



SPECIAL REPORT

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National Crime Victimization Survey

Victimizations Not Reported to the Police, 2006-2010

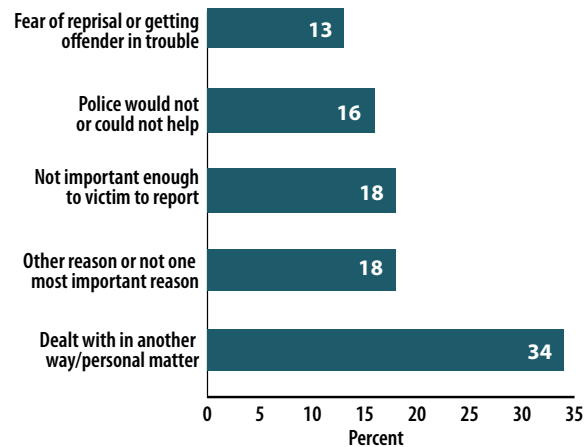
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During the period from 2006 to 2010, 52% of all violent victimizations, or an annual average of 3,382,200 violent victimizations, were not reported to the police. Of these, over a third (34%) went unreported because the victim dealt with the crime in another way, such as reporting it to another official, like a guard, manager, or school official (figure 1). Almost 1 in 5 unreported violent victimizations (18%) were not reported because the victim believed the crime was not important enough.

When crimes are not reported to the police, victims may not be able to obtain necessary services to cope with the victimization, offenders may go unpunished, and law enforcement and community resources may be misallocated due to a lack of accurate information about local crime problems. Understanding the characteristics of crimes unknown to police, victims who do not report crimes, and the reasons these crimes are not reported may help identify gaps in the provision of criminal justice services and inform police practice and policies. Using data from the National Crime Victimization Survey, this report examines trends in the types of crime not reported to police, the characteristics of unreported victimizations, and the victims' rationale for not reporting these crimes.

FIGURE 1
Most important reason violent victimizations were not reported to the police, 2006-2010



Note: See appendix table 1 for detailed response categories for the most important reason for not reporting to police. See appendix table 3 for standard errors.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006-2010.

HIGHLIGHTS

- From 1994 to 2010, the percentage of serious violent crime—rape or sexual assault, robbery, or aggravated assault—that was not reported to police declined from 50% to 42%.
- The percentage of unreported violent crime victimizations that were not reported because the victim believed the police would not or could not do anything to help doubled from 10% in 1994 to 20% in 2010.
- From 2006 to 2010, the highest percentages of unreported crime were among household theft (67%) and rape or sexual assault (65%) victimizations, while the lowest percentage was among motor vehicle theft (17%) victimizations.
- About 3 in 10 (31%) victimizations involving a weapon and an injury to the victim went unreported to police between 2006 and 2010.
- From 2006 to 2010, a greater percentage of victimizations perpetrated by someone the victim knew well (62%) went unreported to police, compared to victimizations committed by a stranger (51%).
- Among unreported intimate partner violent victimizations, 38% went unreported because the victim was afraid of reprisal or getting the offender in trouble.
- About 76% of violent crime victimizations that occurred at school were not reported to police.
- From 2006 to 2010, victimizations against youth ages 12 to 17 were more likely to go unreported than victimizations against persons in other age categories.

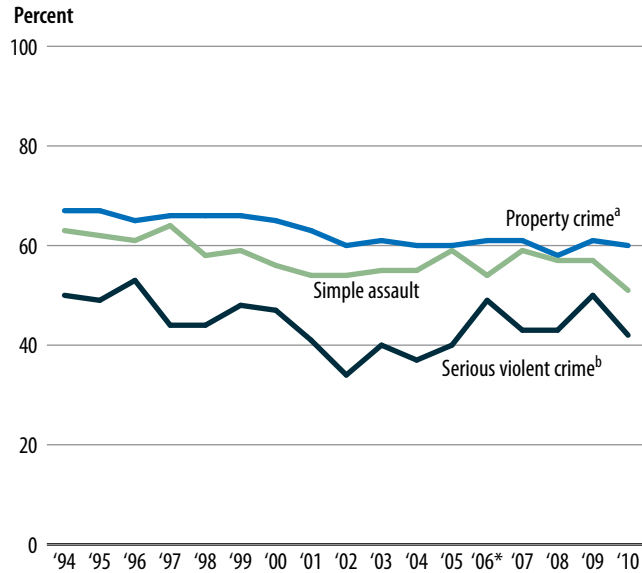
Although caution is warranted when comparing data from 2006 to other years, this report examines aggregate data from 2006 to 2010. (See *Methodology* for more information about the 2006 data collection.) The combination of five years of data diminishes the potential variation between data from 2006 and later years.

Percentage of victimizations not reported to police declined from 1994 to 2010

From 1994 to 2010, the percentage of serious violent crime—rape or sexual assault, robbery, or aggravated assault—that was not reported to police declined overall from 50% to 42% (figure 2). Unreported serious violent victimizations reached one of the lowest levels in 2002, when 34% of these victimizations were not reported to police. The decline in the percentage of unreported rape or sexual assault and aggravated assault victimizations from 1994 to 2010 contributed to the overall decline in unreported serious violent victimizations during this period (appendix table 2). No change was detected in the percentage of unreported robberies from 1994 to 2010.

The percentage of property and simple assault victimizations not reported to police declined from 1994 to 2010. Despite an increase in 2006 and 2007, the percentage of simple

FIGURE 2
Victimizations not reported to the police, by type of crime, 1994–2010



Note: Personal larceny is not shown. See appendix table 2 for percentages by type of crime. See appendix table 4 for standard errors.

*Due to methodological changes, use caution when comparing 2006 NCVS criminal victimization estimates to other years. See *Criminal Victimization 2007*, <http://www.bjs.gov>, for more information.

^aIncludes burglary, motor vehicle theft, and other household theft.

^bIncludes rape/sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 1994–2010.

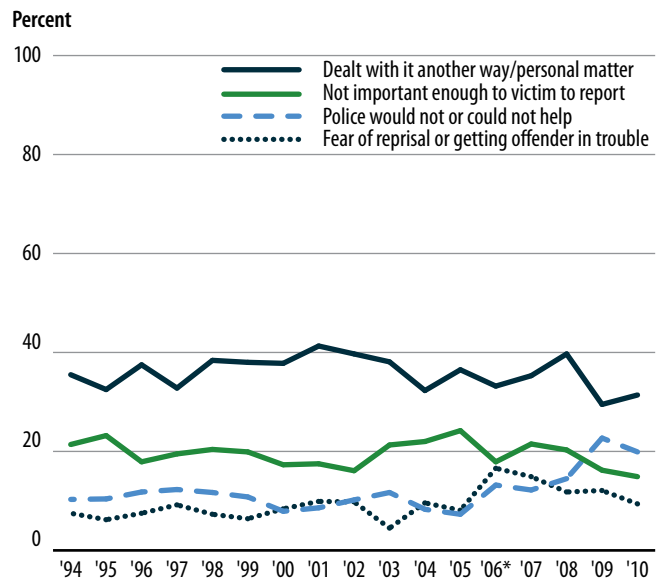
assaults not reported declined from 63% in 1994 to 51% in 2010. The percentage of property crime victimizations not reported declined from 67% in 1994 to 60% in 2010.

Percentage of unreported violent crime victimizations not reported because the victim believed the police would not or could not help doubled from 1994 to 2010

Victims gave a variety of reasons for not reporting violent crime victimizations to the police. From 1994 to 2010 the most common reason was that the victim dealt with the victimization in another way, such as reporting it to another official or addressing it privately (figure 3).

In 1994, the percentage of unreported violent crime victimizations that were not reported because the victim believed the crime was not important enough to report (21%) was more than double the percentage that went unreported because the victim believed the police would not or could not help (10%). From 2005 to 2010, the percentage of victimizations that went unreported due to the belief that the police would not or could not help increased from 7% to 20%. In 2010, a greater percentage of unreported victimizations was not reported because the victim believed the police would not or could not help (20%), than was not reported because the victim did not think that the crime was important enough to report (15%).

FIGURE 3
Most important reason violent victimizations were not reported to police, 1994–2010



Note: Includes victims of unreported rape/sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. Within-year percentages do not sum to 100% because some victims gave other reasons or could not pick one reason that was the most important. See appendix 5 for standard errors.

*Due to methodological changes, use caution when comparing 2006 NCVS criminal victimization estimates to other years. See *Criminal Victimization 2007*, <http://www.bjs.gov>, for more information.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 1994–2010.

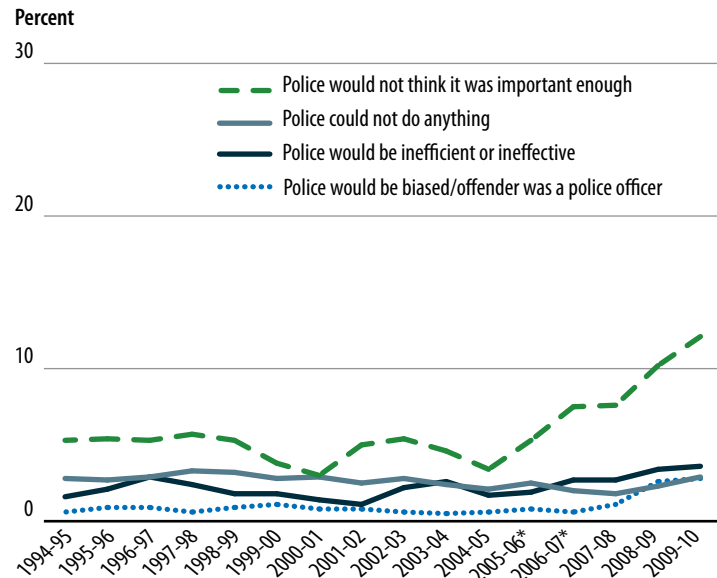
Trends in police-related reasons for not reporting violent crime

The percentage of unreported violent victimizations that were not reported because of a police-related reason (i.e., the police would not or could not do anything to help) nearly tripled from 2005 to 2010 (not shown in figure). Within the general category of police-related reasons for not reporting crime, victims gave a number of more specific reasons why violent crimes went unreported. An examination of trends in these more specific police-related reasons for not reporting a violent victimization provides a clearer understanding of the overall increase.

The increase in the percentage of unreported violent crime victimizations not reported for police-related reasons was driven by a rise in the percentage of victims who reported that the police would not think the crime was important enough to address, from 5% in 2005 to 12% in 2010 (figure 4). The percentage of victims who said that the police would be ineffective or inefficient also increased from 2% in 2005 to 4% in 2010, as did the percentage who thought that the police would be biased (from 1% in 2005 to 3% in 2010). The percentage of unreported victimizations that were not reported because the victim believed that the police could not do anything to help remained stable.

FIGURE 4

Trends in the percent of unreported violent victimizations not reported because the police would not or could not do anything to help, 1994–2010



Note: Percentages based on 2-year rolling averages. Last year in the period is the reference year. Includes victims of unreported rape/sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault victimizations who gave police-related reasons for not reporting. See appendix table 13 for standard errors.

* Due to methodological changes, use caution when comparing 2006 NCVS criminal victimization estimates to other years. See *Criminal Victimization 2007*, <http://www.bjs.gov>, for more information.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 1994–2010.

2 in 3 (65%) rape or sexual assault victimizations were not reported to police from 2006 to 2010

From 2006 to 2010, the two highest percentages of unreported crime were among household theft (67%) and rape or sexual assault (65%) victimizations, and the lowest percentage was among motor vehicle theft (17%) victimizations (table 1). About 46% of serious violent victimizations were not reported to police. In general, the percentage of unreported victimizations was lower for serious violent crime than simple assault (simple assault does not involve an injury or a weapon). However, a higher percentage of rape or sexual assault victimizations (65%) compared to simple assault victimizations (56%) went unreported during the five-year period.

The rationale for not reporting to police varied depending on the type of criminal victimization. For example, among unreported violent crime victimizations, the most common reason the crime was not reported was that the victim dealt with it in another way (34%). Among unreported property crime victimizations, the most common reason was that the victim believed the police would not or could not do anything to help (36%). A lower percentage of unreported serious violent crime (13%) was not reported because the victim believed that the crime was not important enough to report, compared to simple assault (21%) and property crime (30%) victimizations. A greater percentage of unreported rape or sexual assault (28%) and aggravated assault (22%) victimizations compared to any other type of criminal victimization were not reported because the victim was afraid of reprisal or getting the offender in trouble.

TABLE 1

Victimizations not reported to the police and the most important reason they went unreported, by type of crime, 2006–2010

Type of crime	Average annual number not reported*	Percent not reported	Most important reason victimizations went unreported				
			Dealt with in another way/ personal matter	Not important enough to victim to report	Police would not or could not help	Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	Other reason or not one most important reason
Total crime	13,998,600	58%	20%	27%	31%	5%	17%
Violent	3,382,200	52%	34%	18%	16%	13%	18%
Serious violent	1,016,000	46	25	13	21	19	21
Rape/sexual assault	211,200	65	20	6	13	28	33
Robbery	297,100	41	20	13	34	10	23
Aggravated assault	507,700	44	31	16	17	22	15
Simple assault	2,366,200	56	38	21	14	11	17
Personal larceny	69,200	41%	17%	24%	43%	2% !	14%
Household property	10,547,200	60%	15%	30%	36%	3%	16%
Burglary	1,584,700	45	12	27	40	4	17
Motor vehicle theft	140,600	17	16	26	30	7	21
Theft	8,821,900	67	16	31	35	3	16

Note: See appendix table 6 for standard errors.

*Rounded to the nearest hundred.

! Interpret with caution; estimate based on 10 or fewer sample cases, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006–2010.

From 2006 to 2010, 3 in 10 victimizations involving a weapon and an injury to the victim went unreported to police

Violent crime victimizations in which the victim was injured (43%), the offender had a weapon (42%), or both (31%) were less likely to go unreported to police than victimizations in which there was neither an injury nor a weapon (59%) (table 2). About 3 in 10 victimizations (29%) involving a serious injury (e.g., the victim was knocked unconscious or sustained a broken bone, a gunshot or stab wound, or internal injuries) went unreported to police. About 4 in 10 victimizations (38%) involving a firearm went unreported.

When the unreported victimization resulted in an injury and the perpetrator had a weapon, the most common reason the police were not notified was that the victim was afraid of reprisal or of getting the offender into trouble (42%). In comparison, when the unreported victimization involved an injury but no weapon (30%), a weapon without an injury (30%), or neither (38%), the most common reason for not reporting was that the victimization was dealt with in another way.

TABLE 2
Violent victimizations not reported to the police and the most important reason they went unreported, by type of injury sustained and whether the offender had a weapon, 2006–2010

Attributes of victimization	Average annual number not reported ^a	Percent not reported	Most important reason victimizations went unreported				
			Dealt with in another way/ personal matter	Not important enough to victim to report	Police would not or could not help	Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	Other reason or not one most important reason
Injury							
No injury	2,654,200	56%	36%	21%	15%	9%	19%
Any injury	728,000	43	28	9	18	29	16
Minor ^b	604,900	45	31	10	17	26	16
Serious ^c	78,800	29	18	5!	17	50	10
Rape without other injury	43,000	59	14!	1!	28!	28	28
Weapon							
No weapon	2,595,200	56%	36%	19%	14%	12%	18%
Any weapon	590,000	42	28	14	21	20	17
Firearm	179,300	38	14	7	25	37	18
Knife	191,600	49	33	17	20	12	19
Other/unknown type	219,100	42	35	19	19	12	16
Don't know	197,000	46	24	23	21	12	20
Injury							
Weapon	128,800	31%	21%	5%!	25%	42%	7%
No weapon	555,400	47%	30%	10%	15%	26%	18%
No injury							
Weapon	461,100	47%	30%	17%	20%	13%	20%
No weapon	2,039,700	59%	38%	21%	14%	8%	18%

Note: Includes victims of rape/sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. See appendix table 7 for standard errors.

^aRounded to the nearest hundred.

^bExamples include bruises, scratches, and black eyes.

^cExamples include gunshot or stab wounds, broken bones, internal injuries, and unconsciousness.

! Interpret with caution; estimate based on 10 or fewer sample cases, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006–2010.

Among unreported intimate partner violence victimizations, the most common reason for not reporting to police was fear of reprisal or getting the offender in trouble (38%)

From 2006 to 2010, victimizations perpetrated by someone who was well known to the victim (62%)—a neighbor, coworker, patient, or teacher—or by someone with whom the victim was casually acquainted (60%) were most likely to go unreported to police (table 3). About 46% of intimate partner violence (IPV) victimizations were not reported to police between 2006 and 2010. The percentage of IPV victimizations not reported to police was about the same, regardless of whether the victimization was a simple assault (44%) or a serious violent crime (47%) (not shown in table). Among the unreported IPV victimizations, 38% went unreported because the victim was afraid of reprisal or getting the offender in trouble.

From 2006 to 2010, over half (51%) of violent crime victimizations committed by a stranger went unreported to police. Of those, about 18% went unreported because the victim believed that the police would not or could not do anything to help.

About three-quarters of violent crime victimizations that occurred at school were not reported to police

From 2006 to 2010, violent crime victimizations that took place at school (76%), in a public location (55%), or at work (56%) were more likely to go unreported to police than violent crime victimizations that took place in the home (42%) (table 4). The greatest percentage of unreported violent crime victimizations that occurred at school (50%) or work (47%) were not reported because the victim dealt with the crime in some other way, such as reporting it to another official such as a manager or school staff. Unreported violent crime victimizations that occurred in the home (27%) were more likely than unreported violent victimizations at school (6%), work (4%), or in a public location (7%) to go unreported because the victim was afraid of reprisal or getting the offender in trouble.

TABLE 3
Violent victimizations not reported to the police and the most important reason they went unreported, by victim-offender relationship, 2006–2010

Victim-offender relationship	Average annual number not reported*	Percent not reported	Most important reason victimizations went unreported				
			Dealt with in another way/ personal matter	Not important enough to victim to report	Police would not or could not help	Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	Other reason or not one most important reason
Stranger	1,221,000	51%	28%	27%	18%	6%	22%
Casual acquaintance	611,400	60	48	18	13	7	14
Well known	570,800	62	43	13	15	11	18
Relative	204,400	46	36	8	13	32	11
Intimate partner	467,800	46	19	10	17	38	16

Note: Includes victims of rape/sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. Does not include victimizations in which the relationship between the victim and offender was unknown. See appendix table 8 for standard errors.

*Rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006–2010.

TABLE 4
Violent victimizations not reported to the police and the most important reason they went unreported, by location, 2006–2010

Location	Average annual number not reported ^a	Percent not reported	Most important reason victimizations went unreported				
			Dealt with in another way/personal matter	Not important enough to victim to report	Police would not or could not help	Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	Other reason or not one most important reason
At work	669,600	56%	47%	13%	9%	4%	27%
At school	451,300	76	50	22	13	6	9
At home	842,100	42	28	13	19	27	14
In a public location ^b	785,200	55	25	28	20	7	21

Note: Includes victims of rape/sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. See appendix table 9 for standard errors.

^aRounded to the nearest hundred.

^bIncludes victimizations that occurred on the way to school or work, while running errands or engaging in leisure activities outside of the home, or in other public locations outside of school or work.

! Interpret with caution; estimate based on 10 or fewer sample cases, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006–2010.

A greater percentage of unreported violent victimizations against women (20%) than men (8%) were not reported because the victim was afraid of reprisal or getting the offender in trouble

The demographic characteristics of violent crime victims contributed to differences in the percentage of unreported victimizations and reasons for not reporting the crime to the police. From 2006 to 2010, a greater percentage of victimizations against men (55%) were not reported to police than victimizations against women (49%) (table 5). A greater percentage of victimizations against white non-Hispanics (54%) than black non-Hispanics (46%) went unreported to police.

The rationale for not reporting a victimization to the police also varied depending on the demographic characteristics of violent crime victims. For example, from 2006 to 2010, a greater percentage of unreported violent victimizations against women (20%) than men (8%) were not reported to police because the victim was afraid of reprisal or getting the offender in trouble.

In addition, from 2006 to 2010, unreported violent crimes against victims age 65 or older (33%) were more likely than violent crimes against victims ages 12 to 17 (10%) to go unreported because the victim believed that the police would not or could not do anything to help. A greater percentage of unreported crimes against victims age 17 or younger (42%) than victims age 65 or older (19%) were not reported to police because the victim handled it in another way.

TABLE 5
Violent victimizations not reported to the police and the most important reason they went unreported, by victim characteristics, 2006–2010

Victim characteristic	Average annual number not reported ^a	Percent not reported	Most important reason victimizations went unreported				
			Dealt with in another way/ personal matter	Not important enough to victim to report	Police would not or could not help	Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	Other reason or not one most important reason
Sex							
Male	1,859,800	55%	36%	22%	16%	8%	18%
Female	1,522,400	49	32	14	15	20	18
Race/Hispanic origin							
White ^b	2,308,600	54%	35%	19%	15%	13%	19%
Black/African American ^b	441,700	46	31	17	18	18	16
Hispanic/Latino	394,600	51	32	20	19	12	17
American Indian/Alaska native ^b	35,200	39	22!	21!	21!	23!	12!
Asian/Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander ^b	89,300	66	32	19	19!	8!	22
Two or more races ^b	112,800	60	38	13	14	17	18
Age							
12–17	844,300	68%	42%	22%	10%	12%	14%
18–34	1,379,600	51	30	18	16	16	21
35–64	1,100,300	47	34	15	20	12	18
65 or older	58,000	46	19	21	33	9	18
Education							
Less than high school degree	564,400	66%	40%	21%	14%	9%	16%
High school diploma/ some college	1,370,000	49	34	16	16	16	17
College degree	1,422,600	51	32	19	16	13	20

Note: Includes victims of rape/sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. See appendix table 10 for standard errors.

^aRounded to the nearest hundred.

^bExcludes persons of Hispanic or Latino origin.

! Interpret with caution; estimate based on 10 or fewer sample cases, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006–2010.

Over 20% of unreported violent victimizations against persons living in urban areas were not reported because the victim believed the police would not or could not help

During the period from 2006 to 2010, victimizations against persons living in households with two or more children under age 12 were less likely to go unreported to police (46%) than victimizations involving households with no children (54%) or one child (53%) (table 6). A greater percentage of violent victimizations against persons in households with an income of \$50,000 or more (56%) went unreported, compared to households with an income of less than \$25,000 (50%).

Household characteristics associated with violent crime victimizations also contributed to differences in the rationale for not reporting victimizations to police. For instance, unreported violent victimizations against persons living in urban areas (21%) were more likely to not be reported because the victim believed that the police would not or could not do anything to help, in comparison to unreported victimizations against people living in suburban (12%) and rural (16%) areas.

TABLE 6
Violent victimizations not reported to the police and the most important reason they went unreported, by victim household characteristics, 2006–2010

Household characteristic	Average annual number not reported*	Percent not reported	Most important reason victimizations went unreported				
			Dealt with in another way/ personal matter	Not important enough to victim to report	Police would not or could not help	Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	Other reason or not one most important reason
Income							
Less than \$25,000	849,900	50%	31%	18%	21%	15%	16%
\$25,000–\$49,999	745,700	54	35	17	16	15	17
\$50,000 or more	996,400	56	38	20	12	8	22
Not reported	790,200	50	31	19	16	17	17
Location of residence							
Urban	1,262,100	51%	30%	18%	21%	13%	18%
Suburban	1,535,600	54	37	19	12	13	19
Rural	584,500	51	36	18	16	15	15
Household members under age 12							
None	2,219,400	54%	34%	20%	16%	13%	18%
One	644,100	53	35	12	18	15	20
Two or more	518,700	46	35	20	13	14	17

Note: Includes victims of rape/sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. See appendix table 11 for standard errors.

*Rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006–2010.

Methodology

Survey coverage

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). The NCVS is a self-report survey in which interviewed persons are asked about the number and characteristics of victimizations experienced during the prior six months. The NCVS collects information on nonfatal personal crimes (rape or sexual assault, robbery, aggravated and simple assault, and personal larceny) and household property crimes (burglary, motor vehicle theft, and other theft) both reported and not reported to police. In addition to providing annual level and change estimates on criminal victimization, the NCVS is the primary source of information on the nature of criminal victimization incidents. Survey respondents provide information about themselves (such as age, sex, race and ethnicity, marital status, education level, and income) and if they experienced a victimization. For crime victims, information about the offender (such as age, race and ethnicity, gender, and victim-offender relationship), characteristics of the crime (including time and place of occurrence, use of weapons, nature of injury, and economic consequences), whether the crime was reported to police, reasons why the crime was or was not reported, and experiences with the criminal justice system are collected about each victimization incident.

The NCVS is administered to persons age 12 or older from a nationally representative sample of households in the United States. Once selected, households remain in the sample for 3 years, and eligible persons in these households are interviewed every six months for a total of seven interviews. New households rotate into the sample on an ongoing basis to replace outgoing households that have been in sample for the 3-year period. The sample includes persons living in group quarters, such as dormitories, rooming houses, and religious group dwellings, and excludes persons living in military barracks and institutional settings, such as correctional or hospital facilities, and the homeless. (For more detail, see the Survey Methodology for Criminal Victimization in the United States, 2007, NCJ 227669, March 2010, on the BJS website at www.bjs.gov.)

In 2010, about 147,000 persons age 12 or older from 82,000 households across the country were interviewed during the course of the year. From 2006 to 2010—the primary reference period for this report—a total of 701,000 persons from about 394,000 households were interviewed. This equates to an annual average of 140,000 persons age 12 or older in 79,000 households interviewed each year from 2006 to 2010.

Nonresponse and weighting adjustments

The 82,000 households that participated in the NCVS in 2010 represents a 92% household response rate. The person-level response rate—the percentage of persons age 12 or older in participating households who completed an NCVS interview—was 88% in 2010.

Estimates in this report use data from the 1994 to 2010 NCVS data files weighted to produce annual estimates for persons age 12 or older living in U.S. households. Because the NCVS relies on a sample rather than a census of the entire U.S. population, weights are designed to inflate sample point estimates to known population totals and to compensate for survey nonresponse and other aspects of the sample design.

The NCVS data files include both household and person weights. The household weight is commonly used to calculate estimates of property crimes, such as motor vehicle theft or burglary, which are identified with the household. Person weights provide an estimate of the population represented by each person in the sample. Person weights are most frequently used to compute estimates of crime victimizations of persons in the total population. Both household and person weights, after proper adjustment, are also used to form the denominator in calculations of crime rates.

The victimization weights used in this analysis account for the number of persons present during an incident and for repeat victims of series incidents. The victimization weight counts series incidents as the actual number of incidents reported by the victim, up to a maximum of ten incidents. Series victimizations are victimizations that are similar in type but occur with such frequency that a victim is unable to recall each individual event or to describe each event in detail. Survey procedures allow NCVS interviewers to identify and classify these similar victimizations as series victimizations and collect detailed information on only the most recent incident in the series. In 2010, about 3% of all victimization were series incidents. The approach to weighting series incidents as the number of incidents up to a maximum of ten incidents produces more reliable estimates of crime levels, while the cap at 10 minimizes the effect of extreme outliers on the rates. Additional information on the series enumeration is detailed in the report *Methods for Counting High Frequency Repeat Victimization* in the National Crime Victimization Survey, NCJ 237308, April 2012, on the BJS website at <http://www.bjs.gov>.

For this report, prior to applying the weights to the data, all victimizations that occurred outside of the U.S. were excluded. From 2006 to 2010, about 1% (304) of the total 37,457 unweighted victimizations occurred outside of the U.S. and was excluded from the analyses.

Standard error computations

When national estimates are derived from a sample, as is the case with the NCVS, caution must be taken when comparing one estimates to another estimate or when comparing estimates over time. Although one estimate may be larger than another, estimates based on a sample have some degree of sampling error. The sampling error of an estimate depends on several factors, including the amount of variation in the responses, the size of the sample, and the size of the subgroup for which the estimate is computed. When the sampling error around the estimates is taken into consideration, the estimates that appear different may, in fact, not be statistically different.

One measure of the sampling error associated with an estimate is the standard error. The standard error can vary from one estimate to the next. In general, for a given metric, an estimate with a smaller standard error provides a more reliable approximation of the true value than an estimate with a larger standard error. Estimates with relatively large standard errors are associated with less precision and reliability and should be interpreted with caution.

In order to generate standard errors around numbers and estimates from the NCVS, the Census Bureau produces generalized variance function (GVF) parameters for BJS. The GVFs take into account aspects of the NCVS complex sample design and represent the curve fitted to a selection of individual standard errors based on the Jackknife Repeated Replication technique. The GVF parameters were used to generate standard errors for each point estimate (such as counts, percentages, and rates) in the report. For average annual estimates, standard errors were based on the ratio of the sums of victimizations and respondents across years.

In this report, BJS conducted tests to determine whether differences in estimated numbers and percentages were statistically significant once sampling error was taken into account. Using statistical programs developed specifically for the NCVS, we tested the significance of all comparisons in the text. The primary test procedure used was Student's t-statistic, which tests the difference between two sample estimates. To ensure that the observed differences between estimates were larger than might be expected due to sampling variation, we set the significance level at the 95% level.

Data users can use the estimates and the standard errors of the estimates provided in this report to generate a confidence interval around the estimate as a measure of the margin of error. The following example illustrates how standard errors can be used to generate confidence intervals:

According to the NCVS, in 1994, 50% of serious violent victimizations were not reported to police (see appendix table 2). Using the GVFs, BJS determined that the estimate has a standard error of 1.3% (see

appendix table 4). A confidence interval around the estimate was generated by multiplying the standard errors by ± 1.96 (the t-score of a normal, two-tailed distribution that excludes 2.5% at either end of the distribution). Thus, the confidence interval around the 50% estimate from 1994 is $50\% \pm 1.3\% \times 1.96$ or (47.45% to 52.55%). In others words, if different samples using the same procedures were taken from the U.S. population in 1994, 95% of the time the percentage of serious violent crime victimizations that went unreported would fall between 47.45 and 52.55%.

In this report, a coefficient of variation (CV), representing the ratio of the standard error to the estimate, was also calculated for all estimates. CV's provide a measure of reliability and a means to compare the precision of estimates across measures with differing levels or metrics. In cases where the CV was greater than 50%, or the unweighted sample had 10 or fewer cases, the estimate was noted with a "!" symbol (interpret data with caution; estimate based on 10 or fewer sample cases, or the coefficient of variation exceeds 50%).

Methodological changes to the NCVS in 2006

Methodological changes implemented in 2006 may have affected the crime estimates for that year to such an extent that they are not comparable to estimates from other years. Evaluation of 2007 and later data from the NCVS conducted by BJS and the Census Bureau found a high degree of confidence that estimates for 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 are consistent with and comparable to estimates for 2005 and previous years. The reports, Criminal Victimization, 2006, NCJ 219413, December 2007; Criminal Victimization, 2007, NCJ 224390, December 2008; Criminal Victimization, 2008, NCJ 227777, September 2009; Criminal Victimization, 2009, NCJ 231327, October 2010; and Criminal Victimization, 2010, NCJ 235508, September 2011, are available on the BJS website at <http://www.bjs.gov>.

Although caution is warranted when comparing data from 2006 to other years, the combination of five years of data in this report diminishes the potential variation between 2006 and later years. In general, findings do not change significantly if the year 2006 is excluded from the analysis. For total victimizations, violent victimizations, and serious violent victimizations, the annual average number of victimizations and the percentage of victimizations not reported to the police during the period from 2006 to 2010 were not significantly different from the annual average number and the percentage not reported during the period from 2007 to 2010. Similarly, the distribution of the reasons given for why unreported violent victimizations were not reported to police did not differ significantly across the two periods.

APPENDIX TABLE 1**Detailed response categories for the most important reason violent victimizations were not reported to police, 2006–2010**

Reason	Unreported violent victimizations	
	Average annual number	Percent
Total not reported	3,382,200	100%
Dealt with it another way	1,143,500	34%
Reported to another official	538,700	16
Private or personal matter handled informally	603,900	18
Not important enough to report	619,100	18%
Minor or unsuccessful crime/small loss/recovered property	465,900	14
Child offender or “kids’ stuff”	72,600	2
Not clear it was a crime or harm was intended	80,500	2
Loss was less than insurance deductible	900	--!
Police would not or could not do anything	535,900	16%
Police could not do anything	77,000	2
Crime discovered too late	7,800	--
Could not recover property	3,100	--!
Could not identify offender/lack of proof	66,200	2
Police would not help	459,000	14
Police would not think it was important enough	305,400	9
Police would be inefficient or ineffective	99,500	3
Police would be biased or could cause respondent trouble or offender was a police officer	54,100	2
Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	452,700	13%
Afraid of reprisal by offender or others	283,900	8
Did not want to get offender in trouble with the law	158,100	5
Other reason or not one most important reason	610,700	18%
Advised not to report to police	10,700	--
Too inconvenient to take the time	108,300	3
Do not know why crime was not reported	30,300	1
Not one reason more important than the others	85,800	3
Other reasons	386,400	11

Note: Numbers rounded to the nearest hundred. See appendix table 12 for standard errors.

! Interpret with caution; estimate based on 10 or fewer sample cases, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

--Less than 0.5%.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006–2010.

APPENDIX TABLE 2**Victimizations not reported to the police, by type of crime, 1994–2010**

Year	Serious violent crime					Property crime			
	Total	Rape/sexual assault	Robbery	Aggravated assault	Simple assault	Total	Burglary	Motor vehicle theft	Theft
1994	50%	66%	46%	48%	63%	67%	51%	21%	74%
1995	49	77	43	46	62	67	50	24	73
1996	53	67	51	52	61	65	51	22	71
1997	44	75	45	38	64	66	50	19	72
1998	44	68	41	42	58	66	53	21	71
1999	48	74	40	45	59	66	51	16	73
2000	47	57	48	44	56	65	51	20	70
2001	41	59	41	35	54	63	47	17	70
2002	34	45	32	32	54	60	42	16	67
2003	40	44	36	41	55	61	46	23	68
2004	37	70	39	30	55	60	45	14	66
2005	40	65	44	34	59	60	44	18	67
2006*	49	70	53	42	54	61	48	18	67
2007	43	58	30	49	59	61	48	15	68
2008	43	61	41	37	57	59	44	20	65
2009	50	77	39	50	57	61	46	15	68
2010	42	51	41	39	51	60	41	16	68

Note: Excludes victims who did not know whether the victimization was reported to police. Personal larceny is not shown in table. See appendix table 4 for standard errors.

*Due to methodological changes, use caution when comparing 2006 NCVS criminal victimization estimates to other years. See *Criminal Victimization 2007*, <http://www.bjs.gov>, for more information.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 1994–2010.

APPENDIX TABLE 3**Standard errors for figure 1: Most important reason violent victimizations were not reported to the police, 2006–2010**

Most important reason victimizations were not reported	Percent
Dealt with it another way/personal matter	1.2%
Not important enough to victim to report	0.9
Police would not or could not help	0.9
Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	0.8
Other reason or not one most important reason	0.9

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006–2010.

APPENDIX TABLE 4**Standard errors for figure 2: Victimizations not reported to the police, by type of crime, 1994–2010**

Year	Serious violent crime					Property crime			
	Total	Rape/sexual assault	Robbery	Aggravated assault	Simple assault	Total	Burglary	Motor vehicle theft	Theft
1994	1.3%	3.1%	2.2%	1.6%	1.0%	0.6%	1.2%	1.5%	0.6%
1995	1.4	3.0	2.4	1.7	1.0	0.6	1.2	1.7	0.6
1996	1.5	3.8	2.4	1.8	1.1	0.6	1.3	1.8	0.7
1997	1.6	3.5	2.8	1.9	1.2	0.7	1.4	1.8	0.7
1998	1.9	4.5	3.1	2.2	1.4	0.8	1.5	2.0	0.8
1999	1.8	3.4	2.9	2.3	1.4	0.8	1.5	1.9	0.8
2000	2.1	4.9	3.3	2.6	1.6	0.9	1.6	2.1	0.9
2001	2.1	4.3	3.7	2.6	1.7	0.9	1.7	2.0	1.0
2002	2.1	5.0	3.5	2.6	1.6	0.9	1.7	2.0	1.0
2003	2.2	5.3	3.6	2.8	1.7	0.9	1.7	2.3	0.9
2004	2.2	5.8	4.0	2.6	1.8	0.9	1.7	2.0	0.9
2005	2.5	7.2	4.1	3.1	1.9	1.0	1.8	2.2	1.1
2006	2.2	4.8	3.8	2.8	1.8	0.9	1.8	2.5	1.0
2007	2.4	6.2	3.4	3.1	1.9	0.9	1.7	2.1	1.0
2008	2.6	5.7	4.2	3.5	1.9	1.0	1.9	2.7	1.1
2009	2.7	5.1	4.2	3.5	2.1	1.0	1.8	2.5	1.1
2010	2.7	6.1	4.3	3.5	2.1	0.9	1.8	2.8	1.0

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 1994–2010.

APPENDIX TABLE 5**Standard errors for figure 3: Most important reason violent victimizations were not reported to police, 1994–2010**

Year	Dealt with in another way/personal matter	Not important enough to victim to report	Police would not or could not help	Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	Other reason or not one most important reason
1994	1.0%	0.8%	0.6%	0.5%	0.9%
1995	1.0	0.9	0.6	0.5	1.0
1996	1.1	0.8	0.7	0.5	1.0
1997	1.2	1.0	0.8	0.7	1.1
1998	1.5	1.2	0.9	0.7	1.2
1999	1.4	1.1	0.8	0.6	1.2
2000	1.7	1.2	0.8	0.9	1.5
2001	1.8	1.3	0.9	1.0	1.5
2002	1.8	1.3	1.0	1.0	1.5
2003	1.8	1.4	1.1	0.7	1.5
2004	1.8	1.6	1.0	1.1	1.7
2005	2.0	1.7	1.0	1.0	1.7
2006	1.8	1.4	1.2	1.4	1.4
2007	1.9	1.6	1.2	1.3	1.4
2008	2.1	1.7	1.4	1.3	1.4
2009	2.0	1.5	1.8	1.3	1.7
2010	2.2	1.6	1.8	1.3	2.0

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 1994–2010.

APPENDIX TABLE 6

Standard errors for table 1: Victimitizations not reported to police and the most important reason they went unreported, by type of crime, 2006–2010

Type of crime	Average annual number not reported	Percent not reported	Most important reason victimizations went unreported				
			Dealt with in another way/ personal matter	Not important enough to victim to report	Police would not or could not help	Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	Other reason or not one most important reason
Total crime	452,671	0.6%	0.5%	0.6%	0.7%	0.3%	0.5%
Violent	192,199	1.0	1.2	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9
Serious violent	95,818	1.5	1.8	1.3	1.7	1.6	1.7
Rape/sexual assault	40,343	3.3	3.4	1.9	2.8	3.8	4.0
Robbery	48,501	2.4	2.8	2.4	3.4	2.1	3.0
Aggravated assault	65,021	2.0	2.6	2.0	2.1	2.3	2.0
Simple assault	155,796	1.2	1.4	1.1	0.9	0.8	1.0
Personal larceny	22,340	4.6	5.4	6.1	7.2	2.0!	5.0
Household property	258,055	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.2	0.4
Burglary	93,331	0.9	0.8	1.2	1.3	0.5	1.0
Motor vehicle theft	25,706	1.3	3.0	3.6	3.7	2.0	3.3
Theft	235,394	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.4

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006–2010.

APPENDIX TABLE 7

Standard errors for table 2: Violent victimizations not reported to the police and the most important reason they went unreported, by type of injury sustained and whether the offender had a weapon, 2006–2010

Attributes of victimization	Average annual number not reported	Percent not reported	Most important reason victimizations went unreported				
			Dealt with in another way/personal matter	Not important enough to victim to report	Police would not or could not help	Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	Other reason or not one most important reason
Injury							
No injury	166,629	1.1%	1.3%	1.1%	1.0%	0.7%	1.0%
Any injury	79,437	1.7	2.1	1.3	1.8	2.2	1.7
Minor	71,649	1.8	2.4	1.5	1.9	2.3	1.9
Serious	23,913	3.4	5.1	2.9	5.0	6.8	4.0
Rape without other injury	17,437	6.9	6.3	2.1	8.1	8.1	8.1
Weapon							
No weapon	164,446	1.1%	1.3%	1.1%	0.9%	0.9%	1.0%
Any weapon	70,660	1.8	2.4	1.8	2.1	2.1	2.0
Firearm	36,949	2.8	3.1	2.2	3.9	4.4	3.5
Knife	38,285	3.2	4.2	3.3	3.5	2.8	3.4
Other/unknown type	41,146	2.7	4.0	3.2	3.2	2.6	3.0
Don't know	38,866	3.1	3.7	3.6	3.5	2.8	3.4
Injury							
Weapon	30,988	2.9%	4.3%	2.2%	4.6%	5.3%	2.7%
No weapon	68,336	1.9%	2.5%	1.6%	1.9%	2.4%	2.1%
No injury							
Weapon	61,667	2.1%	2.7%	2.2%	2.3%	2.0%	2.3%
No weapon	142,889	1.3%	1.5%	1.2%	1.0%	0.8%	1.2%

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006–2010.

APPENDIX TABLE 8**Standard errors for table 3: Violent victimizations not reported to the police and the most important reason they went unreported, by victim-offender relationship, 2006–2010**

Victim-offender relationship	Average annual number not reported	Percent not reported	Most important reason victimizations went unreported				
			Dealt with in another way/ personal matter	Not important enough to victim to report	Police would not or could not help	Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	Other reason or not one most important reason
Stranger	106,359	1.5%	1.7%	1.7%	1.4%	0.8%	1.5%
Casual acquaintance	72,075	2.1	2.6	1.9	1.7	1.3	1.8
Well known	69,375	2.1	2.7	1.7	1.9	1.6	2.0
Relative	39,637	3.0	4.1	2.2	2.8	4.0	2.6
Intimate partner	62,152	2.1	2.3	1.7	2.1	2.8	2.1

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006–2010.

APPENDIX TABLE 9**Standard errors for table 4: Violent victimizations not reported to the police and the most important reason they went unreported, by location of occurrence, 2006–2010**

Location	Average annual number not reported	Percent not reported	Most important reason victimizations went unreported				
			Dealt with in another way/ personal matter	Not important enough to victim to report	Police would not or could not help	Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	Other reason or not one most important reason
At work	75,812	2.0%	2.5%	1.6%	1.4%	0.9%	2.2%
At school	60,942	2.3	3.0	2.4	1.9	1.3	1.7
At home	86,191	1.5	2.0	1.4	1.7	2.0	1.5
In a public location	82,874	1.8	2.0	2.1	1.8	1.1	1.9

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006–2010.

APPENDIX TABLE 10

Standard errors for table 5: Violent victimizations not reported to the police and the most important reason they went unreported, by victim characteristics, 2006–2010

Victim characteristic	Average annual number not reported	Percent not reported	Most important reason victimizations went unreported				
			Dealt with in another way/ personal matter	Not important enough to victim to report	Police would not or could not help	Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	Other reason or not one most important reason
Sex							
Male	135,436	1.3%	1.5%	1.3%	1.1%	0.8%	1.2%
Female	120,673	1.3	1.6	1.2	1.2	1.4	1.3
Race/Hispanic origin							
White	153,571	1.2%	1.4%	1.1%	1.0%	0.9%	1.1%
Black/African American	60,220	2.1	2.8	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.2
Hispanic/Latino	56,610	2.4	2.9	2.5	2.4	2.0	2.4
American Indian/ Alaska native	15,711	6.2	8.2	8.0	8.1	8.4	6.5!
Asian/Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	25,542	5.0	5.9	5.0	4.9	3.4	5.2
Two or more races	28,889	4.4	5.5	3.7	3.9	4.2	4.3
Age							
12–17	86,316	1.8%	2.2%	1.8%	1.3%	1.4%	1.5%
18–34	114,043	1.4	1.6	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.4
35–64	100,247	1.5	1.9	1.4	1.6	1.3	1.5
65 or older	20,375	5.4	6.1	6.4	7.3	4.4	5.9
Education							
Less than high school degree	68,942	2.2%	2.6%	2.2%	1.8%	1.5%	1.9%
High school diploma/ some college	113,586	1.4	1.7	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3
College degree	116,067	1.4	1.7	1.4	1.3	1.1	1.4

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006–2010.

APPENDIX TABLE 11

Standard errors for table 6: Violent victimizations not reported to the police and the most important reason they went unreported, by victim household characteristics, 2006–2010

Household characteristic	Average annual number not reported	Percent not reported	Most important reason victimizations went unreported				
			Dealt with in another way/ personal matter	Not important enough to victim to report	Police would not or could not help	Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	Other reason or not one most important reason
Income							
Less than \$25,000	86,638	1.7%	2.1%	1.7%	1.8%	1.6%	1.6%
\$25,000–\$49,999	80,512	1.8	2.3	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.7
\$50,000 or more	94,767	1.7	2.0	1.6	1.3	1.1	1.7
Not reported	83,171	1.7	2.1	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.7
Location of residence							
Urban	108,386	1.4%	1.7%	1.4%	1.5%	1.2%	1.4%
Suburban	121,271	1.4	1.7	1.3	1.1	1.1	1.3
Rural	70,294	2.0	2.5	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.9
Household members under age 12							
None	150,081	1.2%	1.4%	1.2%	1.0%	0.9%	1.1%
One	74,191	1.9	2.4	1.6	1.9	1.8	2.0
Two or more	65,801	2.0	2.7	2.2	1.8	1.9	2.1

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006–2010.

APPENDIX TABLE 12

Standard errors for appendix table 1: Detailed response categories for the most important reason violent victimizations went unreported to police, 2006–2010

Reason	Unreported violent victimizations	
	Average annual number not reported	Percent of violent victimizations
Total not reported	192,199	~
Dealt with it another way	102,463	1.2%
Reported to another official	67,190	0.9
Private or personal matter handled informally	71,581	0.9
Not important enough to report	72,574	0.9%
Minor or unsuccessful crime/small loss/recovered property	62,015	0.8
Child offender or "kids' stuff"	22,914	0.3
Not clear it was a crime or harm was intended	24,184	0.3
Loss was less than insurance deductible	2,391	--
Police would not or could not do anything	66,998	0.9%
Police could not do anything	23,623	0.3
Crime discovered too late	7,250	--
Could not recover property	4,530	--
Could not identify offender/lack of proof	21,818	0.3
Police would not help	61,505	0.8
Police would not think it was important enough	49,229	0.7
Police would be inefficient or ineffective	27,034	0.4
Police would be biased or could cause respondent trouble or offender was a police officer	19,638	0.2
Fear of reprisal or getting offender in trouble	61,041	0.8%
Afraid of reprisal by offender or others	47,316	0.6
Did not want to get offender in trouble with the law	34,551	0.5
Other reason or not one most important reason	72,030	0.9%
Advised not to report to police	8,534	--
Too inconvenient to take the time	28,263	0.4
Do not know why crime was not reported	14,544	0.2
Not one reason more important than the others	25,005	0.3
Other reasons	55,963	0.7

~Not applicable.

--Less than 0.5%.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 1994–2010.

APPENDIX TABLE 13

Standard errors for appendix table 2: Trends in the percent of unreported violent victimizations not reported because the police would not or could not do anything to help, 1994–2010

Year	Police would not think it was important enough	Police could not do anything	Police would be inefficient or ineffective	Police would be biased/offender was a police officer
1994–95	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%
1995–96	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.1
1996–97	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.2
1997–98	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.1
1998–99	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.2
1999–00	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.2
2000–01	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.2
2001–02	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.2
2002–03	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.2
2003–04	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.2
2004–05	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.2!
2005–06	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.2
2006–07	0.7	0.4	0.4	0.2!
2007–08	0.8	0.4	0.4	0.3
2008–09	1.0	0.4	0.5	0.5
2009–10	1.1	0.5	0.6	0.5

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 1994–2010.



The Bureau of Justice Statistics is the statistical agency of the U.S. Department of Justice. James P. Lynch is the director.

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