

**The Victims of Crime:  
Some National Survey Findings**

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Since the mid-1960s, the problem of "crime on the streets" has been a recurrent theme on the American political agenda. In platforms and campaign speeches, candidates for office have espoused wide-ranging solutions to control crime, from restoring the death penalty or augmenting police departments to radical social and economic reform. This political excitement has been translated into a variety of specific crime-reduction programs. At the local level, rape crisis centers and victim-representation programs have been instituted to provide supportive services for the unfortunate targets of crime. Methadone-maintenance programs have been initiated to respond to the perceived needs of drug users. Halfway houses have been created to facilitate the adjustment of prisoners returning to the community. Police communications hardware and equipment have been upgraded to enable them to respond more rapidly to calls for police assistance, on the presumption that such activity will prevent many crimes from occurring in the first place. The federal government has provided billions of dollars for state and local agencies to initiate and evaluate the effectiveness of such programs, and it has fostered the diffusion of workable ideas throughout the crime-control establishment.

This new attention to the performance of the criminal justice system has highlighted an old problem. In spite of the introduction of innovative programs, we still lack many of the most rudimentary measures necessary to decide which programs work and how our society is

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progressing toward reducing crime. Since the 1930s, the primary source of information on crime, criminals, and their victims has been the yearly *Uniform Crime Reports* collected from local police departments by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Participating departments supply the FBI with the number of crimes of various types that have come to their attention, the number "cleared" (attributed to a firm suspect), and some simple information on the victims of homicide and the recovery of stolen property. They also report the social characteristics (age, race, and sex) of persons arrested for those crimes. These data define the limits of our knowledge about national crime patterns; those limits are quite narrow, and the data themselves are often suspect. In 1967 a Task Force of the Crime Commission concluded:

[T]he United States is today, in the era of the high speed computer, trying to keep track of crime and criminals with a system that was less than adequate in the days of the horse and buggy. . . . In some respects the present system is not as good as that used in some European countries 100 years ago.<sup>1</sup>

The manifold problems of official crime statistics led the Commission to support a series of sample surveys to gauge independently the volume and distribution of crime. In those surveys, interviewers visited randomly selected samples of households and questioned adult "informants" about the individual victimization experiences of household members, and about burglary and other crimes against property perpetrated against the household unit. The resulting data were used to explore the personal characteristics of victims of various types of crime and to generate new measures of the crime rate for the sampled jurisdictions.<sup>2</sup>

This new source of data on crime closes several gaps in official statistics and circumvents important political and organizational processes that lead the police to undercount or undervalue many kinds of crime in their reports to the FBI. Because participation in the uniform crime reporting system is voluntary, coverage of the United States is far from complete for many key statistics. Sample surveys, on the other hand, can be representative of the entire population. Large, carefully drawn samples yield data more reliable than "complete enumerations," which miss many areas and often elicit incomplete, illegible, or inaccurate data.

1. President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice, *Task Force Report: Crime and its Impact—An Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), p. 123.

2. See Philip H. Ennis, *Criminal Victimization in the United States: A Report of a National Survey* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967).

rate accounts of local activity. Furthermore, because they deal with relatively small samples, surveyors can afford to focus upon each individual case in greater depth, thereby eliciting much more thorough descriptions of events. Traditionally, police departments have only collected detailed information on victims, offenders, use of weapons, and physical location in the case of homicide.

Survey measures of crime are also more useful than official statistics in making inter-city comparisons of crime rates and characteristics of crime incidents. The voluntary self-reporting system used by the FBI is plagued by two problems that make comparisons questionable. First, the quality of information kept by local departments varies. The second impediment is differences between standard definitions of specific crimes employed by the FBI for national accounting purposes and the definitions imposed by state criminal codes and city or county ordinances. What is classified as a "robbery" will vary from place to place, and it is not clear that local recordkeeping systems can always be adequately translated into standard form when *Uniform Crime Reports* is compiled. Interview questionnaires, on the other hand, may easily be standardized and deployed in similar fashion across jurisdictions.

Another advantage of surveys is their independence from local authorities. Data gathered and analyzed by organizations not affected by the area's political machinations are not sensitive to local variations in law enforcement politics or police administrative practices. It is easy for the police to cheat. Attempted burglary can be catalogued as vandalism, robbery as purse-snatching, and grand larceny as petty larceny.<sup>3</sup> Rape complaints can be discouraged by rough handling, burglary reports can be "lost," and even homicide can be written off as "suicide" or "hit-and-run" when there is no next-of-kin to raise a ruckus. All of these techniques are useful when they serve the political purposes of the police to "reduce crime," and they may be reversed to achieve the opposite effect as well. Cheating can also take place at the grass-roots level. In departments where the performance of district commanders is evaluated by their ability to manage the local crime rate, they will do so. As one Chicago police officer recently testified, "It's impossible under the present system to write factual and honest official reports and stay out of the commander's office very long."<sup>4</sup>

Finally, even honest official figures can be accumulated only for those crimes that come to the attention of the police. This is both a

3. David Seidman and Michael Couzens, "Getting the Crime Rate Down: Political Pressure and Crime Reporting," *Law and Society Review* 8 (1974): 457-93.

4. *Chicago Tribune*, March 30, 1973.

weakness and a strength of police-based crime statistics. Its weaknesses in the massive undercounting of certain kinds of crime. We have long suspected that many crimes are never reported to the police; European sociologists dubbed this officially unrecognized activity the "dark figure" of crime. In their present organization, the police are primarily a reactive force, intervening upon citizen request. Police rarely observe such events as robbery or burglary, but rely upon victims or their confidants to report crimes to them through calls for assistance. When such calls are not made, the police can neither record nor respond to criminal activities. Unlike official statistics, surveys gather information on many of these unreported victimizations. As we shall see below, nonreporting rates may be as high as eighty percent for some crime categories, and here surveys provide us with the only useful data on victims and offenders.

Surveys of the type reviewed here, however, cannot record many other kinds of crime. They cannot, for example, count crimes without victims. In their "proactive" role, the police detect many events which are not reported to them, but which they must seek out: drug use, public drunkenness, traffic offenses, prostitution. They also determine that events were crimes through intensive investigation; this is how we know, for instance, that a fire was the result of arson. Thus police statistics are the only suitable accounting device for some kinds of crime. In addition, there are other classes of events for which neither official nor survey measures are suitable. It is often impossible to classify an event without knowledge of the perpetrator's motives. When a merchant arrives at his store in the morning and finds a broken front window, shall we label it attempted burglary (a serious crime) or vandalism (not so serious)? When another merchant conducts an inventory and discovers shortages, should we attribute them to shoplifting, to employee theft, or were the goods simply "lost" rather than "stolen"? In the absence of knowledge about specific events, even detailed information about the magnitude of a loss is not very useful. Crimes are furtive activities. Offenders attempt to control information that may link them with criminal activity, and when they are successful *no* measurement technique will betray them.

Within these limitations, surveys of crime may still reveal detailed information of considerable importance on suitable events. Since 1972 the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration and the Bureau of the Census have been conducting national and city-level studies of this type. Twenty-six large cities have been chosen for analysis, and approximately 33,000 interviews with city residents and 2,000 interviews with business owners and managers have been conducted in each of those communities. A continuing series of interviews is also being conducted

with a national panel of 150,000 individuals and 17,500 business representatives. They are questioned every six months in rotation in order to produce quarterly estimates of the crime rate for the United States as a whole. These interviews focus upon a selected set of relatively serious crimes: rape, robbery, assault, burglary, and theft. The section of the survey questionnaire which measures victimization was rigorously pretested in three cities to establish procedures that would most accurately assess crime. Questions have been designed particularly to encourage respondents to remember past events, to recall exact dates and details, and to overcome any embarrassment they might feel about discussing their experiences with an interviewer. In addition to reporting specific crime incidents, victims are asked to describe their assailants, the extent of their financial loss and physical injury is probed, it is ascertained if they filed (and if they collected) any insurance claims, and they are asked if anyone reported the event to the police. Together, this information gives us a new and more detailed picture of criminal victimization patterns in the United States.

### HOW MUCH CRIME IS THERE?

The victimization surveys uncovered considerable disparity between the number of criminal incidents reported to interviewers and official FBI statistics. Extrapolations from the samples indicate that about 37,500,000 criminal events occurred in the United States during 1973 alone. The vast majority of these were crimes against property and therefore did not involve personal contact between a victim and an offender. Together, burglary of households (6,400,000 incidents) and commercial establishments (1,400,000), the loss of motor vehicles (1,300,000), and petty thefts from individuals (over 22,000,000) accounted for 85 percent of the total. Only four percent could be classified as "personal thefts" (robberies, purse-snatches, and other predatory offenses involving direct confrontations between victims and criminals). Slightly over four million instances of interpersonal violence (rapes and assaults) were recorded (11 percent of total reported victimizations). Assaults were far more frequent than rapes, and a surprising number of both (about 70 percent of rapes and 75 percent of assaults) appear to have been unsuccessful, resulting in little or no physical injury.

Undoubtedly this large figure still falls far short of recording *all* crimes that occurred in the United States during 1973. Rape is probably not well measured in a victim survey, although many more incidents were reported to interviewers than surfaced through official reporting channels in 1973. In general, self-reporting procedures for measuring

events are biased when they embarrass the respondent, when the events involve relatives or acquaintances who may be compromised, when the respondent/victim may have been partially responsible for precipitating the event, or when the boundaries that socially define the event are uncertain and shifting. These factors all contribute to measurement error for both rape and assault, and undoubtedly lead victim surveys to underestimate the total number of potentially reportable events in the population. On the other hand, the very large numbers reported above may seriously *overestimate* other classes of offenses. Before they report a crime as having occurred, the police routinely investigate the circumstances surrounding an event; in many cases they conclude that a formal complaint is not required (i.e., no crime has been committed). No such screening is used in these victim surveys, although other surveys employing expert judges to determine if a legally actionable offense has occurred have similarly dismissed a number of citizen-recalled incidents.<sup>5</sup>

It is unlikely, however, that the lack of screening could account for the magnitude of differences between official and survey crime rates revealed here. In some serious categories the ratio of crime uncovered in the interviews to incidents officially recorded is over three to one. While it is impossible to compare official and survey crime figures in every case, Table 9-1 presents such comparisons for those crimes where it is reasonable to do so.

As the figures in Table 9-1 indicate, survey estimates of the crime rate overshadow official counts in every category. Survey data revealed about three times as many rapes, assaults, burglaries, and robberies than reported in *Uniform Crime Reports*. The only crime with a significantly smaller gap between the two figures is vehicle theft. It has been argued that police statistics on auto theft, like those for homicide, are relatively accurate reflections of events that take place in the world. It appears that the magnitude of the loss, the importance of the automobile in daily life, and the widespread belief that a police report must be filed for insurance purposes encourage high reporting rates for auto theft. If the other stages in the crime-recording process function smoothly, this should result in more accurate official figures for vehicle losses.

### WHO ARE THE VICTIMS OF CRIME?

The picture of victimization that emerges from the 1973 national crime survey is a familiar one: the burden of crime is unequally distributed in

5. See Eranis, *op. cit.*

TABLE 9-1. Comparison of Official and Survey Crime Totals for Selected Categories, 1973

Crime	Survey		Ratio	Comments
	U.S. Estimate	Official U.S. Total		
Rape	153,000	51,000	3.0:1	Should be comparable; both count only individuals; much evidence that both undercount.
Assault	1,313,180	416,270	3.2:1	Both count individuals; official definition requires serious injury or use of weapon; survey estimate is for events with comparable characteristics.
Burglary	7,818,026	2,540,000	3.1:1	Official figures have a wider base, and should total more—the survey figure is for households and businesses only, while the official total includes organizations, governments, etc.
Robbery	1,214,884	382,680	3.2:1	Official base is wider, as for burglary.
Motor Vehicle Theft	1,330,470	923,600	1.4:1	Official base is wider—the survey figure is for auto theft from individual owners only, while official totals include thefts from businesses and organizations.

SOURCE: Official figures are from the *Uniform Crime Reports* for 1973; survey totals were calculated from tabulations supplied by the Bureau of the Census for the 1973 Annual National Crime Survey.

American society, falling heavily upon those who already bear the consequences of other forms of social inequality. The victims of crime are disproportionately young, black, and poor. Further, each of these factors appears to contribute independently to the chances that an individual is the victim of a crime. The effects of age, race, and social status accumulate for those at the bottom of the ladder, leading to extremely high victimization rates for selected subgroups in the population. Let us look at these in succession.

Young people are disproportionately the victims of assaultive violence. Table 9-2 reports assault *victimization rates* (the number of victims divided into the number of persons) for different age groups. Assault rates are extremely high for persons in the sixteen to nineteen age cohort, approaching six per hundred. The rate drops off steadily with age, and it is very small for persons over fifty. There are several reasons for this inverse relationship between assault victimization and

age. First, youthful victims are often in close proximity to high-risk offenders, who are also disproportionately other youths: they are on the street, in school yards, and in competitive events with their exuberant peers. Second, until about age sixteen, physical differences between persons of differing ages are often pronounced. Therefore, twelve-year old children will be quite vulnerable to harassment by their immediate elders for several more years.

The differential distribution of interpersonal violence across age cohorts is also presented in Table 9-2; the proportion each group represents in the sample population is contrasted to the proportion each young person is in the pool of assault victims. The contrasts are striking: numbers in the population would lead us to expect. Persons between ages twelve and twenty-four (who make up 30 percent of the sample population) suffer 60 percent of all assaults recalled in the interviews. Any official policy designed to reduce the overall assault rate in the United States must speak to the particular security needs of the younger component of the population. As we shall see, this will be extremely difficult.

The pool of high-risk victims is further defined by sex: the victimization rate for crimes involving assaultive violence is twice as high among males (3.6 per hundred) as among females (1.9 per hundred). The same proportions describe robbery victimizations as well. Females outdistance males only in two crime categories represented in this survey, rape and purse-snatching (some male victims of each were interviewed).

Rapes which were reported for 1973 were twice as common among black women as among whites. Rape rates were much higher among divorced and single women than among the married, and victims were

TABLE 9-2. Age and Victimization, 1973

Age	Assault Rate (per 100)	Percentage of Total Population (Age 12 and over)	Percentage of Assault Victims
12-15	4.81	10.2	18.3
16-19	5.80	9.6	20.7
20-24	5.28	10.7	21.0
25-34	3.01	17.3	19.4
35-49	1.67	20.8	13.0
50-64	.84	18.8	5.9
65 and over	.38	12.5	1.8
		100.0	100.0

SOURCE: Calculated from tabulations prepared by the Bureau of the Census from the 1973 Annual National Crime Survey. Percentages do not total exactly to 100 percent due to rounding.

concentrated in the sixteen to twenty-four age group. Marital status undoubtedly reflects differential opportunities for victimization: single women are more likely to be out at night unescorted or in the presence of males with whom their relationship is uncertain, and are the most accessible targets for attack. The assailant is usually a lone offender: about 80 percent of reported rapes were described in this way, while an additional 10 percent involved two offenders. The victims reported that the offender was a stranger about two-and-one-half times as often as they recalled some previous relationship with him. Strangers may be involved in a far smaller proportion of rapes than these surveys indicate. There is some evidence that rapes in which the victim and the offender are acquainted or related are less likely to be recalled in an interview than the same crimes committed by a stranger. Such crimes by known perpetrators are also less likely to come to the attention of the police.<sup>6</sup>

These attributes of rape help explain why its deterrence presents a difficult problem for the criminal justice system. The structural preconditions of such victimizations involve women's roles, which are certainly less constrained than in the past. This may account in part for the rapid rise of official rape figures in recent years. In addition, the lone, unknown offender is the most difficult to identify and apprehend, reducing the potential impact of police rape-deterrence programs.

The relationship between race and criminal victimization is also clearly patterned: blacks are more likely than whites to be the victims of crime. Table 9-3 presents victimization rates by race for the largest categories of serious crime—robbery, assault, and burglary. In each case, rates for blacks exceed those for whites. Table 9-3 further distinguishes rates for robbery and assault with a weapon and burglary involving breaking and entering. In each of these subcategories, blacks

TABLE 9-3. Race and Victimization Rates, 1973 (per 100)

Type of Offense	Blacks	Whites	Ratio
Assault With a Weapon	3.22	2.64	1.2:1
Robbery	1.73	.91	1.9:1
With a Weapon	1.44	.60	2.4:1
Burglary	.85	.29	2.9:1
Breaking and Entering	13.55	8.77	1.5:1
	6.30	2.56	2.5:1

SOURCE: Computed from tabulations prepared by the Bureau of the Census from the 1973 Annual National Crime Survey.

6. "San Jose Methods Test of Known Crime Victims," *Statistics Technical Report No. 1* (Washington, D.C.: Statistics Division, National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, 1972).

saults; automobile theft and common property theft increase in frequency as we move up the income ladder. These rates seem to reflect the cultural and economic circumstances in which Americans at polar extremes of the income distribution find themselves. Working-class males are more likely to grow up within a cultural milieu which demands that they assert their manhood in a physical manner, and the data indicate that violence within family and acquaintance networks is much more common in lower-income homes. High-income families, on the other hand, are desirable targets for property crime—they have more to steal.

If we simultaneously control for the effects of race and income on victimization rates, the 1973 survey data indicate that each factor is independently important. Both for property offenses and interpersonal violence, rates vary in the fashion described above for blacks and whites within income groups, and for high- and low-income people within the same racial group. Comparisons of victimization rates within these groupings suggest that income is more important than race in determining the probability of becoming a victim. However, the fact that income is more important should not minimize the effect of race revealed in this survey; for most black families in America do not have very much money. In this national sample, 67 percent of all black households fell into the low-income category (annual income less than \$7,500), while 23 percent of all white households and only 8 percent of all black households fell into the high-income category (annual income over \$15,000). That white victimization rates for many property crimes are relatively high because whites have more to steal is a two-edged comment on crime in America.

**WHERE IS THE ACTION?**

Although crime occurs in every corner of the nation, the highest crime rates are concentrated in large cities. Crimes are easy to commit in cities because more strangers are about (making it easier to avoid identification), more goods are available to be stolen, and more people make a point of not knowing their neighbor's business (making it easier to live a "life of crime"). Cities are also places where the rich and poor come into contact daily, increasing opportunities for crime as well as accentuating the differences in their lifestyles.

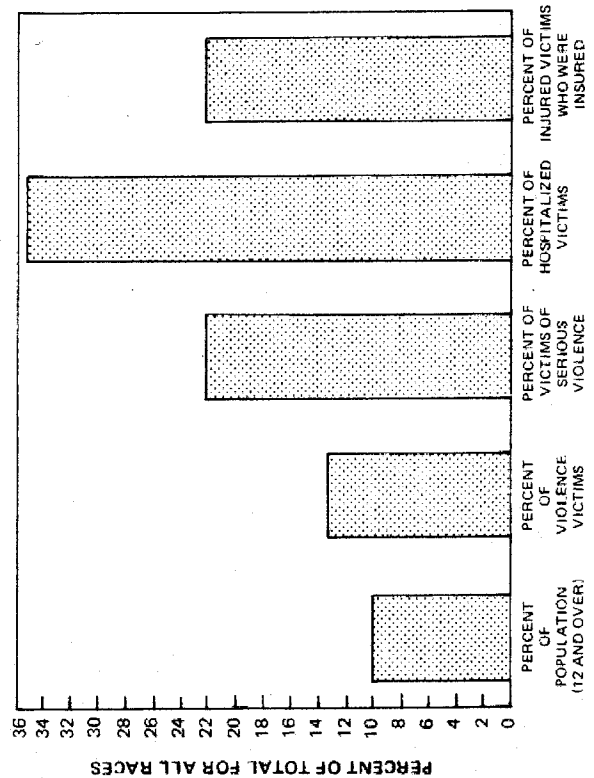
The relationship between city size and crime is reflected in surveys of the citizenry. Victimization rates are higher among residents of cities than among residents of rural areas; urban rates for interpersonal violence are about one-third higher than those in the country; personal thefts are four times as common in cities; property crime rates in rural

are more likely to be victims. In fact, the ratio between black and white victimization rates is higher in these more serious subcategories (i.e. those involving use of a weapon or breaking and entering) than overall rates for the crimes. Further, the evidence indicates that blacks suffer disproportionately from the serious consequences of crime. Figure 9-1 presents an analysis of the medical problems of the victims of assaultive violence. It reveals a familiar pattern: blacks are more likely to be the victims of such crimes, more likely to suffer a serious assault, more likely to be hospitalized overnight, and less likely to be insured. For a great variety of offenses, black Americans disproportionately suffer the burdens of crime.

The high level of victimization endured by blacks is in part a class phenomenon. In general, lower-income people are more likely than others to be the victims of crime, especially interpersonal violence and personal theft. Several types of property theft, on the other hand, more frequently strike upper-income individuals.

There is an inverse relationship between income and personal violence. Violent victimizations drop as income increases; members of families with incomes over \$25,000 suffer [at] only about 60 percent of the rate borne by persons earning less than \$3,000. In contrast to a

FIGURE 9-1. The Consequences of Victimization for Blacks: The Black Victims of Personal Violence in the 1973 National Crime Survey



places are only about 70 percent of city rates. Rates also increase with city size. Figure 9-2 shows victimization rates for residents of various-sized cities and their suburban rings. (Note that these rates represent the location of victims' residences rather than the location of crimes—the two will differ somewhat, and these data will overestimate suburban crime rates and underestimate central city rates.) As Figure 9-2 indicates, personal theft increases steadily with city size, and the highest rates are achieved by residents of America's urban giants. The relatively high rates of victimization experienced by residents of the rings surrounding these communities reflect the changing character of suburbanization. Many of the suburbs immediately contiguous to our largest cities have acquired a distinctly urban flavor; they tend to be industrial, they contain many apartment units, and they often house lower-income families. These characteristics, in conjunction with the possible displacement of crime to the suburbs as a result of improved central-city policing, may account for high rates of victimization among suburban residents.

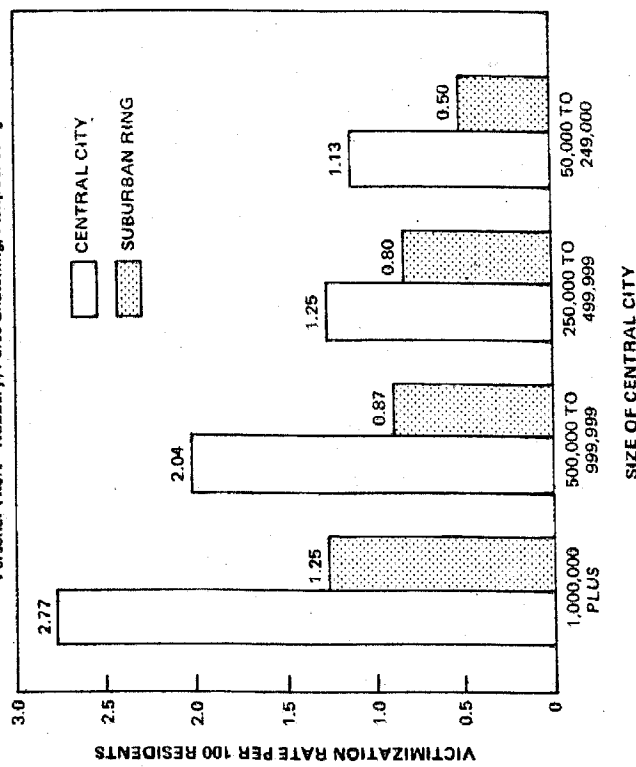
### WHO CALLS THE POLICE?

Most of the crimes examined here typically are not uncovered by police action, but are brought to their attention by victims or their confidants. Only those that achieve official notice enter police recordkeeping systems. Unreported crimes probably contribute the bulk of those that appeared on the "survey" side of Table 9-1 but that did not appear in "official" totals. Not only are unreported crimes excluded from our social accounts, but they are also unlikely to lead to an arrest. Non-reporting thus limits the deterrent capability of the police.

The determinants of reporting behavior are not well understood. Most research on the problem by criminologists in the past can be summarized as follows: individual reporting rates are shaped by (1) the personal characteristics of individual victims (e.g., race, class, age), (2) the relationship between victims and offenders (webs of kinship or acquaintance), and (3) characteristics of the incidents themselves (e.g., the outrage they engender or their seriousness). Each of these factors is likely to play some role in the reporting decision, and their relative importance may vary from crime to crime. Understanding their influence upon reporting practices is crucial, for such actions shape our knowledge of the dimensions of the crime problem and the potential responsiveness of society to changes in criminal activity.

Analysis of the national crime survey data for 1973 indicates that most of the personal characteristics of individual victims are *unrelated* to reporting. Women are only slightly more likely than men to report

FIGURE 9-2. Criminal Victimization 1973 by Size of Place  
Personal Theft—Robbery, Purse Snatching, Pickpocketing



offenses, and income does not appear to play a significant role in shaping reporting behavior. Surprisingly, neither does race. We would not be astonished if blacks were more unwilling than whites to mobilize the police. Based upon their own experience or accumulated folklore, many black Americans have learned that relationships with the police involve distressing calculations: Will their complaints be taken seriously? Will they face police hostility? Is it wise to become known to the police under any circumstances? For a wide variety of offenses, however, blacks are not noticeably less likely than whites to report their experiences to the police.

The only consistent individual predictor of whether a crime was brought to the attention of the authorities was age. Crimes that affect younger people are not reported as frequently as those that victimize their elders. Table 9-4 divides reporting rates for all crimes against persons (personal theft and interpersonal violence) by age groups. Reporting rates are dramatically lower for those under twenty; in that group, less than one-third of these contact crimes are reported to the police. Table 9-4 also indicates the survey estimate of the *number* of victimizations suffered by each age group. The findings are extremely

TABLE 9-4. Age and Reporting Rates: Crimes Against Persons, 1973

Age	Percentage Reported	Number of Victimization
12-19	31.5	2,161,940
20-34	49.2	2,304,350
35-49	56.6	747,490
50-64	53.3	494,850
65 and over	53.6	247,300

SOURCE: Computed from tabulations prepared by the Bureau of the Census from the 1973 Annual National Crime Survey.

significant, for the young are also disproportionately the victims of crimes against the person. In 1973, youths between ages twelve and nineteen (mostly males, disproportionately black) experienced 35 percent of all personal-contact victimizations, and very few of these incidents became known to the police. The reporting practices of young people thus exercise an enormous influence over the official violent crime rate in the United States; currently, they keep the rate deceptively low, but an increase in youthful reporting could cause official figures seemingly to skyrocket.

One of the major interests of students of crime has been the *social relationships* between victims and offenders—the bonds of friendship and kinship that unite them. Offenders and their prey often have certain commonalities. They are usually the same race and frequently reside in the same neighborhood. Neither are they always strangers to one another. Close victim-offender relationships are common in murder cases: it is not unusual for 75 percent of the homicides in large cities to involve friends, lovers, relatives, or business partners. It has been assumed that these social bonds frequently inhibit reporting offenses to the police; people do not want their friends or spouses sent to jail, or they define such encounters as “private matters” beyond the scope of the law. National crime survey figures for 1973 indicate that the incidence of crime within personal circles is relatively high. About 40 percent of all assaults, 25 percent of rapes, and 20 percent of violent robberies involved victims and offenders who were *not* strangers. The survey also indicated, however, that such ties between victims and criminals do not appear to inhibit the reporting of most offenses to the police. For example, about 41 percent of the assaults involving strangers were reported, and about 39 percent of the assaults involving relations or acquaintances were reported. The only dramatic difference in reporting rates that appeared in the 1973 figures was for rape. In rape cases, attacks by strangers were reported about 20 percent more often. Again, a methodological caveat is in order: there is some evi-

dence that crimes perpetrated by friends or relatives are underenumerated in the survey, and victims may be more likely to recall in the interview those acquaintanceship crimes that they reported to the police. This would contribute to the pattern of reporting for rape described here. Even if this is the case, it still appears that close victim-offender relationships do not have the dramatic effect on reporting rates that we anticipated.

The strongest and most consistent determinant of citizen reporting to the police is the *seriousness of the offense*. There are at least four major dimensions of seriousness: the value of stolen or damaged property, the extent of personal injury, the use of a weapon which threatens bodily harm, and the extent to which the crime intrudes into the secure lifespaces of the victim. Victim surveys reveal that the greater the loss, harm, threat, or insecurity generated by an event, the more likely it is to be reported to the police.

It is not surprising that the value of the loss plays an important role in the reporting decision. Deciding to call the police involves a cost-benefit calculation: the individual weighs the costs of reporting in terms of time, anticipated hostility from the police, and fear of reprisal from the offender or his friends, against the benefits which might accrue from the action (the probability that the offender will be caught and ultimately convicted, or that the property will be recovered). If the amount of the loss is relatively small, reporting costs will most likely outweigh reporting benefits. This is particularly true in the case of property offenses, where the lack of personal contact between victims and offenders makes it virtually impossible to identify suspects. Arrest or clearance rates for such offenses are very low, and the proportion of stolen property recovered is small.

The simple effect of the value of the loss on reporting rates is illustrated in Table 9-5, which compiles reporting rates for all property thefts in the 1973 survey according to loss values. The reporting rate for successful thefts with small losses (less than ten dollars) was only 8 percent. In the \$50-99 range it approached 50 percent, and above \$250 it averaged over 80 percent.

The introduction of other elements of seriousness into the equation greatly increases reporting rates, regardless of the value of the loss. Property crime involving an invasion of the home is more readily reported than simple theft away from home. Personal contact crimes that led to serious injury were reported at higher rates than similar offenses that did not result in injuries. Finally, the use of a weapon in a crime appears to have escalated reporting rates in the 1973 data. Table 9-5 also presents survey estimates of the reporting rate for nonviolent rob-



TABLE 9-5. Incident Seriousness and Reporting Rates, 1973

All Household and Personal Property Theft	
Value and Loss	Percentage Reported
Less than \$10	7.8
\$10-49	19.8
\$50-99	45.4
\$100-249	61.5
\$250 and above	82.4

All Robbery Without Personal Assault	
Combinations	Percentage Reported
Attempted; no weapon	24.4
Successful; no weapon	39.2
Attempted; weapon	41.0
Successful; weapon	67.8

SOURCE: Computed from tabulations prepared by the Bureau of the Census from the 1973 Annual National Crime Survey.

bery. The figures indicate that the use of a weapon in both successful and unsuccessful robberies increased the reporting rate by 20 to 30 percent. Clearly the threat of harm induced by the display of guns and knives encourages citizens to report incidents to the police.

In sum, the evidence on citizen reporting suggests that the process is highly rational. With the exception of age, reporting rates do not appear to be substantially related to the personal characteristics of individual victims; instead, they are incident-specific. Reporting rates are higher for personal contact crimes, where identifications and arrests are easier to effect. They increase with the value of the loss, when the security of the home is breached, and when the offender threatens serious harm or is considered a menace to the community.

## CONCLUSIONS

Until the development of victim surveys, official police records were the only source of information about the distribution of crime and the success or failure of crime-reduction programs. For certain kinds of illegal activity, official statistics remain our only accounting; crimes without victims or crimes that can be uncovered only through police investigations are more difficult to measure by alternative techniques. Valuable new information about other types of crime can be gleaned from interviews with samples of the population. These surveys are unencumbered by many of the well-known limitations of official crime statistics. They make it possible to gather information on incidents that were not reported and therefore could never enter our system of official

accounts. They also record the characteristics of events that were ignored or discounted by the police, whether for political or organizational reasons.

Extrapolations from the 1973 national crime survey suggest that the volume of crime in America was about three times larger than recorded in official reports. The total was very large, even though many incidents we would label "criminal" were not covered by the survey. But more important than numbers of incidents are data on the details of those events that are recounted in surveys. One of the chief criticisms of the FBI crime statistics is the paucity of specific information about the distribution of crimes and victims, and the consequences of crime for society. Although they are based upon samples, victim surveys may give us a better picture of these details than more extensive but less accurate enumerations.

Several examples of this detail have been reported here. We have seen the highly skewed inverse relationship between age and distribution of assaultive violence. The victim surveys revealed many more assaults than enter official records, and a considerable proportion affected those under twenty-five. Young people are much less likely than individuals in other age brackets to report any kind of victimization to the police, thereby disguising untold numbers of incidents. Any change in this pattern of nonreporting could cause official crime statistics to fluctuate wildly because of the differential distribution of events. Any concerted societal attack on the problem of assaultive violence would have to deal with this problem, for programs to encourage violence reporting assaults would have to begin with those under twenty-five. The reduction policy successful. Other studies of attitudes toward law and the criminal justice system suggest that this would be difficult to achieve. Youths of all races and backgrounds always prove to be the most alienated and suspicious subgroup of the population when we probe their relationships with the police and the courts. Victim surveys would enable us to detect changes in these attitudes, in victim reporting practices, and in the victimization rate for young people. This data would be important because of the tremendous effect such shifts might have on the utility of official crime statistics.

The victim surveys suggest further limitations of crime-reduction policies. Patterns of victimization are far from random, but rather reflect enduring features of the social structure. In the absence of changes in several fundamental social processes, it is unlikely that crime will disappear easily. We have seen, for example, that the probability of victimization is related to the social roles that persons play and the

range of victim behaviors those roles demand. Certain roles for women lead them into circumstances under which they are highly vulnerable to rape; commercial establishments with lone operators that are open at night are vulnerable to robbery. Women's roles are related to very fundamental characteristics of the social order, and the directions in which they are evolving are more likely to drive victimization rates up than down. In the absence of a decline in the demand for liquor, groceries, or gasoline (perhaps the latter is likely), opportunities for criminal profit in commercial establishments are not likely to decline either. The distribution of property crime also reflects the social order. Evidence about the frequency of serious theft and the amounts lost in those episodes suggests that target selection is quite rational, and that as long as the distribution of wealth in the society is skewed, the distribution of its victims of property crimes will follow.

Information on these and other topics will continue to flow from the crime surveys, for they are a continuing enterprise. The first results from the 1973 national survey were released in 1974, and in ensuing years a regular cycle of surveys and reports will be established. The national surveys will produce new time-series social indicators, monitoring changes in the victimization rate and patterns of victimization, while more detailed city studies can be used to evaluate the impact of specific governmental programs. In addition, they may be used routinely by local police departments to allocate resources in response to the distribution of crime. We are only beginning to realize the many uses to which this new tool can be put.