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Criminal Victimization
in the United States:

Summary Findings of 1977-78
Changes in Crime and
of Trends Since 1973

October 1979

Crime rates for the personal and household offenses measured by the National Crime Survey (NCS) were generally unchanged between 1977 and 1978. Only for personal larceny with contact was there some indication of a rise for 1978,¹ as the victimization rates for rape, robbery, assault, personal larceny without contact, household burglary, household larceny, or motor vehicle theft were not significantly changed. The increase in personal larceny with contact, moreover, did not significantly affect the overall rate for personal crimes of theft, of which the noncontact form of larceny is by far the larger proportion. Also, the rate for the three violent crimes combined did not register a meaningful change from 1977 to 1978 (Table 1).

Over the 6 years for which the NCS has measured crime, each of the eight major offenses except rape and personal larceny with contact exhibited significant change.² Definite increases were observed between 1973 and 1978 in the incidence of assault, personal larceny without contact, and household larceny. Clear decreases were found in the victimization rates for personal robbery and household burglary, and there was a statistically less conclusive drop in the rate for motor vehicle theft. The rise in the rate of assault was brought about by a substantial increase in the occurrence of simple assault (Table 2).

Closer examination of the NCS rates within the 1973-78 time frame reveals further refinements in trends. The rate of household larceny, for example, increased sharply between 1973 and 1974, but there had been no measurable change on a year-to-year basis since 1974. The robbery victimization rate, on the other hand, has dropped since 1974, and, although none of the year-to-year decreases were statistically significant, the cumulative result was a clear-cut 18-

percent lower rate in 1978 than in 1974. A similar decline characterized the burglary rate since 1974, resulting in an 8-percent drop by 1978. The rate of motor vehicle theft fell substantially between 1975 and 1976, with no measurable change since the latter year. The 1978 rate for assault, as well as that for simple assault, was higher than in any of the preceding years, although the most recent apparent increase (between 1977 and 1978) lacked statistical significance.

The rates at which crimes were reported to the police were also essentially unchanged between 1977 and 1978. For each of the three violent crimes considered separately, no significant directions emerged in police notification rates; this was true whether the crimes were committed by strangers or nonstrangers. For crimes of violence as a whole, however, there was some indication that relatively fewer offenses were reported in 1978 than a year earlier. The reduction in the overall proportion of violent crimes brought to police attention centered on stranger-to-stranger offenses rather than on those involving nonstrangers (Table 3).

With respect to the NCS-measured property crimes, there were no appreciable decreases or increases in the relative number of larcenies, whether against individuals or households, reported to the police in 1978. In like manner, there were no significant changes in the rates at which law enforcement authorities were informed about residential burglaries or motor vehicle thefts.

NCS data are collected by means of interviews with a representative sample of persons age 12 and over living in approximately 60,000 households across the Nation. The survey is designed and carried out for the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Data in

also did not change significantly during 1973-78. The combined rate for the three personal crimes of violence was unchanged, but that for crimes of theft (encompassing the two forms of personal larceny) increased. The rate for simple assault, the other subcategory of assault, rose during the period.

¹Personal larceny with contact consists of pocket picking and purse snatching, whether completed or attempted. A 94-percent confidence level was associated with the overall rate change for these crimes. All changes discussed in this report are significant at a minimum confidence level of 90 percent.

²Aggravated assault, a subcategory of assault,

this report, third in a series to examine trends in crime, are preliminary and subject to revision.³ Further analyses will be contained in two forthcoming reports: the first of these will focus in more detail on trends in criminal victimization, and the second, which will be a more comprehensive review of the 1978 data, will examine, in addition to victimi-

zation rates, other characteristics related to incidents, victims, and offenders. Each of those reports will also contain a description of the survey methodology, including a discussion of sampling error, as well as definitions and other technical information.

³See *Criminal Victimization in the U.S.: A Comparison of 1976 and 1977 Findings--Advance Report*, NCJISS, LEAA, SD-NCS-N-10A (November 1978) and *Criminal Victimization in the*

United States: A Description of Trends from 1973 to 1977, NCJISS, LEAA, SD-NCS-N-10 (forthcoming).

Table 1. Personal and household crimes: Number of victimizations and victimization rates, by type of crime, 1973-78.

Sector and type of crime	(Rate per 1,000)					
	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978
Personal sector						
Crimes of violence						
Number	5,351,000	5,510,000	5,573,000	5,599,000	5,902,000	5,941,000
Rate	32.6	33.0	32.8	32.6	33.9	33.7
Rape						
Number	156,000	163,000	154,000	145,000	154,000	171,000
Rate	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.9	1.0
Robbery						
Number	1,108,000	1,199,000	1,147,000	1,111,000	1,083,000	1,038,000
Rate	6.7	7.2	6.8	6.5	6.2	5.9
Assault						
Number	4,087,000	4,148,000	4,272,000	4,344,000	4,664,000	4,732,000
Rate	24.9	24.8	25.2	25.3	26.8	26.9
Aggravated assault						
Number	1,655,000	1,735,000	1,631,000	1,695,000	1,738,000	1,708,000
Rate	10.1	10.4	9.6	9.9	10.0	9.7
Simple assault						
Number	2,432,000	2,413,000	2,641,000	2,648,000	2,926,000	3,024,000
Rate	14.8	14.4	15.6	15.4	16.8	17.2
Crimes of theft						
Number	14,971,000	15,889,000	16,294,000	16,519,000	16,933,000	17,050,000
Rate	91.1	95.1	96.0	96.1	97.3	96.8
Personal larceny with contact						
Number	504,000	520,000	524,000	497,000	461,000	549,000
Rate	3.1	3.1	3.1	2.9	2.7	3.1
Personal larceny without contact						
Number	14,466,000	15,369,000	15,770,000	16,022,000	16,472,000	16,501,000
Rate	88.0	92.0	92.9	93.2	94.6	93.6
Total population age 12 and over	164,363,000	167,058,000	169,671,000	171,901,000	174,093,000	176,215,000
Household sector						
Household burglary						
Number	6,458,700	6,720,600	6,743,700	6,663,400	6,764,900	6,704,000
Rate	91.7	93.1	91.7	88.9	88.5	86.0
Household larceny						
Number	7,537,300	8,933,100	9,223,000	9,300,900	9,418,300	9,351,900
Rate	107.0	123.8	125.4	124.1	123.3	119.9
Motor vehicle theft						
Number	1,343,900	1,358,400	1,433,000	1,234,600	1,296,800	1,365,100
Rate	19.1	18.8	19.5	16.5	17.0	17.5
Total number of households	70,442,400	72,162,900	73,559,600	74,956,100	76,412,300	77,980,400

NOTE: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding.

Table 2. Personal and household crimes: Comparison of changes in victimization rates, by type of crime, 1973-78.

Sector and type of crime	Percent change in the victimization rate				
	1973-78	1974-78	1975-78	1976-78	1977-78
Personal sector					
Crimes of violence	+3.6	+2.2	+2.7	+3.5	-0.5
Rape	+2.1	-1.0	+6.6	+15.5	+9.0
Robbery	*-12.6	*-18.0	*-12.9	** -8.8	-5.3
Assault	*+8.0	*+8.1	*+6.6	*+6.3	+0.2
Aggravated assault	-3.8	*-6.7	+0.8	-1.7	-2.9
Simple assault	*+16.0	*+18.8	*+10.3	*+11.4	+2.1
Crimes of theft	*+6.2	+1.7	+0.8	+0.7	-0.5
Personal larceny with contact	+1.6	+0.3	+1.0	+8.0	**+17.7
Personal larceny without contact	*+6.4	+1.8	+0.8	+0.5	-1.0
Household sector					
Household burglary	*-6.2	*-7.7	*-6.2	-3.3	-2.9
Household larceny	*+12.1	** -3.1	*-4.4	** -3.3	-2.7
Motor vehicle theft	** -8.2	-7.0	*-10.1	+6.3	+3.2

*Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

**Statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

Table 3. Personal and household crimes: Change in police reporting rates, by type of crime, 1977-78.

Sector and type of crime	(Percent of victimizations reported to the police)								
	Total			Stranger			Nonstranger		
	1977	1978	Percent change	1977	1978	Percent change	1977	1978	Percent change
Personal sector									
Crimes of violence	46.1	44.2	** -4.2	48.7	45.7	* -6.0	41.8	41.6	-0.5
Rape	58.4	48.8	-16.6	62.0	49.9	-19.5	52.0	45.8	-11.8
Robbery	55.5	50.6	-9.0	56.2	52.3	-6.9	53.0	44.6	-16.0
Assault	43.5	42.7	-2.0	45.9	43.7	-4.8	40.2	41.2	+2.5
Aggravated assault	51.5	52.8	+2.5	51.9	52.4	+1.0	50.8	53.4	+5.1
Simple assault	38.8	37.0	-4.8	41.9	38.1	-9.1	34.7	35.5	+2.3
Crimes of theft	24.8	24.6	-0.8	...	...	...	...	...	...
Personal larceny with contact	37.2	33.7	-9.4	...	...	...	...	...	...
Personal larceny without contact	24.5	24.3	-0.6	...	...	...	...	...	...
Household sector									
Household burglary	48.8	47.1	-3.5	...	...	...	...	...	...
Household larceny	25.4	24.5	-3.8	...	...	...	...	...	...
Motor vehicle theft	68.5	66.1	-3.5	...	...	...	...	...	...

*Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

**Statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

... Represents not applicable. The distinction between stranger and nonstranger is not made for property crimes because victims rarely see the offenders.

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