

Welcome to the National Crime Victimization Survey Knowledge Corner. This short video will focus on three types of estimates that can be calculated using NCVS data: victimization, incident, and prevalence.

There are three types of estimates typically published by BJS using NCVS data: Victimization, Prevalence, and Incident. Taken together, victimization, incident, and prevalence provide a more complete picture of criminal 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. For example, a person who is robbed three times has experienced three victimizations. In the figure on your slide, you can see that these 10 people experienced a total of 7 victimizations.

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. To calculate the rate of victimizations, per 1,000 persons in the population, divide the number of victimizations in a population by the number of persons in the population. Then multiply that number by 1,000 to calculate the rate per 1,000 persons. For example, in 2022, there were approximately 6,419,060 robbery victimizations, and the population of persons age 12 or older was about 282,304,640. This means that the rate of robbery victimizations in 2022 was 2.5 per 1,000 persons age 12 or older.

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 counts as one victim, but a person who is robbed three times is also counted as one victim even though they experienced three victimizations. In the figure on the slide, you can see that this group of 10 people includes 2 victims.

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. To get the rate of prevalence, divide the number of victims in the population by the number of persons in the population. Since prevalence rates are often expressed as percentages, multiply your result by 100%. For example, in 2022, approximately 443,950 people were victims of robbery. The population of persons age 12 or older remains the same at about 282,304,640. This means that 0.16% of persons age 12 or older were victims of robbery in 2022.

Let's compare calculations for victimization and prevalence using the same information. Say we have a population of 10 people, as pictured on the slide. Person 1 has experienced three violent victimizations. Person 2 has experienced 4 violent victimizations. The other 8 people have not experienced any victimizations. For the victimization rate, these 10 people have experienced a total of 7 victimizations. To get the victimization rate, we divide the number of victimizations, 7, by the number of people in our population, 10. We then multiply that number by 1,000. In a

population of 1,000 people, we would expect a total of 700 victimizations. That is the victimization rate.

Now let's look at prevalence. Person 1 was a victim of violent crime. Person 2 was also a victim of violent crime. The other 8 people were not victims of violent crime. In our sample of 10 people, there were 2 victims. To get the prevalence rate, we divide the number of victims, 2, by the number of people in the population, 10. We then multiply that number by 100% to get the percentage of persons who were victims of violent crime. This means we would expect 20% of people in that population to have been victims of violent crime. When people hear that 700 per 1,000 persons are victims, they get a different picture of crime than if they hear 20% of people are victims. This is why it is helpful to look at both victimization and prevalence rates.

The key distinction between victimization and prevalence rates is whether the numerator consists of the number of victimizations or the number of victims. In both cases, the denominator is the number of persons or households in the population of interest. Both victimization and prevalence rates indicate a risk of experiencing crime, and both can be used to look at trends over time. If victimization rates increase but prevalence rates do not, there are more persons who have experienced multiple crimes, or repeat victims. If prevalence rates increase but the victimization rates do not, more individuals have been victims of crime.

Incident estimates reflect the number of specific criminal acts involving one or more victims. Unlike victimization and prevalence, incidents are rarely expressed as rates. One incident can have multiple victims. For example, if one person is robbed, this would count as one incident and one victimization. If two people are walking together and both are robbed, this is considered one incident but two victimizations. In the figure on the slide, these 10 people experienced one incident.

You may be wondering why you need three different estimates to look at criminal victimization. Victimization, incident, and prevalence estimates have different uses. Incident estimates are used to look at characteristics of criminal acts. Incident estimates 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 the NCVS can be used to generate victimization, incident, and prevalence estimates that provide a more complete picture of criminal victimization.

For additional information on the NCVS, see the NCVS page on the BJS website. You can also see the NCVS technical documentation for more information about the methodology. Please email askbjs@usdoj.gov with any questions and your email will be forwarded to a BJS statistician with topical experience. Finally, you can access the NCVS public-use data files at the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data, or NACJD.

Thank you.