



# Crime & Victimization in the United States

The FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program and the Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) are the two largest and most comprehensive resources for information relating to crime and victimization in the United States. While the UCR and the NCVS use different methodologies and serve distinct purposes, these resources complement each other in a number of ways. The most important distinction between the two is that the **UCR reports information regarding crimes known to law enforcement** agencies (but cannot reflect unreported crime), while the **NCVS, which measures reported and unreported victimizations**, helps researchers identify hidden victimizations that the UCR is unable to track—"the dark figure of crime." Together the UCR and the NCVS provide researchers, policymakers, and the public with a general understanding regarding the state of crime and victimization in the United States.

## UNIFORM CRIME REPORT

The Uniform Crime Report (UCR), launched in 1929, collects information reported to **law enforcement agencies** on the following crimes: murder and non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, arson, and human trafficking. Law enforcement agencies also report **arrest data for 22 additional crime categories** (e.g., forgery and counterfeiting, drug abuse violations, disorderly conduct, vagrancy). Each year, the FBI issues a report on the main UCR findings, titled *Crime in the United States*, as well as several other reports (e.g., *Hate Crimes 2015* and *Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted, 2015*). The UCR presents crime counts for the entire nation, as well as for regions, states, counties, cities, towns, tribal law enforcement, and colleges and universities. **Its primary purpose is to provide reliable criminal justice statistics for law enforcement administration and management.**

### UCR CRIMES

- murder/non-negligent manslaughter
- rape
- robbery
- aggravated assault
- burglary
- larceny-theft
- motor vehicle theft
- arson
- human trafficking

## NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMIZATION SURVEY

The methodology for the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), which began in 1973, differs from that of the UCR. The NCVS is based on a nationally **representative sample of U.S. households**. Household members **age 12 and older** are interviewed by the U.S. Census Bureau every six months for a three-year period. The NCVS collects information on the frequency and nature of: rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated and simple assault, household burglary, theft, and motor vehicle theft. **It does not measure:** homicide, commercial crimes, crimes against residents under 12 years old, or crimes against individuals in other residential settings (e.g., nursing homes, prisons) and may exclude transient populations and people who are homeless.

### NCVS CRIMES

- rape
- sexual assault
- robbery
- aggravated assault
- simple assault
- household burglary
- theft
- motor vehicle theft

The NCVS gathers information on crimes both **reported and not reported** to the police, estimates the proportion of crimes reported to law enforcement, and describes the reasons given by victims for reporting or not reporting. The NCVS also includes questions about **victims' experiences** with the criminal justice system, possible substance use by offenders, and whether victims received services following their victimization. The NCVS collects **demographic information** about both victims and offenders (e.g., age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, victim-offender relationship), as well as information about the crimes (including time and place of occurrence, use of weapons, nature of injury, and economic impact). The NCVS also collects periodic supplements on specific crime issues such as stalking or school crime.

# THE FUTURE OF CRIME AND VICTIMIZATION RESEARCH

While the UCR and the NCVS are important resources for researchers, policymakers, and the public, they cannot address all crimes or victimizations. And though national collection efforts continue to grow, **gaps still exist, particularly for emerging crimes**, such as elder victimization, human trafficking, stalking, and financial, corporate, environmental, and mass casualty crimes.

In 2015, the **UCR Program released a plan to improve and modernize their data collection**. Two key aspects of this plan include: 3

## UCR IMPROVEMENTS

1. To continue the transition from the Summary Reporting System (SRS) (the current UCR method of data collection) to the **National Incident-Based Reporting System** (NIBRS), which has many implications for enhanced understanding on issues pertinent to victims and service providers, by 2021.
2. To provide researchers, providers, policymakers, and the general public with information regarding the **use of force or the discharge of a firearm by law enforcement officers**.

**The NCVS is also currently undergoing a redesign**. This multi-year effort to fill long-standing gaps in information includes:

## NCVS ENHANCEMENTS

1. **Providing subnational estimates:** While the original purpose of the NCVS was to provide estimates of victimization at the national level, the NCVS subnational program will generate victimization estimates at the state and local level for the 22 largest states.
2. **Modernizing socio-demographic information** to reflect victimization by sexual orientation, gender identity, veteran status, and citizenship. The update also includes expanding disability status questions to all respondents, not just those self-reporting victimization.
3. **Expanding the information collected** about formal and informal help-seeking behavior, issues related to fear of crime, perceptions of neighborhood disorder and satisfaction with police, and the consequences of victimization.
4. **Expanding the type of crimes collected** in the NCVS, including fraud.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics, in partnership with the Office for Victims of Crime, has also launched the new **Victim Services Statistical Research Program** (VSSRP), aiming to build a critical body of knowledge for the field by collecting and analyzing data from victims and the diverse entities that serve them nationwide. In addition to data collected from victims as described above, data collected directly from entities that serve victims is important for understanding whether providers have the capacity to meet the needs of all victims seeking services. BJS's VSSRP includes a number of initiatives to collect information from victim service providers, including the **National Census of Victim Service Providers** (NCVSP) fielded for the first time in 2017, and the **National Survey of Victim Service Providers** (NSVSP)—both designed to help define and enhance understanding of all types of providers, from community and justice-system based, to campus, hospitals, corrections, legal aid and others, all playing a critical role in serving victims of crime. The census data will, for the first time, provide quantitative information about how many providers exist, organizational structure, types of services offered, crime types served, staffing considerations, and funding sources.

Other efforts focus on particular types of service providers, such as the collaboration between BJS and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s National Center for Health Statistics to develop a new **National Survey of Hospital Victim Services** to better understand the range of hospital-based and affiliated services available for crime victims in health settings. BJS has also launched pilot programs to examine the feasibility of collecting information related to victim services in homeless shelters, and to better understand the prevalence of victimization and service needs in correctional settings beginning with jails. BJS has also added or is in the development phase of adding questions about victim services to existing BJS surveys, including surveys of law enforcement agencies, prosecutors' offices, and corrections agencies. **Together, all of these efforts will offer the most comprehensive picture of victim service provision to date.**

## RESOURCES

FBI, "Uniform Crime Reporting," (U.S. Department of Justice), <https://ucr.fbi.gov>

Bureau of Justice Statistics, "National Crime Victimization Survey," (U.S. Department of Justice), <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcetail&iid=245>

