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## Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report

# The Use of Weapons in Committing Crimes

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Armed offenders were responsible for 24 million victimizations during the period 1973-82, accounting for 37% of all violent victimizations.

Half of all robberies, a third of all assaults, and a fourth of all rapes that occurred during this 10-year period were committed by armed offenders, according to findings from the National Crime Survey (table 1).<sup>1</sup>

In 35% of victimizations by armed offenders, the offender had a gun; the weapon was a knife in 29%, and some other object such as a rock, bottle, or stick was used as a weapon in 36% of the victimizations by armed offenders (table 2). Offenders in rapes and robberies were armed with guns and knives more frequently than with other weapons (37% and 41% respectively used guns, 47% and 37% used knives), while in assaults, offenders were more likely to be armed with other weapons (41%) than with guns or knives (32% and 26% respectively).

Data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) that are compiled from data reported to the police show that for aggravated assaults during 1974-83 more than half of all incidents involved weapons other than a gun or knife, including other dangerous weapons, such as blunt objects, and personal weapons, such as the use of fists, hands, and feet as weapons (table 3). Unlike the NCS program, the UCR program does include the use of fists and feet as

The extent of weapons use in the commission of violent crime and the consequences of such use for the victims are matters of intense interest to the American public. This special report again demonstrates the potential of victimization surveys—in the United States the National Crime Survey (NCS)—to provide insights into the many aspects of a citizen's experience in a criminal incident.

Data presented here have been collected during the 10 years from 1973 to 1982, permitting BJS to examine the characteristics of weapons use in far more detail than would be possible from a single year of data; more than 65 million victimizations, including 24 million involving armed offenders, are examined in this report.

The report addresses such issues as the extent of the use of different types of weapons in various violent crimes; the effect of the use of these weapons on whether the perpetrator was successful in completing the crime; the characteristics of the victims who most frequently are confronted with weapons; the number of incidents involving multiple victims and offenders; and the consequences of attacks by both armed and unarmed offenders in terms of injury, the need for medical attention, or hospital care.

Even though victimization surveys

can vastly expand our knowledge about weapons and crimes, there are clearly issues that are beyond the purview of such interviews with citizens. First, there are problems with coverage: homicides are excluded since this crime is all but impossible to measure using victim surveying methods; only homicide victims with surviving members in the same household could be included. Also, since the survey is based on a sample of U.S. households, crimes affecting commercial establishments are not included. But more important than matters of coverage, there are many important questions associated with weapons that cannot be answered by the existing National Crime Survey:

- what are the effects of various weapon control laws, including gun control legislation, on the use of weapons?
- what is the desirability of individuals keeping or carrying weapons for the defense of their home or person?
- what response or self-defense measures should victims take when confronted with a weapon?

Even with these limitations, however, the victimization data presented in this report will substantially improve understanding of an alarming aspect of crime in this society.

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weapons. In robberies compiled from UCR data, firearms were used in about two-fifths of all cases; the total for firearms and knives or other cutting instruments was 54% (table 4).

### Effect of weapon use on crime completion

Possession of a gun was associated with a higher completion rate than

<sup>1</sup>For definitions of these crimes, see methodology section.

possession of a knife or other weapon when examining an offender's ability to complete robberies and rapes. Offend-

ers with guns or knives completed a higher proportion of rapes than did unarmed offenders and those armed

with other weapons (table 5). Nearly half of the rapes by offenders with guns (49%) and more than two-fifths of the rapes by offenders with knives were completed, compared to more than a fourth (28%) of rapes by unarmed offenders and a fifth of those armed with other weapons.

Offenders armed with guns completed 79% of all robberies, those with knives completed 61%, and those with other weapons, 56%; unarmed offenders completed 57% of all robberies. The possession of other weapons did not generally seem to increase the completion rate for rapes or robberies above that of unarmed offenders.

Offenders armed with guns completed 14% of all aggravated assaults, whereas those armed with knives completed 24% and those armed with other weapons completed 43% of such assaults. (The relatively low rate of completions associated with aggravated assaults is because, under NCS definitions, completed aggravated assaults must always involve an injury whereas completed robberies may or may not include injury to the victim.)

#### Characteristics of victims

Male victims and black victims were more likely than female victims and white victims to be accosted by an armed offender (table 6). While the differences for men and women were consistent across weapon types, blacks were twice as likely as whites to be confronted by an offender armed with a gun (23% vs. 11%), more than 50% more likely than whites to be victimized by an offender with a knife (16% vs. 10%), and as likely as whites to suffer victimization by an offender with another weapon (13%).

While the percentage of the population victimized by an armed offender varied little by age of the victim, there were differences in the type of weapon used. Older victims (50-64 and 65 and older) suffered relatively more victimizations by offenders armed with guns and relatively fewer victimizations by offenders armed with other weapons than did the youngest victims (12-19).

#### Multiple victims and multiple offenders

Offenders armed with guns or other weapons were more likely than those armed with knives or unarmed offenders to victimize more than one person in the same incident (table 7). Forty percent of the victimizations committed by offenders with guns and 30% of those by offenders with other weapons

Table 1. Weapon use in violent crime victimizations, 1973-82

Crime	Number of victimizations	Percent of violent victimizations			
		Total	By armed offenders	By unarmed offenders	Don't know if armed
Total	65,343,000	100%	36.7%	55.8%	7.5%
Rape	1,738,000	100	25.5	63.9	10.7
Robbery	12,248,000	100	49.1	39.7	11.2
Assault*	51,358,000	100	34.2	59.3	6.5

Note: Percents may not add to total because of rounding. \* Includes both aggravated and simple assaults.

Table 2. Weapons used in violent crime victimizations, 1973-82

	Number of victimizations	Percent of victimizations involving				
		Any weapon	Guns	Knives	Other weapons	Type not ascertained
All violent victimizations						
Total	65,343,000	36.7%	12.7%	10.8%	13.3%	1.8%
Rape	1,738,000	25.5	9.5	11.9	4.7	1.2
Robbery	12,248,000	49.1	20.0	18.2	11.6	2.4
Assault	51,358,000	34.2	11.0	9.0	14.0	1.7
By armed offenders						
Total	24,006,000	100%	34.5%	29.3%	36.1%	4.9%
Rape	443,000	100	37.2	46.6	18.5	4.6
Robbery	6,016,000	100	40.8	37.0	23.6	4.9
Assault	17,548,000	100	32.3	26.3	40.9	5.1

Note: Weapon type percents add to more than total any weapon percent because weapons in multiple weapon incidents are tallied in all appropriate categories.

Table 3. Aggravated assault: Uniform Crime Reports, breakdown by weapon, 1974-83

Year	Number of aggravated assaults	Percent of reported crimes involving			
		Any firearm	Knife or other cutting instrument	Other dangerous weapon (club, hammer, blunt object)	Personal weapons (hands, fists, feet)
1974	382,778	25.4%	24.2%	23.2%	27.2%
1975	429,947	24.9	23.5	25.0	26.6
1976	455,582	23.6	23.4	26.0	26.9
1977	474,094	23.2	23.2	27.0	26.5
1978	526,336	22.4	22.6	28.3	26.6
1979	562,242	23.0	22.4	27.6	27.0
1980	616,751	23.9	22.0	27.5	26.5
1981	585,665	23.6	22.0	28.1	26.4
1982	601,461	22.4	23.2	27.9	26.5
1983	601,576	21.2	23.9	29.1	25.8
10-year total	5,236,432	23.2%	23.0%	27.2%	26.6%

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports (unpublished data submitted to BJS).

Table 4. Robbery: Uniform Crime Reports, breakdown by weapon, 1974-83

Year	Number of robberies	Percent of reported crimes involving			
		Any firearm	Knife or other cutting instrument	Other dangerous weapon (club, hammer, blunt object)	Personal weapons (hands, fists, feet)
1974	389,140	44.7%	13.1%	8.1%	34.1
1975	439,965	44.8	12.5	7.8	35.0
1976	408,788	42.6	13.0	7.8	36.5
1977	383,962	41.6	13.2	8.5	36.7
1978	405,735	40.8	12.7	9.0	37.5
1979	434,654	39.7	13.2	9.4	37.7
1980	526,537	40.3	12.8	9.1	37.8
1981	522,549	40.1	13.1	8.9	37.8
1982	512,444	39.9	13.6	9.1	37.4
1983	488,246	36.6	13.6	9.5	40.3
10-year total	4,512,020	41.0%	13.1%	8.8%	37.2%

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports (unpublished data submitted to BJS).

**Table 5. Rapes, robberies, and aggravated assaults, by type of weapon, 1973-82**

Type of weapon	Number of victimizations	Percent of victimizations that were		
		Total	Completed	Attempted
<b>Rape</b>				
By armed offender				
Guns	165,000	100%	48.7%	51.3%
Knives	206,000	100	41.9	58.1
Other weapons	82,000	100	19.8	80.2
Weapon type not ascertained	19,000	100	42.3	57.7
By unarmed offender	1,110,000	100	28.1	71.9
Don't know whether offender armed	185,000	100	22.0	78.0
<b>Robbery</b>				
By armed offender				
Guns	2,454,000	100%	78.8%	21.2%
Knives	2,225,000	100	60.6	39.4
Other weapons	1,420,000	100	55.5	44.5
Weapon type not ascertained	296,000	100	67.7	32.3
By unarmed offender	4,862,000	100	56.6	43.4
Don't know whether offender armed	1,370,000	100	60.8	39.2
<b>Aggravated assault<sup>a</sup></b>				
By armed offender				
Guns	5,662,000	100%	13.8%	86.2%
Knives	4,608,000	100	24.2	75.8
Other weapons	7,170,000	100	42.7	57.3
Weapon type not ascertained	872,000	100	38.7	61.3
By unarmed offender	938,000	100	100.0	b
Don't know whether offender armed	88,000	100	100.0	b
Note: For victimizations in which offenders had more than one type of weapon, weapons were tallied in each appropriate category.				
<sup>a</sup> Completed assault is defined as assault		with injury.		
		<sup>b</sup> Attempted assault by unarmed offenders is defined as simple rather than aggravated assault.		

Note: For victimizations in which offenders had more than one type of weapon, weapons were tallied in each appropriate category.

<sup>a</sup> Completed assault is defined as assault

with injury.

<sup>b</sup> Attempted assault by unarmed offenders is defined as simple rather than aggravated assault.

involved multiple victims, compared to 25% of those by offenders with knives and 21% of those by unarmed offenders.

Fifty-seven percent of victimizations by offenders with guns and 59% of those by offenders with other weapons were committed by a lone offender, compared to 67% by offenders with knives and 72% by unarmed offenders. When combinations of weapons were used (guns, knives and other weapons), more than one victim was involved in about half the incidents, and more than one offender was involved in about two-thirds of incidents.

### The victim-offender relationship

Victims are more likely to face armed offenders if their assailants are strangers (68%), rather than acquaintances (26%) or relatives (6%) (table 8). Strangers were the offenders in 71% of all victimizations involving guns, in 68% of all involving knives, and in 65% of all involving other weapons.

### Consequences of weapons use

#### Attacks with weapons

Violent offenders may use weapons to force the victim to submit to the offender's demands without actually assaulting the victim and causing injury. Offenders armed only with guns actually shot victims in somewhat less than 4% of all violent victimizations and attempted to shoot the victim in 21% of such incidents; offenders armed only with knives actually stabbed victims in 10% and tried to stab victims in another 12% of all victimizations (table 9). More than half of all victimizations by offenders armed only with guns (58%) and half of all victimizations by offenders armed only with knives involved only the threat posed by the weapon itself.

#### Robbery

It is useful to examine findings for robbery separately, because even though a victim may also be assaulted during a robbery, a defining characteristic of this crime is that the offender attempts to coerce the victim into turning over his or her possessions.

Robberies are roughly twice as likely to involve offenders armed with guns (20%) as are other NCS violent crimes—10% for rape and 11% for assault (table 10). Similarly, knives are used in 17% of robberies, compared to 11% of rapes and 9% of assaults. Robberies constituted approximately 19% of all violent

**Table 6. Characteristics of victims of violent crime victimizations by type of weapon, 1973-82**

Victim character- istics	Number of victim- izations	Percent of victimizations							Don't know whether offender was armed
		Total	By unarmed offender	By armed offender				Weapon type not ascr- tained	
				Total armed	Gun	Knife	Other		
<b>Sex</b>									
Male	41,590,000	100%	52.0%	41.2%	14.0%	11.8%	15.6%	1.9%	6.8%
Female	23,753,000	100	62.4	28.9	10.4	8.8	9.2	1.8	8.7
<b>Race</b>									
White	55,506,000	100%	58.4%	34.5%	11.1%	10.0%	13.3%	1.8%	7.1%
Black	8,813,000	100	39.1	51.0	22.5	15.6	13.3	2.0	9.9
<b>Age</b>									
12-19	21,218,000	100%	61.3%	33.7%	8.7%	10.8%	14.2%	1.6%	5.0%
20-34	29,744,000	100	55.1	38.1	14.0	10.9	13.5	1.8	6.8
35-49	8,440,000	100	51.0	38.9	15.7	10.8	12.0	2.2	10.1
50-64	4,175,000	100	46.3	38.7	16.2	10.4	11.1	2.8	14.9
65+	1,767,000	100	44.1	35.6	15.2	8.8	10.6	2.5	20.3
Note: Percents may not add to total because of rounding. Weapon type percents add to more than total armed percent because weapons in multiple					weapon incidents are tallied in all appropriate categories.				

Note: Percents may not add to total because of rounding. Weapon type percents add to more than total armed percent because weapons in multiple

weapon incidents are tallied in all appropriate categories.

**Table 7. Number of victims and offenders in violent crime victimizations by type of weapon, 1973-82**

Type of weapon	Number of victims				Number of offenders		
	1	2	3	4 or more	1	2 or more	Unknown
<b>By armed offender</b>							
Gun only	59.9%	21.4%	8.1%	10.6%	57.2%	35.8%	7.0%
Knife only	75.4	13.9	5.0	5.7	66.5	32.7	0.8
Other only	69.8	17.4	5.1	7.7	59.3	38.7	2.0
Combinations of weapons	51.2	22.8	8.8	17.2	34.5	64.6	0.9
Type not ascertained	76.2	15.7	3.0	5.1	63.3	31.8	4.9
<b>By unarmed offender</b>							
	78.7	13.1	4.0	4.2	72.3	26.8	0.9
<b>Don't know whether offender armed</b>							
	81.4	12.7	3.0	2.9	53.3	42.4	4.3

Table 8. Weapon use by relation of victim to offender, 1973-82

Type of relationship	Type of weapons used							Total
	Any weapon	Gun	Knife	Other	Type not ascertained	None	Don't know if armed	
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Stranger	67.6	71.2	67.8	64.5	62.5	55.0	76.9	61.1
Acquaintance	26.0	22.1	26.0	30.0	26.8	36.0	19.6	31.2
Relative	6.4	6.7	6.2	5.5	10.7	9.0	3.5	7.7
Number of victimizations	21,714,000	7,216,000	6,186,000	7,254,000	1,059,000	34,092,000	4,325,000	60,131,000
Note: Categories of weapon use are arrayed in perceived order of seriousness. For crimes in which offender(s) possessed more than one type of weapon, the crime is classified by the most serious weapon present.								

Table 10. Proportion of victimizations involving weapon used by type of violent crime, 1973-82

Type of crime	Number of victimizations	Percent of victimizations by offenders with:						
		Total	Gun	Knife	Other	Weapon type not ascertained	No weapon	Don't know if armed
Total	65,343,000	100%	12.7%	10.1%	12.1%	1.8%	55.8%	7.5%
Rape	1,738,000	100	9.5	10.7	4.1	1.1	63.9	10.7
Robbery	12,248,000	100	20.0	16.7	10.0	2.4	39.7	11.2
Assault	51,358,000	100	11.0	8.5	12.9	1.7	59.3	6.5
Note: Categories of weapon use are arrayed in perceived order of seriousness. For crimes in which offender(s) possessed more than one type of weapon, the crime is classified by the most serious weapon present. Percents may not add to total because of rounding.								

Table 11. Weapon use in violent crimes, 1973-82

Type of crime	Total	Percent of victimizations by offenders with:						
		Gun	Knife	Other	Weapon type not ascertained	No weapon	Don't know if armed	
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Rape	2.7	2.0	2.8	0.9	1.6	3.0	3.8	
Robbery	18.7	29.6	31.0	15.4	24.9	13.3	27.9	
Assault	78.6	68.4	66.2	83.6	73.5	83.6	68.3	
Number of victimizations	65,343,000	8,285,000	6,598,000	7,938,000	1,187,000	36,431,000	4,905,000	
Note: Categories of weapon use are arrayed in perceived order of seriousness. For crimes in which offender(s) possessed more than one type of weapon, the crime is classified by the most serious weapon present. Percents may not add to total because of rounding.								

Table 12. Attack injuries, medical attention and hospital care in violent crime victimizations, by type of weapon, 1973-82

Type of weapons	Number of victimizations	Percent of victimizations									
		Total	Was victim attacked?*		Was victim injured?		Did injured victim need medical help?		Did victim who needed medical help receive hospital care?		
			No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	
By armed offender											
Gun only	7,565,000	100%	63.4%	36.6%	22.6%	14.0%	6.4%	7.5%	1.4%	6.2%	
Knife only	6,190,000	100	57.3	42.7	17.8	24.9	11.3	13.6	3.5	10.1	
Other only	7,923,000	100	37.2	62.8	17.8	45.0	23.0	22.0	6.6	15.5	
Combinations of weapons	1,142,000	100	41.8	58.2	20.2	37.9	16.8	21.1	6.6	14.5	
Type not ascertained	1,187,000	100	43.9	56.1	13.6	42.5	23.5	18.9	5.7	13.3	
By unarmed offender	36,431,000	100%	47.9%	52.1%	22.1%	29.9%	19.5%	10.4%	4.8%	5.6%	
Don't know whether offender armed	4,905,000	100%	62.7%	37.3%	15.2%	22.1%	12.9%	9.2%	3.4%	5.8%	
Note: Percentages in each column represent subcategories of the previous column. When read horizontally the table shows what happens to the 100% of victims of each weapon category. Percents may not add to total because of rounding. *Attacks include attempted attacks.											

Table 9. Weapon involvement in violent crime attacks, attempted attacks and threats by offenders armed only with guns or knives, 1973-82

	Gun only	Knife only
Total	100.0%	100.0%
Attacks		
Shot or knifed	3.5	9.8
Other injury		
Including attempted attack with weapon	4.0	3.8
Weapon present, not used	6.5	11.3
Attempted attacks without injury		
With weapon	17.3	7.9
Weapon present, not used	5.1	9.4
Threats		
With weapon	57.9	49.9
Weapon present, not used	4.8	7.0
Attack or threat type not available	0.9	0.9

crimes recorded by the NCS during this period, but this crime accounted for 30% of all victimizations involving guns and 31% of crimes involving knives (table 11).

### Injury

Offenders armed with only guns or knives were less likely to attack victims than either unarmed offenders or those armed with other weapons (table 12). When compared with victims of offenders armed only with knives or other weapons, victims of offenders armed only with guns were less likely to suffer injury; victims were injured in 14% of all victimizations by offenders armed only with guns, in 25% of all victimizations by offenders armed only with knives, and in 45% of all victimizations by offenders armed only with other weapons. Victims attacked by unarmed offenders were injured in 30% of all unarmed victimizations.

When armed offenders attack victims they do not always use their weapons. For example, an offender with a gun may hit, push, or kick a victim.

Gunshot injuries make up about 25% of injuries sustained by victims in crimes by offenders armed only with guns (3.5% shot out of 14% injured). Similarly, stabbing or cutting injuries make up about 40% of the injuries to victims of offenders armed only with knives (9.8% with knife wounds out of 24.9% injured). Other injuries are those caused by the armed offender hitting, kicking, or otherwise attacking the victim.

In order to avoid ambiguities in associating injury to weapon type, analyses relating to injury were restricted to those crimes in which the offender possessed only one type of weapon. In addition, with the exception of summary injury tables, those injuries directly attributable to weapons (gunshots and stabbings) are distinguished from those caused by other types of attacks.

Victims of attacks by offenders armed only with other weapons were the most likely of any attack victims to be injured. Specifically, only 28% of those attacked with other weapons escaped injury.

Victimizations in which the victim received gunshot injuries represented 4% of all victimizations involving offenders armed only with guns (table 13). Similarly, victimizations involving knife injury represented 10% of all victimizations by offenders armed only with knives. In all attacks in which a knife was present, 23% resulted in knife injuries; in all attacks in which a knife was actually used in the attack, 45% resulted in knife injuries.

Because of the nature of other weapons, for those victimizations by offenders armed only with other weapons it is not possible to determine whether victim injuries were attributable to the weapon itself or to other aspects of the attack.

Eight percent of victims of attacks by offenders with more than one type of weapon suffered a gunshot or knife wound, although the specific type of wound is not determinable from the data (table 14).

#### Medical attention

Victims injured in attacks by offenders with guns or knives were more likely than those injured by offenders with other weapons or those injured by unarmed offenders to require medical attention or to require hospital treatment (table 15). Forty-four percent of those injured by offenders armed only with guns and 41% of those injured by offenders armed only with knives required hospital treatment, compared with 34% of victims of offenders armed only with other weapons. Victims injured in attacks by unarmed offenders required hospital treatment in 19% of all such victimizations.

For victims who reported hospital stays of overnight or longer, those who had been injured by guns reported an average hospital stay of 16.3 days (half

Table 13. Gunshot and knife injuries by offenders armed only with guns or knives, 1973-82

	Number of victimizations involving only guns	Percent resulting in gunshot injuries	Number of victimizations involving only knives	Percent resulting in knife injuries
Total victimizations <sup>a</sup>	7,565,000	3.5%	6,190,000	9.8%
All attacks where weapon was present <sup>b</sup>	2,748,000	9.5	2,613,000	23.1
With weapons used <sup>b</sup>	1,873,000	14.0	1,331,000	45.4
With injury <sup>c</sup>	1,058,000	24.7	1,541,000	39.2

<sup>a</sup> Attacks and threats: rape, robbery and assault.

<sup>b</sup> Includes attempts but not threats.

<sup>c</sup> Injuries included are those caused by use of the weapons as well as other types of attacks by offenders (hitting, kicking).

Table 14. Type of injury by weapon use in violent attacks, 1973-82

	Number of violent attacks <sup>a</sup>	Percent	Gunshot or knife wound	Other serious injury <sup>c</sup>	Minor injury <sup>d</sup>	No injury
By armed offender						
Gun only	2,766,000	100%	9.5%	5.6%	23.2%	61.8%
Knife only	2,844,000	100	22.9	4.4	31.0	41.7
Other weapon only	4,976,000	100	—	11.7	60.0	28.3
Combinations of weapons	664,000	100	8.1 <sup>b</sup>	8.6	48.5	34.8
Type not ascertained	752,000	100	1.7 <sup>b</sup>	12.5	52.8	33.0
By unarmed offender	18,969,000	100	—	7.0	50.5	42.5
Don't know whether offender armed	1,828,000	100	—	12.2	47.1	40.7

Note: Percents may not add to total because of rounding.

<sup>a</sup> Attacks include attempted attacks.

<sup>b</sup> In victimizations in which offenders were armed with both guns and knives, the data do not allow differentiation between gun and knife wounds.

<sup>c</sup> Other serious injury includes broken bones,

loss of teeth, internal injuries, loss of consciousness and undetermined injuries requiring 2 or more days of hospitalization. <sup>d</sup> Minor injury includes bruises, black eyes, cuts, scratches, swelling and undetermined injuries requiring less than 2 days hospitalization.

Table 15. Medical treatment and hospital care required by victims of violent crime victimizations, by type of weapon, 1973-82

	Number of victims injured	Percent of injured victims who required medical attention	Percent of injured victims who required hospital care
By armed offender			
Gun only	1,058,000	54.0%	44.2%
Knife only	1,541,000	54.6	40.7
Other only	3,568,000	48.9	34.4
Combinations of weapons	433,000	55.6	38.2
Weapon type not ascertained	504,000	44.6	31.2
By unarmed offender	10,910,000	34.8	18.8
Don't know whether offender armed	1,085,000	41.6	26.1

Note: Victim injuries include those inflicted by weapons and those inflicted by other means.

stayed at least 7.3 days—the median), compared to an average of—

- 7.2 days for incidents involving knives (median 5.0),
  - 8.2 days for other weapons (median 4.1), and
  - 6.6 days for injuries inflicted by unarmed offenders (median 3.5).
- When a gun was used, almost half (46%) of hospitalized victims spent 8 days or more in the hospital (table 16).

#### Summary

Generally, females and whites were less likely to encounter an armed

assailant when experiencing a crime incident than males and blacks.

Possession of a gun was associated with a higher completion rate than possession of a knife or other weapon as to an offender's ability to complete robberies and rapes.

Of the rapes, robberies, and assaults committed by armed offenders, a substantial proportion resulted in victim injury, with a smaller proportion resulting in serious injury; however, the level of injury sustained from an actual attack reflects the seriousness of the



weapon used. Further, even if the victim escapes from an incident uninjured, the presence of a weapon, particularly a gun, may increase the likelihood that the crime will be completed.

For guns in particular it appears that the weapon may be used by the offender to coerce the victim into meeting demands rather than to injure the victim; however, if the weapon is actually fired, the risk of serious injury (and perhaps death, though homicides are not and cannot be measured by a survey that interviews victims) is greater for the victim than if another weapon or no weapon at all is used.

### Methodology

These findings were developed from the National Crime Survey (NCS), an ongoing household survey in which all members age 12 and older in 60,000 households throughout the country are interviewed twice a year concerning whether they have been victims of crime, and, if so, what the characteristics of the crimes were. Findings were aggregated for the period 1973-82 to provide a large number of sample cases for examination.

This report covers the three violent crimes measured by the National Crime Survey.

**Rape** in this program is defined as completed or attempted unlawful sexual intercourse with a male or female by force or without legal or factual consent.

**Robbery** is defined as unlawful taking or attempted taking of property that is in the immediate possession of another by force or threat of force.

**Assault** is the unlawful intentional infliction or attempted infliction of injury upon the person of another. Aggravated assault occurs when there is serious bodily injury or an unlawful threat or attempt to inflict bodily injury or death by means of a deadly or dangerous weapon. Simple assault is the unlawful intentional infliction or the attempt or threat to inflict less than serious bodily injury without a deadly or dangerous weapon.

The National Crime Survey categorizes weapons as guns, knives, and "other" weapons. Other weapons are objects capable of inflicting injury and include rocks, bottles, sticks, and miscellaneous weapons such as brass knuckles. "Armed offenders" as defined in this report are those who are carrying one of these weapons.

Table 16. Length of inpatient hospital care, by type of weapon, 1973-82

Type of weapon	Percent of injured victims hospitalized overnight or longer					Mean	Median
	Total	1-2 days	3-4 days	5-7 days	8 days or more		
Gun	100.0%	22.4%	10.8%	21.3%	45.5%	16.3 days	7.3 days
Knife	100.0	27.7	16.4	26.8	29.1	7.2	5.0
Other	100.0	30.2	21.9	21.8	26.1	8.2	4.1
Unarmed	100.0	29.5	27.3	19.0	24.2	6.6	3.5

Note: This table is restricted to injuries actually produced by the weapons indicated as opposed to situations where the weapon was present but not used in the attack that resulted in the injury.

Throughout this report the terms "offender" and "offenders" are used interchangeably. Victimization by lone offenders and by multiple offenders are not separated in the analyses, except in the section pertaining to number of offenders.

For analyses dealing with the effects of weapons on injury and crime completion, only those crimes in which offenders had only one type of weapon are examined in order to avoid confusion as to which weapon was the primary cause of the phenomenon under discussion. Because the offender had only one type of weapon in 95% of the victimizations in which the victim could identify a weapon, the overall effect of ignoring crimes with multiple weapons is minimal.

For different kinds of analyses weapon use was categorized differently. For example, in some analyses the combination category was examined separately; in other cases, a hierarchy was established to differentiate crimes involving guns from those involving knives and those involving other weapons. In other instances, weapon type was classified in all appropriate categories (see table notes for details).

### Issue of undercounting

The NCS may significantly undercount the number of people nonfatally injured by firearms. In a recent study of these victimizations, Philip Cook used NCS injury data and Uniform Crime Report (UCR) homicide data to create a gunshot death to injuries rate.<sup>2</sup> He compared this rate for the years 1973-79 to similar rates constructed from small area police data and to FBI data on the number of police officers assaulted and killed. He found that the NCS/UCR rate (UCR gun homicides divided by the NCS estimate of nonfatal gunshot cases plus UCR gun homicides) indicated that 34.6% of all

<sup>2</sup>Cook, Philip J. "The Case of the Missing Victims: Gunshot Woundings in the National Crime Survey," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1985, pp. 91-102.

people shot subsequently died; the "other studies" all indicated that only about 15% of all gunshot victims died.

Because Cook thought it unlikely that all the other studies were incorrect, he concluded that the NCS undercounts nonfatal gunshot injuries, and presented two hypotheses for the undercount: (1) people shot by relatives or while engaged in some criminal activity may not report such injuries to NCS interviewers; (2) the people most likely to be victims of serious violent crime—young males and people with deviant lifestyles—are probably underrepresented in the NCS sample, and therefore are never interviewed.

If Cook's conclusions and hypotheses are correct, the NCS, while undercounting the totality of people injured by guns, presents an estimate of gunshot injuries for those people living in typical household settings, thus affording the average citizen an estimate upon which to base a judgment of the degree to which he or she is vulnerable to gunshot injury.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Reports are prepared principally by BJS staff under the direction of Joseph M. Bessette, deputy director for data analysis. This report was written by Marshall DeBerry, Patsy Klaus, Michael Rand, and Bruce Taylor (listed alphabetically) and edited by Benjamin H. Renshaw, deputy director for management. Marilyn Marbrook, publications unit chief, administered report production, assisted by Millie J. Baldea, Tina Dorsey, and Joyce M. Stanford. Gertrude Thomas provided statistical assistance and Catherine J. Whitaker and Richard W. Dodge provided statistical reviews.

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## Bureau of Justice Statistics reports

(revised December 1985)

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