



Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin

Criminal Victimization 1985

Criminal victimizations in the United States dropped by nearly 700,000 to about 34.9 million in 1985 for persons age 12 and older, according to the National Crime Survey (NCS). This decline continued a trend that has now reduced criminal victimizations to their lowest level in the 13-year history of the NCS, about 16% below the 41.5 million victimizations recorded in the peak year of 1981 (table 1).¹

The victimization rate for robberies dropped 11% during the year to a new low, about 32% below the peak for these crimes, which occurred in 1981. The rate for personal larceny without contact, down 3% during the year, has been declining since 1977 and is now 30% below the rate for that year (figure 1).

¹For definitions of the crimes measured by the National Crime Survey and a description of NCS operations, see *Measuring Crime*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, NCJ-75710, February 1981.

Trends in victimization rates for selected crimes, 1973-85

Rate per 1,000 persons or households

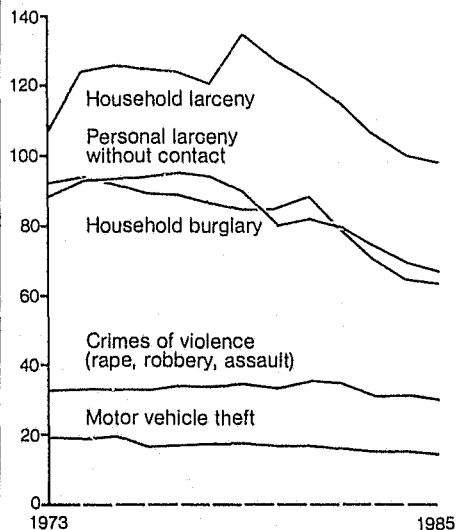


Figure 1

October 1986

The data in this bulletin update the preliminary estimates of victimization in 1985, which were released in April of this year. For the fourth year in a row, the overall level of crime decreased, bringing the number of crimes in the U.S. to the lowest level in the 13-year history of the National Crime Survey (NCS).

The National Crime Survey measures both crimes reported to the police and crimes not reported. The survey has consistently shown that almost two-thirds of all NCS crimes, including about half of all violent crimes, are not reported to the police.
Steven R. Schlesinger
Director

The National Crime Survey obtains information on criminal victimizations, whether or not the crime was reported to the police. Crimes were reported to the police in 1985 at a rate not measurably different from that of 1984. About one in three crimes measured by the NCS were reported to the police. The rate of police reporting has remained comparatively unchanged since measurement began in 1973.

Personal crimes decline

The victimization rate for personal crimes—crimes of violence and crimes

of theft—declined 4% in 1985, resulting in approximately half a million fewer crimes in 1985 than in 1984 (table 2).

The victimization rate for robbery continued a downward trend begun in 1982 (table 3). The rate for 1985—5.1 victimizations per 1,000 persons—was 32% lower than its high point in 1981 and the lowest in NCS history (figure 2). The rate for completed robberies with injury decreased 29% from the previous year.

The victimization rate for rape declined from 0.9 per 1,000 persons to

Table 1. Victimization levels for selected crimes, 1973-85

	Number of victimizations (in 1,000's)			
	Total	Violent crimes	Personal theft	Household crimes
1973	35,661	5,350	14,970	15,340
1974	38,411	5,510	15,889	17,012
1975	39,266	5,573	16,294	17,400
1976	39,318	5,599	16,519	17,199
1977	40,314	5,902	16,933	17,480
1978	40,412	5,941	17,050	17,421
1979	41,249	6,159	16,382	18,708
1980	40,252	6,130	15,300	18,821
1981	41,454	6,582	15,863	19,009
1982	39,756	6,459	15,553	17,744
1983	37,001	5,903	14,657	16,440
1984	35,544	6,021	13,789	15,733
1985	34,864	5,823	13,474	15,568
Percent change, 1981-85 ^a	-15.9 ^b	-11.5 ^b	-15.1 ^b	-18.1 ^b

^aTotal victimizations peaked in 1981.

^bThe difference is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Table 2. Changes in victimization levels and rates for personal and household crimes, 1984-85

	Number of victimizations (1,000s)			Victimization rates		
	1984	1985	Percent change 1984-85	1984	1985	Percent change 1984-85
All crimes	35,544	34,864	-1.9% ^b
Personal crimes	19,810	19,296	-2.6% ^b	103.2	99.4	-3.7% ^b
Crimes of violence	6,021	5,823	-3.3	31.4	30.0	-4.4
Completed	2,193	2,060	-6.0	11.4	10.6	-7.1
Attempted	3,828	3,762	-1.7	19.9	19.4	-2.8
Rape ^a	180	138	-23.0	0.9	0.7	-23.8% ^c
Completed	61	71	16.6	0.3	0.4	15.2
Attempted	119	68	-43.2% ^b	0.6	0.3	-43.8% ^b
Robbery	1,097	985	-10.2	5.7	5.1	-11.2% ^c
Completed	729	652	-10.5	3.8	3.4	-11.5
With injury	293	211	-27.8% ^b	1.5	1.1	-28.6% ^b
From serious assault	150	120	-20.2	0.8	0.6	-21.1
From minor assault	143	92	-35.9% ^b	0.7	0.5	-36.6% ^b
Without injury	436	440	1.1	2.3	2.3	0.0
Attempted	368	333	-9.5	1.9	1.7	-10.5
With injury	106	83	-22.1	0.6	0.4	-22.9
From serious assault	54	41	-23.2	0.3	0.2	-23.8
From minor assault	52	41	-20.9	0.3	0.2	-21.7
Without injury	262	250	-4.4	1.4	1.3	-5.5
Assault	4,744	4,699	-1.0	24.7	24.2	-2.0
Aggravated	1,727	1,605	-7.1% ^c	9.0	8.3	-8.1
Completed with injury	606	508	-16.2% ^b	3.2	2.6	-17.1% ^b
Attempted assault with weapon	1,122	1,097	-2.1	5.8	5.7	-3.2
Simple	3,017	3,094	2.6	15.7	15.9	1.4
Completed with injury	798	830	4.1	4.2	4.3	2.9
Attempted assault without weapon	2,220	2,264	2.0	11.6	11.7	0.9
Crimes of theft	13,789	13,474	-2.3	71.8	69.4	-3.4% ^c
Completed	12,969	12,764	-1.6	67.6	65.8	-2.7
Attempted	820	709	-13.3% ^b	4.3	3.7	-14.4% ^b
Personal larceny with contact	530	523	-1.3	2.8	2.7	-2.4
Purse snatching	125	106	-15.2	0.7	0.5	-16.2
Completed	91	83	-9.4	0.5	0.4	-10.3
Attempted	34	24	-30.7	0.2	0.1	-31.1
Pocket picking	404	416	3.0	2.1	2.1	1.9
Personal larceny without contact	13,259	12,951	-2.3	69.1	66.7	-3.4% ^c
Completed	12,474	12,265	-1.7	65.0	63.2	-2.8
Less than \$50	6,145	5,918	-3.7% ^c	32.0	30.5	-4.8% ^c
\$50 or more	5,797	5,778	-0.3	30.2	29.8	-1.4
Amount not available	531	569	7.0	2.8	2.9	5.8
Attempted	786	686	-12.7% ^b	4.1	3.5	-13.7% ^c
Household crimes	15,733	15,568	-1.1%	178.7	174.4	-2.4%
Completed	13,324	13,244	-0.6	151.3	148.4	-2.0
Attempted	2,409	2,324	-3.6	27.4	26.0	-4.9
Burglary	5,643	5,594	-0.9	64.1	62.7	-2.2
Completed	4,322	4,354	0.7	49.1	48.8	-0.6
Forcible entry	1,844	1,827	-0.9	20.9	20.5	-2.3
Unlawful entry without force	2,478	2,527	2.0	28.1	28.3	0.6
Attempted forcible entry	1,321	1,240	-6.1	15.0	13.9	-7.4
Household larceny	8,750	8,703	-0.5	99.4	97.5	-1.9
Completed	8,167	8,067	-1.2	92.8	90.4	-2.6
Less than \$50	3,982	3,886	-2.4	45.2	43.5	-3.7
\$50 or more	3,791	3,758	-0.9	43.1	42.1	-2.2
Amount not available	394	424	7.5	4.5	4.7	6.1
Attempted	583	636	9.0	6.6	7.1	7.5
Motor vehicle theft	1,340	1,270	-5.2	15.2	14.2	-6.5
Completed	836	823	-1.5	9.5	9.2	-2.9
Attempted	505	447	-11.3	5.7	5.0	-12.6

NOTE: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding. Percent change is based on unrounded figures. Victimization rates are calculated on the basis of the number of victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 and over or per 1,000 households. The population age 12 and over grew from 191,962,000 in 1984 to 194,097,000 in 1985, an increase of 1.1%. The number of households grew from 88,039,000 to 89,263,000 between

1984 and 1985, an increase of 1.4%.

^aThe victimization rate for female rape (the number of rapes per 1,000 women age 12 and over) was 1.6 in 1984 and 1.3 in 1985.

^bThe difference is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

^cThe difference is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

...Not applicable.

0.7 per 1,000 persons. This decline was accounted for by the drop in the rate of attempted rapes from 0.6 to 0.3 victimizations per 1,000 persons.

There was no measurable difference in the overall rate for assault between 1984 and 1985. The rate for aggravated assault with injury, however, fell 17% from 3.2 to 2.6 per 1,000 persons.

The rate for personal crimes of theft—69.4 per 1,000 persons—dropped 3% during 1985. The 1985 rate was 29% below its peak in 1977 (table 4).

There was no measurable change in the rate for personal larceny with contact, which consists of purse snatching and pocket picking. These crimes occur far less often than noncontact larcenies. Consequently, actual changes in the level or rate of personal larceny with contact are much more difficult to measure.

Household crimes stable

Rates for the three household crimes measured by the NCS—burglary, household larceny, and motor vehicle theft—remained basically unchanged between 1984 and 1985. However, the overall rate for household crimes for 1985—174 crimes per 1,000 households—is lower than for any year between 1973 and 1983.

The rate for burglary was 63 per 1,000 households. Household larceny occurred at a rate of 98 per 1,000 households and motor vehicle theft occurred at a rate of 14 per 1,000 households. Although not measurably different from the 1984 crime rates, the rates for burglary and household larceny were lower than at any time between 1973 and 1983. The rate for motor vehicle theft was lower than for any time between 1973 and 1982.

Police reporting unchanged

In 1985, 36% of all NCS crimes were reported to the police, a rate of reporting that has remained basically unchanged throughout the 1980s (table 5 and figure 3).² About half (48%) of all violent crimes, two-fifths (39%) of all household crimes, and one-fourth (27%) of all crimes of personal theft were reported.

The 1985 reporting rate did not change measurably for any major crime category. As in the past, motor vehicle theft, with roughly 7 in every 10 incidents reported to the police, had the highest rate of reporting; personal

²The aggregate rate of police reporting includes all the crime categories shown in table 5.

Table 3. Victimization rates for personal and household crimes, 1973-85

	Victimization rates per 1,000 population age 12 and over or per 1,000 households												
	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Personal crimes													
Crimes of violence	32.6	33.0	32.8	32.6	33.9	33.7	34.5	33.3	35.3	34.3	31.0	31.4	30.0
Rape	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.9	1.0	1.1	0.9	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.7
Robbery	6.7	7.2	6.8	6.5	6.2	5.9	6.3	6.6	7.4	7.1	6.0	5.7	5.1
Assault	24.9	24.8	25.2	25.3	26.8	26.9	27.2	25.8	27.0	26.4	24.1	24.7	24.2
Aggravated assault	10.1	10.4	9.6	9.9	10.0	9.7	9.9	9.3	9.6	9.3	8.0	9.0	8.3
Simple assault	14.8	14.4	15.6	15.4	16.8	17.2	17.3	16.5	17.3	17.1	16.2	15.7	15.9
Crimes of theft	91.1	95.1	96.0	96.1	97.3	96.8	91.9	83.0	85.1	82.5	76.9	71.8	69.4
Personal larceny with contact	3.1	3.1	3.1	2.9	2.7	3.1	2.9	3.0	3.3	3.1	3.0	2.8	2.7
Personal larceny without contact	88.0	92.0	92.9	93.2	94.6	93.6	89.0	80.0	81.9	79.5	74.0	69.1	66.7
Household crimes													
Household burglary	91.7	93.1	91.7	88.9	88.5	86.0	84.1	84.3	87.9	78.2	70.0	64.1	62.7
Household larceny	107.0	123.8	125.4	124.1	123.3	119.9	133.7	126.5	121.0	113.9	105.2	99.4	97.5
Motor vehicle theft	19.1	18.8	19.5	16.5	17.0	17.5	17.5	16.7	17.1	16.2	14.6	15.2	14.2

NOTE: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding. Statistically significant differences between the rates for 1985 and each preceding year are identified in table 4.

Table 4. Comparison of changes in victimization rates for personal and household crimes, 1973-85

	Percent change in victimization rates											
	1973-85	1974-85	1975-85	1976-85	1977-85	1978-85	1979-85	1980-85	1981-85	1982-85	1983-85	1984-85
Personal crimes												
Crimes of violence	-7.8%	-9.0%	-8.6%	-7.9%	-11.5%	-11.0%	-13.1%	-9.8%	-15.1%	-12.5%	-3.2%*	-4.4%*
Rape	-25.3*	-27.6	-22.0*	-15.5*	-20.2*	-26.8*	-34.3	-24.5*	-25.3*	-12.3*	-11.7*	-23.8
Robbery	-24.8	-29.4	-25.0	-21.5	-18.5	-13.9	-19.0	-22.7	-31.6	-28.4	-15.9	-11.2
Assault	-2.7*	-2.5*	-3.9*	-4.2*	-9.6	-9.8	-11.0	-6.0	-10.2	-8.2	0.3*	-2.0*
Aggravated assault	-17.9	-20.4	-13.9	-16.1	-17.1	-14.7	-16.6	-10.7	-14.2	-11.2	3.8*	-8.1*
Simple assault	7.7	10.4	2.4*	3.4*	-5.2*	-7.1	-7.8	-3.3*	-8.0	-6.7	-1.5*	1.4*
Crimes of theft	-23.7	-27.0	-27.7	-27.8	-28.6	-28.3	-24.5	-16.4	-18.5	-15.9	-9.8	-3.4
Personal larceny with contact	-12.4*	-13.5*	-12.9*	-6.9*	1.5*	-13.8*	-6.3*	-11.2*	-17.2	-12.1*	-8.8*	-2.4*
Personal larceny without contact	-24.2	-27.5	-28.2	-28.4	-29.5	-28.7	-25.0	-16.6	-18.5	-16.0	-9.8	-3.4
Household crimes												
Household burglary	-31.7	-32.7	-31.6	-29.5	-29.2	-27.1	-25.5	-25.6	-28.7	-19.8	-10.4	-2.2*
Household larceny	-8.9	-21.2	-22.2	-21.4	-20.9	-18.7	-27.1	-22.9	-19.4	-14.4	-7.3	-1.9*
Motor vehicle theft	-25.4	-24.4	-27.0	-13.6	-16.1	-18.7	-18.8	-14.7	-16.8	-11.9	-2.4*	-6.5*

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

*The difference is not statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

larceny without contact and household larceny, with only 1 in every 4 cases reported, had the lowest police reporting rates.

The National Crime Survey

The NCS measures selected personal and household offenses, including crimes not reported to the police, through interviews at 6-month intervals with the occupants of housing units that make up a representative national sample. During 1985, some 101,000 persons—occupants of about 49,000 housing units—participated in the survey. Interviews are administered monthly to one-sixth of the sample, according to a rotation schedule. Information pertaining to the previous 6 months is gathered at each interview.

Preliminary estimates and sampling error

In April 1986, the Bureau of Justice Statistics released preliminary NCS

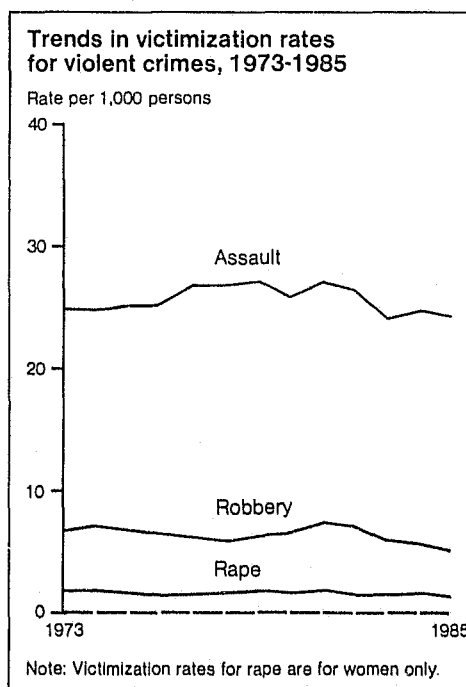


Figure 2

victimization levels and rates, as well as police reporting data for 1985. When levels and rates of victimization for the early 1985 estimates are compared to the final 1985 estimates, the procedure used in calculating the preliminary estimates appears to have yielded reliable indicators of both magnitude and change in criminal victimization during 1985 (table 6). For example, the preliminary 1985 rate for household larceny was 97.1 per 1,000 households; the final rate was 97.5.³

Data collected in the National Crime Survey are obtained from a sample and not from a complete enumeration. Consequently, a sampling error (standard error) is associated with each number in this report, including the numbers measuring change. In general, if the difference between two numbers is greater than twice the

³For a complete discussion of preliminary estimation procedures, see BJS Bulletin *Criminal Victimization, 1983*, NCJ-93869, June 1984.

Table 5. Reporting victimizations to the police, 1973-85

	Percent of victimizations reported to the police												
	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Personal crimes													
Crimes of violence	46%	47%	47%	49%	46%	44%	45%	47%	47%	48%	47%	47%	48%
Rape	49	52	56	53	58	49	51	41	56	53	47	56	61
Robbery	53	54	53	53	56	51	56	57	56	56	53	54	54
Assault	44	45	45	48	44	43	42	45	44	46	46	45	46
Aggravated assault	52	53	55	58	52	53	51	54	52	58	57	55	58
Simple assault	38	39	39	41	39	37	37	40	39	40	41	40	40
Crimes of theft	22	25	26	27	25	25	24	27	27	27	27	26	27
Personal larceny with contact	33	34	35	36	37	34	36	36	40	33	36	31	33
Personal larceny without contact	22	24	26	26	25	24	24	27	26	27	26	26	27
Household crimes													
Household burglary	47	48	49	48	49	47	48	51	51	49	49	49	50
Household larceny	25	25	27	27	25	25	25	28	26	27	25	27	27
Motor vehicle theft	68	67	71	70	68	66	68	69	67	72	69	69	71

Table 6. Preliminary estimates and final results for 1985 victimization levels and rates.

	Number of victimizations (in 1,000s)			Victimization rates		
	Preliminary	Final	Percent change	Preliminary	Final	Percent change
Personal crimes						
Crimes of violence	5,860	5,823	-0.6%	30.3	30.0	-0.8%
Rape	128	138	8.6	0.7	0.7	7.6
Robbery	978	985	0.9	5.0	5.1	0.6
Assault	4,758	4,699	-1.2	24.6	24.2	-1.5
Aggravated assault	1,694	1,605	-5.2	8.7	8.3	-5.5
Simple assault	3,063	3,094	1.0	15.8	15.9	0.8
Crimes of theft	13,160	13,474	2.4	67.9	69.4	2.2
Personal larceny with contact	443	523	18.0	2.3	2.7	17.5
Personal larceny without contact	12,719	12,951	1.8	65.7	66.7	1.6
Household crimes						
Household burglary	5,483	5,594	2.0	61.5	62.7	1.9
Household larceny	8,661	8,703	0.5	97.1	97.5	0.4
Motor vehicle theft	1,331	1,270	-4.6	14.9	14.2	-4.6

NOTE: Numbers and rates may not add to totals shown because of rounding. Percent changes were calculated based on unrounded numbers.

standard error for that difference, we can say that we are 95% confident that the two numbers are in fact different—that is, the apparent difference is not simply the result of surveying a sample and not the entire population. If the difference is greater than 1.6 standard errors, we are 90% confident that the two numbers are different. All comparisons made in the

text are at or above the 90% confidence level. When differences between two numbers are below the 90% confidence level, the two numbers are described in the text as "not measurably different."

Methodological note

Beginning in 1985, slight changes were made in the classification of the personal crimes of robbery and assault when they occurred in commercial establishments. The 1984 data presented in this report have been adjusted to take this classification change into account and will differ slightly from previously published 1984 data.

New releases from BJS:

- Prosecution of felony arrests, 1981, 129 pp., NCJ-101380, 9/86.
- Children in custody: 1982/83 census of juvenile detention and correctional facilities, 11 pp., NCJ-101686, 9/86.
- Children in custody: Public facilities census, 1985, BJS Bulletin, 8 pp., NCJ-102457, 10/86.

- State and Federal prisoners, 1925-85 (BJS Bulletin), 4 pp., NCJ-102494, 10/86.
- Sourcebook of criminal justice statistics, 1985, 667 pp., NCJ-100899, 10/86.
- 1986 directory of automated criminal justice information systems, 1,000 pp., NCJ-102260, 10/86.
- National criminal defense systems study, 120 pp., NCJ-94702, 10/86.

Trends in reporting to the police for selected crimes, 1973-1985

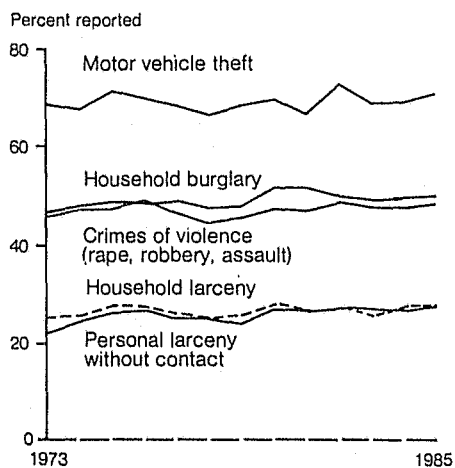
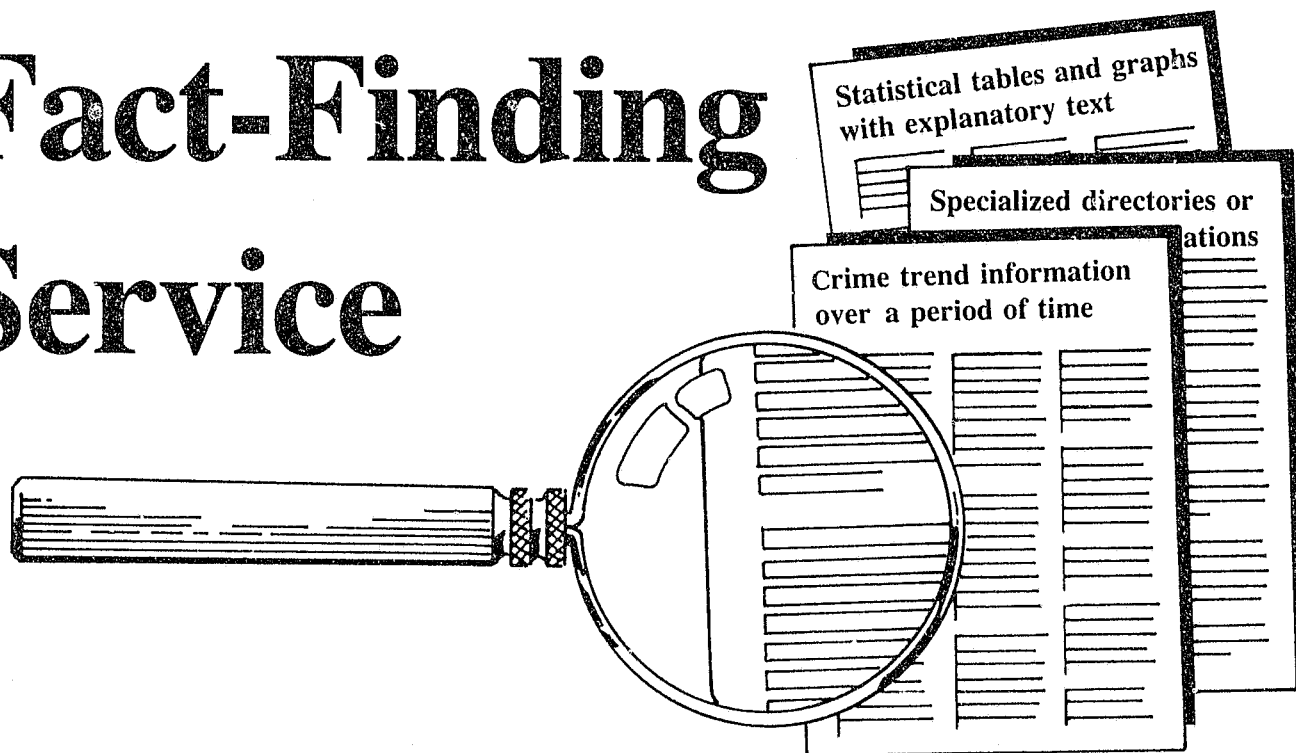


Figure 3

Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletins are prepared principally by the staff of BJS. This bulletin was written by Marshall DeBerry and Anita Timrots. Carol B. Kalish, chief of data analysis, edits the bulletins. Marilyn Marbrook, publications unit chief, administers production, assisted by Tina Dorsey, Millie Baldea, and Joyce Stanford.

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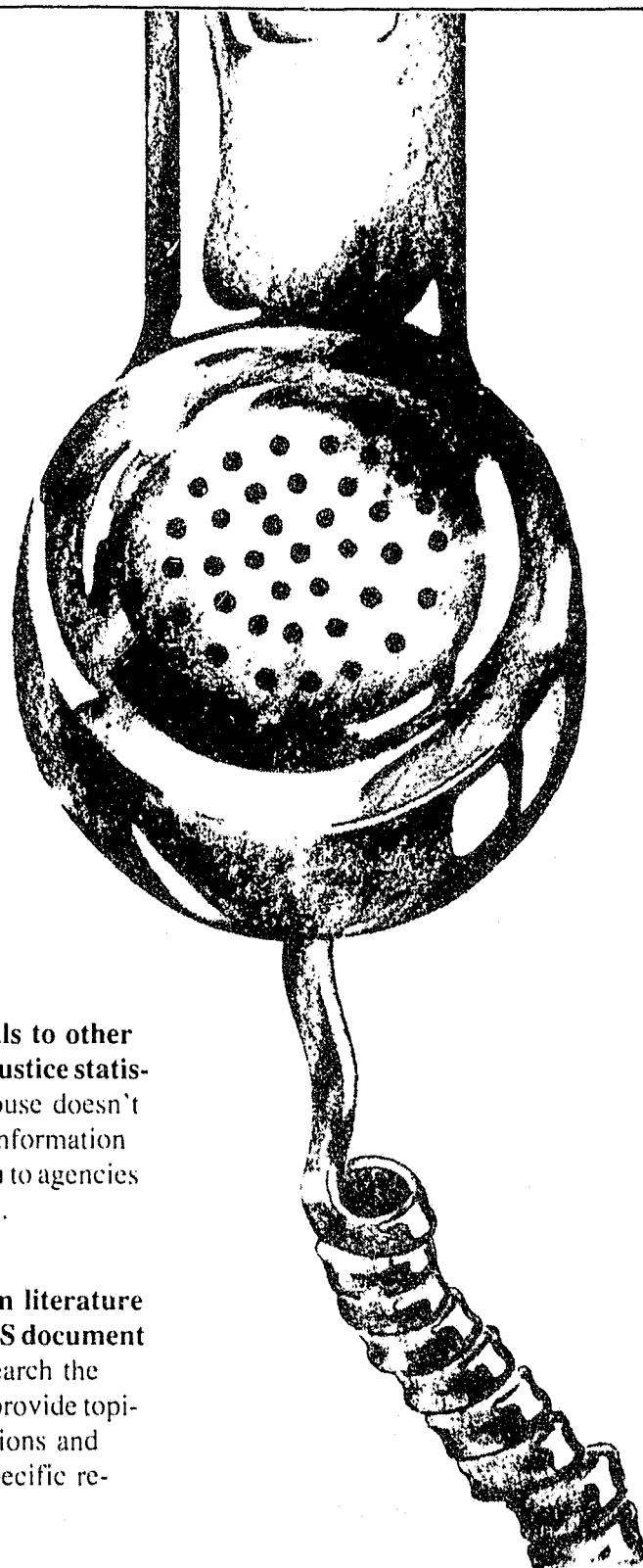
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(revised October 1986)

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