



# Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin

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## Criminal Victimization, 2006

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### NCVS estimates based on new methods

Violent and property crime rates in urban and suburban areas of the United States remained stable between 2005 and 2006, according to findings from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Due to changes in survey methodology in 2006 that mainly affected rural areas, national-level estimates were not comparable to estimates based on NCVS data from previous years. Continuity between urban and suburban areas in the sample for both years enabled year-to-year comparisons for these areas.

In urban and suburban areas, U.S. residents age 12 or older in 2006 experienced an estimated 3.7 million violent crimes (rape or sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated and simple assault), 138,520 personal thefts (pocket picking and purse snatching), and 12 million property crimes (burglary, motor vehicle theft, and theft).<sup>1</sup> The overall violent crime rate in these areas was 23.3 victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 or older; the property crime rate was 159.1 per 1,000 households.

The U.S. Census Bureau, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), and a panel of outside experts extensively reviewed the 2006 NCVS data and determined that there was a break in series between 2006 and previous years that prevented annual comparison of criminal victimization at the national level. This was mainly the result of three major changes in the survey methodology —

- introducing a new sample to account for shifts in population and location of households that occur over time
- incorporating responses from households that were in the survey for the first time
- using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI).

<sup>1</sup>Estimates are based on urban and suburban areas in the sample (continuing areas) in both 2005 and 2006. See *Technical notes* for details on changes in sample design.

### Crime victimization rates in urban and suburban areas remained stable between 2005 and 2006

| Type of crime        | 2005       |                   | 2006       |                   | Percent change     |
|----------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------|--------------------|
|                      | Number     | Rate <sup>a</sup> | Number     | Rate <sup>a</sup> |                    |
| Violent <sup>c</sup> | 3,577,220  | 22.1              | 3,672,940  | 23.3              | 5.6% <sup>b</sup>  |
| Personal theft       | 168,050    | 1.0               | 138,520    | 0.9               | -15.2 <sup>b</sup> |
| Property             | 12,598,090 | 162.8             | 12,133,460 | 159.1             | -2.3 <sup>b</sup>  |

Note: Based on data from continuing urban and suburban areas only.

<sup>a</sup>Victimization rates are per 1,000 persons age 12 or older or per 1,000 households.

<sup>b</sup>Percent changes between 2005 and 2006 are not statistically significant. See section on *Standard error computations* on page 5.

<sup>c</sup>Excludes murder because the NCVS is based on interviews with victims and therefore cannot measure murder.

The introduction of the new sample affected the NCVS estimates in areas that were added in 2006, especially nonurban areas. The new sample required hiring and training a large number of new interviewers in the new areas. In addition, based on the experience of the U.S. Census Bureau computer-assisted personal interviewing has been associated with improved, but higher survey estimates.

The variation in the amount and rate of crime was too extreme to be attributed to actual year-to-year changes. For areas that were in both the old and new samples — primarily urban and suburban areas — the data for 2006 were consistent with data from previous years. Survey changes had the most impact on estimates for rural areas. Eighty-three percent of rural households were in new sampling areas, compared with 14% of households in urban areas and 15% in suburban areas.

Annual nationwide estimates of crime victimization can be generated from NCVS for 2006. Overall U.S. residents age 12 or older experienced an estimated 25 million crimes of violence and theft. The overall violent crime rate was 24.6 victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 or older; for property crimes it was 159.5 per 1,000 households.

## Implementation of the methodological changes in the NCVS

The NCVS sample was redrawn to update representation of the entire population of the United States based on more recent Census counts. A selected number of households in the sample that were based on the 1990 Decennial Census was replaced with newly selected households based on the 2000 Census. In general, interviews from households in NCVS for the first time produce higher rates of victimization. Typically, these first interviews are not included in the data for analysis but are used as a reference (bounding interview) for subsequent interviews. In 2006 BJS was required to use data from these first-time interviews due to insufficient funding (See forthcoming *Technical notes* for discussion of bounding interviews).

Similar to first-time interviews, automation of data collections also typically produce higher rates of victimization. In July 2006, NCVS replaced paper and pencil interviews (PAPI) with CAPI because the Census Bureau discontinued paper and pencil household surveys. While the conversion to CAPI was expected to produce higher rates of crime, BJS did not have sufficient funds to develop procedures to evaluate the impact of the questionnaire automation and generate statistical parameters to control for the effects.

### Victimization estimates showed the effects of pre-redesign and post-redesign adjustments in the past

When NCVS underwent a redesign in 1992, two comparable samples were conducted. This made it possible to develop an adjustment factor that showed what the victimization estimates would have been if the redesigned survey had been used from 1973 through 1992.<sup>2</sup> When the adjust-

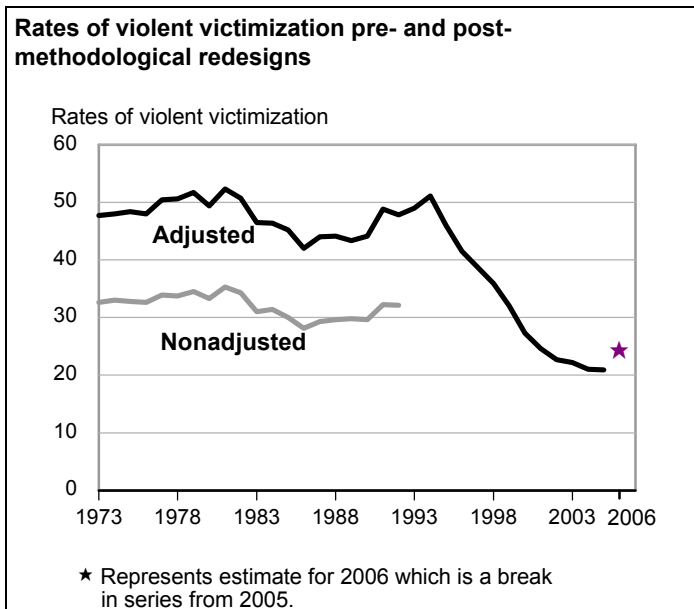


Figure 1

ment ratio was applied to the data, violent crime rates in 1992 increased from 32.1 to 47.8 per 1,000 persons (figure 1). For property crimes, in 1992 the rates increased from 152.2 to 325.3 per 1,000 households (figure 2). The adjustments in the series between 1973 and 1992 for violent and property crime permitted trend data to be maintained.

If it had been possible to conduct two comparable samples in the 2006 redesign, there would have been a similar adjustment factor to make the 2006 data comparable to 2005. While the rates for both violent and property crime increased between 2005 and 2006, it is unknown how much of the increase was caused by methodological changes rather than any real change in crime trends.

### Estimates for urban and suburban areas in 2006 were comparable to previous years

Some areas in the sample were included in both the old and new sample designs. They were principally in urban and suburban locations. Violent and property crime rates in these locations remained unchanged between 2005 and 2006 (table 1).

In 2006 U.S. residents age 12 or older residing in continuing urban areas experienced an estimated 8.3 million violent and property crimes. These criminal victimizations included about 2 million violent crimes, 90,000 personal thefts, and 6.3 million property crimes. The rate of violent crime in continuing urban areas, 30 victimizations per 1,000 individuals age 12 or older, was unchanged from 2005. The rate of property crime victimization, 195 victimizations per 1,000 urban households, was also unchanged.

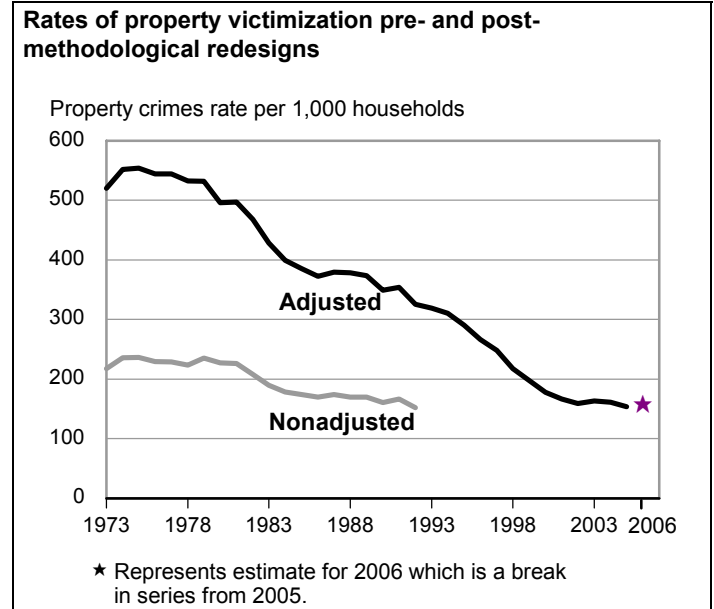


Figure 2

<sup>2</sup>See *Effects of the Redesign on Victimization Estimates* (April 1997) at <<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/erve.htm>>.

**Table 1. Criminal victimization in continuing areas of the NCVS sample, numbers and rates, 2005 and 2006**

| Type of crime                     | Continuing urban areas |                   |           |                   |                     | Continuing suburban areas |                   |           |                   |                     |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------------|
|                                   | 2005                   |                   | 2006      |                   | Percent change      | 2005                      |                   | 2006      |                   | Percent change      |
|                                   | Number                 | Rate <sup>a</sup> | Number    | Rate <sup>a</sup> |                     | Number                    | Rate <sup>a</sup> | Number    | Rate <sup>a</sup> |                     |
| All crimes                        | 7,557,540              | ~                 | 8,263,715 | ~                 |                     | 8,785,820                 | ~                 | 7,681,210 | ~                 |                     |
| <b>Violent crimes<sup>c</sup></b> | 1,725,140              | 29.4              | 1,905,900 | 29.7              | 1.0% <sup>b</sup>   | 1,852,080                 | 17.9              | 1,767,040 | 18.9              | 5.6% <sup>b</sup>   |
| Rape/sexual assault               | 82,550                 | 1.4               | 76,460    | 1.2               | -14.3 <sup>b</sup>  | 75,870                    | 0.7               | 90,155    | 1.0               | 42.9 <sup>b</sup>   |
| Robbery                           | 303,600                | 5.2               | 282,040   | 4.4               | -15.4 <sup>b</sup>  | 209,035                   | 2.0               | 201,980   | 2.2               | 10.0 <sup>b</sup>   |
| Assault                           | 1,338,980              | 22.8              | 1,547,400 | 24.1              | 5.7 <sup>b</sup>    | 1,567,180                 | 15.2              | 1,474,905 | 15.8              | 3.9 <sup>b</sup>    |
| Aggravated                        | 346,680                | 5.9               | 453,140   | 7.1               | 20.3 <sup>b</sup>   | 378,185                   | 3.7               | 412,330   | 4.4               | 18.9 <sup>b</sup>   |
| Simple                            | 992,300                | 16.9              | 1,094,260 | 17.1              | 1.2                 | 1,188,990                 | 11.5              | 1,062,580 | 11.4              | -0.9 <sup>b</sup>   |
| <b>Personal theft</b>             | 101,390                | 1.7               | 90,480    | 1.4               | -17.6% <sup>b</sup> | 66,660                    | 0.6               | 48,045    | 0.5               | -16.7% <sup>b</sup> |
| <b>Property crimes</b>            | 5,731,010              | 196.6             | 6,267,335 | 194.8             | -0.9% <sup>b</sup>  | 6,867,080                 | 142.3             | 5,866,120 | 133.0             | -6.5% <sup>b</sup>  |
| Household burglary                | 1,082,385              | 37.1              | 1,157,610 | 36.0              | -3.0 <sup>b</sup>   | 1,141,685                 | 23.7              | 985,620   | 22.3              | -5.9 <sup>b</sup>   |
| Motor vehicle theft               | 400,290                | 13.7              | 426,100   | 13.2              | -3.6 <sup>b</sup>   | 395,470                   | 8.2               | 387,620   | 8.8               | 7.3 <sup>b</sup>    |
| Theft                             | 4,248,340              | 145.7             | 4,683,625 | 145.6             | -0.1 <sup>b</sup>   | 5,329,930                 | 110.5             | 4,492,880 | 101.9             | -7.8 <sup>b</sup>   |

Note: Detail may not add total shown because of rounding. The total population age 12 or older in continuing urban areas was 58,724,730 in 2005 and 64,168,560 in 2006. The total number of households in continuing urban areas was 29,149,690 in 2005 and 32,176,350 in 2006. The total population age 12 or older in continuing suburban areas was 103,279,790 in 2005 and 93,334,000 in 2006. The total number of households in continuing suburban areas was 48,253,550 in 2005 and 44,105,880 in 2006.

~Not applicable.

<sup>a</sup>Victimization rates are per 1,000 persons age 12 or older or per 1,000 households.

<sup>b</sup>Percent changes between 2005 and 2006 are not statistically significant. See section on *Standard error computations* on page 5.

<sup>c</sup>Excludes murder because the NCVS is based on interviews with victims and therefore cannot measure murder.

In 2006 U.S. residents age 12 or older residing in continuing suburban areas experienced an estimated 7.7 million violent and property crimes. These criminal victimizations included an estimated 1.8 million violent crimes, 48,000 personal thefts, and 5.9 million property crimes. In 2006 the rate of violent crime (19 victimizations per 1,000 individuals age 12 or older) and property crime (133 per 100 households) were unchanged from 2005.

### U.S. residents age 12 or older experienced an estimated 25 million violent and property crimes in 2006

While national-level estimates of criminal victimizations in 2006 cannot be compared to previous years, the data provide an annual description of the nature of crime in the United States. In 2006 U.S. residents age 12 or older experienced an estimated 25 million violent and property crime victimizations, according to the NCVS (table 2). These criminal victimizations included an estimated 19 million property crimes, 6 million violent crimes, and 174,000 personal thefts.

**Table 2. Criminal victimization, numbers and rates, 2006**

| Type of crime                     | Number     | Rate <sup>a</sup> |
|-----------------------------------|------------|-------------------|
| All crimes                        | 25,077,700 | ~                 |
| <b>Violent crimes<sup>b</sup></b> | 6,094,720  | 24.6              |
| Rape/sexual assault               | 272,350    | 1.1               |
| Robbery                           | 711,570    | 2.9               |
| Assault                           | 5,110,810  | 20.7              |
| Aggravated                        | 1,354,750  | 5.5               |
| Simple                            | 3,756,060  | 15.2              |
| <b>Personal theft</b>             | 174,150    | 0.7               |
| <b>Property crimes</b>            | 18,808,820 | 159.5             |
| Household burglary                | 3,539,760  | 30.0              |
| Motor vehicle theft               | 993,910    | 8.4               |
| Theft                             | 14,275,150 | 121.0             |

Note: Detail may not add total shown because of rounding. The total population age 12 or older was 247,290,210 in 2006. The total number of households was 117,952,450 in 2006.

~Not applicable.

<sup>a</sup>Victimization rates are per 1,000 persons age 12 or older or per 1,000 households.

<sup>b</sup>Excludes murder because the NCVS is based on interviews with victims and therefore cannot measure murder.

**Table 3. Violent victimization, by gender and age, 2006**

|               | Population  | Number    | Rate* |
|---------------|-------------|-----------|-------|
| <b>Gender</b> |             |           |       |
| Males         | 120,513,190 | 3,187,880 | 26.5  |
| Females       | 126,777,010 | 2,906,850 | 22.9  |
| <b>Age</b>    |             |           |       |
| 12-15         | 16,892,570  | 799,610   | 47.3  |
| 16-19         | 16,687,150  | 873,480   | 52.3  |
| 20-24         | 20,397,690  | 891,220   | 43.7  |
| 25-34         | 39,931,470  | 1,407,710 | 35.3  |
| 35-49         | 65,886,660  | 1,320,800 | 20.0  |
| 50-64         | 51,916,140  | 677,790   | 13.1  |
| 65 or older   | 35,578,530  | 124,120   | 3.5   |

\*Victimization rates are per 1,000 persons age 12 or older or per 1,000 households.

### At the national level characteristics of victims remained the same as in previous years

The break in the NCVS series shifted the relative magnitude of victimization rates overall, but did not alter the relative proportions of crimes experienced among various demographic groups. In 1993 after the NCVS redesign, which improved the ability to measure crimes, the relative risk of victimization for certain groups remained the same. For instance, males were still more likely to experience victimization than females. In 2006 estimates of characteristics of crime victims and incidents of crime remained consistent with those of previous years.

### Gender

In 2006 males experienced higher rates of victimizations than females. During this time, males experienced 26 violent victimizations per 1,000 males age 12 or older. The rate of violent victimizations for females in 2006 was 23 per 1,000 females age 12 or older (table 3).

**Table 4. Property victimization, by age of head of household, 2006**

| Age of head of household | Households | Number    | Rate* |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------|-------|
| 12-19                    | 1,071,880  | 396,510   | 369.9 |
| 20-34                    | 26,750,370 | 5,692,920 | 212.8 |
| 35-49                    | 36,379,710 | 6,857,820 | 188.5 |
| 50-64                    | 30,114,990 | 4,200,460 | 139.5 |
| 65 or older              | 23,635,500 | 1,661,100 | 70.3  |

\*Victimization rates are per 1,000 households.

### Age

Persons in older age groups generally experienced lower rates of violent victimization than persons in younger age groups. In 2006, households that were headed by persons age 65 or older experienced lower rates of property victimization than households headed by younger persons (table 4).

### Race

Black victims experienced higher rates of violence than whites or persons of other races (table 5). The rate of violent victimization for black individuals was 33 victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 or older. In 2006 households headed by black individuals were at a greater risk of property victimization than those headed by whites or persons of other races.

**Table 5. Violent and property victimizations, by race of victim or race of head of household, 2006**

| Race of victim                 | Violent     |           |                   | Property   |            |                   |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------------|------------|------------|-------------------|
|                                | Population  | Number    | Rate <sup>a</sup> | Households | Number     | Rate <sup>a</sup> |
| White only                     | 201,524,080 | 4,682,980 | 23.2              | 96,382,970 | 15,016,110 | 155.8             |
| Black only                     | 29,980,370  | 980,400   | 32.7              | 14,819,970 | 2,721,330  | 183.6             |
| Other race <sup>b</sup>        | 12,849,300  | 240,740   | 18.7              | 5,506,430  | 759,650    | 138.0             |
| Two or more races <sup>c</sup> | 2,936,460   | 190,590   | 64.9              | 1,243,070  | 311,720    | 250.8             |

<sup>a</sup>Victimization rates are per 1,000 persons age 12 or older or per 1,000 households.

<sup>b</sup>Includes American Indians, Eskimo, Asian Pacific Islander if only one of these races is given.

<sup>c</sup>Includes all persons of any race, indicating two or more races.

### Victim and offender relationship

Of offenders victimizing males in 2006, 5% were described as intimates and 47% as strangers (table 6). In contrast, of offenders victimizing females 21% were described as intimates and 29% as strangers. Males and females were equally likely to be victimized by an offender they previously knew.

### Presence of weapons

In 2006 an estimated 25% of all violent crime incidents were committed by an armed offender (table 7). The presence of a firearm was involved in 9% of these incidents.

In 2006 there were 499,890 incidents and 560,300 firearm victimizations (not shown in table). There were 2.3 victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 or older involving a firearm. An incident is a specific criminal act involving one or more victims and offenders while a victimization is a crime that affects one individual person or household.

**Table 6. Victim and offender relationship, 2006**

| Relationship with victim | Violent crime |         |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------|
|                          | Number        | Percent |
| <b>Male victims</b>      |               |         |
| Total                    | 3,187,880     | 100%    |
| Nonstranger              | 1,577,580     | 50%     |
| Intimate                 | 144,350       | 5       |
| Other relative           | 154,530       | 5       |
| Friend/acquaintance      | 1,278,700     | 40      |
| Stranger                 | 1,495,580     | 47%     |
| Relationship unknown     | 114,720       | 4%      |
| <b>Female victims</b>    |               |         |
| Total                    | 2,906,850     | 100%    |
| Nonstranger              | 2,038,910     | 70%     |
| Intimate                 | 595,740       | 21      |
| Other relative           | 276,150       | 10      |
| Friend/acquaintance      | 1,167,020     | 40      |
| Stranger                 | 833,840       | 29%     |
| Relationship unknown     | 34,100        | 1%*     |

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% because of rounding.  
\*Based on 10 or fewer sample cases.

**Table 7. Presence of weapons in violent incidents, 2006**

| Presence of offender's weapon | Violent crime incidents |         |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---------|
|                               | Number                  | Percent |
| Total                         | 5,695,000               | 100%    |
| <b>No weapon</b>              | 3,822,420               | 67.1%   |
| <b>Weapon</b>                 | 1,433,770               | 25.2%   |
| Firearm                       | 499,890                 | 8.8     |
| Knife                         | 359,220                 | 6.3     |
| Other                         | 484,510                 | 8.5     |
| Type not ascertained          | 90,160                  | 1.6     |
| <b>Don't know</b>             | 438,810                 | 7.7%    |

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% because of rounding. If the offender was armed with more than one weapon, the crime is classified based on the most serious weapon present.

### Reporting to the police

During 2006, 49% of all violent victimizations and 38% of all property crimes were reported to the police (table 8). Rape or sexual assault was less likely to be reported to the police than robbery and aggravated assault. Robbery and aggravated assault were equally likely to be reported to the police. Fifty-seven percent of robberies and 59% of aggravated assaults were reported to the police in 2006. As in previous years, motor vehicle theft was the property crime most likely to be reported to the police. About 81% of these victimizations were reported to the police in 2006.

**Table 8. Percent of violent and property crimes reported to the police, 2006**

| Type of crime          | Percent |
|------------------------|---------|
| <b>Violent crimes</b>  | 48.9%   |
| Rape/sexual assault    | 41.4    |
| Robbery                | 56.9    |
| Aggravated assault     | 59.2    |
| Simple assault         | 44.3    |
| <b>Personal theft</b>  | 56.0%   |
| <b>Property crimes</b> | 37.7%   |
| Burglary               | 49.6    |
| Motor vehicle theft    | 81.0    |
| Theft                  | 31.7    |

### Methodology

This Bulletin presents data on nonlethal violence and property crimes from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Victimization rates are based on data collected during the calendar year. In 2006, about 76,000 households and 135,300 individuals age 12 or older were interviewed for the NCVS. The response rate was 90.9% of eligible households and 86.1% of eligible individuals. See the *Technical Notes Appendix* for details on methodological changes to the 2006 survey.

### Standard error computations

Comparisons of percentages and rates made in this report were tested to determine if observed differences were statistically significant. Differences described as higher, lower, or different passed a test at the 0.05 level of statistical significance (95% confidence level). Differences described as somewhat, slightly, marginally, or some indication passed a test at the 0.10 level of statistical significance (90% confidence level). Caution is required when comparing estimates not explicitly discussed in this Bulletin.

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This Bulletin was written by Michael Rand and Shannan Catalano, Ph.D. Cathy Maston verified the report. Patsy Klaus provided statistical review. Tina Dorsey produced and edited the report, and Jayne E. Robinson prepared it for final printing, under the supervision of Doris J. James.

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## Technical notes

### 2006 NCVS data examined for explanations of anomalies from previous years

The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) is an annual data collection, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). As an ongoing survey of households, the NCVS measures crimes of violence and theft both reported and not reported to police. It produces national rates and levels of personal and property victimization.

A number of NCVS estimates for 2006 varied widely from the estimates for previous years. The differences were too extreme to be attributed to year-to-year changes. To look for explanations for the extreme variations, Census Bureau staff examined their data collection and processing procedures, including a review of the sampling and weighting procedures used for the survey. BJS staff also conducted analyses of the data to identify patterns that might suggest possible explanations for the differences.

The Census Bureau's Demographic Statistical Methods Division (DSMD) concluded that NCVS processes and procedures related to the design, collection, processing, and weighting of the data did not erroneously increase the victimization estimates between 2005 and 2006. DSMD determined that methodological changes had contributed to the large differences between the 2005 and 2006 estimates. These technical notes describe the methodological changes to the survey in 2006 and their impact on the victimization rates.

The three major methodological changes in 2006 included:

- introducing a new sample beginning in January 2006, based on the 2000 Decennial Census to account for shifts in population and location of households that occur over time
- incorporating responses from households that were in the survey for the first time (called "bounding interviews") in the production of survey estimates
- replacing paper and pencil interviewing (PAPI) with computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI).

### Sample redesign

Every 10 years, the Census Bureau conducts the official population census or the Decennial Census of the United States. The most recent sample redesign of the NCVS was based on the 2000 Decennial Census. A redesign was necessary to account for changes in locations and characteristics of households and individuals across the U.S. since the 1990 Decennial Census.

As a standard practice, the Census Bureau updates its sample areas for ongoing household surveys about mid-decade. As areas based on the most recent census data are introduced to the sample area, areas based on the previous census are phased-out. For the NCVS sample redesign, this update entailed introducing new 2000 Decennial Census sample areas while phasing-out 1990 Decennial Census sample areas.

In 2005 and 2006, the Census Bureau introduced the 2000-based sample redesign in the NCVS's continuing and new areas. Continuing areas were areas included in both the 1990-based and 2000-based NCVS samples. New areas were areas included in the 2000-based sample but not in the 1990-based sample. The 2000-based sample was introduced in continuing areas of the NCVS in 2005. Full implementation of the sample redesign began with new sample areas in January 2006.

During 2006 and 2007, the NCVS sample contained both 1990 and 2000 designated sample areas, called primary sampling units (or PSUs). Continuing areas included about two-thirds of the sample areas surveyed in 2006. (See appendix table 1.) Of the new areas included in the 2006 sample, about two-thirds were in nonmetropolitan areas designated by the survey as "rural" areas.

As the new sample was introduced, the outgoing 1990-based portion of the sample was reduced by 16% to offset the inclusion of bounding interviews in the production of survey estimates. This reduction kept the number of interview cases used in the 2006 estimates (approximately 76,000 households) at a level and cost comparable to the previous 2005 estimates (approximately 77,200 households).

### Inclusion of bounding interviews

To increase the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the interviewing process, the NCVS uses a rotating panel design. Addresses for households remain in the sample for 3 years, and all residents age 12 or older are interviewed at 6-month intervals, for a total of seven interviews. The production of estimates for the sample of NCVS households includes six rotation groups (i.e., seven interview rotations minus the bounding interview).

**Appendix table 1. Percent of NCVS sample in continuing and new areas, by location, 2006**

|                   | Continuing areas* | New areas |
|-------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| Total NCVS sample | 68%               | 32%       |
| Total             | 100%              | 100%      |
| Urban             | 38                | 13        |
| Suburban          | 55                | 21        |
| Rural             | 7                 | 67        |

\*Continuing areas were in the NCVS sample in both 2005 and 2006.

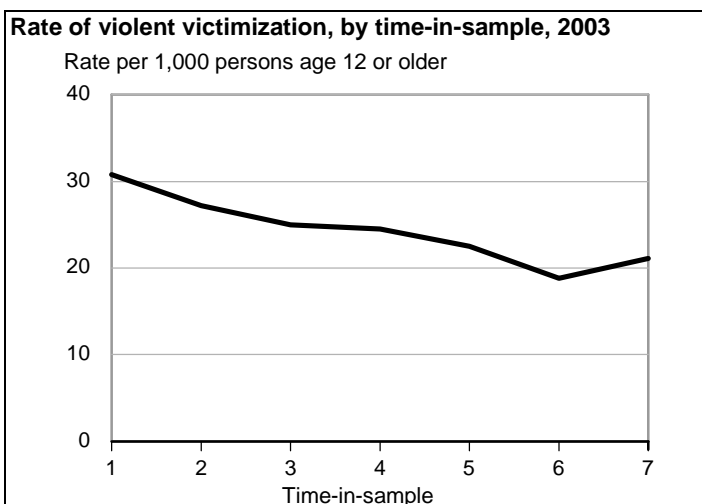
First-time interviews are designated as time-in-sample 1 (TIS-1), second interviews as TIS-2, continuing through the seventh interview as TIS-7. Data collected for the full NCVS sample are balanced across the seven rotations so that about an equal number of households each year receive their first through seventh interviews.

Earlier research conducted during the development of the NCVS (then called the National Crime Survey) found the existence of two time-in-sample effects on survey estimates—telescoping and panel bias. Telescoping affects survey estimates when an individual remembers an event as having occurred at a time other than when it actually did.

Forward telescoping includes events reported as having taken place at a time that was more recent than when they actually occurred. Backward telescoping includes events reported as having taken place at a time that was less recent than when they actually occurred. For retrospective surveys such as the NCVS, forward telescoping is of great concern because of the possibility of over-reporting events during the survey's reference period.

Panel bias (sometimes called respondent fatigue) is the likelihood that the respondent will provide less information for the survey as the number of interviews increases. The longer a household remains in sample, the less likely respondents are to report being victims of crime.

Because of telescoping and panel bias, respondents tend to report more incidents of crime during first-time interviews than in subsequent interviews. A bounding procedure that excludes the first interview at each household from the production of annual estimates was incorporated in the NCVS to help prevent telescoping. This bounding procedure uses the first of seven interviews at each address solely to create a boundary for incidents recalled in subsequent interviews. Excluding the first interview from the production of annual estimates helps to prevent telescoping only.



Appendix figure 1

NCVS procedures are unable to prevent panel bias because it is an acknowledged effect of conducting a panel survey. Provided the sample remains balanced (i.e., the same proportion of households are interviewed during each wave of the survey), the effects of panel bias should change little over time, having no effect on the survey's year-to-year change estimates.

NCVS data for 2003 demonstrate the differential levels of reporting victimizations across the seven TIS interviewing stages (appendix figure 1). In 2003 respondents in households interviewed for the first time (TIS-1) experienced violent victimizations at a rate of about 31 per 1,000 persons age 12 or older. Respondents interviewed for the sixth time had a rate of 19 victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 or older. This difference is attributable to panel bias.

Excluding TIS-1 bounding interviews in the production of estimates for the 2000-based redesign would have meant implementing the sample redesign in July 2005 and conducting interviews with approximately 24,000 households between July and December 2005. These interviews would have been used solely to bound subsequent interviews at these households.

To remain within the BJS budget, BJS and the Census Bureau developed a truncated implementation plan that eliminated the initial bounding interviews for incoming sample households. The new sample was introduced in January 2006.

An examination of sample data from previous years and alternative methods of integrating first-time interview data indicated that a downward adjustment of these data could be used to adjust for the upward bias associated with using unbounded interviews. Without an adjustment to account for the effects of telescoping, these interviews would result in an over-reporting of crime.

To adjust for using first-time interviews in the production of estimates for the 2000-based redesign, a BJS and Census Bureau methodological working group began the process of developing a weighting adjustment factor in 2004 to mitigate any over-counting of crime. Following an exploration of various adjustment protocols, BJS and Census Bureau staff concluded that the best approach was to build adjustment factors based on 2005 data that used a ratio of TIS-2 through TIS-7 households to TIS-1 crime (appendix table 2).

**Appendix table 2. 2005 Bounding adjustment factors, by time in sample**

| Period   | Household adjustment factor | Person adjustment factor |
|----------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2005 2:1 | .78                         | .81                      |
| 2005 3:1 | .69                         | .73                      |
| 2005 4:1 | .69                         | .68                      |
| 2005 5:1 | .65                         | .56                      |
| 2005 6:1 | .67                         | .77                      |
| 2005 7:1 | .62                         | .76                      |



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These adjustment factors accounted for both telescoping and panel bias. A household interviewed in 2006 for the first time that had entered the sample as a TIS-5 household had the sample weight multiplied by .65 to account for the difference between a first time and a fifth-time interview. A person interviewed in 2006 for the first time who entered the sample as a TIS-5 interview had the sample weight multiplied by .56 to account for the difference between a first time and a fifth-time interview. Analysis of this adjustment method demonstrated a close fit to actual victimization rates for the year.

#### *Introduction of computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI)*

In July 2006, NCVS was converted to a fully automated data collection. Computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) replaced paper-and-pencil interviewing. Field representatives used questionnaires loaded into laptop computers to conduct interviews, which could be completed either in person or by telephone.

NCVS data collection was partially automated in 1987 when the Census Bureau began using a combination of paper-and-pencil interviewing (PAPI) and computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). CATI is a telephone survey technique in which the interviewer follows a script provided by a software application. Research has suggested that CATI enhances data accuracy and produces higher and more accurate estimates because the computer-based interviewing process ensures that correct skip patterns are followed so that respondents answer all relevant questions.

For the NCVS data collection, CATI interviews were conducted from two telephone facilities. NCVS households interviewed using CATI were not randomly assigned. They were generally located in primary sampling units (PSUs) with large numbers of sample cases that required more than one interviewer and interviews were easier to complete. These households were characteristically not in rural areas. Cases that could not be completed using CATI were recycled back to the field office for completion by field interviewers.

NCVS surveys conducted using PAPI were more concentrated in rural and urban areas where fewer interviewers were available or where interviews were more difficult to complete. These areas included inner city areas that required multilingual interviewers or areas difficult to enumerate.

Similar to the initial transition from PAPI to computer-based telephone interviewing, the transition from CATI to CAPI was expected to produce higher rates of crime. To avoid

overloading interviewers with additional cases during the conversion to a fully automated data collection, CATI interviewing from Census telephone facilities continued after CAPI implementation. During the first half of 2006, interviewers completed approximately 76% of NCVS interviews using PAPI, while the remaining 24% was completed using CATI. During the second half of 2006, interviewers completed approximately 19% of NCVS interviews using CATI, while the remaining 81% was administered using the new CAPI environment.

#### **Effects of methodological changes on survey estimates**

Initial examination of the NCVS estimates for 2006 by BJS and Census Bureau staff uncovered patterns in the data and differences between the 2005 and 2006 estimates that could not be attributed to actual changes in the level of crime. According to the Census Bureau, a close review of the 2006 NCVS estimates detected patterns indicating that changes to the survey had affected the crime estimates with differences too extreme to be attributed to sampling variation.

This conclusion centered on the estimates for rural areas. Eighty-three percent of rural households in the sample were in new areas. There was very little difference between the 2005 and 2006 rates of violent victimization reported for both urban and suburban sample areas. The rate of violent victimization in the rural sample areas increased 62% between 2005 and 2006. The violent victimization rates for 2006 for continuing areas (urban, suburban and rural) were not significantly different from those for 2005 overall (appendix table 3).

The sample size was not sufficient to measure the differences between the rates for continuing areas and the differences for old and new areas for each of the NCVS measured offenses. The year-to-year differences for each offense in old and new areas were nominally greater than for continuing areas.

#### **Changes were not implemented in a way that facilitated identifying and quantifying their effects on survey estimates**

The Census Bureau and BJS's review and analysis of the data concentrated on two areas: the transition from paper-and-pencil interviewing to CAPI and the effects associated with implementing the sample redesign. Of the three methodological changes implemented, it was anticipated that including first-time interviews in the production of estimates and converting from PAPI to CAPI would have an

effect on the 2006 estimates. A weighting instrument was developed to adjust and account for the effects of using first-time interviews. Resources were not available for BJS to fund two samples to study the effects of converting from PAPI to CAPI.

The Census Bureau did not find any underlying problems with the sample design, the implementation of the new sample, or the weighting and processing of the new data. The Census Bureau identified a few issues, including the treatment of both out-of-scope and duplicate incidents that might have had some effect on the estimates. These effects were not of a magnitude sufficient to produce the anomalous results for 2006.

#### Conversion to CAPI

Other surveys, such as the Current Population Survey (CPS), also produced higher estimates of the behavior being measured after migrating to CAPI. CPS estimates of unemployment rates increased following implementation of the CAPI collection methods in 1994.<sup>1</sup>

CAPI was not implemented in the NCVS in a way that would enable measuring its impact on survey estimates. The only way that its impact could be assessed was to compare pre- and post-implementation victimization rates. The NCVS sample was not large enough to capture pre- and post-CAPI effects for violent crime rates, but an increase in pre- and post-CAPI rates was evident for property crimes (appendix table 4).

The property crime rate was 150 victimizations per 1,000 households between January and June 2006 when PAPI interviews were used. This rate increased significantly, to

169 victimizations per 1,000 households between July and December 2006, following the implementation of CAPI. Because these estimates are for two separate time periods, it was not possible to separate CAPI effects from actual changes in the rate of property crime.

As observed with the introduction of CATI, a fully automated NCVS data collection showed an increase in the crime estimates. The structured aspect of computerized questionnaire instruments provides little opportunity for interviewers to use their own judgment to interpret, alter, or skip survey questions. In CAPI, questions and skip patterns are programmed into the instrument. This improves the ability of the interviewer to follow the complex skip patterns.

#### Effects associated with the sample redesign

The Census Bureau used similar variables and processes to stratify both the 1990-based and 2000-based sample redesign. During every redesign, the selection and integration of a new sample requires hiring and training interviewers to administer the survey in new areas.

In January 2006, new interviewers trained during the previous month began collecting NCVS data for the first time. Roughly 7% of all interviews were conducted by new interviewers in 2005 and approximately 28% of the NCVS assignments were completed by new interviewers in 2006. The data collected from new interviewers in these sample areas were included in the estimates. The Census Bureau continues to evaluate the effects of new interviewers on survey data.

**Appendix table 3. Criminal victimization rates, by type of crime and sample area, 2005 and 2006**

| Type of crime                     | 2005                   |                  | 2006      |                               | Percentage change old and new areas | Percent change continuing areas |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                                   | Old areas <sup>a</sup> | Continuing areas | New areas | Continuing areas <sup>a</sup> |                                     |                                 |
| <b>Violent crimes<sup>b</sup></b> | 20.5                   | 21.4             | 27.2      | 23.5                          | 32.7%‡                              | 9.8% <sup>c</sup>               |
| Rape/sexual assault               | 0.2*                   | 0.2              | 0.5*      | 0.3                           | 150.0                               | 50.0                            |
| Robbery                           | 1.2                    | 3.0              | 2.5       | 3.1                           | 108.3                               | 3.3                             |
| Assault                           | 18.8                   | 17.5             | 23.8      | 19.2                          | 26.6                                | 9.7                             |
| Aggravated                        | 4.4                    | 4.3              | 5.8       | 5.3                           | 31.8                                | 23.3                            |
| Simple                            | 14.4                   | 13.2             | 18.0      | 13.9                          | 25.0                                | 5.3                             |
| <b>Personal theft</b>             | 0.5*                   | 1.1              | 0.4*      | 0.8                           | -20.0%                              | -27.3% <sup>c</sup>             |
| <b>Property crimes</b>            | 143.0                  | 158.0            | 165.9     | 156.7                         | 16.0%                               | -0.8% <sup>c</sup>              |
| Household burglary                | 31.7                   | 28.8             | 34.0      | 28.3                          | 7.3                                 | -1.7                            |
| Motor vehicle theft               | 4.7                    | 9.7              | 4.5       | 10.1                          | -4.3                                | 4.1                             |
| Theft                             | 106.6                  | 119.5            | 127.3     | 118.3                         | 19.4                                | -1.0                            |

‡The difference from 2005 to 2006 is significant at the 90%-confidence level.

\*Based on 10 or fewer sample cases.

<sup>a</sup>Victimization rates are per 1,000 persons age 12 or older or per 1,000 households.

<sup>b</sup>Excludes murder because the NCVS is based on interviews with victims and therefore cannot measure murder.

<sup>c</sup>Percent change between 2005 and 2006 in continuing areas is not statistically significant.

<sup>1</sup>Ryscavage, Paul (1995). "A surge in growing income inequality?" *Monthly Labor Review*, 118 (8), 51-61.

**Further research is needed to examine the effects of methodological changes on the NCVS**

*CAPI Instrumentation*

Limited time and financial resources prohibited the Census Bureau and BJS staff from fully assessing the effects of CAPI on the 2006 NCVS estimates. Without a control group for benchmarking the CAPI effects, the effects could be evaluated through an analysis of the output of the CAPI instrument only.

*New versus experienced interviewers*

Due to differences between data collected by new versus experienced interviewers, refresher classroom training has been recommended. Research should examine whether a correlation exists between the level of interviewer experience and crime incidents captured. Additional analyses should reveal any interviewer effects in continuing or new sample areas.

*New Area Crime Estimates*

In 2008, Census Bureau and BJS staff will have the data to more fully assess the effect of the 2000-based new sample areas on crime estimates. Some shifting in the sample percentage in rural areas will provide an opportunity for evaluating characteristics of the new areas included in the 2006 survey.

*The effect of differential nonresponse on crime rates*

The NCVS nonresponse rate has steadily increased over the past decade. These increasing nonresponse rates may affect the smaller subgroups. Research should examine household and individual nonresponses by demographic and geographic group characteristics and type of sample area to explore the impact of nonresponses on the 2005 and 2006 estimates.

**Appendix table 4. Criminal victimization rates, by pre- and post-CAPI implementation, 2006**

| Type of crime                     | Total      |                   | Pre-CAPI<br>(January-June 2006) |                   | Post-CAPI<br>(July-December 2006) |                   |
|-----------------------------------|------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
|                                   | Number     | Rate <sup>a</sup> | Number                          | Rate <sup>a</sup> | Number                            | Rate <sup>a</sup> |
| <b>Violent crimes<sup>b</sup></b> | 6,094,720  | 24.6              | 2,851,690                       | 23.1              | 3,243,030                         | 26.2 <sup>c</sup> |
| Rape/sexual assault               | 272,350    | 1.1               | 105,770                         | 0.9               | 166,570                           | 1.3 <sup>c</sup>  |
| Robbery                           | 711,570    | 2.9               | 357,990                         | 2.9               | 353,580                           | 2.9 <sup>c</sup>  |
| Assault                           | 5,110,810  | 20.7              | 2,387,930                       | 19.4              | 2,722,880                         | 22.0 <sup>c</sup> |
| Aggravated                        | 1,354,750  | 5.5               | 621,600                         | 5.0               | 733,150                           | 5.9 <sup>c</sup>  |
| Simple                            | 3,756,060  | 15.2              | 1,766,330                       | 14.3              | 1,989,730                         | 16.0 <sup>c</sup> |
| <b>Personal theft</b>             | 174,150    | 0.7               | 100,880                         | 0.8               | 73,280                            | 0.6 <sup>c</sup>  |
| <b>Property crimes</b>            | 18,808,820 | 159.5             | 8,799,290                       | 149.5             | 10,009,530                        | 169.4†            |
| Household burglary                | 3,539,760  | 30.0              | 1,851,000                       | 31.5              | 1,688,760                         | 28.6 <sup>c</sup> |
| Motor vehicle theft               | 993,910    | 8.4               | 470,660                         | 8.0               | 523,250                           | 8.9 <sup>c</sup>  |
| Theft                             | 14,275,150 | 121.0             | 6,477,630                       | 110.1             | 7,797,530                         | 131.9†            |

†The difference between pre-CAPI and post-CAPI is significant at the 95% confidence interval.  
<sup>a</sup>Victimization rates are calculated as per 1,000 persons age 12 or older or per 1,000 households.  
<sup>b</sup>Excludes murder because the NCVS is based on interviews with victims and therefore cannot measure murder.  
<sup>c</sup>The difference between pre-CAPI and post-CAPI is not statistically significant.