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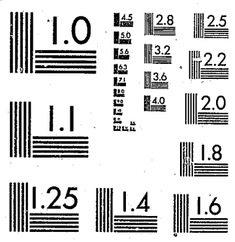

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U.S. Department of Justice
Bureau of Justice Statistics

MF-1

Bureau of Justice Statistics Technical Report

1979-80 Changes, 1973-80 Trends

Criminal Victimization in the U.S.

By Adolfo L. Paez and Richard W. Dodge
U.S. Bureau of the Census

Rates of victimization remained stable for most offenses measured by the National Crime Survey (NCS) in 1980. The only statistically significant changes that took place between 1979 and 1980 were declines affecting three crimes.[1] The rate of assault fell about 6 percent, and the two most common forms of theft—personal larceny without victim-offender contact and household larceny—also registered decreases (see figure 1). Rates for rape, personal robbery, personal larceny with contact, household burglary, and motor vehicle theft did not change significantly.

These overall findings about crime in 1980 generally held true even when series victimizations are used in calculating rates. Series victimizations are events involving three or more separate but similar incidents in which the respondent is unable to describe each incident separately to an NCS interviewer.[2]

[1] All changes or differences discussed in this report are statistically significant at a confidence level of 95 percent, unless qualified by the expression "some indication," which denotes significance at a 90-percent level. Certain crime figures for 1980 (and 1979, to a far lesser extent) may have been affected by changes in the data collection procedure, as discussed on pages 5 and 6.

[2] As a special feature of this report, data on series victimizations have been combined with the conventional non-series victimizations in calculating selected statistics for 1979 and 1980. Although series crimes were used previously in measuring the percentage of households touched by crime (see The Prevalence of Crime, NCJ-75905, a BJS Bulletin issued in March 1981), this is the first examination of the effects of series crimes upon levels and rates of victimization. The new estimates appear in Table 4 and are discussed in "The issue of series victimizations," pages 4 and 5.

Trends in victimization rates for selected crimes, 1973-80

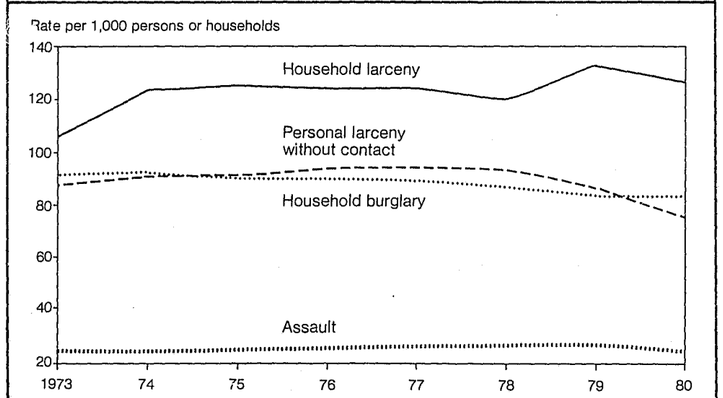

Figure 1

National Crime Survey Report
SD-NCS-N-21
NCJ-80838
July 1982

National Crime Survey (NCS) data for 1980 are being released as a technical report because of various program changes made in response to budgetary constraints. The changes, discussed on pages 5-6, required statistical evaluation and delayed publication of data for 1980. No delay is anticipated in issuing findings for future years. This report also examines the effects of incorporating series victimizations into the usual NCS estimates (pages 4-5).

The major adjustment in the NCS program was in the mode of interviewing. Starting in February 1980, telephone interviews were more than doubled and in-person interviews reduced. Because of this, comparisons of 1980 data with earlier years may have been affected. However, data for 1981, to be issued later this year, will be fully compatible with the 1980 findings.

Other cost-saving measures taken in 1980 were in the area of data collection and involved certain aspects of interviewer performance. These cuts were fully restored in 1981. Data processing quality controls actually were strengthened during this period. Moreover, the statistical standards applied in preparing this report were the same as those used in previous official releases.

Technical reports will be issued by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) whenever there are appropriate topics. Some will present the findings of technical research; others will address issues of statistical methodology, including refinements in measuring crime.

Increase in police reporting

The decline in victimization rates for three NCS offenses was accompanied by increases in the proportions of crimes that victims reported to the police. Higher police reporting rates were found for two of the offenses that had lower 1980 victimization rates: Police reporting for personal larceny without contact and household larceny increased by roughly a tenth. Burglary also had a higher police reporting rate in 1980. Although these three crimes were the only specific ones having statistically significant increases in police reporting, they were part of a general upward trend for the year. This development contrasted sharply with the lack of significant changes in the police reporting rates between 1978 and 1979. Despite a decrease of roughly 1.9 million personal or household victimizations experienced by Americans during 1980, some 580,000 more crimes were reported to the police than in 1979.[3]

NCS police reporting rates should be distinguished from crime statistics maintained by police departments across the Nation. The latter information is compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation under the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program and published annually in Crime in the United States. The NCS data are derived independently, based solely on interviews with individuals in a representative sample of about 60,000 housing units across the Nation. NCS police reporting rates are calculated by dividing the number of victimizations that victims said were reported to the police by the total count of victimizations for a specific category of crime.

Although measuring some of the same offenses, the NCS and UCR differ in other basic respects.[4] The scope of the NCS, for example, is limited to persons age 12 and over and does not extend to crimes against businesses or other institutions, whereas the UCR covers crimes against persons of all ages, as well as commercial and other offenses. The NCS does not cover murder, a crime that is well reported to the police. Other key differences pertaining to specific crimes measured under the two programs are pointed out in the discussion that follows.

[3]The overall NCS police reporting rate for personal and household crimes went from 32.8 percent in 1979 to 35.8 percent in 1980, an increase of 9.4 percent.

[4]For a detailed comparison of the NCS and UCR, see Measuring Crime, NJC-75710, a BJS Bulletin issued in February 1981. A notable similarity in the two programs involves the classification of incidents: The NCS classifies each incident by the most serious offense that occurred, based on a seriousness ranking corresponding to that of the UCR Index offenses.

Table 1. Personal and household crimes: Number of victimizations and victimization rates, by type of crime, 1973-80

(Rate per 1,000)

Sector and type of crime	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
Personal sector								
Crimes of violence								
Number	5,351,000	5,510,000	5,573,000	5,599,000	5,902,000	5,941,000	6,159,000	5,974,000
Rate	32.6	33.0	32.8	32.6	33.9	33.7	34.5	33.1
Rape								
Number	156,000	163,000	154,000	145,000	154,000	171,000	192,000	169,000
Rate	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.9	1.0	1.1	0.9
Robbery								
Number	1,108,000	1,199,000	1,147,000	1,111,000	1,083,000	1,038,000	1,116,000	1,179,000
Rate	6.7	7.2	6.8	6.5	6.2	5.9	6.3	6.5
Assault								
Number	4,087,000	4,148,000	4,272,000	4,344,000	4,664,000	4,732,000	4,851,000	4,626,000
Rate	24.9	24.8	25.2	25.3	26.8	26.9	27.2	25.7
Aggravated assault								
Number	1,655,000	1,735,000	1,631,000	1,695,000	1,738,000	1,708,000	1,769,000	1,661,000
Rate	10.1	10.4	9.6	9.9	10.0	9.7	9.9	9.2
Simple assault								
Number	2,432,000	2,413,000	2,641,000	2,648,000	2,926,000	3,024,000	3,082,000	2,966,000
Rate	14.8	14.4	15.6	15.4	16.8	17.2	17.3	16.4
Crimes of theft								
Number	14,971,000	15,889,000	16,294,000	16,519,000	16,933,000	17,050,000	16,382,000	14,936,000
Rate	91.1	95.1	96.0	96.1	97.3	96.8	91.9	82.8
Personal larceny with contact								
Number	504,000	520,000	524,000	497,000	461,000	549,000	511,000	546,000
Rate	3.1	3.1	3.1	2.9	2.7	3.1	2.9	3.0
Personal larceny without contact								
Number	14,466,000	15,369,000	15,770,000	16,022,000	16,472,000	16,501,000	15,871,000	14,390,000
Rate	88.0	92.0	92.9	93.2	94.6	93.6	89.0	79.8
Total population age 12 and over	164,363,000	167,058,000	169,671,000	171,901,000	174,093,000	176,215,000	178,284,000	180,350,000
Household sector								
Household burglary								
Number	6,458,700	6,720,600	6,743,700	6,663,400	6,764,900	6,704,000	6,685,400	6,817,300
Rate	91.7	93.1	91.7	88.9	88.5	86.0	84.1	84.2
Household larceny								
Number	7,537,300	8,933,100	9,223,000	9,300,900	9,418,300	9,351,900	10,630,100	10,246,900
Rate	107.0	123.8	125.4	124.1	123.3	119.9	133.7	126.5
Motor vehicle theft								
Number	1,343,900	1,358,400	1,433,000	1,234,600	1,296,800	1,365,100	1,392,800	1,354,600
Rate	19.1	18.8	19.5	16.5	17.0	17.5	17.5	16.7
Total number of households	70,442,400	72,162,900	73,559,600	74,956,100	76,412,300	77,980,400	79,498,600	80,976,800

NOTE: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding. Estimates for 1980 may have been affected by changes in the data collection procedure (see "Recent economy measures in data collection").

No change in rape

Rape, the most serious NCS crime, has had a yearly victimization rate of about 1 per every 1,000 persons age 12 and over. The NCS measures both heterosexual and homosexual rape, but the scarcity of sample cases of the latter precludes analysis. The UCR definition of rape requires that the victim be female. With this exception, the NCS offense of rape is defined in the same manner as the UCR's forcible rape. The 1980 NCS victimization rate for rape of females age 12 and over was 1.6 per 1,000, a figure that has not changed significantly since 1973.

Robbery unchanged since 1978

According to the NCS ranking, personal robbery is the second most serious crime. The victimization rate for that crime declined 18 percent from 1974 to 1978, but there has been no significant change since then. There was, however, an increase in the percent of robbery victimizations reported to the police between 1978 and 1980. In 1980, personal robberies happened at a rate of about 7 per 1,000 persons and some 57 percent of the victimizations were made known to the police. The NCS does not measure robberies of business establishments, such as banks and retail stores; such offenses are included in the UCR.

Reversal in assault trend

The victimization rate for assault dropped by 6 percent between 1979 and 1980.[5] This reversed a 9-percent upward trend from 1973 to 1979. The components of assault, the aggravated and simple forms of the crime, moved in opposite directions over the 1973-80 period. There was some indication of a decline in the rate of aggravated assault, which corresponds to the UCR Index offense and consists of an unlawful physical attack with a weapon or one that results in serious bodily injury. The victimization rate for simple assault—a physical attack resulting in minor injury or threat of attack—was 11 percent higher in 1980 than in 1973. Simple assault is not a UCR Index crime.

[5]The change in the NCS data collection procedure may have had an effect on the assault rate, as discussed on pages 5 and 6.

Substantial drop in larceny

Victimization rates for the two major forms of larceny measured by the NCS, personal larceny without contact and household larceny, declined between 1979 and 1980.[6] This decrease was concentrated in the three-fourths of larcenies not reported to the police. On the other hand, larcenies reported to the police presented a different picture. Combining these two forms of larceny, the rate for crimes reported to the police apparently rose about 2 percent, but this change was not statistically significant.[7] However, the combined victimization rate for larcenies of $50 or more that were reported to the police increased about 10 percent between 1979 and 1980.

Personal larceny without contact and household larceny have displayed different trends since the inception of the NCS in 1973. The rate for the former crime has declined about 16 percent since 1977, after rising from 1973 to 1977. Overall, the 1980 rate was 9 percent below that for 1973. On the other hand, household larceny rose

Table 2. Personal and household crimes: Change in police reporting rates, by type of crime, 1979-80

Sector and type of crime	Percent of victimizations reported to the police 1979	1980	Percent change
Personal sector			
Crimes of violence	45.1	47.2	+4.7
Rape	50.5	41.5	-17.8
Robbery	55.5	56.9	+2.5
Assault	42.4	44.9	+5.8
Aggravated	51.3	54.0	+5.4
Simple	37.4	39.8	+6.4
Crimes of theft	24.0	26.9	*+12.1
Personal larceny with contact	35.6	35.8	+0.8
Personal larceny without contact	23.6	26.6	*+12.4
Household sector			
Household burglary	47.6	51.3	*+7.8
Household larceny	25.1	27.5	*+9.4
Motor vehicle theft	68.2	69.3	+1.7

NOTE: Estimates for 1980 may have been affected by changes in the data collection procedure (see "Recent economy measures in data collection").
* Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

[6]The change in the data collection procedure may have caused part of the decline in household larceny. The distinction between personal larceny without contact and household larceny is based upon where the item was stolen—whether it was taken from a place away from home or from the home or its immediate vicinity. The UCR measures shoplifting and other forms of commercial larceny, which are not measured by the NCS.

[7]This observation and others referring to a "combined" form of larceny are based on rates (not shown) calculated by dividing the sum of personal larceny without contact and household larceny victimizations by the population age 12 and over. Similarly, selected victimization rates were calculated by dividing the number of victimizations reported or not reported to the police by the population age 12 and over; in a small number of cases, it could not be determined if the authorities were notified and, thus, the victimization rates for crimes reported to the police and those not reported do not sum to the total victimization rate, and the percents of crimes reported and not reported do not add to 100.

Table 3. Personal and household crimes: Comparison of changes in victimization rates, by type of crime, 1973-80

Sector and type of crime	Percent change in victimization rate 1973-80	1974-80	1975-80	1976-80	1977-80	1978-80	1979-80
Personal sector							
Crimes of violence	+1.8	+0.4	+0.9	+1.7	-2.3	-1.8	**-4.1
Rape	-1.1	-4.1	+3.3	+11.9	+5.6	-3.1	-13.0
Robbery	-3.0	**-8.9	-3.3	+1.2	+5.1	+11.0	+4.5
Assault	+3.1	+3.3	+1.9	+1.5	-4.3	-4.5	*-5.7
Aggravated	**-8.5	*-11.4	-4.2	-6.6	**-7.7	-5.0	-7.2
Simple	*+11.1	*+13.9	+5.7	**+6.7	-2.2	-4.2	-4.9
Crimes of theft	*-9.1	*-12.9	*-13.8	*-13.8	*-14.8	*-14.4	*-9.9
Personal larceny with contact	-1.3	-2.6	-1.9	+4.8	+14.3	-2.9	+5.6
Personal larceny without contact	*-9.3	*-13.3	*-14.1	*-14.4	*-15.7	*-14.8	*-10.4
Household sector							
Household burglary	*-8.2	*-9.6	*-8.2	*-5.3	*-4.9	-2.1	+0.1
Household larceny	*+18.3	+2.2	+0.9	+2.0	+2.7	*+5.5	*-5.4
Motor vehicle theft	*-12.3	*-11.1	*-14.1	+1.6	-1.4	-4.5	-4.5

NOTE: Percent changes were calculated using rates that were rounded to the nearest hundredth. Estimates for 1980 may have been affected by changes in the data collection procedure (see "Recent economy measures in data collection").

* Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

** Statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

about 18 percent over the same period, despite significant declines in 1975-78 and 1979-80. Combined, the victimization rates for the two types of larceny rose only about 2 percent from 1973 to 1980, a change that was not statistically significant. The trend for all larcenies reported to the police is very different—a 21-percent increase in the rate across the 8-year period.

It is interesting that the two forms of larceny--which together represent a majority of NCS-measured offenses--display differing trends, as the distinction between the two is basically definitional. Despite their similarities, however, other differences are known to exist between the two crimes. Historically, for example, the two have had distinct seasonal patterns. Household larceny is high in midsummer and low during the first few months of the year (see figure 2). By contrast, the peak period for personal larceny without contact comes in October, possibly reflecting an upsurge in petty thefts at the start of each school year. This rise is accompanied by a downturn in household larceny. Diurnal differences also are known to exist, with the noncontact personal larcenies more likely than the household larcenies to happen during the daytime hours. Victims often don't know when larceny incidents--especially of the household variety--take place. Among cases for which the time is known, however, most household larcenies occur at night.

Personal larceny with contact, which includes purse snatching and pocket picking, comprised only about 2 percent of all larceny victimizations in 1980. The victimization rate for this crime did not change significantly between 1979 and 1980. Although there were minor fluctuations during the 1973-80 period, the rate for the latter year was not substantially different from what it was in 1973.

Burglary rate levels off

As indicated, the overall NCS victimization rate for household burglary did not change significantly between 1979 and 1980, averaging about 84 crimes per 1,000 residences during those years.[8] However, there were substantial differences in the behavior of the rates, depending upon whether or not the crime was reported to the police. The victimization rate for burglaries

[8]UCR coverage of burglary is broader, as it includes offenses against business concerns, public buildings, and other nonresidential structures.

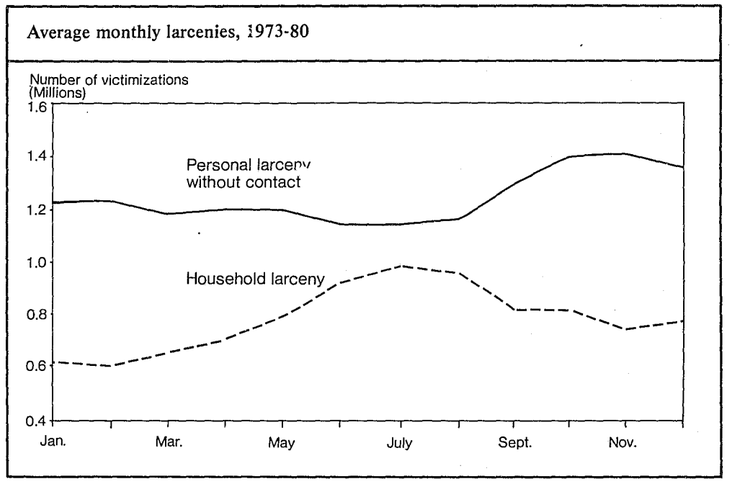

Figure 2

reported to the authorities rose 8 percent between 1979 and 1980, but there was some indication of a decline in that for unreported burglaries.[9]

The overall burglary rate has declined about 8 percent since 1973, but again there was divergence between reported and unreported crimes. Reported burglaries displayed relative stability over this period, but the victimization rate for those crimes not brought to police attention dropped 17 percent since 1973.

Post-1975 stability in vehicle theft

The NCS victimization rate for motor vehicle theft did not change significantly between 1979 and 1980, but the 1980 rate was appreciably lower than the 1973 figure. In fact, motor vehicle theft rates have remained relatively stable in recent years--at about 17 incidents per 1,000 households--and below the average for the 1973-75 period. Seven in every 10 of the thefts were reported to the police in 1980, a ratio that did not change significantly from 1979.

It should be noted that the NCS measures motor vehicle theft differently than does the UCR. NCS counts of motor vehicle thefts are limited to vehicles owned by private individuals, whereas the UCR also tallies vehicles owned by firms and other organizations. Any motorized vehicle—including automobiles, trucks, buses, or motorcycles--owned by individuals and allowed on public roads and highways falls within the scope of the NCS. The UCR's coverage is broader, extending to snowmobiles and golf carts (cases that are classified as larceny by the NCS).

[9]The change in the data collection procedure may have affected the burglary rate, but it is unlikely that the relative numbers of burglaries reported and not reported to the police were affected substantially.

THE ISSUE OF SERIES VICTIMIZATIONS

Victims are not always able to separate crime incidents into discrete events. They occasionally have difficulty remembering details of different incidents having similar characteristics. Offenses of this kind are called series victimizations in the National Crime Survey. Three conditions must be met before interviewers can classify a crime as a series:

- there must be at least three incidents in the series;
- all the incidents must be very similar in key details, so that they will classify as the same type of crime; and
- the respondent must be unable to report details about the individual incidents separately, even after extensive probing.

Once it has been established that the crime qualifies as a series, details are collected about the most recent incident.

How to handle series crimes has been much debated since the inception of the NCS. There were a number of reasons behind the decision not to incorporate series incidents in the regular crime estimates. First, it was

believed that many incidents of this kind were not so much discrete events as occupational or domestic conditions, without a recognizable beginning or end and, therefore, different from the bulk of NCS offenses. For example, should frequent harassment of persons in their roles as police officers or bus drivers be treated in the same manner as similar events that befall others outside occupational settings? There was the further question of whether victims of series incidents could recall accurately the number of times a particular kind of victimization occurred. Also, how well and how consistently were interviewers applying the series concept? Multiple victimizations may well be treated differently by different interviewers. A diligent interviewer may be successful in getting a respondent to sort out the details of each incident sufficiently so that separate reports can be obtained, whereas a less adept interviewer may classify the events as a series crime to simplify the interviewing task. There is also no certainty that the most recent incident is truly representative of the entire series. Considerations such as these were persuasive in limiting the published data to regular crimes, with a discussion of series crimes included in technical appendices to recurring reports.

On the other hand, the exclusion of series crimes from the NCS substantially lowers estimates of the amount of crime. In recent years, events classified as series crimes have comprised about 3 percent of all victimizations, counting each series as a single crime. However, because each series contains a minimum of three incidents and some consist of many more, the "true" amount of crime is appreciably higher than indicated by the published data.

The NCS questionnaire was recently revised to aid in assessing the impact of adding series crimes to the main body of crime data. Information on series crimes is being collected by the calendar quarter (or quarters) of occurrence, rather than by the season in which incidents took place, as was previously done. This change made it possible to combine series and regular crimes for the same time frame. Also, an effort is being made to obtain a more precise count of the number of incidents within each series.

The addition of series crimes, based on the details of the most recent incident only, has a varying impact on the measurement of crime levels, depending upon the type of crime.

Table 4. Personal and household crimes: Estimates incorporating series victimizations, 1979-80

Type of crime	Number of victimizations			Victimization rate			Percent reported to the police		
	1979	1980	Percent change	1979	1980	Percent change	1979	1980	Percent change
Personal sector									
Crimes of violence	6,652,000	6,419,000	-3.6	37.3	35.6	**-4.6	44.7	46.9	**+5.0
Rape	196,000	182,000	-7.7	1.1	1.0	-8.2	50.1	39.9	-20.4
Robbery	1,156,000	1,210,000	+4.5	6.5	6.7	+3.4	54.7	56.6	+3.5
Assault	5,299,000	5,027,000	**-5.4	29.7	27.9	*-6.2	42.3	44.9	**+6.1
Aggravated	1,861,000	1,763,000	-5.6	10.4	9.8	-6.4	51.3	54.0	+5.2
Simple	3,438,000	3,264,000	-5.3	19.3	18.1	**-6.1	37.4	39.9	+6.7
Crimes of theft	16,714,000	15,223,000	*-9.8	93.8	84.4	*-10.0	23.7	26.6	*+12.1
Personal larceny with contact	513,000	554,000	+7.4	2.9	3.1	+6.6	35.4	35.3	-0.3
Personal larceny without contact	16,202,000	14,669,000	*-10.5	90.9	81.3	*-10.5	23.4	26.3	*+12.5
Household sector									
Household burglary	6,910,200	7,037,700	+1.8	86.9	86.9	(Z)	47.2	51.0	*+8.0
Household larceny	11,029,900	10,617,900	*-3.9	138.7	131.1	*-5.5	24.7	27.2	*+10.2
Motor vehicle theft	1,410,300	1,372,900	-2.7	17.7	17.0	-4.5	68.0	68.6	+1.0

NOTE: The calculation method for these estimates and their relationship to figures in Tables 1-3 are discussed in "The issue of series victimizations." Estimates for 1980 may have been affected by changes in the data collection procedure (see "Recent economy measures in data collection").
Z Less than 0.05.
* Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.
** Statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

Crimes of violence were about 7 to 8 percent higher when series offenses were included in both 1979 and 1980. In contrast, property crimes were less affected. Burglary and household larceny registered increases in the 3 to 4 percent range, whereas personal larceny and theft of motor vehicles were only about 1 to 2 percent above previous levels.

Victimization rates were obviously higher when series incidents were added, but changes in rates from 1979 to 1980 were essentially in the same direction as those for the regular crimes alone (table 4). Significant differences in rates between the 2 years occurred for the same crimes when series crimes were added.

Police reporting rates were apparently lower in most cases when series incidents were combined with regular crimes, but the differences were not statistically significant. As was the case with victimization rates, the changes in police reporting rates between 1979 and 1980 were usually in the same direction as for regular crimes. The same crimes showed increased reporting rates between the 2 years: personal crimes of theft (and its subcategory, personal larceny without contact), burglary, and household larceny.

Further research needs to be undertaken before the appropriate way of treating series crimes can be determined. In the meantime, efforts must continue to impress upon interviewers the need to complete separate incident reports whenever possible, rather than assuming that a series of crimes is involved. This might achieve a substantial reduction in series crimes, since approximately 44 percent of violent series and about 60 percent of series thefts reported during 1980 consisted of only three or four incidents, with three being the minimum number of incidents in a series.

More important are such issues as a better way of getting at accurate estimates of the number of events in a series, a line of questioning that will ensure that the circumstances of each event are essentially the same, and a decision whether series incidents that reflect continuing conditions or states ought to be combined with discrete events or whether they should be reported separately.

These kinds of issues are being addressed by the NCS Redesign Consortium. The consortium consists of university and private research specialists who are examining a number of conceptual, methodological, and analytical issues in measuring crime by means of victimization surveys. Technical reports resulting from this effort will be issued periodically.

RECENT ECONOMY MEASURES IN DATA COLLECTION

To achieve economies of operation in response to budgetary constraints, the Bureau of Justice Statistics directed a number of changes in the collection of NCS data. The changes were introduced in 1980. Some of them --notably the increased use of telephone rather than in-person interviewing—have remained in effect since that time. Assessments have been performed to determine if the changes in data collection had any effect on the survey's results. Release of the 1980 data was delayed pending those assessments.

The change in the mode of interviewing was introduced during February 1980 in a manner that reduced the possibility of biasing the results. For four of the seven interviews at a sample address, the procedure was the same as that used for the entire sample prior to that date: The first, third, fifth, and seventh interviews were conducted primarily by personal (face-to-face) interview, with telephone followup permitted. The other three interviews have been conducted insofar as possible by telephone. Before February 1980, about 20 percent of all interviews were by telephone, whereas the proportion has risen to about 50 percent under the new procedure.

The effects of the collection procedure change upon the 1980 data in this report are not entirely known.[10] An extensive analysis of the increased use of telephone interviewing focused on differences among the results of the seven interviews. That examination detected only a few statistically significant effects. The most notable was that the household larceny rate appeared to be lower than it would have been under the old (pre-February 1980) mode of interviewing. There was also some indication of effects on the rates for personal crimes of violence (considered in the aggregate), assault, and burglary.

Measurement of possible effects of the increased used of telephones was complicated by the phenomenon known as time-in-sample bias. This is the observed tendency of respondents to report fewer crimes to interviewers the longer their household has been in the NCS sample. For many crime categories, the new procedure clearly affected the historical pattern of rates calculated for specific times in sample. This suggests the presence of certain interactions between the form of interviewing and the number of crimes reported.

Because of the complexity of the survey process and the effects of sampling error, it was not feasible to detect other possible interactions between interviewing modes and crime yields. Therefore, assurance cannot be given that there were no additional effects, and caution must be exercised in comparing the 1980 data with results for previous years. Because the data collection procedure has remained unchanged since February 1980, results for that year will be fully compatible with data for 1981.

The assessment of the effects of increased telephone interviewing was based on certain assumptions, whose correctness affected the validity of the conclusions reached. In particular, it was assumed that the change in procedure did not affect data from the initial interview, which was conducted in the old mode. Detailed examination of results from initial interviews revealed no evidence that the assumption was incorrect.

In addition to the alteration in the mode of interviewing, the following steps were prompted by the need for cost reduction:

- Cancellation of the 1980 refresher training session for interviewers, normally conducted on a yearly basis at regional centers throughout the Nation.
- A 3-month suspension of the field reinterview program, whereby 5 percent of all households in the NCS sample are administered the questionnaire for a second time by a different interviewer, usually a supervisor, in order to assess the accuracy of interviewers' work.
- Reduction in the frequency (from a monthly to a quarterly schedule) of at-home interviewer studies and associated exercises and tests.

The first and second measures were restored to the NCS program by 1981, and the at-home training of interviewers on a quarterly basis was deemed to be adequate. Other features of the survey operation, such as interviewer observation and checks on data coding and edits, were never suspended or relaxed. None of the cost-saving measures introduced in 1980 were in the area of data processing. In fact, the verification of data keying (data input for computer processing) has been performed on a 100-percent basis since early 1981, whereas it was previously done on a sample basis.

[10] Because the NCS has a 6-month reference period and the change in the mode of interviewing began in February 1980, certain data for 1979 also may have been affected, but to a far lesser extent than data for 1980.

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