



*National Crime Victimization Survey
(NCVS)
"At a Glance"*

What is the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)?

The National Crime Victimization Survey, which is often referred to as the NCVS, is a nationwide survey based upon a sample of households. It is designed to obtain detailed information about persons victimized by certain types of crimes, such as theft, burglary, motor vehicle theft, robbery, rape, and purse snatching/pocket picking.

Purpose:

The U.S. Census Bureau conducts the NCVS to collect data which measures the types and amount of crimes committed against persons 12 years of age and older and their households.

Sponsor:

The NCVS is sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), which is part of the U.S. Department of Justice. The BJS sponsors the survey under the authority of Title 42, United States Code, Section 3732. The U.S. Census Bureau performs the work under the authority of Title 13, United States Code Section 8. The BJS analyzes and publishes statistical information collected on crime, its victims and offenders. To date, it is the largest ongoing statistical survey sponsored by the BJS. They also provide data about crime to the President, Congress, other government officials, and the general public.

Questions and comments about the NCVS can be sent via E-mail to: askbjs@usdoj.gov. To obtain the most recent reports from the NCVS data, you may write or call the following office:

National Criminal Justice Reference Service/NCJRS
P. O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
1-800-851-3420 or 1-877-712-9279 (TTY Service for the hearing impaired/toll free)

You may also access the NCJRS and the BJS Internet websites at: www.ncjrs.gov and www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/.

Data Uses: The NCVS is the main source of information for measuring crime and its impact. This survey produces several facts that are useful in report preparation and scholarly publications, testimony before Congress, neighborhood and victim assistance programs, and police patrol strategies and training.

Length of Interview:

We anticipate the interview to take about 25 minutes. However, this is only an estimate, as it will vary depending on one's experiences within the six-month reference period. Any recommendations for reducing the survey's length can be mailed to the following address:

**Chief, Victimization and Statistics Branch
Bureau of Justice Statistics
Washington, DC 20531**

Participation Requirements:

Participation in this survey is voluntary, and there are no penalties for refusing to answer any questions. However, your cooperation is extremely important to help ensure the completeness and accuracy of this much needed information.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**What information comes from this survey?**

This survey collects information on the types and amounts of crimes committed, the characteristics of victims, as well as the characteristics of offenders who have committed violent crimes. For reported crimes, the NCVS also collects detailed information, such as when and where crimes occur, economic loss to the victim, extent of injuries suffered by the victim, whether the victim knew the offender, whether the offender used a weapon, whether the police were notified, and whether the incident was a hate crime.

Why can't you get this information from police records?

Based on information received in previous survey years, we've found that over half of all crimes go unreported to the police. Since this survey includes crimes that are both reported and unreported, data users can get a more complete picture of crime in the United States from this survey.

How many times will I be interviewed?

You will probably be contacted a total of seven times over three years. We hope that you will not become a victim of crime during that time, but we need to continue asking the questions to find people who do become victims. Research has shown that by contacting the same households a number of times, we are able to obtain the most accurate information.

What kind of results are released from this survey?

Our sponsor, the BJS, releases crime statistics periodically from this survey, together with reports on specific topics. They only publish statistical summaries for the Nation as a whole, and never release information about you as an individual. *(For personal visit interviews)* Here is a recent Fact Sheet (Form NCVS-110) showing statistical graphs, charts, and figures released from this survey. *(For telephone interviews)* I can mail you a copy of a recent Fact Sheet showing statistical graphs, charts, and figures from this survey. You can find detailed results from the survey by visiting the BJS website at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>.

Who uses this information?

This survey's data users encompass a wide audience of individuals, including researchers, community groups, government and law enforcement agencies, as well as the print and broadcast media. It has also been used by the Supreme Court in making decisions. The survey provides data to our users in a neutral, unbiased way, to assist them in making public policy.

Why do you need to interview me and ask all these questions when I don't have any crimes to report?

Your participation is important whether or not you report a crime. We cannot accurately capture the percentage of people who experience crime, unless we collect information from both victims and non-victims. We have studied asking fewer questions, but our research found that people sometimes don't think about a crime until a specific question reminds them about it. We need to ask all people the same questions to guarantee the quality and accuracy of the data.

Why are you calling me since my phone number is listed on the "Do Not Call" registry?

The "Do Not Call" registry does not limit a call made for the sole purpose of conducting a survey. Therefore, calls from the Census Bureau for survey data collection are not restricted by this registry.

Isn't this survey a waste of taxpayers' money?

The survey tells us about the amount and nature of crime, as well as crime trends and crimes not reported to the police. It can help save taxpayer money when new programs are developed by focusing on the people who are most likely to be victims of crime, and by making crime prevention and control programs more effective.

I answer these questions, but crime still occurs. Is the survey not working?

It may not be possible to eliminate all crime; however, we want to reduce it as much as possible. The survey is also used to develop and improve programs for assisting those who have become crime victims.

(Refer to Part A, Chapter 2 for more FAQs and their Answers.)

Key Concepts and Definitions
(Designed for your reference only)

Types of Respondents

The **Household Respondent** is the person who is the most knowledgeable household member and at least 18 years of age. The **Household Respondent** is the first household member to be interviewed in each enumeration. (See NCVS-550 Manual at Part C, Chapter 1 for exceptions to the age requirement.) **Individual Respondents** are all other household members who are 12 years of age and older.

In most cases, a **Proxy Respondent** is a household member who is allowed to answer questions for an individual respondent in the same household, the **Proxy Person**. The **Proxy Person** is someone who cannot answer the NCVS by self response for one of the three reasons detailed in the NCVS-550 Manual. In order for a person to act as a **Proxy Respondent** for an individual household member, he/she must first complete his/her own interview by Self Response. (See the NCVS-550 Manual at Part C, Chapter 1 for the strict rules regarding when to accept a proxy respondent.)

Reference Person

The **Reference Person** is used solely for the purpose of establishing the relationship of people on the roster to the reference person. The **Reference Person** is used as the benchmark to determine how the people on the roster are related. (See NCVS-550 Manual, Part C, Chapter 1 for more information on who should be coded as the **Reference Person**.) Although the Household Respondent can change from enumeration to enumeration, the **Reference Person** should remain the same over the course of the seven interviews. The exception to this rule is when the **Reference Person** moves out of the sample unit.

Reference Period

For first enumeration period interviews, the **reference period** begins on the first day of the month, six months prior to the month of interview, and ends the day before the interview. For subsequent enumeration period interviews, the previous interview date is used as the starting date for the **reference period**, and the ending date will be the day before the current interview. If the last date of interview is more than six months ago, the **reference period** begins on the first day of the month, six months prior to the month of interview.

Series Crimes

To consider several incidents as a **series**, there must be at least six occurrences, or incidents, that happened during the current reference period, and all incidents must be very similar in detail. Also, the respondent must be unable to recall separate details for each incident.

Types of NCVS Crimes

The NCVS accounts for crimes that fall under two broad crime categories--Personal Crimes and Property Crimes. **Personal crimes** can be actual or attempted crimes that involve direct contact between the victim and the offender; they include rape, sexual, aggravated, and simple assaults, purse snatching, and pocket picking. **Property crimes** do not involve personal contact; these include household burglary (both completed and attempted), theft (such as larceny), and motor vehicle theft.

The NCVS does not account for crimes such as murder, kidnaping, fraud, public drunkenness, drug abuse, prostitution, illegal gambling, con-games, and blackmail.

Presence of a Household Member During an Incident

For a household member to be considered **present** during an incident, the individual must have been at the immediate scene of the crime during the incident and was in a place that was reachable by the offender so that the offender could have attacked, threatened to attack, or stolen something directly from the household member. For example, if the respondent is sleeping in his/her bedroom and an offender attempts to break into his/her home, the sleeping respondent is considered present during the incident. Although the offender did not get into the house, the opportunity to threaten or attack the sleeping respondent existed at the time of the incident. However, if the respondent is sleeping in his/her bedroom when an offender stole his/her car from the driveway, but no attempt was made to gain access to the home, there was no opportunity to threaten or attack the respondent at the time of the incident, then the respondent was not present during the incident. (See the NCVS-550 Manual at Part C, Chapter 3 for determining **presence** during an incident.)

Forced Illegal Entry

Forced illegal entry is when someone who has no legal right to be on the premises uses force to gain entry into a residence.

Rape vs. Sexual Assault

Rape is defined for the purposes of the NCVS as forced sexual intercourse and includes both psychological and physical coercion. Forced sexual intercourse includes vaginal, anal, or oral penetration by the offender(s) and can include incidents where the penetration is from a foreign object, such as a bottle. **Sexual assault** includes attacks, or attempted attacks, involving unwanted sexual contact. Sexual assault may or may not involve force and includes such things as grabbing, fondling, and/or verbal threats.

Types of NCVS Threats

A **threat** must meet the following conditions to be acceptable as a threat for the NCVS:

- ✓ The **threat** must be delivered verbally and *face-to-face* between the offender and the respondent,

AND

- ✓ The **threat** must involve the *potential for physical harm* to the respondent.

(See the NCVS-550 Manual, Part C, Chapter 2 for more information on **threats**.)

Household Property Ownership

Household Property is defined as property owned by the sample household and belonging to the respondent or a household member at the time of the interview. However, property that belongs to a recognizable business should not be considered owned by the sample household for the purposes of this survey.

Borrowed vs. Loaned Property

Borrowed property is property that does not belong to the household member, but is in their possession for a specified time period. Borrowed property that is stolen from a household member is not included in the NCVS, because the household member does not own the stolen property. **Loaned or entrusted property** is property that the household member has given permission for someone to borrow. If household members loan their property to someone and the borrower does not return the property, this is not considered an NCVS crime. However, if the loaned household property was stolen while in the possession of the borrower, this is considered an NCVS crime.

Theft From Businesses--Recognizable vs. Unrecognizable

A **Recognizable Business** is one that is observable from the outside of the unit by means of a sign or similar indicator. Business advertisements appearing only in the newspaper, phone book, or on transitory vehicles are not considered observable indicators. Thefts that occur to recognizable businesses are not included in the NCVS. An **Unrecognizable Business** is one where there are no signs or outside indicators. Thefts of property belonging to unrecognizable businesses are included in the NCVS.

Vandalism

Vandalism is defined as the deliberate or intentional damage to, or destruction of, household property. Since vandalism alone is not considered an NCVS crime, you do not need to complete a crime incident report. However, if an NCVS crime was committed together with an act of vandalism, then you must complete an NCVS-2, Crime Incident Report.

Weapons Recognized by NCVS

Guns and knives are always considered **weapons**, while other objects are considered weapons only if they are used as weapons. Objects that are never considered weapons include animals, parts of the body, food, small empty cans, mace, tear gas, and chloroform.

(Use this job aid as a quick reference while interviewing. For detailed NCVS concept definitions and procedures, refer to Part C of your NCVS-550 Manual.)