

Bureau of Justice Statistics
Bulletin

Households Touched by Crime, 1983

The proportion of the Nation's households touched by a crime of violence or theft fell in 1983 to 27% from the previous year's level of 29%. This is the lowest level in the 9-year period for which these data are available (table 1). The percent of the Nation's households touched by crime has been declining slowly since 1975, but the 1982-83 change was the largest year-to-year decrease to date. A household is considered "touched by crime" if during the year it experienced a burglary, auto theft, or household larceny, or if a household member was raped, robbed, or assaulted or was the victim of a personal larceny.

The percentage of households victimized fell substantially in 1983 for virtually every type of crime. This represents a shift from the experience of previous years, when declines were caused primarily by a decrease in the percentage of households touched by personal larceny without contact (theft from a place away from the home, such as an office or restaurant) (figure 1). Only rape and simple assault did not decline significantly in 1983, while personal larceny with contact (purse snatching or pocket picking) decreased marginally.

Although the percentage of households touched by crime was lower than in previous years, a substantial portion of Americans felt the impact of serious criminal victimization in 1983. One household in every five was the victim of personal or household larceny, and 1 household in 10 either suffered a burglary or had a member who was the victim of a violent crime committed by

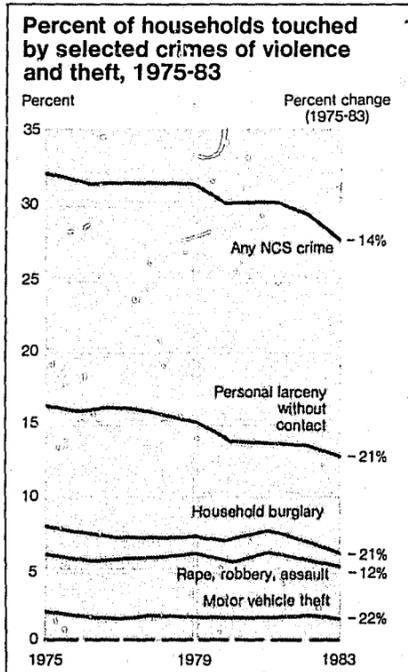


Figure 1

a stranger. Also, 4% of U.S. households were victims of both personal and household crimes, and about 1.5% experienced both personal theft and violence.

Changes and trends

Three of the most serious crimes were among those that underwent dramatic decreases from their 1982 levels. The proportion of households

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This is the fourth annual bulletin in the series, "Households Touched by Crime." BJS developed the measure on which this series is based because of its recognition that the effect of crime is not limited to the immediate victim. It is felt by all the members of the family, just as a burglary or theft from a home affects all of its residents. Therefore, a household is counted as touched by crime if it has been a crime target or if any of its members has been a crime victim.

This series measures the pervasiveness of crime in a way that a count of criminal incidents alone cannot. For example, in 1983 about 70 million people lived in households touched by crime. Even though this number is smaller than that for the previous year, it indicates that crime victimization remains a widespread occurrence.

Steven R. Schlesinger
Director

touched by robbery dropped by 19%; for aggravated assault and burglary the proportions dropped 9% and 11% respectively (table 1).

The proportion of U.S. households touched by robbery reached a level (1.1%) equal to the previous record low established for the crime in 1978. The percentage of households touched by burglary declined sharply in 1983, reaching the lowest level ever for that

crime. In fact, while the total number of households in the Nation in 1983 was 18% larger than in 1975, the number of households burglarized was 7% below the 1975 figure.

As in prior years, suburban households were somewhat less vulnerable to crime than urban households, but more vulnerable than rural households. It appears, however, that the vulnerability

to crime of households in suburban areas, although still generally closer to the higher risk associated with urban households, was moving toward the lower level of risk associated with rural households (figure 2). Personal larceny without contact, which in the 1970's was the only crime affecting a higher percentage of suburban homes than urban homes, occurred in both urban and suburban households with the same frequency in 1983. The nearly identical percentages victimized by this crime in urban and suburban areas may result, in part, from daily population movement patterns in metropolitan areas, because personal larceny without contact is, by definition, a crime that occurs away from the home. The vulnerability of urban, suburban, and rural households to burglary decreased at comparable rates between 1975 and 1983.

The gap between the percentages of white and black households touched by crime widened in 1978 and again in 1981, because of differences in the vulnerability of black and white households to violent crime (figure 3). In 1983, the difference between the percentages of white and black households touched by crime was about the same as in the previous 2 years.

The percentages of families with incomes over \$15,000 that are touched by personal larceny in a given year has fallen sharply since 1975.

Table 1. Households touched by crime, 1983 and relative percent change since 1982

	1983		1982 ¹		Relative percent change 1982-83 ²
	Number of households	Percent	Number of households	Percent	
Total	86,146,000	100.0%	85,178,000	100.0%	-
Households touched by					
All crimes	23,621,000	27.4	24,989,000	29.3	-7
Violent crime	4,400,000	5.1	4,776,000	5.6	-9
Rape	128,000	0.1	136,000	0.2	-6 ³
Robbery	981,000	1.1	1,196,000	1.4	-19
Assault	3,620,000	4.2	3,835,000	4.5	-7
Aggravated	1,301,000	1.5	1,415,000	1.7	-9
Simple	2,568,000	3.0	2,712,000	3.2	-6 ³
Larceny	16,983,000	19.7	17,835,000	20.9	-6
Personal	11,230,000	13.0	11,821,000	13.9	-6
With contact	533,000	0.6	574,000	0.7	-7 ⁴
Without contact	10,836,000	12.6	11,381,000	13.4	-6
Household	7,706,000	8.9	8,181,000	9.6	-7
Burglary	5,268,000	6.1	5,865,000	6.9	-11
Motor vehicle theft	1,193,000	1.4	1,358,000	1.6	-13
Crimes of high concern ⁵	7,681,000	8.9	8,521,000	10.0	-11

NOTE: Detail does not add to total because of overlap in households touched by various crimes. Percent change is based on unrounded figures.

¹Recalculated estimates—See Methodology section for explanation.

²All differences are statistically significant at the 95% level except those noted

by asterisks.

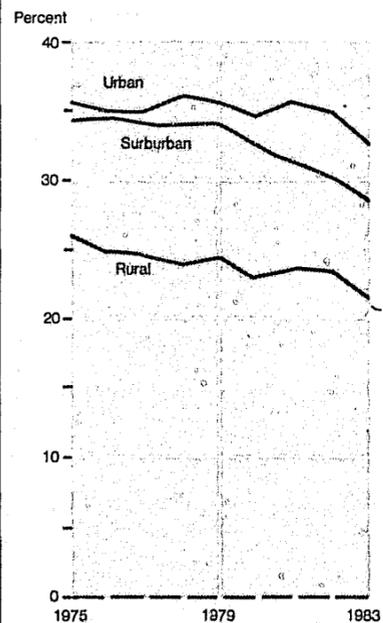
³The difference is not statistically significant at the 90% level.

⁴The difference is statistically significant at the 90% level.

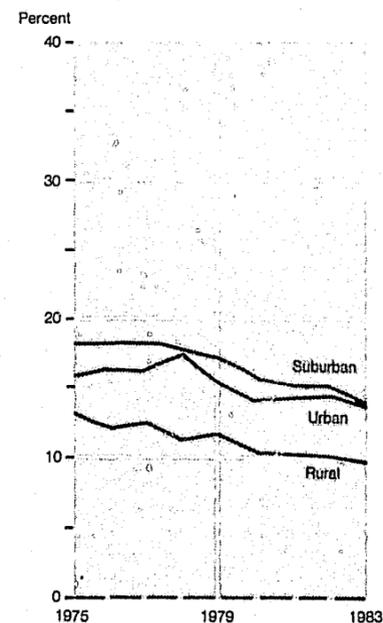
⁵Rape, robbery, assault by strangers or burglary.

Households touched by selected crimes, by place of residence, 1975-83

Any NCS crime



Personal larceny without contact



Burglary

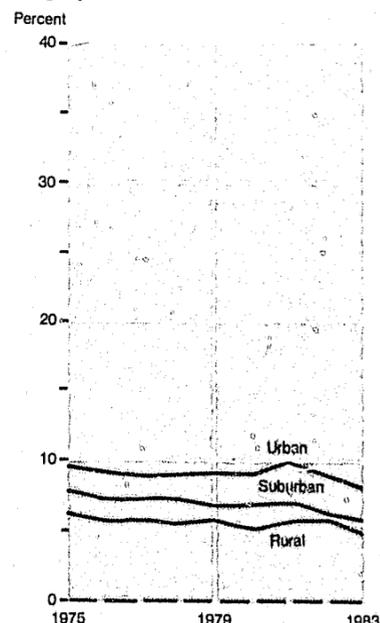


Figure 2

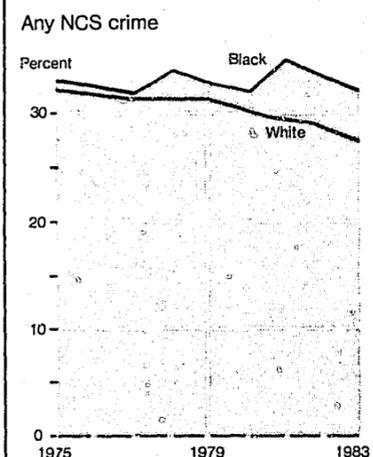
DETAILED FINDINGS

In 1983, as in previous years, black households, households with higher incomes, and households in central cities had the greatest vulnerability to criminal victimization (table 2).

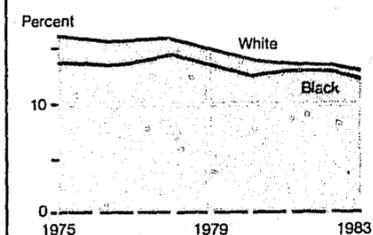
Race of household head

● 4.6% of all black households had members who were victims of serious violent crime (rape, robbery, or aggravated assault), almost twice the per-

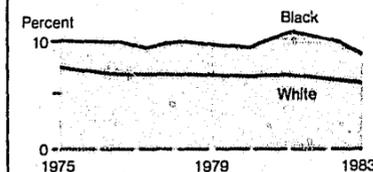
Percent of households touched by selected crimes, by race of head of household, 1975-83



Personal larceny without contact



Burglary



Rape, robbery, assault

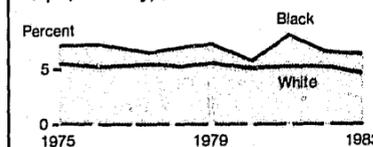


Figure 3

centage for white households (2.4%).

● Black households were more vulnerable than white households to burglary (8.5% vs. 5.8%).

● About the same percentage of white households as black households suffered thefts of objects from places away from the home (at work, in restaurants, etc.); however, a higher percentage of black than of white households suffered thefts of objects from around the home (excluding burglaries).

Family income

● The fraction of all families touched by a crime of violence or theft varied by size of income; about a fourth (26%) of all low income families were victimized compared with about a third (35%) of all high income families.¹

● Households with annual incomes of \$25,000 or more a year had the greatest risk of being touched by crimes of theft. A fourth (25%) of these households suffered thefts during 1983, compared with 16% of households with incomes under \$7,500.

Place of residence

● For most personal crimes, the aggregate victimization experience of suburban households was closer to that of urban households than that of rural households. (For burglary and household larceny, however, the opposite was true). For example, suburban households are victimized by personal lar-

¹In this report households with annual incomes of less than \$7,500 are considered low-income households; those with incomes of \$7,500-\$14,999, medium; \$15,000-\$24,999, medium high; and \$25,000 or more, high.

ceny without contact about as often as urban households but much more frequently than rural households.

● A third (33%) of all urban households were touched by a crime of violence or theft in 1983.

● There was little difference in the percentages of urban and suburban households victimized by the theft of objects away from the home, but urban households were more like their suburban counterparts to be victims of theft from around the home.

● The percentage of urban households touched by violent crime by strangers was more than double that for rural households (4.8% vs. 1.9%).

● The biggest relative difference between urban and suburban households was for robbery; the urban estimate is more than twice the suburban estimate, despite the small absolute difference between them (2.1% vs. 0.9%).

● The biggest relative difference between suburban and rural households was for motor vehicle theft; the percentage of rural households victimized by this crime was only half that of suburban households (0.7% vs. 1.4%).

Size of household

The size of a household is an important factor in assessing its vulnerability to crime. Overall, the more people in a household, the greater its vulnerability, although this tendency is more pronounced for personal crimes than for household crimes. (Larger households have more members at risk for personal crimes; but each household, regardless of size, is the unit at risk for household crimes.)

Table 2. Percent of households touched by crime by selected characteristics, 1983

	Race of head		Annual family income				Place of residence		
	White	Black	Low Under \$7,500	Medium \$7,500-\$14,999	High \$15,000-\$24,999	\$25,000 or more	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Any NCS crime	26.9%	31.8%	24.7%	25.9%	27.5%	32.4%	32.5%	28.4%	21.6%
Violent crime	4.9	6.5	5.9	4.9	4.9	5.3	6.5	5.2	3.7
Rape	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2
Robbery	1.0	2.3	1.6	1.2	1.1	0.9	2.1	0.9	0.5
Assault	4.1	4.7	4.5	4.0	4.0	4.6	4.8	4.5	3.3
Aggravated	1.4	2.5	1.8	1.6	1.4	1.4	2.0	1.5	1.1
Simple	3.0	2.5	3.1	2.7	2.9	3.5	3.2	3.3	2.4
Property crime	13.0	13.1	9.1	10.9	13.7	18.3	14.8	14.3	9.9
Personal larceny	13.0	13.1	9.1	10.9	13.7	18.3	14.8	14.3	9.9
Burglary	5.8	8.5	8.2	6.0	5.4	5.6	8.0	5.8	4.7
Household larceny	8.8	10.1	8.7	9.4	9.2	9.3	10.9	8.8	7.4
Motor vehicle theft	1.3	2.1	1.1	1.3	1.6	1.6	2.1	1.4	0.7
Serious violent crime¹	2.4	4.6	3.4	2.7	2.5	2.3	4.0	2.4	1.7
Crimes of high concern²	8.6	11.7	10.7	8.6	8.2	8.9	11.9	8.8	6.3
Total larceny³	19.6	20.4	15.7	18.3	20.6	24.9	22.3	20.9	16.0

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

¹Rape, robbery, aggravated assault.

²Rape, robbery, assault by stranger, or burglary.

³Personal larceny, household larceny

- 1 in 5 single-person households was touched by crime in 1983 (table 3).
- 2 in 5 households with six or more members were touched by crime.
- The percentage touched by crime varied most by size of household for personal larceny, and varied least by size of household for burglary.

Deriving estimates of households touched by crime

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

Households-touched-by-crime statistics are derived from National Crime Survey (NCS) data on rape, personal robbery, assault, household burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft.³ Because the NCS counts only crimes for which the victim can be interviewed, homicide is not counted in this analysis; but its exclusion does not noticeably affect the estimates presented here. If each of the homicides during the year 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 percentage of households touched by crime (27.4%).⁴

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

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

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

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

⁴1983 homicide estimates are not yet available. There were 21,000 homicides in the United States in 1982 (Uniform Crime Reports, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1982).

Table 3. Percent of households touched by selected crimes by size of household, 1983

	Size of household			
	1	2-3	4-5	6+
Any NCS crime	20.0%	26.2%	35.7%	40.9%
Violent crime	2.3	4.6	7.1	11.0
Personal larceny	7.8	12.4	18.7	20.7
Burglary	5.8	5.9	6.7	8.0
Household larceny	6.2	8.7	11.5	13.9
Motor vehicle theft	1.1	1.3	1.8	1.8

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

For instance, the households-touched-by-crime estimate for 1983 (27.4%) is less than the sum of the estimates for households touched by personal crimes (16.6%) and those touched by household crimes (15.0%) because 4% of U.S. households were victims of both personal and household crimes. Similarly, because about 1.5% of the U.S. households were touched by both personal theft and violence, the sum of households touched by personal theft (13.0%) and those touched by violence (5.1%) exceeds the estimate of those touched by personal crime (16.6%).

Methodology

All data in this bulletin are from the National Crime Survey. The NCS is an ongoing survey conducted for the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Interviews are conducted at 6-month intervals with all occupants age 12 and over of about 60,000 housing units (128,000 persons). Because the NCS does not obtain information about crimes against persons under age 12, households experiencing only these crimes are not included in the estimate of households touched by crime.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletins are prepared by BJS staff. Carol B. Kalish, chief of data analysis, edits the bulletins. Marilyn Marbrook, publications unit chief, administers their publication, assisted by Millie J. Baldea and Joyce M. Stanford. The author of this bulletin is Michael R. Rand.

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"Household" as used throughout this bulletin refers to a dwelling unit and the people who occupy it. No attempt was made to locate people who moved during an interview period. Instead, the people who moved into the vacated dwelling unit were interviewed for the rest of the year. Biases produced by people moving during the year affect the estimates to a minor degree because only about 20% of all households move during a typical year. "Family" has been used synonymously with "household." Actually, 73% of all households are families, 23% are persons living alone, and 4% are groups of unrelated persons.

Because the estimates in this bulletin are derived from sample survey data, they are subject to sampling variation.⁵ Because the procedure used to produce estimates of households touched by crime differs from that which produces 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. The estimates are also subject to response errors, including crimes that are forgotten or withheld from the interviewer. Response errors tend to cause understated counts of households touched by crime.

The 1983 data for this report were prepared using a newly introduced NCS data processing system. In order to determine its effect on the data, 1982 data were processed under the new system and compared with 1982 data produced under the old system. This comparison revealed that the effect of the new processing system on the households-touched-by-crime measure is minimal; at most, the percentages touched by any category of crime differed by less than 0.5 percentage points. The 1982 data presented in this report were prepared under the new procedure, and, therefore, may differ slightly from those presented in *Households Touched by Crime, 1982*. These changes do not affect the year-to-year comparisons discussed in this report.

This bulletin, like its predecessors, *Households Touched by Crime, 1981 and 1982*, examines aspects of the measure, households touched by crime, not covered in the original bulletin, *The Prevalence of Crime*. That first bulletin covered only the characteristics of households touched by crime. The two subsequent bulletins explored other areas such as comparison of victimization risk to other life events, the percentage of households touched by crime during a multiyear period, and multiple victimization of households. This bulletin examines the victimization experience of households of different size. In future years, additional characteristics of the households-touched-by-crime indicator will be examined.

⁵Details of the NCS sample design, the standard error computation, and the customary estimation procedure for victimization rates and counts may be found in appendix III of the BJS report *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1981*, NCJ-90208, November 1983.

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

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- 1979 (final report), NCJ-76710, 12/81

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- Prisoners in State and Federal institutions on December 31, 1981 (final report), NCJ-86485, 7/83
- Capital punishment 1981 (final report), NCJ-86484, 5/83

1979 survey of inmates of State correctional facilities and 1979 census of State correctional facilities: Career patterns in crime (BJS special report), NCJ-88672, 6/83

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- Census of jails and survey of jail inmates: Jail inmates 1982 (BJS bulletin), NCJ-87161, 2/83
- Census of jails, 1978: Data for individual jails, vols. IV, Northeast, North Central, South, West, NCJ-72279-72282, 12/81
- Profile of jail inmates, 1978, NCJ-65412, 2/81
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- BJS five-year program plan, FY 1982-86, 7/82
- Violent crime in the U.S. (White House briefing book), NCJ-79741, 6/82
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