Although the day-to-day activities of the criminal justice system focus necessarily on immediate events, it is important to take a broad look at changes in criminal victimization across time to understand the context in which individual crimes take place. Criminologists compare and contrast the data from two key sets of national data that are gathered consistently from year to year—the Uniform Crime Reports and the National Crime Victimization Survey—to identify and assess our nation’s important crime trends. Both these sources show that crime has decreased substantially, particularly in comparison to crime rates from the 1970s and 80s. Data from the last decade, as well, have continued to demonstrate a downward trend, although there were (and still are) occasional fluctuations in some numbers. While experts find it difficult to identify the reasons for declining crime rates, this trend is undoubtedly good news for the victim services field. At the same time, however, there is still much work to do. Rates of victimization have decreased, but the population continues to increase and millions of crimes still occur every year. The criminal justice system continually faces significant challenges in meeting the needs of victims as they work to restore their lives and build for the future.

### Violent Crime

- In 1973, the rate of violent crimes reported by victims was 4,770 per 100,000. It reached its peak at 5,230 per 100,000 persons in 1981 and dropped to 1,690 per 100,000 persons in 2009.
- By comparison, the rate of violent crime reported to law enforcement in 1973 was 417.4 per 100,000 persons. It reached a peak in 1991 at 758.2 and fell to 431.9 per 100,000 persons in 2009.
- Historically, males have higher rates of violent victimization compared to females. For example, in 1994 males experienced a rate of violent victimization of 59.6 per 1,000 while the rate for females was 42.5 per 1,000. However, in 2010 the rates of violent victimization were 15.7 per 1,000 for males and 14.2 per 1,000 for females, indicating a continuing convergence of male and female victimization.
- The percentage of victims of violent crimes who suffered an injury during the victimizations declined slightly from 2001 to 2008, as reported by victims; however there was an increase from 24 percent in 2008 to 29 percent in 2010.
- In 2010, victims reported that about 50 percent of all violent victimizations were reported to police. Over the past 10 years, this percentage has remained stable.

### Assault

- In 1973, the rate of aggravated assault reported by victims was 1,250 per 100,000. It reached its peak at 1,290 per 100,000 persons in 1974 and dropped to 320 per 100,000 persons in 2008.
- By comparison, the rate of aggravated assault reported to law enforcement was 200.5 per 100,000 persons in 1973. It reached its peak in 1992 at 441.9 per 100,000 persons and dropped to 264.7 per 100,000 persons in 2009.
- In 1973, the rate of simple assault reported by victims was 2,590 per 100,000. It reached its peak at 3,150 per 100,000 persons in 1994 and dropped to 1,130 per 100,000 persons in 2009.

### Rape

- In 1973, the rate of rapes reported by victims was 250 per 100,000. It reached its peak at 280 per 100,000 persons in 1979 and dropped to 30 per 100,000 persons in 2009.
- By comparison, the rate of rapes reported to law enforcement in 1973 was 24.5 per 100,000 persons and reached its peak in 1992 at 42.8. In 2009, the rate dropped to 29.1 per 100,000 persons.

### Robbery, Larceny-theft, and Burglary

- In 1973, the rate of robbery reported by victims was 670 per 100,000. It reached its peak at 740 per 100,000 persons in 1981 and dropped to 210 per 100,000 persons in 2009.

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1. The UCR measures crimes reported to law enforcement and includes victims of all ages, while the NCVS is based on a large, national sample of Americans age 12 and older. The NCVS offers important insights into what criminologists call the “dark figure of crime,” or crimes that go unreported. Criminologists analyze data from these two sources to determine current crime trends in the United States. (See also “Interpreting Crime Statistics” in the introduction to Section 6 of the Resource Guide.)


5. Ibid., 1.

6. Ibid.

7. “Reported by victims” means reported to interviewers for the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Crimes reported to NCVS interviewers were not necessarily reported to law enforcement. Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Crime—National or State Level Data with One Variable,” [http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/tables/viortrdtab.cfm](http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/tables/viortrdtab.cfm).


11. Ibid.


Crime Rates Reported by Victims, 1973 – 2009*

Crime Rates Reported to Law Enforcement, 1973 – 2009

*2006 data omitted in source
Crime Trends


Property Crime Rates Reported to Law Enforcement, 1973 – 2009
• By comparison, the rate of robbery reported to law enforcement in 1973 was 183.1 per 100,000 persons. It reached its peak in 1991 at 272.7 per 100,000 persons and fell to 133.1 in 2009.14

• The rate of larceny-theft reported to law enforcement was 2,071.9 per 100,000 persons in 1973. It reached its peak in 1991 at 3,229.1 per 100,000 persons and dropped to 2,064.5 per 100,000 persons in 2009.15

• The rate of burglary reported to law enforcement in 1973 was 1,222.5 per 100,000 persons. It reached its peak in 1980 at 1,684.1 per 100,000 persons and fell to 717.7 per 100,000 persons in 2009.16

• The rate of motor vehicle theft reported to law enforcement in 1973 was 442.6 per 100,000 persons. It reached its peak in 1991 at 659.0 per 100,000 persons and declined to 259.2 per 100,000 persons in 2009.17

• Personal theft decreased between 2001 and 2010 by 34 percent.18

Property Crime

• The rate of property crime reported to law enforcement was 3,737.0 per 100,000 persons in 1973. It reached its peak in 1980 at 5,353.3 per 100,000 persons and declined to 3,041.3 per 100,000 persons in 2009.19

• As reported by victims, between 1993 and 2002, the property crime victimization rate declined by 50 percent (from 31,890 per 100,000 households to 15,900). This rate further declined to 12,020 per 100,000 households in 2010.20

• In 2010, as reported by victims, nearly 40 percent of property crimes were reported to the police. Over the past 10 years, this percentage has remained stable.21

Weapons

• As reported by victims, from 2001 to 2010, weapon violence declined from 26 percent to 22 percent, and stranger-perpetrated violence declined from 44 percent to 39 percent.22

• Between 2001 and 2010, about 6 percent to 9 percent of all violent victimizations reported by victims were committed with firearms. Since 2004, this percentage has remained stable.23

Murder

• The rate of murder reported to law enforcement in 1973 was 9.4 per 100,000 persons (19,640 homicides). It reached its peak in 1980 at 10.2 per 100,000 persons (23,040 homicides), and fell to 5.0 per 100,000 persons (15,399 homicides) in 2009.24

14 Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Crime—National or State Level Data with One Variable.”
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Truman, Criminal Victimization, 2010, 3.
19 Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Crime—National or State Level Data with One Variable.”
20 Truman, Criminal Victimization, 2010, 7.
21 Ibid., 1.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Crime—National or State Level Data with One Variable.”