



# Bureau of Justice Statistics Selected Findings

November 1994, NCJ-149259

## Domestic violence

# Violence between Intimates

### What is violence between intimates?

Violence between intimates includes those murders, rapes, robberies, or assaults committed by spouses, ex-spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends. In this report, intimates are distinguished from —

- *other relatives* (parent, child, sibling, grandparent, in-law, cousin)
- *acquaintances* (friend, someone known)
- *strangers*.

Violence between intimates is difficult to measure; it often occurs in private, and victims are often reluctant to report incidents to anyone because of shame or fear of reprisal.

### How many people are victims of nonfatal violence committed by intimates?

According to an analysis of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) from 1987-91, intimates commit an annual average of 621,015 rapes, robberies or assaults representing over 13% of all of these violent victimizations.

In the NCVS in 1992, 51% of the victims of intimate violence were attacked by boyfriends or girlfriends, 34% were

This report summarizes the following Department of Justice statistics about violence between intimates:

- The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) produces estimates of violence that victims perceive to be crimes and are willing and able to report to survey interviewers. Violent crimes included in the NCVS are rape, robbery, and assault. (Murder is not measured because of the inability to question the victims.)
- Data about murder are from two sources: the FBI's Supplemental Homicide Report from the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) program and a Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) study of 1988 murder cases from

prosecutors' files in large urban counties.

- Information on police policies and units for domestic violence is from the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics survey (LEMAS).
- Information about confined violent offenders was collected in the 1989 Survey of Inmates in Local Jails and the 1991 Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities.

Sources of the information in this report are listed on page 9. Additional detail and methodological explanations about each of these datasets are contained in the publications listed.

attacked by spouses, and 15% were attacked by ex-spouses. In 1992, 54% of the general population age 12 and over were married, 30% were never married, 10% were divorced, and 7% were widowed.

Most violence between intimates is assault: the intentional inflicting of injury on another person. In 1992, 81% of the violent victimizations committed by spouses and ex-spouses were assaults. The remainder were rapes and robberies, which also may have involved assault.

### How many murders are committed by intimates?

According to the FBI's *Crime in the U.S.*, 22,540 murders were committed nationwide in 1992. The relationship between the victims and the offender was known in 61% of these murders and unknown in 39%. About 15% of the murders where the relationship between the victim and the assailant was known involved a victim described in police records as an intimate (spouse, ex-spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend) of the killer. (See methodological note on page 9 for further information about these data.)

Of those murders where the relationship between the victim and the killer was known, about 10% involved the killing of a spouse or ex-spouse and nearly 6% involved the killing of a boyfriend or girlfriend.

### Females are more likely than males to be victims of violence by intimates

Annually, compared to males, females experienced over 10 times as many incidents of violence by an intimate. On average each year, women experienced over 572,000 violent victimizations committed by an intimate, compared to approximately 49,000 incidents committed against men.

Average annual number of single-offender violent victimizations, 1987-91

Victim-offender relationship	Sex of victim	
	Female	Male
Intimate	572,032	48,983
Other relative	117,201	75,587
Acquaintance	796,067	1,268,506
Stranger	571,114	1,182,307

Source: BJS, *Violence Against Women: A National Crime Victimization Survey Report*, 1994

Women are much less likely than men to become victims of violent crime in general, but they are more likely than men to be victimized by intimates, such as husbands or boyfriends. Men are more likely than women to be victims of violence perpetrated by acquaintances or strangers.

Average annual rate per 1,000 population of single-offender violent victimizations, 1987-91

Victim-offender relationship	Sex of victim	
	Female	Male
Intimate	5.0	.5
Other relative	1.0	.7
Acquaintance	8.0	13.0
Stranger	5.0	12.0

Source: BJS, *Violence Against Women: A National Crime Victimization Survey Report*, 1994

### What are the characteristics of women violently victimized by intimates?

#### Race

White and black women had equivalent rates of violence committed by intimates and other relatives (about 5 per 1,000 persons).

#### Ethnicity

Hispanic and non-Hispanic females had about the same rate of violence attributable to intimates, 6 per 1,000 persons.

#### Age

Women age 20 to 34 had the highest rates of violent victimization attributable to intimates (16 per 1,000 persons) of any age group.

#### Education

Women who graduated from college had the lowest rates of violence attributable to intimates (3 per 1,000 persons) compared to women with less than a high school education (5 per 1,000), high school graduates,

(6 per 1,000) or women with some college (6 per 1,000)

#### Income

Women with family incomes under \$9,999 had the highest rates of violence attributable to an intimate (11 per 1,000 persons) and those with family incomes over \$30,000 had the lowest rates (2 per 1,000).

#### Marital status

Divorced or separated women had higher rates of violence by intimates (16 per 1,000 persons) than women who never married (7 per 1,000) or married women (1.5 per 1,000).

#### Location of residence

Women living in central cities, suburban areas and rural locations experienced similar rates of violence committed by intimates.

Source: BJS, *Violence Against Women: A National Crime Victimization Survey Report*, 1994

Women were more likely to be raped or assaulted by an acquaintance than by an intimate, another relative, or a stranger. Robbery was the only non-fatal crime in which women were more likely to be victimized by strangers rather than intimates, other family members, or acquaintances.

In over 90% of the violence by intimates recorded in the NCVS from 1987-91, the victim was female.

Victim-offender relationship	Percent of all victims who were female
Intimate	
Spouse	93%
Boyfriend/girlfriend	91
Ex-spouse	89
Other relatives	
Child	78
Brother/sister	59
Other relative	57
Parent	52
Unspecified	28
Other known offender	38
Stranger	32

Source: *Highlights from 20 Years of Surveying Crime Victims: The National Crime Victimization Survey, 1973-92*, 1993

An estimated 1,432 females were killed by intimates in 1992 according to the FBI's *Crime in the U.S.* Female victims represented 70% of the intimate murder victims. About a third of all female murder victims over age 14 were killed by an intimate compared to 4% of male murder victims. The wives-to-husbands ratio for spousal murder differs for blacks and whites: 59% of black victims of spousal murder were wives while 74% of white victims were wives.

### How many female victims of intimate violence experienced repeated victimizations?

About 1 in 5 females victimized by their spouse or ex-spouse reported to the NCVS that they had been a victim of a series of 3 or more assaults in the last 6 months that were so similar that they could not distinguish one from another. For assaults in general in 1992, fewer than 1 in 10 victimizations involved this type of victimization.

## What are the trends in violence between intimates?

### During the past five years, rates of intimate rapes, robberies and assaults for both male and female victims have been constant

According to the NCVS between 1987 and 1992, the rate of violent victimizations committed by intimates varied little from the average annual rate of 5 per 1,000 for females and 0.5 per 1,000 for males. The proportion of all violence committed by intimates was also consistent during the period: about 27% of all violence against females and about 2% of all violence against males.

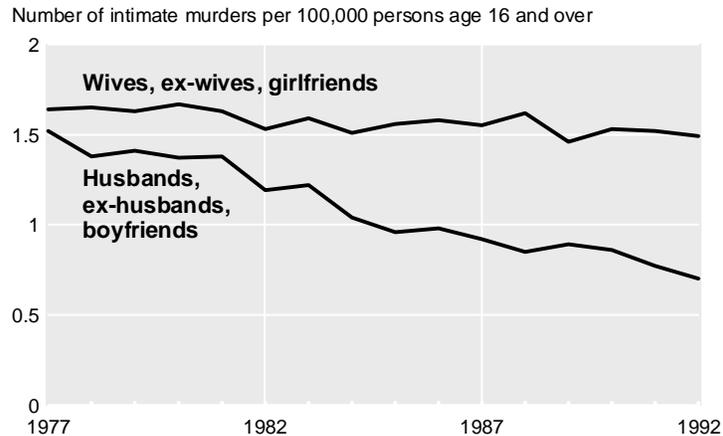
	Number of single-offender victimizations by intimates	Rate per 1,000 population	Percent of all victimizations committed by intimates
<b>Male victims</b>			
1987	31,685	0.3	1.6%
1988	55,877	0.6	2.1
1989	52,816	0.5	2.0
1990	26,737	0.2	1.1
1991	62,004	0.6	2.2
1992	49,038	0.5	2.2
<b>Female victims</b>			
1987	405,640	4.0	27.0%
1988	585,261	5.5	26.6
1989	586,137	5.6	28.1
1990	531,179	5.0	26.9
1991	585,385	5.5	27.4
1992	593,546	5.5	27.4

Note: The numbers from NCVS presented here do not show a statistically significant trend.

### Improvements to the NCVS will better measure intimate violence

In the mid-1970's the National Academy of Sciences evaluated the NCVS for accuracy and usefulness. While the survey was found to be an effective instrument for measuring crime, reviewers identified aspects of the methodology and scope of the NCVS that could be improved. Many of the recommendations resulted in improvements to the measurement of domestic violence.

### The murder rates for both male and female intimates have declined; the rate for males dropped the most, falling in half from 1977 to 1992



Source: FBI, *Crime in the U.S.*, 1977-92 and U.S. Population Estimates from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. See page 9 of this report for the data points.

### During the last 15 years —

- The ratio of male to female victims of intimate murder fell

In 1977, 54% of the murder victims who were killed by intimates were female. By 1992, the ratio of female to male victims had changed, with 70% of the victims being female.

In other words the number of male victims fell from 1,185 in 1977 to 657 in 1992 and the number of female victims increased from 1,396 to 1,510 during the same period.

- Murder rates of young black females killed by intimates declined

For black female victims of intimate murder age 18-34, the rate fell from 8.4 per 100,000 in 1977 to 6 per 100,000 in 1992.

During the same time period the rate for white females age 18-34 remained relatively constant (1.4 per 100,000).<sup>†</sup>

- The ratio of black husbands to black wives killed fell

In 1977, more black husbands were killed than black wives. In 1982, the same pattern prevailed, but by 1992, fewer black husbands were killed than black wives.

For whites, wives have consistently outnumbered husbands as victims of intimate murder.

<sup>†</sup> James Alan Fox, *Domestic Homicide in America: Trends and Patterns for 1976-92*, unpublished paper, June 23, 1994.

Within the categories of violent crime measured by the NCVS, the redesign will produce fuller reporting of those incidents that involved intimates or other family members.

The redesigned questionnaire was implemented into 100% of the sample in June 1993 and an initial release of the data was made at the end of October, 1994. Regular processing of the

NCVS data results in a release of the analysis of the detailed variables including victim-offender relationship several months after the initial release. Therefore, no data from the redesign are included in this report.

Additional information about the redesign of the NCVS and the changes in domestic violence questions is presented on page 10.

## How many victims of intimate violence face an armed assailant?

For rape, robbery, and assaults recorded in the NCVS, 18% of the women victimized by intimates faced an armed offender, compared to 33% of those victimized by strangers, 22% by other relatives, or 21% by acquaintances.

Of the intimate victimizations where weapons were present, 40% involved knives or sharp instruments, 34% involved guns, 12% involved blunt objects, and 15% involved other weapons. Strangers, compared to other types of offenders, were more likely to be armed with guns.

## Most murders of intimates are committed with firearms

According to the FBI's Supplemental Homicide Reports in 1992, 62% of the murder victims known to have been killed by intimates were shot to death (see table on page 10). Firearms were most frequently used to kill —

- wives and ex-wives (69%)
- husbands and ex-husbands (61%)
- girlfriends (60%).

Boyfriends were more often killed with knives (54%) than firearms (41%).

The proportion of murders involving firearms was smaller for victims killed

by intimates (62%) than for victims killed by strangers (75%) or acquaintances (69%). For all types of victims killed by firearms, most are killed by handguns. Over three-quarters of the firearms used to kill intimates were handguns. Wives and girlfriends were more likely than other types of victims to have been killed with shotguns.

Some murder victims are also armed.

In a study of murder cases in large urban counties in 1988, about 15% of the victims killed by spouses were armed with a gun, knife, or other weapon.

## How many victims of intimates receive a nonfatal injury?

According to the NCVS, about 3% of the women who were victimized by intimates received serious but nonfatal injuries. This proportion was similar to that for women victimized by other relatives, acquaintances, or strangers.

About 54% of the women victimized by intimates received minor injuries. Women victimized by other relatives, acquaintances, or strangers were less likely to sustain minor injuries.

If the attacker was an intimate rather than a stranger, injured women were also more likely to —

- receive medical care (27% vs. 14%)
- require hospitalization (15% vs. 8%).

For rape victims, however, the outcome was different: women who were raped by a stranger received injuries in addition to the rape itself more often than women raped by someone whom they knew.

## Most women who are victims of intimate violence took some form of self-protective action

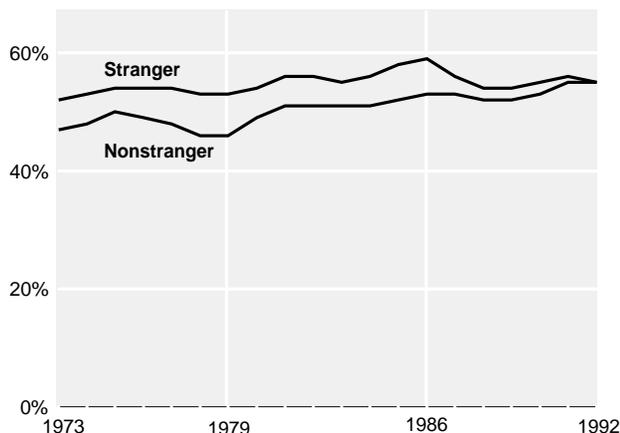
The NCVS data show that 80% of women victimized by an intimate took some form of self-protective action, including 40% who took a physical action and 40% who took a passive/verbal action. Of women victimized by intimates, the proportion who used self-protective action was about the same as that for women victimized by strangers, acquaintances, or relatives other than intimates. The proportion of women who used physical self-protection such as fighting back was higher for women victimized by an intimate than for women victimized by a stranger (40% vs. 20%).

Of women who tried to protect themselves against intimate attackers —

- over half believe their self-protective behavior helped the situation
- almost a quarter believe their actions actually made the situation worse.

## Reporting to the police by females victimized by nonstrangers increased to equal the reporting by females victimized by strangers

Percent of victimizations reported to the police by female victims of violence



Source: National Crime Victimization Survey, 1973-92

For all violent victimizations —

- victims of all types report about half of their victimizations to the police
- since 1973, the percent reported to the police increased.

Female victims of violence —

- are more likely to report to the police than male victims
- are reporting an increasing proportion of both stranger and nonstranger crimes.

Female victims of violence by intimates —

- report over half of their victimizations to the police
- are about as likely to report to the police as those female victims who were attacked by other relatives or strangers.

**What reasons do women victimized by intimates give for reporting or not reporting the crime to the police?**

According to the NCVS, the most frequent reason female victims of intimates gave for not reporting to police was that they believed the incident was a private or personal matter. The reason for not reporting most often given by females victimized by strangers was that they felt the incident was minor and might not be considered a crime.

Almost 6 times as many women victimized by intimates (18%) as those victimized by strangers (3%) said that they did not report their violent victimization to police because they feared reprisal from the offender.

Half of the female victims attacked by intimates said that the most important reason they reported to police was to punish the offender and another quarter said that the most important reason was to stop or prevent this from happening to "me or others." The most common reasons given for reporting by women victimized by nonintimates were similar to those given by women victimized by intimates.

**How do the police respond to reports of intimate victimization?**

Victims reported to the NCVS that police respond to over three-quarters of all reports by females victimized by intimates, as well as by acquaintances, other relatives, or strangers by coming to the crime scene.

According to victims' perceptions, the police responded within 5 minutes in 36% of the victimizations where the offender was a stranger, in 25% where the offender was an intimate, in 24% where the offender was a relative other than an intimate, and in 24% where the offender was an acquaintance.

Police take a report in over two-thirds of all incidents of violence reported, regardless of the victim-offender relationship. However, the police are more likely to take a formal report if the

offender is a stranger (77%) rather than an intimate (69%), other relative (67%), or acquaintance (70%).

Police question witnesses in about the same proportion of violent victimizations of females, regardless of the victim-offender relationship. Searching the scene for evidence occurs more often when a stranger rather than an intimate or other known offenders committed the crime.

**How do police agencies deal with domestic disputes?**

According to the 1990 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics Survey (LEMAS), 93% of the large local police agencies (agencies with more than 100 officers) and 77% of the sheriffs' departments have written policies concerning domestic disturbances. In addition, 45% of the large local police agencies and 40% of the sheriffs' departments have special units to deal with domestic violence.

As of 1992, 14 States and the District of Columbia had laws mandating arrest in crimes of domestic violence.\*\* The States with mandatory arrest laws include Arizona, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin.

To legally arrest a suspect, police are required to obtain an arrest warrant from a judge before arresting a suspect unless they are able to show at the time of the arrest they had probable cause to believe the suspect had committed the crime. Warrantless probable-cause arrests in cases of domestic violence are authorized in 47 States and the District of Columbia. Most State codes permitting warrantless arrests for domestic violence crimes also instruct police to inform victims of certain rights including the

\*\* Barbara J. Hart, Esq., "State codes on domestic violence: Analysis, commentary and recommendations," *Juvenile & Family Court Journal*, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 43:4, 1992.

availability of protection orders, shelter or emergency facilities, and transportation.

**What are the characteristics of defendants accused of killing their spouse?**

In a study of murder cases in large urban counties in 1988, of defendants who killed their spouse —

- almost 60% were male
- 77% were over age 30.

By comparison, of defendants in nonfamily murders —

- 93% were male
- 65% were under age 30.

Over half of the defendants who killed their spouse had a prior criminal history. However, they were less likely to have a prior criminal history than defendants who killed nonfamily members. Also, they were less likely than nonfamily murder defendants to be unemployed (25% vs. 37%) but more likely to have a history of mental illness (12% vs. 3%).

**Most defendants in spousal murder cases are convicted**

In the study of murder cases in 1988 in large urban counties, about 80% of the defendants in spousal murder cases were convicted or pleaded guilty.

Outcomes of murder cases where the defendant killed a spouse are similar to the outcomes of nonfamily murder cases.

Case disposition	Percent of murder defendants accused of killing —	
	Spouses	Nonfamily victims
Diverted	.6%	.7%
Rejected	6.5	8.4
Dismissed	3.5	7.5
Acquitted	6.1	7.6
Insanity acquittal	1.2	.2
Convicted at trial	37.4	33.9
Pleaded guilty	42.1	38.2
Other*	2.5	3.4

\*Includes murder defendants who died or whose individual cases had not been disposed. Source: BJS, *Murder in Families*, July 1994.

## What are the characteristics of spousal murder cases in urban areas?

### **Time and place of the murder**

Over a third of the victims of spouses were killed during the day. Comparatively, a quarter of the nonfamily murder victims were killed during the day. About 86% of victims who were killed by spouses were murdered at home, a proportion similar to other victims of murder by a family member. About a fifth of nonfamily murder victims were killed at home.

### **Number of victims**

Most defendants who murdered their spouse killed no one else at the time. Of the defendants accused of killing a spouse, 2% killed more than one victim. The proportion of defendants accused of killing more than one victim was 13% when one of the victims was a parent, 12% when one of the victims included a child, and 5% when the victims were unrelated to the defendant.

### **Victim involvement**

About 23% of the murdered spouses precipitated the incident by provoking

the defendant with a deadly weapon, a nonlethal weapon, or other physical contact such as hitting with fists or pushing. Nonfamily victims were about as likely to have precipitated the incident as spouses.

### **Alcohol use at the time of the murder**

Over half of the defendants accused of murdering their spouse had been drinking alcohol at the time of the offense. Nonfamily murder defendants were more likely to have been drinking. Also, almost half of the victims of spousal murder had been drinking alcohol at the time of the offense, about the same proportion as the nonfamily murder victims.

### **Time to arrest**

Over 62% of the defendants accused of murdering spouses were arrested on the day of the crime. About 32% of the defendants accused of killing nonfamily members were arrested on the day of the crime.

Source: BJS, *Murder in Families*, Special Report, NCJ-143498, July 1994.

## There are differences in outcomes of cases where a woman is accused of killing her husband and those where a man is accused of killing his wife

In spousal murder cases in large urban counties in 1988, women defendants were more likely than men defendants to have their cases —

- diverted, rejected or dismissed (12% vs. 9%)
- result in an acquittal (13% vs. 1%).

Of those accused of killing their spouses —

- 41% of the men and 31% of the women were convicted at trial
- 46% of the men and 38% of the women pleaded guilty.

## Persons convicted of killing their spouses were about as likely as other murderers to be convicted on the most serious arrest charge

Of those convicted in large urban counties in 1988, spousal murderers were less likely than nonfamily murderers to be convicted of first-degree murder or other types of murder (47% vs. 58%) and more likely to be convicted of voluntary/nonnegligent manslaughter (43% vs. 29%)

For convicted murderers, the most serious conviction offense was —

- first-degree murder for 18% of the women who killed their husbands and 24% of the men who killed their wives
- voluntary/nonnegligent manslaughter for 54% of the women who killed their husband and 37% of the men who killed their wives.

## Most convicted murderers are sentenced to a prison term, regardless of their relationship to the victim

The study of murder cases in large urban counties in 1988 found some sentencing differences between murderers convicted of killing their spouses and other murderers:

- Of the men convicted of killing their wives, 94% were sentenced to prison, including 15% who were sentenced to life terms. Women who killed their husbands were less likely to receive a prison sentence: 81% were sentenced to prison, including 8% who received a life term.

- Spousal murderers were more likely than nonfamily murderers to be sentenced to probation rather than incarceration (9% vs. 3%). Of the women convicted of killing their husbands, 16% were sentenced to probation compared to 5% of the men who killed their wives.

## Of those convicted of spouse murders, men receive longer prison sentences than women

In large urban counties, the average prison sentence length on a murder or nonnegligent manslaughter conviction (excluding life sentences or the death penalty) was —

- 17.5 years for men convicted of killing their wives
- 6.2 years for women convicted of killing their husbands.

**Of the 328,000 State prisoners incarcerated for a violent offense in 1991, 7% had victimized an intimate**

Prisoner relationship to the victim	Percent of State prisoners incarcerated for								
	Total violence	Murder	Man-slaughter	Kidnaping	Rape	Other sexual	Robbery	Assault	Other violent
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Intimates	7	11	12	14	10	6	1	12	1
Spouse or ex-spouse	3	6	4	5	2	1	0	5	0
Boy/girl friend	4	5	8	9	8	4	1	7	1
Other relative	10	6	7	3	23	36	1	6	49
Known	27	33	35	23	36	41	11	29	30
Stranger	56	50	47	59	31	17	87	53	20

- ◆ Like the prison population, 7% of jail inmates serving sentences in 1989 for violent offenses had victimized intimates.
- ◆ Most violent State prisoners were incarcerated for crimes against strangers.
- ◆ 87% of the State prisoners incarcerated for robbery victimized a stranger.

Source: BJS Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities, 1991.

**Almost two-thirds of the violent State prisoners who victimized intimates were convicted of murder or assault**

Prisoner relationship to the victim	Percent of State prisoners incarcerated for a violent offense								
	Total	Murder	Man-slaughter	Kidnaping	Rape	Other sexual	Robbery	Assault	Other violent
Total	100%	23%	4%	3%	8%	13%	31%	17%	1%
Intimates	100%	35%	6%	5%	11%	10%	3%	30%	0%
Spouse or ex-spouse	100	48	5	5	6	5	0	31	0
Boy/girl friend	100	27	7	5	14	13	5	29	0
Other relative	100%	14%	3%	1%	18%	48%	2%	10%	5%
Known	100%	29%	5%	2%	10%	20%	13%	19%	1%
Stranger	100%	21%	3%	3%	4%	4%	48%	16%	0%

- ◆ Of violent State prisoners who victimized intimates, 35% were convicted of murder and 30% were convicted of assault.
- ◆ 48% of the violent State prisoners who victimized their spouses were convicted of murder.
- ◆ Over a quarter of the State prisoners who victimized a boyfriend or girlfriend were convicted of rape or other sexual assault.

Source: BJS Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities, 1991.

**What are the characteristics of violent prisoners who victimized intimates?**

Prisoner characteristics	Percent of violent State prisoners who victimized:	
	Intimates	Nonintimates
Sex		
Male	90%	97%
Female	10	3
Age		
24 and under	10%	20%
25-34 years	41	45
35-44 years	30	23
45-54 years	11	8
55 or older	9	4
Race and ethnicity		
White	47%	37%
Black	40	47
Hispanic	10	14
Other	3	3

Source: BJS Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities, 1991.

**The background characteristics of prisoners who victimized intimates were similar to those of prisoners convicted of similar crimes who victimized nonintimates**

- In 1991, of violent State prisoners who victimized intimates—
- about half grew up living with both parents
  - 12% had lived in a foster home at some time
  - 22% reported some physical or sexual abuse
  - 31% had parents who abused drugs or alcohol
  - 35% had a family member who served time in prison or jail.

**Female prisoners are more likely than male prisoners to have harmed an intimate**

In 1991, of the State prisoners incarcerated for violent crimes excluding robbery, over a quarter of the female prisoners and a tenth of the male prisoners harmed an intimate. About a third of the female prisoners incarcerated for homicide killed their husband, ex-husband, or boyfriend.

Conviction offense	Percent of violent prisoners who victimized intimates	
	Male prisoners	Female prisoners
Total*	7%	20%
Homicide	9	32
Robbery	1	1
Sexual assault	7	3
Assault	12	20
Kidnaping	14	11

Source: BJS Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities, 1991.

## What are the differences in offense type between male and female prisoners incarcerated for harming an intimate?

Inmates' relationship to the victim	Number of prisoners	Prisoners who were incarcerated for violent offenses								
		Total	Murder	Manslaughter	Kidnaping	Rape	Other sexual	Robbery	Assault	Other violent
Male prisoners who had:										
Intimate victims	20,170	100%	32%	5%	6%	12%	11%	3%	31%	0%
Wives and ex-wives	7,431	100	44	4	5	7	6	0	34	0
Girlfriends	12,739	100	25	6	6	16	14	5	29	0
All other victims	279,677	100	22	4	2	8	13	33	16	1
Female prisoners who had:										
Intimate victims	2,345	100%	61%	16%	1%	0	1%	1%	20%	1%
Husbands and ex-husbands	1,308	100	73	10	1	0	0	0	16	0
Boyfriends	1,037	100	47	22	0	0	1	3	25	1
All other victims	9,455	100	31	10	1	1	5	30	19	3

Note: Excludes cases where the victim-offender relationship could not be determined.

Source: BJS Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities, 1991.

### Two-thirds of the State prisoners incarcerated for harming intimates had a criminal history

In 1991, of those male prisoners with violent offenses against intimates—

- 30% were first offenders (persons who had not been sentenced to probation or incarceration prior to this conviction)
- 34% had a previous conviction for a violent offense
- 36% had a previous conviction for a nonviolent offense.

This pattern was similar to that for violent male prisoners with other types of victims.

In general, violent female prisoners were more likely than violent male prisoners to be first offenders. For female prisoners incarcerated for intimate violence the pattern is the same:

- 72% were first offenders
- 13% had a previous conviction for a violent offense
- 15% had a previous conviction for a nonviolent offense.

Female prisoners with violent offenses against intimate victims were more likely than those who victimized others to be first offenders (72% vs. 52%).

### Sentence lengths of State prisoners who victimized intimates are similar to those who attacked nonintimates

In 1991, the average sentence length for State prisoners convicted of violence other than robbery was about 20 years. Of those prisoners convicted of violence against intimates—

- 16% were sentenced to 5 years or less
- 14% were sentenced to 5 to 10 years
- 50% were sentenced to 10 or more years
- 20% were sentenced to life terms or the death penalty.

The proportion of female prisoners convicted of violence against intimates who received life terms or the death penalty (33%) is higher than that for male prisoners convicted of violence against intimates (19%) and that for female prisoners who victimized nonintimates (22%). This difference is probably attributable to the higher proportion of female prisoners who victimized intimates being convicted of some form of homicide.

### How long do State prisoners who victimized intimates expect to stay in prison?

Most State prisoners are released from prison eventually: some before their entire sentence is served through parole or good time provisions, the rest when their sentences expire. State prisoners who victimized intimates and those who victimized others share similar expectations about how long they will serve. For State prisoners who victimized intimates—

- 60% expected to serve at least 5 years.
- the average time expected was about 9 years.

Prisoners' sex and relationship to the victim	Percent of violent* State prisoners who expected to serve —			
	2 years or less	More than 2 to 5 years	More than 5 to 10 years	More than 10 years
Total	14%	26%	26%	34%
Intimate	15	26	30	30
Others	14	26	26	34
Male	14%	26%	26%	34%
Intimate	15	27	30	29
Others	14	26	26	35
Female	18%	26%	30%	26%
Intimate	15	19	31	36
Others	19	29	30	23

\*Excluding robbery  
Source: Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities, 1991.

## Sources

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## Methodological note

Since nearly 4 in 10 murders reported by law enforcement have an unknown victim-offender relationship, it is possible that they may distribute in the same way as known cases, especially if the unknown cases disproportionately occur in some jurisdictions due to poor reporting of this variable. However, it may also be the case that unknown assailants are more likely to be reported in cases where the victim and offender have no prior relationship, indicative of a higher prevalence of stranger murders. In light of the substantial fraction of murders with unknown victim-offender relationships, readers are urged to use caution in estimating the proportion of murders occurring between intimates.

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### Trends in the number and rates of homicide victims by relationship to the offender, 1977-92

	Estimated number of homicide victims						Rate per 100,000 population age 16 and over	
	Wife or girlfriend	Husband or boyfriend	Other relatives	Other known	Stranger	Unknown	Wife or girlfriend	Husband or boyfriend
1977	1,396	1,185	1,683	7,113	2,562	5,162	1.6	1.5
1978	1,428	1,095	1,701	6,199	2,640	5,886	1.7	1.4
1979	1,438	1,137	1,674	6,909	2,682	7,574	1.6	1.4
1980	1,498	1,129	1,797	7,304	3,064	8,248	1.7	1.4
1981	1,486	1,149	1,869	7,837	3,491	6,666	1.6	1.4
1982	1,408	1,008	1,807	7,290	3,551	5,904	1.5	1.2
1983	1,487	1,043	1,796	6,681	2,897	5,445	1.6	1.2
1984	1,420	897	1,701	6,542	3,289	4,822	1.5	1.0
1985	1,480	835	1,708	7,099	2,752	5,106	1.6	1.0
1986	1,525	866	1,690	7,708	2,679	6,142	1.6	1.0
1987	1,508	824	1,729	7,377	2,653	5,950	1.6	0.9
1988	1,592	765	1,613	7,383	2,564	6,783	1.6	0.9
1989	1,441	817	1,741	7,568	2,817	7,117	1.5	0.9
1990	1,524	797	1,688	7,946	3,375	8,134	1.5	0.9
1991	1,528	714	1,703	7,567	3,716	9,472	1.5	0.8
1992	1,510	657	1,531	7,550	3,218	9,295	1.5	0.7

Note: Wife or girlfriend and husband or boyfriend includes ex-spouses.  
Source: FBI, *Crime in the U.S.*, 1977-92 and U.S. Population Estimates from the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

## Additional details about the redesign of the National Crime Victimization Survey

### The redesign of the NCVS

In the mid-1970's the National Academy of Sciences evaluated the NCVS for accuracy and usefulness. While the survey was found to be an effective instrument for measuring crime, reviewers identified aspects of the methodology and scope of the NCVS that could be improved. They proposed research to investigate the following:

- an enhanced screening section that would better stimulate respondents' recall of victimizations
- screening questions that would sharpen the concepts of criminal victimization and diminish the effects of subjective interpretations of the survey questions
- additional questions on the nature and consequences of victimizations that would yield useful data for analysis
- enhanced questions and inquiries about domestic violence, rape, and sexual attack to get better estimates of these hard-to-measure victimizations.

### The redesign has improved the measurement of domestic violence

Respondents may be reluctant to report acts of domestic violence as crimes, particularly if the offender is present during the interview. In addition, victims may not perceive domestic violence as discrete criminal acts but as a pattern of abuse. Though these issues still pose measurement problems, the redesigned screening section includes explicit questions about incidents involving family members, friends, and acquaintances.

Screening questions also include multiple references to acts of domestic violence to encourage respondents to report such incidents even if they do not define these acts as crimes. The survey staff review these reported incidents using standardized definitions of crimes. Thus, within the categories of violent crime measured by the NCVS, the redesign will produce fuller reporting of those incidents that involved intimates or other family members.

### A comparison of the old and new questionnaire illustrates the expanded cues that help a respondent recall an incident

#### New

2. People often don't think of incidents committed by someone they know. Did you have something stolen from you OR were you attacked or threatened by —
  - a. Someone at work or school —
  - b. A neighbor or friend —
  - c. A relative or family member —
  - d. Any other person you've met or known?
3. Did you call the police to report something that happened to YOU which you thought was a crime?
4. Did anything happen to you which you thought was a crime, but did NOT report to the police?

#### Old

2. Did you call the police to report something that happened to YOU which you thought was a crime?
3. Did anything happen to YOU which you thought was a crime, but did NOT report to the police?

## Percent of murder victims by relationship to the offender and weapon type, 1992

Victim's relationship to the offender	Percent of murder victims										
	Total	Firearms				Other guns and not stated	Knives or cutting instruments	Personal weapons (hands, fists, feet)	Blunt objects (clubs, hammers, etc.)	Other weapons*	Weapon type not specified
		Total firearms	Handguns	Rifles	Shotguns						
Total	100%	68%	55%	3%	5%	5%	15%	5%	5%	3%	5%
Intimates total	100	62	48	5	8	1	24	5	3	3	3
Males	100	53	44	3	5	1	40	1	2	1	2
Husband	100	61	50	5	6	1	30	2	3	1	2
Boyfriend	100	41	35	1	4	1	54	1	1	1	2
Females	100	66	50	6	9	1	17	7	4	4	3
Wife	100	69	51	6	10	1	15	5	4	4	3
Girlfriend	100	60	47	4	7	1	19	9	3	5	3
All other relatives	100	45	31	5	8	1	18	18	6	8	4
Other known	100	69	56	4	6	3	18	5	4	2	2
Stranger	100	75	64	3	4	3	11	4	5	2	2
Unknown	100	71	58	1	3	9	10	3	5	3	8

\*Poison, pushed or thrown, explosives, fire, narcotics, drowning, strangulation, or asphyxiation.  
Source : Special analysis of Supplemental Homicide Report, Uniform Crime Reports, FBI, 1992