

# The Cost of Negligence:

## Losses from Preventable Household Burglaries

A National Crime  
Survey Report

U.S. Department of Justice

Law Enforcement  
Assistance Administration

National Criminal Justice  
Information and Statistics Service

53527

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## Highlights of the findings

Unlawful entry without force is an all too common, yet relatively mysterious criminal act. It is a *crime of opportunity* in which the victims, often through their own negligence in securing dwellings and other residential structures, provide offenders with the opportunity to carry out burglaries with relative ease.

During the 3-year period from 1973 to 1975 roughly 9 million unlawful entries were committed across the United States resulting in total losses of more than a billion dollars. Only two-fifths were reported to the police. The high rate of nonreporting was partly attributable to relatively small individual theft losses and partly the result of an absence of factual information about the incident.

Entry into residential structures was most frequently through unlocked doors or windows. Although a majority of offenses occurred in dwellings, a sizeable number took place in auxiliary structures such as garages and sheds. Furthermore, much of the stolen property was of low value, a finding which tends to substantiate the theory that many burglaries of this type are committed on the spur of the moment by "nonprofessionals" motivated by factors other than maximization of economic gain.

Not all households are equally vulnerable. For example, households headed by very young individuals experienced a higher rate of unlawful entry than households headed by older persons, renters were more vulnerable than owners, and relatively wealthy families were more likely to be victimized than those with moderate incomes.

With regard to unlawful entry and its impact on American society, it may be said that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; that is, the importance of the crime transcends total theft losses. The frequency of its occurrence contributes to the development of a general perception of lawlessness that has altered the way Americans live. As a consequence, it is most important to emphasize that effective prevention of unlawful entry may in many cases be as simple as locking doors and windows before leaving home.

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## Introduction

Over the past decade crime has become one of the most intensively studied phenomena in the United States. The wealth of books, articles in learned journals and popular magazines, newspaper reports, and television and radio coverage has truly been overwhelming. Yet Americans tend to view crime not as a social ill to be quantified and analyzed but as a threat—frequently perceived as growing—to the lives and property of law-abiding citizens.

Unquestionably, we are most fearful of crimes that deprive or threaten to deprive us of life and limb—murder, rape, robbery, and assault—especially when they come unexpectedly at the hands of persons who are complete strangers. But we also are concerned about nonviolent household crimes, such as burglary, that not only deprive us of property but threaten the very sanctity of our homes. Concern over burglary in the 1970's has been reflected in the growth of local prevention programs and the mushrooming of the home security industry, which now offers a dazzling array of residential services and protective devices.

Americans have good reason to be worried. In 1975, there were approximately 8.2 million burglaries, 6.7 million committed in residential structures. Upon close inspection, many of these crimes appeared to be quite similar in nature. Residents returned home from work, shopping, or an evening's entertainment to find that someone had entered their house, apartment, or garage without using force, usually through a door or window that had been left unlocked, and stolen cash and/or household property. Assessing the damage, victims often found that the total value of the loss was modest, and as a result of the minor nature of the incident, the absence of any incriminating evidence, and, perhaps, embarrassment over failure to adequately secure their property, they usually did not notify the police. If the victims harbored any hope of seeing their stolen goods again they were apt to be disappointed, for recovery rarely took place.

The type of crime whose characteristics are outlined above is known to law enforcement authorities as unlawful entry without force. Based primarily upon data from the National Crime Survey, this report seeks to provide information on the nature and incidence of this specific type of

burglary, its victims, and, indirectly, the individuals who commit them. In so doing it is hoped that the study will promote a greater awareness and better understanding of this seemingly minor but all too common property crime, not only among members of the criminal justice community but also among the crime's potential victims.

When serious crimes such as rape, robbery, and forcible entry burglary appear almost daily to threaten our safety and security, it could be asked, with some justification, why be so concerned with unlawful entry? After all, these incidents only infrequently produce major financial losses and often are not even discovered until long after they occur.

There are several reasons why it makes sense to attempt to understand and prevent unlawful entries. To begin with, each time an offense occurs, no matter how insignificant it might appear, there is a potential for physical violence. During a recent 3-year period there were more than 100,000 incidents in the United States which began with an unlawful entry but escalated with victim-offender contact into robbery. In about one-third of these incidents, the victims suffered some type of physical injury, and it is not known how many offenders were injured. Hence, the potential for violence and injury always lurks in the background during any criminal encounter.

Second, perceptions regarding the seriousness of any incident differ from victim to victim. For some, particularly those who are relatively defenseless and fearful, falling victim to a minor crime such as unlawful entry may be a very serious and unsettling experience. Violation of one's private living space by a stranger, even if it results from the victim's own carelessness and does not involve expensive loss, may deal a major blow to an individual's sense of security, and produce economic, social, or emotional repercussions that far outweigh the seriousness of the act. This is particularly likely to happen if the incident occurs during a period of heightened sensitivity to crime.

Finally, a large number of incidents are reported to the police, even though in relative terms the reported crimes make up only about two-fifths of all unlawful entries. The effort required merely to record the 1 million offenses which came to the attention of local authorities in 1975, let alone investigate even a small

portion of them, can't help but draw critical resources away from crimes involving injury or greater loss.

This report is one in a series of special reports based on findings of the National Crime Survey that address such important topics as domestic violence, crime and the environment, and crime and the elderly. These studies complement the series of general reports (see inside front cover) by providing a more thorough treatment of significant survey findings in specific interest areas.

The National Crime Survey, hereafter referred to as the crime survey, is an ongoing survey begun in 1972 involving personal interviews in a representative sample of approximately 60,000 households across the United States. The crime survey is designed to measure the incidence of selected crimes and their impact on society. More specifically, it provides estimates of the amount of crime, unreported as well as reported to the police, committed against persons 12 years of age and older, households, and commercial establishments; it also yields information on the circumstances under which the crimes took place and the effects of crime on the victims. Not all types of crime are counted, only those which victims are generally able and willing to report to the interviewer. For individuals these are rape, robbery, assault, and personal larceny; for households they are burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. Murder and kidnapping are not covered nor are the so-called victimless crimes such as drunkenness, drug abuse, or prostitution, or crimes in which victims willingly participated, such as gambling. The survey is designed and conducted for the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration by the United States Bureau of the Census.

As with data from all sample surveys, the findings from the crime survey must be used with caution because they are estimates and subject to errors arising from the fact that the information was obtained from a sample rather than a complete census and to errors associated with the collection and processing of data. Appendix I offers a brief discussion of the sources of error and provides additional technical information. For those who seek more information, a thorough treatment of sample reliability and variance may be found in *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1976*.

Most estimates in this report are based upon information drawn from the full sample of respondents, and have been weighted to approximate existing but unknown levels of crime. Statements involving comparisons of two or more numbers have

met statistical tests that differences were at least 2.0 standard errors, or, in other words, that the chances are at least 95 out of 100 that each difference described did not result solely from sampling variability. A special subsample of completed survey questionnaires was used to acquire data not available in computerized data files. (For technical information on this subsample see Appendix II.) Estimates based upon these microdata are intended to be more illustrative than representative.

## What is an unlawful entry without force and how many are there?

The crime survey defines an unlawful entry without force as a form of burglary committed by someone having no legal right to be on the premises even though force is not used. Unlawful entries can take place in commercial establishments as well as in private residences; this report, however, is limited to an examination of residential offenses. These incidents include entries into dwelling units such as houses, apartments, and group quarters, or other household structures, for example, garages, sheds, or utility rooms.

Unlawful entries have two characteristics that when combined make them unique among the property crimes surveyed. First, the victimized householders must consider the offender an intruder, that is a person with *no right* to be on the property. Incidents committed by relatives, friends, or other persons who have been invited inside by members of the household, or offenses carried out by persons having legitimate access to a structure, such as maintenance personnel, are classified as larcenies, not burglaries.

Second and perhaps more important, there is an absence of any visual evidence of force. Thefts or attempted thefts involving the breaking of a window, the forcing of a door, or the slashing of a screen are recorded as forcible entries. The offenses of interest here are those in which the offender usually gained entrance *simply by opening an unlocked door or window or using a key*. Unlawful entry, or *no-force entry* as it also will be called, is, therefore, not characterized by violence or cunning on the part of the offender but by vulnerability of property often caused by victim negligence.

To the extent that this crime can be deterred by using minimal household security devices such as door or window locks, it may also be regarded as *preventable*. It is extremely difficult, however, to measure such an attribute. To illustrate, a survey of this type obviously cannot measure crimes that were never attempted because adequate household security existed, nor can it accurately estimate the number of attempted unlawful entries, incidents in which the offenders tried unsuccessfully to gain entry without

using force. And with regard to incidents which *were completed*, we are unable to identify crimes in which the offenders first attempted a no-force entry and then resorted to force or violence when the initial effort proved ineffective. What is known is that skilled "professionals" or even amateurs will not be thwarted by door or window locks if they are determined to enter a structure. On this point law enforcement officials and convicted thieves agree. However, many experts also believe that no-force burglaries are frequently the work of individuals, many of them children, who simply cannot resist an easy opportunity to steal.<sup>1</sup> If this is so, we could reduce the burglary rate and the size of the offender population by limiting the opportunities available to commit "easy" offenses.

If failure to adequately protect personal or household property is directly related to the commission of a crime, can we say that victims are in some way responsible? This is a difficult question to answer, irrespective of the type of crime, since there is little agreement even among experts on the theoretical and legal basis for victim responsibility. But it is particularly perplexing with regard to household crimes for, unlike a personal crime in which the victim might directly precipitate an attack through the use of a gesture, a verbal comment, or an overt act, household members rarely do anything which could be considered improper or provocative.

Although victim responsibility might be to some observers too harsh a term, it is clear that many households are guilty of negligence. And some are more negligent than others; for example, the family that leaves home with the garage door open or a housekey placed invitingly under a doormat is assuredly more careless than the family that closed but failed to lock a second-story window. Ultimately the degree of negligence rests, at least in part, on the nature of the cues the victim leaves and *the extent to which these cues* prompt or motivate criminal activity.

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<sup>1</sup>See for example, T. A. Repetto, *Residential Crime*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1974); I. Waller, "Victim Research, Public Policy and Criminal Justice," *Victimology: An International Journal*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (Summer 1976), 240-252; J. Q. Wilson and B. Boland, "Crime," in *The Urban Predicament*, eds. W. Gorham and N. Glazer (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1976), 179-230.

When the cue proves to be a major motivating force, that is to say when an individual who would not otherwise have acted seizes upon a perceived opportunity and commits a burglary, the victims must certainly share in the blame.

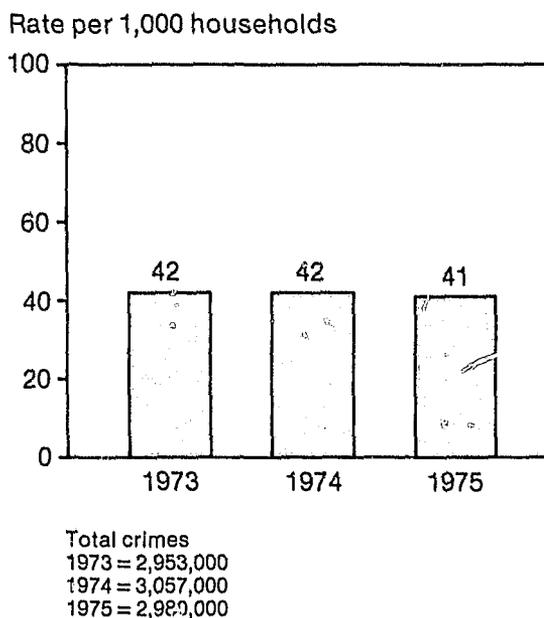
Unlawful entries are not unusual or bizarre occurrences that only plague those persons who are too poor to afford adequate household security or too ignorant to know any better. In 1975 an estimated 2,980,000 no-force burglaries occurred in all types of households across the Nation, black and white, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, renters and homeowners.<sup>3</sup> That means that every day of the year an average of about 8,200 households fell victim to no-force burglary. In the preceding years the absolute level of victimization was comparable—2,953,000 in 1973 and 3,057,000 in 1974—bringing the total for the 3-year interval to roughly 9 million crimes. The annual victimization rate, a measure of occurrence whose numerator is the volume of crime and denominator the total number of household units, averaged 42 crimes per 1,000 households. As shown in Figure 1, there was little if any fluctuation in the rate from year to year.

No-force burglary ranks as one of the most prevalent crimes measured by the crime survey. In 1975 it accounted for 44 percent of the total number of residential burglaries, compared with 34 percent for completed forcible entry, and 22 percent for attempted forcible entry. Judged as a component of all measured household crimes, no-force burglary, with 17 percent of the total, was second only to household larceny of less than \$50. And as portrayed in Figure 2, for every 100 no-force burglaries committed in 1975 there were 5 rapes, 38 robberies, and 55 aggravated assaults.

The fact that unlawful entry without force is a more common crime than forcible entry runs contrary to certain published findings that stress the prevalence of the latter offense. Here it is worth remembering that the crime survey, unlike other statistical series, tallies crimes which go unreported to law enforcement authorities as well as those that are

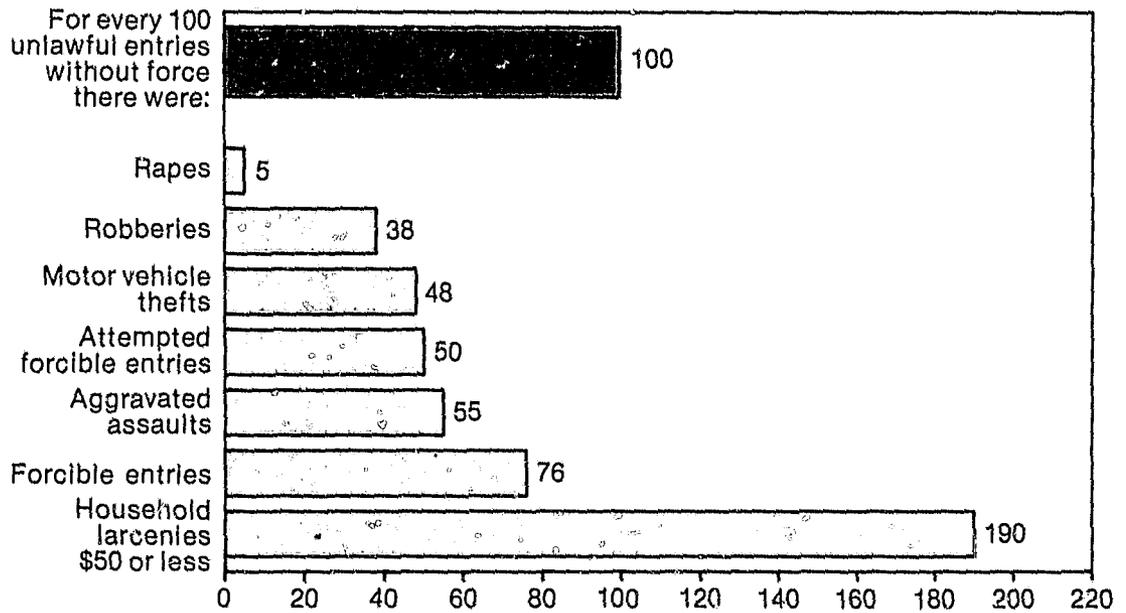
reported. And, as will be shown below, no-force burglaries are more likely than a number of other more serious crimes, including completed forcible entries, to escape police attention.

Figure 1.  
Victimization rates for  
unlawful entry without  
force, 1973-75



<sup>3</sup>Series crimes, three or more separate but similar incidents for which the respondent was unable to identify separately the details of each event, were excluded from this report except in the subset of completed questionnaires. Although exactly comparable annual data are not available, there were approximately 122,000 series crimes committed between April 1974 and March 1975. For a thorough discussion of series crimes see National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service, *Criminal Victimization in the United States: A Comparison of 1975 and 1976 Findings*, (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1977), pp. 58-59.

Figure 2.  
Frequency of occurrence of selected  
crimes relative to unlawful entry  
without force, 1975



## How much do victims lose?

When we consider the cost of a residential theft we usually think in terms of monetary loss, particularly the value of cash and property stolen by the thief. While direct financial loss is a major factor, and one that will be closely examined in this section, it should be noted that it is often not the only adverse result.

No doubt the most catastrophic consequence of any crime is the serious injury or death of a family member, with the attendant medical expense and loss of family income if the victim is a provider. Personal injury, however, is not common to residential theft, for most offenders take care to avoid face-to-face contact with their victims. Less visible than personal injury, but no doubt much more common, is the psychological trauma that may be a byproduct of a residential theft. The loss of a sense of security or physical invulnerability is in and of itself emotionally damaging, and there also may be adverse social and economic consequences.<sup>3</sup> A household fearful of falling victim to another attack may take extraordinary protective measures such as drastically curtailing outside activities, installing expensive home security systems, or even relocating to a safer neighborhood.

In addition to the direct losses associated with the theft of household property there may be other economic losses. Even in the absence of personal injury to a family member, some loss of time from work may ensue if the task of reporting a crime to the police or putting the house back in order requires the attention of a breadwinner. Then, too, additional cash outlays may be needed to repair or replace household items damaged but not stolen during the incident. At times these expenditures can be as costly as replacing stolen goods.

Beyond the costs incurred by those directly touched by crime there is a price society as a whole pays for lawlessness. As taxpayers, Americans share the burden for rising costs in all areas of law enforcement; the police, the courts, and the correctional systems. In addition to this, to a greater

or lesser degree we all bear the psychological burden of the fear of crime.

## The value of theft losses

The crime survey measures the more tangible costs of crime—cash and property lost, property damages, medical expenses, and time lost from work. Because by definition burglary cannot involve personal injury (i.e., thefts with injury are considered violent personal crimes) and because few no-force crimes result in property damage or lost work time, this report will focus on the most common component of loss, stolen cash and property.

Overall, the cost to the Nation from stolen cash and property was staggering; total losses for the 3-year period, as determined by data from the crime survey, amounted to roughly \$1.2 billion or an average of about \$400,000,000 each year.<sup>4</sup> Not every unlawful entry ended in theft; in 15 percent of the offenses committed between 1973 and 1975 there was no property loss. But of those that did end in theft the median value of the loss was \$60.<sup>5</sup> There were few devastating losses: 15 percent ended in setbacks of \$250 or more, and losses of \$1,000 or more occurred in only 3 percent of the incidents (Figure 3). By contrast, 48 percent of the losses were valued at less than \$50, 17 percent below \$10.

Between 1973 and 1975 the median value of stolen cash and property rose from \$49 to \$74, an increase of approximately 50 percent (Figure 4). Inflation certainly contributed to this increase, it simply cost more to replace a stolen item in 1975 than in 1973. But it was not the only factor, for the rate of inflation as measured by the increase in the consumer price index was significantly less than the recorded increase in the median value of stolen property. This may suggest that burglars in 1975 were stealing more or better goods.

<sup>4</sup>The 3-year estimate was obtained by multiplying the middle value in each of four dollar loss categories (less than \$10, \$10-\$49, \$50-\$249, and \$250-\$999) and the lowest value in the \$1,000 and over category by the number of victimizations in each category and then summing the products.

<sup>5</sup>The worth of stolen property as reported by the respondent was usually determined by one of the following: (1) original or replacement costs, (2) estimates of current value, or (3) insurance or police estimates.

<sup>3</sup>For an appraisal of the psychological impact of burglary on a small sample of victims see, B. Bourque et al., *Crisis Intervention: Investigating the Need for New Applications*, (Washington, D.C.: American Institutes for Research, 1978).

Figure 3.  
Percent distribution of  
unlawful entries without  
force, by value of cash and  
property lost, 1973-75

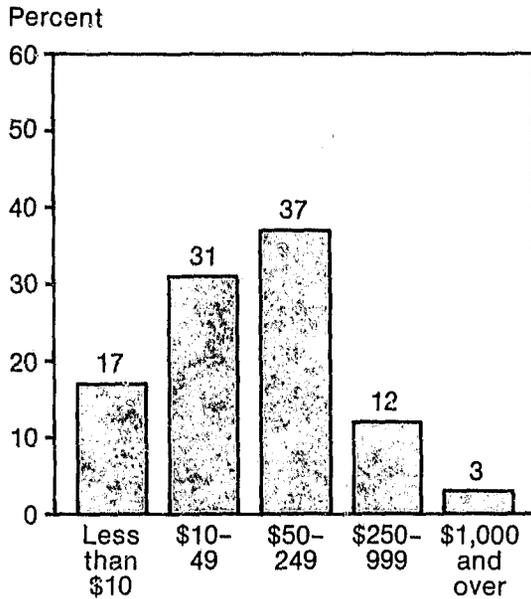
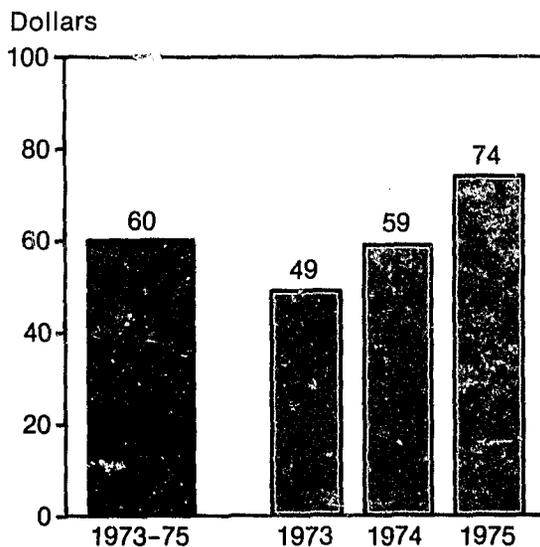


Figure 4.  
Median value of loss  
from unlawful entry  
without force, 1973-75



## Recovery of theft losses

Crime survey data show that in approximately four-fifths of the unlawful entries the victimized households neither recovered their lost goods nor received compensation (Figure 5). Recovery of a portion of the loss occurred in 11 percent of the crimes, whereas in only 7 percent were the victims fortunate enough to recoup all their losses.

Victims of property theft may recoup their losses several different ways. Stolen property may be found by victims or their friends, often near the scene of the crime, it may be recovered by the police, or there may be financial compensation if the goods are not recovered and the household is insured.

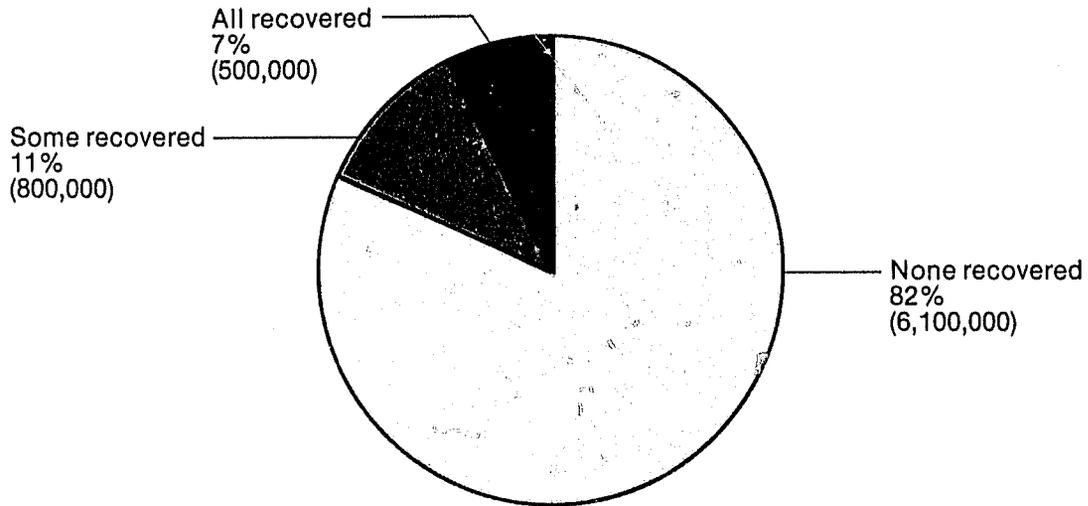
With respect to no-force burglary, the characteristics of the crime tend to lessen the likelihood of institutional recovery. Losses, as we have seen, are often small, so small that they fall far below the lowest theft insurance deductible. Hence, even if victims are insured against theft there may be no compensation. With regard to assistance from law enforcement authorities, the modest value of the stolen property and the absence of concrete information about the crime cause many victims to decide against informing the police. If uninformed, the police are not likely to find a household's purloined property, and even if they do it is unlikely that they could locate the owners unless the stolen merchandise has sufficient identification.

It is interesting to note that in 1975 the recovery rate for most other property crimes measured by the survey was not appreciably better (Figure 6). Only motor vehicle theft, a crime characterized by high average loss, excellent police reporting, and widespread insurance coverage, had better than 50 percent recovery.

Is the possibility of recovery or compensation related in any way to the amount of property lost? Specifically, are the relatively costly no-force burglaries more likely to result in some restitution than the economically trivial crimes? The answer appears to be yes. For those crimes with losses of \$10 or more the proportion which had at least a partly positive resolution for the victims increased with the value of the loss (Figure 7). Thus, whereas only 9 percent of the incidents with losses of \$10-\$49 resulted in partial or complete recovery, one-third of those valued at \$250 or more ended on at least a moderately positive note. No doubt the greater the loss the more likely victims are to seek and receive institutional assistance.

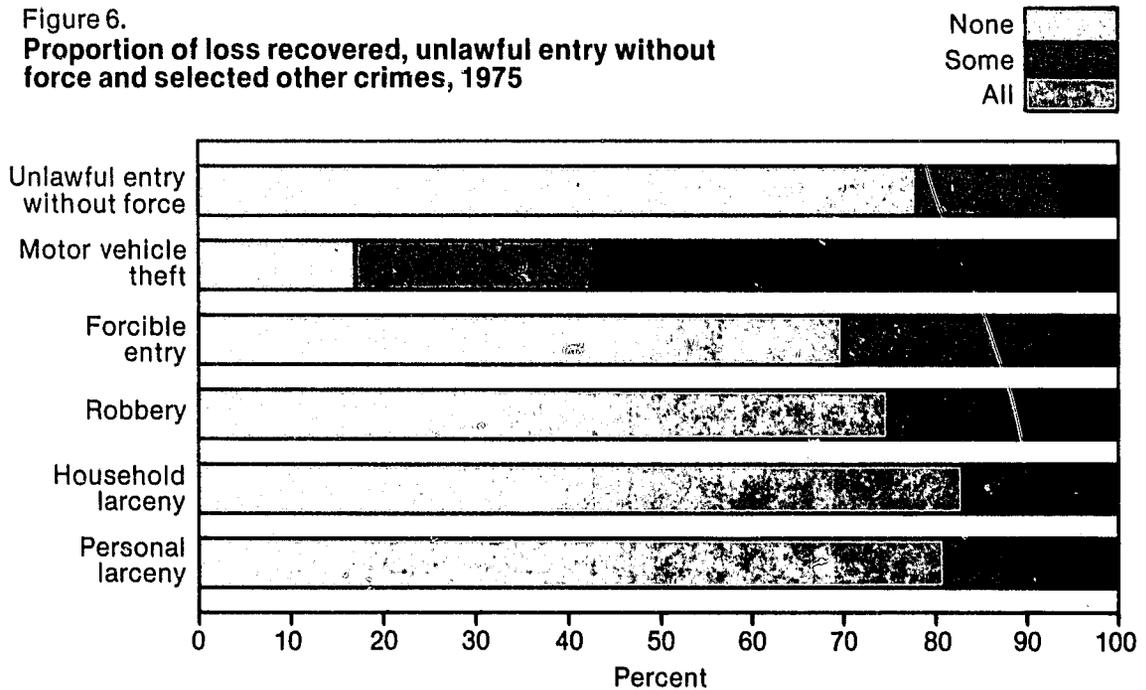
In summary, most unlawful entries without force had as common features modest theft losses and an

Figure 5.  
**Percent distribution of unlawful entries without force involving theft, by proportion of cash and property recovered, 1973-75**



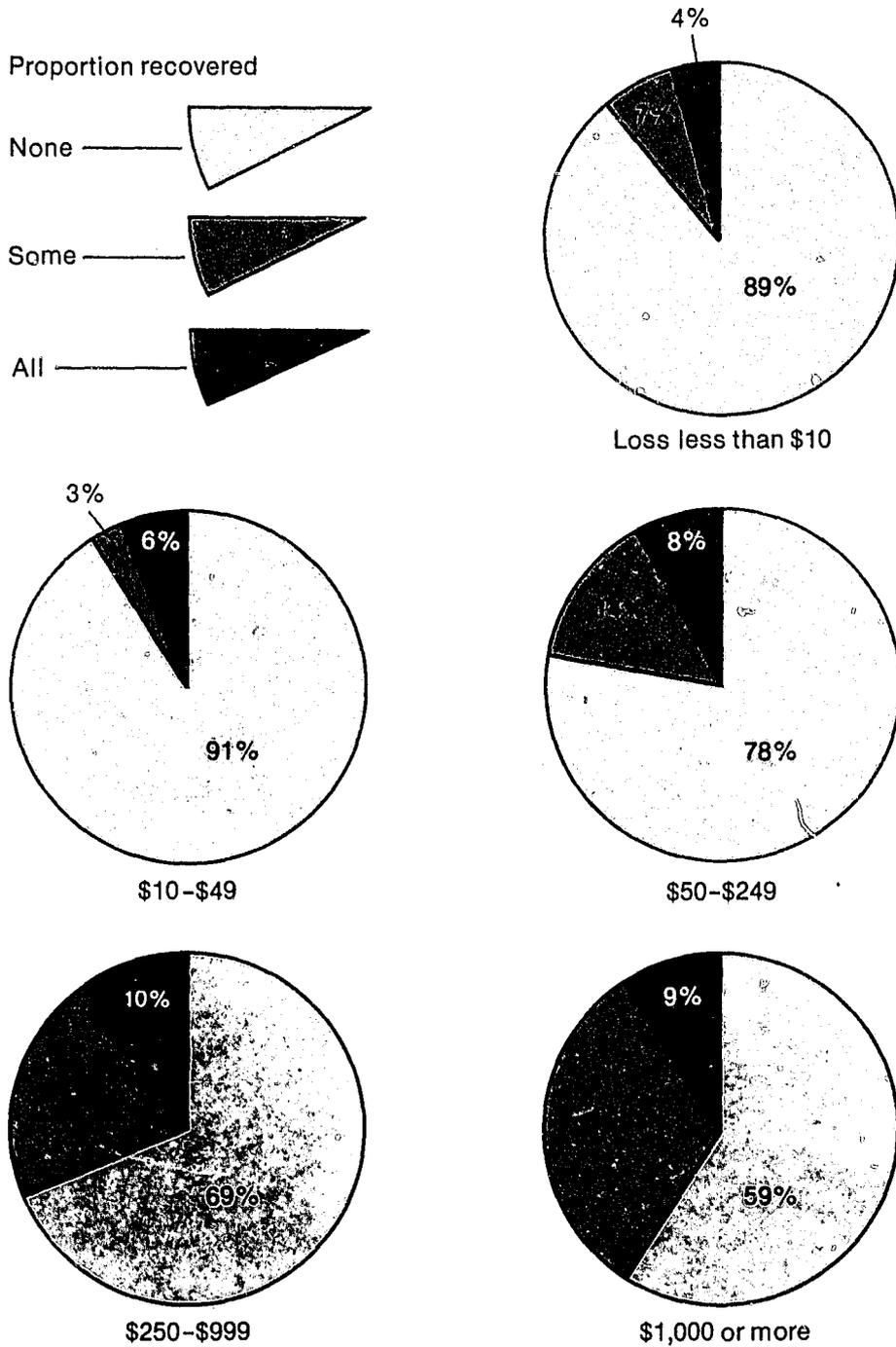
NOTE: "Some" includes incidents in which the proportion recovered was not ascertained and could have been "All."

Figure 6.  
**Proportion of loss recovered, unlawful entry without force and selected other crimes, 1975**



NOTE: "Some" includes incidents in which the proportion recovered was not ascertained and could have been "All."

Figure 7.  
**Percent distribution of unlawful entries without force  
 involving theft, by amount  
 of loss and proportion recovered, 1973-75**



NOTE: "Some" includes incidents in which the proportion recovered was not ascertained and could have been "All."

absence of recovery or reimbursement. Inasmuch as institutional support from the police and insurers was not as likely to be requested or provided when losses were low, this outcome was predictable.

### **Losses and offenders**

As to the reason why more victims of unlawful entry did not suffer greater losses, the crime survey cannot supply an answer. Some insight may be gained by considering the nature and motivation of the individuals committing these illegal acts. As reported earlier, many no-force burglaries are thought to be committed by amateurs. Furthermore, it is believed that these individuals are less likely to plan their crimes with an eye toward maximizing their profits; instead they tend to act spontaneously when presented with a set of circumstances that have the perceived effect of facilitating entry and reducing the risk of confrontation and detection. In other words, they take advantage of a favorable opportunity, such as an unlocked and temporarily unoccupied dwelling, and commit an "easy" crime.

It logically follows that once propelled into action the opportunist must settle for whatever is available in the burglarized structure; at times, particularly when the target is a garage or other auxiliary structure, there is little of value to choose from. When this occurs the offender leaves with not much to show for the effort. In addition, it has been suggested that some opportunists, given their youth and inexperience, do not want or are not able to carry out a major theft even if valuable property is at hand. There is some indication that the challenge of the illegal entry—that is the excitement or thrill of actually committing the crime—may be an important source of satisfaction to some of these individuals.

## What are the characteristics of unlawful entry?

All of the incidents under consideration in this report must have as common features (1) entry into a residential building, usually with intent to steal, by a person with no right to be there, and (2) absence of force in gaining entry. However, other characteristics of these unlawful events such as time of occurrence, place of occurrence, and type of goods stolen may vary without affecting the formal classification. In this section we take a look at several important incident attributes in an attempt to ascertain if no-force burglaries share other common traits.

Before proceeding, it should be pointed out that information relating to certain incident characteristics, specifically the type of building burglarized and the type of property lost, was obtained from a small subsample of crime survey questionnaires. Because of the size of the subsample (308 cases) and the nature of the information (much of it drawn from uncoded interviewer summaries) the findings cannot be accorded the same degree of reliability given to results based upon the full sample. Keeping this cautionary note in mind, the subsample data can prove to be a useful source of information.

### Type of structure burglarized and method of entry

Residential burglary may occur either within the actual dwelling unit, be it a house, apartment, hotel/motel room, or group quarters, or in an auxiliary structure such as a garage, shed, barn, workshop, or utility room. Violation of the actual "dwelling house" or immediately adjacent buildings was required in common law for the incident to be considered a burglary, but modern legal statutes have expanded the definition of burglary to include most residential buildings. Whether or not the structure is inhabited at the time of entry is an important factor in some States; the crime survey, however, makes no distinction in this regard.

Analysis of the subsample of 308 unweighted cases of no-force burglary shows that the majority of incidents, 64 percent, took place in dwelling units. Not surprisingly, the single-family dwelling, the most common type of living unit in the United States, was

Table 1. Type of structure burglarized

Type of building	Percent* N=308
Total	100
Dwelling:	64
House	33
Apartment	15
Mobile home	3
Hotel/motel	3
Group residence	5
Other/NA	5
Nondwelling:	35
Garage	25
Other/NA	11

\*Data based on a subsample of unweighted cases. Information on the reliability of these data can be found in Appendix II.

the most frequent dwelling targeted, accounting for 33 percent of the sampled incidents. Fifteen percent of these offenses occurred in apartment buildings which ranged in size from small structures with only a few dwelling units to large complexes with many units. Other burglarized dwellings included mobile homes, hotel and motel rooms, dormitories, and fraternity houses.

Auxiliary structures provided the setting for a relatively large minority of the incidents, 36 percent. The garage, a common residential landmark across the United States, was very often a target; 25 percent of all no-force burglaries and 70 percent of offenses committed against nondwellings occurred in this type of structure. Other types of outbuildings such as sheds, barns, and utility rooms constituted the bulk of the remaining structures.

Entering a residential building, regardless of its type, usually presents no challenge to the average no-force burglar. The culprit has no reason to use force, nor must he/she display much technical or physical prowess, since the victimized householders have often provided an unobstructed entry through their own negligence. Certainly there are exceptions. Scaling a wall to reach an unlocked second-story window, slipping a lock, dismantling a security device, or wig-

Figure 8.  
Percent distribution of unlawful entries  
without force, by offender's method  
of entry, 1973-75

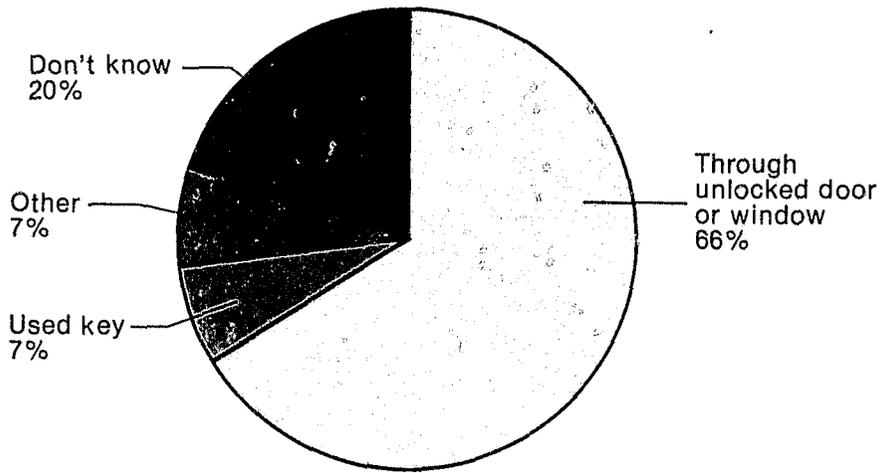
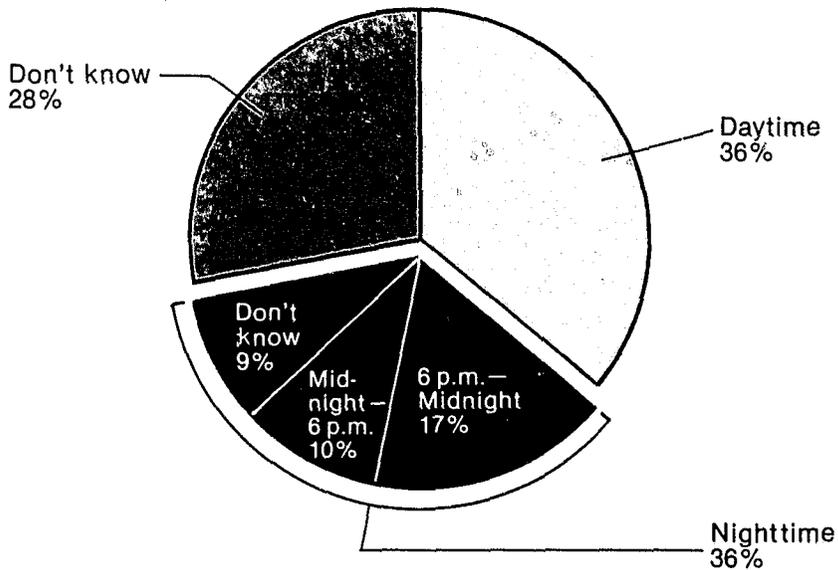


Figure 9.  
Percent distribution of unlawful entries  
without force, by time of occurrence, 1973-75



gling through a "doggy-door" are no mean feats. Nonetheless, the available evidence seems to indicate that in a majority of incidents the offender simply opens a door or window, walks or climbs through, steals something, and departs.

Data from the complete sample relating to the method of entry shows that during the 3-year survey period 66 percent of all incidents occurred through an unlocked door or window. (Figure 8). In 14 percent of the incidents the offender used a key or other method to gain entry, whereas in 20 percent the victimized householders were at a loss to explain how the offenders got in. Some in the latter category told interviewers that their homes had been properly secured both before and after the crime was committed, and that there was no evidence of entry!

The overwhelming majority of burglaries of garages, sheds, and other auxiliary buildings identified in the subsample were carried out through entrances with unlocked doors, open doors, or no doors at all. There were only a few incidents in which the victimized householders believed a key or other method was used or did not know how the entry took place. By contrast, a somewhat smaller proportion of dwelling entries occurred through unlocked doors or windows, whereas a larger proportion was attributed to the use of a key, to other methods, or went unexplained. Furthermore, it is probably true, even though only fragmentary information is available, that unlike nondwelling offenses, which often took place through portals having *no doors, windows, or locks*, burglaries of dwellings were most apt to occur where doors or windows were *closed but unlocked*.

### Time of occurrence

Data from the full sample of the crime survey show that a roughly equal number of incidents occurred during the daytime (6 a.m. to 6 p.m.) and at night (6 p.m. to 6 a.m.). Of the offenses which were known to have occurred after dark, half took place between 6 p.m. and midnight, one-quarter between midnight and 6 a.m., and one-quarter at an undetermined hour. There was a large number of incidents for which the time of day was unknown. (Figure 9). More precisely, in 28 percent of the nearly 9 million unlawful entries which occurred during the 3-year period victims did not have even a rough idea of when the offense took place. Thus, while one could conclude that there was no preeminent time period for those incidents having time-of-day information, it is impossible to make any definitive statement about all no-force burglaries.

Interviewer summaries illustrate the difficulty victims had estimating time of occurrence. Some respondents reported that it was only after unsuccessfully searching for a piece of jewelry, a household item, or a garden tool that they concluded it had been stolen. Others said they returned from an extended vacation, a business trip, or a weekend visit to find that a burglary had occurred. In either case, it was impossible for the victims to know what day the crime took place, let alone whether it transpired during the daytime or at night. And even when the exact date was known, the time of occurrence—that is day or night—was frequently a matter of conjecture.

### Type of property taken

Having illegally entered a house, apartment, garage, or other residential structure, a burglar has the opportunity to steal any or all items, personal and household, which can be carried off. We know, however, that thieves rarely "clean out" a household, that is steal all the family's possessions; rather they usually select a small number of articles out of the total available property. It is this selection process and the types of goods which end up missing which interest us here. What kind of merchandise attracts no-force burglars? Are they inclined to take cash or small, high-value items such as jewelry or silver, more popular consumer goods, or do they prefer a large number of different items?

As previously noted there are some very fortunate households that experience a no-force entry yet suffer no property loss; between 1973 and 1975 there was an absence of loss in roughly 15 percent of the incidents.

Assuming there was intent to steal, one of two things probably happened. Either the burglars were frightened away before they could complete the job or, having scoured the premises, could find nothing they wanted to take. Both situations were alluded to by victims during interviews. The possibility of being surprised in the act, was sometimes merely inferred, but other times respondents said they returned home to find household items stacked by the door or, more dramatically, caught the offender with goods in hand. In a number of other incidents, when they returned to a home that was searched but left intact, householders concluded the offenders saw nothing they liked.

As to the nature of the losses suffered by the less fortunate households, analysis of the subsample of no-force burglaries shows that (1) a wide variety of different types of goods was stolen, and (2) victims

sometimes lost more than one type of item in an incident.<sup>6</sup>

Overall a total of 293 types of items were lost in the 255 unweighted cases characterized by property loss. Of course in any one incident there may have been more than one item of a given type stolen—two pieces of stereo equipment, for example—so that the figures reported should not be confused with the total number of items lost. Moreover, a simple count of the total number of types or individual items lost masks the diversity apparent when individual incident summaries are examined. In some cases, households lost only one small inexpensive article, such as a garden rake or a can of gasoline; in others a relatively expensive item, a watch or a large amount of cash, was taken, while in still others there was theft of a number of different possessions.

As Table 2 shows, roughly one-fifth of all the successfully completed crimes were characterized by cash loss. In many of these incidents, cash was all that was taken, sometimes a large amount and sometimes merely pocket money, but in others it constituted only a portion of the stolen property.

Entertainment items (televisions, stereo equipment, cameras) and luxury goods (jewelry, silver, fur coats, etc.) each were stolen in roughly one-tenth of the crimes. As would be expected, most of these items were taken from dwellings. The garage provided the setting for many bicycle thefts (very often an expensive racing bicycle) or thefts of bicycle parts. Motor vehicles and motor vehicle parts and equipment, including CB radios and tape decks, and guns and ammunition were also listed as losses from no-force crimes.

Goods having low monetary value or low marketability constituted the bulk of the remainder of the stolen property. This was particularly true of household goods which had already seen much use before they were stolen. Without question, it could be said that a theft involving these types of goods exclusively would be financially successful only if the number of items taken greatly surpassed the average number stolen in our surveyed incidents.

Roughly 15 percent of the incidents involved the loss of tools or building supplies. This merchandise ranged in size and value from inexpensive hand gardening tools to farm implements and precision mechanic's tools; most of the items were stolen from unlocked garages, barns, sheds, or workshops. Home

**Table 2. Type of items stolen**

Type of item	Percent of incidents* N=255
Cash	22
Television, stereo equipment, cameras	11
Bicycles/parts	11
Jewelry, furs, silver	8
Motor vehicles/parts and equipment	5
Guns and ammunition	2
Tools and building supplies	15
Home furnishings	11
Food and drink	8
Clothing	6
Sporting goods	6
Gasoline	4

\*Adds to more than 100 percent because of multiple entries. Data based on a subsample of unweighted cases. Information on the reliability of these data can be found in Appendix II.

furnishings, such as kitchen utensils, dishes, linen, or small pieces of furniture were taken in approximately one-tenth of the incidents. Other types of low value items included food and drink, clothing, sporting goods, and gasoline.

If thieves were rated solely on the basis of the value of their heist, how would we rate our no-force burglars? Considering all of the sampled offenses, both successful and unsuccessful, and the sum total of all types of items lost in each successful incident, we would have to conclude that these offenders were not very skillful. To begin with, a sizeable number of incidents failed, that is no cash or property was taken even though an entry was made. Many more offenses produced some stolen property, but the purloined items were of types not likely to provide profitable return on the illegal market.

In the remaining two-fifths of the incidents, offenders stole one or more items which fell into a general category of goods having high unit value and/or high demand. But even here, the actual value of the purloined merchandise was frequently so low that the offender would have been compelled to steal many more times before the activity became lucrative.

To summarize, data from the crime survey indicate that the overwhelming majority of no-force burglaries occurred when occupants were away from the premises, either briefly—to run errands, pick up children, visit neighbors—or for longer periods of time—for the workday, the evening, a weekend trip,

<sup>6</sup>To facilitate analysis, stolen goods were grouped into a number of general categories and crimes were then classified on the basis of whether or not a particular type of item was stolen.

or an extended vacation. Entry into the burglarized structure was most often through an unlocked door or window, although door keys and other methods were occasionally used. If there was a preferred time the survey was not able to identify it, for there were too many instances in which the victims had no idea when the crime occurred.

As to the type of building burglarized, findings from a small subsample of the survey show that dwellings were the most frequent targets, although a large number of incidents took place in such structures as garages, sheds, and other outbuildings. The subsample also shows that no-force burglars stole, in addition to cash, a wide variety of items, some having a relatively high unit value but most modestly valued.

## Are unlawful entries reported to the police?

Once a burglary has been committed, a victimized household has the option of either reporting or not reporting the offense to law enforcement authorities. Informing the police may be a bothersome experience to some, particularly if it requires a personal appearance at the precinct headquarters or stationhouse during regular working hours. Also, if stolen property is recovered by the police additional trips may be required first to identify and then claim the items. Failure to notify the police, on the other hand, almost guarantees that the stolen goods will never be recovered, reduces the possibility, however slight, that the offender or offenders will be caught before they strike again, and runs counter to what is generally regarded as one's civic duty. When the pro's and con's are weighed, reporting might seem to be the correct course of action.

Yet crime survey findings indicate that most no-force burglaries go unreported. Of the roughly 9 million crimes which occurred between 1973 and 1975 only 38 percent came to the attention of the police (Figure 10). That means that in 5.6 million incidents the victimized households failed to contact the police. Annual findings show that the level of reporting remained relatively constant in each of the 3 years.

Of course, no-force burglaries are not the only crimes that go unreported, crimes of all types no matter how serious are never brought to the attention of the police. Nonetheless, in terms of the rate of reporting, there is a good deal of variation (Figure 11). In 1975, motor vehicle thefts and forcible entry burglaries were reported about twice as frequently as no-force burglaries, and personal crimes of violence also were better reported. By contrast, household larcenies and attempted forcible entry burglaries were characterized by lower reporting rates.

Why are some incidents reported and others not?

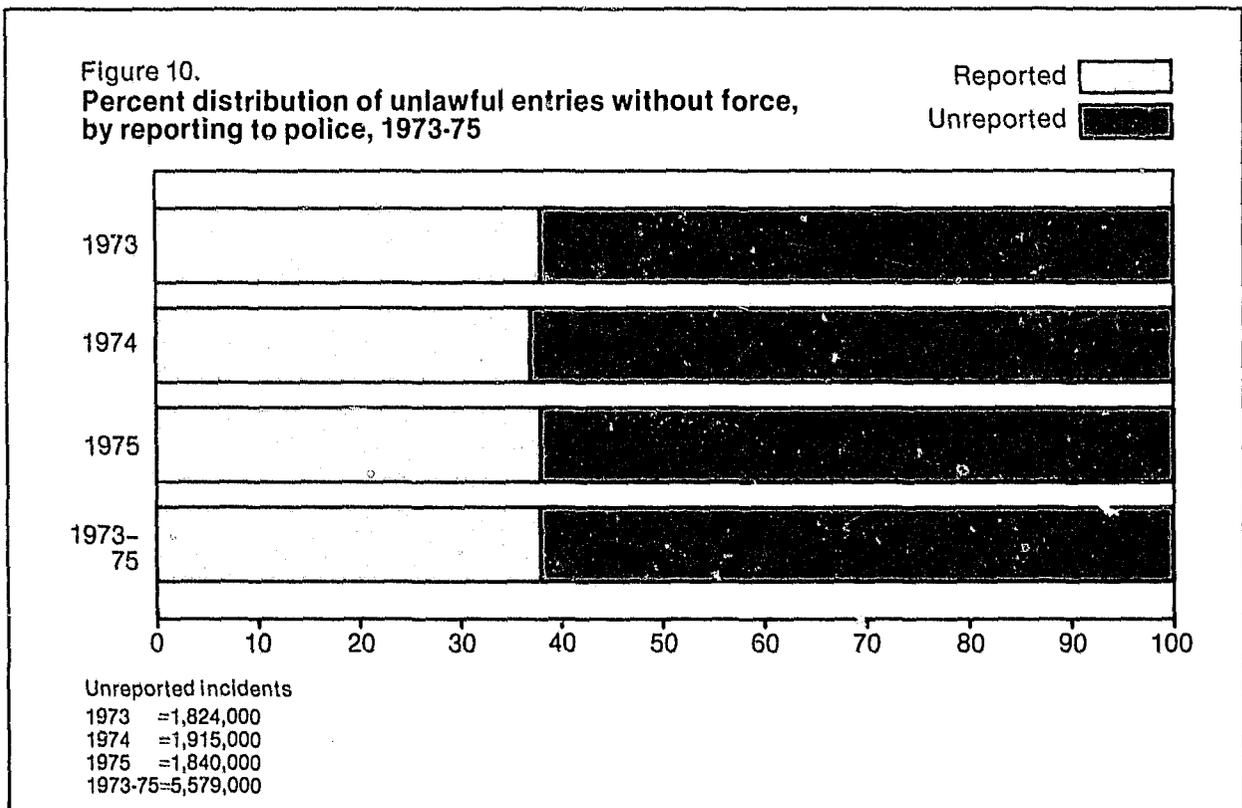
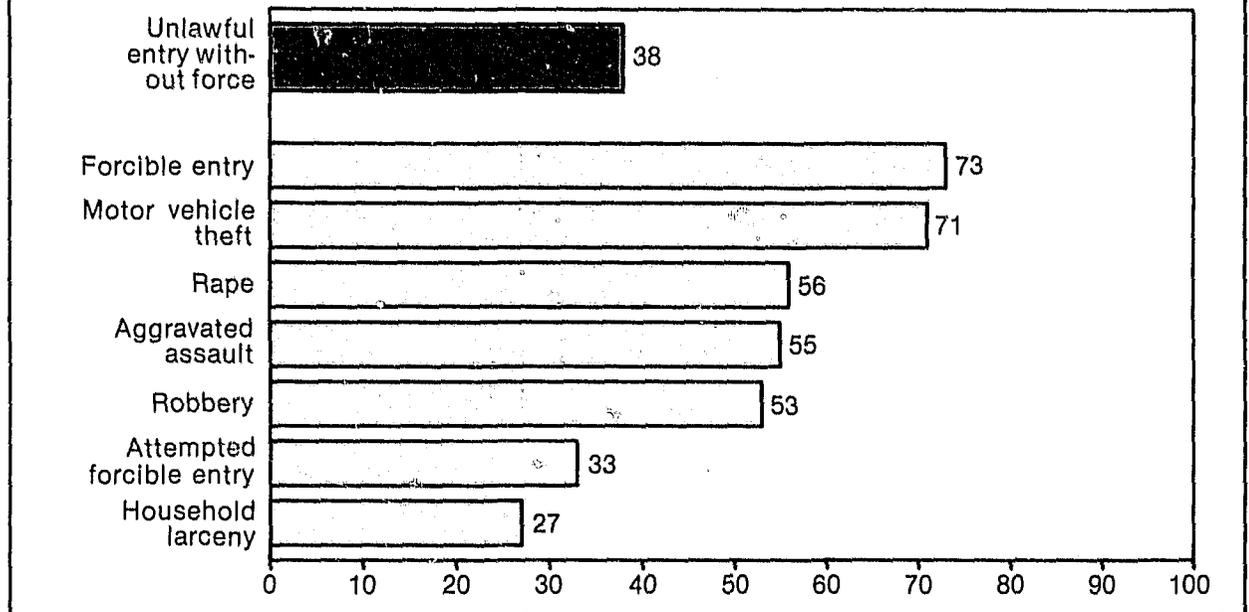


Figure 11.  
**Percent of victimizations reported to the police,  
 unlawful entry without force and selected  
 other crimes, 1975**



One possible explanation is that the offenses perceived to be the more serious, as determined by factors such as the presence and degree of victim injury, use of a gun or other dangerous weapon, or extent of financial loss, are reported while the less serious events go unreported. With regard to unlawful entry, and indeed each of the survey's household crimes, there can be no confrontation between victims and offenders and thus no weapons use or victim injury. However, there is frequently economic loss.

The nature of the loss associated with a no-force theft should then be a factor in determining whether or not an incident will be reported to the police. Results from the crime survey show that loss does appear to influence reporting, that, in general, the costlier the incident the more apt it is to be brought to the attention of the authorities (Figure 12).<sup>7</sup> When cash and property losses were small—less than \$10—

<sup>7</sup>Incidents with no cash or property loss are excluded from this analysis. A surprisingly large proportion of these crimes, 37 percent, were reported to the police in 1975. It is possible other factors relating to incident seriousness, such as victim-offender contact, which takes place in those unsuccessful no-force burglaries where offenders are caught in the act, may, in part, explain this relatively high reporting rate.

fewer than 1 in 5 offenses were reported, but when a considerably greater amount was lost—\$250 or more—3 of 4 came to the attention of the police. Offenses with moderately light losses—\$10-\$49—were reported to the police 20 percent of the time; those resulting in moderately heavy losses—\$50-\$249—were reported half the time.

Comparison of median losses for reported and unreported crimes offers additional insight into the relationship between monetary value and police reporting. Unlawful entries known to the police had a median value of loss of roughly \$160; by contrast, the median for unreported incidents was only \$40, or one-fourth the amount for the reported burglaries.

Crime survey respondents who said they had not informed the police were asked for the reasons behind their decision. Their responses substantiate the view that perceived seriousness is an important factor in reporting. In 3 of every 10 unreported burglaries resulting in loss, householders indicated that the *minor nature of the event* was at least one of the reasons why they had not told law enforcement authorities. As might be expected, the number who based their decision at least in part on the insignificance of the crime varied with the extent of economic loss. This reason was given for not re-

porting 51 percent of the incidents involving losses of less than \$10 but dropped, as the value of the stolen cash and property rose, to a low of only 5 percent for those crimes involving losses of \$250 or more (Figure 13).

But what of the other reasons given for nonreporting? The most common reply, even more prevalent than the "not serious enough" response, was that *nothing could be done about the crime*; half of the nonreporters gave this as a justification for remaining silent. Victims losing between \$10 and \$249 were more likely to offer this explanation than those who suffered either larger or smaller losses (Figure 14). Given that victims of no-force burglary usually knew little about the offense, aside from the fact that an entry had taken place and property lost, the frequency of this response is not too terribly surprising.

Other responses, including the belief that the authorities would not want to be bothered, concern about the private nature of the crime, inconvenience, or fear of reprisal were seldom used as justifications for not reporting (Figure 15).

Figure 13.  
Percent of respondents giving "Not important enough" as a reason for not reporting to police, by amount of loss, 1973-75

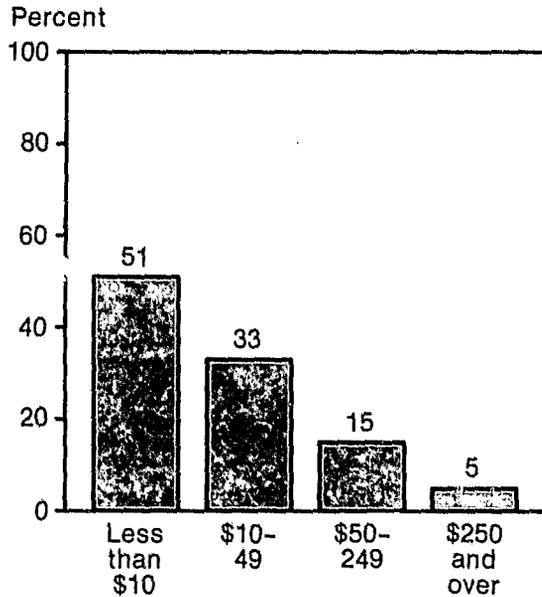


Figure 12.  
Percent of unlawful entries without force reported to the police, by amount of loss, 1973-75

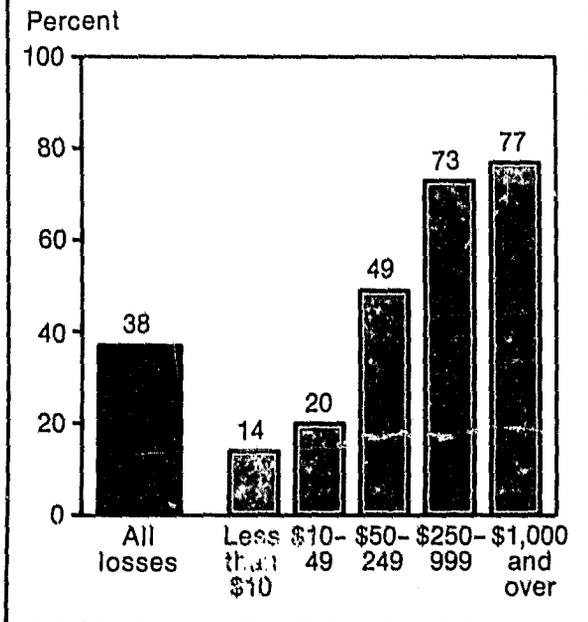


Figure 14.  
Percent of respondents giving "Nothing could be done" as a reason for not reporting to police, by amount of loss, 1973-75

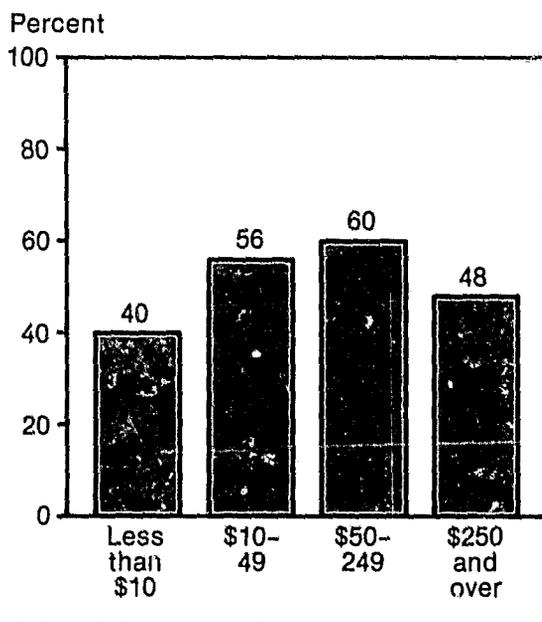
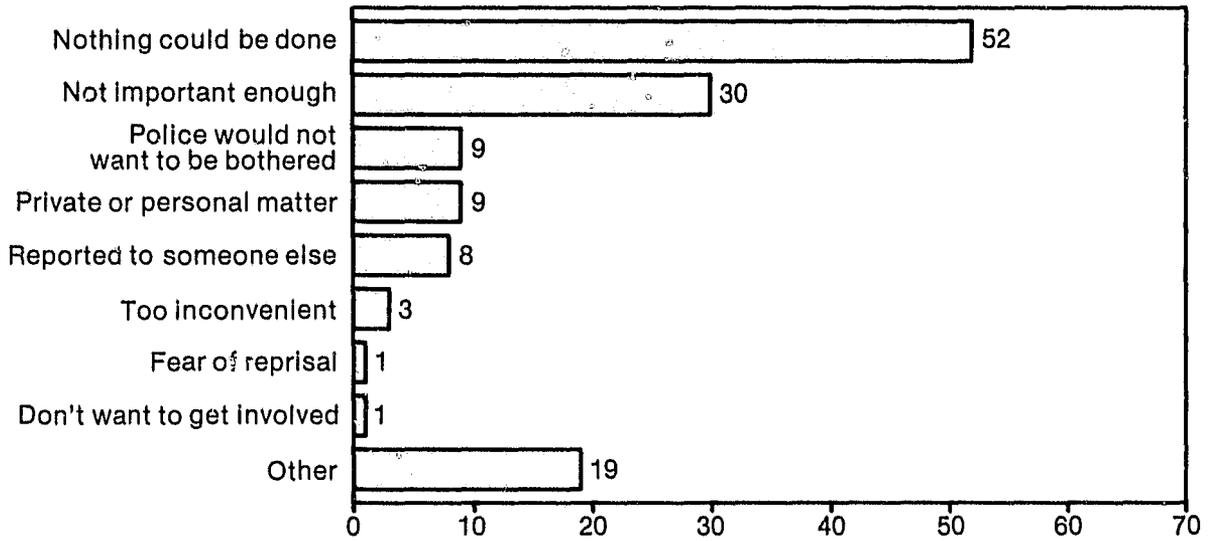


Figure 15.  
**Percent of nonreporters, by reasons for  
not reporting to police, 1973-75**



NOTE: Total adds to more than 100 because of multiple responses.

## Who are the victims of unlawful entry?

No individual or household is completely safe from crime. Regardless of how cautious we are in our daily activities or how well we secure our personal or household possessions, the possibility exists that we may fall victim to criminal attack. This is not to say, however, that we all are equally likely to become victims. There are some unfortunate persons who appear to be almost regularly preyed upon by criminals, and there are many others who have not experienced a crime and perhaps never will. At an aggregate level, there is an increasing body of evidence, bolstered by crime survey findings, which points to the fact that certain types of individuals or households are more likely than others to become victims of certain crimes. Is this true for unlawful entry? Are households with particular demographic, socioeconomic, or geographical characteristics uncommonly vulnerable to attack?

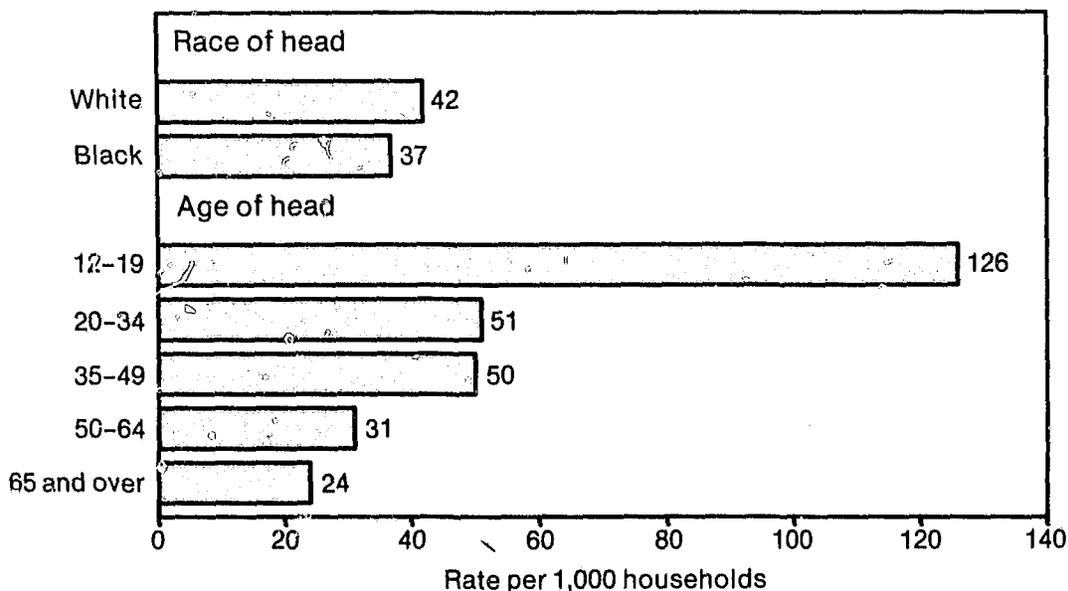
## Race of head of household

A number of studies conducted in recent years show that black Americans experienced higher victimization rates than whites for a variety of offenses.<sup>8</sup> Particularly striking is the disparity in victimization rates between the races for such violent personal crimes as robbery and aggravated assault. As determined by the crime survey, the average annual victimization rate for robbery between 1973 and 1975 was 6 per 1,000 whites and 14 per 1,000 blacks, and for aggravated assault the rate was 9 for whites and 15 for blacks.

For no-force burglary, however, the crime survey findings show that blacks were *slightly less likely* than whites to have experienced an unlawful entry at their residence. Specifically, black households were

<sup>8</sup>Because of relatively large statistical variances associated with data from households headed by persons belonging to other racial groups, this section will be limited to an examination of white and black households.

Figure 16.  
Average annual victimization rate for unlawful entries without force, by selected characteristics of head of household, 1973-75



burglarized at an average annual rate of 37 per 1,000 households, whites at a rate of 42 (Figure 16).

A somewhat different picture emerges when other forms of burglary are considered. Black households experienced higher rates for both break-ins and attempted break-ins, so much higher in fact that when the rates for all forms of residential burglary were added together blacks were significantly more vulnerable (Table 3).

Another consideration in assessing the impact of no-force burglary is its frequency relative to other types of household burglary. Or, put another way, how typical of all burglaries is the no-force variety? Among the total population, unlawful entry accounted for 44 percent of all burglaries experienced in the United States during 1973-75. When the race of the head of household was taken into account, there was a considerable difference between the two groups in the size of the no-force component. Roughly half of all burglaries committed against whites were unlawful entries, compared with only 28 percent for blacks. By contrast, successful break-ins accounted for 48 percent of the thefts in black households and 30 percent of those in white households (Figure 17). Clearly the type of burglary being considered here is much more representative of the incidents experienced by whites, a fact worth considering when developing and implementing crime prevention programs.

## Age of head of household

The impact of fear of crime on the behavior of older Americans and the plight of elderly victims of crime are social problems of the first order. In analyzing the relationship between fear of attack and crime rates, some commentators suggest that as a consequence of their heightened fear of attack our senior citizens have taken preventive measures that have resulted in reduced crime rates but also have diminished the quality of their lives. Whether or not this process has in fact occurred, the crime survey does show that households headed by persons age 65 and over were the least likely to fall victim to no-force burglary.

An average of only 24 of every 1,000 elderly households were victimized annually (Figure 16). By contrast, the small number of households headed by persons under the age of 20 experienced a victimization rate of roughly 126, the highest rate for any age group. Among households headed by persons who were neither very young nor very old, vulnerability appeared to decline with age, the rate being higher for families headed by persons age 20-34, or 35-49, than for those headed by persons age 50-64. This general relationship between age and victimization appeared to hold for white and black households (Figure 18).

Not only were households headed by the elderly

**Table 3. Average annual household burglary rate, by race and age of head of household, 1973-75**

(Rate per 1,000 households)

Characteristic	All burglaries	Unlawful entry without force	Forcible entry		
			Total	Completed	Attempted
Race of head of household:					
White	87.2	42.2	45.0	26.4	18.6
Black	131.9	36.9	95.1	62.7	32.4
Age of head of household:					
12-19	216.7	125.6	91.0	53.4	37.6
20-34	124.0	51.2	72.8	43.7	29.0
35-49	99.7	49.9	49.8	31.0	18.8
50-64	69.0	30.7	38.3	23.1	15.2
65 and over	54.4	23.9	30.5	17.1	13.4

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

Figure 17.  
**Percent distribution of burglaries by type and selected characteristics of victimized households, 1973-75**

Unlawful entry without force   
 Attempted forcible entry   
 Forcible entry 

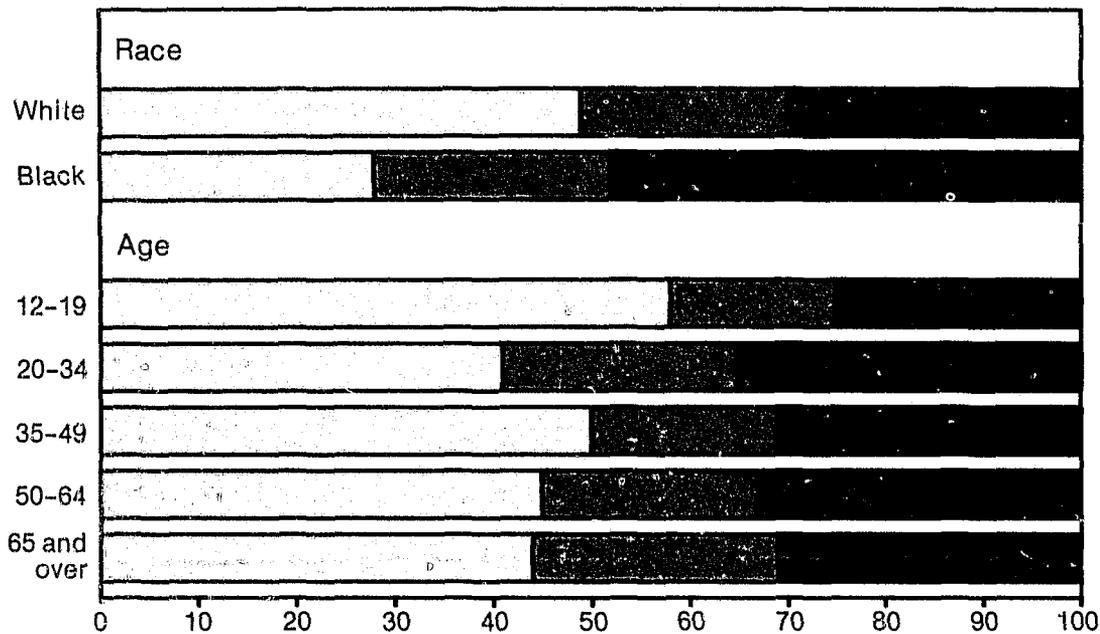
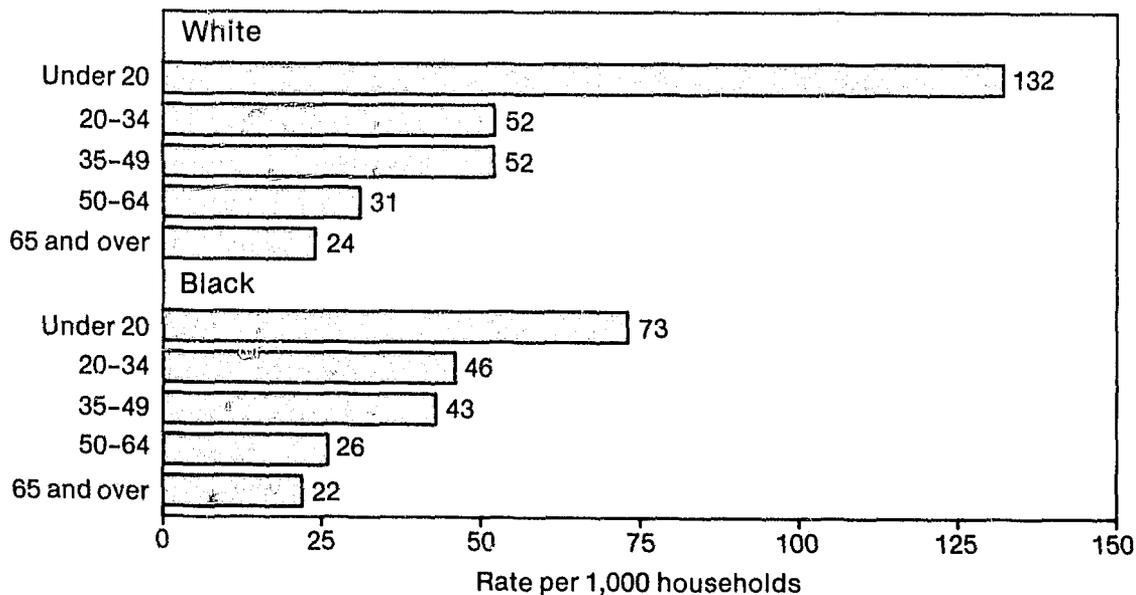


Figure 18.  
**Average annual victimization rate for unlawful entries without force, by race and age of head of household, 1973-75**



relatively safe from no-force burglary, they also were less likely than most others to experience forcible or attempted forcible burglary. As a consequence, their overall burglary rate was lower than others, particularly the rate for families headed by very young persons (Table 3).

Households with the youngest heads experienced an abnormally large number of no-force crimes relative to other types of burglary; three-fifths of all the offenses compared to one-half for households headed by persons age 35-49 were committed without the use of force. Among other age groups, no-force burglary was not nearly as common a crime (Figure 17).

### Economic circumstances

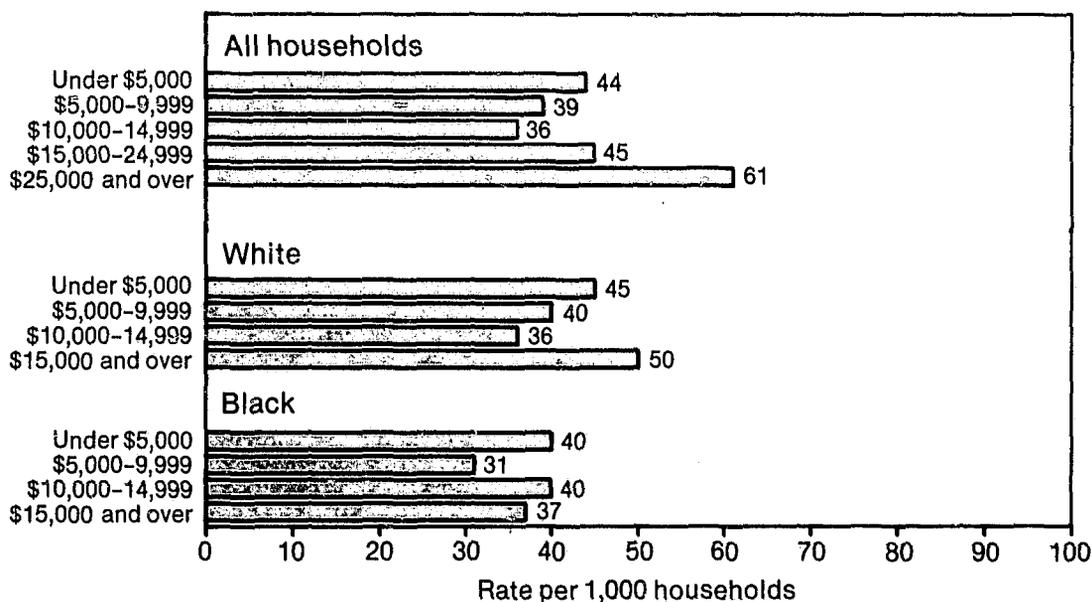
Results from the crime survey show that comparative economic prosperity provides no guarantee of immunity from residential crime. Quite the contrary, affluent households (annual family incomes of \$25,000 or more) ran a greater chance of falling victim to no-force burglary than any other income group (Figure 19). Families in the next highest income bracket, \$15,000-\$24,999, along with families at the lower end of the income scale, those earning less than \$5,000, registered intermediate

crime rates. Least vulnerable of all were households with incomes between \$5,000 and \$14,999.

The no-force burglary pattern among white households at varying income levels approximated the pattern for the general population. Rates among black households did not show much variation, although there were not enough victimized families in the highest income category to provide a reliable measure. Minority families earning above average incomes of \$15,000 or more were victimized at a rate no different from that for less affluent blacks, but significantly lower than the rate for equally prosperous whites.

The pattern that prevailed for no-force burglary was not evident for the forcible forms; higher income households were no more crime prone than others when it came to forcible or attempted forcible entry. (Table 4). On the other hand, low income households, those earning less than \$5,000, experienced a combined forcible and attempted forcible burglary rate which was significantly higher than the rate for most other income groups. Thus, it appears that poor households have at least moderately high victimization rates for all types of burglary, whereas relatively affluent households are only abnormally vulnerable to unlawful entry.

Figure 19.  
Average annual victimization rate for unlawful entries without force, by annual family income and race of head of household, 1973-75



**Table 4. Average annual household burglary rate, by family income, tenure, and place of residence, 1973-75**

(Rate per 1,000 households)

Characteristic	All burglaries	Unlawful entry without force	Forcible entry		
			Total	Completed	Attempted
Annual family income:					
Less than \$5,000	101.3	44.0	57.3	34.5	22.8
\$5,000-\$9,999	93.0	39.3	53.7	32.7	21.1
\$10,000-\$14,999	79.7	36.2	43.5	25.9	17.6
\$15,000-\$24,999	92.2	45.0	47.2	27.9	19.3
\$25,000 or more	108.0	61.4	46.5	28.4	18.1
Tenure:					
Owned or being bought	76.4	36.7	39.7	23.9	15.8
Rented	119.1	50.1	59.1	41.5	27.6
Place of residence:					
Inside central cities	118.6	45.5	73.1	44.9	28.1
Suburbs	88.3	41.1	47.2	27.8	19.4
Small towns and rural areas	68.9	38.1	30.8	18.2	12.6

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

## Tenure

Are the majority of American families who live in their own dwellings any less vulnerable to no-force burglary than families who rent? Most definitely, according to findings from the crime survey. Between 1973 and 1975 the average annual crime rate among households owning or buying their home was 37, whereas the rate for renters was 50, a difference of 13 offenses per 1,000 households (Figure 21). With a rate of 52 per 1,000 households, white tenants were responsible for disparity between renters and owners; black renters, by comparison, were much less likely to be victims.

As shown in Table 4, renters were not only more vulnerable than owners to burglaries of the no-force variety, they also experienced high victimization rates for forcible and attempted forcible entry. As a consequence, the overall burglary rate was significantly higher among renters than owners.

Irrespective of the rate of criminal attack, households that owned or were buying their own dwelling had a higher proportion of no-force burglaries relative to total burglaries than renters (Figure 20). Hence, although owners were much less

vulnerable to all forms of burglary than renters, there was a greater likelihood that when a burglary did occur in an owner-occupied unit it would be a no-force entry.

## Environmental characteristics

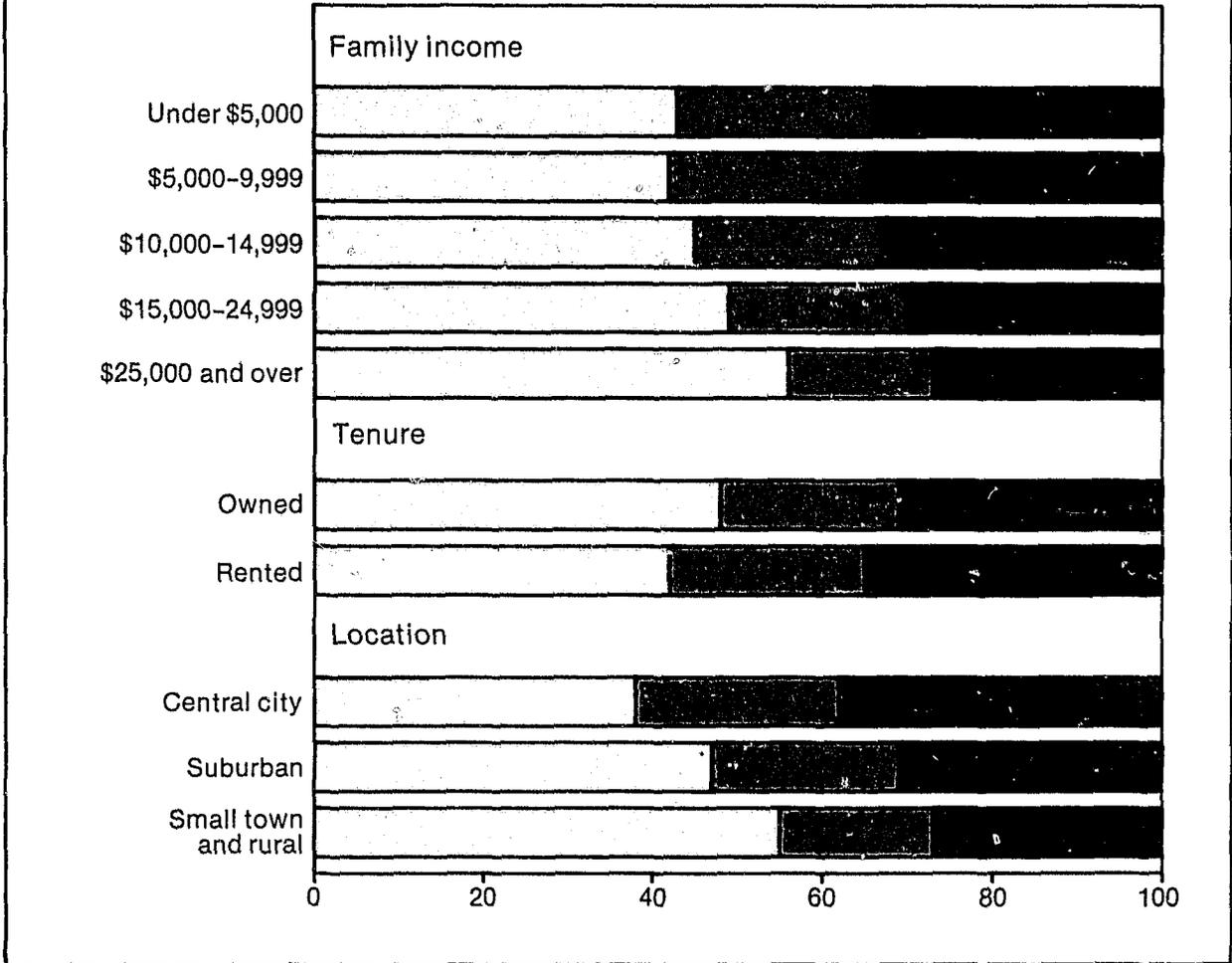
Crime has long been regarded as essentially an urban problem. Although few have been so naive as to suggest that our suburbs, small towns, or rural areas are free of crime, particularly in the light of recent disclosures of suburban crime waves, most commentators have maintained that crime in these areas, particularly serious personal or property crime, is much less of a problem. Statistical studies have generally substantiated the belief that crime "heats up" as one moves toward the central city.

Does this relationship appear to hold for no-force burglary specifically? Do residents of central cities stand a greater chance of falling victim to this type of property crime than families living on the urban edge or persons inhabiting nonmetropolitan areas?

Data from the crime survey demonstrate that central city households indeed experienced a slightly greater vulnerability than their suburban or

Figure 20.  
**Percent distribution of burglaries by type and selected characteristics of victimized households, 1973-75**

Unlawful entry without force   
 Attempted forcible entry   
 Forcible entry 



nonmetropolitan counterparts (Figure 22). A small but significant difference also existed between the rates for the two groups living outside central cities. This pattern prevailed for white, but not black, households. The average annual victimization rates for the 3-year period were 45 among city dwellers, 41 among suburbanites, and 38 among residents of small towns and rural areas.

An examination of rates for each of the 3 years provides another view of the relationship between place of residence and vulnerability to attack. There was no doubt that urban households were more vulnerable to no-force burglaries in 1973 and 1974,

but a drop in the urban rate of 5 incidents per 1,000 households in 1975, coupled with stable rates among households in the other areas, had the effect of leveling rates in the three geographical areas. The explanation for the relatively precipitous decline in the rate among residents of central cities is not immediately at hand.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> More recent information, which falls outside the scope of this report, shows that in 1976 the rate among residents of small towns and rural areas dropped sharply, whereas rates for the other two areas were not unlike those of the previous year. Additional annual data will be needed before any trend can be established.

Figure 21.  
**Average annual victimization rate for unlawful entries without force, by household tenure and race of head of household, 1973-75**

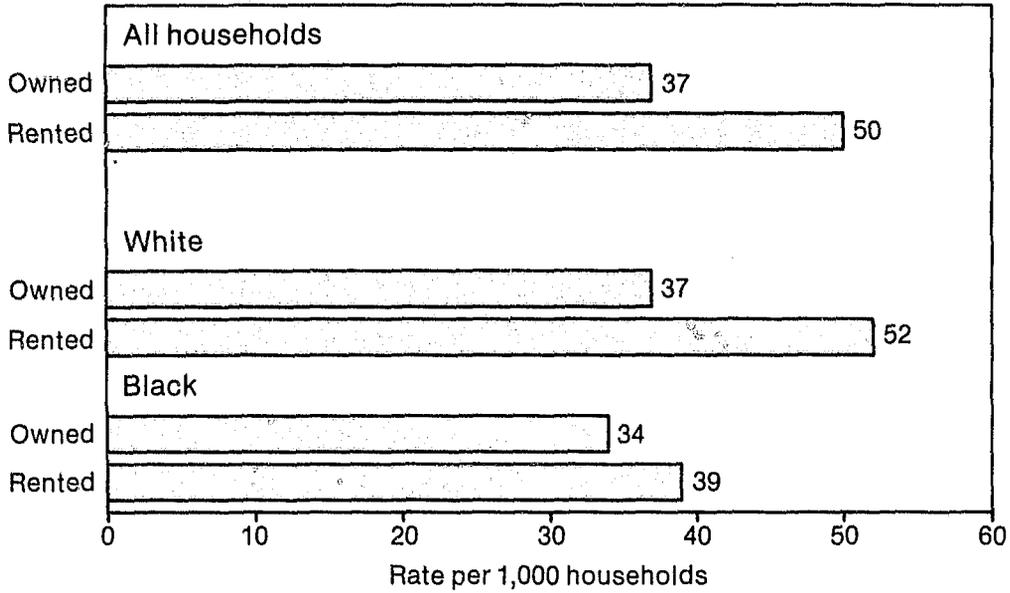
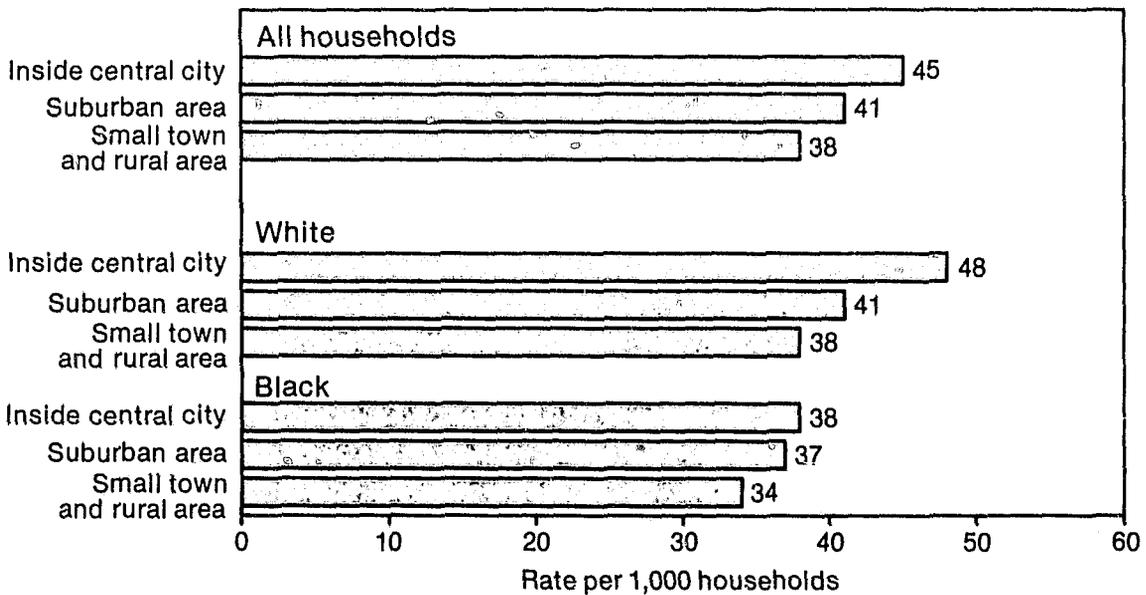


Figure 22.  
**Average annual victimization rate for unlawful entries without force, by place of residence and race of head of household, 1973-75**



Urban households also were most likely to experience forcible or attempted forcible burglary (Table 4). The combined rate of 73 per 1,000 households among central city families was approximately 50 percent higher than the rate among suburbanites and 140 percent above that experienced by residents of small towns and rural areas. It comes as no surprise, then, that when all burglaries were considered, urbanites had the highest rate. As for the distribution of crimes, unlawful entries accounted for 38 percent of all burglaries of central city residents, but for 47 and 55 percent of those which were carried out against suburbanites and nonmetropolitan inhabitants, respectively (Figure 20).

Despite the fact that families in central cities recorded the highest average annual no-force burglary rate, it cannot be said that all types of urban households were in the greatest danger. To illustrate, city-dwelling households headed by elderly persons posted a lower crime rate than suburban area or small town and rural area households headed by very young individuals; similarly, urban dwellers with incomes between \$5,000-\$14,999 were no more likely to be victimized than families earning \$15,000 or more living outside central cities. Apparently, with respect to no-force burglary, residence outside the limits of a central city does not in and of itself guarantee a low crime rate.

A brief examination of certain key household characteristics has uncovered some significant variations in the crime rate for no-force burglary. Households headed by whites, very young individuals, renters, or those with relatively high incomes were more likely to become victims than their counterparts. Residents of central cities were somewhat more vulnerable than inhabitants of suburban or nonmetropolitan areas, although there was evidence that the rates might be converging.

## **Appendix I**

### **Information on the sample and the reliability of the estimates**

Survey results contained in this report are based on data collected from a sample of persons living in households throughout the Nation and from persons living in group quarters, such as dormitories, rooming houses, and religious group dwellings. Excluded from the survey were crews of merchant vessels, Armed Forces personnel living in military barracks, institutionalized persons, U.S. citizens residing abroad, and foreign visitors to this country. With these exceptions, all individuals age 12 and over living in households designated for the sample were eligible to be interviewed.

#### **Sample design and size**

Households were chosen for interview by means of a stratified multistage cluster sample. This complex selection procedure produced a potential universe of approximately 73,000 housing units and other living quarters. Then, for the purpose of conducting the field interviews, the sample was divided into six groups, or rotations, each of which contained housing units whose occupants were to be interviewed once every 6 months over a period of 3 years. After these groups have completed their time in sample, they are replaced by new groups consisting of households selected in a similar manner.

As might be expected, not all housing units which are designated for the sample provide interviews; of the units selected, interviews were eventually obtained for about 60,000. Most of the noninterviewed units were found to be vacant, demolished, or turned into nonresidential use; only about 4 percent of those units considered eligible were not interviewed.

Because a major objective of the crime survey is to provide measures of the total incidence of crime throughout the United States, sample data are inflated or weighted up by means of a multistage estimation procedure. The estimation procedure is performed on a quarterly basis to produce quarterly estimates of the volume and rates of victimization

and these in turn are aggregated to produce annual estimates. Simply stated, the inflation process starts with a basic weight equal to the reciprocal of the probability of selection and then is refined further to reduce the variability of the sample estimates.

#### **Reliability of estimates**

Estimates presented in this report are subject to sampling and nonsampling errors. Sampling errors exist because the particular sample employed, although representative, was only one of many that could have been drawn using the same design and selection procedure, and estimates from these different samples would differ from each other. The standard error of a survey estimate is a measure of the variation among the estimates from all possible samples and is, therefore, a measure of the precision with which the estimate from a particular sample approximates the average result of all possible samples. The estimate and its associated standard error may be used to construct a confidence interval, that is, an interval having a prescribed probability that it would include the figure from a complete census. The 68 percent confidence interval is defined as the range of values given by the estimate minus the standard error and the estimate plus the standard error; the chances are 68 out of 100 that a figure from a complete census would fall within that range. Similarly, the 95 percent confidence interval is defined as the estimate plus or minus two standard errors. Statements based on the full sample involving comparisons in this report are good at the 95 percent confidence level, that is to say the chances were at least 95 out of 100 that a difference did not result solely from sampling variability.

The sources of nonsampling error are, in part, related to the problem of memory lapse or recall. Research on the capacity to recall has shown that individuals sometimes forget about crimes that occurred during a particular reference period or bring within the designated time period a crime that occurred earlier or later. Survey procedures such as bounding—using previous interviews to establish a time frame for subsequent interviews—minimize the impact of victim recall problems although they cannot completely prevent them from occurring.

## Appendix II

### Information on the subsample

The small group of no-force burglaries analyzed with the aid of uncoded questionnaire entries was selected using a systematic sample of all households that were victims of no-force burglary in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th collection quarters of 1974 and the 1st collection quarter of 1975. For the 1974 collection quarters every 8th victimized household was selected from a computerized listing, and for the 1st quarter of 1975 every 9th unit was picked. The completed questionnaires, which contained the basic screening questions (Form NCS-1) and all crime incident reports (Form NCS-2), were obtained and used in the analysis. (A facsimile of the questionnaire may be found in any of the general NCS reports.) This procedure produced a total of 277 questionnaires, 66 from the 2nd quarter of 1974, 68 from the 3rd quarter of 1974, 79 from the 4th quarter of 1974, and 64 from the 1st quarter of 1975.

Twenty-eight households reported more than one no-force burglary during the same 6-month interval. As a consequence, 308 separate incidents were reported by the 277 households. Of those victimized more than once, 25 experienced two burglaries and three fell victim to three crimes. Eleven households included in the subsample reported a *series crime*, that is three or more no-force burglaries for which respondents were unable to provide details for each incident separately. During the interview, incident characteristics were collected for the most recent event in the series. Series crimes included in the subsample were regarded, for the purposes of this analysis, as a single event.

Although estimates based upon the subsample are meant to be illustrative and not representative, standard errors have been calculated in order to gauge sampling variability. Table I contains the standard errors for estimates of type of dwelling entered, and Table II gives the errors for proportions of types of items stolen. To illustrate the use of the tables, Table I—and Text Table 1—show that 33 percent of the subsample of no-force burglaries occurred in houses. The estimated standard error for this proportion is 3.3. Therefore, the confidence interval surrounding the estimate is about 29.7 to

36.3; or the chances are about 68 out of 100 that the results of a complete census would have produced an estimate with this range. Similarly, the chances are about 95 out of 100 that a complete enumeration would have resulted in an estimate within the range of two standard errors, or from 26.4 to 39.6.

**Table I. Type of structure burglarized**  
(68 chances out of 100)

Type of dwelling	Estimated percent	Estimated standard error
Dwelling:	64	3.4
House	33	3.3
Apartment	15	2.5
Mobile home	3	1.1
Hotel/motel	3	1.1
Group residence	5	1.6
Other/NA	5	1.6
Nondwelling:	36	3.4
Garage	25	3.1
Other/NA	11	2.2

**Table II. Type of items stolen**  
(68 chances out of 100)

Type of item	Estimated percent	Estimated standard error
Cash	22	3.2
Television, stereo equipment, cameras	11	2.5
Bicycles/parts	11	2.4
Jewelry, furs, silver	8	2.1
Motor vehicles/parts and equipment	5	1.7
Guns and ammunition	2	1.0
Tools and building supplies	15	2.8
Home furnishings	11	2.4
Food and drink	8	2.1
Clothing	6	1.9
Sporting goods	6	1.9
Gasoline	4	1.4

## Glossary

**Age of head of household**—The appropriate age category is determined by the household head's age as of the last day of the month preceding the interview.

**Aggravated assault**—Attack with a weapon resulting in any injury and attack without a weapon resulting either in serious injury (e.g., broken bones, loss of teeth, internal injuries, loss of consciousness) or in undetermined injury requiring 2 or more days of hospitalization. Also includes attempted assault with a weapon.

**Annual family income**—Includes the income of the household head and all other related persons residing in the same household unit. Covers the 12 months preceding the interview and includes wages, salaries, net income from business or farm, pensions, interest, dividends, rent, and any other form of monetary income. The income of persons unrelated to the head of household is excluded.

**Assault**—An unlawful physical attack, whether aggravated or simple, upon a person. Includes attempted assaults with or without a weapon. Excludes rape and attempted rape, as well as attacks involving theft or attempted theft, which are classified as robbery.

**Attempted forcible entry**—A form of burglary in which force is used in an attempt to gain entry.

**Burglary**—Unlawful or forcible entry of a residence or business, usually, but not necessarily, attended by theft. Includes attempted forcible entry. In this report, only residential burglaries are considered.

**Central city**—The largest city (or "twin cities") of a standard metropolitan statistical area (SMSA), defined below.

**Commercial crimes**—Burglary or robbery of business establishments and certain other organizations, such as those engaged in religious, political, or cultural activities. Includes both completed and attempted acts.

**Forcible entry**—A form of burglary in which force is used to gain entry (e.g., by breaking a window or slashing a screen).

**Head of household**—For classification purposes, only one individual per household can be the head

person. In husband-wife households, the husband arbitrarily is considered to be the head. In other households, the head person is the individual so regarded by its members; generally, that person is the chief breadwinner.

**Household**—Consists of the occupants of separate living quarters meeting either of the following criteria: (1) Persons, whether present or temporarily absent, whose usual place of residence is the housing unit in question, or (2) Persons staying in the housing unit who have no usual place of residence elsewhere.

**Household crimes**—Burglary or larceny of a residence, or motor vehicle theft. Includes both completed and attempted acts.

**Household larceny**—Theft or attempted theft of property or cash from a residence or its immediate vicinity. Forcible entry, attempted forcible entry, or unlawful entry is not involved.

**Incident**—A specific criminal act involving a victimized household.

**Larceny**—Theft or attempted theft of property or cash without force. A basic distinction is made between personal larceny and household larceny.

**Metropolitan area**—Abbreviation for "Standard metropolitan statistical area (SMSA)," defined below.

**Motor vehicle**—Includes automobiles, trucks, motorcycles, and any other motorized vehicle legally allowed on public roads and highways.

**Motor vehicle theft**—Stealing or unauthorized taking of a motor vehicle, including attempts at such acts.

**Nonmetropolitan area**—A locality not situated within an SMSA. The category covers a variety of localities, ranging from sparsely inhabited rural areas to cities of fewer than 50,000 population. In this report, nonmetropolitan places are referred to as "small towns or rural areas."

**Offender**—The perpetrator of a crime.

**Offense**—A criminal incident.

**Outside central cities**—See "Suburban area," below.

**Personal crimes**—Rape, robbery of persons, assault, personal larceny with contact, or personal larceny without contact. Includes both completed and attempted acts.

**Personal crimes of violence**—Rape, robbery of persons, or assault. Includes both completed and attempted acts.

**Personal larceny**—Equivalent to personal crimes of theft. A distinction is made between personal larceny with contact and personal larceny without contact.

**Race of head of household**—Determined by the interviewer upon observation. The racial categories distinguished are white, black, and other. Data on the category "other" are not treated in this report.

**Rape**—Carnal knowledge through the use of force or the threat of force, including attempts. Statutory rape (without force) is excluded. Includes both heterosexual and homosexual rape.

**Rate of victimization**—See "Victimization rate," below.

**Robbery**—Theft or attempted theft, directly from a person or a business, of property or cash by force or threat of force, with or without a weapon.

**Standard metropolitan statistical area (SMSA)**—Except in the New England States, a standard metropolitan statistical area is a county or group of contiguous counties that contains at least one city of 50,000 inhabitants or more, or "twin cities" with a combined population of at least 50,000. In addition to the county, or counties, containing such a city or cities, contiguous counties are included in an SMSA if, according to certain criteria, they are socially and economically integrated with the central city. In the New England States, SMSA's consist of towns and cities instead of counties. Each SMSA must include at least one central city, and the complete title of an SMSA identifies the central city or cities.

**Suburban area**—The county, or counties, containing a central city, plus any contiguous counties that are linked socially and economically to the central city. On data tables, suburban areas are categorized as those portions of metropolitan areas situated "outside central cities."

**Tenure**—Two forms of household tenancy are distinguished: (1) Owned, which includes dwellings being bought through mortgage, and (2) Rented, which also includes rent-free quarters belonging to a party other than the occupant and situations where rental payments are in kind or in service.

**Unlawful entry**—A form of burglary committed by someone having no legal right to be on the premises even though force is not used.

**Victim**—The recipient of a criminal act; in the case of unlawful entry the burglarized household is the victim.

**Victimization**—A specific criminal act as it affects a single victim, whether a person, household, or com-

mercial establishment. Each criminal act against a household is assumed to involve a single victim, the affected household. For household crimes the term is synonymous with "incident."

**Victimization rate**—For crimes against persons, the victimization rate, a measure of occurrence among population groups at risk, is computed on the basis of the number of victimizations per 1,000 resident population age 12 and over. For crimes against households, victimization rates are calculated on the basis of the number of incidents per 1,000 households. And, for crimes against commercial establishments, victimization rates are derived from the number of incidents per 1,000 establishments.

**Victimize**—To perpetrate a crime against a person, household, or commercial establishment.

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LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION

USER EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

The Cost of Negligence: Losses  
from Preventable Household Burglaries  
SD-NCS-N-11, NCJ-53527

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