



## Bureau of Justice Statistics

# Family Violence Statistics

Including Statistics on Strangers and Acquaintances

**Reported and unreported family violence**

**Murder of family members**

**Family violence reported to police**

**Family violence recorded by police**

**State prosecution of family assault**

**Federal prosecution of domestic violence**

**Family violence offenders in prison**

**Family violence offenders in jail**

## Highlights, definitions, and counting rules

### Introduction

This compendium contains the most recent family violence statistics from these sources: surveys conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), the BJS database of Federal statistics, and two statistical databases maintained by the FBI.

The sources provide statistical snapshots of family violence at different stages in the administration of justice. First are statistics on the nature and extent of family violence. Next are statistics on family violence that is reported to police, followed by statistics on the prosecution of persons charged with family violence. Lastly are statistics on persons sent to prison or jail for family violence.

The report is divided into eight sections giving statistics on —

- Reported and unreported family violence
- Fatal family violence
- Family violence reported to police
- Family violence recorded by police
- State prosecution of family assault
- Federal prosecution of domestic violence
- Family violence offenders in prison
- Family violence offenders in jail.

### Highlights

#### *Trends in family violence*

The rate of family violence fell between 1993 and 2002 from an estimated 5.4 victims to 2.1 victims per 1,000 U.S. residents age 12 or older. Throughout the period family violence accounted for about 1 in 10 violent victimizations.

#### *Reported and unreported family violence*

Family violence accounted for 11% of all reported and unreported violence between 1998 and 2002. Of these roughly 3.5 million violent crimes committed against family members, 49% were crimes against spouses, 11% were sons or daughters victimized by a parent, and 41% were crimes against other family members.

The most frequent type of family violence offense was simple assault. Murder was less than half of 1% of all family violence between 1998 and 2002.

About three-fourths of all family violence occurred in or near the victim's residence.

Forty percent of family violence victims were injured during the incident. Of the 3.5 million victims of family violence between 1998 and 2002, less than 1% died as a result of the incident.

The majority (73%) of family violence victims were female. Females were 84% of spouse abuse victims and 86% of victims of abuse at the hands of a boyfriend or girlfriend.

While about three-fourths of the victims of family violence were female, about three-fourths of the persons who committed family violence were male.

Most family violence victims were white (74%), and the majority were between ages 25 and 54 (65.7%). Most family violence offenders were white (79%), and most were age 30 or older (62%).

#### *Fatal family violence*

About 22% of murders in 2002 were family murders. Nearly 9% were murders of a spouse, 6% were murders of sons or daughters by a parent, and 7% were murders by other family members.

Females were 58% of family murder victims. Of all the murders of females in 2002, family members were responsible for 43%.

Children under age 13 were 23% of murder victims killed by a family member, and just over 3% of nonfamily murder victims.

The average age among sons or daughters killed by a parent was 7 years, and 4 out of 5 victims killed by a parent were under age 13.

Eight in ten murderers who killed a family member were male. Males were 83% of spouse murderers and 75% of murderers who killed a boyfriend or girlfriend.

In 2002 family murders were less likely than nonfamily murders to involve a firearm (50% versus 68%). Parents were the least likely family murderers to use a firearm (28%), compared to spouses (63%) or other family members (51%).

Among incidents of parents killing their children, 19% involved one parent killing multiple victims.

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### *Family violence reported to police*

Approximately 60% of family violence victimizations were reported to police between 1998 and 2002. The reporting rate among female victims was not significantly greater than the reporting rate among male victims.

The most common reason victims of family violence cited for not reporting the crime to police was that the incident was a "private/personal matter" (34%). Another 12% of non-reporting family violence victims did not report the crime in order to "protect the offender."

Among the 2.1 million incidents of family violence reported to police between 1998 and 2002, 36% resulted in an arrest.

### *Family violence recorded by police*

Family violence accounted for 33% of all violent crimes recorded by police in 18 States and the District of Columbia in 2000. Of these more than 207,000 family violence crimes, about half (53%, or 110,000) were crimes between spouses.

Among crimes recorded by police, 2% of family violence involved a firearm, compared to 6% of nonfamily violence. A weapon was used in 16% of family and 21% of nonfamily violence.

About 6% of all violent crime recorded by police in 2000 involved more than one offender victimizing a lone victim. The exception was stranger crime, in which 14% of incidents involved multiple offenders victimizing a lone victim.

About 49% of family violence crimes recorded by police resulted in an arrest. Males comprised 77% of suspected family violence offenders arrested in 2000.

### *State prosecution of family assault*

Of the approximately 1,500 defendants charged with felony assault during May 2000 in the State courts of 11 large counties, about a third were charged with family violence.

Among felony assault defendants charged with family violence in State courts, 84% had at least one prior arrest for either a felony or a misdemeanor (not necessarily for family violence), and 73% had been previously convicted of some type of felony or misdemeanor (not necessarily family violence).

Nearly half of felony assault defendants charged with family violence were released pending case disposition.

Among the 1,500 felony assault cases, the probability of the case leading to conviction (felony or misdemeanor) was greater for family assault defendants (71%) than nonfamily assault defendants (61%).

State courts sentenced 83% of persons convicted of assault (both family and nonfamily) to either prison or jail. Among felony assault defendants convicted in State courts —

- 68% of incarceration sentences for family assault were to jail
- 62% of incarceration sentences for nonfamily assault were to prison
- 45% of persons sent to prison for family assault received a sentence of more than 2 years, compared to 77% of nonfamily assault offenders sent to prison.

### *Federal prosecution of domestic violence*

Persons suspected of domestic violence made up 4% of the total 18,653 Federal suspects referred to U.S. attorneys for alleged violent crimes from 2000 to 2002.

Of the 757 suspects referred to U.S. attorneys for domestic violence offenses between 2000 and 2002, most were firearm-related domestic violence offenses rather than interstate domestic violence offenses.

- The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives accounted for 80% of all referrals for firearm-related domestic violence.
- The FBI accounted for 72% of all interstate domestic violence referrals.

Federal courts convicted 90% of defendants adjudicated for an interstate domestic violence offense.

Among defendants convicted in federal courts —

- 79% of convictions were the product of a guilty plea, and the remaining 21% were the product of conviction following a trial
- most were male (96%), under age 40 (67%), white (72%), and non-Hispanic (95%)
- 4 in 5 defendants had a prior adult conviction.

Of 47 Federal defendants sentenced for an interstate domestic violence offense between 2000 and 2002, 91% received a prison term with a median length of 60 months.

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### *Family violence offenders in prison*

Of the nearly 500,000 men and women in State prisons for a violent crime in 1997, 15% were there for a violent crime against a family member.

Nearly half of all the family violence offenders in State prisons were serving a sentence for a sex offense against a family member. More than three-quarters of parents convicted of a violent crime against their son or daughter were in prison for a sex offense.

Of the crimes for which family violence offenders were in prison —

- most were against a female (78%)
- more than half were against a child under age 18
- more than a third were against a child under age 13.

About 90% of offenders in State prisons for family violence had injured their victim:

- 50% of family violence victims were raped or sexually assaulted
- 28% of the victims of family violence were killed
- 50% of offenders in State prisons for spousal abuse had killed their victims
- Of State prison inmates imprisoned for a crime against their son or daughter, 79% had raped or sexually assaulted the child, and another 10% had killed the child.

Among family violence offenders in State prisons in 1997 —

- most were male (93%)
- 6 out of 10 were white, while about a quarter were black
- about 80% were between ages 25 and 54.

Among offenders whose incarceration in State prisons was for family violence, 23% had used a weapon to commit their crime. The comparable percentage among State prisoners incarcerated for nonfamily violence was higher— 46%.

### *Family violence offenders in jail*

Convicted family violence offenders made up about 22% of the nearly 86,500 convicted violent offenders in local jails in 2002. Most (60%) of these approximately 18,700 jail inmates incarcerated for family violence were in jail for an aggravated assault.

Local jail inmates convicted of family violence reported that —

- their victims were predominantly female (79%)
- nearly 30% of their victims were under age 18.

Among local jail inmates convicted of family violence, 55% injured their victim.

Most convicted jail inmates serving time for violence against a family member (88%) did not use a weapon during the crime.

Among jail inmates convicted of family violence, 45% had been subject to a restraining order at some point in their life. About 18% were under an active restraining order at the time of admission to jail.