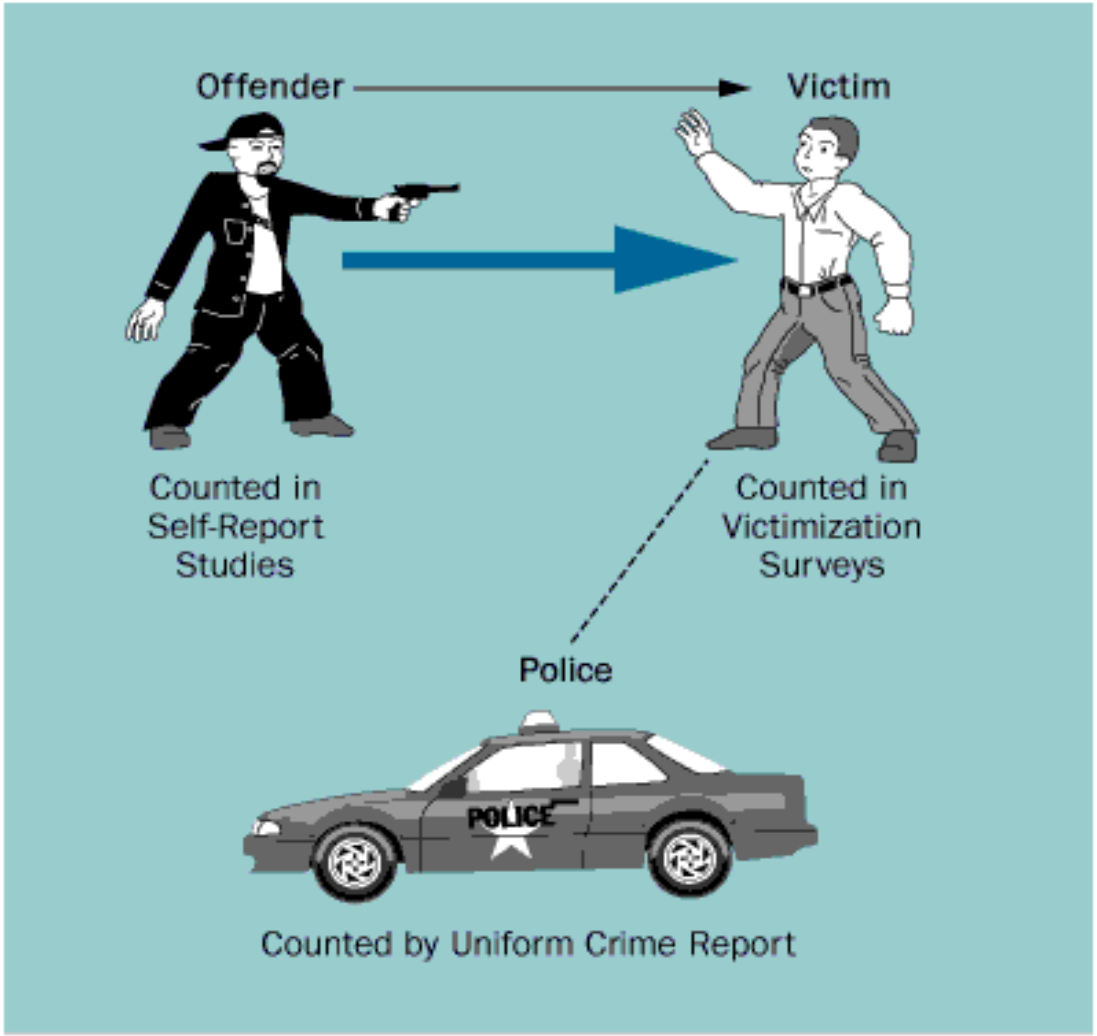
Lecture 4A. Measuring Crime

Part I: Uniform Crime Reports (index crimes).

Part II. Self-Report Surveys

Part III. Victim Surveys

► A Typical Crime against a Person



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Part 1: Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)

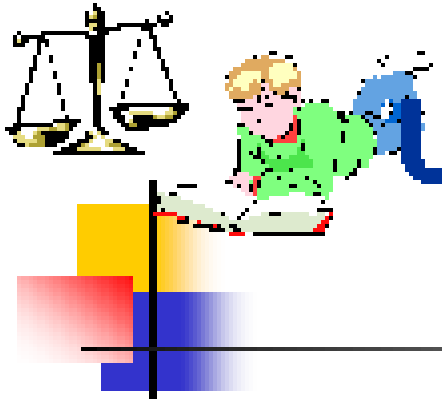
1.) What is the UCR

2.) Collecting the UCR

3.) The Accuracy of the UCR

1.) What is the Uniform Crime Report?

- Most widely cited source of aggregate criminal statistics
- FBI compiles records from 16,000 police departments in the U.S.
- Divided into index and non-index crimes



Uniform Crime Reports

Violent Crime

- **Indexed Crimes**
  - Criminal Homicide
  - Forcible Rape
  - Robbery
  - Aggravated assault
  - Burglary
  - Larceny/theft
  - Motor vehicle theft
  - Arson
- **Non-Indexed Crimes**
  - All others

Non-violent Crime

Non-Index Crimes (Part II Crimes)

- All crimes other than index crimes

- Examples: Simple assault, forgery and counterfeiting, fraud, embezzlement, prostitution and commercialized vice, drug violations, offenses against family and children, DWI, liquor offenses, disorderly conduct.

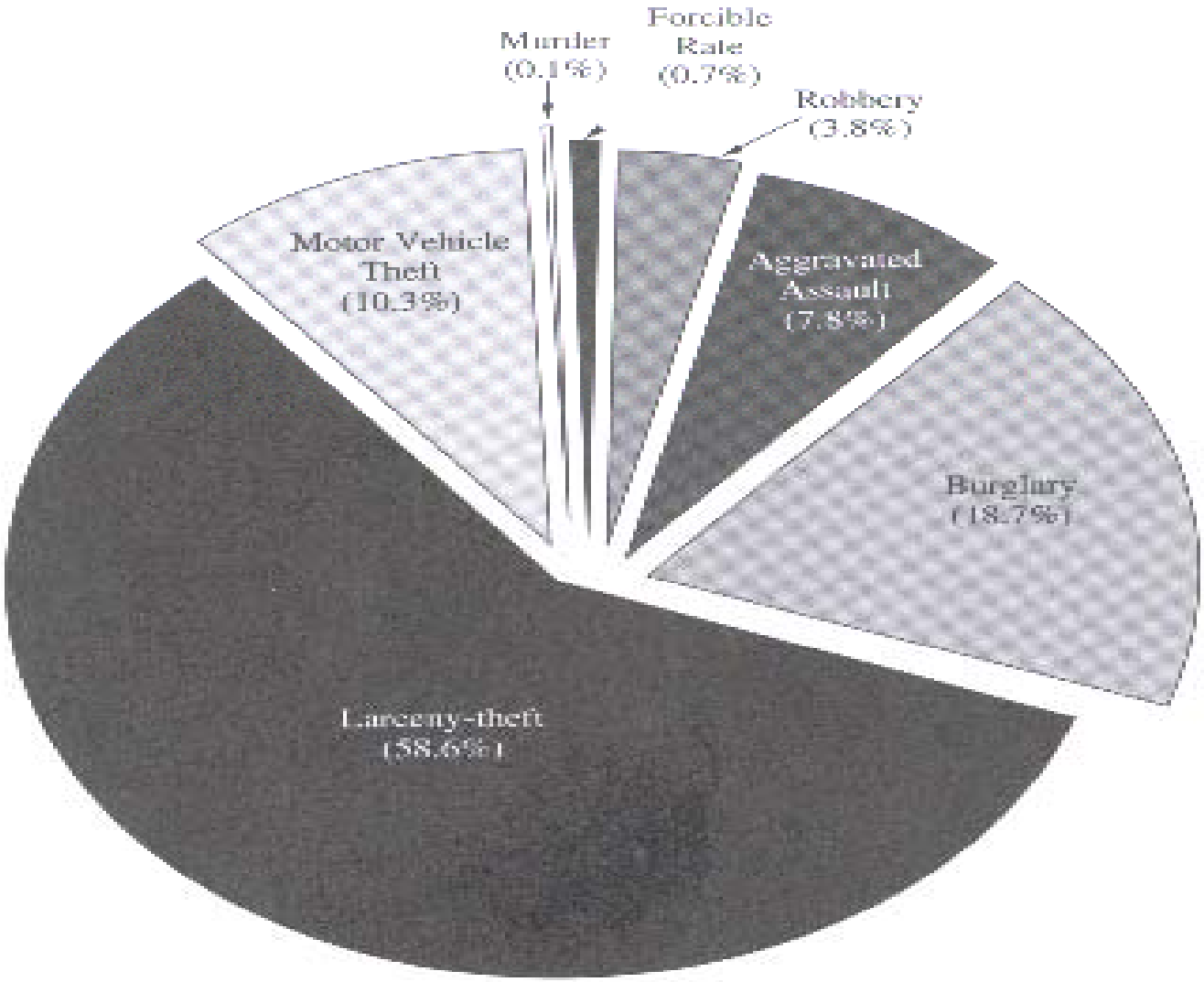


FIGURE 2.4 The Distribution of Crime Index Offenses, 1997

SOURCE: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1998, p. 9.

2.) Collecting the UCR

- Each month, agencies report:

A.) counts of index crimes taken from victim complaints, officers who discovered them, and other sources (false cases are eliminated).

B.) total crimes that were *cleared:*

a.) offender is arrested, charged, and prosecuted or b.) arrest is impossible.

TABLE 8.3

Crimes Cleared by Arrest

TYPE OF CRIME	PERCENT CLEARED
Murder	67
Forcible rape	52
Robbery	27
Aggravated assault	58
Burglary	14
Larceny	20
Motor vehicle theft	14
Arson	15
Overall clearance rate	21

SOURCE: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Crime Reports, 1996* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997).

How data are presented

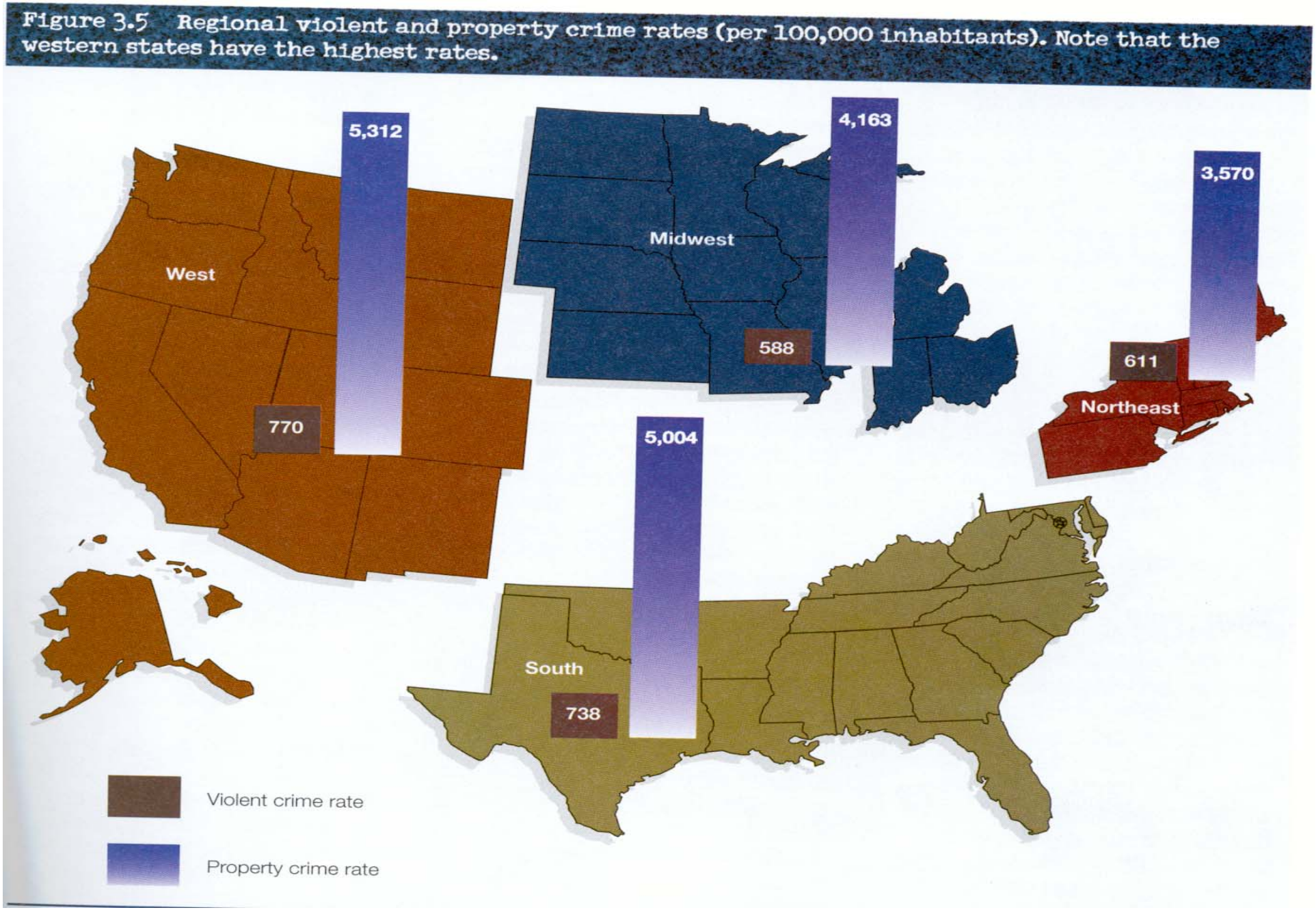
- **Raw figures** (21, 597 murders occurred 1995).
- **Percent change** in amount of crime between years.
- Crime rates per 100,000 people

Calculating Crime Rate

$$\frac{\text{Number of Reported Crimes}}{\text{Total Population}} \times 100{,}000 = \text{Rate per } 100{,}000$$

Example: 18 homicides in a population of 50,000.

(18/50,000) * 100,000 = 36 people per 100,000 people.



Regional Crime Rates

3.) Accuracy of UCR: Reporting Practices

- Many crimes are not reported by victims (fewer than 40%)

- “a private matter” ; “nothing could be done”

3.) Accuracy of UCR: Law enforcement practices

1.) Different recording practices

2.) Variable definitions

3.) Systematic errors

4.) Deliberately falsifying crime reports

5.) Professionalism and reporting techniques

3.) Accuracy of UCR: Methodological Problems

1.) Reports are voluntary and vary in accuracy

2.) Not all police departments submit reports

3.) For multiple crimes, only the most serious recorded

4.) Inconsistency of listing acts

5.) Definitions differ between FBI and departments

Official Statistics

- Sir Josiah Stamp (1940): "The government are very keen on amassing statistics. They collect them, raise them to the nth power, take the cube root, and prepare wonderful diagrams. But you must never forget that every one of these figures comes in the first instance from the village watchman, who just puts down what he damn pleases."
- Numbers of Offenses vs. Crime Rates (per 100,000)

Persons versus Property

- For crimes against persons (homicide, rape and assault) score one offense for each victim.
- For crimes against property (robbery, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson) score one offense for each distinct operation.

Example

(from UCR Reporting Handbook)

- A lone male with a gun appeared in a tavern and ordered 10 patrons and the owner to hand over their cash and jewelry. After obtaining the loot, the subject left.
- Score one robbery only.

Example the last

(from UCR Reporting Handbook)

- A thief enters a hotel, forcibly enters seven rooms, and steals articles from each. The rooms are occupied by guests.
- Score one burglary (the "hotel rule"; burglary likely reported by a single manager. If a robbery occurred in each room, would count as seven robberies.)

National Incident-Based Reporting

- Participating agencies will provide brief summary of individual incidents.

- Information on type of incident, characteristics of victim and offender, types and value of property stolen and recovered, and characteristics of persons arrested in connection with a crime incident.

Part II: Self-Report Surveys

Dark Figure of Crime

A ship's captain can only see that part of an iceberg that is above the water. Likewise, the public only sees visible, or reported crime. The dark figure of crime is that which the public does not see.

Self-Report Surveys

- Participants reveal information about their violations of the law

- Surveys administered in schools, prisons, homes, etc. (anonymity is usually promised)

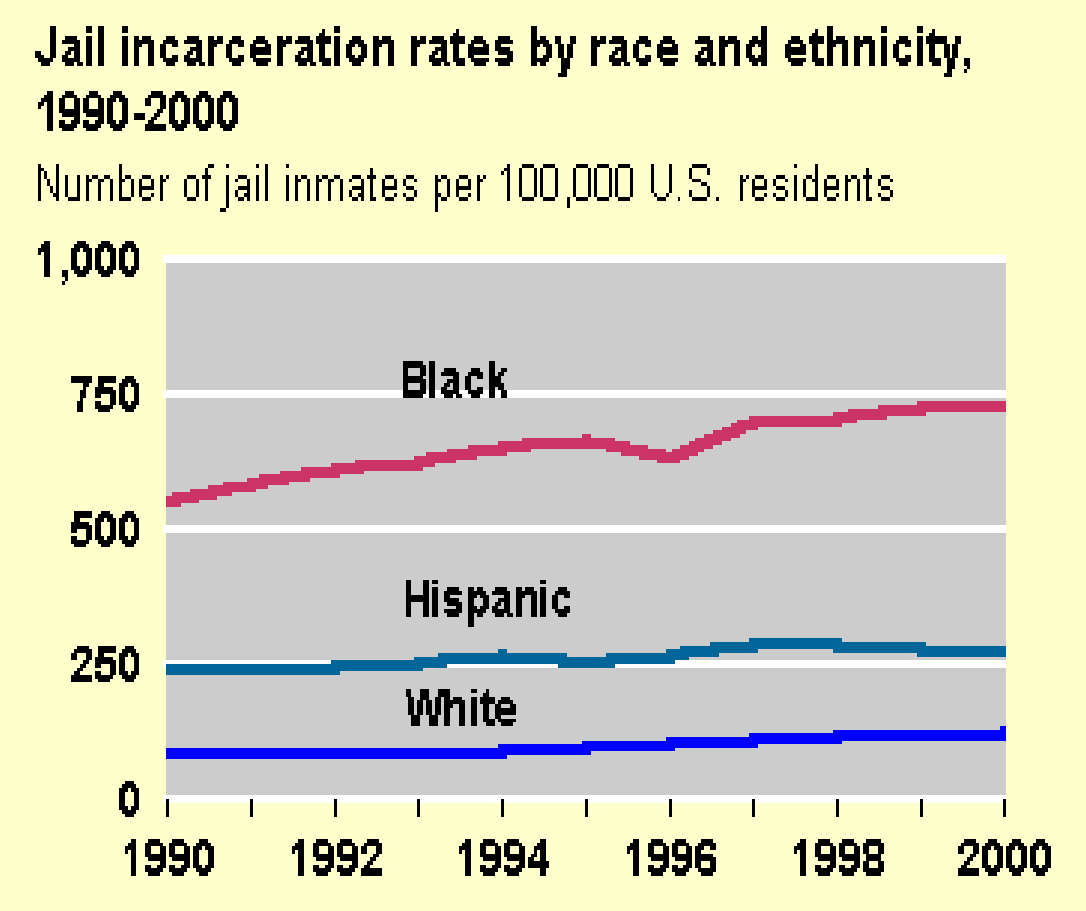
Benefits of Self-Reports

- Possible to estimate the number of people in the population who have committed illegal (or deviant) acts BUT NOT BEEN CAUGHT, and the frequency of their violations (e.g., drug abuse).

- Additional measures taken (age, ethnicity, attitudes, behaviors, personal traits). Facilitates testing of criminological theories.

Benefits of Self-reports cont.

- Do not depend on individuals being apprehended by police.
- Evaluate if racial bias exists in the criminal justice system.



Accuracy of Self-Reports

- Do respondents admit, exaggerate, and forget their deviant and criminal acts?

- Problems of comparisons and tests of reliability and validity. However, problems are surmountable?

- Problem of missing cases (e.g., students who do not go to school).

Part III. Victim Surveys

Victim Surveys

- Surveys that ask respondents to report their encounters with criminals or criminal events

- First national survey in 1966 found that the number of criminal victimizations was far higher than previously believed.

National Crime Victimization Survey

- Government survey of about 56,000 households and 120,000 individuals.
- Households interviewed twice a year for three years about victimizations suffered.
- 90% completion rate and considered an unbiased sample.

Problems with NCVS

- Over reporting due to misinterpretation by victims (e.g., open door is a burglary).
- Underreporting due to embarrassment, or forgetfulness.
- Does not measure victims' involvement in crime (e.g., drug use, murder)
- Sampling representative populations is problematic.

Were You a Victim of Crime?

Household Screen Questions

38. Now I'd like to ask some questions about crime. They refer only to the last 6 months: between _____ 1, 19__ and _____, 19__. During the last 6 months, did anyone break into or somehow illegally get into your (apartment/home), garage, or another building on your property?
   - ☐ Yes: How many times? _____
   - ☐ No

39. Other than the incident(s) just mentioned did you find a door jimmied, a lock forced, or any other signs of an ATTEMPTED break in?
   - ☐ Yes: How many times? _____
   - ☐ No

40. Was anything at all stolen that is kept outside your home or happened to be left out, such as a bicycle, a garden hose, or lawn furniture (other than any incidents already mentioned)?
   - ☐ Yes: How many times? _____
   - ☐ No

41. Did anyone take something belonging to you or to any member of this household, from a place where you or they were temporarily staying, such as a friend's or relative's home, a hotel or motel, or a vacation home?
   - ☐ Yes: How many times? _____
   - ☐ No

42. How many DIFFERENT motor vehicles (cars, trucks, motorcycles, etc.) were owned by you or any other member of this household during the last 6 months?
   - ☐ None: Skip to 45
   - ☐ 1
   - ☐ 2
   - ☐ 3
   - ☐ 4 or more

43. Did anyone steal, TRY to steal, or use (it/any of them) without permission?
   - ☐ Yes: How many times? _____
   - ☐ No

44. Did anyone steal or TRY to steal parts attached to (it/any of them), such as a battery, hubcaps, tape-deck, etc.?
   - ☐ Yes: How many times? _____
   - ☐ No

Source: National Crime Victimization Survey screening instrument. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1987.

InfoTrac College Edition Research

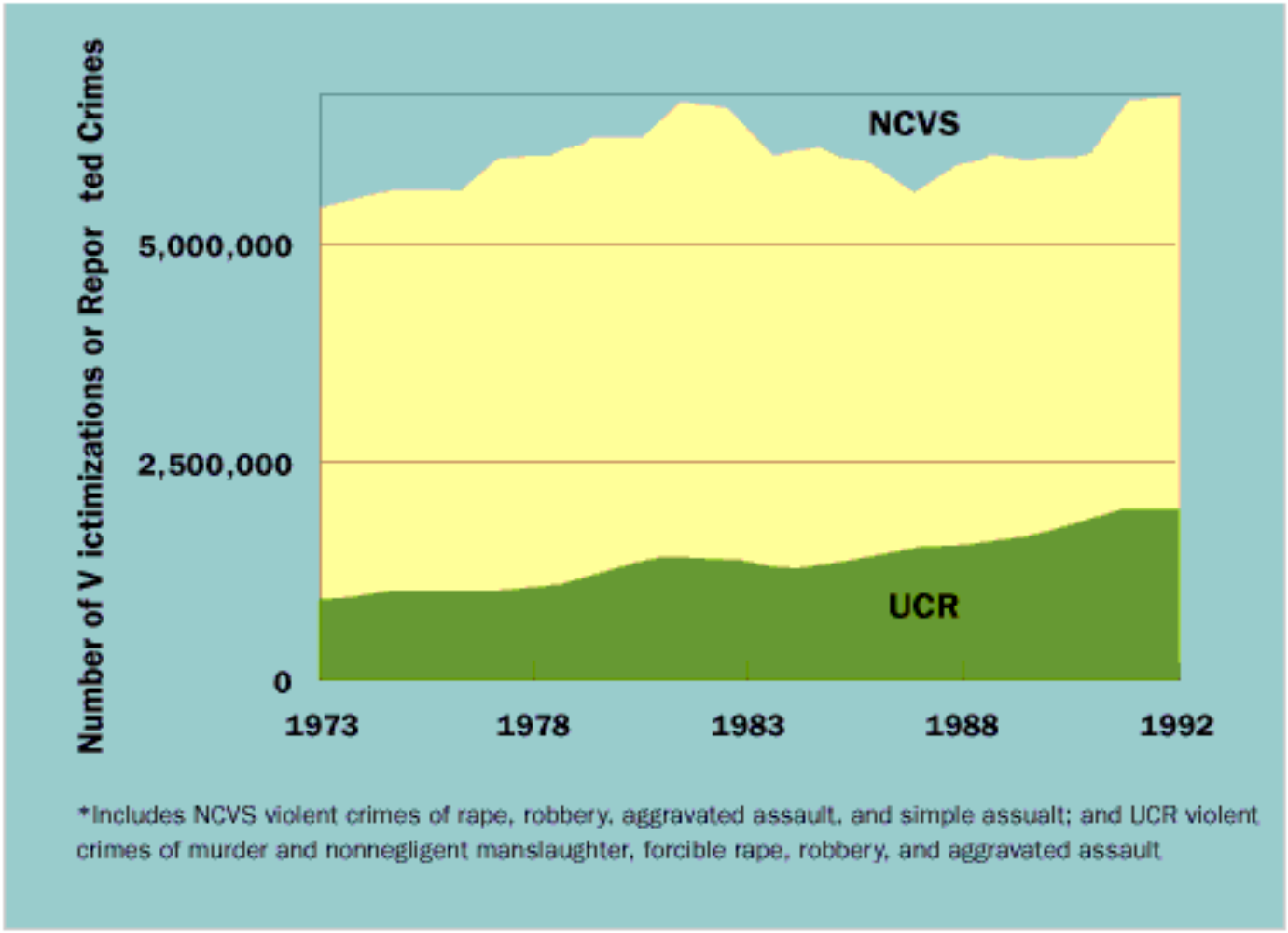
Search the term "Victims." What issues exist in the current literature regarding victims of crime?

Part IV. Compatibility and Trends

Are Crime Statistics Sources Compatible?

- Each measure has strengths and weaknesses that results in different measures of crime.
- Although different, UCR and NCVS records similar trends and patterns (age, sex, and changes of crime rates through time).
- Self-report data: Can serious offenders be sampled and their responses trusted?

- **The Volume of Violent Crime as Measured by Police Statistics and Victimization Surveys**



*Includes NCVS violent crimes of rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assualt; and UCR violent crimes of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault

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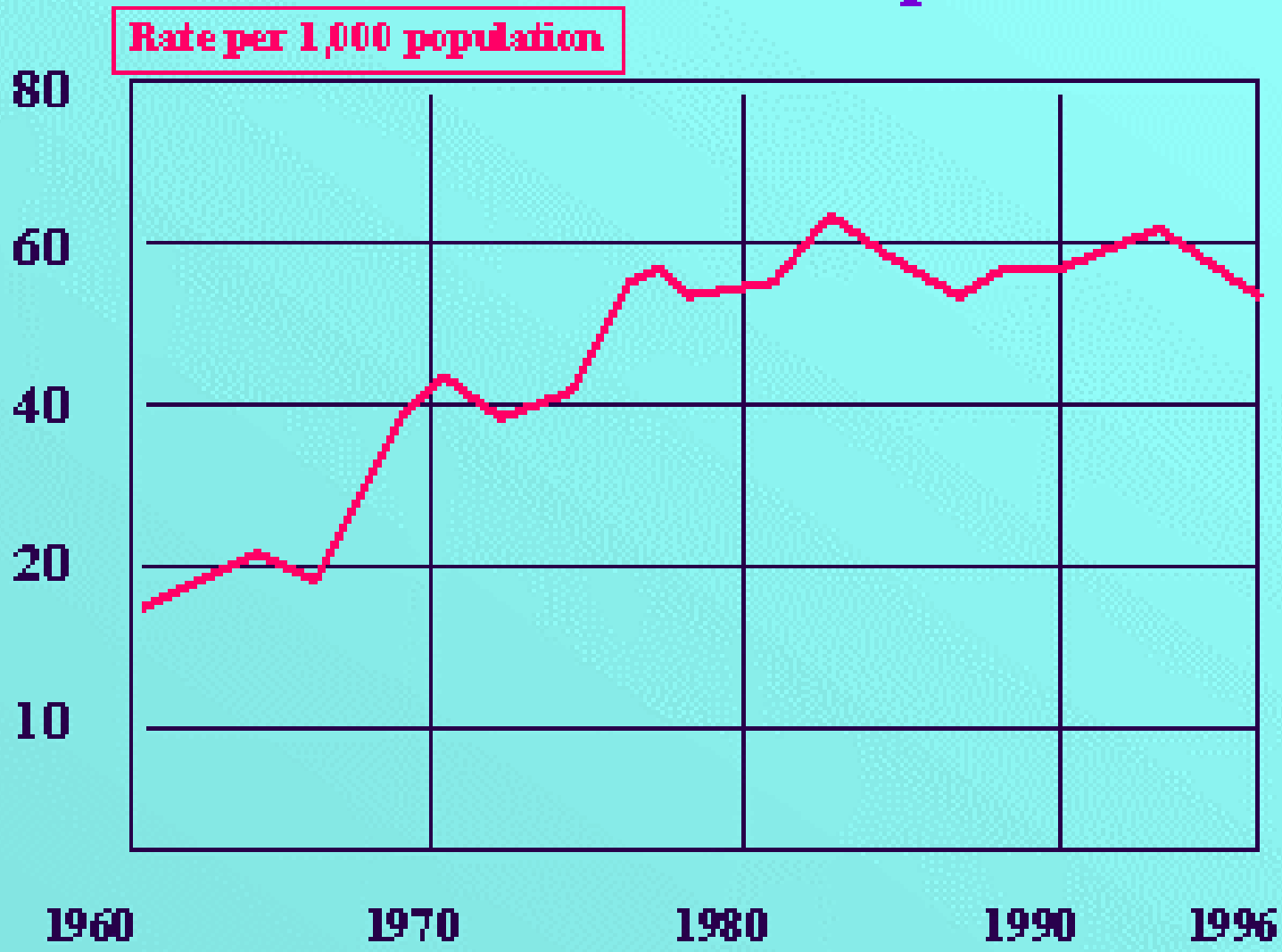
Trends from UCR Data

- Crime rates increased gradually from 1933 (when UCR started) until the 1960's. Crime rates increased faster following 1960's through the 70's and 80's.

- Crime rates have recently started to decline.

Crime Rate Trends
Uniform Crime Reports



Victim Surveys

- About 40,000 million crimes occur each year

- NCVS mirrors UCR trends of recent decline of crime rates

Self-Report Trends

- Illustrates that MANY people violate laws (most common self-report offences are truancy, alcohol abuse, false ID, fighting, marijuana, vandalism).

- Drug and alcohol use increased in the 1970's and leveled off in the 1980's

- No visible reduction in self-reported criminality

Lecture 4B: Public Perceptions of Crime

- Video: Bowling for Columbine

Crime Viewed as a Massive Social Problem

- In general, U.S. citizens are obsessed with the crime problem and are fearful

- This is somewhat unsurprising since crime has enormous costs on society. National Institute of Justice estimates that the cost of crime (including pain, suffering, and loss of quality of life) is $450 billion dollars a year.

Mass Media Distorts the Public's View of Crime

- The media distort the volume of crime (murder .2% of crime, yet 26.2% of all newspaper reports of crime)

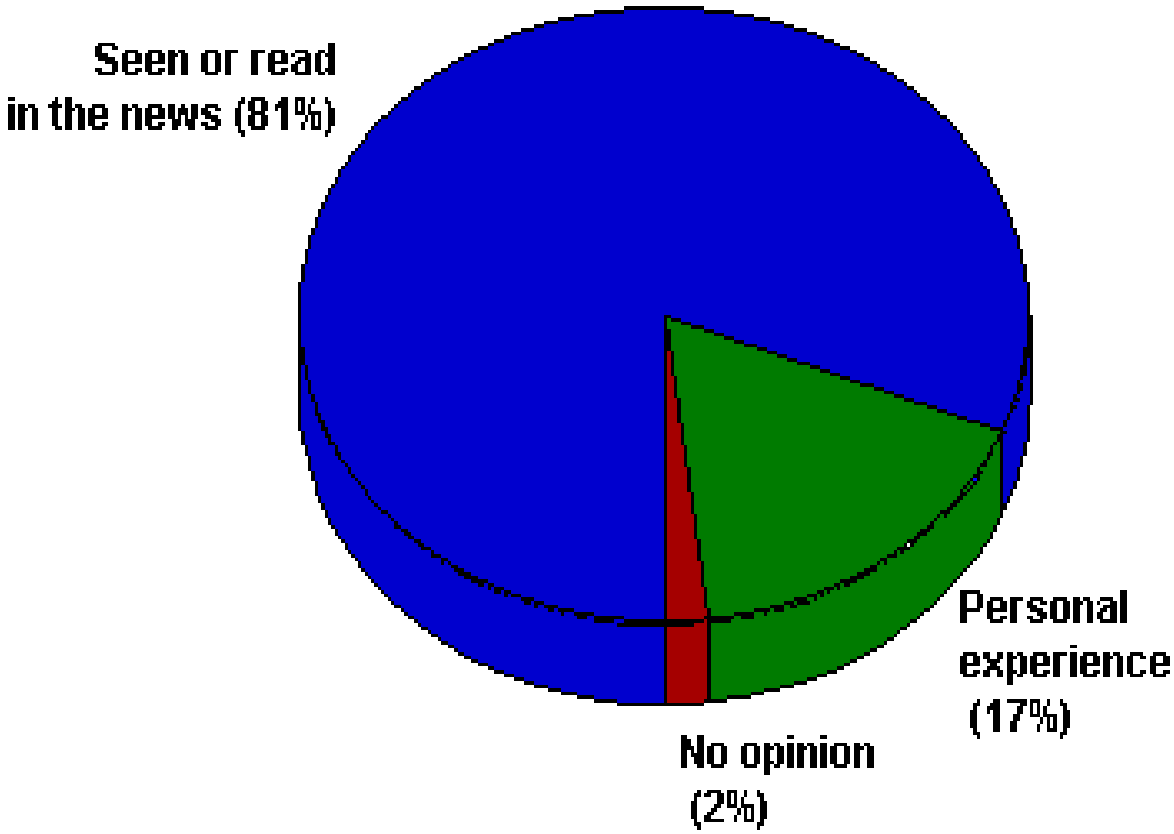
- The media distort crime trends over time.

- The media distort the incidence of nonviolent crime (theft 47% of crimes reported to police, yet only 4% of crimes in newspapers).

Crime: People's Chief Concerns

Large majorities of Americans say the news media influences their perceptions about crime

When you say the crime problem in the country is bad, is that based on what you've seen or read in the news, or is it based on your own personal experience?



Source: ABC News 6/00

Perceptions of Neighborhood Crime, 1995

- From 1991 onwards, about 7% of households in a large national sample identified crime as a problem.
- Trends in crime perceptions do not always match trends in crime rates as measured by victimization data. Although crime rates dropped from 1994 to 1995, crime perceptions remained constant.

Perceptions and Race

- In 1995, blacks were 2.5 times as likely than whites to say that crime is a major problem in their area.
- However, the victimization data do not match up with this pattern very well; In 1995, **27%** of black households and **23%** of white households reported one or more victimizations of crime.

Perceptions of Crime: Sample from the state of Florida

Survey Research Team

- Ted Chiricos -- Principal Investigator
- Marc Gertz -- Research Associate
- Sarah Eschholz -- Research Assistant
- Mike Hogan -- Research Assistant
- Constance Kostelac -- Research Assistant
- Ranee McEntire -- Research Assistant
- Kristin Winokur -- Research Assistant

http://www.criminology.fsu.edu/TA/fear/

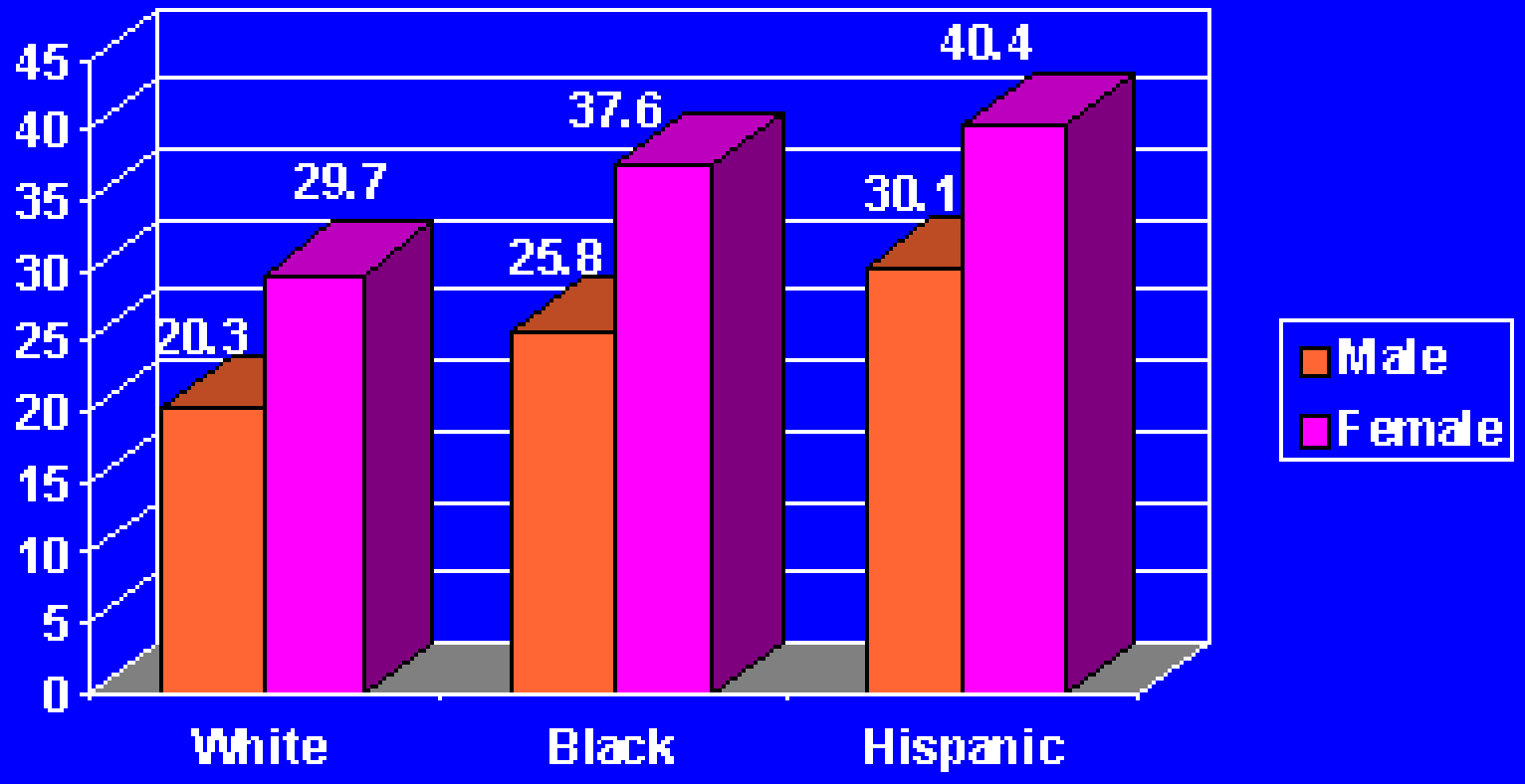
Survey Characteristics

- Random sample: N = 3,000
- Calls Made: August, September 1996
- Four Main Areas:
  - Fear of Crime
  - Perceived Risk of Crime
  - Perceptions of Law Enforcement
  - Perceptions About Juvenile Crime & Justice

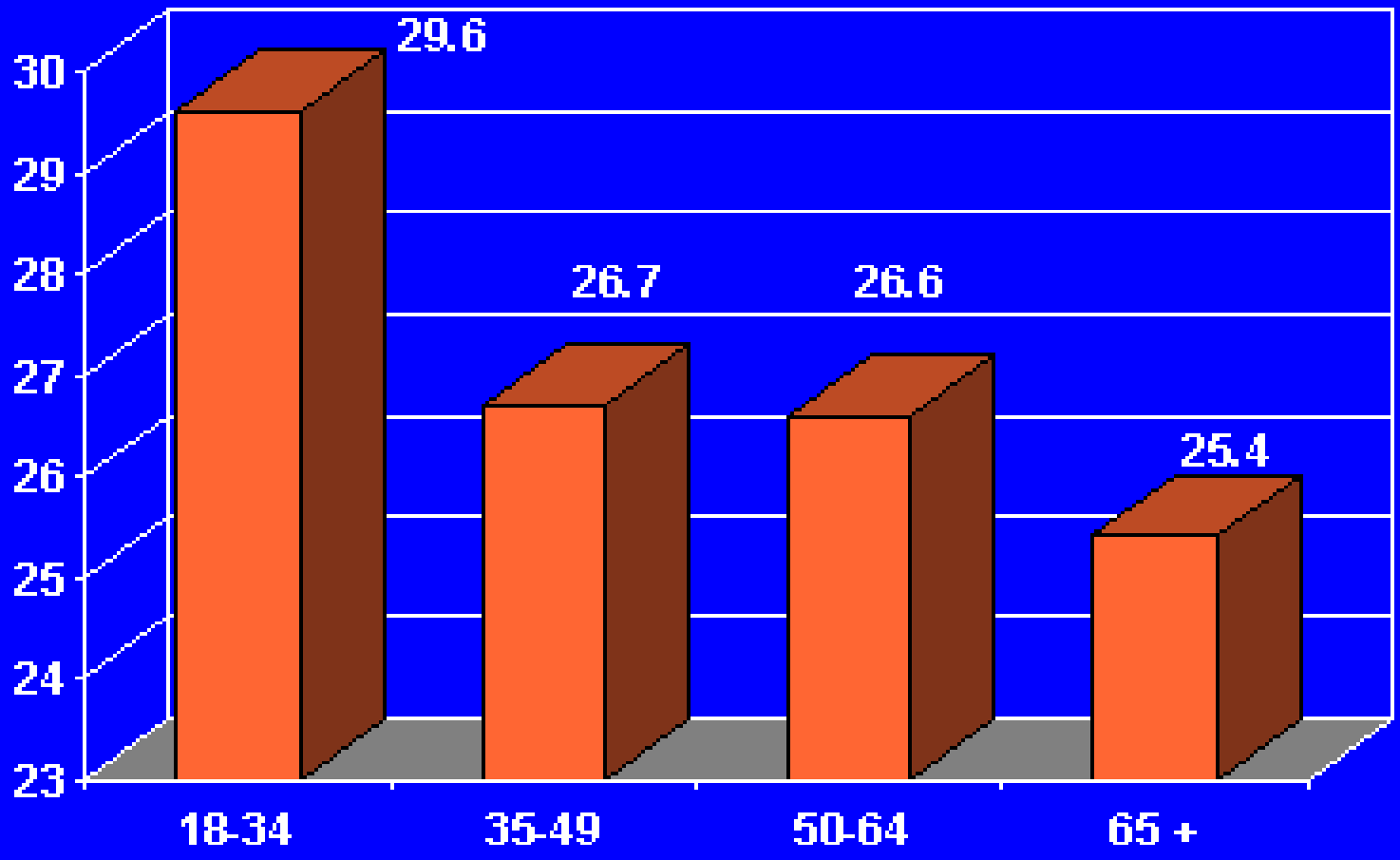
Measuring Fear of Crime

- "On a scale from one to ten, with one being **not at all fearful** and ten being **very fearful**, how much would you say you fear:
  - Being Murdered
  - Being Sexually Assaulted
  - Being Robbed or Mugged
  - Having Home Broken Into When You Are There
  - Having Home Broken Into When You Are Away
  - Having Your Car Stolen

Mean Fear of Crime by Sex & Race

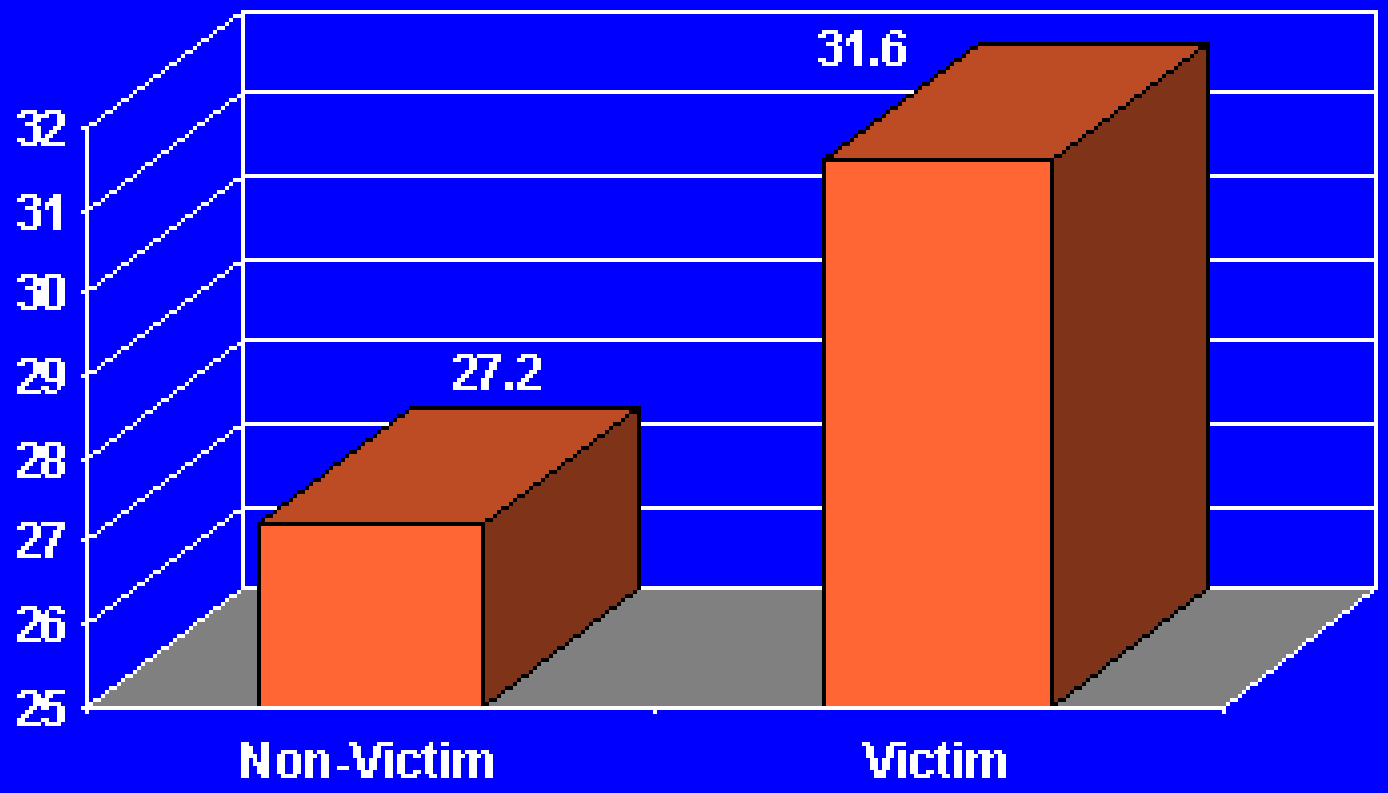


Mean Fear of Crime by Age

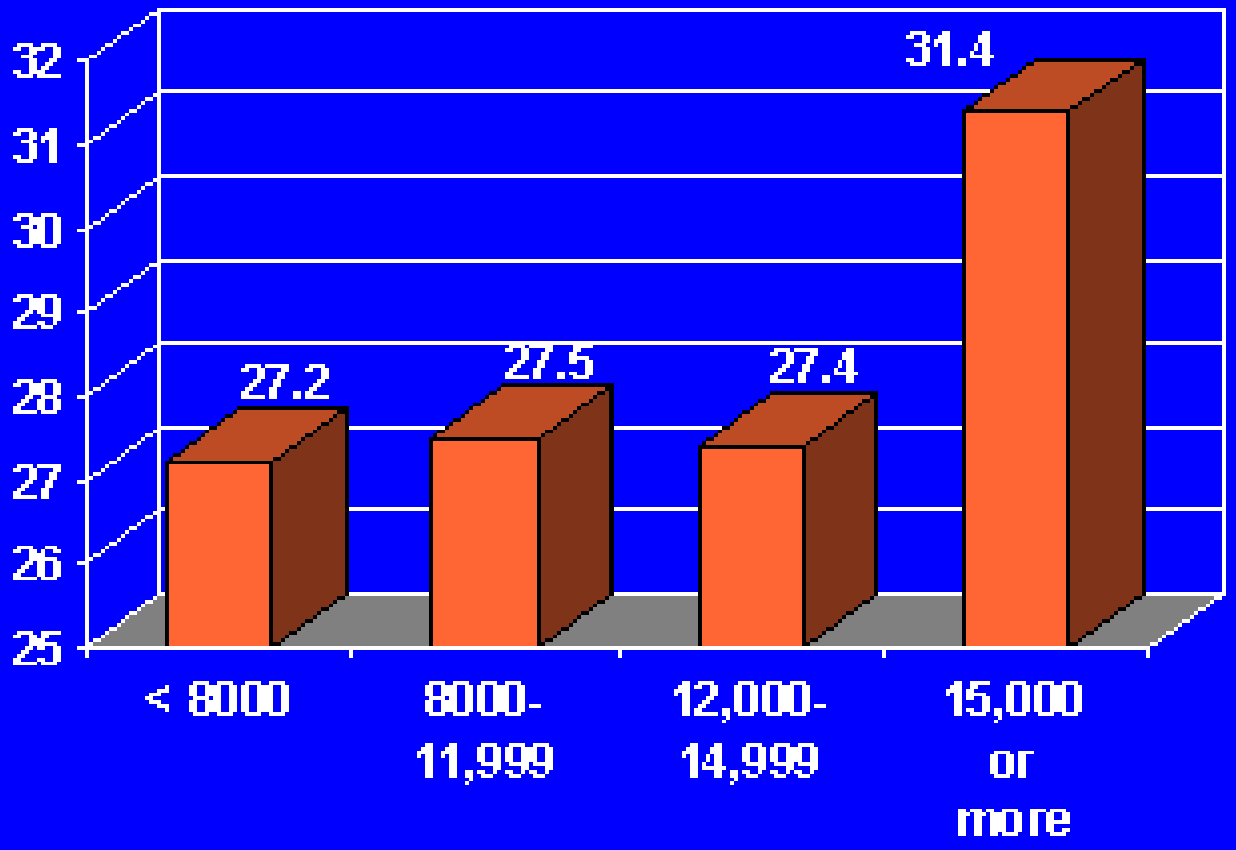


Recent research contradicts the conventional expectation that fear increases with age.

Mean Fear of Crime by Victimization Experience



Mean Fear of Crime by City Index Crime Rate

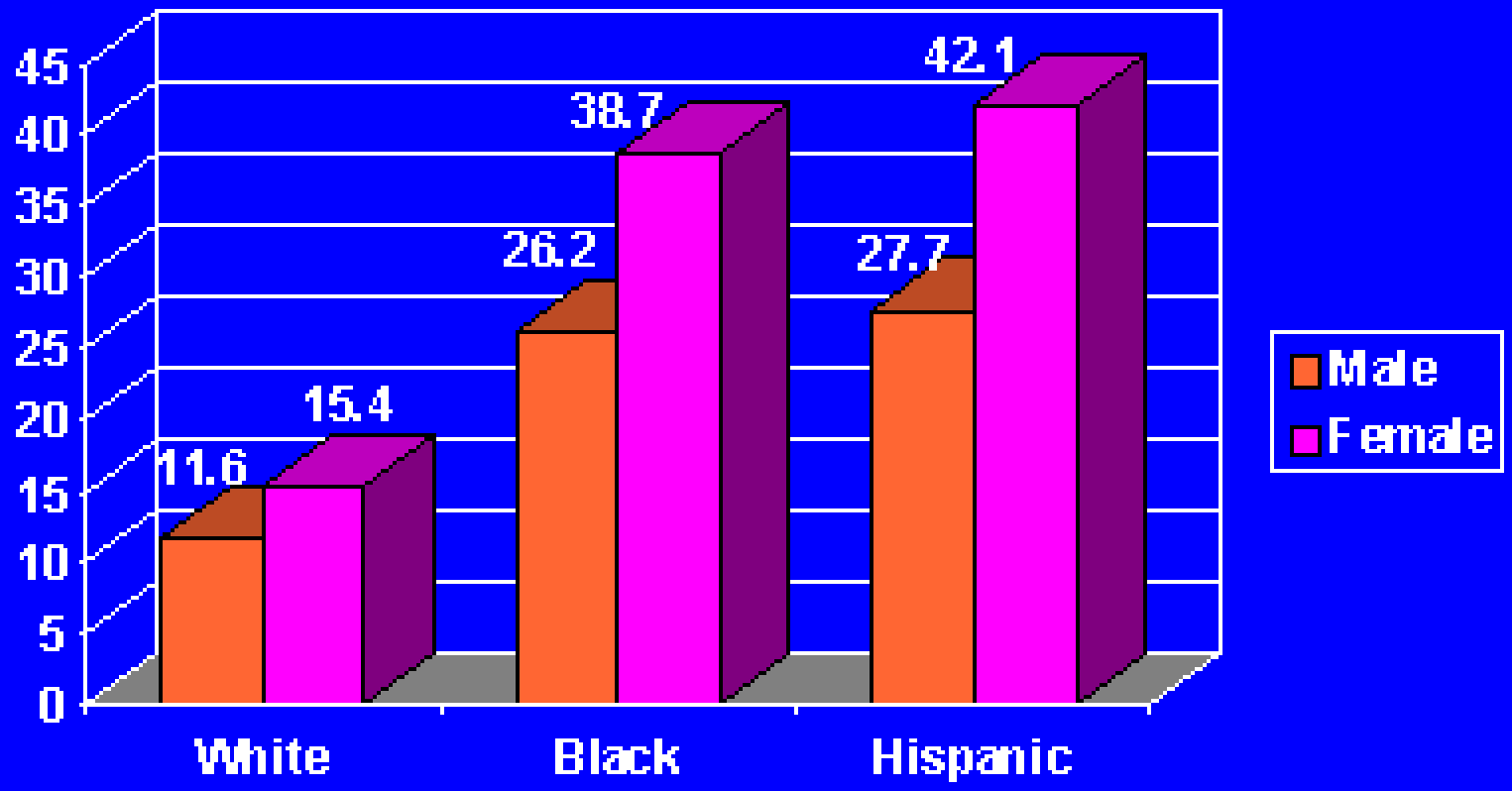


Levels of fear are unrelated to city crime rate until that rate is double the state average. Even then, fear increases by just 15%.

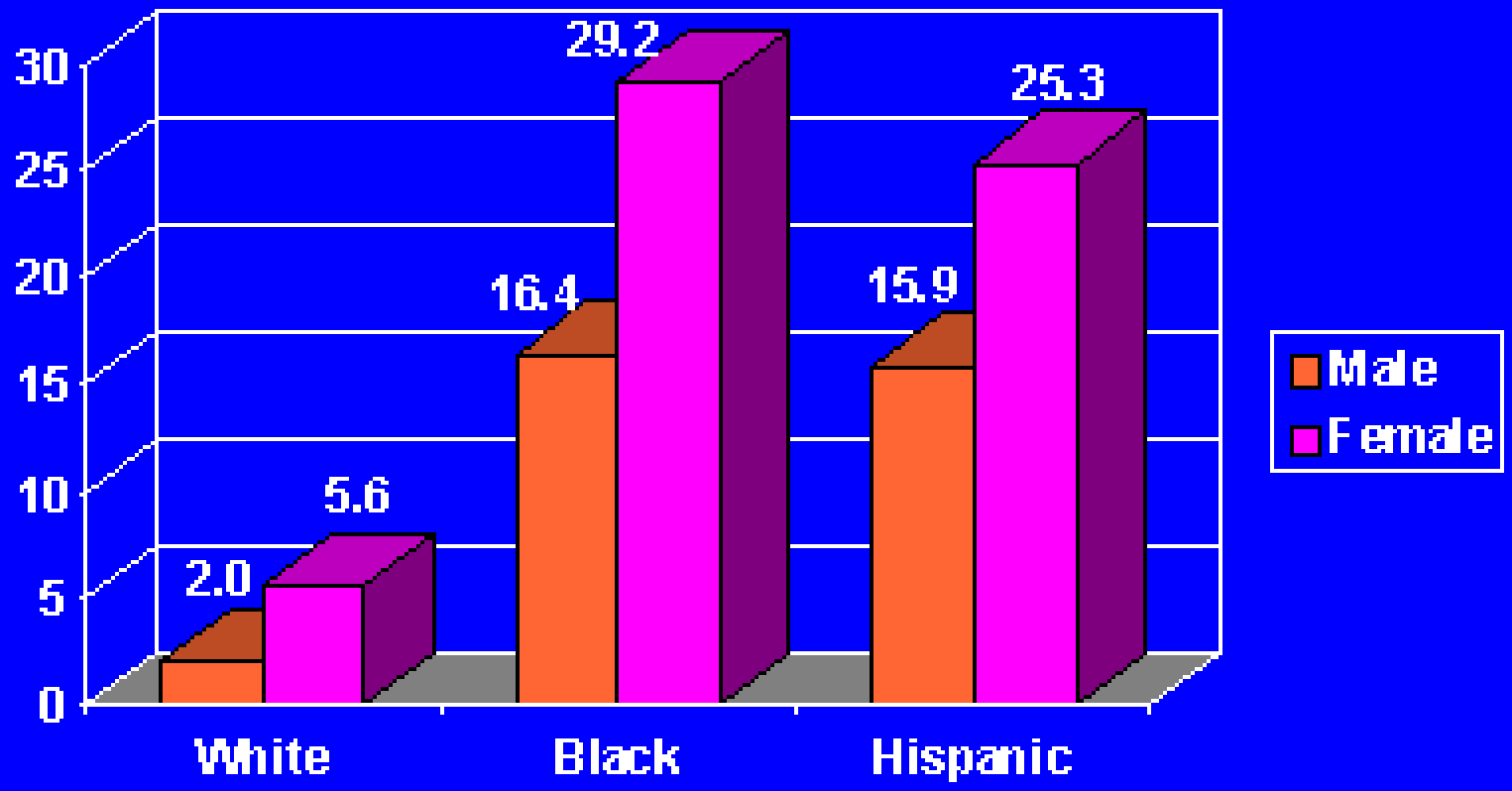
Measuring Perceived Risk

- ON A SCALE FROM ONE TO TEN, WHERE ONE MEANS **NOT AT ALL LIKELY** AND TEN MEANS **VERY LIKELY**, HOW LIKELY DO YOU THINK IT IS THAT IN THE NEXT YEAR, YOU WILL:
  - BE MURDERED
  - BE SEXUALLY ASSAULTED
  - BE ROBBED OR MUGGED
  - HAVE YOUR CAR STOLEN
  - HAVE SOMEONE BREAK INTO YOUR HOME
    - OCCUPIED & UNOCCUPIED

Risk of Burglary while Away
Pct. "Likely" by Sex & Race



Risk of Being Murdered
Pct. "Likely" by Sex & Race



"Likely" is 8 or more on a 10 point scale of perceived risk.