



## Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin

# Households Touched by Crime, 1984

Twenty-six percent of the Nation's households were touched by a crime of violence or theft in 1984, compared to 27.4% a year earlier.<sup>1</sup> The 1984 estimate continued a downward trend that has characterized the measure since its introduction for 1975 (figure 1). In that year 32% of all American households were touched by crime. 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, assaulted, or a victim of personal larceny.<sup>2</sup>

An estimated 22.8 million households were touched by crime in 1984 (table 1). This number is about 800,000 fewer than in the previous year, and about two million fewer than in 1982, the peak year for households touched by crime. The changes in 1983 and 1984 in the number of households touched by crime were the first consecutive decreases the measure has experienced (table 2).

Prior to 1983, the number of households touched by crime gradually increased. However, the annual rate of increase was usually smaller than the annual rate of increase for all American households. As a result the percent of households touched by crime has slowly declined.

<sup>1</sup>"Household" as used throughout this bulletin refers to a dwelling unit and the people who occupy it.

<sup>2</sup>These are the crimes measured by the National Crime Survey (NCS), the source of the report's data.

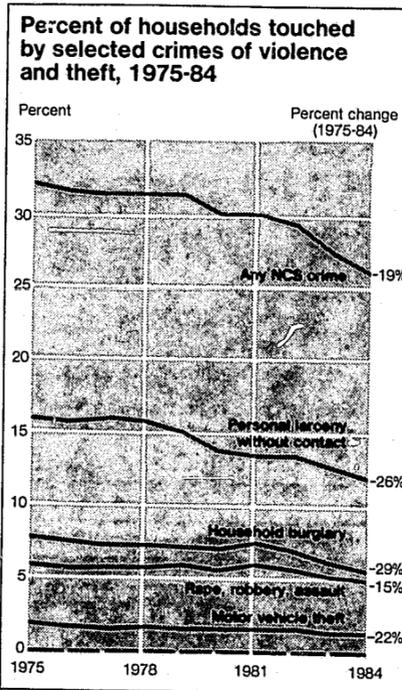


Figure 1

Throughout the 10-year period, certain kinds of households have remained more vulnerable to crime than others. These are black households, households with high incomes, and households in central cities of metropolitan areas. During 1984, 29% of all black households, 30% of all households with incomes of \$25,000 or more, and 31% of all households in central cities were touched by crime.

June 1985

This bulletin, the fifth in the annual series "Households Touched by Crime," provides both positive and negative news concerning the amount and distribution of crime in our Nation. On the negative side, crime continues to be an enormous problem for American society. Almost 23 million households were touched by crime in 1984. These households felt, in varying degrees, the pain, economic loss, sense of violation and frustration that accompany crime victimization.

On the positive side, in 1984 fewer American households felt the effects of criminal victimization than in any of the previous 9 years.

Many believe that recent declines in crimes rates are due, in part, to greater public awareness and understanding of crime, and to citizen crime prevention programs. Our goal at the Bureau of Justice Statistics is to increase that awareness and understanding, thereby assisting in our Nation's effort to combat crime.

Steven R. Schlesinger  
Director

In 1984, as in previous years, larceny affected the highest percentage of American households, touching almost 1 in 5. Five percent of all households had a member victimized by

**Table 1. Households touched by crime, 1984 and relative percent change since 1983**

Households	1984		1983		Relative percent change 1983-84 <sup>a</sup>
	Number of households	Percent	Number of households	Percent	
<b>Total</b>	<b>87,693,000</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>86,146,000</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	
Touched by					
Any NCS crimes	22,786,000	26.0	23,621,000	27.4	-5%
Violent crime	4,306,000	4.9	4,400,000	5.1	-4 <sup>b</sup>
Rape	161,000	0.2	128,000	0.1	+24 <sup>b</sup>
Robbery	914,000	1.0	981,000	1.1	-8 <sup>b</sup>
Assault	3,563,000	4.1	3,620,000	4.2	-3 <sup>b</sup>
Aggravated	1,306,000	1.5	1,301,000	1.5	-1 <sup>b</sup>
Simple	2,538,000	2.9	2,568,000	3.0	-3 <sup>b</sup>
Total larceny	16,315,000	18.6	16,983,000	19.7	-6
Personal	10,764,000	12.3	11,230,000	13.0	-6
With contact	518,000	0.6	533,000	0.6	-5 <sup>b</sup>
Without contact	10,343,000	11.8	10,836,000	12.6	-6
Household	7,460,000	8.5	7,706,000	8.9	-5
Burglary	4,790,000	5.5	5,268,000	6.1	-11
Motor vehicle theft	1,199,000	1.4	1,193,000	1.4	-1 <sup>b</sup>
Crimes of high concern (rape, robbery, assault by strangers or burglary)	7,058,000	8.0	7,681,000	8.9	-10

**Note:** Detail does not add to total because of overlap in households touched by various crimes. Relative percent change is based on unrounded figures.

<sup>a</sup>All differences are statistically significant at the 95% level except those footnoted.  
<sup>b</sup>The difference is not statistically significant at the 90% level.

**Table 2. Number and percent distribution of households touched by crime by type of crime 1975-1984**

Percent of households touched by:	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
<b>Any NCS crimes</b>	<b>32.0%</b>	<b>31.5%</b>	<b>31.3%</b>	<b>31.3%</b>	<b>31.3%</b>	<b>30.0%</b>	<b>30.0%</b>	<b>29.3%</b>	<b>27.4%</b>	<b>26.0%</b>
Violent crime	5.8	5.6	5.7	5.7	5.9	5.5	5.9	5.6	5.1	4.9
Rape	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2
Robbery	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.1	1.0
Assault	4.5	4.4	4.7	4.6	4.8	4.4	4.7	4.5	4.2	4.1
Personal larceny	16.4	16.2	16.3	16.2	15.4	14.2	13.9	13.0	12.3	12.3
Burglary	7.7	7.4	7.2	7.2	7.1	7.0	7.4	6.9	6.1	5.5
Household larceny	10.2	10.3	10.2	9.9	10.8	10.4	10.2	9.6	8.9	8.5
Motor vehicle theft	1.8	1.6	1.5	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.4	1.4
Households touched by crime (thousands)	23,377	23,504	23,741	24,277	24,730	24,222	24,863	24,989	23,621	22,786
Households in U.S. (thousands)	73,123	74,528	75,904	77,578	78,964	80,622	82,797	85,178	86,146	87,693

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

**Table 3. Percent of households touched by crime by selected characteristics, 1984.**

Percent of household touched by:	Race of head			Annual family income				Place of residence		
	White	Black	Other	Low Under \$7,500	Medium \$7,500-\$14,999	High \$15,000-\$24,999	\$25,000 or more	Urban	Suburban	Rural
<b>Any NCS crime</b>	<b>25.5%</b>	<b>29.4%</b>	<b>27.9%</b>	<b>23.8%</b>	<b>24.1%</b>	<b>26.3%</b>	<b>30.3%</b>	<b>31.2%</b>	<b>26.2%</b>	<b>20.9%</b>
Violent crime	4.8	6.1	5.5	5.6	4.8	4.8	5.1	6.3	4.9	3.7
Rape	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.1
Robbery	0.9	2.0	1.5	1.4	1.0	0.8	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.5
Assault	4.0	4.4	4.2	4.5	3.9	4.1	4.3	4.7	4.1	3.4
Aggravated	1.4	2.1	2.1	1.8	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.7	1.5	1.3
Simple	2.9	2.6	2.6	3.0	2.8	3.1	3.1	3.4	3.0	2.3
Total larceny	18.5	19.1	19.9	15.1	16.8	19.4	23.0	21.0	19.6	15.1
Personal larceny	12.3	11.8	12.9	8.6	10.2	12.8	16.7	13.6	13.5	9.5
Household larceny	8.3	10.0	9.6	8.5	8.9	8.8	8.8	10.7	8.2	6.9
Burglary	5.2	7.5	5.8	7.3	5.5	4.9	5.2	7.3	4.8	4.5
Motor vehicle theft	1.2	2.3	1.7	1.0	1.2	1.4	1.7	2.1	1.4	0.7
Serious violent crime <sup>a</sup>	2.4	4.1	3.8	3.3	2.6	2.2	2.4	3.7	2.4	1.8
Crimes of high concern <sup>b</sup>	7.7	10.4	8.8	9.8	7.7	7.6	8.1	11.0	7.4	6.1

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

<sup>a</sup>Rape, robbery, aggravated assault.  
<sup>b</sup>Rape, robbery, assault by stranger, or burglary.

violent crime, and 6% of all households had an attempted or completed burglary.

**TRENDS**

The decade-long decline in the percent of households touched by crime can be divided into two distinct periods. During the first, from 1975 through 1981, it gradually decreased by 2 percentage points. Since 1982, the decline has been sharper, accounting for two-thirds of the total decrease during the decade.

The decrease between 1983 and 1984 was primarily caused by declines in the percentages of households touched by burglary and by larceny. In 1984, 18.6% of all households suffered at least one personal or household larceny, compared with 19.7% in 1983. The percentage of households touched by burglary decreased from 6.1% to 5.5%.

By contrast, the percent of households with members who were victims of violent crime was virtually the same in both years (5.1% in 1983 and 4.9% in 1984). The percent of households with an attempted or completed motor vehicle theft was 1.4% in both years.

**DETAILED FINDINGS**

**Race of household**

A higher percentage of black households than white households had members who were victims of violent crime in 1984, primarily because 2% of all black households had members who were robbed, compared with 1% of all white households (table 3).

<sup>3</sup>For this analysis, the race of the household is considered to be that of the household head.

One in 24 black households and 1 in 42 white households had a member who was raped, robbed or the victim of aggravated assault.

Black households were substantially more vulnerable to burglary than white households and somewhat more vulnerable to thefts of objects from around the home (household larceny).<sup>4</sup> Over the 10-year period a higher percentage of black households than white households have consistently suffered motor vehicle thefts (2.3% vs. 1.2% in 1984).<sup>5</sup>

Twenty-eight percent of households headed by members of minority races other than black (Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans) were touched by crime in 1984. In most of the 10 years from 1975 to 1984, the percent of such households that were touched by crime have been between the percentages for white and black households<sup>6</sup> (figure 2).

**Family income**

The percent of households touched by crime varies by family income level: it is lowest for households with annual incomes below \$7,500 and highest for those with family incomes of \$25,000 or more. The differences across income levels are due to crimes of theft, to which high-income households are substantially more vulnerable than low-income households (23.0% vs. 15.1% in 1984). In fact, 76% of all high-income households touched by crime in 1984 were victims of crimes of theft, compared to 63% of all such low-income households. Low-income households suffered relatively more burglaries and violent crimes.

Between 1981 and 1984 the percent of high-income households that were burglarized fell from 7.1% to 5.2%, a sharper decline than that for low-income households, where the percentage that were burglarized dropped from 8.5% to 7.3%.

Violent crimes committed by strangers affected similar proportions of households in all income groups, although there were indications that households with incomes between \$7,500 and \$14,999 were less vulnerable

<sup>4</sup>Apparent differences in the percentages of white and black households that suffered the theft of objects from places away from the home (personal larceny) were not statistically significant.

<sup>5</sup>An apparent difference for 1977 was not statistically significant.

<sup>6</sup>Because of the small size of the other minority race population, these differences have not been statistically significant.

<sup>7</sup>Incomes were not adjusted for inflation.

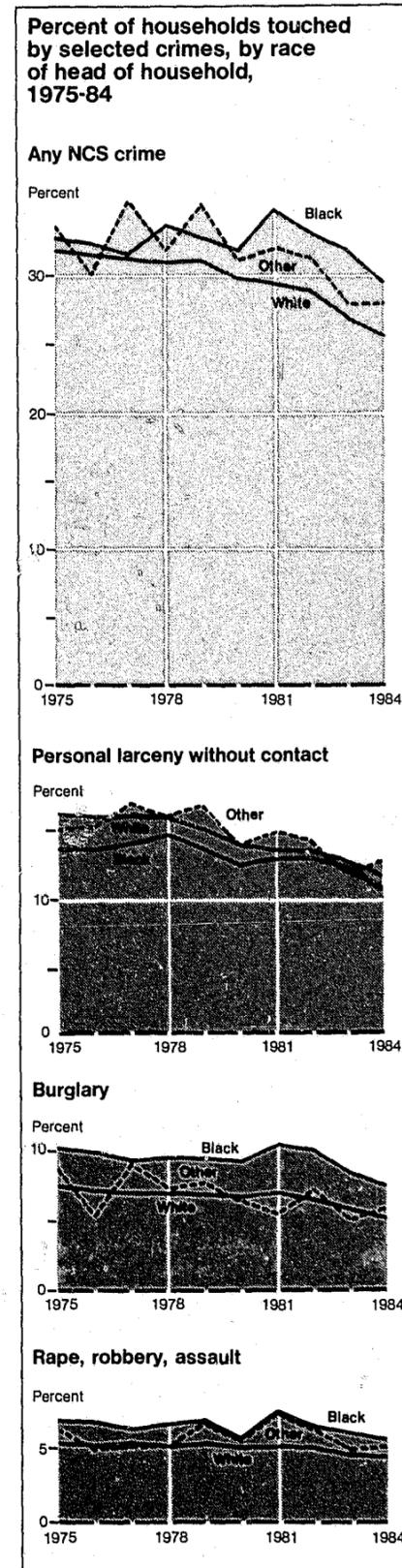


Figure 2

to such crimes than households in the highest income category.

**Place of residence**

Households in central cities were the most vulnerable to crime and households in rural areas the least vulnerable. The percent of suburban households victimized by crime was closer to that of urban households for personal larceny, but closer to that of rural households for burglary. One out of nine urban households suffered at least one burglary or violent crime by strangers, compared to 1 in 14 suburban and 1 in 16 rural households.

The percentage of suburban households that were burglarized has decreased to about the level of rural households (figure 3). In 1975, the percentage for suburban areas was 22% higher than that for rural areas; but in 1984 the percentages of suburban and rural households that were burglarized were not significantly different (4.8% vs. 4.5%).

There was no measurable difference in the percentages of urban and suburban households that had objects stolen from places away from the home (personal larceny): 13.6% vs. 13.5%. However, a greater percentage of urban than suburban households had objects stolen from the home (household larceny): 10.7% vs. 8.2%.

One in 53 urban households had a member who was the victim of a robbery, compared to 1 in 111 suburban households and 1 in 200 rural households.

**Size of household**

In general, the more people in a household, the greater is its vulnerability to crime (table 4). This tendency is more pronounced for personal crimes than for household crimes. Larger households have more members at risk for personal crimes;

**Table 4. Percent of households touched by selected crimes, by size of household, 1984**

Percent of households touched by:	Number of people in household			
	1	2-3	4-5	6+
<b>Any NCS crimes</b>	<b>18.4%</b>	<b>25.1%</b>	<b>33.7%</b>	<b>41.4%</b>
Violent crime	2.9	4.4	7.0	11.7
Total larceny	11.5	18.0	25.5	31.1
Personal larceny	7.2	11.7	17.4	21.8
Household larceny	5.6	8.4	11.1	13.9
Burglary	5.4	5.1	6.0	7.6
Motor vehicle theft	1.0	1.4	1.5	2.4

### Households touched by selected crimes, by place of residence, 1975-84

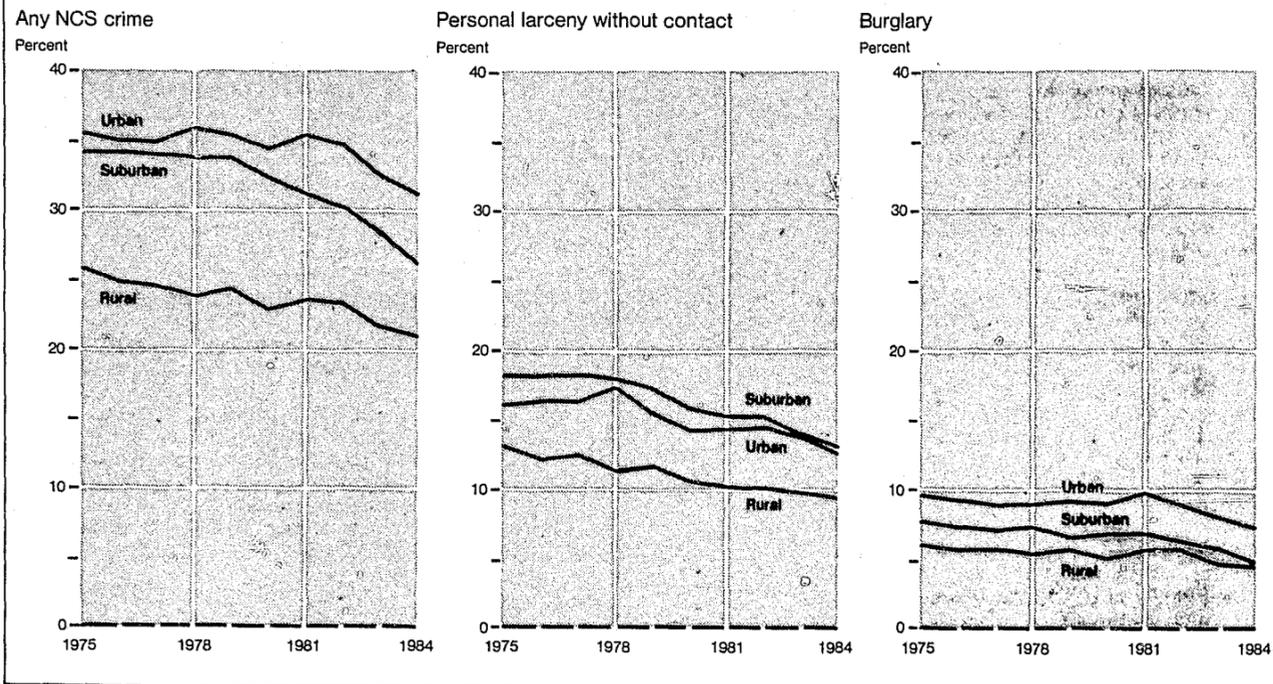


Figure 3

but each household, regardless of size, is the unit at risk for household crimes.

For personal crimes, the differences between single-person households and larger households are not proportional to differences in household size. For instance, the percent of households with six or more members that are touched by crime is about two times rather than six times that of single-person households.

Many households with two or more persons include children under 12 years of age. Crimes against such young children are not measured in the NCS, so crimes against children are not included in the measurement of households touched by crime.<sup>8</sup> In addition, differences in demographic characteristics and lifestyles between different size households will affect the degree to which they are touched by crime, since both are related to crime vulnerability.

● One in 5 single-person households was touched by crime in 1984, compared to 2 in 5 households with six or more members.

<sup>8</sup>Crimes against children under age 12 are excluded from the survey because children of that age are usually too young to give responsible and reliable information, and asking sensitive questions about victimization might be distressful to the child or parents.

● Households with four or five members were twice as likely, and those with six or more members were four times as likely as single-person households to be touched by violent crime.

● One in 9 single person households was touched by a personal or household larceny. Estimates for larger households:

2-3-person households: 1 in 6;  
4-5-person households: 1 in 4;  
6-or-more-person households: 1 in 3.

● The percentage of households touched by crime varied least by household size for burglary: 5.4% of single-person households were burglarized compared to 7.6% of households with six or more members.

#### Multiple victimization of households

The ratio of the number of crime incidents to the number of households touched by crime in a given year provides a rough gauge of the degree to which households touched by crime are victims of more than one crime incident during the year, as well as of the distribution of crime throughout the Nation. A ratio of 1.0 to 1 would mean that the average victimized household was victimized only one time in a single year, and that each incident that occurred during the year affected a

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

In 1984, the ratio for all National Crime Survey crimes was 1.5 to 1; theoretically, the average victimized household experienced 1.5 incidents (table 5). The ratios for individual crimes were smaller, ranging from 1.1 to 1.2.

Type of crime	Incidents <sup>a</sup> (thousands)	Households (thousands)	Average crimes per household (Ratio) <sup>b</sup>
<b>Any NCS crimes</b>	<b>34,323</b>	<b>22,786</b>	<b>1.5</b>
<b>Violent crimes</b>	<b>5,654</b>	<b>4,306</b>	<b>1.3</b>
Rape	177	161	1.1
Robbery	1,073	914	1.2
Assault	4,404	3,563	1.2
<b>Larceny</b>	<b>21,913</b>	<b>16,315</b>	<b>1.3</b>
Personal	13,292	10,764	1.2
Household	8,621	7,460	1.2
Burglary	5,473	4,790	1.1
<b>Motor vehicle theft</b>	<b>1,283</b>	<b>1,199</b>	<b>1.1</b>

<sup>a</sup>Preliminary 1984 estimates.  
<sup>b</sup>Ratio calculated using unrounded incident and households touched estimates

The degree to which households suffered more than one type of crime can be explored by examining the overlap in the number of households touched by individual crimes and by composite crime categories:

● 14% of all households that were touched by crime (about 4% of all households in the Nation) suffered both a personal crime of violence or theft and a household crime (burglary, household larceny, motor vehicle theft).

● 12% of all households victimized by larceny (2% of the Nation's households) were victims of both personal and household larcenies.

● 8% of all households touched by violent crime were touched by more than one of the three types of violent crime (rape, robbery, and assault).

Between 1975 and 1979, the composite ratio of incidents to households touched by crime hovered at or near 1.6 to 1 (table 6). It decreased in 1980, rising back to the previous level in 1981. Beginning in 1982, the ratio has shown a declining trend, falling to 1.5 to 1 in 1984. This recent decline means not only that fewer households experience crime during the year, but that those that do experience crime, as a group, experience less of it.

#### FACTORS AFFECTING TRENDS

It is not only changes in the amount of crime that affect the differences in the percent of households touched by crime in 2 years. Changes in the way Americans live also affect the estimates because they influence how crime is distributed across society.

American society is extremely mobile. People are constantly moving into and out of different households, creating new households, and merging existing households. One demographic trend evident during the past decade is a gradual movement away from central cities into suburban areas and rural areas. Between 1975 and 1984 the percentage of households located in

Year	Ratio
1975	1.59 to 1
1976	1.60 to 1
1977	1.62 to 1
1978	1.60 to 1
1979	1.60 to 1
1980	1.56 to 1
1981	1.62 to 1
1982	1.55 to 1
1983	1.52 to 1
1984	1.51 to 1

central cities fell from 32% to 29% of all households. Suburban and rural households went from 68% to 71% of all American households.

During the 1975-84 decade, the average American household decreased in size. One-person households represented 20% of all households in 1975, but 23% of all households in 1984. Households containing six or more people fell from 8% to 5% of all households during the decade. What is interesting, from the standpoint of crime vulnerability, is that these population shifts are movements from more vulnerable types of households—larger/urban—to less vulnerable types—smaller/suburban or rural.

Estimates of the percent of households touched by crime are probably somewhat lower than they would have been had these population shifts not occurred. For example, if the size distribution of American households was the same in 1984 as it had been in 1975, then the percent of households touched by crime would have been 26.8% rather than 26.0%.<sup>9</sup>

#### 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.<sup>10</sup> The household was chosen as the unit of analysis because the effects of a crime are seldom limited to the victim alone, but are also felt by other members of the victim's household.

Households-touched-by-crime statistics are derived from National Crime Survey (NCS) data on rape, personal robbery, assault, household burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft.<sup>11</sup> Because the NCS counts only crimes for which the victim can be interviewed, homicide is not counted. Its exclusion does not noticeably affect the estimates 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

<sup>9</sup>For this analysis it was assumed that for each household size the percent of households touched by crime in 1984 would not have been affected if the size distribution for all households had remained unchanged.

<sup>10</sup>The Prevalence of Crime, Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, NCJ-75905, March 1981.

<sup>11</sup>These crimes are defined in *Measuring Crime*, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-75710, February 1981.

the overall percentage of households touched by crime (26.0%) by as much as 0.05%.<sup>12</sup>

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

Traditional measures of crime are in the form of volumes or rates. Data on the volume of crime have limited usefulness because the size of the population is not taken into account. Rates—expressed in the 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 is widely spread or highly concentrated within a given population.

For each type of crime examined, a household is counted only once regardless of how many times that household was victimized. For example, if a household were burglarized twice and one of its members robbed once during the year, it 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 1984 (26.0%) is less than the sum of the estimates for households touched by personal crimes (15.7%) and those touched by household crimes (14.0%) 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 (12.3%) and those touched by violence (4.9%) exceeds the estimate of those touched by personal crime (15.7%).

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 in about 60,000 housing units (128,000 persons). Because the NCS does not obtain information about crimes against persons under age 12, households

<sup>12</sup>Homicide estimates for 1984 are not yet available. There were 19,000 homicides in the United States in 1983 (Uniform Crime Reports, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1984).

experiencing only these crimes are not included in the estimate of households touched by crime.

Because the estimates in this bulletin are derived from sample survey data, they are subject to sampling variation.<sup>13</sup> 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

<sup>13</sup>Details of the NCS sample design, the standard error computation, and the customary estimation procedure for victimization rates and counts may be found in appendix III of the BJS report *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1982*, NCJ-92820, August 1984.

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.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>A more detailed description of the procedures used to estimate households touched by crime appears in an unpublished memorandum prepared by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The memorandum is available on request from the author at BJS.

Bureau of Justice Statistics  
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