Violent Victimization in the United States: Major Issues and Trends

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Backdrop

• Criminal victimization is common in the United States.

• Crime touches the lives of most residents of the country directly or indirectly.

• Violent victimization rates consistently reflect an over-representation among victims and offenders of youth, minorities, and the most impoverished residents of urban areas.
Current Presentation

• Measurement of Crime

• Crime Trends

• Victim Characteristics

• Cost of Crime

• Crime Victims’ Movement

• Crime Victims’ Services and Programs
Measuring Violent Victimization

• Primarily measured and reported through the Uniform Crime Report program (UCR) and the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)

• Sources of data on violent victimizations also can be found in other databases:
  - National Vital Statistics System, Fatal Injury Reports
  - National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey
  - National Violent Death Reporting System
Uniform Crime Report (UCR)

Crimes reported to or discovered by the police

• Violent Offenses: Murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault

- **Murder**: The willful (non-negligent) killing of one human being by another

- **Forcible Rape**: Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim
Robbery: The taking of anything of value from a person or persons by force or threat of force

Aggravated Assault: The unlawful attack by a person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury
Limitations of UCR

• Only “official” crime data

• Only the most serious crime in a multiple-crime incident (hierarchy rule)

• Purposeful downgrading of crime

• Sometimes less than a full-year’s worth of data is available from a jurisdiction (under-submission)
National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)

Offenses that do and do not come to the attention of the police

• Approximately 90,000 household and 160,000 individual interviews (aged 12 and older)

• The impact of crime and the characteristics of offenders
NCVS (cont.)

• Useful in understanding why victims fail to report crimes to the police

• Sheds light on the interactions and relationships between victims and offenders as well as differences over time and place (e.g., rural, suburban, urban settings).
Limitations of NCVS

• Relies on a national sample of households

• Respondent errors:
  
  ➢ Memory Decay
  
  ➢ “Telescoping”
  
  ➢ Fear of Retaliation (non-reporting)
  
  ➢ Defining incident as a “non-crime”
Victimization 2012: UCR

• 1,214,462 violent crimes were reported/recorded (387 violent crimes per 100,000 residents)

- Aggravated Assault (63%)
- Robbery (29%)
- Forcible Rape (7%)
- Murder (1%)
Victimization Trends: UCR

- Violent crime rate has consistently declined for the past 20 years.
  - From 1993 to 2002, declined 34%
  - From 2003 to 2012, declined 19%
  - From 1993 to 2012, declined 48%
Victimization 2012: NCVS

- 6,842,590 violent victimizations (2,610 violent victimizations per 100,000 residents)

  - Sexual Assault
  - Robbery
  - Non-Sexual Assault (Simple and Aggravated)
Victimization Trends: NCVS


- From 1994 to 2001, the violent crime rate declined 48%.

- From 2004 to 2013, the violent crime rate declined 16%.

- From 1993 to 2012, the violent crime rate declined 49%.
Victim Characteristics

• Violent victimization rate much higher among:
  
  - young people
  
  - blacks (double the rate among whites [1973 to 2006])
  
  - men (except for rape and intimate partner violence)
  
  - people in lower income brackets
Cost of Crime

- **Cost to Victims**: From 1987 to 1990, crime cost an estimated $450B annually.

Violent crime in 2000 alone cost $37B.

- **Criminal Justice Expenditures**: The expense of operating the correctional system (federal, state, local) cost $80B in 2010, growing 350% since 1980.
Cost of Crime (cont.)

- **Emotional Burden**: Feelings of vulnerability, dread, chronic anxiety, depression, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- The President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice (1967) asserted: “The most damaging of the effects of violent crime is fear, and that fear must not be belittled.”
Crime Victim Movement

- Victimology
- Women’s Movement
- System Failure
- Grassroots Efforts
Legislative Initiatives

• President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime (1981)

• Omnibus Victim and Witness Protection Act (1982)

• Victims of Crime Act (1984)

• Justice for All Act (2004)
Assistance for Crime Victims

- Victim Compensation
- Victim Notification and Information
- Victim/Witness Protection
- Victim Services
- Victim Advocacy and Rights
Take Away Points

• Violent victimization is common but not ubiquitous.
• National measures of crime and victimization are highly useful and complementary but have shortcomings.
• Violent victimization has been declining for 20 years.
• The likelihood of violent victimization varies with demographic characteristics.
• Victimization is quite burdensome in terms of direct costs to victims and criminal justice expenditures.
• Legislation and programming have attempted to address crime victims’ needs since the 1980s.