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# Third-Party Involvement in Violent Crime, 1993-99

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At least one other person besides a lone victim and the offender(s) was present at about two-thirds of violent victimizations, according to estimates from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), 1993-99. In about 6.4 million violent victimizations annually a third party was present. Less than a quarter of these third parties were victimized themselves.

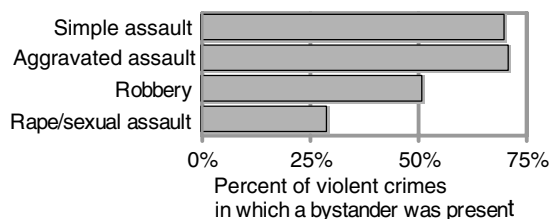
Violent crime is often characterized as an event occurring in isolation between an offender and a victim. These characterizations are often void of the situational and social context in which these events occur. Criminal incidents may occur in the presence of or involve persons in addition to a lone victim and the offender(s).

These third parties may be victimized themselves, witness the crime, intervene during the incident, and/or escalate the violence of the incident. (See page 7.) Third parties sometimes choose not to become involved even during an assault.

In addition to the third parties' presence during incidents of violence, they often serve as witnesses to criminal events. They may call the police, provide information that helps to solve crimes, clarify the characteristics of the incident, or bear some responsibility for the commencement or escalation

### Highlights

**About 66% of all violent crimes between 1993 and 1999 occurred in the presence of someone in addition to the victim and offender(s).**



- Third parties were present during two-thirds of all violent victimizations between 1993 and 1999. Third parties were present at 70% of assaults, 52% of robberies, and 29% of rapes or sexual assaults.
- About a third of all intimate partner violence occurred in the presence of a third party compared to about two-thirds of violence between strangers or other acquaintances.
- Less than a quarter of third parties present during a violent crime were harmed or robbed themselves. Of all violent victimizations 51% involved only one victim and at least one third party.
- Third parties were more likely to help the situation than to make it worse, but more often they did neither. Victims stated that the actions of third parties helped in 36% of violent victimizations, worsened the situation in 11%, and did neither in 44%.
- Third parties primarily helped by preventing injuries. In 18% of cases where a third party was present, the actions of that person helped to prevent injury, compared to 1% in which the actions caused injury.
- On average each year, 1993-99, third-party actions prevented injuries in 1.2 million violent victimizations.
- In 38% of the victimizations in which the third party helped, either the victim escaped or the offender was scared off.
- Violent victimizations at school or occurring during leisure activities away from home were the most likely circumstances to involve the presence of a third party.

**Table 1. Third-party presence during violent crime, 1993-99**

| Year | Violent victimizations |                          |
|------|------------------------|--------------------------|
|      | Total                  | Percent with third party |
| 1993 | 11,630,720             | 65.5%                    |
| 1994 | 11,583,370             | 66.4                     |
| 1995 | 10,225,170             | 67.4                     |
| 1996 | 9,543,460              | 66.0                     |
| 1997 | 9,023,510              | 66.5                     |
| 1998 | 8,548,450              | 65.8                     |
| 1999 | 7,473,880              | 65.6                     |

of violence. Therefore, to better understand many violent crimes, it is necessary to account for persons present at but often not directly involved in the victimization.

This report uses data from the NCVS to describe how often and under what circumstances other people, in addition to the victim interviewed and the offender(s), are present during a violent crime and their impact on the outcome of these events.

A third party is an individual(s) other than the victim interviewed and the offender(s) who is present during a violent crime. For example, a third party may be another victim, a bystander, an eyewitness, one who intervenes, an instigator, another household member, a police officer, or some combination of the above. (For

**The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)**

The NCVS is the Nation's primary source of information on the frequency, characteristics, and consequences of criminal victimization. One of the largest ongoing household surveys conducted by the Federal Government, the NCVS collects information about crimes both reported and not reported to police.

The survey provides a national forum for victims to describe the impact of crime and the characteristics of violent offenders. This report is one in an ongoing series using the NCVS to inform topics of particular interest. Previous reports in this series and NCVS data are presented on the BJS website at — [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/)

**Table 2. Third-party presence, by type of crime, 1993-99**

| Type of crime       | Average annual violent victimizations |                    |                          |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
|                     | All                                   | With a third party | Percent with third party |
| Total               | 9,718,370                             | 6,432,480          | 66.2%                    |
| Rape/sexual assault | 393,200                               | 114,160            | 29.0                     |
| Robbery             | 1,088,390                             | 560,080            | 51.5                     |
| Aggravated assault  | 2,074,940                             | 1,471,630          | 70.9                     |
| Simple assault      | 6,161,830                             | 4,286,610          | 69.6                     |

more detailed information on the definition of a third party, see page 3.)

stabbed when they attempt to stop a crime.

**Presence of a third party**

NCVS data show for 1993-1999, on average, over 66% of all violent crimes involved someone besides the offender and victim. The percentage of crimes involving a third party did not change significantly from 1993 to 1999 (table 1).

Third parties were present most often during aggravated (71%) and simple assaults (70%) and less often during rapes/sexual assaults (29%) (table 2). About half of all robberies are committed in the presence of a third party.

**Victimization of third parties**

It is possible that third parties were also the target of the violence, such as a robber who victimized a group of shoppers. In other cases the third party may have been harmed when he or she attempted to intervene. For example, third parties may be shot or

The NCVS cannot identify the true intent of the offender. It does not collect information on whether third parties present during the incident were targeted by the offender or became involved in some other way. In addition, the NCVS does not record the number of third persons present during the incident, only the number who were victimized.

When present during a violent incident, third parties were not likely to be harmed or robbed (table 3). While 66% of all violent victimizations involved third parties, 15% involved multiple victims. Of those incidents in which a third party was present, 23% involved two or more victims: 14% involved two victims, 4% three victims, and 5% four or more victims.

Of those victimizations involving third parties, the number of victims varied by type of crime (table 4). Thirty-two percent of aggravated assault incidents involving third parties resulted in

**Table 3. Number of victims present in violent incidents, by type of crime, 1993-99**

| Type of crime       | Total | Percent of victimizations |                              |                  |
|---------------------|-------|---------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|
|                     |       | Only victim present       | One victim and third parties | Multiple victims |
| Rape/sexual assault | 100%  | 67.9%                     | 25.7%                        | 3.3%             |
| Robbery             | 100   | 45.4                      | 38.1                         | 13.3             |
| Aggravated assault  | 100   | 27.0                      | 48.2                         | 22.7             |
| Simple assault      | 100   | 28.5                      | 55.8                         | 13.7             |
| All violence        | 100   | 31.7                      | 51.0                         | 15.2             |

Note: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding. For each type of crime there were 3% or less of victimizations with other or unknown configurations of victims.

**Table 4. Number of victims in crimes with third-party presence, by type of crime, 1993-99**

| Type of crime       | Total | Number of victims |      |      |           |
|---------------------|-------|-------------------|------|------|-----------|
|                     |       | 1                 | 2    | 3    | 4 or more |
| Rape/sexual assault | 100%  | 88.6%             | 7.5% | 1.4% | 2.5%      |
| Robbery             | 100   | 74.1              | 16.1 | 5.7  | 4.1       |
| Aggravated assault  | 100   | 68.0              | 19.2 | 5.8  | 7.0       |
| Simple assault      | 100   | 80.3              | 12.6 | 3.2  | 3.9       |
| Total               | 100   | 77.1              | 14.3 | 4.0  | 4.6       |

Note: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding.

### Definition of a third party in the NCVS

A third party for this study is defined as any person at least age 12, other than the victim interviewed and the offender, who was present during the victimization. Third parties may have been victimized during the incident and did not necessarily intervene, physically or verbally. Third-party presence and the actions of third parties are based on the victim's perception of the events as stated during the survey interview. These perceptions were influenced by the victim's ability to accurately recognize and recall the attributes of the incident. For example, victims may have not been aware of the presence or actions of other parties outside of their purview while the crimes were occurring.

Third parties include eyewitnesses, bystanders, instigators, interlopers, other household members, and police officers. Third parties can be a single person or a group. In some cases the victim may have been a third-party witness who intervened and was then victimized. The NCVS does ask how many other persons were victimized but does not count the number of third parties present.

An incident may have multiple victims, including third parties age 12 or older who were present during the incident and were either harmed or threatened with harm.

To be considered "present," the third party must have been at the immediate scene of the crime during the incident. The opportunity for this person to be attacked or threatened or to lose something by robbery or theft must have been possible to consider the person present. The third party did not have to be conscious or awake to be considered present. A third party not at the scene of the crime but personally attacked or threatened with harm or subject to attempted harm was considered present. These situations include being shot at through a window by someone outside a building and being threatened by a neighbor in the next yard but do not include threats not made in person, such as over the telephone or through another person, the mail, or the Internet.

**Table 5. Number of offenders and victims in violent crime, 1993-99**

|                    | Lone victim | Multiple victims | Total     |
|--------------------|-------------|------------------|-----------|
| All violence       | 84.8%       | 15.2%            | 9,718,370 |
| Lone offender      | 87.9        | 12.1             | 7,459,780 |
| Multiple offenders | 73.1        | 26.8             | 1,953,700 |

another person being harmed or robbed, compared to 11% of rape/sexual assaults. Compared to other types of crime, assaults are significantly more likely to involve a third party, and these persons are more likely to be harmed.

In general, crimes with multiple offenders were more likely than single-offender crimes to involve multiple victims (table 5). Twenty-seven percent of the victimizations involving multiple offenders were associated with multiple victims compared to 12% of victimizations involving a single offender.

### Victim characteristics and third-party involvement

The percentage of violent crimes committed in the presence of someone other than the victim and offender varied by important victim characteristics (table 6).

#### Gender of victim

Males were more likely than females to experience a violent crime in the presence of a third party, 1993-99. Seventy percent of all violent crime involving male victims was committed in the presence of another person compared to 61% involving female victims.

**Table 6. Third-party presence during violent crime, by victim characteristics, 1993-99**

| Characteristic          | Average annual victimizations | Percent involving third party |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>           |                               |                               |
| Male                    | 5,503,970                     | 70.2%                         |
| Female                  | 4,214,400                     | 60.9                          |
| <b>Age</b>              |                               |                               |
| 12-15                   | 1,601,170                     | 74.5%                         |
| 16-19                   | 1,549,050                     | 73.9                          |
| 20-24                   | 1,478,070                     | 67.7                          |
| 25-34                   | 2,159,370                     | 61.3                          |
| 35-49                   | 2,195,480                     | 60.9                          |
| 50-64                   | 583,540                       | 60.8                          |
| 65 or older             | 151,680                       | 51.5                          |
| <b>Marital status</b>   |                               |                               |
| Never married           | 5,528,240                     | 69.7%                         |
| Married                 | 2,431,880                     | 67.1                          |
| Divorced/separated      | 1,606,570                     | 54.2                          |
| Widowed                 | 118,300                       | 50.7                          |
| <b>Race</b>             |                               |                               |
| White                   | 6,955,230                     | 67.1%                         |
| Black                   | 1,373,600                     | 63.4                          |
| Other*                  | 281,610                       | 62.4                          |
| Hispanic                | 978,340                       | 64.0                          |
| <b>Household income</b> |                               |                               |
| Less than \$7,500       | 1,117,260                     | 60.7%                         |
| \$7,500-\$14,999        | 1,286,180                     | 61.2                          |
| \$15,000-\$24,999       | 1,468,080                     | 64.8                          |
| \$25,000-\$34,999       | 1,344,010                     | 66.7                          |
| \$35,000-\$49,999       | 1,447,470                     | 69.5                          |
| \$50,000-\$74,999       | 1,251,110                     | 72.0                          |
| \$75,000 or more        | 846,120                       | 71.7                          |

\*In this report "other races" and "others" are defined as Asians, Native Hawaiians, other Pacific Islanders, Alaska Natives, and American Indians and are considered together.

#### Age of victim

Younger persons were more likely to experience violent victimization in the presence of another party. Seventy-four percent of all violent crime experienced by victims age 12 to 19 involved third parties, compared to 61% of incidents with victims age 25 to 64 and 52% with victims age 65 or older. Sixty-eight percent of all violence experienced by victims age 20 to 24 occurred in the presence of a third party.

#### Marital status

Married victims were as likely as those who have never been married to have a third party present during a violent crime. Seventy percent of all violence experienced by those never married

**Table 7. Third-party presence, by victim-offender relationship, 1993-99**

| Victim-offender relationship | Average annual victimizations | Percent with third-party |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Stranger                     | 4,560,520                     | 70.4%                    |
| Intimates                    | 1,044,540                     | 35.6                     |
| Other acquaintances          | 4,113,310                     | 69.3                     |

Note: Table totals differ because some respondents did not answer some questions.

**Table 8. Third-party presence, by perceived involvement of a gang in the incident, 1993-99**

| Perceived gang involvement | Average annual victimizations | Percent with third-party |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Gang-related               | 781,090                       | 75.0%                    |
| Non-gang-related           | 5,179,610                     | 65.0                     |
| Unsure                     | 3,538,030                     | 68.1                     |

Note: Table totals differ because some respondents did not answer some questions.

occurred in the presence of a third party compared to 67% of those who were married. Divorced/separated and widowed persons were less likely to have another person present during the violent event (54% and 51%, respectively).

#### *Race of victim*

In general, white victims experienced violence more often in the presence of a third party than victims of other races. From 1993 to 1999, 67% of violent victimizations experienced by white victims occurred in the presence of a third party compared to 63% for black victims, 64% for Hispanic victims, and 62% for victims of "other races."

#### *Household income*

Overall the higher the person's annual household income, the greater the likelihood that a third party was present during the victimization. Third parties were present at 61% of victimizations in which the victim had an annual household income of less than \$15,000, compared to 72% of victimizations of victims with annual household incomes of \$50,000 or more.

**Table 9. Third-party presence, by perceived alcohol/drug use by offender during incident, 1993-99**

| Perceived use by offender | Average annual victimizations | Percent with third-party |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Alcohol/drug              | 2,896,770                     | 69.6%                    |
| No alcohol/drug           | 2,758,820                     | 66.1                     |
| Do not know               | 3,945,100                     | 65.2                     |

Note: Table totals differ because some respondents did not answer some questions.

**Table 10. Third-party presence, by weapon presence, 1993-99**

| Presence of weapon during crime | Average annual victimizations | Percent with third-party |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| No weapons                      | 6,377,840                     | 66.7%                    |
| Weapon                          | 2,533,530                     | 66.6                     |
| Firearm                         | 943,750                       | 64.8                     |
| Knife                           | 626,200                       | 65.9                     |
| Other weapon                    | 852,650                       | 69.8                     |
| Unknown                         | 110,930                       | 61.4                     |
| Do not know if offender armed   | 807,000                       | 61.0                     |

Note: Table totals differ because some respondents did not answer some questions.

### **Offender characteristics and third-party involvement**

Sixty-four percent of violent crimes in which the victim knew the offender occurred in the presence of a third party compared to 70% for violence involving strangers (table 7). Intimate partner violence occurred in the presence of third parties 36% of the time compared to 69% for non-intimate violence.

Three-quarters of all gang-related incidents involved third parties compared to 65% of non-gang violence (table 8).

Third parties were more likely to be present when the victim perceived that the offender was using alcohol and/or drugs during the incident (70%) (table 9).

### **Situational aspects of victimizations involving third parties**

#### *Weapon use*

Third parties were as likely to be present at crimes in which someone had a weapon — firearm, knife, or other weapon — as they were to be at incidents in which there was no weapon (table 10). A third party was

**Table 11. Third-party presence during violent crime, by situational characteristic, 1993-99**

| Situational characteristic          | Average annual victimizations | Percent with third-party |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Locality</b>                     |                               |                          |
| Urban                               | 3,652,890                     | 64.2%                    |
| Suburban                            | 4,539,610                     | 67.3                     |
| Rural                               | 1,525,860                     | 67.8                     |
| <b>Activity</b>                     |                               |                          |
| Work                                | 1,743,380                     | 74.5%                    |
| Traveling to or from work           | 407,800                       | 44.8                     |
| Shopping/errands                    | 373,490                       | 60.9                     |
| School                              | 825,450                       | 80.3                     |
| Traveling to or from school         | 361,280                       | 71.1                     |
| Leisure away from home              | 2,206,740                     | 77.2                     |
| Sleeping                            | 206,920                       | 46.1                     |
| Other home activity                 | 1,940,090                     | 51.2                     |
| Traveling to or from other activity | 876,540                       | 57.8                     |
| Other                               | 734,800                       | 66.7                     |
| <b>Time of incident</b>             |                               |                          |
| Day                                 | 5,104,030                     | 66.8%                    |
| Night                               | 4,489,870                     | 66.0                     |

Note: Table totals differ because some respondents did not answer some questions.

present in 67% of violent incidents involving a weapon or not.

#### *Urbanicity*

The level of third-party involvement in violent crime was greater in both rural and suburban locations than in urban areas (table 11). Sixty-four percent of urban victims of violent crime reported the presence of a third party compared to 67% and 68% for suburban and rural victims, respectively.

#### *Victim activity*

The presence of third parties varied depending on what the victim was doing before the incident occurred. School and leisure activities away from home were the most likely activities to include third parties when a victimization occurred.

#### *Time of incident*

The presence of a third party did not vary by the time the incident occurred. Both daytime and nighttime victimizations had a third party present about 66% of the time.

**Table 12. Police notification and third-party presence, 1993-99**

| Presence of third party | Percent of violent incidents |                     |             | Average annual victimizations |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|
|                         | Police notified              | Police not notified | Do not know |                               |
| Lone victim             | 40.6%                        | 58.8%               | 0.6%        | 3,078,100                     |
| Third party             | 44.2                         | 54.2                | 1.6         | 6,432,480                     |
| Do not know             | 37.0                         | 60.5                | 2.4         | 106,460                       |
| Total                   | 42.9                         | 55.8                | 1.3         | 9,718,370                     |

Note: Table totals differ because some respondents did not answer some questions.

**Table 14. Whether third-party involvement helped or worsened the situation, by type of crime, 1993-99**

| Type of crime       | Percent of violent incidents in which third party — |        |        |      |         | Average annual victimizations |
|---------------------|---|--------|--------|------|---------|-------------------------------|
|                     | Total   | Helped | Worsen | Both | Neither |                               |
| Rape/sexual assault | 100%  | 33.4%  | 15.2%  | 0.9% | 43.1%   | 114,160                       |
| Robbery             | 100   | 29.2   | 12.1   | 2.7  | 49.3    | 560,080                       |
| Aggravated assault  | 100   | 38.3   | 11.0   | 3.0  | 41.0    | 1,471,630                     |
| Simple assault      | 100   | 36.0   | 11.3   | 2.7  | 43.9    | 4,286,610                     |
| Total               | 100   | 35.9   | 11.3   | 2.7  | 43.7    | 6,432,480                     |

Note: Table totals differ because some respondents did not answer some questions.

### Reporting to the police

The presence of a third party was significantly related to whether the police were notified (table 12). Police notification occurred 41% of the time when the victimization involved only the victim versus 44% when the victimization occurred in the presence of a third party. Police notification by the victim or by someone else may occur during the incident or hours or even days later.

**Table 15. How third-party involvement helped or worsened the situation, 1993-99**

| Victim opinion of third-party involvement <sup>a</sup> | Average annual victimizations | Percent of total with third party <sup>b</sup> |
|--|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Helped</b>  |                               |  |
| Prevented injury                                       | 1,154,780                     | 18.0%  |
| Scared offender off                                    | 447,280                       | 7.0  |
| Victim escaped   | 493,030                       | 7.7  |
| Protected property                                     | 80,830                        | 1.3  |
| Protected other people                                 | 228,200                       | 3.5  |
| Helped other ways                                      | 824,530                       | 12.8   |
| <b>Worsened</b>  |                               |  |
| Victim injured   | 69,120                        | 1.1%   |
| More property loss                                     | 14,230                        | 0.2  |
| Others hurt worse                                      | 44,420                        | 0.7  |
| Offender got away                                      | 12,010                        | 0.2  |
| Made offender angrier                                  | 559,280                       | 8.7  |
| Harmed other ways                                      | 275,980                       | 4.3  |

Note: Table totals differ because some respondents did not answer some questions.

<sup>a</sup>Victims could indicate more than one category.

<sup>b</sup>The numbers do not total to 100% because the third party did not always help or worsen the incident (43%) and victims could indicate multiple categories.

### Third-party involvement and whether it helped or worsened the situation

For all types of crime, when third parties were present, victims stated that the third parties were more likely to help the situation (36%) than to make it worse (11%), but most of the time they did neither (44%) (table 13). In a small number of cases, third parties both helped and hurt the situation (3%).

The NCVS asks only about how the actions of the third party either helped or worsened the situation. It does not gather information about the number of third parties present who could have intervened or about the characteristics of those who did (or did not) intervene.

Third parties were more likely to help the situation than to make it worse, regardless of the type of crime (table 14). However third parties were less likely to help the situation during robberies (29%) compared to either simple (36%) or aggravated (38%)

**Table 13. Whether third-party involvement helped or worsened the situation, 1993-99**

| Third-party involvement | Average annual victimizations | Percent total |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Helped                  | 2,306,210                     | 35.9%         |
| Worsened                | 729,850                       | 11.3          |
| Both                    | 176,670                       | 2.7           |
| Neither                 | 2,811,160                     | 43.7          |
| Do not know             | 408,600                       | 6.4           |

Note: Table totals differ because some respondents did not answer some questions.

assaults. The percent of third parties who made the situation worse did not differ by type of crime.

### Third parties helping the situation

A third party most often helped the victim by preventing injury (47%) (table 15). This help resulted in 1.2 million victimizations annually, 1993-99, in which an injury or further injury to the victim was prevented. In 38% of the cases in which the third parties helped, either the victim escaped (20%) or the offender was scared off (18%), totaling 940,310 such victimizations annually. Third-party actions also helped to protect other people (9%) and property (3%).

### Third parties worsening the situation

In cases when the victim stated that third-party actions worsened the situation, usually the offender had become angrier (62%). In 8% of these cases, third-party actions resulted in victim injury, and in 5%, in others being hurt worse. In 30% of these cases the victim was harmed in other ways.

In 18% of cases when a third party was present the actions of this person helped to prevent injury compared to 1% in which the actions caused victim injury.

**Table 16. Whether third-party involvement helped or worsened the situation, by the presence of a weapon, 1993-99**

| Presence of weapon during crime | Percent of violent incidents in which third party — |        |          |      |         | Average annual victimizations |
|---------------------------------|---|--------|----------|------|---------|-------------------------------|
|                                 | Total   | Helped | Worsened | Both | Neither |                               |
| Weapon                          | 100%  | 36.6%  | 11.1%    | 2.6% | 43.2%   | 1,687,550                     |
| No weapon                       | 100   | 36.3   | 11.7     | 2.8  | 43.9    | 4,252,670                     |
| Do not know                     | 100   | 29.7   | 9.0      | 2.7  | 43.8    | 492,270                       |

Note: Table totals differ because some respondents did not answer some questions.

## Intervention outcomes and incident characteristics

When a third party was present, the victim's perception varied as to whether the third party helped or made the situation worse.

### Weapons

There was no significant difference in whether a third party either hurt or helped the situation if the offender was armed or unarmed (table 16). Third parties helped in about 37% of cases and hurt in 11%, but were most likely to do neither (43%).

### Victim-offender relationship

Victims perceived third-party involvement as more helpful in incidents involving strangers than in victimizations in which the victims knew the offenders (table 17). In addition, third parties were more likely to make the

**Table 17. Whether third-party involvement helped or worsened the situation, by victim-offender relationship, 1993-99**

| Victim-offender relationship | Percent of violent incidents in which third party — |        |          |      |         |             | Average annual victimizations |
|------------------------------|---|--------|----------|------|---------|-------------|-------------------------------|
|                              | Total   | Helped | Worsened | Both | Neither | Do not know |                               |
| Stranger                     | 100%  | 37.5%  | 10.3%    | 2.7% | 43.1%   | 6.3%        | 3,209,400                     |
| Intimates                    | 100   | 35.4   | 11.5     | 2.3  | 43.9    | 6.9         | 371,550                       |
| Other acquaintances          | 100   | 34.0   | 12.5     | 2.9  | 44.4    | 6.3         | 2,851,530                     |

Note: Table totals differ because some respondents did not answer some questions.

situation worse when the offender was known to the victim than in a stranger-related victimization. In either case third parties were more likely to help than make the situation worse, but often did neither.

When intimate partner violence and non-intimate violence is compared, the results of third-party involvement did not differ significantly. Third parties helped in about 35% of these victimizations, made the situation worse in 12% of the cases, and did neither in 44%. In both cases, third parties were more likely to help than hurt, but often did neither.

### Urbanicity

The outcome of third-party involvement did not differ by the residential location of the victim (table 18). Regardless of location third parties helped the situation in about 35% of victimizations and made it worse in about 11% of victimizations.

### Gang-related incidents

The percent of victimizations that were helped by third-party involvement did not differ significantly based on offender gang membership (table 19). However if the offender was in a gang third parties were likely to make the situation worse. In all instances, third parties were more likely to help than to make the situation worse, but most did neither.

### Offender alcohol/drug use

When the victim perceived the offender to be under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs during the incident, third parties were more likely to help the situation than to make it worse or to have no impact (table 20). In these incidents, third-party actions were more likely to help the situation or to make the situation worse compared to incidents in which the offender was not under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs.

**Table 18. Whether third-party involvement helped or worsened the situation, by location of victim's residence, 1993-99**

| Location of victim's residence | Percent of violent incidents in which third party — |        |          |      |         |             | Average annual victimizations |
|--------------------------------|---|--------|----------|------|---------|-------------|-------------------------------|
|                                | Total   | Helped | Worsened | Both | Neither | Do not know |                               |
| Urban                          | 100%  | 35.4%  | 10.8%    | 2.5% | 44.2%   | 7.2%        | 2,343,820                     |
| Suburban                       | 100   | 36.2   | 11.4     | 2.7  | 43.8    | 5.3         | 3,053,440                     |
| Rural                          | 100   | 34.1   | 12.5     | 3.5  | 42.3    | 7.7         | 1,025,220                     |

Note: Table totals differ because some respondents did not answer some questions.

**Table 19. Whether third-party involvement helped or worsened the situation, by perceived gang involvement of the offender, 1993-99**

| Perceived gang involvement | Percent of violent incidents in which third party — |        |          |      |         |             | Average annual victimizations |
|----------------------------|---|--------|----------|------|---------|-------------|-------------------------------|
|                            | Total   | Helped | Worsened | Both | Neither | Do not know |                               |
| Gang-related               | 100%  | 36.1%  | 14.6%    | 4.2% | 40.8%   | 4.2%        | 585,590                       |
| Non-gang-related           | 100   | 37.2   | 10.9     | 3.0  | 43.7    | 5.2         | 3,365,130                     |
| Do not know                | 100   | 34.3   | 11.3     | 2.1  | 44.1    | 8.1         | 2,409,370                     |

Note: Table totals differ because some respondents did not answer some questions.

**Table 20. Third-party involvement and incident outcomes, by offender alcohol and drug use, 1993-99**

| Perceived use by offender | Percent of violent incidents in which third party — |        |          |      |         |             | Average annual victimizations |
|---------------------------|---|--------|----------|------|---------|-------------|-------------------------------|
|                           | Total   | Helped | Worsened | Both | Neither | Do not know |                               |
| Alcohol/drug              | 100%  | 42.4%  | 12.6%    | 4.1% | 35.6%   | 5.3%        | 2,017,230                     |
| No alcohol/drug           | 100   | 34.5   | 10.5     | 2.4  | 47.8    | 4.8         | 1,824,530                     |
| Do not know               | 100   | 31.8   | 11.0     | 2.0  | 47.2    | 8.1         | 2,571,380                     |

Note: Table totals differ because some respondents did not answer some questions.

## Survey methodology

This Special Report presents data on rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). The NCVS gathers data on crimes against persons age 12 or older, reported and not reported to the police, from a nationally representative sample of U.S. households. The NCVS provides information about victims (age, gender, race, ethnicity,

marital status, income, and educational level), offenders (gender, race, approximate age, and victim-offender relations) and the nature of the crime (time and place of occurrence, use of weapons, nature of injury, and economic consequences).

Between 1993 and 1999 approximately 336,300 households and 651,750 individuals age 12 or older were interviewed. For the NCVS data presented, response rates varied between 93% and 96% of eligible households and between 89% and 92% of eligible individuals.

In some instances the sample size used to generate an estimate is small. While the estimate is reliable, it is also likely associated with a relatively large confidence interval and should be viewed with caution.

#### Standard error computations

Comparisons of percentages and rates made in this report were tested to determine if observed differences were statistically significant. Differences described as higher, lower, or different passed a hypothesis test at the .05 level of statistical significance (95% confidence level). The tested difference was greater than twice the standard error of that difference. For comparisons that were statistically significant at the 0.10 level (90% confidence level), "somewhat," "slightly," or "marginally" is used to note the nature of the difference.

Caution is required when comparing estimates not explicitly discussed in this Special Report. What may appear to be large differences may not test as statistically significant at the 95% or the 90% confidence level. Significance testing calculations were conducted at the Bureau of Justice Statistics using statistical programs developed specifically for the NCVS by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. These programs take into consideration many aspects of the complex NCVS sample design when calculating generalized variance estimates.

#### Further reading on third parties and crime

- Richard Felson and H. S. Steadman, "Situations and Processes Leading to Criminal Violence," *Criminology*, 26, 1983, pp. 59-74.
- Leslie Kennedy and David Forde, *When Push Comes to Shove: A Routine Conflict Approach to Violence*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- B. Latane and S. Nida, "Ten Years of Research on Group Size and Helping," *Psychological Bulletin*, 89, 1981, pp. 308-324.
- A. M. Rosenthal, *Thirty-eight Witnesses*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1964.
- R. L. Shotland and L. I. Goodstein, "The Role of Bystanders in Crime Control," *Journal of Social Issues*, 40, 1984, pp. 9-26.
- Samantha Wells and Kathryn Graham, "The Frequency of Third-Party Involvement in Incidents of Barroom Aggression," *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 26, 1999, pp. 457-480.

#### Definitions

The NCVS data have a number of data collection procedures to consider when discussing violent crime. The victims recall the incidents and the data are not verified through other data sources. Victims do not report many of these incidents to law enforcement officials. The survey relies on the victim's ability to recall accurately the characteristics of each incident.

The NCVS treats six or more incidents similar in nature, for which the victim is unable to furnish the specific details for each incident separately, as "series data." Only the incident information about the most recent incident is collected, and the NCVS counts the series as one victimization.

Violent crime is defined in this report as attempted or completed rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. Definitions used in this report are as follows:

**Rape** is forced sexual intercourse, including both psychological coercion and physical force. Forced sexual intercourse means vaginal, anal, or oral penetration by the offender(s). This category includes incidents where the penetration is from a foreign object such as a bottle. This definition includes attempted rapes, male and female victims, and heterosexual and homosexual rape.

Sexual assault includes a wide range of victimizations, distinct from rape or attempted rape. These crimes include completed or attempted attacks generally involving unwanted sexual contact between the victim and offender. Sexual assaults may or may not involve force and include such things as grabbing or fondling. Sexual assault also includes verbal threats.

Robbery is a completed or attempted theft directly from a person, of property or cash by force or threat of force, with or without a weapon, and with or without an injury.

Aggravated assault is a completed or attempted attack with a weapon, regardless of whether or not an injury occurred. It is also an attack without a weapon in which the victim is seriously injured.

**Simple assault** is an attack without a weapon resulting either in no injury, minor injury (such as bruises, black eyes, cuts, scratches, or swelling), or an undetermined injury requiring less than 2 days of hospitalization. Simple assaults also include attempted assaults without a weapon.

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This report and the data that it analyzes are available on the Internet through <[www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs)>.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics is the statistical agency of the U.S. Department of Justice. Lawrence A. Greenfeld is acting director.

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Mike G. Planty wrote this report under the supervision of Michael Rand. Timothy C. Hart provided statistical assistance and verification. Callie Marie Rennison reviewed the report and prepared it for release. Tom Hester edited the report. Jayne Robinson prepared the report for publication.

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