

National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) Knowledge Corner:

Victimization, incident, and prevalence estimates in the NCVS



Bureau of Justice Statistics





Estimates with NCVS data

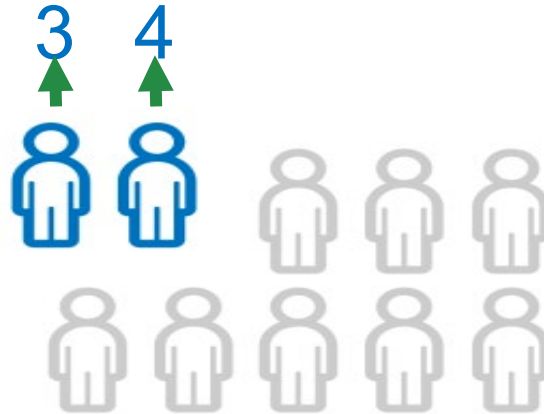
- There are three types of estimates typically published by BJS using NCVS data—
 - Victimization
 - Prevalence
 - Incident
- Taken together, victimization, incident, and prevalence provide a more complete picture of criminal victimization



Bureau of Justice Statistics

Victimization

- **Victimization estimates reflect the total number of times** that persons or households were victims of crime
- One person can experience more than one victimization
 - A person who is robbed three times has experienced three victimizations
- These 10 people experienced 7 victimizations





Calculating victimization rates

- Victimization estimates are often presented as rates
- Victimization rates measure the extent to which violent and property victimizations occur in a specified population during a specified time
- For example, in 2022, there were an estimated 6,419,060 robbery victimization
 - The population of persons age 12 or older was approximately 282,304,640
 - This means that the rate of robbery victimizations was 2.5 per 1,000 persons

• Victimization rate_N = $\frac{\text{Number of victimizations in a population}_T}{\text{Number of persons in a population}_T} * 1,000$



Prevalence

- **Prevalence estimates reflect** the number or percentage of **unique persons** or **unique households** who were crime victims
- A person or household is either a victim or not a victim
 - A person who is robbed one time and a person who is robbed three times are both counted as one unique victim
- This group of 10 people includes 2 victims





Calculating prevalence rates

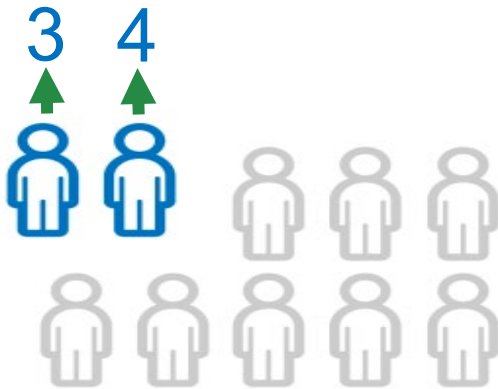
- Prevalence rates are estimated by dividing the number of unique victims or victimized households in the specified population by the total number of persons or households in the population during a specified time
- For example, in 2022, an estimated 443,950 people were victims of robbery
 - The population of persons age 12 or older was about 282,304,600
 - This means that 0.16% of persons age 12 or older were victims of robbery in 2022

- Prevalence rate_N =
$$\frac{\text{Number of victims in a population}_T}{\text{Number of persons in a population}_T}$$



Victimization and Prevalence Rates: Sample Calculation

- Suppose you have a sample of the 10 people below
 - Seven victimizations
 - Two unique victims



$$\text{Victimization rate}_T = \frac{7}{10} * 1,000 = 700 \text{ per } 1,000$$

$$\text{Prevalence rate}_T = \frac{2}{10} * 100\% = 20\%$$



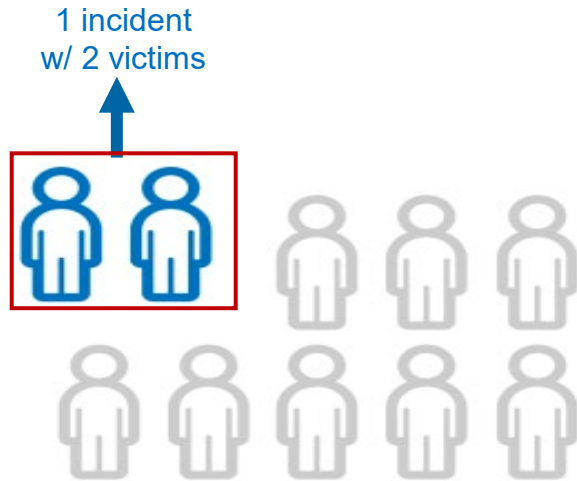
Victimization vs prevalence

- The key distinction between victimization and prevalence rates is whether the numerator consists of the number of victimizations or number of victims
- Both tell about the risk of experiencing crime
- Can be used to look at trends over time
 - If victimization rates increase but prevalence rates do not, there are more repeat victims
 - If prevalence rates increases but the victimization rates do not, more individuals have been victims of crime



Incidents

- The number of specific **criminal acts** involving one or more victims.
 - Unlike victimization and prevalence, rarely expressed as rates
- One incident can have multiple victims
 - In the example below, these 10 people experienced one incident





Why multiple measures?

- Incident estimates are used to look at characteristics of criminal acts
 - Incident estimate are adjusted to compensate for the possibility that the incident could be reported several times by multiple victims and thus be overcounted
- If each criminal incident had one victim and each victim experienced exactly one victimization, victimization, incident, and prevalence estimates would be the same
 - But incidents have multiple victims and victims experience multiple victimizations
- Taken together, victimization, incident, and prevalence estimates provide a more complete picture of criminal victimization





Questions?

- See the NCVS page on the BJS website – <https://bjs.ojp.gov/programs/ncvs>
 - See the [NCVS, 2016: Technical Documentation](#) for more information about the methodology
- Email AskBJS@usdoj.gov with questions – emails are forwarded to BJS statisticians with topical expertise
- Access NCVS public-use data files at the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD) at the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) – <https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/ICPSR/series/95>
 - See the annual codebooks for more information

