

## Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin

# Households Touched by Crime, 1982

June 1983

Twenty-nine percent (24.8 million) of the Nation's households were touched by a crime of violence or theft in 1982 (table 1). The percentage of households touched by crime in 1982 was slightly lower than it was in 1981 (30%) and almost 3 percentage points lower than the 1975 estimate (32%).

In 1982, households with high incomes, those in central cities, and those headed by blacks continued to be most vulnerable to crime. A fifth of the Nation's households were victimized by larcenies, once again the most common crime, while 7% of all households were victims of an attempted or completed burglary, and 6% had a member who was the victim of a violent crime.

This is the third annual bulletin in the series "Households Touched by Crime." Two years ago the Bureau of Justice Statistics developed this new measure to assess the frequency with which American homes experience crime directly. Its widespread acceptance indicates that it has helped to provide a new perspective on

the problem of crime in the United States.

It is the goal of the Bureau to continue to develop statistical measures that will provide the American public with a greater understanding of crime and criminal justice.

Steven R. Schlesinger  
Director

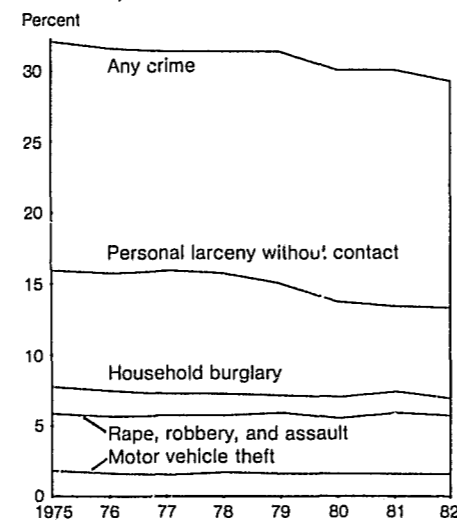
The percentage of households touched by crime declined slowly between 1975 and 1982, due mainly to a drop from 15.9% to 13.3% in personal larcenies without contact (thefts from a place away from the home, such as a restaurant or workplace). The percentage of households touched by other crimes (such as burglary and crimes of violence) did not fluctuate greatly between 1975 and 1982 and showed no discernible trend.

### Detailed findings

As in previous years, chances of victimization were related to a household's family income, race, and place of residence (table 2).

- Black households were more likely than white households to have had members who were victims of robbery or aggravated assault in 1982.
- 10% of all black households and 6% of all white households were victims of at least one burglary or attempted burglary in 1982.
- About the same proportions of white

Households touched by selected crimes of violence and theft, 1975 - 82



and black households were victims of theft.

- In general, the higher the income the

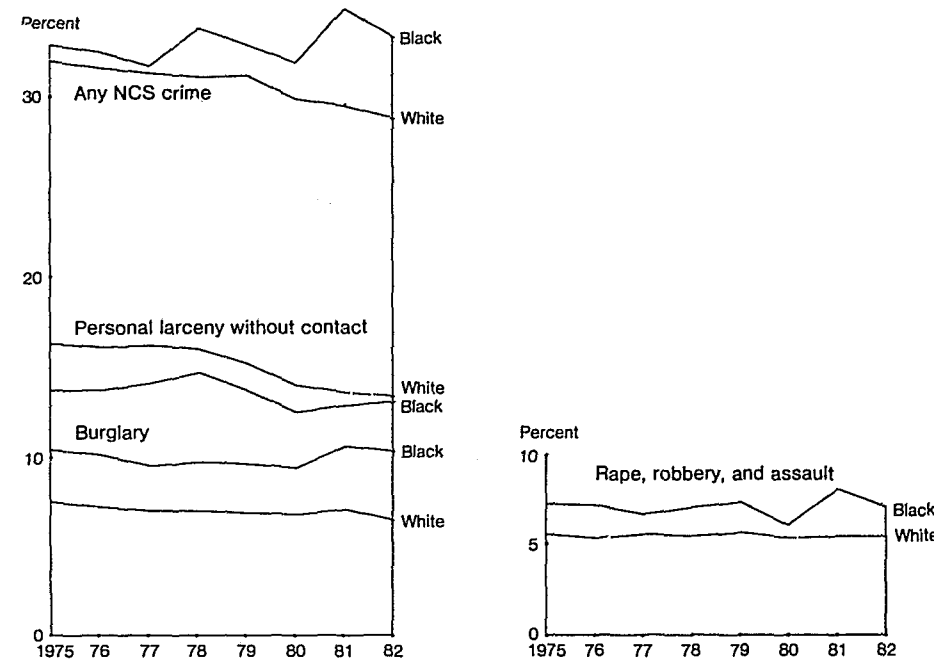
Table 1. Households touched by crime, 1982

	Number (millions)	Percent
U.S. households	85.0	100.0
Households touched by		
All crimes	24.8	29.2
Rape	.1	0.2
Robbery	1.2	1.4
Assault	3.8	4.5
Aggravated	1.4	1.6
Simple	2.7	3.2
Larceny	17.7	20.9
Personal	11.7	13.8
Household	8.2	9.6
Burglary	5.8	6.9
Motor vehicle theft	1.4	1.6

Note: Percent detail does not add to total because of overlap in households touched by various crimes.

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**Households touched by selected crimes, by race of household head, 1975 - 82**



more likely a family was to be a victim of theft.

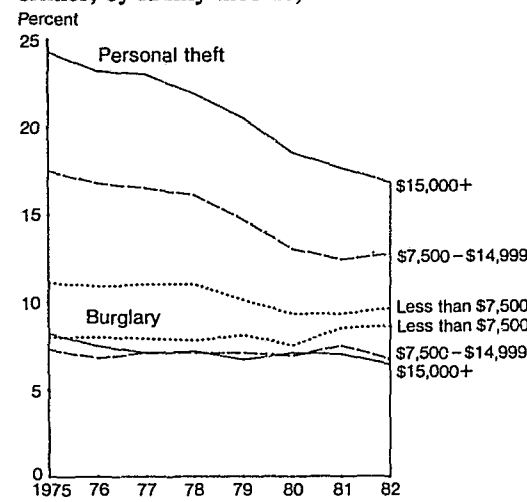
- Families with low incomes were the most likely to be victims of burglary.
- At least a third of all urban households were touched by crime.
- The greater vulnerability of urban than suburban households was due primarily to higher urban rates for burglary and violent crime.
- Households in rural areas were less likely than those in urban or suburban areas to be victims of any crime.
- Urban households were only a bit more likely than suburban households to be victims of larcenies.

- 13% of urban (but only 10% of suburban and 8% of rural) households were victims of crimes of high concern (violent crimes by strangers and burglaries).

**Multiple victimization of households**

The ratio of the number of crime incidents per year to the number of households touched by crime provides a way to examine the degree to which households touched by crime were victims of more than one crime incident during the year. A ratio of 1.0 to 1 means that the average victimized

**Households touched by selected crimes, by family income, 1975 - 82**



household was victimized only once in a single year. Ratios greater than 1.0 to 1 show the extent to which the average household touched by crime was victimized more than once in the same year.

In 1981, the ratio for all crimes was 1.6 to 1; that is, the average victimized household experienced 1.6 incidents (table 3).<sup>1</sup> The ratios for individual types of crime ranged from 1.0 to 1.3. Many households were victims of at least two different crimes during that year. Evidence of the extent of multiple victimization comes from examining the overlap in the number of households touched by individual crimes and by composite crime categories.

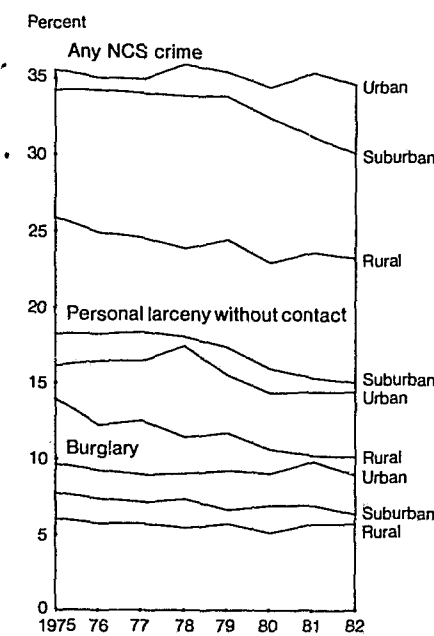
- 5% of all households were touched by

<sup>1</sup>NCS incident data were not yet available for 1982, so 1981 incident and households-touched data were used for this aspect of the analysis.

**Table 3. Ratio of incidents to households touched by crime, 1981**

	Incidents (millions)	Households touched (millions)	Ratio
All crimes	39.6	24.9	1.6 to 1
Violent	5.6	4.9	1.2 to 1
Rape	0.2	0.2	1.0 to 1
Robbery	1.2	1.1	1.1 to 1
Assault	4.3	3.9	1.1 to 1
Larceny	25.2	17.7	1.4 to 1
Personal	15.0	11.5	1.3 to 1
Household	10.2	8.5	1.2 to 1
Burglary	7.4	6.1	1.2 to 1
Motor vehicle theft	1.4	1.3	1.1 to 1

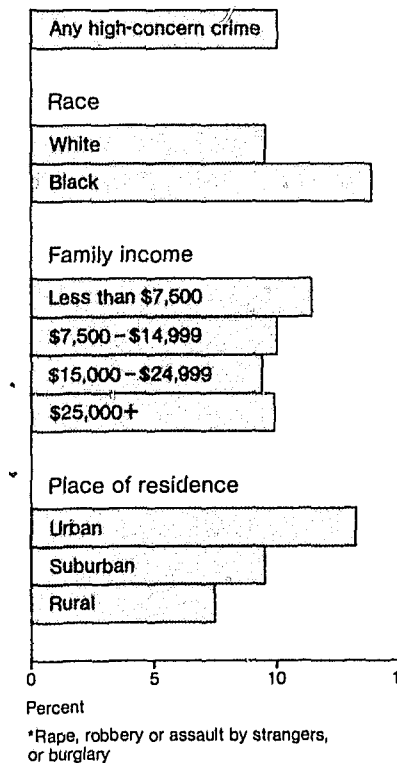
**Households touched by selected crimes, by place of residence, 1975 - 82**



both a household crime and a personal crime of theft or violence.

- 11% of the households touched by personal crimes (2% of all households in the Nation) were victims of both violence and theft.
- 7% of the households touched by crimes of high concern (1% of the

**Percent of households touched by crimes of high concern\*, 1982**



Nation's households) were victims of both violent crime by strangers and burglary.

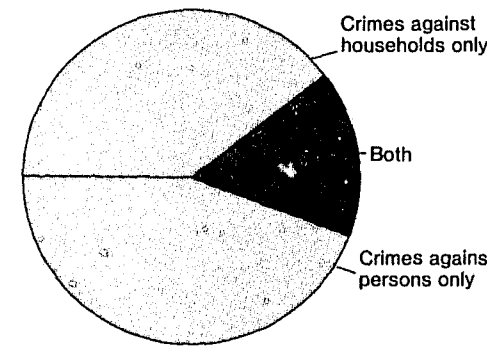
**Function and makeup of the indicator**

The households-touched-by-crime indicator was introduced by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 1981. Its aim is to improve our understanding of the impact of crime on our society.<sup>2</sup> The household was chosen as the unit of analysis because the effects of a crime are not limited to the victim alone but are also felt by other members of the victim's household.

Households-touched-by-crime statistics are derived from National Crime Survey (NCS) data on rape, personal robbery, assault, household

<sup>2</sup>The Prevalence of Crime, Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, NCJ-75905, March 1981.

**Households touched by crime, by type of crime, 1982**



burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft.<sup>3</sup> Because the NCS counts only crimes for which the victim can be interviewed, homicide is not counted in this analysis, but its exclusion does not noticeably affect the estimates presented here. If each of the 1982 homicides (about 20,000) had touched a different household and these households had been touched by no other crime (the largest possible effect), the result would not raise the overall percentage (29.2%) of households touched by crime.<sup>4</sup>

Other crimes against persons or their households—such as fraud, confidence games, kidnaping, and arson—were not included because no reliable measures are available for the number of such crimes that occur or the number of households victimized by these crimes.

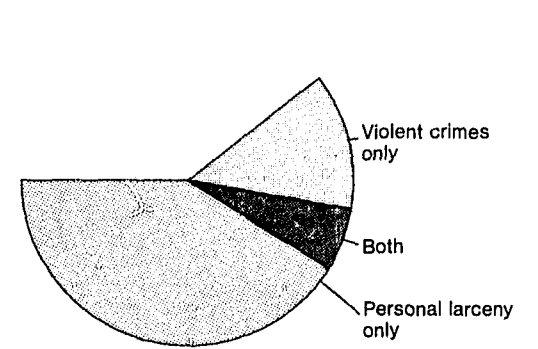
Traditional measures of crime are in the form of volume or rates. Data on the volume of crime have limited usefulness, unless the size of the population base is taken into account. Rates—expressed in the National Crime Survey as crimes per 1,000 households or crimes per 1,000 persons—automatically correct for different population sizes, but they do not show whether a given level of crime within a given population is widely spread or highly concentrated.

For each type of crime examined, a household is counted only once regardless of how many times that household was victimized. For example, if a household was burglarized twice and one of its members was robbed once during the year, it is counted once for households touched by burglary even

<sup>3</sup>These crimes are defined in Measuring Crime, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-75710, February 1981.

<sup>4</sup>Estimate derived from Uniform Crime Reports, 1982 Preliminary Annual Release, FBI, April 1983.

**Households touched by crimes against persons, by type of crime, 1982**



**Table 2. Percent of households touched by crime by selected characteristics, 1982**

	Race of head		Annual family income (dollars)				Place of residence		
	White	Black	Low under 7,500	Medium 7,500-14,999	High 15,000-24,999	25,000+	Central cities	Suburban	Rural
Any crime	28.7	33.2	25.7	28.6	30.7	33.9	34.6	30.1	23.2
Violent crime	5.5	7.1	6.1	6.0	5.5	5.8	7.3	5.7	4.1
Rape	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1
Robbery	1.2	2.8	1.8	1.5	1.3	1.1	2.5	1.2	0.6
Assault	4.5	4.7	4.5	4.7	4.3	4.8	5.2	4.6	3.7
Aggravated	1.6	2.3	1.9	1.8	1.5	1.5	2.0	1.6	1.4
Simple	3.2	2.8	3.0	3.2	3.2	3.7	3.8	3.4	2.5
Property crime	13.7	13.7	9.6	12.7	15.0	18.6	15.4	15.4	10.3
Personal larceny	6.4	10.2	8.6	6.7	6.3	6.4	8.9	6.3	5.7
Burglary	9.5	10.5	9.1	10.0	10.1	10.1	11.5	9.4	8.0
Household larceny	1.5	2.5	1.8	1.6	1.9	1.7	2.6	1.5	0.7
Motor vehicle theft									
Serious violent crime <sup>1</sup>	2.8	5.0	3.7	3.3	2.8	2.6	4.5	2.8	2.0
Total larceny <sup>2</sup>	20.8	21.3	16.4	20.1	22.6	25.8	23.4	22.3	16.8

<sup>1</sup>Rape, robbery, aggravated assault  
<sup>2</sup>Personal larceny, household larceny

though it was victimized twice by burglary. It is also counted once for households touched by robbery. Finally, it is counted once in the overall measure, households touched by crime.

For instance, the households-touched-by-crime estimate for 1982 (29.2%) is less than the sum of the estimates for households touched by personal crimes (17.7%) and those touched by household crimes (14.5%), because almost 5% of U.S. households were victims of both personal and household crimes. Similarly, because almost 2% of the U.S. households were touched by both theft and violence, the sum of households touched by theft (14%) and those touched by violence (5.7%) exceeds the estimate of those touched by personal crime (17.7%).

#### Methodology

All data in this bulletin are from the National Crime Survey. The Bureau of Justice Statistics contracts with the U.S. Bureau of the Census to collect and compile the survey data.

"Households" as used throughout this bulletin refers to a dwelling unit and the people who occupy it. No attempt was made to locate people who moved during an interview period. Instead, the people who moved into the vacated dwelling unit were interviewed for the rest of the year. Biases produced by people moving during the year affect the estimates to a minor degree because only about 20% of all households move during a typical year. "Family" has been used as synonymous with "household." Actually, 75% of all households are families, 22% are persons living alone, and 3% are groups of unrelated persons.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletins are prepared principally by the staff of the bureau. Carol B. Kalish, chief of policy analysis, edits the bulletins. Marilyn Marbrook, publications unit chief, administers their production, assisted by Julie A. Ferguson. The author of this bulletin is Michael R. Rand.

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Because the estimates in this bulletin are derived from sample survey data, they are subject to sampling variation.<sup>5</sup> The techniques used to derive the estimates produce standard errors about 8% higher than those for a victimization estimate with the same base and rate. The estimates are also subject to respondent errors. Examples are crimes that are forgotten or withheld from the interviewer. Respondent errors tend to understate the number of households touched by crime.<sup>6</sup>

This bulletin, as did its predecessor, Households Touched by Crime 1981, examined aspects of the indicator not covered in the original bulletin, The Prevalence of Crime. That first bulletin examined only the characteristics of households touched by crime. The second bulletin began to explore other areas such as comparison of

<sup>5</sup>Details of the NCS sample design, the standard error computation, and the customary estimation procedure for victimization rates and counts may be found in appendix III of the BJS report Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1980, NCJ-84015, June 1983.

<sup>6</sup>A more detailed description of the procedures used to estimate households touched by crime appears in an unpublished memorandum prepared by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The memorandum is available on request from the author at BJS.

victimization risk to other life events, the percent of households touched by crime during a multiyear period, and a topic further discussed in this bulletin, multiple victimization of households. In future years, additional characteristics of the households-touched-by-crime indicator will be examined.

Eventually estimates may be devised to show how often a household is touched by crime during a longer span of time. For example, how many of the households among the 29% touched by crime in 1982 were also among those touched by crime in 1981 and in previous years? Is a household touched by a crime of violence more than once in a single year likely to have several members who were victims or one member who was victimized several times? The answers to these and other questions about the prevalence of crime should do much to increase our knowledge of how crime is distributed among its victims.

#### Further reading

To be added to the mailing list for bulletins or National Crime Survey reports or to obtain a copy of BJS reports referenced in this bulletin, write to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Box 6000, Rockville, Md. 20850, telephone (301) 251-5595. 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 1240, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106, telephone (313) 764-5199.

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