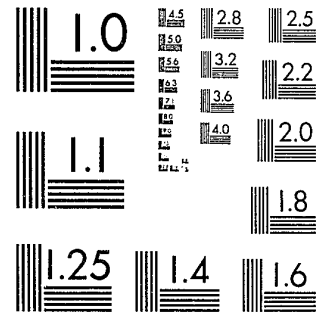


National Criminal Justice Reference Service



This microfiche was produced from documents received for inclusion in the NCJRS data base. Since NCJRS cannot exercise control over the physical condition of the documents submitted, the individual frame quality will vary. The resolution chart on this frame may be used to evaluate the document quality.



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS-1963-A

Microfilming procedures used to create this fiche comply with the standards set forth in 41CFR 101-11.504.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the author(s) and do not represent the official position or policies of the U. S. Department of Justice.

National Institute of Justice
United States Department of Justice
Washington, D. C. 20531

80829

U.S. Department of Justice 80829
National Institute of Justice

This document has been reproduced exactly as received from the person or organization originating it. Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the National Institute of Justice.

Permission to reproduce this copyrighted material has been granted by

Public Domain
Bureau of Justice Statistics

to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS).

Further reproduction outside of the NCJRS system requires permission of the copyright owner.



Bureau of Justice Statistics
Bulletin

Violent Crime by Strangers

Three of every five violent crimes are committed by persons who are strangers to their victims. This finding emerges from a study of National Crime Survey data for the crimes of rape, robbery, and assault from 1973 through 1979. An estimated 23.4 million of these crimes were committed during the 7-year period—an average of more than 3 million a year. (See table 1.)

The fear of crime is, in general, the fear of a random unprovoked attack or robbery by a stranger. A 1967 Presidential commission on crime concluded that "...the fear of crimes of violence is not a simple fear of injury or death or even of all crimes of violence, but, at bottom, a fear of strangers."¹

In recent years, Americans have become increasingly crime conscious. During the past year, the national media and public officials have focused much attention on the volume of crime, its costs, and its effects on people in the Nation. Recent polls have found that many of us are becoming increasingly afraid of crime and, as a result, are changing our lifestyles. Yet, the overall rate at which these violent crimes were committed by strangers over the 1973-79 period shows no upward trend.

The study of crimes committed by strangers was limited to rape, robbery, and assault (both simple and aggravated).²

¹The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society, a report by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1967, p. 52.

²For a definition of these crimes and an explanation of the National Crime Survey, see the BJS Bulletin, *Measuring Crime*, February 1981, NCJ-75710.

Table 1. Violent crimes by strangers, 1973-79 averages

Type of crime	Number	%
Total	3,356,851	100
Rape	105,308	3
Robbery	843,686	25
Aggravated assault	947,579	28
Simple assault	1,460,278	44

April 1982

This bulletin uses statistics from the first 7 years of the National Crime Survey (NCS) to examine crimes of violence committed by persons not known to their victims. The large data base that the NCS now represents permits a more detailed analysis of the characteristics of crime than can be obtained with data for a single year. A similar approach was used in the December bulletin, "Crime and the Elderly," and will be used later this year in a bulletin on weapons use.

Benjamin H. Renshaw III
Acting Director

Murder and kidnapping are not covered by the National Crime Survey, and comparable data for these two crimes from other sources do not exist.

Some data on the relationship of murderers to their victims are available from the FBI Uniform Crime Reports (UCR).³ The proportion of murders by strangers remained relatively stable during 1976-79.⁴ In 1979, the relationship between murderer and victim was unknown in more than a third of the cases, but in cases where the relationship was known, only 20% of the victims were killed by strangers. When only the murders committed along with another felony (such as a rape or robbery) are considered, the proportion of crimes in which the victim-offender relationship is not known rises to more than 45%. In cases where the relationship is known, the proportion of murders by strangers rises to nearly 60%.

Who is a stranger?

In the National Crime Survey, victims identify their offender, when known, by one of a series of relationships ranging from that of stranger to specified relative. The study of the 1973-79 data on crimes committed by strangers included both persons identified by the victim as strangers and

³For an explanation of the UCR and its relationship to the NCS, see *Measuring Crime*.

⁴UCR data on relationship between victim and offender are not available for homicides before 1976.

persons identified as "known by sight." A group of offenders committing a single crime was considered to be a group of strangers only when the victim identified them as strangers or as known by sight only. No data are available on how well the offenders knew the victims.

How often are people victimized by strangers?

Evidence and logic both suggest that a victim is more likely to report a crime to an interviewer if the offender is a total stranger and less likely to do so if the offender is a close relative. In the latter case, both embarrassment and fear of retaliation are inhibiting forces; there may even be failure to recognize that a crime has occurred. In view of this possible bias, the number of crimes committed by non-strangers may be somewhat understated, and the proportion of crimes committed by strangers may be somewhat overstated.

Americans age 12 and over were victims of violent crimes by strangers at an average rate of 20 victimizations per 1,000 people over the 1973-79 period. This compares with a nonstranger victimization rate of 12 per 1,000 people. Robbery and rape were the two violent crimes most often committed by strangers. The average percent of violent crime committed by strangers during 1973-79 was:

All violent crime	59
Rape	65
Robbery	76
Aggravated assault	56
Simple assault	53

Robbery was committed by strangers so often that the victimization rates for robbery by strangers and aggravated assaults by strangers were about the same (roughly 5 per 1,000) even though the overall rate for aggravated assault (10.0 per 1,000) was 52% higher than that for robbery.

Trends in crimes by strangers

Because crimes by strangers account for 60% of all violent crimes, the pattern in their rates over time is virtually the same as for total violent crimes—one of great stability. In contrast, the rate of violent crimes committed by persons known to their victims increased by 10% over the 1973-79 period. (See figure 1.)

80829

The rate of violent crime committed by strangers was stable in the 7-year period for both whites and blacks. Not only did the rate of violent crimes by strangers remain unchanged between 1973 and 1979, but the character of these crimes also remained apparently unchanged. For example, about a third of the robbery victims were injured throughout the 7-year period, while the proportion seriously injured averaged about 7%. The use of weapons in robbery showed no increase. Robbery with any weapon accounted for about half of all robberies in each year, while robbery with a gun was slightly more than one-fifth each year.

Victims of strangers

Men were victimized by violent strangers at a rate almost triple that of women. The average rate for men from 1973 to 1979 was 29 per 1,000; for women, 11 per 1,000. This ratio contrasts sharply with that for violence at the hands of relatives or acquaintances. Men were somewhat more likely than women to be victims of violence from acquaintances (12 per 1,000 vs. 7 per 1,000) while the reported rates for violence from relatives were practically the same (1 per 1,000 vs. 3 per 1,000). The latter figures, of course, are the most likely to be affected by incomplete reporting.

Blacks were more than twice as likely as whites to be robbed by strangers, but whites were more likely to be victims of simple assault. The likelihood of rape or aggravated assault by strangers was roughly the same for both races.

The victimization rates per 1,000 population by sex and by race for 1973-79 are:

	White	Black	Male	Female
Rape	1	1	0.1	1
Robbery	4	10	7	3
Aggravated assault	6	6	9	2
Simple assault	9	5	12	5

For both sexes, the overall chance of becoming the victim of a violent stranger decreased as age increased. Persons age 65 and over had victimization rates substantially lower than persons age 20 to 24. The difference was especially sharp for aggravated assault of males. Men age 20 to 24 had an aggravated assault rate 30 times that for men over 65.

While the general likelihood of being the victim of violent crime at the hands of a stranger fell with increasing age, this was not the case for robbery specifically. For both men and women, robbery rates for the elderly were not significantly different from those of young people age 20 to 24. Many older people are physically unable to move about outside their homes. Others, according to published surveys, have consciously curtailed their outside activities for fear of crime. Therefore, the risk of robbery for older persons who continue to be active and mobile may be greater than the overall risk for the elderly.

Characteristics of unknown assailants

In rapes and assaults by strangers, the assailant was more often a lone white male over age 21. In contrast, persons robbed by strangers were more likely to be confronted by a pair or a group of black males who were as likely to be under 21 as over 21.

Whites were the offenders in two-thirds of all assaults, more than half of all rapes, but only a third of all robberies. Less than 1 of every 10 violent strangers was female.

Rapes and assaults by strangers were highly intraracial, but less so than non-stranger rapes and assaults. Robbery by strangers, however, was primarily intraracial only for black victims. In robberies, 85% of black victims reported that the robber was black; among white victims, only 37% reported that the robber was white, while 51% reported that the robber was black. (See table 2.)

Young offenders did not appear to be singling out the elderly as victims of robbery and assault. The rates at which persons age 65 and over were victims of robbery and assault by offenders under age 21 were not significantly different from those of the rest of the population. Similar percentages of robbery and assault victims over 65 and under 65 reported that their robbers were under 21.

Crime locales

Many media reports focus on street crime as one of the most serious problems facing this country. Though usually undefined and variously interpreted, street crime commonly means violent offenses committed by strangers in outdoor public areas. Different people might expand or limit this definition, but regardless of how it is defined, street crime occurs in a variety of places. As used here, "street crime" means all violent crime committed by strangers outdoors but away from the victim's home; for example, in a park, playground, field, parking lot, or schoolyard.

Crimes by strangers were much more likely than crimes by acquaintances or relatives to have been street crimes. More than half of all violent crimes by strangers were street crimes compared to a third of those committed by acquaintances and a tenth of those committed by relatives. Robbery was the most common street crime (3 out of 5 occurred on the street). Simple assault and rape were no more likely to occur on the street than elsewhere.

Commercial establishments encompass everything from banks to buses, restaurants, and train stations. Such places were less likely than outdoor areas but more likely than homes or their environs to have been the site of violent crimes by strangers. Only 4% of such crimes occurred inside schools and only 1% inside offices or factories. This may simply reflect the fact that schoolmates and coworkers are likely to know each other.

A home was the locale of a fifth of all rapes by strangers. Only 7% of all robberies and 4% of all assaults were in the home. In more than 4 out of 5 rapes or robberies committed in the home by strangers, the stranger broke in or entered illegally. Far more rapes in the home are committed by strangers who break in or enter illegally than by strangers such as sales or repair personnel who enter with permission. Less than 1% of all household burglaries were accompanied by rape.

Time of occurrence

The highest hourly rate for violent crimes by strangers occurred during the evening (6 p.m. to midnight). Two-fifths of such crimes occurred during these 6 hours, while the proportion that occurred during the 12 daytime hours (6 a.m. to 6 p.m.) was also two-fifths. The pattern of victimization by relatives was similar to that of victimization by strangers, but more than half of all victimizations by an acquaintance occurred during the day.

The relationship between the time and place of violent crimes by strangers was about what one would expect.⁵ Of any combination of time and place, the highest rate of such crime per hour occurred outdoors during the evening. Outdoors, about as much crime occurred during the 6 evening hours as during the 12 daytime hours.

Nine-tenths of the crimes in school buildings and two-thirds of those in offices occurred during the day--when these locations are most likely to be open. Almost half the crimes at commercial establishments occurred during the evening; a third occurred during the day. The home and its environs had the most nearly even time distribution of any type of location: a third of the crimes in the home occurred in the daytime, two-fifths in the evening, and almost a fourth after midnight.

For rape, the pattern of time and place of occurrence differed somewhat from that of other violent crimes; the percentage of victimizations in the home at night was higher for rape than for robbery or assault.

⁵The statistics on time and place collected in the survey are not detailed enough to allow precise analysis of their relationship.

Table 2. Crimes of violence by strangers, 1973-79 averages

	Violent crime total	Percent of victimizations			
		Rape	Robbery	Aggravated assault	Simple assault
White victims					
White offenders	64	59	37	71	72
Black offenders	28	31	51	21	21
Mixed-race offenders	3	2	5	2	2
Other race or don't know	6	8	8	6	6
Black victims					
Black offenders	76	79	85	69	66
White offenders	17	14	8	24	28
Mixed-race offenders	2	4	3	3	1
Other race or don't know	4	3	5	3	5
Crimes reported to police					
Completed	48	55	55	53	40
Attempted	61	59	66	62	53
Crimes completed					
Completed	41	53	37	50	37
Crimes attempted	34	38	61	30	21
Crimes attempted	66	62	39	70	79
Involving victim injury					
Type of injury	27	36	31	30	21
Knife or gunshot wound	2	*	2	4	0
Broken bones or teeth	2	2	2	5	0
Internal injuries, knocked unconscious	2	4	3	3	0
Bruises, black eye, cuts, scratches, swelling	22	31	26	23	19
Other	5	7	5	5	4
Place of occurrence					
At or in own dwelling, in garage or other building on property (includes break-in or attempted break-in)	5	20	7	5	4
At or in a vacation home, hotel/motel	*	2	1	*	*
Inside commercial building such as store, restaurant, bank, gas station, public conveyance or station	17	7	15	16	20
Inside office, factory, or warehouse	1	1	1	1	2
Near own home: yard, sidewalk, driveway, carport, apartment hall (Does not include break-in or attempted break-in)	8	8	7	8	8
On the street, in a park, field, playground, school grounds or parking lot	54	48	61	55	50
Inside school	4	2	3	2	5
Other	10	12	6	13	11
Time of day					
Day (6 a.m. to 6 p.m.)	42	36	42	38	46
Evening (6 p.m. to Midnight)	43	38	43	45	40
Night (Midnight to 6 a.m.)	15	25	14	16	13
Evening/night but don't know time (6 p.m. to 6 a.m.)	*	*	*	*	*

*Less than 1 percent

As mentioned earlier, rape was more than four times as likely as robbery and assault combined to occur in the home. Almost 40% of all rapes in the home occurred at night, but the night was the least likely time for robbery and assault to take place.

Weapons used by strangers

Strangers employed weapons in 4 of every 10 violent crimes they committed.

Armed strangers committed a greater proportion of robberies (50%) than of rape (30%) or assault (40%). By definition, however, simple assault does not involve weapons. If aggravated assault alone is considered, 96% involve the use of a weapon.

For each type of crime, armed offenders used guns and knives almost equally. Data from the FBI Uniform Crime Reports, however, indicate that guns are employed in

Violent crime in the U.S., victimization rates, 1973-79

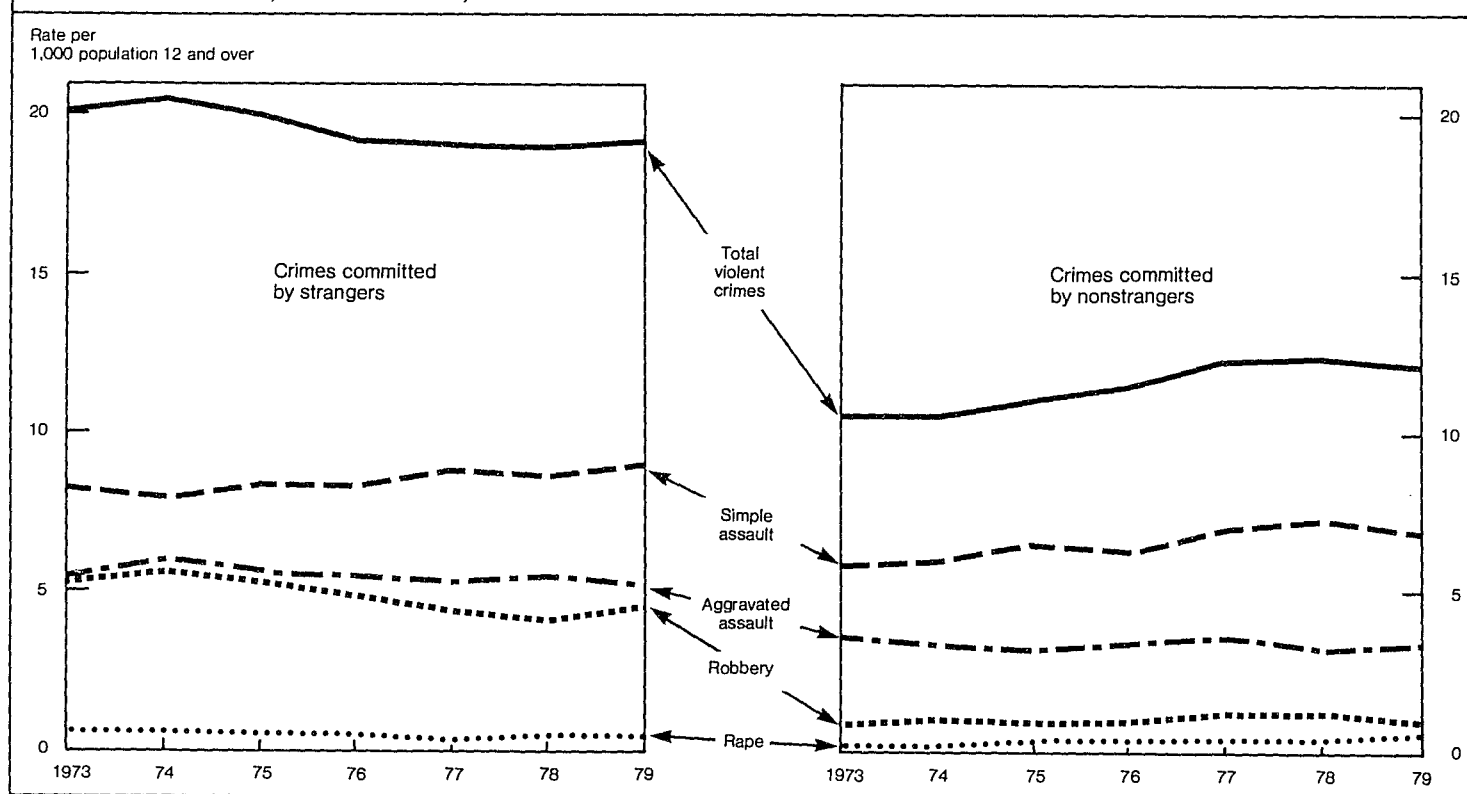


Figure 1.

murder more often than all other weapons combined and suggest that a gunshot wound is more likely to be fatal than injury caused by any other weapon. Other weapons, ranging from blackjacks and brass knuckles to rocks and beer bottles, are used most often in assaults (more than guns or knives) and least often in rape.

Completed crimes

The difference between an attempted and a completed crime is somewhat arbitrary, and it differs for each of the three violent crimes. The definition is arbitrary because no one except the offender is certain what the offender was attempting to do. An assault could represent an attempt to rob, to rape, or even to murder. In the National Crime Survey, the victim reports whether a rape was attempted or completed. A robbery is classified as an attempt if the offender clearly tried to take something from the victim and as a completed robbery if he succeeded. An assault is completed only if there is injury. Clearly, crime completion is not synonymous with crime seriousness—an attempted rape or robbery can involve severe personal injury to the victim and thereby can be much more serious than a robbery involving only loss of property or a simple assault involving only minor injury.

Two-thirds of all violent crimes by strangers are not completed. The completion rate for robbery was 61%; rape, 38%; aggravated assault, 30%; and simple assault, 21%. The high completion rate for robberies is in part due to the fact that strangers committing robberies were armed half the time and, when armed, 4 out of 5 times they had a gun or knife. Strangers who robbed with guns relieved their victims of property 80% of the time; strangers with knives, 60% of the time. Strangers armed with some other weapon were no more successful at robbery than unarmed strangers.

The high robbery completion rate also resulted from the tendency of strangers to rob in groups of two or more. The presence of more than one robber increased the like-

lihood of success by 24%. The presence of more than one robber had the greatest impact when a knife or knives were used; it increased the likelihood of success by 40% vs. only 30% for all other robberies, armed or unarmed or both. Nevertheless, a group of robbers with guns was even more often successful (83% of the time) than a group of robbers with knives (67% of the time).

Injury

How great was the threat of physical injury from violent strangers? Only 1 in every 20 victims received a serious injury such as a knife or gunshot wound, broken bones, or internal injuries. One in four received a minor injury such as a bruise, cut, scratch, or swelling. Because the National Crime Survey does not attempt to measure the psychological consequences of victimization, injury data cannot fully reveal the trauma of violence at the hands of a stranger.

Rape was the crime most likely to involve injury to the victim; 36% of all rape victims were injured, 6% seriously. Robbery and assault victims were injured about 30% of the time, but 4 out of 5 of these injuries were not serious.

Attempted attacks with weapons comprised 9% of all armed crime. Robbers shot and missed in 3% of all gun robberies, and assailants shot and missed in 19% of all assaults with guns. All weapons except guns were used unsuccessfully in about 2% of all violent crimes. Attempted aggravated

assaults with guns or knives accounted for 8% of all aggravated assaults by strangers. Even if no injury resulted, crimes in which a gun was shot or a knife used probably contribute a great deal more to the fear associated with violent crime than their outcomes might suggest.

Strangers wielding a weapon other than a gun or knife were more likely to do injury than those with guns or knives or with no weapons at all.⁶ Strangers with guns injured 14% of their victims; those armed with knives and unarmed strangers each injured 25% of their victims; those armed with some other weapon injured 44% of their victims.

Even when the same type of weapon was involved, the rates of serious injury inflicted on victims differed sharply between robberies and assaults. (The data on rape were insufficient to analyze the seriousness of injury by weapon use.) Unarmed and gunwielding robbers were least likely to injure victims seriously; those armed with a weapon other than a gun or knife were most likely to cause serious injury. Unarmed assaulters and those armed with a gun or some weapon other than a knife were about equally likely to do serious injury to their victims (3%, 5%, and 5%, respectively); knife-wielders inflicted serious injuries on a higher percent of assault victims (12%).

* * *

During the 1970's, our consciousness of street crime grew rapidly, even though the rate of violent victimizations by strangers remained stable. Through the information provided here and in earlier bulletins presenting National Crime Survey data, we hope to provide a realistic perspective for individual citizens on the risks and avoidance of personal victimization.

⁶Incidents in which more than one type of weapon was used were classified according to the most deadly weapon used, with guns taking precedence over knives and knives taking precedence over all other weapons. Use of more than one kind of weapon occurred in only about 5% of all armed victimizations by strangers.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletins are prepared principally by the staff of the bureau. Carol B. Kalish, chief of policy analysis, edits the bulletins; Marilyn Marbrook, head of the bureau publications unit, administers their publication, assisted by Julie A. Ferguson. The principal author of this bulletin is Michael R. Rand.

April 1982, NCJ-80829

U.S. Department of Justice
Bureau of Justice Statistics

Official Business
Penalty for Private Use \$300

Postage and Fees Paid
U.S. Department of Justice
Jus 436

THIRD CLASS
BULK RATE



Washington, D.C. 20531

Bulletin

END