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16.6 MILLION PEOPLE EXPERIENCED IDENTITY THEFT IN 2012

Financial losses totaled \$24.7 billion

WASHINGTON – An estimated 16.6 million people, representing 7 percent of all persons age 16 or older in the United States, experienced at least one incident of identity theft in 2012, the Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) announced today.

Financial losses due to personal identity theft totaled \$24.7 billion, over \$10 billion more than the losses attributed to all other property crimes measured in the National Crime Victimization Survey. About 14 percent of victims suffered an out-of-pocket financial loss due to the most recent incident of identity theft. Of the victims who experienced an out-of-pocket loss, about half lost \$99 or less.

Identity theft is the attempted or successful misuse of an existing account, such as a debit or credit card account, the misuse of personal information to open a new account, or the misuse of personal information for other fraudulent purposes, such as obtaining government benefits or providing false information to police during a crime or traffic stop.

In 2012, the misuse or attempted misuse of an existing account was the most common type of identity theft— experienced by 15.3 million people. An estimated 7.7 million people reported the fraudulent use of a credit card and 7.5 million reported the fraudulent use of a bank account such as a debit, checking or savings account. Another 1.1 million persons had their information misused to open a new account, and about 833,600 persons had their information misused for other fraudulent purposes.

The most common way victims discovered the identity theft in 2012 was when a financial institution contacted them about suspicious activity on an account. About 2 out of 3 victims did not know how the offender obtained their information, and 9 out of 10 did not know anything about the identity of the offender.

In general, victims who had personal information such as a social security number misused were more likely to experience financial, legal, or other problems as a result of the incident than other types of identity theft victims. In addition, about 6 percent of victims who experienced the fraudulent use of

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personal information to create a new account reported significant problems at work or school, compared to about 1 percent of victims of credit card fraud and bank account fraud.

The majority of identity theft victims spent one day or less clearing up associated problems, while about 10 percent spent more than a month. Victims who spent more time resolving associated problems were more likely to experience problems with work or personal relationships and severe emotional distress than victims who resolved the problems relatively quickly. Among identity theft victims who spent 6 months or more resolving financial and credit problems due to the theft, 47 percent experienced severe emotional distress, compared to 4 percent who spent a day or less.

In 2012, about 9 percent of identity theft victims reported the incident to police. Nearly 90 percent of identity theft victims contacted a credit card company or bank to report misuse or attempted misuse of an account or personal information, 9 percent contacted a credit bureau, and 6 percent contacted a credit monitoring service.

Other findings include•

- Overall, 14 percent of persons in the 2012 survey age 16 or older, or 34.2 million people, had experienced one or more incidents of identity theft in the past.
- Persons in households with annual incomes of \$75,000 or more were the most likely to experience identity theft (10 percent).
- Identity theft prevalence rates did not vary by sex.
- Identity theft victims (10 percent) were less likely than violent crime victims (27 percent) to report that the victimization was severely distressing.

These findings are based on data from the 2012 Identity Theft Supplement (ITS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey. The ITS surveyed about 70,000 persons age 16 or older in the United States about experiences with identity theft during the previous 12 months.

The report, *Victims of Identity Theft, 2012* (NCJ 243779), was written by BJS statisticians Erika Harrell and Lynn Langton. The report, related documents and additional information about BJS statistical publications and programs can be found on the BJS website at <http://www.bjs.gov/>.

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