

Fact Sheet

Rural Crime Facts

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Overview

The task of assembling *rural* crime facts is complicated by the many definitions of *rural* that abound, and the tendency for most agencies to aggregate data in ways that are difficult to apply to local communities. Similar difficulties are inherent in the word “crime” which often is broadly construed to encompass a wide range of violent behaviors.

The most frequently cited source of crime statistics is the Bureau of Justice Statistics, which summarizes information from the Uniform Crime Reports and the National Crime Victimization Survey. The Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics also compiles tables from these and other sources in an annual publication. Facts pertinent to rural crime are also sprinkled through a variety of other data sources, and often need to be teased out of reports written for purposes other than exploring rural differences.

The overall impression when looking at individual reports across different data sources is that rural crime and violence is a serious and complicated problem that demands a specialized approach. The seriousness of the problem is evident from the failure of rural areas to benefit to in the same degree from declining crime rates as urban areas. The complicating features of addressing rural safety issues arise from the fact that although rural areas are structurally different from urban areas, there is considerable variation among rural communities. Thus, even when considering an overall view of rural crime, the specific causes and consequences of crime for any individual community are likely to be unique.

Rural Crime Facts

- The number of total arrests in rural counties numbered 848,968 in 1998, reported by 1,837 different law enforcement agencies, covering an estimated population of 20 million residents. ⁽¹⁾
- The majority of arrestees in rural counties were white (79%) and over the age of 18 (88%). ⁽¹⁾
- The falling crime rate has benefitted urban and suburban areas more than rural areas. From 1993-1998, there has been less of a decrease in violent and property crime rates in rural areas than in urban and suburban areas, though overall violent crime rates are still lower in rural areas. ⁽²⁾
- Rural violent crime victims are less likely to be victimized by a stranger than urban or suburban victims. For example, the percentage of homicides involving an intimate is greater in rural areas (21%) than in large cities (7%). ⁽³⁾
- Despite an overall decrease in homicide trends, most of the decrease has occurred in large cities with rural areas experiencing relatively little change in homicide prevalence. ⁽³⁾
- The most common location for rural victims of violent crime was their homes (18%). For urban and suburban areas, the most common areas were open places such as on the street, or in public transportation. ⁽²⁾
- The percentage of rural violent crime offenders perceived to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs

(35%) was higher than the percentages of urban and suburban offenders (29%).⁽²⁾

- Rural violent offenders are less likely (8%) than suburban (9%) or urban (12%) violent offenders to use a firearm.⁽²⁾
- Rural residents of races other than black or white were twice as likely to be victims of violent crime as were black or white rural residents. Specifically, the rates of victimization were: 31% white; 34% black; 68% other. Additionally, rural residents headed by persons of other races were victims of property crime at higher rates (34%) than black (20%) or white (21%) households.⁽²⁾
- Between 1993-1998, 90% of the rural population was white and whites were perceived to have committed 72% of rural violent victimizations. Although blacks comprised 8% of the rural population, they were perceived to have committed 16% of rural violent crimes.⁽²⁾

SOURCES

1. Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics (1999) (available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/>)
2. Bureau of Justice Statistics (2000). *Urban, suburban, and rural victimization, 1993-1998*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. NCJ 182031.
3. Bureau of Justice Statistics (2000). *Homicide trends in the U.S.: Trends by city size*. (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/city.htm)

State Resources for Rural Crime Facts

Each state has a Statistical Analysis Center, a federally designated agency that has responsibility for collecting criminal justice data. There is a good deal of variance in the type and amount of data collected, mostly dependent upon the size of the state, but often these centers are the only place where one may get county and community level crime data. For more information on how to contact state Statistical Analysis Centers and view relevant publications you can visit the Justice Research and Statistic Association website (www.jrsa.org).

Other Sites for Related Rural Crime Facts

Bureau of Justice Statistics (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs)

The United Nations Crime and Justice Information Network (www.ifs.univie.ac.at/~uncjin/wcs.html)

Childtrends (www.childtrends.org)

The Census Bureau (www.census.gov)

Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (www.icpsr.umich.edu)

National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (www.fldc.cornell.edu)

Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstabb/index.htm>)

Center for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov)

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