



National Crime Victimization Survey Redesign

What is the National Crime Victimization Survey ?

The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) is one of two Justice Department measures of crime in the United States. A pioneering effort when it was begun in 1972, the survey was intended to complement what is known about crime from the FBI's annual compilation of information reported to law enforcement agencies. The survey which also counts incidents not reported to the police, provides a detailed picture of crime incidents, victims and trends from the victim's perspective. Data are collected every year from a sample of approximately 50,000 households more than 100,000 individuals age 12 or over.

Victimizations are categorized as personal or property crimes. Personal crimes, including attempts, involve incidents with direct contact between the victim and offender. (Murder is **not** measured by the NCVS because of the inability to question the victim.) Property crimes do not involve personal confrontation and include such crimes as household burglary, theft, and motor vehicle theft.

Why redesign ?

- **Criticism** of the earlier survey's capacity to gather information about certain crimes, including sexual assaults and domestic violence prompted numerous improvements.
- **Improved survey methodology** improves the ability of people being interviewed to recall events.
- **Public attitudes** toward victims have changed, permitting more direct questioning about sexual assaults.

What is the redesign ?

The new methodology was systematically field tested and introduced starting in 1989, and its results are being published for the first time this year. New questions were added to accommodate heightened interest in certain types of victimizations. Improvements in technology and survey methods were incorporated in the redesign. The extended effort to improve the survey is paying off, as the numbers from the redesign will be available in October 1994. An advisory panel of criminal justice policymakers, social scientists, victim advocates, and statisticians oversaw the work of a consortium of criminologists and social and survey scientists who conducted research on improved procedures.

What are the results of the redesign ?

Victims are now reporting more types of crime incidents to the survey's interviewers. Previously undetected victimizations are being captured. For example, the survey changes have substantially increased the number of rapes and aggravated and simple assaults reported to interviewers. For the first time, other victimizations, such as non-rape sexual assault and unwanted or coerced sexual contact that involves a threat or attempt to harm, are also being measured.

Why are survey participants reporting so many more victimizations?

The survey now includes improved questions and cues that aid victims in recalling victimizations. Survey interviewers now ask more explicit questions about sexual victimizations. Advocates have also encouraged victims to

talk more openly about their experiences. Together, these changes substantially improve reporting for many types of personal and household crime.

Can the new results be compared with previous years' ?

Measuring annual change in crime victimization is one of the most important uses of NCVS. The transition to the redesigned survey preserved the ability to detect annual change. Both versions of the survey were used simultaneously to collect data for 1992-93. The overlap also permits measuring the differences between the old and new surveys to show whether the 1992-93 differences were due to changes in crime or changes in the survey.

Why did the Justice Department pick this time to release these findings?

Annual change estimates of crime victimizations are regularly published in the fall. For the first time, data collected with the redesigned survey are available for two consecutive years. The transition to the redesigned survey began in 1989, and this release has been planned since that time.

What do the results of the redesign tell us about the adequacy of information from the original survey?

• **Number of victimizations.** The original National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) benefited from survey methods that were state-of-the-art at the time it was developed. The improvements in survey procedures for the redesigned NCVS have resulted in increased reporting of victimizations. Because victims are reporting more victimization experiences, the redesigned survey is in fact producing a more comprehensive picture of the overall volume of crime.

• **Characteristics of victimizations.** The standards the NCVS uses to define different types of victimizations remain largely the same in the redesigned survey. Details other than what happened to the victim, such as age, race, victim-offender relationship, and location of the offense, are also comparable with information provided by the original survey. Consequently, data collected about the characteristics of crime incidents are equally reliable, regardless of which questionnaire was used to collect it.

• **Annual change estimates.** Year-to-year victimization comparisons have always been calculated on data collected with like questionnaire and procedures. Comparisons for 1991-92 were calculated using the old questionnaire., and those for 1992-93 were prepared with information from the new questionnaire. Consequently, any published findings of differences across years should be considered reliable.

For more information about the NCVS redesign, contact Jay Hoover, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 202-307-1132.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) in the Department of Justice collects and analyzes statistics from all aspects of the criminal justice system. The NCVS data are collected and processed by the Bureau of Census. In addition to the National Crime Victimization Survey, BJS collects and disseminates information regarding corrections, law enforcement, prosecution, drugs, and justice expenditure and employment. For more information call the BJS Clearinghouse at 1-800-732-3277.