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Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report

1973-82 Trends

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Criminal Victimization in the United States

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U.S. Bureau of the Census

A general downturn in criminal victimization occurred in the United States during 1982, according to the latest National Crime Survey (NCS) results. Some 1.7 million fewer victimizations took place in 1982 than in 1981, with property offenses—notably household burglary, the rate for which dropped to a 10-year low—accounting for the bulk of this reduction. Although appearing to share in the overall decline, violent crime did not change significantly between the two years.¹

The NCS measures selected personal and household crimes, including offenses not reported to the police, through interviews at 6-month intervals with the occupants of an average of about 58,000 housing units (132,000 persons). Based on a sample that is representative of the U.S. population age 12 and over, the survey has yielded since 1973 an unprecedented amount of information about crime and its victims. Survey results are statistically weighted, producing national estimates.² The 1982 figures are the 10th in an annual series.

Stability in the Nation's rates of criminal victimization generally has characterized the NCS (figure 1). The downturn measured between 1981 and 1982 was one of the most sweeping, single-direction changes to have taken place since the program's inception. Virtually all categories of crime contributed to the reduction, and there were no statistically significant increases.

For all NCS offenses, 39.8 million victimizations occurred in 1982, 4.1% fewer than the 41.5 million in 1981. Between

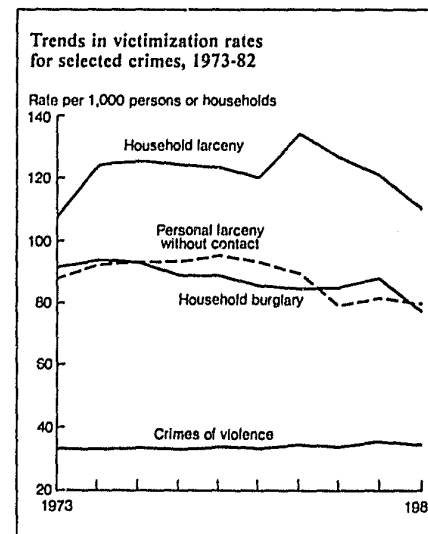


Figure 1

those years, the population age 12 and over increased by an estimated 1.2% (table 1).

No change in violent crime

Some 6.5 million violent victimizations—rapes, personal robberies, and assaults—occurred in 1982. This yielded a rate of 34.3 victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 and over. Neither of those figures was significantly different from the corresponding ones for 1981. In fact, the 1982 rate did not differ significantly from most of the matching figures recorded over the 10-year history of the NCS program (tables 2 and 3). The component categories of violent crime also did not change significantly between 1981 and 1982.

Assault is the most prevalent of the NCS violent offenses. Roughly 5 million of these crimes—occurring at a rate of 26.4 victimizations per 1,000 individuals—were recorded in 1982. Assaults occurred at a somewhat lower rate in 1973 and 1974, but the latest figure was not significantly different from the other annual measurements.³

Similarly, the latest rate for personal robbery was slightly greater than the rates in 1977-79, but it was not significantly different from those for the other years.⁴

The rate for rape, the most serious NCS offense, is shown in tables 1 and 2 on the basis of the entire U.S. population age 12 and over. The 1982 rate, 0.8 victimizations per 1,000, was about 25% lower than the 1979 figure. Because of sampling variability, other seemingly large percentage differences between the annual rates for rape are not statistically significant (nor are some for other low-incidence crimes). Based on the more relevant population, the 1982 rate for rape was 1.4 victimizations per 1,000 women (figure 2).

Continued decline in personal thefts

Two forms of personal theft are measured by the NCS: larcenies with and without victim-offender contact. The overall rate for these crimes declined by about 3% between 1981 and 1982. The latest figure, 82.5 victimizations per 1,000 population, was lower than those for each of the preceding years, except 1980.

Personal larceny without victim-offender contact, the most common of the NCS offenses, appeared to resume a general downward direction that began after 1978 but was interrupted in 1981.

The rate for that crime did not change significantly between 1980 and 1981. There was some indication, however, that

the 1982 rate was lower than the preceding year's figure, and it was clearly lower than the 1979 rate.⁵

The rate for larcenies involving contact between victims and offenders—purse snatchings and pocket pickings—did not change significantly between 1981 and 1982. This is one of the less prevalent NCS offenses, and the yearly rate for it has averaged about 3 victimizations per 1,000 persons.

Record low burglary rate

Residential burglary accounted for the largest share of the general decline in NCS-measured crimes during 1982. American homes sustained 731,000 fewer burglaries in 1982 than in 1981. That reduction represented 43% of the entire downturn in victimization for 1982.

The latest rate—78.2 burglaries per 1,000 households—was about 10 points lower than that measured for 1981. It was by far the lowest figure since 1973. The decline came about largely because of a lessening in forcible entries (or break-ins), although the rate for unforced entries was down as well.⁶

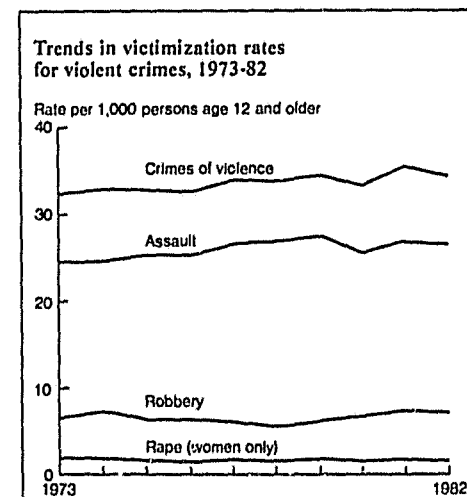


Figure 2

Sector and type of crime	Victimization levels (1,000s)			Victimization rates		
	1981	1982	Percent change	1981	1982	Percent change
Personal sector						
Crimes of violence	6,582	6,459	-1.9	35.3	34.3	-3.0
Rape	178	153	-14.0	1.0	0.8	-14.7
Completed rape	51	46	-9.8	0.3	0.3	-7.4
Attempted rape	126	106	-15.9	0.7	0.6	-17.6
Robbery	1,381	1,334	-3.4	7.4	7.1	-4.5
Robbery with injury	440	414	-5.9	2.4	2.2	-6.8
From serious assault	215	213	-0.9	1.2	1.1	-1.7
From minor assault	225	202	-10.2	1.2	1.1	-11.6
Robbery without injury	941	919	-2.3	5.1	4.9	-3.6
Assault	5,024	4,973	-1.0	27.0	26.4	-2.2
Aggravated assault	1,796	1,754	-2.3	9.6	9.3	-3.4
With injury	591	587	-0.7	3.2	3.1	-1.9
Attempted with weapon	1,205	1,167	-3.2	6.5	6.2	-4.3
Simple assault	3,228	3,219	-0.3	17.3	17.1	-1.4
With injury	843	859	1.9	4.5	4.6	0.9
Attempted without weapon	2,385	2,360	-1.0	12.8	12.5	-2.2
Crimes of theft	15,863	15,553	-2.0	85.1	82.5	-3.1
Personal larceny with contact	605	577	-4.6	3.3	3.1	-5.8
Purse snatching	195	177	-9.2	1.0	1.0	-9.5
Completed purse snatching	146	131	-10.3	0.8	0.7	-11.4
Attempted purse snatching	49	46	-6.1	0.3	0.3	-3.8
Pocket picking	410	399	-2.7	2.2	2.1	-3.6
Personal larceny without contact	15,258	14,976	-1.8	81.9	79.5	-2.8
Total population age 12 and over	186,336	188,497	1.2			
Household sector						
Household burglary	7,394	6,663	-9.9	37.9	35.4	-6.6
Forecible entry	2,587	2,104	-18.7	13.8	11.2	-19.7
Unlawful entry without force	3,078	2,932	-4.7	16.6	15.6	-6.0
Attempted forcible entry	1,729	1,627	-5.9	9.1	8.6	-5.5
Household larceny	10,176	9,705	-4.6	53.9	51.5	-4.4
Less than \$50	4,904	4,614	-5.9	26.3	25.3	-3.8
\$50 or more	4,034	3,964	-1.7	21.6	21.2	-1.9
Amount not available	508	444	-12.6	2.7	2.3	-14.8
Attempted larceny	731	683	-6.6	3.7	3.4	-7.7
Motor vehicle theft	1,439	1,377	-4.3	7.7	7.3	-5.6
Completed theft	891	947	6.3	4.7	5.1	8.5
Attempted theft	548	430	-21.5	2.9	2.2	-22.5
Total number of households	84,095	85,211	1.3			

NOTE: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding. Percent change based on unrounded figures. Victimization rates are calculated on the basis of the number of victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 and over (personal sector) or per 1,000 households (household sector).
* The difference is statistically significant at the 95% level.
** The difference is statistically significant at the 90% level.

Sector and type of crime	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
Personal sector										
Crimes of violence	32.6	33.0	32.8	32.6	33.9	33.7	34.5	33.3	35.3	34.3
Rape	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.9	1.0	1.1	0.9	1.0	0.8
Robbery	6.7	7.2	6.8	6.5	6.2	5.9	6.3	6.6	7.4	7.1
Assault	24.9	24.8	25.2	25.3	26.8	26.9	27.2	25.8	27.0	26.4
Aggravated assault	10.1	10.4	9.6	9.9	10.0	9.7	9.9	9.3	9.6	9.3
Simple assault	14.8	14.4	15.6	15.4	16.8	17.2	17.3	16.5	17.3	17.1
Crimes of theft	91.1	95.1	96.0	96.1	97.3	96.8	91.9	83.0	85.1	82.5
Personal larceny with contact	3.1	3.1	3.1	2.9	2.7	3.1	2.9	3.0	3.3	3.1
Personal larceny without contact	88.0	92.0	92.9	93.2	94.6	93.6	89.0	80.0	81.9	79.5
Household sector										
Household burglary	81.7	93.1	91.7	88.9	88.5	86.0	84.1	84.3	87.9	78.2
Household larceny	107.0	123.8	125.4	124.1	123.3	119.9	133.7	126.5	121.0	113.9
Motor vehicle theft	19.1	18.8	19.5	16.5	17.0	17.5	17.5	16.7	17.1	16.2

NOTE: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding. Statistically significant differences between the rates for 1982 and each preceding year are identified on table 3. Estimated population control figures based on the 1980 census were used in calculating the 1980-82 rates. Controls for the 1973-79 rates were derived from the 1970 census.

Table 3. Comparison of changes in victimization rates for personal and household crimes, 1973-82

Sector and type of crime	Percent change in victimization rate							
	1973-82	1974-82	1975-82	1976-82	1977-82	1978-82	1979-82	1980-82
Personal sector								
Crimes of violence	**5.3	3.9	4.4	**5.2	1.1	1.6	-0.8	3.0
Rape	-14.7	-17.4	-11.0	-3.6	-9.0	-16.5	*-25.0	-13.8
Robbery	5.0	-1.4	4.7	9.6	*13.8	*20.2	**13.1	7.9
Assault	**6.1	*6.2	4.8	4.4	-1.5	-1.8	-3.1	2.5
Aggravated assault	**7.6	*10.4	-3.1	-5.6	-6.7	-3.9	-6.2	0.5
Simple assault	*15.4	*18.3	*9.8	*10.8	1.6	-0.5	-1.2	3.6
Crimes of theft	*9.4	*13.3	*14.1	*14.1	*15.2	*14.7	*10.2	-0.6
Personal larceny with contact	-0.3	-1.6	-1.0	5.9	15.5	-1.9	6.6	1.0
Personal larceny without contact	*9.7	*13.6	*14.5	*14.8	*16.0	*15.2	*10.8	-0.7
Household sector								
Household burglary	*14.7	*16.0	*14.7	*12.1	*11.7	*9.1	*7.0	*7.2
Household larceny	*6.4	*8.0	*9.2	*8.2	*7.6	*5.0	*14.8	*10.0
Motor vehicle theft	*15.3	*14.1	*17.0	-1.9	-4.8	-7.7	-7.8	-3.2

NOTE: Percent change calculated using rates that were rounded to the nearest hundredth.

* The difference is statistically significant at the 95% level.

** The difference is statistically significant at the 90% level.

A downturn, this one for the third consecutive year, also was found in residential larceny. The latest rate, 113.9 crimes per 1,000 households, was some 7 points lower than in 1981. It was also the lowest figure for that crime since 1973. The reduction between 1981 and 1982 centered upon larcenies valued at less than \$50, as the costlier thefts did not change significantly.

Despite an appreciable reduction in attempts, the overall rate of motor vehicle theft did not change significantly between 1981 and 1982. The most recent—16.2 crimes per 1,000 households—was not significantly different from most of the pre-1982 figures.

Police reports of aggravated assault up

The overall proportion of crimes that victims said they had reported to the police during 1982—35.7% of all victimizations measured—was not significantly different from what it was in 1981 (35.5%) or in 1980 (35.8%). However, the overall

share of crimes reported to authorities was higher than in 1979 (32.8%).

In contrast with the lack of change in the aggregate proportion of crimes reported to police, reporting rates for two personal offenses and one household crime did change from 1981 to 1982 (tables 4 and 5). The latest reporting rate for aggravated assault, 57.6%, was up from the 1981 rate of 52.2%. Police reports of personal larceny with contact, at 32.7%, were down sharply from the 1981 rate of 40.4%. In the household sector, there was an increase in reports to the authorities of motor vehicle thefts (up about 6 percentage points).

Personal larceny without contact and household larceny, which together made up roughly three-fifths of all offenses, had reporting rates of only 27% in 1982. Both those rates were not significantly different from the corresponding figures for 1981 (figure 3). The overall police reporting rate for violent crime, 48%, was not significantly different from that for 1981.

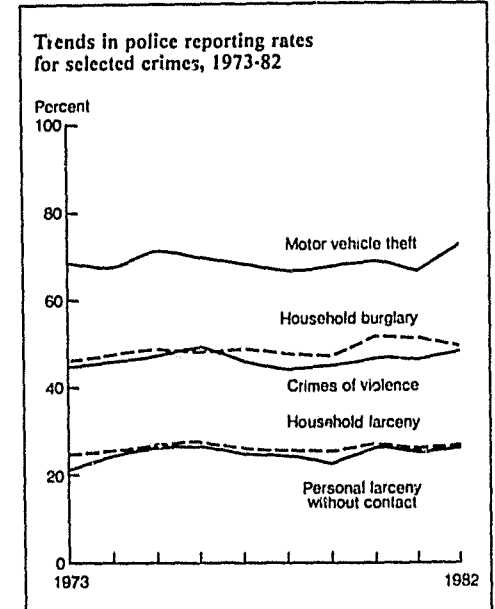


Figure 3

Table 4. Police reporting rates for personal and household crimes, 1973-82

Sector and type of crime	Percent of victimizations reported to the police									
	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
Personal sector										
Crimes of violence	45.5	46.9	47.2	48.8	46.1	44.2	45.1	47.1	46.6	48.2
Rape	48.9	51.8	56.2	52.7	58.4	48.8	50.5	41.4	55.7	52.8
Robbery	52.5	53.6	53.3	53.3	55.5	50.5	55.5	56.8	55.8	56.2
Robbery with injury	63.4	61.9	65.0	62.9	66.1	65.4	62.2	69.6	66.6	67.1
Robbery without injury	46.6	49.6	47.9	48.6	49.6	43.6	52.0	50.1	50.7	51.2
Assault	43.5	44.7	45.2	47.5	43.5	42.7	42.4	44.9	43.7	45.9
Aggravated assault	51.6	53.1	55.2	58.4	51.5	52.7	51.3	54.0	52.2	57.6
Simple assault	38.0	38.7	39.0	40.6	38.8	37.0	37.4	39.8	39.0	39.6
Crimes of theft	22.1	24.6	26.3	26.6	24.8	24.6	24.0	26.9	26.7	26.9
Personal larceny with contact	32.8	33.8	34.5	36.2	37.2	33.7	35.6	35.7	40.4	32.7
Personal larceny without contact	21.8	24.2	26.0	26.3	24.5	24.3	23.6	26.5	26.2	26.7
Household sector										
Household burglary	46.6	47.7	48.6	48.1	48.8	47.1	47.6	51.3	51.1	49.3
Household larceny	24.8	25.2	27.1	27.1	25.4	24.5	25.1	27.5	26.2	26.8
Motor vehicle theft	68.3	67.3	71.1	69.5	68.4	66.1	68.2	69.3	66.6	72.4

NOTE: Statistically significant differences between the rates for 1982 and each preceding year are identified on table 5. Estimated

population control figures based on the 1980 census were used in calculating the 1980-82

rates. Controls for the 1973-79 rates were derived from the 1970 census.

Sector and type of crime	Percent change in police reporting rate							
	1973-82	1974-82	1975-82	1976-82	1977-82	1978-82	1979-82	1980-82
Personal sector								
Crimes of violence	*5.9	2.9	2.2	-1.2	4.5	*9.0	*7.0	2.3
Rape	7.9	1.9	-6.1	0.1	-9.7	8.2	4.4	27.5
Robbery	7.1	4.8	5.4	5.4	1.2	11.1	1.2	-1.2
Robbery with injury	5.9	8.5	3.3	6.6	1.5	2.7	7.9	-3.6
Robbery without injury	9.8	3.3	7.0	5.3	3.2	*17.4	-1.5	2.2
Assault	5.6	2.7	1.6	-3.4	5.5	*7.7	*8.2	2.3
Aggravated assault	*11.7	**8.4	4.4	-1.3	*11.9	**9.2	*12.4	6.6
Simple assault	4.1	2.3	1.3	-2.5	1.9	7.0	5.8	-0.5
Crimes of theft	*21.5	*9.5	2.3	1.2	*8.3	*9.1	*12.0	0.1
Personal larceny with contact	-0.3	-3.4	-5.4	-9.9	-12.1	-2.9	-8.1	-8.6
Personal larceny without contact	*22.5	*9.9	2.5	1.5	*6.9	*9.5	*12.8	0.5
Household sector								
Household burglary	*5.8	3.5	1.5	2.4	-1.1	4.7	3.7	-3.8
Household larceny	*8.1	**6.2	-1.0	-1.0	5.3	*9.4	**6.5	-2.7
Motor vehicle theft	6.0	**7.5	1.8	4.3	5.8	*9.6	6.2	4.4

NOTE: Percent change calculated using rates that were rounded to the nearest hundredth.

* The difference is statistically significant at the 95% level.

** The difference is statistically significant at the 90% level.

Only 33% of attempted residential break-ins (as compared with 39% of unforced entries and 76% of forced entries) were reported to the police, and the difference between attempted and completed vehicle thefts (37% vs. 89%) also was large.⁸

Police-reported crime rates down

A special kind of victimization rate—based only on those offenses that victims said were known to the police—was calculated in order to gauge possible changes between 1981 and 1982 in the incidence of crimes reported to the authorities. For each NCS offense, victimizations reported to the police (numerator) were divided by either the population age 12 and over or the number of households (denominator), as appropriate.

The results (table 6) show that the rates for personal larceny with contact and household burglary declined between 1981 and 1982. The police-reported victimization rate for personal larceny with contact declined by about 24% and that for household burglary dropped by 14%. The major part of the downturn in the burglary rate was contributed by forcible entries, which declined from 23.5 victimizations per 1,000 households in 1981 to 18.7 in 1982.

Sector and type of crime	Victimization rates for NCS crimes reported to the police		Percent change
	1981	1982	
Personal sector			
Crimes of violence	16.5	16.5	0.4
Rape	0.5	0.4	-18.9
Robbery	4.1	4.0	-3.9
Robbery with injury	1.6	1.5	-5.7
Robbery without injury	2.6	2.5	-2.3
Assault	11.8	12.1	2.8
Aggravated assault	5.0	5.4	6.6
Simple assault	6.8	6.8	-0.2
Crimes of theft	22.8	22.2	-2.6
Personal larceny with contact	1.3	1.0	*-23.7
Personal larceny without contact	21.5	21.2	-1.3
Household sector			
Household burglary	44.9	38.6	*-14.1
Household larceny	31.7	30.5	-3.9
Motor vehicle theft	11.4	11.7	2.6

NOTE: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding. In calculating the rates, victimizations reported to the police were divided either by the population age 12 and over (personal sector) or by the total number of households (household sector). Percent change calculated using rates that were rounded to the nearest hundredth.

* The difference is statistically significant at the 95% level.

Footnotes

¹Comparisons made in this report passed a hypothesis test at the 0.10 level of statistical significance (i.e., the 90% "confidence level"), or better. In fact, most comparisons passed the test at the level of 0.05 (or the 95% confidence level). Thus, for most comparisons cited, the estimated difference between values being examined was greater than twice the standard error of the difference. A few statements of comparison have been qualified by footnotes denoting that the estimated difference between values being examined was within the range of 1.6 and 2.0 standard errors—statistically significant at the 0.10 level but not at the 0.05 level (or a confidence level between 90% and 95%). The presence and level of statistically significant differences are noted on tables 1, 3, 5, and 6.

²The NCS also enables examination of the incidence of crime against the residents of certain types of localities, and estimates are available for a number of large States. The survey also furnishes data on the extent to which crime is experienced by various population groups. Data on subnational populations and on subgroups are available on request from BJS, and some of this kind of information can be found in the latest in the series of comprehensive annual reports, *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1980*, NCJ-84015, and in special reports; the 1981 edition of the annual report will be published in November 1983, and the 1982 edition is now being prepared.

³The difference between the 1973 and 1982 assault rates is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

⁴The difference between the 1979 and 1982 robbery rates is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

⁵The difference between the 1981 and 1982 rates for personal larceny without contact is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

⁶The decline in the rate for unlawful entry without force is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

⁷The aggregate rate of police reporting is an average calculated for all of the categories shown in table 4.

⁸Table 4 displays the overall percentages of burglaries and motor vehicle thefts reported to the police, but the component categories cited here are not shown.

Bureau of Justice Statistics reports
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Public-use tapes of BJS data sets and other criminal justice data are available from the Criminal Justice Archive and Information Network, P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106, (313/764-5199).

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