



# Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin

# Households Touched by Crime, 1988

NCJRS  
SEP 15 1988

A fourth of the 93 million households in the United States were touched by a crime of violence or theft in 1988, the same proportion that were touched by crime during each of the previous 3 years. The estimate remained at the lowest level since 1975, the first year it was available, when a third of American households were touched by crime. No measurable difference existed between 1987 and 1988 in the percentage of households touched by any of the crimes measured: rape, robbery, assault, personal theft, household burglary, household theft, and motor vehicle theft (table 1).

A household refers both to a dwelling unit like a house or an apartment and to the people who live in it. A household touched by crime during a year meets one of the following criteria:

- It fell victim to a burglary, auto theft, or household theft.
- A household member age 12 or older was raped, robbed, or assaulted.
- A household member age 12 or older experienced a personal theft.

The crimes include attempted as well as completed offenses and crimes not reported to the police as well as those reported. They are measured by the National Crime Survey (NCS), the source of this bulletin.

Five percent of the Nation's households had a member age 12 or older who was the victim of a violent crime during 1988. Five percent of all households experienced at least one burglary during the year, and 17% had a completed or attempted theft.

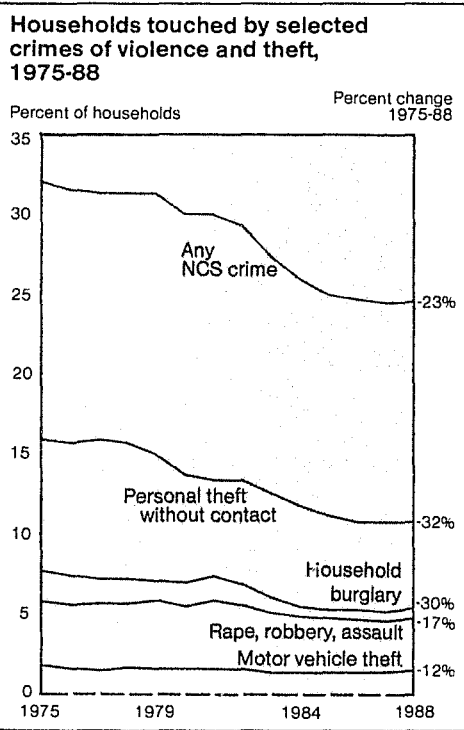


Figure 1

In 1988, as in previous years, households with higher incomes, households in urban areas, and black households were more vulnerable to crime than others. During 1988, 27% of households with incomes of \$25,000 or more, 29% of black households, and 30% of urban households were touched by crime. Hispanic households continued to be more vulnerable to crime than non-Hispanic households, and households in the West continued to have the highest proportion of households touched by crime (30%), while the Northeast had the lowest (19%). Twenty-five percent of

## ACQUISITIONS

June 1989

Twenty-three million U.S. households during 1988 experienced a theft or burglary or had a member who was raped, robbed, or assaulted. Just as in 1985 through 1987, 1 in 4 households were touched by theft or a violent crime.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics for 9 years has reported on the fraction of households touched by crime — tracing its decline from a third of all households in 1975 to the current level of a fourth. Based on data from the National Crime Survey (NCS), the indicator measures the dispersion of crime in our society. It helps us to understand the extent to which crime affects the households of different races, ethnic groups, sizes, and income levels as well as households in separate U.S. regions and rural-suburban-urban categories.

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Acting Director

households in the Midwest and 24% of households in the South were touched by crime in 1988.

### Trends

The percentage of all households touched by crime has never shown a year-to-year increase since the inception of the indicator in 1975 (figure 1). The period 1975 to

**Table 1. Households touched by crime, 1988, and relative percent change since 1987**

Households	1987		1988		Relative percent change 1987-88*
	Number of households	Percent	Number of households	Percent	
Total	81,391,000	100.0%	92,892,000	100.0%	
Touched by:					
Any NCS crime	22,404,000	24.5%	22,844,000	24.6%	.3%
Violent crime	4,248,000	4.6	4,482,000	4.8	3.8
Rape	114,000	.1	141,000	.2	21.6
Robbery	803,000	1.0	872,000	.9	-5.0
Assault	3,429,000	3.8	3,676,000	4.0	5.5
Aggravated	1,282,000	1.4	1,418,000	1.5	8.8
Simple	2,408,000	2.6	2,502,000	2.7	2.2
Total theft	16,085,000	17.6%	16,182,000	17.4%	-1.0%
Personal	10,188,000	11.1	10,390,000	11.2	.3
with contact	447,000	.5	432,000	.5	-4.9
without contact	9,853,000	10.8	10,038,000	10.8	.2
Household	7,301,000	8.0	7,174,000	7.7	-3.3
Burglary	4,747,000	5.2	5,049,000	5.4	4.7
Motor vehicle theft	1,337,000	1.5	1,431,000	1.5	5.3
Crimes of high concern (a rape, robbery, or assault by a stranger or a burglary)	6,792,000	7.4%	7,190,000	7.7%	4.1%

Note: Estimates for 1987 differ slightly from those published in *Households Touched by Crime, 1987* (see Methodology). Detail does not add to total because of overlap in households touched by various

crimes. Relative percent change is based on unrounded figures.  
\* No change was statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

1985 was one of decreasing household vulnerability to crime. Since 1985 the percentage of households touched by crime has remained unchanged (table 2). The lack of change, however, masks differing trends for urban and rural households and for white and black households.

Since 1986 the percentage of urban households victimized has risen from 28% to 30%, while that for rural households has fallen from 20% to 18%. White households have become less vulnerable to crime since 1985, while black households have become more vulnerable (figure 2). Although the percentage of black households touched by crime has increased marginally since 1985, in 1988 it remained well below the percentage touched in 1975. However, black households had a much smaller relative decrease between 1975 and 1988 than did white households, their proportion of households touched by crime declining by 11%, compared to a 25% decline for white households. The overall difference in the trends for white and black households was caused primarily by differences in the trends for crimes of theft.

### 1987-88 comparisons

American households overall were as vulnerable to crime in 1988 as they had been in 1987. Moreover, except for households in central cities, which were less likely to be touched by crime in 1988 than in 1987, the indicator was stable between the 2 years for all demographic groupings examined: race, household income, size of household, ethnicity, and region.

**Households touched by selected crimes, by race of household head, 1975-88**

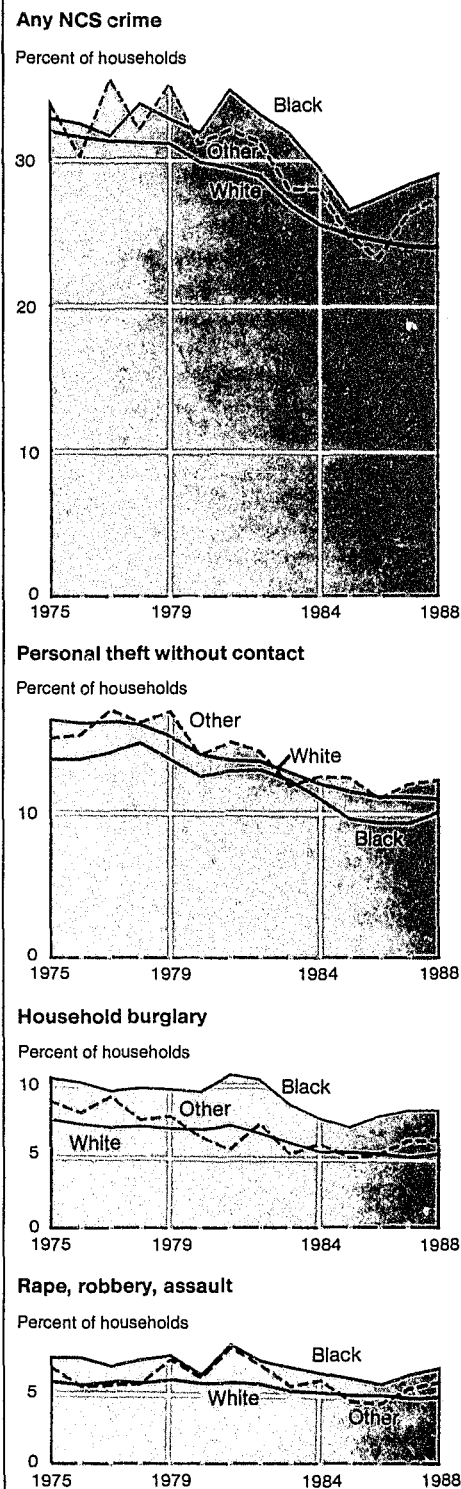


Figure 2

**Table 2. Percent of households touched by crime, by type of crime, 1975-88**

Percent of households touched by:	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Any NCS crime	32.0%	31.5%	31.3%	31.3%	31.3%	30.0%	30.0%	29.3%	27.4%	26.0%	25.0%	24.7%	24.5%	24.6%
Violent crime	5.8%	5.6%	5.7%	5.7%	5.9%	5.5%	5.9%	5.6%	5.1%	5.0%	4.8%	4.7%	4.6%	4.8%
Rape	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.1	.2	.1	.1	.1	.2
Robbery	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.1	1.0	.9	.9	1.0	.9
Assault	4.5	4.4	4.7	4.6	4.8	4.4	4.7	4.5	4.2	4.1	4.0	3.8	3.8	4.0
Personal theft	16.4	16.2	16.3	16.2	15.4	14.2	13.9	13.9	13.0	12.3	11.5	11.2	11.1	11.2
Household theft	10.2	10.3	10.2	9.9	10.8	10.4	10.2	9.6	8.9	8.5	8.1	8.0	8.0	7.7
Burglary	7.7	7.4	7.2	7.2	7.1	7.0	7.4	6.9	6.1	5.5	5.3	5.3	5.2	5.4
Motor vehicle theft	1.8	1.6	1.5	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.5
Households touched by crime (in millions)	23.377	23.504	23.741	24.277	24.730	24.222	24.863	24.989	23.621	22.806	22.191	22.201	22.404	22.844
Households in U.S. (in millions)	73.123	74.528	75.904	77.578	78.964	80.622	82.797	85.178	86.146	87.791	88.852	90.014	91.391	92.892

Note: Detail does not add to total because of overlap in households touched by various crimes. The esti-

mates for 1987 differ slightly from last year's report (see Methodology).

**Race and ethnicity of household**

In 1988 black households were measurably more vulnerable to crime than were white households (table 3).<sup>1</sup> Black households suffered, proportionately, a larger amount of violent crime and household theft than did white households and had a somewhat higher percentage for assault. For the first time in the history of the indicator, white households were not more likely than black households to have a member victimized by personal theft. Households of other races — Asians, Pacific Islanders and Native Americans — were somewhat more susceptible to crime than white households.

Hispanic households were more likely than non-Hispanic households to have been touched by crime in 1988 because of their greater susceptibility to robbery, burglary, household theft, and motor vehicle theft. Hispanic and non-Hispanic households had similar vulnerability to assault and personal theft.

<sup>1</sup>For this analysis, the race of the household is considered to be that of the household head.

**Table 3. Percent of households touched by crime, by race and ethnicity of household head, 1988**

Percent of households touched by:	Race of household head			Ethnicity of household head	
	White	Black	Other	Non-Hispanic	Hispanic
Any NCS crime	23.9%	29.0%	27.4%	24.3%	30.0%
Violent crime	4.6%	6.6%	5.6%	4.7%	6.5%
Rape	.1	.4	.3	.2	.2
Robbery	.8	2.0	1.2	.9	1.9
Assault	3.9	4.6	4.5	3.9	4.8
Aggravated	1.4	2.3	1.9	1.5	2.0
Simple	2.7	2.6	2.9	2.7	3.0
Total theft	17.3%	18.2%	18.5%	17.3%	20.0%
Personal	11.2	10.6	12.8	11.2	11.1
Household	7.5	9.2	7.5	7.5	10.7
Burglary	5.1	8.1	6.0	5.3	6.7
Motor vehicle theft	1.3	2.9	2.5	1.5	2.6
Serious violent crime <sup>a</sup>	2.2%	4.5%	3.1%	2.4%	3.9%
Crimes of high concern <sup>b</sup>	7.3%	10.8%	8.1%	7.6%	10.4%

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

<sup>a</sup>A rape, robbery, or assault by a stranger or a burglary.

<sup>b</sup>Rape, robbery, or aggravated assault.

**Table 4. Percent of households touched by crime, by selected characteristics, 1988**

Percent of households touched by:	Annual family income				Place of residence <sup>a</sup>			Region			
	Under \$7,500	\$7,500-\$14,999	\$15,000-\$24,999	\$25,000 or more	Urban	Suburban	Rural	North-east	Mid-west	South	West
	Any NCS crime	23.2%	22.8%	23.9%	27.1%	30.3%	23.8%	18.0%	19.0%	24.9%	24.4%
Violent crime	6.4	5.1	4.8	4.3	6.4	4.4	3.5	3.6	5.0	4.6	6.2
Rape	.4	.2	.1	.1	.3	.1	.1	.1	.2	.2	.2
Robbery	1.4	1.0	.9	.6	1.7	.7	.3	1.0	.8	.9	1.2
Assault	5.0	4.2	3.9	3.7	4.7	3.8	3.1	2.7	4.2	3.8	5.1
Aggravated	2.0	1.9	1.4	1.3	1.9	1.4	1.2	.8	1.6	1.6	2.0
Simple	3.3	2.6	2.7	2.7	3.1	2.7	2.1	2.0	2.9	2.5	3.5
Total theft	14.7%	14.8%	16.8%	20.6%	21.0%	17.3%	12.4%	13.0%	18.0%	17.0%	22.1%
Personal	8.1	8.6	10.5	14.1	12.8	11.8	7.7	8.9	11.6	11.0	13.4
Household	8.0	7.5	7.8	8.1	10.2	7.0	5.6	5.1	7.7	7.4	11.0
Burglary	7.2	6.1	5.1	4.8	7.0	4.7	4.6	3.9	5.3	5.9	6.4
Motor vehicle theft	.9	1.4	1.5	1.8	2.2	1.6	.5	1.4	1.4	1.4	2.1
Serious violent crime <sup>b</sup>	3.7%	2.9%	2.4%	2.0%	3.8%	2.1%	1.6%	1.8%	2.5%	2.5%	3.2%
Crimes of high concern <sup>c</sup>	9.7%	8.2%	7.4%	7.2%	10.3%	6.9%	5.8%	5.8%	7.6%	8.0%	9.4%

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

<sup>a</sup>These estimates are not comparable to estimates for place of residence prior to 1986 because of changes in geographic classification (see footnote 3).

<sup>c</sup>A rape, robbery, or assault by a stranger, or a burglary.

<sup>b</sup>Rape, robbery, or aggravated assault.

**Family Income**

Households with higher incomes were more susceptible to crimes involving theft and less susceptible to crimes involving violence than were lower income households. Overall, because theft comprises almost two-thirds of all criminal victimizations measured by the NCS, the percentage of households with higher incomes that were touched by crime in 1988 was greater than the percentage of lower income households touched by crime (table 4). Households with incomes of at least \$25,000 were more than 1 1/2 times as likely to have experienced a personal theft as were households with incomes below \$7,500. Despite differing risks for personal theft, households at all income levels appeared equally susceptible to household theft.

Households earning less than \$15,000 experienced violent crimes and burglary to a greater degree than did households in higher income categories.

**Place of residence**

In 1988 households in urban areas continued to be the most likely and those in rural areas continued to be the least likely to be touched by crime. For most types of crime, the vulnerability of suburban households fell between that of urban and rural households. However, urban and suburban households did not differ measurably

in the percentage that suffered personal theft without contact. Suburban and rural households did not differ in the degree to which they were burglarized or had members who were victims of aggravated assault.

In 1988, 1 in 57 urban households had a member who was the victim of a robbery, compared with 1 in 149 suburban households and 1 in 303 rural households.

**Region**

As in the 2 previous years, during 1988 households in the Northeast were the least vulnerable to crime (19%), while those in the West were the most vulnerable (30%). Twenty-five percent of midwestern households and 24% of southern households were touched by crime.

The pattern of the Northeast's being lower and the West's being higher than the Midwest and South was true for most crimes measured. Some exceptions did exist. Northeastern, midwestern, and southern households had no measurable regional differences in the percentages of those touched by robbery or motor vehicle theft. Households in the Midwest were somewhat more likely than households in the South to have a member who suffered a simple assault, a crime that does not involve a weapon or a serious injury. Finally, the percentage of western households burglarized, while being higher than

the percentages in the Northeast and Midwest, was not measurably higher than that in the South.

**Size of household**

In general, the more people in a household, the greater is its vulnerability to crime (table 5). This tendency is more pronounced for personal crimes than for household crimes because larger households have more members at risk for personal crimes, but each household, regardless of size, is at risk for household crimes.

Vulnerability to personal crime victimization generally does not increase at a rate proportional to increases in household size. For example, in 1988 the percentage of six-or-more-person households touched

**Table 5. Percent of households touched by selected crimes, by size of household, 1988**

Percent of households touched by:	Number of persons in household			
	1	2-3	4-5	6+
Any NCS crime	17.1%	24.3%	31.9%	37.9%
Violent crime	3.0%	4.4%	6.9%	10.7%
Total theft	10.8	17.4	23.5	27.8
Personal	6.6	11.3	15.4	17.3
Household	4.9	7.5	10.5	13.7
Burglary	4.8	5.4	6.1	7.0
Motor vehicle theft	1.2	1.5	1.9	2.4

by personal theft was about 2 1/2 times that of one-person households.

One reason why personal crime victimization is not simply proportional to household size is that many households with two or more members include children under 12 years of age. Crimes against such young children are not included in the measurement of households touched by crime.<sup>2</sup> In addition, differences in demographic characteristics and lifestyles among different size households will affect the degree to which they are touched by crime because both of these factors are related to crime vulnerability.

The relationship between household size and vulnerability to crime shown in past years also held for 1988:

- Fewer than 1 in 5 single-person households were touched by crime, compared with 2 in 5 households with six or more persons.
- Households with six or more members were about 4 times more likely than single-person households to be touched by violent crime (11% vs. 3%) and 2 1/2 times more likely to be touched by personal or household theft (28% vs. 11%).

As in previous years, the percentages of households of different sizes touched by crime varied least for burglary. In 1988, 5% of single-person households were burglarized one or more times, compared to 7% of households with six or more members.

### Crimes of high concern

In 1988, 1 in 13 households in the Nation were burglarized or had a member who was the victim of a violent crime (rape, robbery, or assault) committed by a stranger. These crimes, which many people consider the most threatening, have been designated "crimes of high concern" in this report.

In 1988 black, low-income, and urban households were most likely to be victims of crimes of high concern (figure 3). By

<sup>2</sup>Crimes against children under age 12 are excluded from the National Crime Survey because asking sensitive questions about victimization might be stressful to the child or the parents, possibly discouraging adult participation in the survey.

region, the percentage of households touched by a crime of high concern was largest in the West; the percentages in the Midwest and South were about equal, and both were larger than the percentage for the Northeast.

From 1981, when 11% of all households were touched by a crime of high concern, until 1985, when 8% of all households were so victimized, the percentage of households touched by such crime decreased yearly. Since 1985 the percentage of households touched by a crime of high concern has not changed measurably.

### Race and crime seriousness

In 1988 black households were not only more vulnerable to crime than white households but were also more likely, if victimized, to be victimized by a serious violent crime or a crime of high concern. In 1988, 16% of the black households that were touched by crime had a member victimized by a rape, robbery, or aggravated assault, while 9% of white households touched by crime had a member who suffered one of these crimes. Similarly, 37% of black households touched by crime, compared to 31% of white households touched by crime, were victims of crimes of high concern.

### Factors affecting trends

Population movements and changes in household composition have undoubtedly affected the overall downward trend that the households-touched-by-crime indicator has shown since 1975.

American society is extremely mobile. For some time the population has been moving away from the Northeast and Midwest into the South and West as well as away from urban areas into suburban and rural areas. In 1975, 50% of the U.S. population lived in the Northeast or Midwest, compared to 45% in 1987. Between 1975 and 1985 the percentage of households located in urban areas fell from 32% to 29% of all households, while suburban and rural households increased from 68% to 71% of all American households.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Estimates of households in urban, suburban, and rural areas for 1986-88 are not comparable to those of previous years. Geographic codes for 1986 through 1988 estimates are based on 1980 census definitions, and estimates for earlier years are based on 1970 census definitions.

Households touched by crimes of high concern, by race of household head, 1981-88

(A rape, robbery, or assault by a stranger or a household burglary)

Percent of households

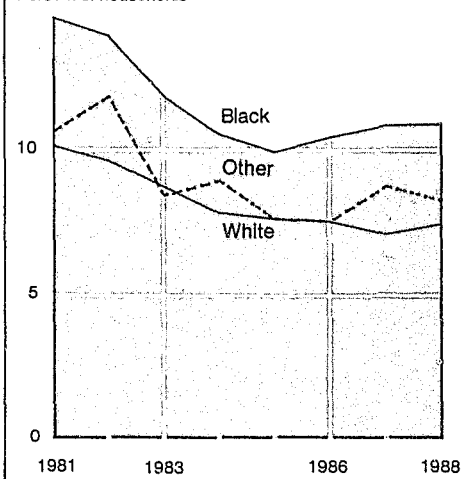


Figure 3

People are constantly moving into and out of different households, creating new households, and merging existing households. During the 1975-88 period the average American household decreased in size. One-person households represented 21% of all households in 1975 but 25% in 1988. The percentage of households containing six or more persons fell from 7% to 3% during this period.

Two of these movements shift population from households more vulnerable to crime — larger ones and those in urban areas — to those less vulnerable — smaller ones and those in suburban or rural areas. The third movement has shifted the population in the opposite direction, from the Northeast, a region with a lower likelihood of crime, to the West, where a higher proportion of households experience crime.

While current data do not permit measurement of the degree to which all population movements have affected the indicator, estimates can be made for the effect of changes in household size. If the size distribution of American households were the same in 1988 as in 1975, then the estimate of households touched by crime would have been 25.5% rather than 24.6%.<sup>4</sup> This adjusted estimate, however, is still significantly below the 1975 estimate of 32% of households touched by crime.

<sup>4</sup>This analysis assumes that in each category of household size the percentage of households touched by crime in 1988 would be unchanged, given the size distribution for all households that existed in 1975.

## Methodology

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) developed the households-touched-by-crime indicator in 1981 to improve our understanding of the impact of crime on our society.<sup>5</sup> The household was chosen as the unit of analysis because crimes such as burglary are crimes against an entire household and crimes against persons affect not only the victim but also members of the victim's household.

Households-touched-by-crime estimates are derived from NCS statistics on rape, personal robbery, assault, household burglary, personal and household theft, and motor vehicle theft.<sup>6</sup> Because the NCS counts only crimes for which the victim can be interviewed, homicide is not counted. Its exclusion does not noticeably affect the estimates. If each of the homicides during 1988 had touched a different household and if these households had been touched by no other crime (the largest possible effect), then the inclusion of homicides in these findings would not have raised the overall percent of households touched by crime (24.6%) by as much as .05%.<sup>7</sup>

Other crimes against persons or their households, such as fraud, confidence games, kidnaping, and arson, are not included in this analysis because they are not measured by the NCS.

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

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 were burglarized twice and one of its members

(robbed once during the year, it is counted once for households touched by burglary even 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.

Consequently, the households-touched-by-crime estimate for 1988 (24.6%) is less than the sum of the estimates for households touched by personal crimes (14.7%) and those touched by household crimes (13.4%) because 3.4% of U.S. households were victims of both personal and household crimes. Similarly, because about 1.3% of the U.S. households were touched by both personal theft and violence, the sum of households touched by personal theft (11.2%) and those touched by violence (4.8%) exceeds the estimate of those touched by personal crime (14.7%).

All data in this bulletin are from the NCS except those specifically attributed to other sources. The NCS is an ongoing survey conducted for BJS by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Interviews are conducted at 6-month intervals with all occupants age 12 or older in about 49,000 housing units (99,000 persons). Because the NCS does not obtain information about crimes against persons under age 12, households experiencing only such crimes are not included in the estimate of households touched by crime.

Beginning in 1987, about 5% of the NCS sample has been interviewed through computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). In CATI an interviewer enters responses directly into a computer rather than on a printed form. Previous NCS reports excluded data from CATI households, pending study of the effects of the new procedures. This report incorporates CATI data for both 1987 and 1988. For this reason, estimates for 1987 in this report differ slightly from those published in *Households touched by crime, 1987*.

The estimates in this bulletin are derived from sample survey data, and they are subject to sampling variation.<sup>8</sup> Because the procedure used to produce estimates of households touched by crime differs

from that for victimization rates, the households-touched data have standard errors about 8% higher than those for victimization rates with the same population bases, even though they are derived from the same sample survey.

Comparisons presented in this report were determined to be statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, meaning that the estimated difference is greater than twice the standard error. Statements of comparison qualified by language such as "slightly" or "somewhat" indicate statistical significance at the 90% level (1.6 standard errors).

The estimates are also subject to response errors, including crimes that are forgotten or withheld from the interviewer. Such response errors tend to cause understated counts of households touched by crime.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</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 from the author, Michael Rand, c/o Bureau of Justice Statistics, 633 Indiana Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20531, telephone (202) 724-7774.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletins are prepared principally by the staff of BJS. Michael R. Rand wrote this bulletin. Thomas Hester edited it. Marilyn Marbrook, publications unit chief, administered production, assisted by Marianne Zawitz, Tina Dorsey, Priscilla Middleton, Jeanne Harris, Yvonne Boston and Jayne Pugh.

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The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the following program offices and bureaus: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and Office for Victims of Crime.

<sup>6</sup>The prevalence of crime, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-75905, March 1981.

<sup>7</sup>These crimes are defined in *Measuring crime*, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-75710, February 1981. As used in this report, the term "theft" is synonymous with the term "larceny" used in previous reports.

<sup>8</sup>Preliminary estimates for 1988 indicate that homicides increased by 3% from the 20,096 that occurred in 1987 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reports, 1988).

<sup>9</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 *Criminal victimization in the United States, 1986*, NCJ-111456, August 1988, Appendix III.

## Bureau of Justice Statistics reports

(revised August 1989)

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- Privacy and security of criminal history information and information policy
- Federal statistics (annual)
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Public-use tapes of BJS data sets and other criminal justice data are available from the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (formerly CJAIN), P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 (toll-free 1-800-999-0960).

## National Crime Survey

**Criminal victimization in the U.S.:**

- 1987 (final report), NCJ-115524, 6/89
- 1986 (final report), NCJ-111456, 9/88
- 1985 (final report), NCJ-104273, 5/87

**BJS special reports:**

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