



OBJECTIVES

- Understand the strengths and weaknesses of the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS).
- Explain the relationship between UCR and NCVS data.
- Outline how self-report studies add to our understanding of criminality.
- Know what the “dark figure of crime” is and how it affects estimates of criminality.
- Describe the prevalence and incidence of crime in the United States.
- Identify the differences and similarities among juvenile, white-collar, and senior citizen offenders.
- Understand the nature and extent of the criminal victimization experienced by infants, teenagers, college students, senior citizens, and intimate partners.
- Explain how crime victims are a part of the criminal justice system.

Crime, Offenders, and Victims

CHAPTER

3

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THINKING ABOUT CRIME AND JUSTICE



When college students are asked to estimate the number of crimes they have committed in the past year (generally acts such as underage drinking, vandalism, or shoplifting) and create a ratio of their criminal activity to their arrests, the results may be surprising—ratios like 150:0 and 500:1 are not uncommon. Prison interviews show that many offenders have committed nearly 10,000 crimes each year with only a minimum number of arrests. This discrepancy should be cause for alarm, as demonstrated by the case of Coral Eugene Watts.

Watts was arrested in May 1982 in Houston, Texas, for attempting to murder two women after breaking into their homes. Watts was suspected to be responsible for 12 additional murders in Texas and Michigan, but authorities believed that they did not have enough evidence to convict him of those

crimes. Texas prosecutors offered Watts immunity from prosecution for the 12 murders in exchange for a guilty plea to the charge of burglary with intent to murder and a 60-year prison sentence. Watts accepted the deal.

After Watts served 22 years in prison, he became eligible for conditional release, even though he openly admitted that he would kill upon release and confessed to committing between 40 and 80 murders in the past. Michigan authorities quickly mobilized an investigation before Watts could be released. In December 2004, Watts was convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment, thereby averting the release of a serial killer.

- What do the common ratios of criminal activity to arrests suggest about crime statistics?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of using arrests and self-reports to calculate the prevalence of crime?

Source: Rachael Bell, "Coral Eugene Watts: The Sunday Morning Slasher," available at http://www.crimelibrary.com/serial_killers/predators/coral_watts/, accessed March 5, 2007.

Introduction

Historically, crime has always been difficult to measure. Years ago, the economist Sir Josiah Stamp complained that crime statistics "come in the first instance from the village watchman, who just puts down what he damn pleases."¹ Even today, criminologists agree that public information about crime is not very accurate, in part because crime is both context- and time-specific. That is, behavior is evaluated differently depending on where and when it occurs. For example, in 1992, chewing gum was illegal in Singapore. This ban has since been relaxed but not entirely removed. Singaporeans today may purchase chewing gum only in a pharmacy and must submit their names and ID card numbers when buying it.² Another problem with crime data is that some people commit crimes relatively frequently but are never caught, whereas others may be arrested when committing their first offense. Thus arrest records do not always reflect a person's actual involvement in crime. To ease these problems, criminologists have developed multiple yardsticks that, when taken together, provide a respectable approximation of the extent and nature of criminality.

LINK The sticky crime of gum litterbugs in Europe is explored in "Around the Globe" in Chapter 1.

Two main measures of crime are distinguished: **official crime statistics**, which are based on the aggregate records of offenders and offenses processed by police, courts, and corrections agencies; and **unofficial crime statistics**, which are produced by people and agencies outside the criminal justice system. The majority of criminal statistics come from three sources: the URC, which is produced by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); the NCVS, which is produced by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics; and an unofficial measure—self-report studies.

Uniform Crime Reports

One of the earliest national measures of crime was the **Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)**.³ Since its inception in 1929, the UCR has collected statistics from local and state law enforcement agencies on Part I offenses, also known as **Crime Index** offenses, which include the violent crimes of murder and non-

negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and the property crimes of burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, and arson (the last of which was added in 1979) **TABLE 3-1**. In addition to crimes known to the police, the UCR provides information on number of arrests and characteristics of person arrested including the suspect's sex, race, and age. Today, the UCR represents a nationwide, cooperative effort involving roughly 17,000 law enforcement agencies (about 95 percent of all U.S. policing agencies) that voluntarily report data on crime to the FBI. Participation in the UCR program is not mandatory, however, so some state and local law enforcement agencies do not supply data. These omissions make it difficult for criminologists to assemble comprehensive crime data for the United States. In 2005, for instance, law enforcement agencies participating in the program represented approximately 296 million U.S. residents, or about 94 percent of the population. Thus crimes committed by 6 percent of the U.S. population (about 18 million people) were not included in UCR data.⁴ The data that law enforcement agencies willingly report to the FBI are published annually in a report titled *Crime in the United States*.

Problems with UCR Data

While UCR data certainly represent an improvement over the village watchmen's haphazard guesses, there are still several criticisms about the data's accuracy:

The UCR reports only crimes known to the police. Because a high percentage of crime victims do not report their experiences to law enforcement agencies participating in the UCR program, the data that are reported underestimate both the incidence (number of crimes committed) and the prevalence (number of offenders) of crime. Victims tend to not report crime for a variety of reasons, including that they consider the crime to be a private or personal matter, they do not think it is important enough, or they fear reprisal. Because most crime is not reported to the police, there is a large gap between the actual number of crimes committed and the number of crimes reported to the police. The **dark figure of crime** is the term used by criminologists to describe the amount of unreported or undiscovered crime, which calls into question the reliability of UCR data. For instance, the UCR does not report drug offenses or information on federal crimes, including insurance fraud and tax evasion, as "known" crimes.⁵

The UCR reports on only the most serious crime incident. The information reported in the UCR is based

TABLE 3-1

UCR Serious Criminal Offenses

Beginning in 2004, the UCR no longer reports a Crime Index; rather, it simply provides data on the number of people arrested and crimes known to the law enforcement agencies for the following eight categories of serious violent and property crimes.

Serious Violent Crimes

Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter—the willful killing of one person by another

Forcible rape—the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will

Robbery—the taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear

Aggravated assault—the unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury

Serious Property Crimes

Burglary—the unlawful entry into a structure to commit a felony or theft

Larceny-theft—the unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of others

Motor vehicle theft—the theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle

Arson—any willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn, with or without intent to defraud, a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle or aircraft, or the personal property of another

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2006* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).

on the **hierarchy rule**: For a single crime incident in which multiple offenses were committed, only the most serious offense is reported. (Arson is an exception; it is always reported to the FBI.) Thus, if an offender robs and murders a victim, only the murder is reported. The hierarchy rule also affects international crime rate comparisons because many other countries include each crime in a multiple-offenses incident in their statistics.

The UCR does not collect all relevant data. The UCR collects crime details about the victim, the offender, and the circumstance only for homicide cases. The types of weapons used are gathered only for murder, robbery, and aggravated assault. Weapons used

in forcible rape are not reported, and data for rapes include only female victims. (Forcible rape of a male victim is recorded as aggravated assault.)

The UCR reveals more about police behavior than it does about criminality. Some law enforcement agencies falsify the reports they submit to the FBI. Once a citizen reports a crime, police must make an official record for the crime to be counted in the UCR. Sometimes, however, law enforcement officers do not complete a crime report. For example, in Atlanta, crimes that were reported to police were not recorded for a number of years to help the city land the 1996 Olympic Games and boost tourism. In 2002, researchers discovered more than 22,000 missing police reports that never were submitted to the FBI. Those reports included more than 4000 violent offenses that were committed but never counted.⁶ The National Center for Policy Analysis also has discovered that police agencies in Boca Raton (Florida), New York, and Philadelphia have systematically underreported or downgraded crimes in their cities. Both individual officers and police departments may take these steps in response to the extreme pressure they face on a daily basis to demonstrate that they are doing their job. The findings from the National Center for Policy Analysis lend credence to research conducted by Donald Black, who discovered that police filed a crime report in only 64 percent of crimes where no suspect was present, even though a complainant had reported the crime to law enforcement.⁷

In spite of these criticisms, the UCR continues to be widely used and remains the primary source of national estimates of the nature and extent of criminality in the United States. Although there are certainly flaws in the UCR data, the data are still stable enough to provide trend data on changes over the years. Ultimately, the mass of research accumulated over many years provides basic support regarding the validity of the UCR.⁸

Reforming the UCR

Efforts are continuously underway to improve the reliability and validity of official statistics. For instance, recognizing the need for more detailed crime statistics, law enforcement called for a thorough evaluative analysis that would modernize the UCR program. In 1982, these studies led to the creation and implementation of the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).⁹

The NIBRS is currently a component of the UCR program and is expected to eventually replace it. The

NIBRS differs from the UCR in several significant ways **TABLE 3-2**. For example, the NIBRS collects data on each single incident and arrest. When a crime becomes known to the police, information is then gathered for the following categories: the crime incident, the victim, the nature of the property, and the characteristics of the arrested suspect. A total of 53 data elements are recorded for crimes in 22 categories **TABLE 3-3**.

Data produced by NIBRS are of significant benefit to local agencies. When they have access to such comprehensive crime data, local police agencies may be more effective in making arguments for acquiring and then effectively allocating the resources needed to respond to crime.¹⁰ Although only about 36 percent (about 6500) of all U.S. law enforcement agencies currently report data to the NIBRS, it is expected that over the next few years the number of participating agencies will increase dramatically.¹¹

In addition to the creation of the NIBRS, another important change to the UCR occurred in 2004 when the FBI discontinued use of the Crime Index. The original purpose of the Crime Index was to indicate whether overall serious crime was increasing or decreasing in the United States. Today, only the number of serious violent and serious property crimes known to and reported to the police is included in *Crime in the United States*.¹²

National Crime Victimization Survey

Victimization surveys, which ask victims of crime about their experiences, were first developed in the late 1960s, partly in response to the inability of the UCR to provide accurate estimates of the dark figure of crime. Like the NIBRS, victim surveys gather specific information about such crime characteristics as when and where the crime occurred, whether a weapon was used, and whether there was any known relationship between victim and offender.¹³

The first nationwide victimization survey was conducted by the National Opinion Research Center in 1967, which contacted 10,000 households. Interviewers asked a knowledgeable person in each household a few short screening questions that were used to determine whether a member of the household had been a crime victim during the preceding year. Surprisingly, survey results showed that the victimization rate reported for Crime Index offenses was greater than twice the rate reported in the UCR.¹⁴

TABLE 3-2

Differences Between UCR and NIBRS Data

	UCR	NIBRS
Offenses reported	Part I offenses (8 crimes)	Group A offenses (22 crimes)
Rape	Female victims only	Male and female victims
Attempted versus completed offenses	Does not differentiate	Does differentiate
Multiple-offenses crime incidents	Hierarchy rule: reports only the most serious offense	All offenses are reported
Weapons	Recorded only for cases of murder, robbery, and aggravated assault	All weapons data are recorded
Crime categories	Crimes against persons (e.g., murder, rape, and aggravated assault) Crimes against property (e.g., robbery, burglary, and larceny—theft)	Crimes against persons Crimes against property Crimes against society (e.g., drug or narcotic offenses)

TABLE 3-3

NIBRS Serious Criminal Offenses

The following offense categories, known as *Group A Offenses*, are those for which extensive crime data are collected in the NIBRS:

1. Arson
2. Assault offenses: aggravated assault, simple assault, intimidation
3. Bribery
4. Burglary/breaking and entering
5. Counterfeiting/forgery
6. Destruction/damage/vandalism of property
7. Drug/narcotic offenses: drug/narcotic violations, drug equipment violations
8. Embezzlement
9. Extortion/blackmail
10. Fraud offenses: false pretenses/swindle/confidence game, credit card/automatic teller machine fraud, impersonation, welfare fraud, wire fraud
11. Gambling offenses: betting/wagering, operating/promoting/assisting gambling, gambling equipment violations, sports tampering
12. Homicide offenses: murder and non-negligent manslaughter, negligent manslaughter, justifiable homicide
13. Kidnapping/abduction
14. Larceny/theft offenses: pocket picking, purse snatching, shoplifting, theft from building, theft from coin-operated machine or device, theft from motor vehicle, theft of motor vehicle parts or accessories, all other larceny
15. Motor vehicle theft
16. Pornography/obscene material
17. Prostitution offenses: prostitution, assisting or promoting prostitution
18. Robbery
19. Sex offenses, forcible: forcible rape, forcible sodomy, sexual assault with an object, forcible fondling
20. Sex offenses, nonforcible: incest, statutory rape
21. Stolen property offenses (receiving, etc.)
22. Weapon law violations

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Developments in the National Incident-Based Reporting System* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2004).

In 1972, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics began the National Crime Survey, which was renamed the **National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)** in 1990; it is the most comprehensive and systematic survey of victims in the United States.¹⁵ The NCVS produces data on both personal and household crimes:

Personal Crimes

- Aggravated Assault
- Robbery
- Rape
- Sexual assault

Household Crimes

- Burglary
- Motor vehicle theft
- Theft

These seven offenses constitute the **crimes of interest**, so selected because victims are likely to report them to police and victims are usually able to recall them when questioned about them.

Approximately 134,000 people, representing about 77,000 houses, are interviewed each year for the NCVS. If the member of the household who was a victim was younger than age 12 at the time of the

crime, an older member of the household is asked to provide the information. A few screening questions are asked of each person interviewed. These screening questions are used to determine whether the interviewee was a victim of one or more of the crimes of interest; if so, additional questions are then asked.

In addition to providing better estimates on the dark figure of crime, NCVS data perform the following functions:

- The data help criminologists to better understand why so many victims do not report crime incidents to police.
- The data demonstrate that variations in crime reporting depend greatly on the type of offense, crime situation factors, the characteristics of the victim (e.g., his or her race, sex, and social class), and the nature of the victim–offender relationship.
- The data allow criminologists to establish theoretical explanations for how crime often results from social interactions between victims and offenders.¹⁶

Problems with NCVS Data

As with the UCR data, there are several criticisms about the NCVS:

The NCVS is limited in scope. Obviously, the small number of crimes of interest is a problem because they represent only a tiny fraction of all crimes committed. The majority of crimes committed in the United States involve alcohol and illegal drugs, and the many robberies, burglaries, and crimes committed against commercial establishments such as bars, businesses, and factories are not included in the NCVS.¹⁷ By excluding these and other crimes such as computer hacking, insider trading, and public order crimes (e.g., driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, illegal gambling, and prostitution), the NCVS provides data on only a small subset of all crime incidents. Also, because murder victims cannot be interviewed, the most serious of all crimes cannot be included in the survey.

Interview data may be unreliable. Because respondents do not have to meet legal or evidentiary standards to report crimes committed against them, NCVS data may overreport crimes that law enforcement would have considered unfounded and excluded from UCR data.

Additionally, because the NCVS is based on the answers that people give to questions regarding past and sometimes troublesome events, their responses are vulnerable to several types of biases:



Murder is not measured by the NCVS because the victim obviously cannot be interviewed.



Should the NCVS researchers interview family members of murder victims, a group known as “co-victims of homicide”? How could the NCVS further its understanding of homicide?

- *Memory errors*—difficulty recalling details about the event.
- *Telescoping*—difficulty remembering the time of the crime, because it may feel as though the event occurred more recently than it did given that the incident remains vivid in the interviewee's memory.
- *Errors of deception*—difficulty reporting events that are embarrassing, unpleasant, or self-incriminating. (Some people also fabricate crime incidents.)
- *Sampling error*—difficulty including populations outside of ordinary households and resolving discrepancies between sample estimates of behavior and the actual amount of behavior. For instance, because the sampling unit in the NCVS is households, homeless people, who are at greater risk of victimization, are excluded from the sample.¹⁸

In the 1990s, changes were made to the NCVS to increase the likelihood of respondents recalling events accurately. These changes included a variety of questions and cues designed to more accurately elicit the victims' memories of crime incidents. In addition, interviewers were asked more explicit questions about sexual victimizations. For instance, interviewees are now asked: "Have you been forced or coerced to engage in unwanted sexual activity by (1) someone you didn't know before, (2) a casual acquaintance, or (3) someone you know well?"

The first results from the redesigned survey were released in 1992. One of the most significant findings was that victims appeared to recall and report more types of crime incidents than respondents had in the past. This trend was particularly apparent for aggravated assault, rape, and simple assault.

Acclaim for the NCVS

Because NCVS data tend to match official crime reports, the survey helps to provide an understanding about the true magnitude of crime with greater confidence, validity, and reliability. When researchers Janet Lauritsen and Robin Schaum recently compared UCR and NCVS data for robbery, burglary, and aggravated assault in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York from 1980 to 1998, they found that for burglary and robbery, UCR crime rates were generally similar to NCVS estimates over the study period. Police and victim survey data were more likely to show discrepancies in levels and trends related to aggravated assault. Lauritsen and Schaum also found that even when UCR and NCVS

data were different, the differences were not statistically significant.¹⁹ In other words, the UCR and NCVS tell the same story about the extent of these three serious crimes. Indeed, for more than 30 years, criminologists have found that UCR and victimization data generally report similar results regarding the incidence of criminality in the United States.²⁰

Self-Report Surveys

Self-report surveys are an unofficial source of crime data. They provide criminologists with a method for collecting data without having to rely on government resources. In [self-report surveys](#), criminologists ask respondents to identify their own criminality during a specific time period, such as during the prior year. Self-report surveys have generally focused on juvenile crime because youths are more easily surveyed in schools, courts, detention centers, and correctional facilities and are more likely than adults to report their illegal behaviors. For more than 60 years, criminologists have consistently found that 85 to 90 percent of persons report having committed criminal behavior that could have led to their arrest had they been caught.²¹

The most comprehensive self-reported survey so far developed is the [National Youth Survey \(NYS\)](#).²² The NYS interviews a random sample of approximately 1700 youths who were between the ages of 11 and 17 when they were first interviewed. These youths were originally drawn from more than 100 communities around the country and are representative of the socioeconomic, race, and ethnicity of youths in the United States. The original sample has now been reporting on their criminal activity for more than 30 years.

Problems with Self-Report Surveys

While valuable sources of information, self-report surveys do have some problems:

Self-report survey data are not always reliable. When people are asked to tell strangers about their illegal acts, they may lie about their criminal involvement. In addition, many people forget, misunderstand, or distort their participation in crime. Typically, the most active criminals do not participate in self-report surveys because they are not likely to reveal themselves or their activities to strangers.²³

Self-report studies often exclude serious chronic offenders. Because many of these surveys sample college student populations, it is not surprising

that only a small amount of serious crime is detected. In fact, when Stephen Cernkovich and his colleagues compared the self-reported behavior of incarcerated youths and nonincarcerated youths, they discovered that self-report studies often focus on less serious, occasional offenders. These researchers observed significant differences in the offending patterns of the two groups, leading them to conclude that “institutionalized youth are not only more delinquent than the ‘average kid’ in the general population, but also considerably more delinquent than the most delinquent youth identified in the typical self-report.”²⁴

These concerns have inspired criminologists to develop methods to validate the findings from self-report studies. Findings from studies that employed such validity checks have provided general support of the self-report method. In a comprehensive review of the reliability and validity of self-reports, Michael Hindelang and his colleagues concluded that the difficulties of self-report instruments are surmountable and that the self-report method is not fundamentally flawed.²⁵ Thus, like the UCR and the NCVS, self-report studies provide criminologists with a variety of data for use in making generalizations about the nature and extent of crime in the United States.

Self-report studies typically discover trivial events. Studies often find an abundance of respondents who report stealing a small sum of money, using fake identification, occasionally smoking marijuana, and having premarital sex prior to age 18 (a crime in some states). These crimes do not help criminologists to better understand or construct policies to address the problem of crime.²⁶ Unfortunately, some criminologists who rely on self-report studies may lump together children who commit innocuous offenses with adjudicated delinquency and conclude, for instance, that there is no relationship between socioeconomic status and crime.

Acclaim for Self-Report Surveys

Self-report surveys provide criminologists with much information about crime. For example, they have established that more than 90 percent of all juveniles have committed at least one criminal act.²⁷ Similarly, these surveys have added to our awareness of the real extent of the dark figure of crime, pinning it down to somewhere between 4 and 10 times greater than the crime rate reported in the UCR. Finally, self-report research provides clear evidence of race, ethnic, and gender bias in the official processing of suspects.²⁸

Crime Statistics for the United States

There is no perfect measure of crime. Each method of unearthing crime data has both strengths and weaknesses. The best single source of data for estimating serious violent and property crimes is the UCR, which describes 1-year, 5-year, and 10-year trends. Reasonable estimates of less serious crimes can be derived from victimization surveys and self-report studies, although self-report studies are preferable for gauging drug offenses. All of these measures provide some useful information about crime in the United States. When the data from the various sources are merged, they provide criminologists with a much better understanding of the nature and extent of crime.

There are now more than 300 million people living in the United States, and the population is projected to increase in the coming decades (FIGURE 3-1). In this country, a serious violent crime is committed every 22 seconds, and a serious property crime is committed every 3 seconds (FIGURE 3-2).²⁹ In 2005, more than 1 million serious violent crimes and more than 10 million serious property crimes were reported to law enforcement agencies.³⁰ These figures represent a very conservative estimate of the amount of crime committed, however, because most crime is not reported to police.

Based on estimates derived from crime victim studies, from 1993 to 2003, on average, only 44 percent of serious violent crimes and 35 percent of

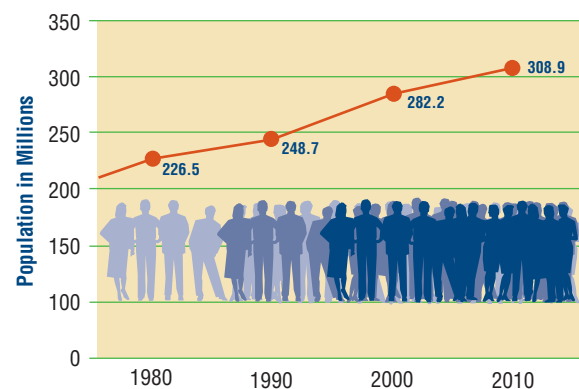


FIGURE 3-1 U.S. Population, 1980–2010

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2007* (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006), available at <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/>, accessed June 28, 2007.

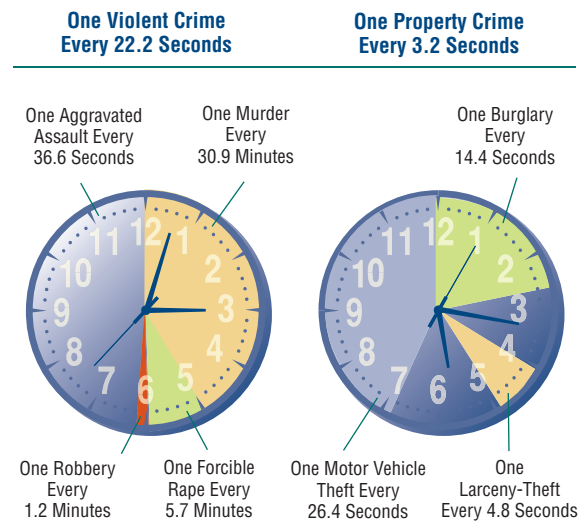


FIGURE 3-2 2006 UCR Crime Clock

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2006* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).

serious property crimes were reported to police. In addition, NCVS data published in 2007 indicate that Americans age 12 and older reported being the victims of more than 16 million property and violent victimizations. These criminal victimizations included more than 14 million property crimes and 3.3 mil-

lion violent crimes, and nearly 200,000 personal thefts.³¹ Yet, between 1994 and 2005, the overall U.S. crime rate dropped 34 percent, as did rates of violent and property crime **FIGURE 3-3**.

Several explanations for the lower crime rate in recent decades have been suggested, including the controversial idea that legalized abortion may have played a significant role (see “Focus on Criminal Justice”).³² Other explanations for the dramatic decrease in crime during the past decade include changes in the following areas:

- *The economy.* The lower crime rate may be tied to changes in the U.S. economy. During a recession, fewer youth-initiated crimes may occur because unemployed parents are more likely to stay home and supervise their children. In times of economic expansion, the economy might provide people with legitimate opportunities to earn money, making crime a less desirable option.
- *Prisons.* Policies designed to incarcerate a greater number of offenders for longer periods of time tend to reduce crime rates. For example, the U.S. incarceration rate increased from 313 inmates per 100,000 population in 1985 to 737 inmates per 100,000 population in 2005—a 135 percent increase over this 20-year span. The crime rate dropped by more than 25 percent during this same period.³³

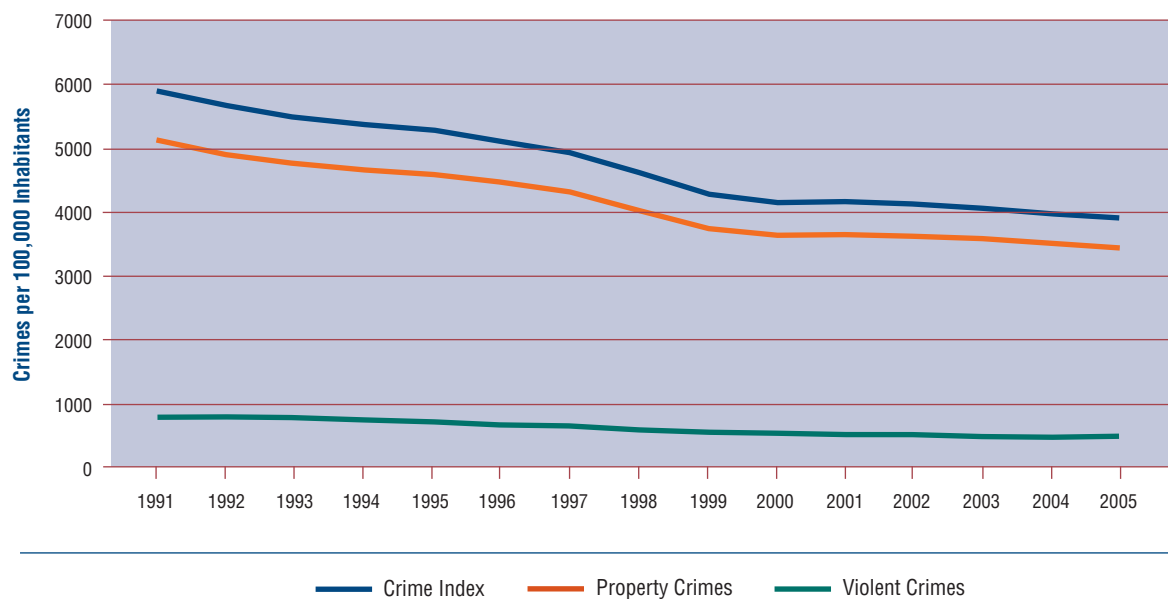


FIGURE 3-3 U.S. Crime Rate Index

Source: The Disaster Center, *U.S. Crime Rates, 1960–2005* (Washington, DC: Federal Emergency Disaster, 2006), available at <http://www.disastercenter.com/crime/uscrime.htm>, accessed May 24, 2007.

- **Policing.** Strengthened policing efforts may have led to a reduction in crime. Law enforcement has implemented more effective crime-controlling strategies, such as community policing, than in the past and assigned a larger number of officers to the streets to fight crime.
- **Age.** Changes in crime rates are closely related to changes in the age distribution of the population. Males between the ages of 20 and 39 are the most likely to commit crimes. When young males account for a smaller portion of the total population, it would seem to follow that there will be less crime.³⁴

Despite these correlated trends, criminologists do not know with certainty why the crime rate has

LINK Community policing, which is discussed in Chapter 6, brings together the police and the public in the fight against crime.

fallen over recent decades, although it ticked upward in both 2006 and 2007. Most likely, the decline in crime observed in recent years is the result of several of these factors being entangled in complex and as yet unknown ways.

Criminal Offenders

Data from the UCR, NCVS, and self-report studies have provided criminologists with an abundance of information about criminal offenders. For example, these sources show that 60 percent of all people who are arrested are between the ages of 19 and 39, even though this age group accounts for only 28 percent of the total U.S. population. With regard to race, about 13 percent of the U.S. population is African American, yet African Americans are arrested for 39 percent of serious violent crimes and 29 percent of serious property crimes. In terms of sex, about 49 percent of the U.S. population is male, but men are arrested for 82 percent of serious violent crimes and 68 percent of serious property crimes. Pulling the data together, the persons who are most likely to be arrested for both serious violent and serious property crimes are African American males between the ages of 19 and 39.³⁵

Offenders by Age

Age and crime are closely related. The **age-crime curve** **FIGURE 3-4** shows that crime rates increase during preadolescence, peak in late adolescence, and then

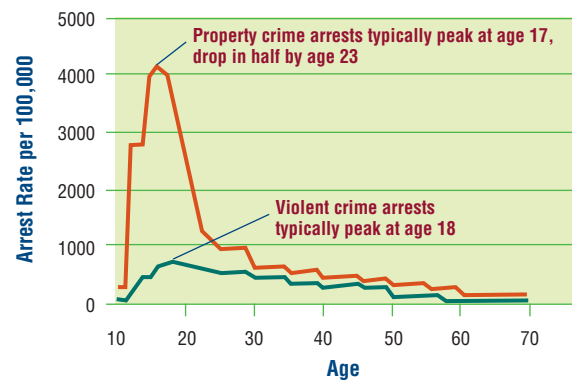


FIGURE 3-4 Age-Crime Curve

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2006* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).

decline steadily thereafter.³⁶ The high point of the curve is different for violent offenses and property offenses. Serious violent crime arrests peak at age 18 and then decline, whereas property crime arrests hit their highest point at age 16 and then decrease.

Juveniles (persons younger than age 18) constitute about 26 percent (about 80 million people) of the U.S. population. In 2005, members of this age group accounted for 15 percent of arrests for serious violent crimes and 28 percent of arrests for serious property crimes. Between 1996 and 2005, the number of serious violent crimes committed by juveniles decreased by 25 percent. In the same period, arrests of juveniles for serious property crimes dropped sharply, decreasing by 42 percent.³⁷

As the age-crime curve shows, older persons typically commit fewer crimes than younger people, a trend known as the **aging-out phenomenon**. The aging-out phenomenon has its roots in the fact that reductions in strength, energy, and mobility with age make it physically more difficult to commit crime as a person grows older. Crime rates also decrease with age for the following reasons:

- Personality changes
- Increased awareness of the cost of crime
- Decreased importance of peer influences
- Lower testosterone levels linked with decreases in male aggression

Some people, however, do not age out of crime. These chronic offenders often started breaking the law at a very young age and continue to commit crime throughout the course of their lives. Unfortunately, many chronic juvenile offenders will likely become adult criminals who cannot be rehabilitated.³⁸



FOCUS ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE

There are many explanations for the dramatic decrease in crime in the late 1990s, but no explanation is more controversial than that offered by economists John Donohue III and Steven Levitt. They attribute the decrease in crime to the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, which legalized abortion.

Donohue and Levitt provide evidence linking the legalization of abortion to recent crime reductions, demonstrating that a steep rise in abortions after 1973, along with declining crime rates, has meant that many persons who might have been prone to criminal activity in the 1990s were never born. Given that the legalization of abortion reduces the general population, it also means a reduction in the number of people who reach the age at which they are most prone to commit crimes. Also, the populations that are more likely to have abortions (e.g., teenagers, unmarried women, the poor, and African Americans) are also more likely to have children who are at risk for committing crimes later in life. Finally, there is a reduction in the number of children born to women with unwanted pregnancies, who may be less likely to be good parents or to harm their fetus during pregnancy by drinking alcohol and taking drugs, thereby increasing the child's likelihood of future criminality.

The Criminal Unborn

The following evidence appears to support Donohue and Levitt's claim:

- The significant decline in crime in the United States occurred during the same years in which *Roe v. Wade* would have had its greatest impact on reducing the number of persons who would have reached the peak of their criminal activity.
- The five states that first experienced a drop in crime legalized abortion in 1970, fully three years before the *Roe v. Wade* decision.
- The largest declines in crime since 1985 have occurred in states with high abortion rates from 1973 to 1976, even when the analysis takes into account differences in incarceration rates, racial composition, and income.

Donohue and Levitt conclude that, if abortion had not been legalized, current crime rates would be 10 to 20 percent higher in the United States. They estimate that legalized abortion may account for as much as 50 percent of the recent drop in crime. According to Donohue and Levitt, legalized abortion has saved Americans more than \$30 billion annually.

Sources: Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner, *Freakonomics*, revised ed. (New York: Harper, 2006); John Donohue III and Steven Levitt, "The Impact of Legalized Abortion on Crime," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 116:379–420 (2001).

Offenders by Socioeconomic Status

When most Americans think of crime, they think of street crime, which includes acts of personal violence and crimes against property. These perceptions of crime are reinforced by the news media, whose stories typically stress street crime and magnify people's fears about their personal safety and belongings. Although the data collected via the UCR and NCVS emphasize street crime, white-collar crime also causes serious harm to society. Examples of white-collar crime include the following:

- ATM fraud
- Cellular phone fraud
- Computer fraud
- Counterfeiting
- Credit card fraud
- Embezzlement

- Forgery
- Identity theft
- Illegal dumping of toxic waste
- Insider stock market trading
- Telemarketing fraud
- Welfare fraud

The origin of the phrase "white-collar crime" can be traced to sociologist Edwin Sutherland, who defined it as "a crime committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of his or her occupation."³⁹

LINK In differential association theory, as outlined in Chapter 4, Sutherland explained how deviants such as white-collar criminals acquire the motivation and technical knowledge for criminal activity through verbal and nonverbal communications with other offenders.⁴⁰

Headline Crime

Bank Heist Linked to Teen



In 2006 in Lima, Ohio, a bank robber might have gotten away with her crime if she hadn't left an important

clue left behind—her book bag. At just 15 years old, this girl is one of the youngest bank robbers in the country.

The robbery was typical in most every way of a robbery committed by an adult. Bank employees reported that two masked men walked into the bank at 10 A.M., one with a gun demanding money. They walked out with \$5000 in stolen cash and sped away in a getaway car to Chicago, where they spent it on drugs and shopping.

Authorities later determined that one of the masked robbers was actually a teenage girl, a freshman at a local high school who confessed to participating in the bank robbery. The girl was not sentenced to a juvenile prison; a magistrate decided that she should receive mental health care.

Source: Sharon Coolidge, "Bank Heists Linked to Teens Catch FBI's Eye," *USA Today*, August 14, 2006, p. 3A, available at http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-08-14-young-bank-robbers_x.htm, accessed June 19, 2007.

Over the years, innumerable instances of white-collar crime have occurred.⁴¹ The monetary cost of white-collar crime is unknown because very little information on its scope is available. The best source of data is the NIBRS, which suggests that more than 6 million people in the United States are the victims of white-collar crime annually. According to the FBI, the annual monetary cost of white-collar crime in the United States exceeds \$300 billion.⁴²



Ken Lay's white-collar crimes led to the collapse of energy giant Enron.



Questions: Why are most people more tolerant of white-collar crime than of street crime? Should white-collar criminals receive harsher punishments than street criminals because their offenses can affect many more people?

Crime Victims

When a crime is committed, there usually is a victim. **Victimology** is the study of the characteristics of crime victims and the reasons why certain people are more likely than others to become victims of crime. The field of victimology covers a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, psychology, criminal justice, and law.

Crime victims play an important role in the efficient operation of the criminal justice system. Although police depend on victims to report crimes and act as complainants, and prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, and juries rely on victims to participate in trials as witnesses, interest in studying crime victimization remained limited for many years. That situation changed in 1967, when the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, in a special task force report, declared that crime victims had been neglected.⁴³ Since then, more than 3000 state and federal pieces of legislation have been passed to aid crime victims, and many states have added victims' rights amendments to their state constitutions **FIGURE 3-5**.

Children

Children of all ages are vulnerable to becoming victims of crime. Often the offenders in these crimes are family members, which is especially the case for infants. Some juveniles are also the victims of abuse and neglect at the hands of their caregivers. Research has

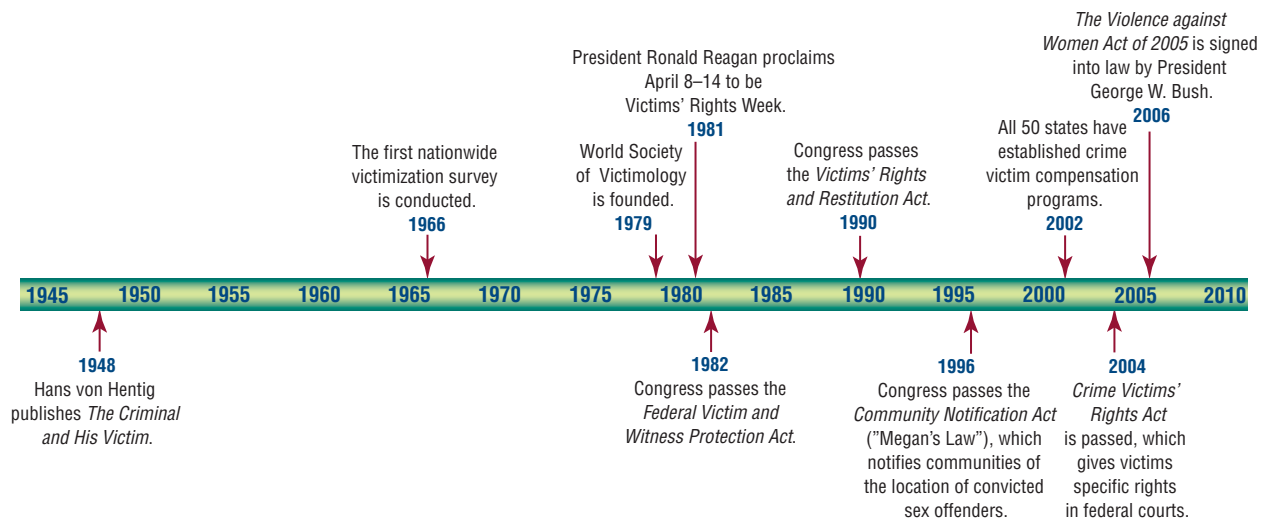


FIGURE 3-5 Victimology Timeline

Source: Office for Victims of Crime, available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/>, accessed May 14, 2007.

shown that child victimization and abuse are associated with problem behaviors later in life, such as teen pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, and criminality.⁴⁴ Understanding childhood victimization can lead to a better understanding of criminality in general.

One of the leading causes of death for children ages 1 to 11 is homicide. When young children are murdered, they are usually killed by family members (61 percent by their parents); by contrast, older children who are the victims of homicide are usually murdered by acquaintances (58 percent).⁴⁵

From 1993 to 2002, children between the ages of 12 and 17 were about three times more likely than adults to be victims of nonfatal violent crimes. Children in this age group were also twice as likely as adults to be victims of robbery or aggravated assault, three times as likely to be victims of rape or sexual assault, and roughly three times as likely to be victims of simple assault. In addition, the nonfatal victimization rate for male youths is about 50 percent greater than the corresponding rate for female youths. Over the 10-year period from 1993 to 2002, urban youth ages 12 to 17 had a significantly higher nonfatal violent victimization rate than did suburban or rural youth.⁴⁶

One of the most common forms of child victimization is **child maltreatment**, which is an act or omission (i.e., failure to act) by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm or serious risk of harm to a child. It can take one of several forms:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Emotional abuse

Each year, approximately 3 million cases of child maltreatment are referred to child protective service agencies in the United States. Almost 6 million children



The long-term consequences of child maltreatment are severe and often include substance abuse and crime.



Should parents who abuse their children, neglect their children, or use narcotics around and with their children lose their parental rights?

are included in these referrals. Of these cases, about one-third are confirmed, which means that roughly 1 million children are victims of maltreatment each year. Moreover, experts estimate that the actual number of incidents of abuse and neglect are three times greater than the number reported to authorities.⁴⁷

The rate of maltreatment victimization is inversely related to age, with the highest rate occurring among the youngest children **FIGURE 3-6**, and with girls being slightly more likely than boys to be victims. The vast majority of perpetrators are parents (80 percent), including birth parents, adoptive parents, and step-parents **FIGURE 3-7**.

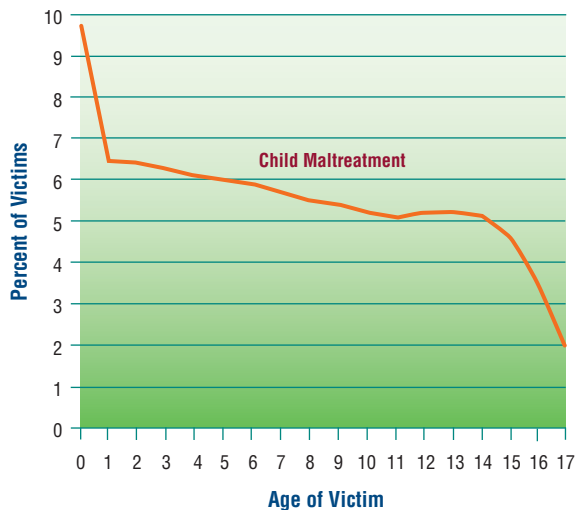


FIGURE 3-6 The Relationship between Child Maltreatment and Age

Source: Howard Snyder and Melissa Sickmund, *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2006).

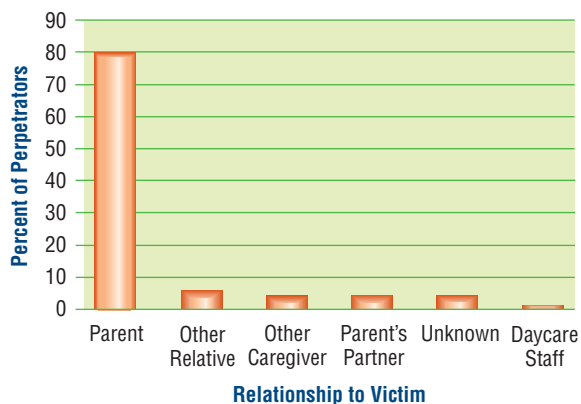


FIGURE 3-7 Perpetrators of Child Maltreatment

Source: Howard Snyder and Melissa Sickmund, *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2006).

Child maltreatment is very serious and produces dire consequences:

- Eighty percent of young adults who had been victims of child maltreatment experienced one or more psychiatric disorders by age 21, including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Maltreated children are 25 percent more likely to experience teen pregnancy than their peers who were not maltreated.
- Children who are victims of maltreatment are 59 percent more likely to be arrested as juveniles, 28 percent more likely to be arrested as adults, and 30 percent more likely to commit violent crimes.
- Children who have been sexually abused are nearly three times more likely to develop alcohol abuse and four times more likely to develop drug addictions than their counterparts who were not sexually abused.
- Nearly 67 percent of all people in treatment for drug abuse report being maltreated as children.⁴⁸

Senior Citizens

There are approximately 36 million senior citizens (age 65 and older) living in the United States today, accounting for more than 12 percent of the total population.⁴⁹ NCVS data show that persons age 65 or older generally experience victimizations at much lower rates than younger groups of people **FIGURE 3-8**.

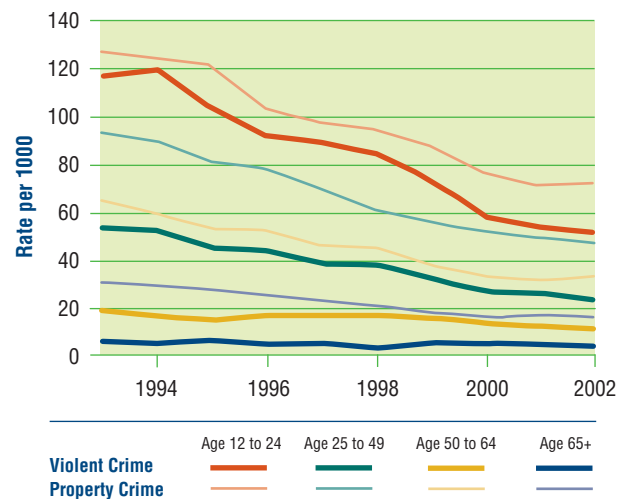


FIGURE 3-8 Rate of Violent and Property Crime Victimization per 1000 Persons, by Age of Victim

Source: Patsy Klaus, *Crimes against Persons Age 65 or Older, 1993–2002* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2005).

Seniors experience nonfatal violent crime at 5 percent that of young persons (only 4 victims per 1000 persons 65 and older). Households headed by seniors experienced property crimes at a rate about 25 percent of that for households headed by persons younger than age 25. Although persons age 65 or older experienced lower victimization rates, when they are victimized they are most often the victims of property crimes; such offenses accounted for about 90 percent of victimizations among people older than age 50. Compared to younger victims of personal crimes, seniors are disproportionately victimized by thefts of their purses and wallets, an act that accounts for 20 percent of personal crimes against seniors.



J. L. Hunter Rountree was convicted of bank robbery at age 92 and sentenced to 12 years in prison.



Should juvenile and elderly offenders receive lighter punishments?

Although seniors are less likely to be victims of violence, when victimized they are equally likely to face offenders with weapons, are more likely to offer no resistance, and are equally likely to receive serious injuries as are younger persons. However, compared to younger victims, persons age 65 or older are more likely to report violence, purse snatching, and pocket picking to the police.

Victims of Intimate Partner Violence

One characteristic shared by many victims of crime is that they run the risk of **intimate partner violence (IPV)**—violent victimization by intimates, including current or former spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, or romantic partners. IPV includes violent acts such

as murder, rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault.

Data released in 2007 indicated that less than 1 percent of households experienced IPV. While this number appears to be low, another way to frame this issue is to recognize that IPV takes place in 1 in 320 U.S. households each year.⁵⁰ Recent estimates of IPV indicate that approximately 1 million violent crimes are committed against intimates each year. Women are five times more likely to be victims of violence by intimates than are men; each year on average, more than 570,000 women are injured by intimates.⁵¹ African American, young, divorced or separated women who are earning lower incomes, living in rental housing, and living in an urban area are most likely to be victimized. Men who are young, African American, divorced or separated, or living in rented housing also have significantly higher rates of IPV than other men.⁵²

IPV is more prevalent and more severe in disadvantaged neighborhoods and occurs more often in households facing economic distress. About one-third of all IPV against women and about half of all IPV against men occurred in the victim's home. Nearly two-thirds of both male and female victims of IPV are physically attacked, with the remaining third being victims of threats or attempted violence. Overall, 65 percent of IPV against women and 68 percent of IPV against men involves a simple assault, the least serious form of IPV **FIGURE 3-9**.⁵³

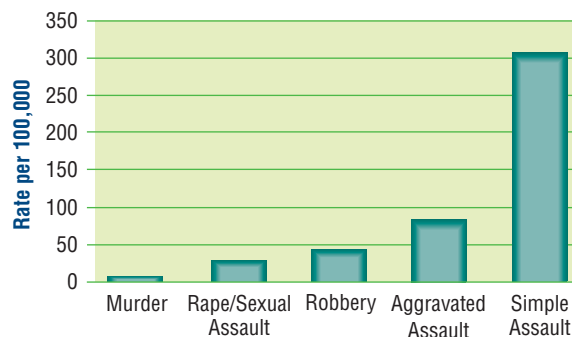


FIGURE 3-9 Rate of Intimate Partner Violence, by Type of Crime

Source: Callie Rennison and Sarah Welchans, *Intimate Partner Violence* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2000).

Intimate Partner Homicide

Most victims of intimate partner homicide are killed by spouses, although this proportion has declined in recent years. Boyfriends or girlfriends are now as

likely as spouses to murder their partners, while the number of intimate partner homicides by ex-spouses have remained steady and infrequent **FIGURE 3-10**. The decline in IPV-related homicide numbers has been most notable for males, although the number of female intimate homicide victimizations has also dropped substantially **FIGURE 3-11**.

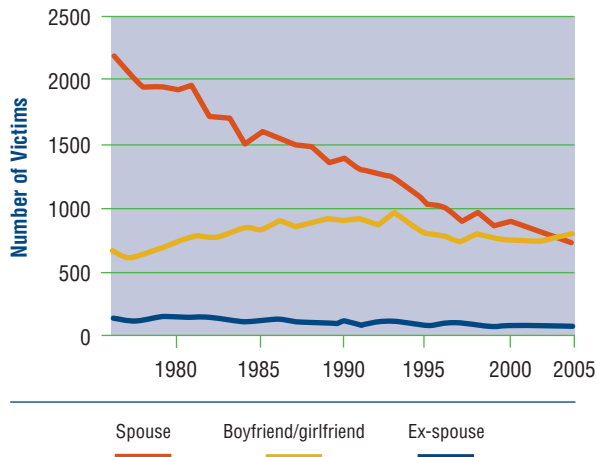


FIGURE 3-10 Homicides of Intimates by Relationship of the Victim to the Offender

Source: James Alan Fox and Marianne Zawitz, *Homicide Trends in the U.S.: Intimate Homicide*, available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/intimates.htm>, accessed May 28, 2007.

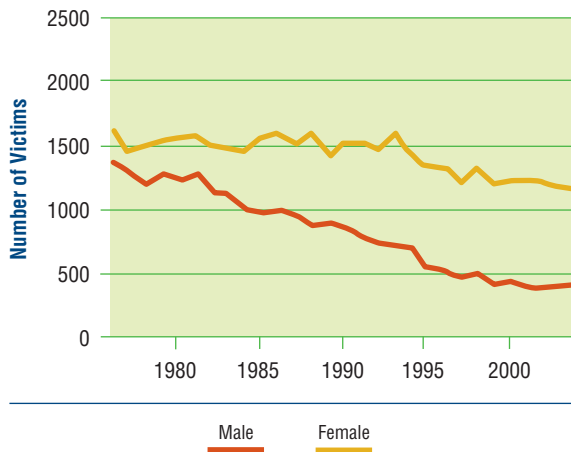


FIGURE 3-11 Homicides of Intimates by Gender of Victim

Source: James Alan Fox and Marianne Zawitz, *Homicide Trends in the U.S.: Intimate Homicide*, available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/intimates.htm>, accessed June 28, 2007.

For same-sex partners, the proportion of intimate partner homicides committed by males is much greater than the percentage committed by females.

Among minorities of both sexes, a greater percentage of IPV victims are killed by boyfriends or girlfriends than by current spouses, and firearms are the weapons most commonly used in the deaths of victims of both sexes. Males are more likely than females to be killed by knives, whereas females are more likely than males to be killed by blunt objects or blows delivered by the hands or feet.⁵⁴

Intimate Partner Rape

Almost 18 million women and 3 million men in the United States have been raped. It is estimated that in a single year, more than 300,000 women and almost 93,000 men are raped. One in every six women has been raped at some time in her life, and younger women are significantly more likely to report being raped than older women. More than half of all female victims and nearly 70 percent of all male victims were raped before age 18. Women who are raped before age 18 are also twice as likely to report being raped as adults. Females are nearly twice as likely as males to be victims of gang rape (8.3 percent versus 4.6 percent, respectively), whereas 78 percent of female rape victims and 83 percent of male rape victims are raped by only one person.⁵⁵ Despite commonly held beliefs, the majority of rapists are not strangers **FIGURE 3-12**.⁵⁶

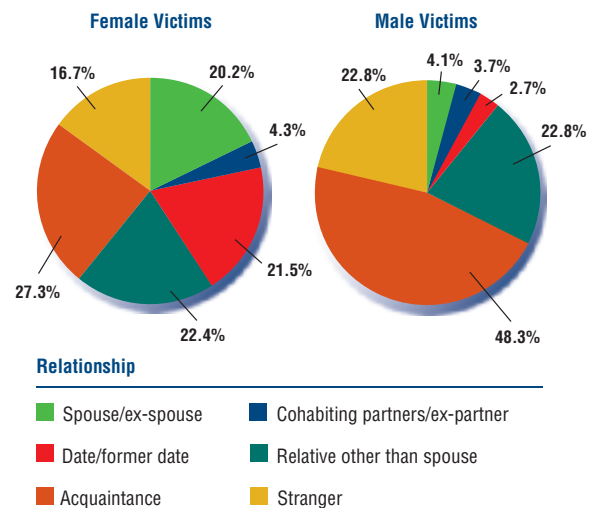


FIGURE 3-12 Rape by Relationship of Victim to Offender
Note: Percentages by victim gender exceed 100% because some victims were raped by more than one person.

Source: Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Rape Victimization: Findings from the National Violence against Women Survey* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2006).

Headline Crime

The Beating of Billy Ray Johnson

Even though thousands of hate crimes are reported annually, some hate crimes are so atrocious that they capture the attention of a nation. One such incident took place on the night of September 27, 2003, in Linden, Texas.

On that night, Billy Ray Johnson, a 42-year-old, mentally disabled African American, was brought to a “pasture party” where more than a dozen young white partygoers were having a bonfire. They got Johnson drunk, humiliated him, and jeered him with racial epithets. When Johnson started to get angry, one of the men, Colt Amox, punched him, knocking Johnson to the ground. For nearly an hour, Johnson lay unconscious bleeding from the head as the group debated what to do. Eventually, they loaded Johnson into the back of a pickup truck and drove two miles down a rural back road (rather than one mile to the nearest hospital). Eventually, they dropped Johnson onto a pile of stinging fire ants near a mound of rotten rubber at a used tire dumpsite. Several hours later, some of the assailants notified law enforcement.

The beating left Johnson severely injured with irreversible brain damage. Today he lives in a nursing home where he drools and soils himself. His speech has been severely impaired, and he has trouble swallowing food and walking unassisted.

Four men were arrested for the assault: Colt Amox, age 20; Dallas Stone, age 18; Cory Hicks, age 24; and Wes Owens, age 19. Amox defended his actions by claiming that Johnson aggressively charged toward him. The all-white jury acquitted Amox and Hicks of serious felony charges and instead handed down lesser convictions, with a recommended sentence of probation. The men were fined and sentenced to both imprisonment and probation, though none served more than 60 days in jail.

Several groups, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), have since looked into the case. The Southern Poverty Law Center filed a civil suit against the four men, alleging that the defendants were liable for assault and negligence and seeking compensatory damages to help pay for Johnson’s care. On April 22, 2007, the



jury found Hicks and Amox responsible for Johnson’s injuries (Stone and Owens had previously reached confidential settlements), and a jury awarded Johnson \$9 million in damages.

Sources: “Billy Ray Johnson Trial Set for April 17, 2007,” Southern Poverty Law Center, available at <http://www.splcenter.org/news/item.jsp?aid=246>, accessed March 31, 2007; “Why I’m Angry—Billy Ray Johnson,” *Angry Black Woman*, available at <http://theangryblackwoman.wordpress.com/2007/03/07/why-im-angry-billy-ray-johnson/>, accessed March 31, 2007; Pamela Colloff, “The Beating of Billy Ray Johnson,” *Texas Monthly*, February 2007, available at <http://www.texasmonthly.com/2007-02-01/index.php>, accessed March 29, 2007; Andre Coe, “Good Ole Boys: Weapons of Black Destruction,” available at <http://www.blackpressusa.com/news/Article.asp?SID=3&Title=National+News&NewsID=4552>, accessed March 31, 2007; Ed Lavandera, “Billy Ray Johnson,” *Paula Zahn Now*, aired March 8, 2007, available at <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0703/08/pzn.01.html>, accessed March 31, 2007; “Texas Jury Awards \$9 Million to Beating Victim,” available at <http://www.cnn.com/2007/LAW/04/22/texas.beating.ap/index.html>, accessed April 22, 2007.

Victims of Hate Crime

Crimes of hatred and prejudice are a sad fact of U.S. history. The FBI has been investigating these offenses as far back as the early 1920s, when it opened their first case against the Ku Klux Klan. The term “hate crime” did not enter the national vocabulary until the 1980s, when emerging hate groups such as Skinheads launched a wave of bias-related crime. Today, a **hate crime** (also known as a bias crime) is defined as a crime in which an offender chooses a victim based on a specific characteristic and evidence is provided that hate or personal disapproval of this characteristic prompted the offender to commit the crime.

Following passage of the Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990, the FBI has gathered and published hate crime statistics every year since 1992 **FIGURE 3-13**.⁵⁷ Some of these statistics are summarized here:

The Primary Motivation for a Hate Crime

- The victim’s race (51 percent)
- The victim’s sexual orientation (18 percent)
- The victim’s ethnicity (17 percent)
- The victim’s religion (13 percent)
- The victim’s disability (1 percent)

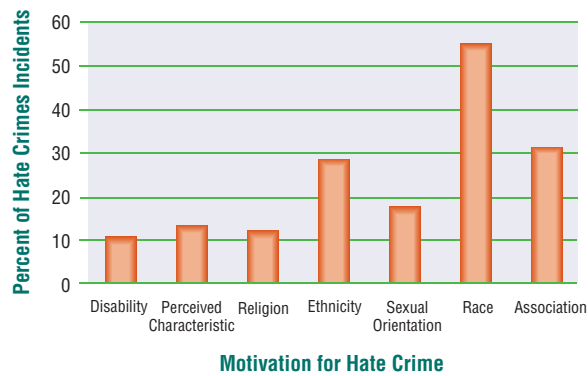


FIGURE 3-13 Motivations for Hate Crimes

Source: Caroline Wolf Harlow, *Hate Crime Reported by Victims and Police* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2005).



Few images embody the idea of hate crime like the activities of the Ku Klux Klan.



Should belonging to a hate group be a crime?
Should hate crimes be given special treatment within the criminal justice system?

The Most Frequently Committed Hate Crimes

- Verbal threats or intimidation (40 percent)
- Simple assault (23 percent)
- Vandalism (18 percent)
- Aggravated assault (14 percent)

The Most Likely Victims of Hate Crimes

- Males (65 percent)
- Whites (67 percent)
- Persons 30–49 years old (35 percent)

NCVS estimates suggest that only about 44 percent of hate crimes are reported to police, or roughly

the same percentage of crimes without a hate component that are reported to police. In half of the reported victimizations, police took a report; in about one-third of cases, they questioned witnesses or suspects; and in about 25 percent of cases, they made an arrest. Victims who reported hate crimes to police had several motivations, including punishing the offender and preventing future crimes. Other victims reported hate crimes so they could receive professional help or alert police about their situation, hoping to improve police surveillance in particular areas. In contrast, many who did not report hate crimes decided to handle the matter on their own. Approximately 25 percent of hate crime victims did not report the incident to police because they considered the crime to be minor or were not certain that the offender intended harm.⁵⁸

Victims and Criminal Justice

The victim's relationship to the criminal justice system has changed considerably from what it was in the earlier part of the twentieth century. Crime victims remained largely invisible until the middle of the twentieth century. Then, as the public became more attuned to the plight of crime victims, they became increasingly included in decisions made about criminal offenders. As public awareness of crime victims increased, significant changes were made in the way the criminal justice system and its agents responded to victims.

Interaction with Police

Sometimes police and victims may come into conflict over the pace and conduct of the investigation of the crime. Police often move cautiously early in the investigation process, especially when they are not certain whether a crime has been committed because they lack evidence to make legally binding decisions. For their part, victims may complain that the police are not responding quickly enough. Victims also may be uncomfortable with or dislike the process of questioning by police, when officers try to determine whether victims are telling the truth.

When police make an arrest, in addition to reading the suspect his or her rights, in some states officers must provide the following information to the victim to alleviate or intensify a victim's sense of personal safety:

- Names, badge numbers, and contact information for the officer and detective handling the case
- Case ID number
- Whether a suspect has been arrested
- Whether a suspect is in jail or out on bail



Victim impact statements convey the emotion inherent to criminal sentencing.



Does the emotional toll on victims deserve a place in criminal sentencing?

Interaction with Prosecutors

After an arrest has been made and charges are being prepared, victims typically come into contact with the prosecutor. The prosecutor has the following responsibilities related to victims of crime:

- Keep crime victims informed of the status of the case
- Articulate victims' interests to the court on matters such as bail, continuances, negotiated pleas, dismissed cases, dropped charges, sentences, and restitution arrangements
- Protect victims from harassment, threats, injuries, intimidation, and retaliation
- Resolve cases as quickly as possible
- Help victims avoid needless waste of their time and money by advising them of court appearances and scheduling changes
- Expedite the return of recovered property⁵⁹

Some of these responsibilities may be met through victim assistance programs. Most such programs provide crisis intervention, follow-up counseling, and

assistance to victims throughout the criminal justice process. These programs' staff members may also provide victims with counseling, emergency shelter, food, and transportation; inform victims of court dates; and help them appear in court if necessary.

A significant challenge facing prosecutors is protecting victims who may be witnesses for the prosecution from threats and intimidation. If victim testimony is not available, the prosecutor must often drop the charges against the accused. It is difficult to estimate the extent of this problem because much victim intimidation goes unreported. Nevertheless, one report issued in 2006 estimated that as many as 36 percent of victims are intimidated in some way after they report a crime.⁶⁰ Victims may be intimidated in a variety of ways, including direct confrontation by the accused or a member of his or her family, vandalizing of their property, or, occasionally, assault.

As is the case with police and victims, conflicts may sometimes arise between victims and prosecutors. Victims may get upset when a case is dropped, charges are reduced, or a plea is negotiated. Additionally, victims are often frustrated because they have very little input into the sentencing decision. Victims are only one of several parties that may sway the outcome—prosecutors, defense attorneys, defendants, and probation officers may also exercise some influence over the sentence. The best chance victims have for affecting the sentencing decision is through a victim impact statement, in which they explain to the judge the emotional, financial, and physical harm they have suffered as a result of the crime.

Interaction with Parole Boards

Most incarcerated offenders will eventually be returned to the community. Perhaps not surprisingly, the decision to grant early release to an inmate often becomes a point of conflict between victims and parole boards. Many parole boards appear to give little consideration to victims' statements, considering them alongside input from prosecutors, judges, prison officials, and offenders. Victims' rights groups are trying to change this situation and to increase the role played by the victim in the parole hearing. These groups would like victims to be notified of parole board hearings, to be able to speak at the hearings, and to be notified if the convict is released.

WRAP UP

THINKING ABOUT CRIME AND JUSTICE: CONCLUSION

The disparity between a person's actual criminal activity and a person's history of arrest merely reinforces the dark figure of crime, the difference between official measures and the true amount of crime. When using arrests as an indicator, it is clear that the criminal justice system fails to measure most criminal activity. Official measures such as the Uniform Crime Reports include data on crimes known to the police, number of arrests, and persons arrested, but they do not count crimes that occur without official notice.

By contrast, self-reports of criminal activity are able to quantify the actual amount of crime that a person commits but have limited accuracy because people may be ignorant, dishonest, or forgetful about their crimes. Additionally, it is unlikely that people who commit serious crimes such as rape and robbery would voluntarily tell others for fear that they would be arrested. As in the case of Coral Watts, even though an arrest record may only hint at a person's actual criminal activity, self-reports may also prove to be unreliable. Ultimately, only the offender may know exactly how many offenses he or she has committed—regardless of what his or her criminal records indicate.

Nevertheless, arrest statistics have been shown to be a valid and reliable measure of crime, because official measures and victimization reports overlap as indicators of crime. Arrests are also a reliable indicator of differences in levels of criminality, such as those that exist between students and prisoners. Whereas students commit generally benign crimes at low rates, prisoners commit an array of crimes, including serious violent offenses, at significantly higher rates. The fact that the average student has zero arrests and the average prisoner has more than 10 arrests reflects not only their differences in criminal activity, but also their differences in criminality.

Chapter Spotlight

- The Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) includes data on crimes known to the police, number of arrests, and persons arrested.
- The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)—and victimization surveys in general—ask people directly whether they have been victims of a crime during the past year.
- Self-report studies ask people directly about which crimes they have committed during the past year.
- The “dark figure of crime” represents the gap between the actual amount of crime committed and the number of crimes reported to police.
- For more than 30 years, UCR and NCVS data have generally told the same story about the incidence and prevalence of crime.
- The primary motivation for committing a hate crime is the victim's race. The most frequently committed hate crimes are verbal threats and intimidation.
- Crime victims today play a much more visible role in the criminal justice system than they did in the past.

Putting It All Together

1. Of what value are UCR, NCVS, and self-report surveys? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
2. If you could use only one source of crime data on which to base your decision making, would you choose the UCR, NCVS, or self-report surveys?
3. Why are senior citizens less likely to commit crimes than younger people?
4. What are the arguments in support of and opposing hate crime legislation?
5. Why do crime victims so often feel ignored by the criminal justice system? What would you propose as a solution to this problem?

Key Terms

age–crime curve A curve showing that crime rates increase during preadolescence, peak in late adolescence, and steadily decline thereafter.

aging-out phenomenon The decline of participation in crime after the teenage years.

child maltreatment The physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect of children.

crime index A statistical indicator consisting of eight offenses that is used to gauge the amount of crime reported to the police. It was discontinued in 2004.

crimes of interest The seven offenses in the National Crime Victimization Survey that people are asked whether they have been a victim of during the past year.

dark figure of crime A term used by criminologists to describe the amount of unreported or undiscovered crime; it calls into question the reliability of UCR data.

hate crime A crime in which an offender targets a victim based on a specific characteristic (i.e., ethnicity, race, or religion), and evidence is provided that hate or personal disapproval of this characteristic prompted the offender to commit the crime.

hierarchy rule A rule dictating that only the most serious crime in a multiple-offenses incident will be recorded in the Uniform Crime Reports.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Violence in intimate relationships, including that committed by current or former spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends.

National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) An annual survey of criminal victimization in the United States conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

National Youth Survey (NYS) A comprehensive, nationwide self-report study of 1700 youths who reported their illegal behaviors each year for more than 30 years.

official crime statistics Statistics based on the aggregate records of offenders and offenses processed by police, courts, corrections agencies, and the U.S. Department of Justice.

self-report surveys Surveys that ask offenders to self-report their criminal activity during a specific time period.

Uniform Crime Report (UCR) An annual publication from the Federal Bureau of Investigation that presents data on crimes reported to the police, number of arrests, and number of persons arrested.

unofficial crime statistics Crime statistics produced by people and agencies outside the criminal justice system, such as college professors and private organizations.

victim impact statement A statement in which the victim explains to the judge the emotional, financial, and physical harm he or she has suffered as the result of a crime.

victimization survey A method of producing crime data in which people are asked about their experiences as crime victims.

victimology The study of the characteristics of crime victims and the reasons why certain people are more likely than others to become victims of crime.

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