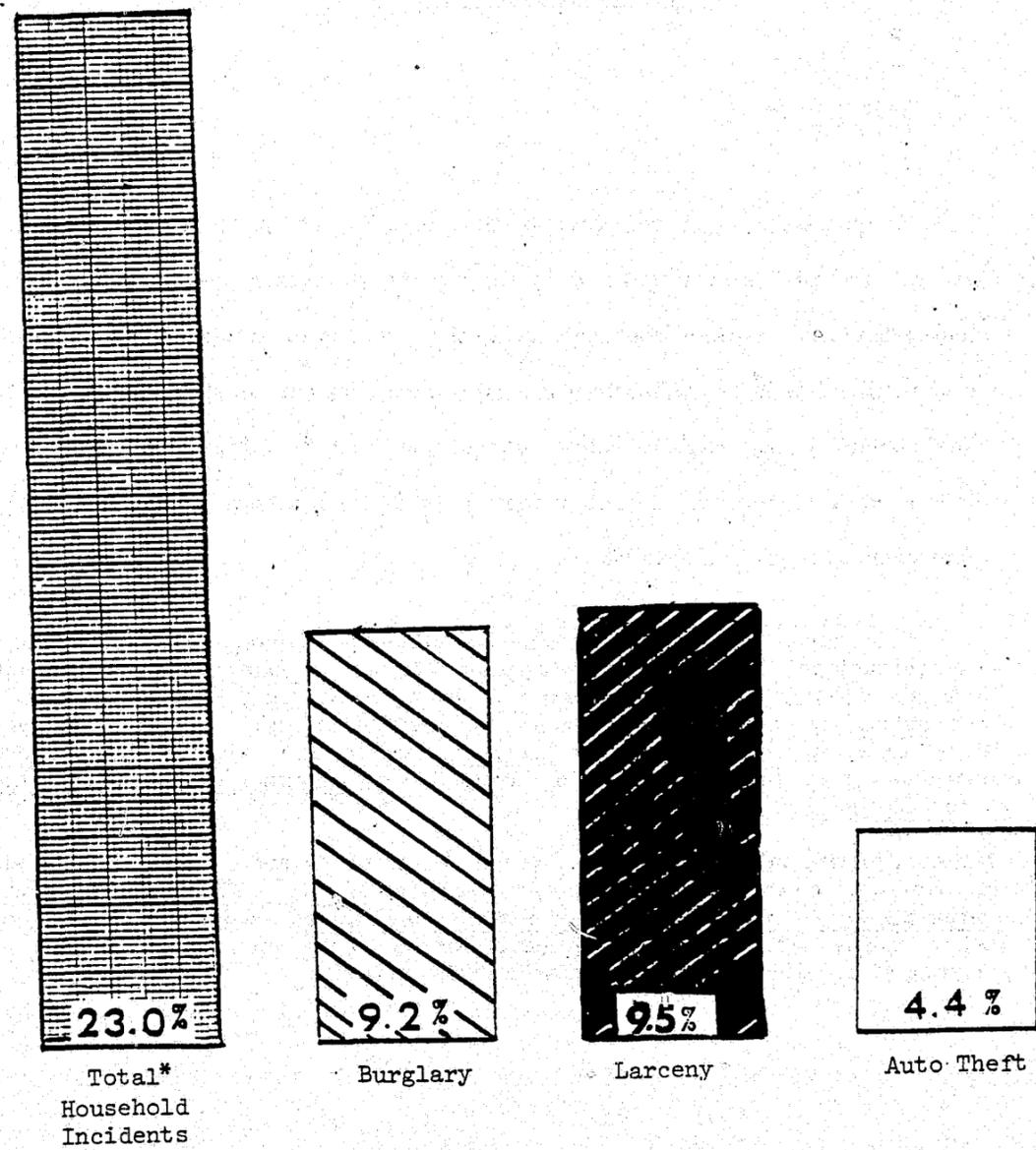
The victimization survey reveals that in 1976 about 12 out of every 100 Massachusetts residents (Figure 1) were victims of either personal theft (not including burglary or other household crimes) or crimes of violence (rape, robbery and assault). This is approximately the same rate that prevailed in Massachusetts during 1974-1975, and slightly below the national rate.³ 2.8% of Massachusetts residents were victims of violent crimes in 1976. Assaults made up 75% of all violent crimes; rapes less than 1%.

* Household crimes do not include crimes of violence. If violence occurs during a household incident, it is classified as a personal crime. Robbery includes crimes in which the object is to "relieve a person of property by force, or threat of force", while larceny is the "theft of cash or property by stealth". Burglary involves "illegal or attempted entry", while household larceny does not (i.e. the offender must have a right to be in the building involved). See Criminal Victimization in the United States - 1973. op. cit.

³ National victimization data for 1976 reveal a rate of 3.2 and 9.6 per 100 residents for crimes of violence and crimes of theft. See Criminal Victimization in the United States - a Comparison of 1975 and 1976 Findings U.S. Department of Justice, LEAA, 1977. Like all surveys, the victimization study is subject to sampling error. This problem is discussed in the appendix.

FIGURE 2

INDEX OF HOUSEHOLD CRIMES
PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS VICTIMIZED



* Standard Error = 1.3 Percentages do not add to 23.0 because of rounding.

Crimes of theft occurred more frequently than violent crimes. About one Massachusetts citizen in eleven was a victim of larceny. *

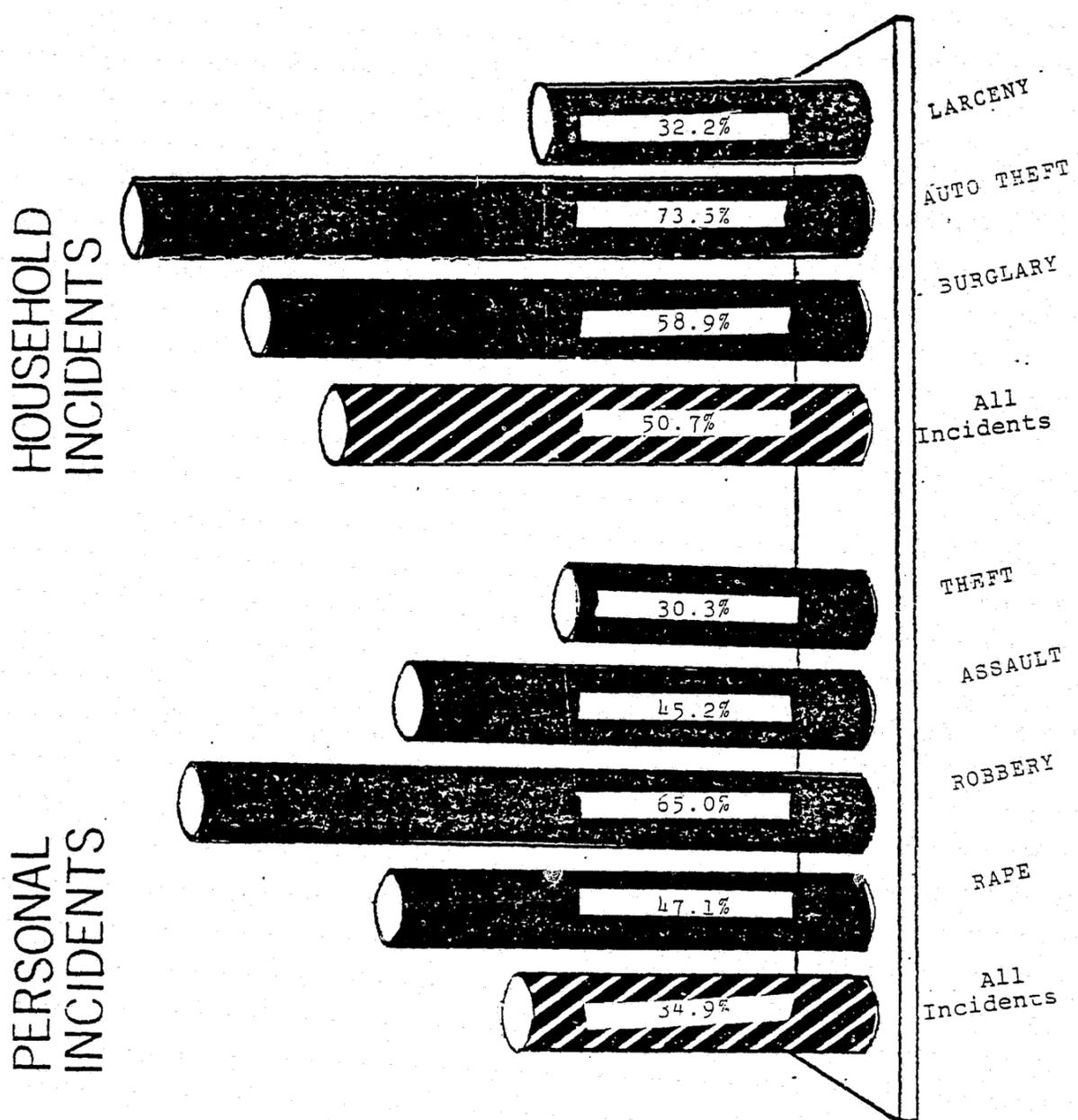
B. Household Crimes

Households as well as individuals can be victims of crime. In 1976 there were 23 such crimes reported for every 100 households in Massachusetts (Figure 2). The most frequently reported household crimes were burglary (9.2 per 100) and larceny (9.5 per 100). These are quite similar to rates which were reported both nationally and in Massachusetts during 1974 and 1975. While only 4.4% of all households experienced an auto theft, this figure is almost three times the national rate.

* Unfortunately, data available to the Statistical Analysis Center do not permit an analysis of victimization rates in individual cities and counties. Only statewide rates can be analyzed.

FIGURE 3:

PERCENT OF VICTIMS REPORTING CRIMES TO THE POLICE



IV. CRIMES REPORTED TO THE POLICE

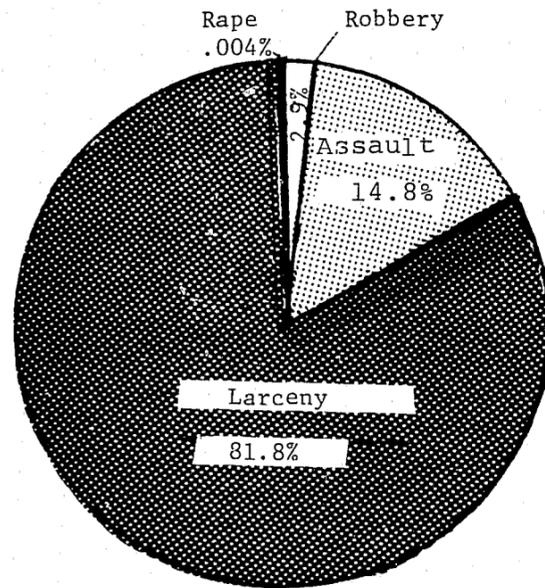
One of the limitations of crime rates derived from police reports is that they only include crimes of which the police are aware. This has two important consequences. First, they underestimate the actual amount of crime. Second, the rates may fluctuate not only because of changes in the actual crime rate, but because of fluctuations in the reporting of crimes to the police. Data from the victimization study allow us to examine the extent to which individuals fail to report crimes and the reasons why they fail to do so.

Only about one third of all personal crimes and one half of all household crimes are reported to the police⁵ (See Figure 3). The type of crime committed, however, has a significant impact on the likelihood that the victim will report. Thus, about 50% of violent personal crimes are reported but only 30% of personal thefts. The reporting rate for household crimes ranges from 32% for larceny to almost 75% for auto theft. Generally, serious crimes have a greater likelihood of being reported than do lesser crimes. Less serious offenses therefore make up the majority of unreported crime (Figure 4). Other factors, however, influence whether a victim reports a crime. Rapes are less likely to be reported than robberies or burglaries due to the embarrassment and stigma associated with the crime. Auto thefts have a high reporting rate because reporting to the police is necessary in order for the victim to collect insurance, and perhaps also because of the relative success of the police in recovering the property.

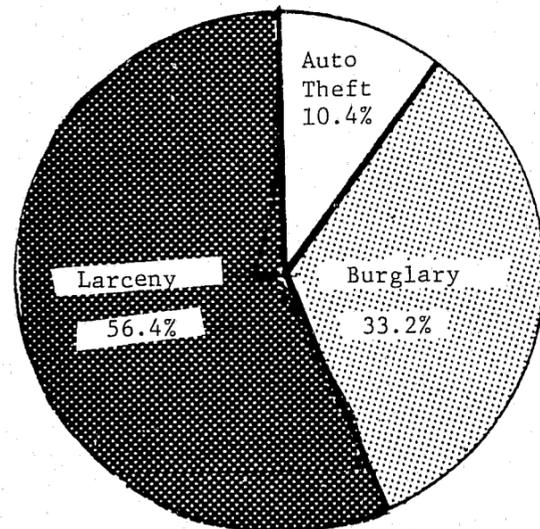
⁵These are very close to previous years' figures. The percent reporting to police according to the 1974-1975 survey was 32% for personal incidents and 53% for household incidents. The reporting rate for Massachusetts is somewhat higher than for the United States as a whole. This is true of all crimes except assault and rape, for which Massachusetts has lower rates.

FIGURE 4:
INCIDENTS NOT REPORTED TO THE POLICE
Breakdown By Type of Crime

PERSONAL INCIDENTS



HOUSEHOLD INCIDENTS



The most common reason given for not reporting a crime to the police was that it was not important. Among those who did not report, this response was given for 44% of personal crimes and 57% of household crimes. A sizeable portion of victims felt either that nothing could be done, or that the police would be bothered if the crime were reported (Figure 5).

Finally, there was no significant difference in the reporting of personal crimes for individuals of different sexes, races or income levels. Age, however, was an important factor.⁶ Forty-eight percent of those over 35 years of age claimed they reported to the police (personal crimes) but only 29% of those between the ages of 12 and 34 did so. This is particularly striking in light of the high crime rate for this younger age group (to be discussed in the following section).

V. THE VICTIMS OF CRIME

Although we have been discussing crime rates on a state-wide level, clearly all individuals do not run the same risk of being victimized. The risk of crime varies according to the type of offense, the area in which an individual lives, and individual background factors as well. The risk of rape, for instance, generally applies only to women, the risk of auto theft only to those who own cars. While the victimization survey does not allow us to examine all of these issues, it does provide information on the risk of crime associated with certain background characteristics. For the most part these results are consistent with previous Massachusetts surveys as well as with the national survey.

⁶These results are also corroborated by the national study for most crimes.

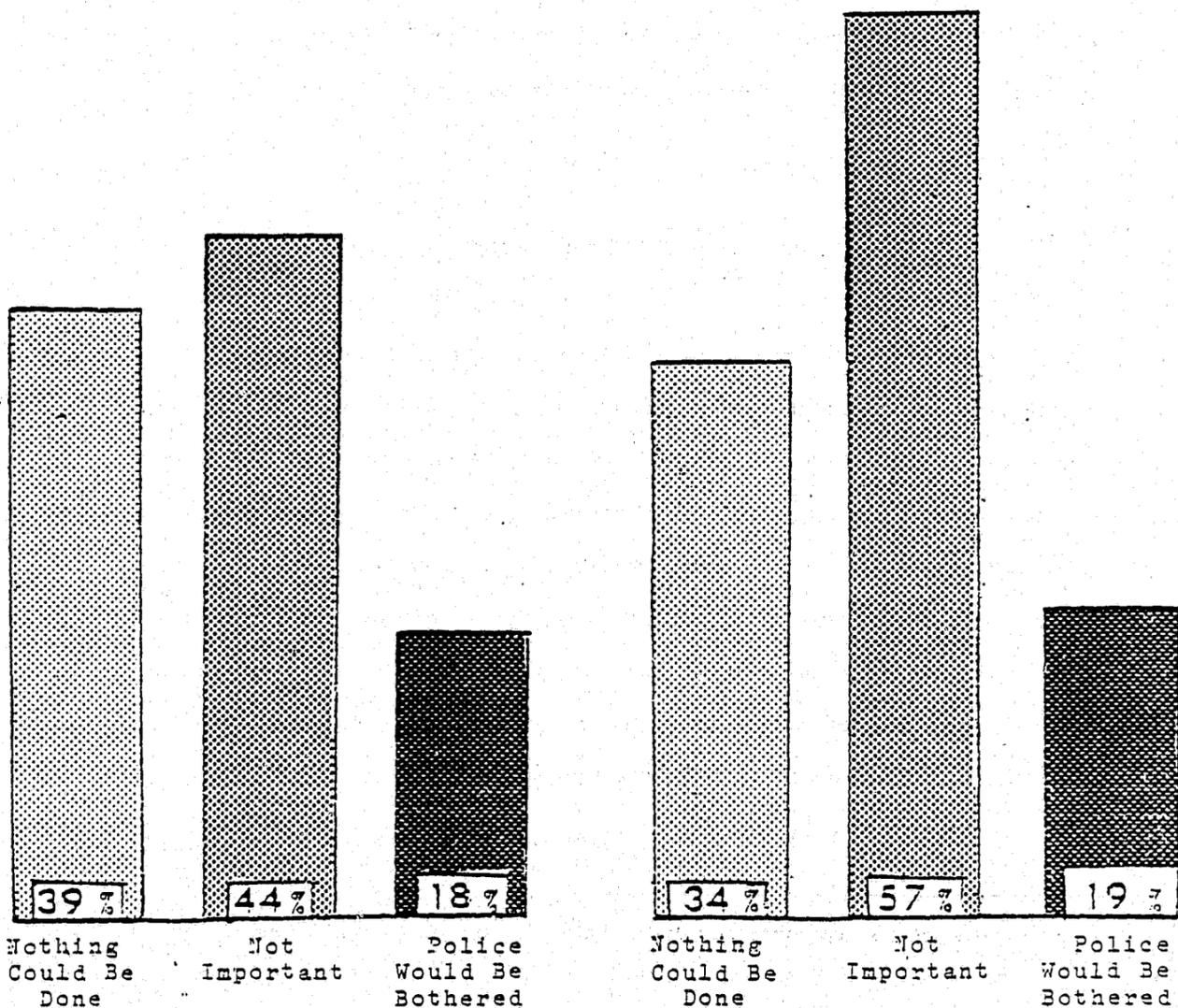
FIGURE 5

REASONS FOR FAILURE TO REPORT CRIME TO POLICE

PERCENTAGE OF THOSE FAILING TO REPORT WHO GAVE INDICATED REASON*

PERSONAL INCIDENTS

HOUSEHOLD INCIDENTS



* Percentages do not add to 100 because of multiple responses

A. Violent Personal Crimes

The likelihood of being the victim of violent crime declines with age (Figure 6). The risk of violence for those under 35 years of age was 4.3%, but for those 35 and over was only 1.4%.⁷ Blacks have more than twice the risk of violent crime as whites (5.6% and 2.7% respectively).⁸ Similarly, people with relatively lower incomes (\$10,000 per year and under) have about twice the risk as those with higher incomes. Finally, the risk of violent crime was 2.3% for females, but 3.4% for males. For the most part these patterns have not changed significantly during the last several years.

B. Personal Crimes of Theft

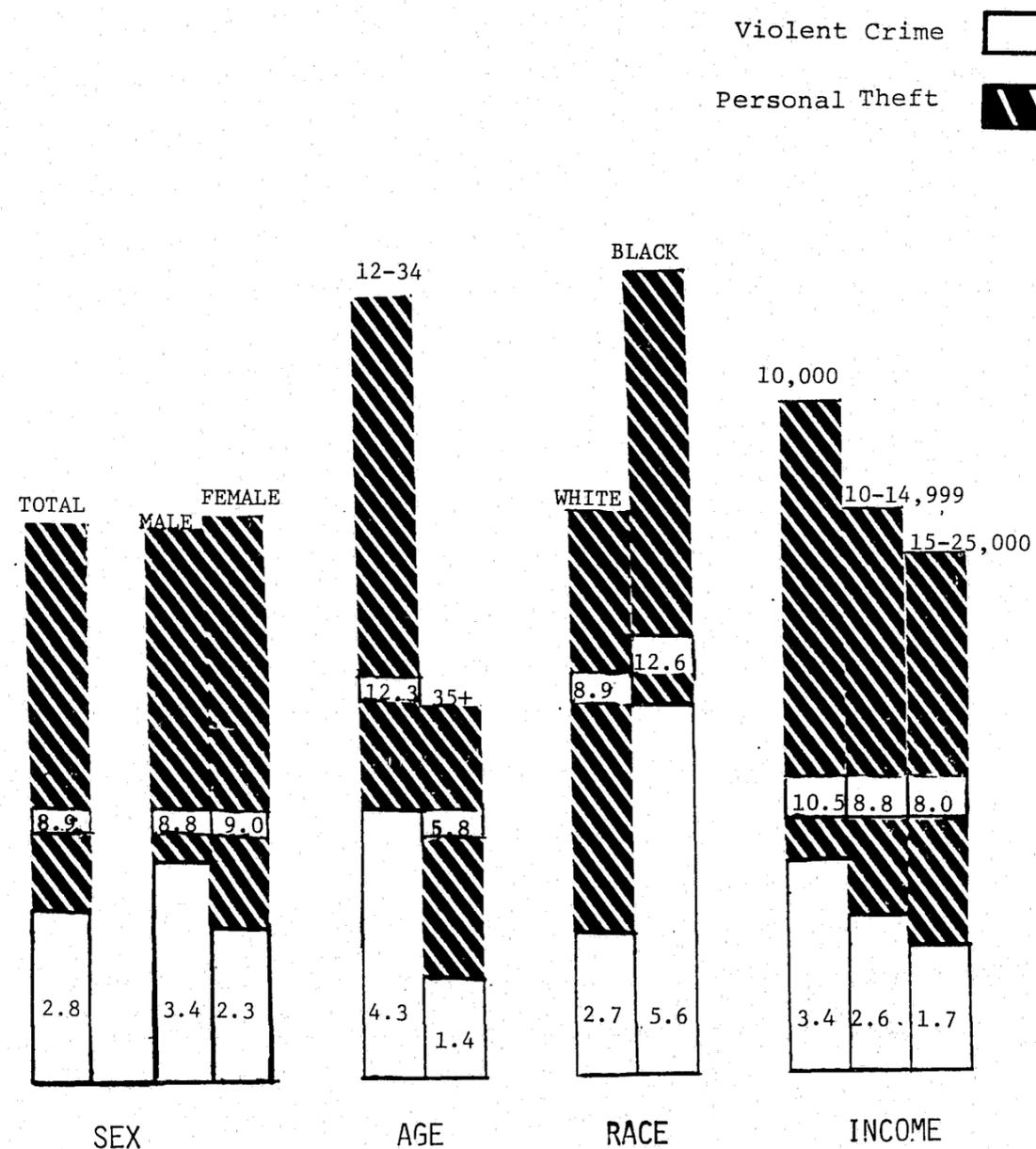
The victimization profile for personal theft (Figure 6) is similar to the profile for violent crimes. Those under 35 years of age were more than twice as likely to be victims of theft as those over 35. Blacks had a significantly higher rate than whites, and people with lower incomes experienced relatively higher rates. There was no significant difference, however, between males and females.

⁷Differences within each of these groups were relatively small.

⁸These estimates are subject to considerable sampling error because of the relatively small number of cases (people interviewed) on which the figures are based. See the appendix for a discussion of this issue.

FIGURE 6:
RISK OF VIOLENT CRIME AND PERSONAL THEFT

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS VICTIMIZED



C. Household Crimes

Households also vary in their risks of being crime victims.⁹ Consistent with the 1974 and 1975 surveys, households with four or more members are most likely to be victimized (Figure 7), having a risk of 32%. Similarly if the head of household is black or below the age of 35, the risk of crime is also high. The situation differs somewhat from personal crime, however, with regard to income. Households with incomes between \$15,000 and \$25,000 had the highest risk while those of lesser income had lower victimization rates.

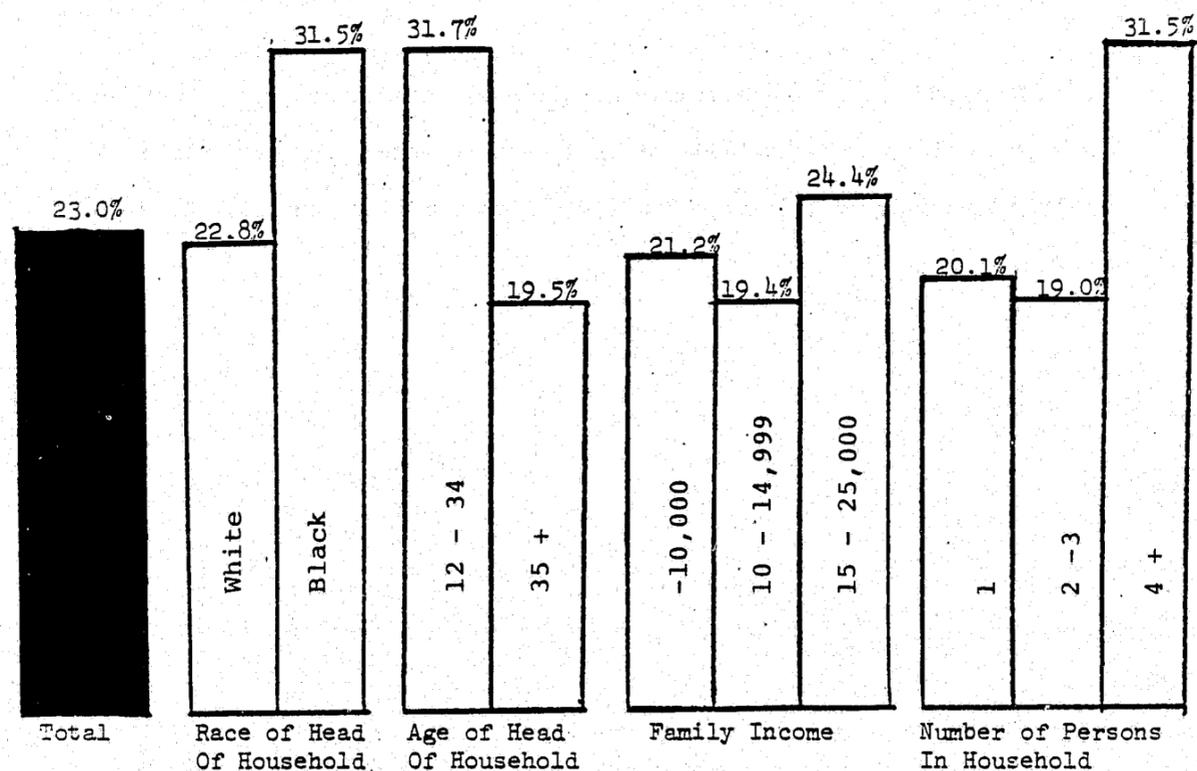
VL CHARACTERISTICS OF OFFENDERS

Information on the characteristics of those who commit crime is also important to our efforts to understand and limit criminal activity. The victimization survey can provide us with some data on this issue, although we must be careful about its use.

⁹Household theft includes burglary, larceny and motor vehicle theft. Rates are based on the number of households in the sample, not the number of individuals.

FIGURE 7:
RISK OF HOUSEHOLD CRIME

PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS VICTIMIZED



Descriptions of offenders were obtained from victims of violent criminal acts who were able to see the person(s) who committed the crime.¹⁰ It is important to remember that the descriptions are based entirely on the victims' perceptions. These perceptions may not always be accurate. Different observers of a crime do not always agree on important details. Further, descriptions may also depend on an individual's preconceptions - for instance, to the extent that victims expect offenders to be young, black and male, they are more likely to perceive an offender as having these characteristics.¹¹

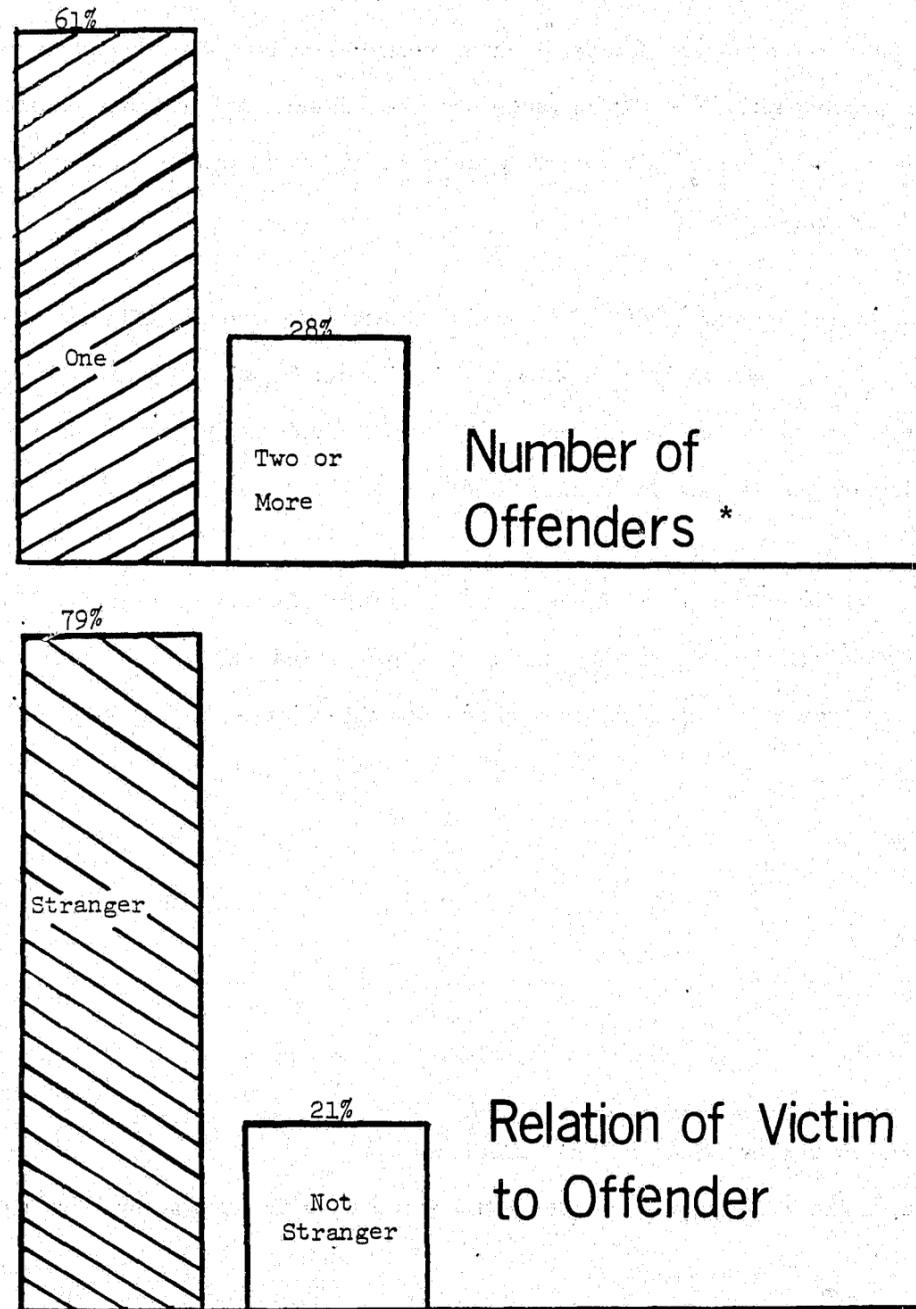
In 61% of the incidents, the crime was committed by a single offender. A group of two or more was involved in 28% of the incidents (Figure 8). The offender was a stranger to the victim, moreover, in 79% of the incidents (Figure 8). This is somewhat higher than the national figure of 64%.

In general the 1976 data confirm, as did the results of previous victimization surveys (1974-1975), the widespread public assumption that those who commit crimes (of the type discussed in the survey) are disproportionately young, black and male (Figure 9).

¹⁰This amounted to about 25% of all personal incidents.

¹¹This is most likely to occur when the victim gets only a fleeting glimpse of the offender.

FIGURE 8
 CHARACTERISTICS OF OFFENDERS
 NUMBER AND RELATION TO VICTIM



* Percentages do not add to 100 due to missing information

While most offenders acting alone were over 21 years of age, most group offenders were younger. Further, about three quarters of the single offenders were white compared to only 46% of group offenders. These results can also be viewed in terms of the actual Massachusetts population. The 1970 Census showed that 16.6% of the population was between the ages of 12 and 20, yet 40% of the single offenders and 56% of the group offenders were perceived as being in this age group. Similarly, 3.1% of Massachusetts residents were recorded by the 1970 Census as being black, while 23% of the single offenders and 41% of the group offenders were perceived as black by participants in the victimization survey.

VII. CONCLUSION

This report has discussed the results of the 1976 National Crime Survey. The techniques of the survey can still be improved and larger samples of Massachusetts residents interviewed. But the results of studies such as this, even in their present form, still provide those interested in Massachusetts' crime problem with needed information not available from other sources. Hopefully, additional reports based on more comprehensive data can be developed to even better meet the information needs of the public and the criminal justice community.

FIGURE 9
 CHARACTERISTICS OF OFFENDERS
 AS
 PERCEIVED BY CRIME VICTIMS

	SINGLE OFFENDERS		GROUP OFFENDERS		
AGE*	Under 20 Years	21 or More	All Under 20 Years	All 21 or More	Mixed
	40%	53%	60% ⁺	12%	27%
RACE	Black	White	White Only	Black Only	Mixed
	23%	76%	46%	41%	14%
SEX	Male	Female	Male Only	Female Only	Mixed
	87%	13%	77%	0%	24%

* Percentages for single offenders do not add to 100 due to missing information

⁺ Includes 4% under 12 years of age, 56% between 12 and 20 years
 There were no single offenders under the age of 12.

APPENDIX

A DISCUSSION OF THE VICTIMIZATION SURVEY

A. Introduction to the Survey

The victimization survey allows us to examine some questions about the nature of crime in Massachusetts that the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) data does not address.¹ The UCR data is limited to those crimes reported to the police. The victimization studies, however, attempt to question individuals directly about the extent to which they or members of their households have been subjects of crime. While this approach clearly allows for the collection of detailed information which UCR cannot supply, there are certain weaknesses as well.

1. Response Biases

A number of factors may bias the number of crimes which individuals report in the survey. (1) Individuals may forget about crimes that occurred, especially if the crime was trivial and occurred several months prior to the survey. (2) Individuals may report crimes that did not actually occur within the period about which they are being asked. (3) The individual may be reluctant to tell the interviewer about a crime. This is probably most likely to occur with crimes such as rape. (4) The interviewer does not attempt to verify the victim's report, so that an incident may be reported which the police would have found lacked grounds for a complaint.

¹ For further discussion of the nature of UCR data and the UCR crime rates in Massachusetts see 1975 Massachusetts Crime Rates - What the Figures Do and Don't Tell Us. 1977 Statistical Analysis Center, Massachusetts Committee on Criminal Justice.

2. Sampling Error

As occurs with all surveys, the victimization study is subject to sampling error. In the case of the 1976 Massachusetts data this error is sometimes considerable. While the survey is based on a total of 4318 interviews, households were interviewed two or three times during the course of the year, so the actual sample size was considerably smaller. The following number of incidents were reported: 111 personal incidents (assault, robbery, rape, larceny), 636 household incidents (burglary, larceny, auto theft), and 25 "series crimes" (in which the victim is subjected to many similar incidents and cannot separate out the details of each one). The victimization study estimates crime rates for the state of Massachusetts based upon these responses. The nature of the sampling error surrounding these estimates can be illustrated by a few examples. The estimate of the violent crime rate for 1976 was 2.8 per 100 individuals. If a different sample were interviewed, however, the figure may have been somewhat different. This potential difference can be measured. We can compute that had all Massachusetts residents been interviewed, the rate could have been as low as 2.0 or as high as 3.6 incidents per 100 individuals.² The victimization rate for violent crimes was 2.7 per 100 population for whites, and 5.6 for blacks. Had all blacks in Massachusetts been interviewed, however, the rate could have been anywhere between 0 and 11.4 (95% confidence interval, standard error of 2.9).

This lack of precision - and the other potential biases discussed above - clearly necessitate that we interpret this data with caution. Nonetheless, the victimization survey remains our best source of data at the present time for certain types of crime-related information. The statistical ambiguity becomes less important, moreover, to the extent that the results are corroborated by other sources of information. For the most part this is the case, leading us to place greater confidence in the results of the survey.

²95% confidence interval. Standard error = .4

B. Comparability of Victimization and UCR Data

There are a number of reasons for the lack of comparability between crime rates derived from the victimization survey and the UCR data. (1) UCR crime rates are based on the number of crimes reported to the police within Massachusetts regardless of who is victimized by these crimes. The victimization rates are based on the number of crimes committed against Massachusetts residents. If a non-resident were assaulted while in Massachusetts, it would be counted in the UCR data (assuming it were reported to the police), but not in the victimization data. If a Massachusetts resident were assaulted while out of state, the opposite situation would occur.

(2) Because of the survey techniques used in the victimization study, no attempt is made to study personal crimes against children under twelve years of age. These are, however, included in the UCR figures.

(3) The base figures used to compute the rates are different for the two data sets. For UCR rates the total state population is used. Victimization rates are based on the number of individuals over 12, for personal crimes, and on the number of households in the case of household crimes.

(4) The crime categories used in the two studies are similar but not identical. Victim reports on murder, for instance, are obviously impossible, and murder rates therefore are not included in the victimization study.

(5) Crimes committed against commercial establishments (burglary, larceny, etc.) and other institutions are not included in the victimization data currently available to us, but are included in UCR statistics.

It is possible to make adjustments in the UCR and victimization rates in order to make rough comparisons between them. When this comparison was undertaken for selected crimes in our 1975 crime report, it revealed the victimization rates to be considerably higher than the UCR rates.³ This differential could be due to the inadequacies of either set of data (previously discussed) or inadequacies in our adjustment technique.

³ See 1975 Massachusetts Crime Rates - What the Figures Do and Don't Tell Us.

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The following reports are either presently available or will be available shortly from SAC:

1. Carolyn F. Shettle, The Utility of Special Conditions. A study of recidivism for a sample of 243 men on probation in Massachusetts Superior Court.
2. Paulette Jones, Inventory of Massachusetts Criminal Justice Agencies with Research and Planning Staff
3. Stephen Perry and Stephen Garry, OBTS: A Pilot Study of Case Processing in Boston Courts
4. Carolyn Shettle, Massachusetts Criminal Justice Expenditure and Employment Data - 1975

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