

## VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS: Myths and Realities about Crime

### Popular Images of Victims and Offenders: "Mad Angry Black Woman"

Bethany Storro's face revealed scars from an incident in September 2010. This twentysomething, white female reported to police that she was at a coffee shop when a stranger spoke to her and threw acid in her face. What type of person would do this? Her report to the police offered a description of the unnamed offender: black female. An indictment of modern race relations: it was a racial hoax. Newspaper reports referred to Storro as "obviously deeply troubled," but "she was sane enough to make a calculated decision to maximize sympathy and deflect suspicion. She blamed it on a black person."<sup>1</sup> The "mad black woman imagery" reflects a disturbing imagery present in modern society about the linkages between race and crime.

The news media exert a powerful impact on how Americans think about crime and justice. Unfortunately, the image the media create is often wildly distorted. Even worse, many of those distorted images have serious racial implications, perpetuating racial stereotypes about criminals and their victims. This chapter attempts to cut through those distorted images and present an evidence-based picture of victims and offenders in America.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this chapter, we describe the social context of crime in the United States. The chapter starts with a discussion of the types of crimes and criminals that catch the attention of the American public and then presents the picture of

the typical victim and typical offender from government victimization and arrest reports.

After you have read this chapter:

1. You will be able to sort your way through basic data on crimes and victims and be able to spot occasions when the news media present a distorted picture of crime in America.
2. You will understand the basic patterns of who commits major crimes and who the principal victims are. You will have a solid grasp of the racial- and ethnic-group patterns related to both victims and offenders.
3. You will understand the concept of "racial hoaxes" and the role they play in distorting public understanding of crime.
4. You will understand the category of "hate crimes," with special reference to race and ethnicity, and how they are different in important respects from what are called "street crimes" (e.g., robbery and burglary).
5. You will understand the different theoretical explanations for the racial and ethnic gap in offending and victimization.
6. You will have a good understanding of the racial and ethnic aspects of gangs in America.

## MEDIA AND CRIME

### Racial Hoaxes

Racial hoaxes have a particularly powerful impact on public images of victims and offenders. Katheryn K. Russell asserts that a racial hoax occurs "when someone fabricates a crime and blames it on another person because of his race OR when an actual crime has been committed and the perpetrator falsely blames someone because of his race."<sup>2</sup> Hoaxes receive a lot of publicity because they are typically sensational and violent crimes that grab media attention. People remember them because of their sensational character. One infamous racial hoax was the case of Susan Smith's assertion that an African-American man stole her car and kidnapped her children.<sup>3</sup> Smith was a white woman. It was later revealed that she drove her car, with her children trapped in their car seats, into a nearby lake. Russell argues that such hoaxes have social and psychological consequences for individuals and the community and significant legal costs.<sup>4</sup> In this 1994 case in South Carolina, state and federal officials spent nine days looking for the alleged offender before she confessed to driving the car into the lake and killing her children. Smith's attempt to blame someone else for the crime was successful (even if temporarily) because it tapped in to widely held societal fears about the typical criminal.

Russell documents known racial hoaxes in the United States from 1987 to 1996. Although she found that racial hoaxes "are perpetrated by people of all

racism, classes, geographic regions and ages."<sup>5</sup> the majority of racial hoax cases were perpetrated by a white person charging an African-American person (70 percent of the cases), with a smaller number of African Americans charging whites in racial hoaxes.<sup>6</sup> (In this discussion, the "perpetrator" is the person who makes a false claim of a crime, not a person who actually commits the alleged crime. Hoax perpetrators have been charged with filing false police reports, but this occurs in less than half of the documented cases.<sup>7</sup>

In her book, *The Color of Crime*, Russell makes a compelling argument for a strong legal response to the perpetration of racial hoaxes. She argues that legislation should be passed, similar to hate-crime legislation, that allows for a sentence enhancement to such charges as filing a false police report in the case of racial hoaxes. Such a law would be similar to one proposed in New Jersey in 1995; it would punish citizens who falsely incriminate another as the perpetrator of a crime or submit a fictitious report based on race, color, or ethnicity (as well as religion and sexual orientation).<sup>8</sup> In addition to a sentence enhancement (fine, fee, additional supervision/incarceration), the person convicted would have to reimburse the law enforcement agencies whose search actions resulted from the racial hoax.

By 2012, the white female by the name of Bonnie Sweeten, who became known as the "Disney World Hoax Mom," would receive both state and federal prison sentences for her actions in 2009. The hoax was a 911 call to police in Philadelphia that "claimed she and her 9-year-old daughter had been carjacked by two black men. She said they'd been stuffed into the trunk of another vehicle." The "manhunt" that resulted from another black on white kidnapping charge ended when the FBI "found the pair unharmed the next day at Disney World." It was revealed that her claim of kidnapping by black men was to cover her taking money from an elderly relative and the stealing hundreds of thousands of dollars from the law firm she worked for. Her state and federal prison term of eight years and the one million dollars in retribution did not result from the racial hoax abduction story, however, but from the financial fraud crimes. What makes it seem expedient to make such racially charged claims?

### Race and Gender of Crime Victims

Some crime stories capture the attention of the public more than others, arguably because of the nature of the offense, the type of victim, and the type of offender. Recently, media outlets have been charged with favoring the presentation of some crime stories over others. The media consistently portray violent crime as more common than property crime when in fact violent crimes are only about 10 percent of all reported crimes.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the media often suggest crime is increasing at astronomical rates when in fact the great American crime drop (see Chapter 1) brought crime rates to historic lows.

Some critics also charge that the media show bias in the coverage of missing persons, arguing that print and television coverage of stories focuses on missing white women and tends to ignore missing women of color. *Essence* magazine contends, for example, that "when black women disappear, the media silence is deafening."<sup>12</sup> Specifically, some media critics charge that attention the media give to cases such as Len

Peterson, Natalee Holloway, and Chandra Levy far outweighs the emphasis placed on cases such as Evelyn Hernandez, LaToyia Figueroa, and Ardena Carter.

Perhaps the typical American recognizes the details of one of the following pairs of missing person victims but not the other.

The first pair of victims is connected by time and location/geography:

In 2004, Laci Peterson, a missing white female who was eight months pregnant, was found dead in the San Francisco Bay Area. Most Americans know not just the details of her disappearance from her home, the search for her whereabouts, and the subsequent recovery of her body but also that her husband, Scott Peterson, was charged and convicted of this offense.

Few Americans are aware that a few months before Laci Peterson's body was discovered, the decapitated body of a young, pregnant Hispanic woman, Evelyn Hernandez, was found. Details of her missing person/murder case were not extensively covered by the national media.

The second pair of victims is connected by time, but not geography:

In May 2005, Natalee Holloway, a white American teenager, was reported missing in Aruba. Her story made headlines almost from the moment that she was reported missing. Print and news media covered the incident extensively for weeks following her disappearance.

In July 2005, 24-year-old LaToyia Figueroa, who was pregnant, was reported missing. Her body was later recovered, and her boyfriend was charged with murder. However, her story was initially ignored by the national media, some suggest because she was not white.

The third pair of victims is connected by time and occupation:

In 2003, Chandra Levy, a white female intern in Washington, DC, disappeared on a morning jog. Considerable attention was paid to her search and recovery in nationwide news stories.<sup>13</sup>

In 2003, Ardena Carter, a young African American graduate student in Georgia, went missing on her way to the library. Her disappearance and the subsequent recovery of her body garnered no more than regional news coverage.<sup>14</sup>

Critics of the media coverage of these types of missing person cases argue that the public is being misled about who is really missing.<sup>15</sup> Department of Justice data, for example, indicate that in California, nearly twice as many Hispanic women (7,453) are missing than white women (4,032).<sup>16</sup> The National Center for Missing Adults reports that of more than 47,000 reported missing women in a recent year, 29,553 were white or Hispanic, 13,859 were African American, 1,199 were Asian American, and 685 were Native American.<sup>17</sup> Of these missing persons, 53 percent were men.

This pattern of more media emphasis on white, female missing persons is not necessarily intentional; nonetheless it does signal a devaluation of the lives of nonwhite victims of crime. Professor Todd Boyd notes that the media's decision

to focus on white women and not women of color may be "an unconscious decision about who matters and who doesn't."<sup>18</sup> He asserts, "In general, there is an assumption that crime is such a part of black and Latino culture that these things happen all the time. In many people's minds it's regarded as being commonplace and not a big deal."

### A BROADER PICTURE OF THE CRIME VICTIM

Our perceptions of crime are shaped to a large extent by the highly publicized crimes featured on the nightly news and sensationalized in newspapers. We read about young African American or Hispanic males who sexually assault, rob, and murder whites, and we assume that these crimes are typical. We assume that the typical crime is a violent crime, that the typical victim is white, and that the typical offender is African American or Hispanic. As Charles Silberman observes, this topic is difficult to address:

In the end, there is no escaping the question of race and crime. To say this is to risk, almost guarantee, giving offense; it is impossible to talk honestly about the role of race in American life without offending and angering both whites and blacks—and Hispanic browns and Native American reds as well. The truth is terrible, on all sides; and we are all too accustomed to the soothing euphemisms and inflammatory rhetoric with which the subject is cloaked.<sup>25</sup>

In short, compelling evidence suggests that the most widely held picture of crime, criminal, and crime victim in America is at best incomplete and at worst inaccurate, particularly as it concerns race and ethnicity of crime victims.

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#### FOCUS ON AN ISSUE

##### Central Park Jogger Case: Update

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In 1989, a 28-year-old white female jogging in Central Park was brutally raped. The perpetrators were identified as young and African American. The media reports coined a new term "wilding." This term was meant to reflect the super-predator image of a band of young, probably gang affiliated, minority males. Shortly after the incident was reported, a group of five minority male teenagers (ages 14–16) were arrested, charged, and convicted of attacking and raping "the Central Park Jogger."

Four from the convicted group spent roughly 7 years each in prison, while the final defendant spent 13 years in prison.

The Central Park Jogger Case has long been used to illustrate the media overemphasis on certain types of crimes (violent crime), with certain types of crime victims (white females), and with certain types of offenders (a "gang" of young, minority males). Does this incident reflect a "typical" criminal event? Many people believe that it does: a white victim falling prey to the

violence of minority gang activity. But the evidence suggests that it is *not* the typical criminal event. First, more than 80 percent of crimes reported to the police are property crimes.<sup>21</sup> Second, a disproportionate number of crime victims are minorities. Third, interracial (between-race) crimes are the exception, not the rule. Finally, not all group activity is gang activity, not all gang actions are criminal, and not all gang members are racial or ethnic minorities.

An article in the *New York Times* several weeks after the well-publicized incident described here helps put this victimization in perspective. A total of 29 rapes were reported in the city that week (April 16–22, 1989), with 17 African-American female victims, 7 Hispanics, 3 whites, and 2 Asians.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the typical rape victim was in fact a *minority* female. Although the 29 reports from the New York Police Department did not indicate the race of the offender, other sources, including the national victimization data discussed later in this chapter, demonstrate that rape is predominantly an intraracial (within-race) crime.<sup>23</sup>

Subsequent to the investigation of this event, five young males of color were eventually convicted and incarcerated for perpetrating this attack, each serving up to 8 years in prison. In 2002, with the assistance of DNA analysis, it was revealed that the five convicted youths were not

the actual offenders.<sup>24</sup> The actual offender has now been identified and has confessed to the offense.<sup>25</sup> Note that these details became known only after the young offenders had served their sentences. Thus, this infamous case is an example of wrongful prosecution based on faulty police work, including very questionable interrogation techniques, that had a devastating impact on young men of color.

After DNA evidence lead police to identify the correct assailant in this case, the five convicted men seek exoneration of their convictions. In 2002, the Manhattan District Attorney supported the call that the original verdict be vacated. It is not always clear how the state should respond to compensate victims of wrongful conviction. In their civil suit against the city of New York, the defendants “accused the city’s police and prosecutors with false arrest, malicious prosecution and a racially motivated conspiracy to deprive the men of their civil rights”.<sup>25</sup> This case has been in the federal courts for over a decade.<sup>26</sup> How should these men be compensated for this “wrongful prosecution”? Recently, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio stated that there is a “moral obligation to right this injustice.” *The New York Times* reports that a settlement has been reached for \$40 million, some 25 years, after the injustice and that “the settlement averages roughly \$1 million for each year of imprisonment for the men.”

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Victimization data, in fact, reveal that people of color are more likely than whites in most circumstances to be victimized by crime.

In the sections that follow, we use victimization data to paint a broad picture of the crime victim, allowing for a view of which racial and ethnic groups are disproportionately the victims of crime. We begin by discussing the National Crime Victimization Survey, the source of most data on criminal victimization in the United States. We then compare the household victimization rates of Non Hispanic African Americans, Non Hispanic Whites, Non Hispanic Other and Hispanic. Personal victimization rates (property and violent offense) are then compared for these groups as well.

### The National Crime Victimization Survey

The most systematic source of victimization information is the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). The survey, which began in 1973, is conducted by the Bureau of Census for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). Survey data are used to produce annual estimates of the number and rate of personal and household victimizations for the nation as a whole and for urban, suburban, and rural comparisons.<sup>27</sup>

Once a household is selected for the survey, interviews are conducted at six-month intervals to ask whether household members have been the victims of selected major household and personal crimes during the last six months. Information is collected about/from persons aged 12 and older who are members of the household selected for the sample. The sample is chosen on the basis of the most recent census data to be representative of the nation as a whole. The NCVS data presented here are estimates based on the interviews that reflect a nationally representative sample of 90,380 households and 158,090 persons, aged 12 years and older. The response rates for the 2014 survey were very high: 84 percent of eligible households and 87 percent of eligible persons responded.<sup>28</sup>

Members of selected households are contacted either in person or by phone every six months for three years. Household questionnaires are completed to describe the demographic characteristics of the household (income, number of members, and so on). The race and ethnicity of the adult completing the household questionnaire is recorded from self-report information as the race and ethnicity of the household. Starting in 2003, respondents can self-report more than one race. Incident questionnaires are completed for both household offenses and personal victimizations. The designated head of the household is questioned about the incidence of household burglary, household larceny, and motor-vehicle theft. Personal victimization incident questionnaires are administered to household members aged 12 and older, probing them to relay any victimization incidents of rape, robbery, assault, and personal larceny. Those who report victimizations to interviewers are asked a series of follow-up questions about the nature of the crime and the response to the crime. Those who report personal victimizations are also asked to describe the offender and their relationship (if any) with the offender.

Here is a sample of the questions from the NCVS<sup>29</sup>:

Question 36a. I'm going to read some examples that will give you an idea of the kinds of crime this study covers. As I go through them, tell me if any of these happened to you in the last six months, that is since \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_.

Was something belonging to YOU stolen, such as

- (a) Things that you carry, like luggage, a wallet, purse, briefcase
- (b) Clothing, jewelry, or cell phone
- (c) Bicycle or sports equipment .... (etc).

41a. ... has anyone attacked or threatened you in any of these ways

- (a) With any weapon, for instance, a gun, or knife ...
- (d) Any rape, attempted rape of other type of sexual attack ...
- (g) Any attack or threat or use of force by anyone at all? Please mention it even if you are not certain it was a crime.

In many ways, the NCVS produces a more complete picture of crime and the characteristics of those who are victimized by crime than official police records. Most important, it includes victimizations not reported to the police. As the NCVS has consistently reported for over 40 years, only slightly more than one-third of all crimes are reported. In addition, the survey includes questions designed to elicit detailed information concerning the victim, the characteristics of the offender(s), and the context of the victimization. This information is used to calculate age-, sex-, and race-specific estimates of victimization. In addition, estimates of interracial and intraracial crime can be calculated. Furthermore, supplements to the survey are done periodically to address victimization issues such as identity theft and school crime and safety.

The NCVS is currently coding race/ethnicity as Non-Hispanic White, Non-Hispanic Black, Non-Hispanic Other (this includes American Indians and Alaska Natives; Asian, Native Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders; and persons of two or more races). It is important to remember that Hispanics may be of any race (see Chapter 1) Race and ethnicity of the household reflect the self-designation of the head of household responding to the survey. Personal theft and victimization reflect the self-designated status of the individual respondent or proxy.

The NCVS offers the following definitions for ethnicity and race to the interviewers<sup>30</sup>:

**Ethnicity:** A classification based on Hispanic culture and origin, regardless of race. Persons are asked directly if they are Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino before being asked about their racial category.

**Hispanic:** A person who describes himself as Mexican American, Chicano, Mexican, Mexicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, South American, or from some other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.

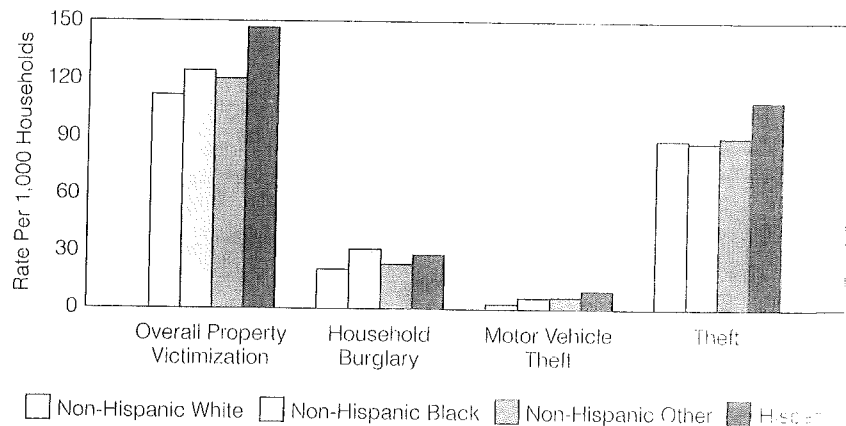
**Non-Hispanic:** Persons who report their culture or origin as something other than "Hispanic" as defined above. This distinction is made regardless of race.

**Race:** For this survey, respondents self identify with one or more racial categories. Racial categories for this report are white only, black only, and other race only. The "other" category is composed of Asian Pacific Islanders, and American Indians, Aleuts, and Eskimos, if only one of these races is given. Persons reporting two or more races are included in the category of "more than one race". The race of the head of household is used for computing household crime demographics.

The NCVS is an invaluable source of data, but it does have certain limitations. For example, it does not cover commercial crime (such as convenience store robberies or bank robberies), state crime, white collar crime, kidnapping, or homicide; the estimates produced are generally for the nation as a whole, however, some data are available by central city compared to suburban areas. These data are not available for particular cities or individual states. Further limitations include how the sample is drawn and the vulnerable nature of the interview format. Specifically, homeless people are not interviewed; and responses are susceptible to memory loss, telescoping (reporting a crime that occurred more than a year ago, which is outside the scope of the survey), exaggeration (e.g., I lost \$1,000 in property when in fact it was only \$500), misunderstandings about crime categories (e.g., robbery vs. burglary), and interviewer bias.

### Household Victimization

The NCVS makes a basic distinction between household crimes and personal crimes. As noted, the NCVS questions the designated head of household about crimes against the household—burglary, household larceny, and motor vehicle theft. Rates are calculated per 1,000 households within the subgroup population identified. The overall Household victimization rate is 118.1 per 1,000 households in 2014.<sup>31</sup> It is clear that household victimization rates vary by race and ethnicity (see Figure 2.1).<sup>32</sup> The lowest victimization rate for all household crime combined is the Non-Hispanic White group at 111.5 per 1,000 households. Thus, while it is the largest racial group, it has a victimization rate lower than the national average. The overall victimization rates for Non-Hispanic African American and Non-Hispanic Other households are similar, and both above the national



**FIGURE 2.1** Household Victimization Rates by Race and Ethnicity of Household, 2014

SOURCE: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Rates of property victimizations, household burglaries, motor vehicle thefts, and thefts by race/Hispanic origin of head of household, 2014. Generated by NCVS Victimization Analysis Tool (June 2016). [www.bjs.gov](http://www.bjs.gov).

average (124.5 and 120.1 per 1,000 households, respectively). Hispanic households, of any race, have the highest overall victimization rate, substantially over the national average at 146.6 per 1,000 households.

When the household rates are disaggregated by type of crime, a slightly different picture of victimization is revealed. In short, Non-Hispanic White households do not always have the lowest victimization rates and Hispanic households do not always have the highest victimization rates. Household burglary rates, for example, reveal that Non-Hispanic African American households have the highest victimization rates. Conversely, household theft victimization rates reveal Non-Hispanic African American with the lowest victimization rates.

### The Effect of Urbanization

The racial differences in household (property) victimization rates discussed thus far are differences for the United States as a whole. A number of criminologists have asserted that victimization patterns can be expected to vary by structural characteristics such as “urbanization.” This section explores victimization rates by degree of urbanization: urban, suburban, and rural. In the most recent data available from the NCVS (Table 2.1), Household victimization rates are highest in urban areas for Non-Hispanic African American, Non-Hispanic White and Hispanic households. Non-Hispanic African Americans and Non-Hispanic Whites have the lowest household victimization rates in rural areas, while the lowest rate for Hispanics is suburban areas. Data for Non-Hispanic Other households (Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American and multi-racial) reveal their highest victimization rates, in rural areas is substantially above average at 191.5 victimizations per 1,000 households.<sup>33</sup>

What differences exist in rural, suburban, and urban areas that result in these racial and ethnic variations in victimization rates? Glaeser and Sacerdote (1999) speculate that specific aspect of urban life impact the likelihood of suitable targets and the motivation of the offender.<sup>34</sup> For example, in urban areas, they argue that the payoff for property crime is higher (the “urban crime premium”), while

**TABLE 2.1 Rates of Property Crime Victimization for Urban, Suburban, and Rural Areas by Race/Ethnicity of Households, 2014**

|                               | Crime Rate per 1,000 Households |          |       |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------|-------|
|                               | Urban                           | Suburban | Rural |
| Race                          |                                 |          |       |
| Non-Hispanic African American | 141.2                           | 111.2    | 91.3  |
| Non-Hispanic White            | 146.5                           | 98.2     | 98.0  |
| Non-Hispanic Other            | 128.0                           | 98.0     | 191.5 |
| Hispanic                      | 175.5                           | 117.4    | 152.6 |

SOURCE: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Race of property victimizations, household burglaries, motor vehicle thefts, and thefts by race/Hispanic origin of head of household and location of residence, 2014. Generated using the NCVS Victimization Analysis Tool (February 20, 2016). [www.bjs.gov](http://www.bjs.gov).

the probability of victim recognition and certainty of a police arrest response are lower in urban than nonurban areas (deterrence hypothesis). Glaeser and Sacerdote also speculate the family structure, specifically link to single-parent households, may also explain part of the differences in victimization rates.

The general pattern of urban areas having the highest household victimization rates for all but Non-Hispanic Other racial groups generally holds when the data are disaggregated by crime type. The exception is that Hispanic household burglary victimization rates are at their highest in rural areas with a rate of 47.4 per 1,000 households in rural areas compared to 36.9 per 1,000 households in urban areas.<sup>35</sup> What explains these divergent patterns? Are rural areas more racially homogenous? Are "other" racial groups, biracial persons, and Hispanics more likely to be seen as interlopers in rural areas?

### Personal Victimization

In addition to questioning the head of the household about crimes against the household, the NCVS interviewers ask all household members aged 12 or older whether they themselves have been the victim of rape (see question above), robbery, assault, or personal theft within the past six months. This information is then used to estimate victimization rates for the nation as a whole and for the various subgroups in the population (see Table 2.2).<sup>36</sup>

Consistent with the pattern of racial disparity found in household victimizations, rates of personal victimization by race and ethnicity reveal that Non-Hispanic African Americans are highest across nearly all violent crime types, note the average victimization rate for simple assault. Non-Hispanic Whites have the lowest personal victimization rates compared to all groups across offense types, except for simple assault where they have the second highest personal victimization rate.

The racial differences across crime-specific types of violence reveal interesting observations. For example, Non-Hispanic African American and Hispanics have

**TABLE 2.2 Rates of Violent Victimization by Race and Ethnicity of Victims and Crime Type, 2014**

|                          | Victimization Rates <sup>a</sup> |                               |                    |                    |          |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------|
|                          | All                              | Non-Hispanic African American | Non-Hispanic White | Non-Hispanic Other | Hispanic |
| Crimes of Violence (all) | 23.2                             | 27.8                          | 23.1               | 26.1               | 21.3     |
| Rape                     | 1.1                              | 1.5                           | 0.8                | .5                 | 1.9      |
| Robbery                  | 2.5                              | 3.8                           | 2.1                | 2.6                | 3.2      |
| Assault                  | 20.1                             | 22.5                          | 20.2               | 23.0               | 16.2     |
| Aggravated               | 7.7                              | 10.1                          | 7.0                | 7.7                | 8.3      |
| Simple                   | 12.4                             | 12.4                          | 13.2               | 15.3               | 7.9      |

<sup>a</sup>Victimization rates per 1,000 persons aged 12 and older, per subgroups named.

SOURCE: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Rates of violent victimizations, personal thefts/larcenies, serious violent victimizations, rape/sexual assaults, robberies, and simple assaults by race/Hispanic origin, 2014. Generated using the NCVS Victimization Analysis Tool (February 20, 2016). [www.bjs.gov](http://www.bjs.gov).

nearly higher robbery than Non-Hispanic Whites. Hispanic respondents report the highest rape/sexual assault victimization rates, followed by Non-Hispanic African Americans. While the highest aggravated assault victimization rate is among Non-Hispanic African Americans, Hispanics have the lowest assault rates, regardless of type.

A recent analysis of the violent offense of carjacking (done by pooling several years of NCVS data) reveals that African Americans were three times as likely to be victims of carjacking than whites.<sup>37</sup> Hispanic respondents are substantially more likely than non-Hispanics to be carjacking victims. NCVS respondents reporting carjacking were most likely to identify the race of the offender as African American. Box 2.1 also shows additional NCVS information on the violent victimization of college students by race and ethnicity compared to similar age respondents who are not college students.

In the Victims of Identity Theft, 2014 report, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, on the basis of NCVS estimates, reported that more than 15.5 million people were the victims of identity theft—roughly 7 percent of Americans<sup>38</sup> aged 16 and older. Nearly 15 percent of respondents reveal that they have experienced identity theft in their lives to this point. The total out of pocket loss (mean of the population) for 2014 was almost \$3,000. The largest number of victims self-identified as

#### **Box 2.1 College Students Victimization: NCVS Special Report**

The Bureau of Justice Statistics has pooled several years of National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data (1995–2002) to offer a picture of violent victimization of college students. About 7.9 million people per year from ages 18 to 24 years were enrolled in college during this time. The consistent pattern of age, race, and victimization from the NCVS data set is that young minorities have routinely higher violent victimization rates than whites. However, white college students have higher rates of violent victimization than African-American students and students of “other” races (65 per 1,000 students compared to 52 and 37 per 1,000 students, respectively). Nonstudent victimization rates (ages 18–24) are substantially higher, with African American and whites having the highest rates (83 and 65 per 1,000 population compared to the numbers outlined previously). African-American students have the highest victimization rates for robbery and aggravated assault, but white students have higher rates of victimization for simple assault and rape victimization.

A unique aspect of this data set is that Hispanics are coded to be of any race for these data, so their victimization rates can be compared to whites and African Americans, rather than simply non-Hispanics. A review of these data indicates that Hispanics have an overall violent victimization rate that is higher than the rate for African Americans but lower than the rate for whites. The exception to this pattern is the Hispanic victimization rate for rape—it is higher than any other racial/ethnic group in the study.

Hart and Rennison (2011) caution that any estimates of campus violence consistently underestimate violent victimizations, particularly of women and Hispanics. Even with this limitation Hispanic college students have a lower serious crime victimization rate, but a higher simple assault victimization rate compared to Hispanics not in college.

SOURCES: Katrina Baum and Patsy Klaus, “Violent Victimization of College Students, 1995–2000,” *Bureau of Justice Statistics Report* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, January 2005). Timothy Hart and Collie Marie Rennison, “Violent Victimization of Hispanic College Students,” *Race and Justice* 1, no. 4 (2011), pp. 362–385.

white, with an estimated 8 percent of all persons in this racial group being victimized. Identity theft victims are found in all racial groups, with roughly 5 percent of African Americans and Hispanics victimized in 2014. While identity theft victimizations seemed consistent with the 2012 estimates, the victimization rate for elderly victims is increasing.

### The Effects of Urbanization

An analysis of victimization trends by the BJS using NCVS data from 1993 to 1998 indicates that urbanization is a key aspect of understanding violent victimization.<sup>39</sup> The BJS report also indicated that urban residents, who accounted for 29 percent of the U.S. population, reported 38 percent of all violent and property crime victimizations. Suburban residents comprise 50 percent of the population and experience 47 percent of the victimizations. Rural residents are least likely to experience criminal victimization; they comprise 20 percent of the population and experience 20 percent of all criminal victimizations.

Interesting convergence and divergence patterns by urbanization and race/ethnicity when data from 2014 are reviewed.<sup>40</sup> Violent victimization rates are highest in urban areas for Non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics, only. While victimization rates for Non-Hispanic African Americans and Non-Hispanic Whites are similar in rural areas, with each having a rate of 23.2 per 1,000 population. Non-Hispanic African Americans report highest violent victimization in rural areas (24.7 per 1,000 population). Non-Hispanic Other have the highest violent victimization rate in rural areas with 64.2 per 1,000 persons.

The most recent multiyear view of personal theft victimization data by race (no information on Hispanics) indicates that although the overall property victimization (theft and robbery) rate is highest for African Americans in urban areas,<sup>42</sup> personal theft victimization rates are always higher for whites, particularly in urban areas.

The work of researchers Glaeser and Sacerdote (1999) addresses issues of victimization and urbanization.<sup>41</sup> For example, in urban areas, they argue that the

#### **Box 2.2 Native Americans and Violent Crime**

Information on the victimization rates of Native Americans is difficult to compile. This group represents less than 1 percent (0.5 percent) of the sample population of non-Hispanic respondents in the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Given that the incidence of victimization in the general population is rare, documenting a rare event in a small population is challenging. The Bureau of Justice Statistics has pooled a number of years (1992–2002) to reveal a picture of Native American (nonfatal) violent victimization: 101 violent victimizations occurred per 1,000 population of Native Americans aged 12 and older. The average violent victimization rate for Native Americans was 2.5 times the rate for whites (41 per 1,000), twice the rate for African Americans (51 per 1,000), and 4.5 times that rate for Asians (22 per 1,000).

*(Continued)*

When the victimization rates are disaggregated by crime type, Native Americans have higher victimization rates in almost all categories. Their robbery and assault victimization rates are twice that of whites and African Americans. However, the rape victimization rate for Native Americans is higher than for whites but lower than for African Americans. Additionally, in contrast to the general intraracial victimization patterns of white and African-American crime, Native Americans report that 6 of 10 violent victimizations were committed by someone they perceived to be white.

In an effort to get more contextual data on American Indian victimization, the Bureau of Justice Statistics awarded three grants to tribes to study victimization: Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Southern Ute Indian Tribe, and Zuni Pueblo Indian Tribe. Respondents on the Umatilla Indian Reservation revealed that nearly two-thirds of respondents had been the victim of a violent crime in the last 12 months. Females are overrepresented as victims in these reports, at roughly two-thirds of respondents reporting violent victimization. The Southern Ute Indian Tribe survey results revealed that roughly twenty percent of respondents experienced a violent victimization in the last 12 months, with the majority of victimizations being reported by female respondents. The survey of Zuni Pueblo Indian Reservation revealed that roughly 30 percent of respondents reported violent victimizations in the last 12 months. Again with this tribe, the majority of violent victimizations were reported by female respondents.

A notable portion of violent victimizations against American Indian women are domestic violence victimizations. Ronette Bachman and colleagues' recent report on "Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women" reveals that sexual assault victimizations are more likely to be reported by "a friend, family member, or another official" than the victim herself. Additionally, victims reported being aware of a subsequent arrest in only 6 percent of sexual assault cases. This review of victimization data also revealed that "lifetime prevalence rates for physical assaults are also higher for American Indian and Alaska Native women compared to other women ... [they] are more likely to be assaulted by known offenders compared to strangers."<sup>44</sup>

What is the impact of having such little information on victimization events of Native Americans? What should be the prevention response to such victimization? What should be the crime control response to such victimization? Bachman et al. argue that:

The unique position of American Indian and Alaska Native tribes as both sovereign and dependent creates problematic jurisdictional barriers that sometimes prohibit an effective criminal justice response to American Indian and Alaska Native victims of violence. Several federal laws have limited tribal government's power to prosecute offenders including the Major Crimes Act (1885), which mandated that virtually all violent crimes committed on tribal lands were to be prosecuted by the federal government. Although tribes have the power to concurrently prosecute cases of violence, the Indian Civil Rights Act (1968) mandates that tribal courts are not permitted to punish offenders with more than \$5,000 in fines, one year in jail or both. Importantly, tribal sovereignty in punishing offenders does not apply to non-American Indian and Alaska Natives (*Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*, 435 U.S. [1978]).<sup>45</sup>

### Box 2.3 Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Violent Crime

Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders make up less than 4 percent of the population, but they account for 3 percent of property crime victimization in the United States and only 2 percent of nonfatal violent crimes. To estimate their victimization rates, the BJS pooled several years of NCVS (2002–2006) data. These rates indicate that Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders have a substantially lower victimization rate than non-Asian Americans.

#### Average Annual Violent Victimization Rate by Race/Hispanic Origin and Type of Crime, 2002–2006

|                                        | Rate per 1,000 persons aged 12 or older |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 10.6                                    |
| White                                  | 22.6                                    |
| African American                       | 29.1                                    |
| Hispanic                               | 24.1                                    |
| Native American/Alaska Native          | 56.4                                    |

Rates for individual violent victimizations indicate that only for robbery are Asian/NH/PI victimization rates essentially the same as the next lowest group (whites).<sup>46</sup>

Additional unique patterns emerge from these NCVS analyses with pooled years of data. For example, compared to the non-Asian racial groups, Asian/NH/PI have a higher percentage of stranger assaults for both males (59 percent compared to 77 percent) and females (34 percent compared to 51 percent). Similarly, the persistent pattern of intraracial crime events does not hold true for Asian American victimizations. When Asian American respondents were asked to report the perceived race of the offender, less than 30 percent of offenders were identified as Asian Americans, whereas 35 percent were identified as white and 26 percent as African American.<sup>47</sup>

Recall that the NCVS data presented earlier on violent victimization combined Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander with Native American/Alaska Native into a group called "other." What questions emerge when looking at victimization data from this viewpoint of pooled data, which allows for the disaggregation of Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander from Native American/Alaskan Native? Given the relatively low victimization rates of one group compared to the high victimization rates of the contrasting constituent group, what victimization patterns remain hidden from view? What mistakes are policy makers vulnerable to if looking at the aggregate information compared to the disaggregate information?