

The offender

Mimi Cantwell

This chapter profiles arrestees and offenders with data that address such questions as—

How do we know who commits crime?
What do we know about the offender?
How many offenders are there?

Who is the "typical" offender? How are offenders and victims similar? How are they different?

What crimes are committed by offenders?

What are the characteristics of career criminals? How much crime do they account for?

How much crime is attributable to youths?

To what extent do blacks, Hispanics, and other ethnic groups participate in crime?

Are women becoming more involved in crime?

What are the family, economic, and educational backgrounds of jail and prison inmates?

What is the role of drugs and alcohol in offenders' lives? How does drug and alcohol use by offenders differ from that of the general population?

Chapter III was written by Mimi Cantwell of the Center for Demographic Studies, U.S. Bureau of the Census. Invaluable contributions were also made by Ralph A. Rossum and Lawrence A. Greenfeld of the BJS staff and by John F. Wallerstedt of the Center for Demographic Studies.

Who commits crime and why?

There are no definitive answers to the why of crime

The questions of *who* and *why* are often confused. We know, for example, that offenders are typically young urban males, economically and educationally disadvantaged, disproportionately black as to the proportion of blacks in the population, and frequently products of unstable homes. Many people think that such characteristics are the causes of crime. Yet none of these characteristics can rightfully be described as a cause of crime; most persons in these categories are law-abiding citizens.

Numerous explanations for why people commit crimes have been propounded

Historically, the causes of criminal behavior have included explanations ranging from the influences of evil spirits to the abnormal shape of the skull. Contemporary theories for the causes of crime still abound but can be grouped into three general explanations:

- The sociogenic—focuses on the environment's effect on the individual and places responsibility for crime on society.¹ It identifies as the causes of crime such factors as poverty, ignorance, high unemployment, inadequate housing, and poor health. To these general environmental factors, it adds the impact of unstable homes, viewing their consequent discord, absence of affection and consistent discipline, and improper moral instruction as especially contributory to juvenile delinquency and youth crime. However, recent research has shown that these factors do not account for long-term fluctuations in crime.² Moreover, these factors cannot explain why under certain circumstances, one individual commits a crime and another does not.
- The psychogenic—focuses on psychological factors and understands crime to be the result of an individual's propensity and inducement toward crime.³ Propensity toward crime is determined by the individual's ability to conceptualize right and wrong, to manage impulses and postpone present gratifications, and to anticipate

and take account of consequences that lie in the future as well as by the individual's fondness of risk and willingness to inflict injury on others. Inducement relates to situational factors such as access and opportunity that may provide the individual with the necessary incentives to commit a crime. Under this explanation, while many environmental factors contribute to an individual's propensity to commit crime, the individual is responsible for his behavior. Further, inducements toward committing crime may be inherent in our technological age which, among other things, allows increased access through greater mobility.

- The biogenic—focuses on biological functions and processes and relates human behavior, specifically criminal behavior, to such biological variables as brain tumors and other disorders of the limbic system, endocrine abnormalities, neurological dysfunction produced by prenatal and postnatal experiences of infants, and chromosomal abnormalities (the XYY chromosomal pattern).⁴

How do we know who commits crime?

Three major sources provide information about offenders:

- Studies of groups of persons in the general population
- Interviews with victims
- Records of persons who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

Studies of the general population typically focus on a birth cohort (a group of persons born in the same year). Several large studies of this kind have been the richest source of information about the characteristics of juvenile offenders. Such studies observe the group over a number of years and note characteristics that are more commonly shared by offenders than by nonoffenders.

Much information can sometimes be obtained from crime victims. For example, victims of robbery, assault, or rape are often able to describe the age, sex, and race of their assailants in interviews conducted for the National Crime Survey.

Official records and survey data provide much information about persons who come into contact with the criminal justice system through arrest, juvenile detention, or incarceration in jail or prison. The data included are not presented to support any particular theory of why people commit crime. Rather, they are the available measures of offender characteristics. Some offender characteristics such as psychological profiles which are difficult to measure are not included.

What we know about criminals refers mainly to "street criminals" and to repeat offenders

A very large number of the persons who come into contact with the criminal justice system are offenders who commit crimes that are readily detectable and for which they are more likely to be arrested, convicted, and sentenced to jail or prison. As a result, the proportion of "street criminals" is probably overrepresented in offender statistics in relation to the proportion of offenses committed by white-collar criminals, whose crimes are less readily detected and who may be less likely to be incarcerated once convicted.

Moreover, national arrest data are complicated by the repeated appearance of a small number of persons. Those who enter jail and, even more so, prisons, are more representative of repeaters than of the criminal population in general. Thus, the profile of offenders that emerges is largely that of the repeat and serious offender.

How many offenders are there?

The most conservative estimates suggest that—

- 36 to 40 million persons—16-18% of the total U.S. population—have arrest records for nontraffic offenses.
- The proportions of offenders who are male and nonwhite (blacks and other races) are considerably higher than their proportions in the general population.

Who is the "typical" offender?

Most crimes are committed by men, especially by men under age 20

Half of all persons arrested for UCR Index Crimes were youths under age 20 and four-fifths were males. By far the highest rate of offending, according to a study by Michael Hindelang, occurs among young black males age 18-20, a fact suggested by arrest data and confirmed by eyewitness reports from crime victims. This does not mean that persons commit crime because they are young, male, or black, but these characteristics are probably associated with other factors in crime.

Offenders and victims share many traits

Like victims of crime, the offenders described in arrest, jail, and prison data are predominantly male and disproportionately young, black, and unmarried, as compared to the general population.

Violent offenders, like victims of violent crime, are typically low-income youths with a high likelihood of unemployment.

What are the characteristics of offenders?

	U.S. population 1980	Index crime arrestees		1981		
		Violent	Property	Convicted jail inmates	State prison inmates	Federal prison inmates
	226,545,805	464,826	1,828,928	91,411	340,639	28,133
Sex						
Male	49%	90%	79%	94%	96%	94%
Female	51	10	21	6	4	6
Race						
White	86	53	67	58	52	63
Black	12	46	31	40	47	35
Other	2	1	2	2	1	2
Ethnic origin						
Hispanic	6	12	10	10	9	16
Non-Hispanic	94	88	90	90	91	84
Age						
Under 15	23	5	14	0	0	0
15-19	9	25	36	14	7	0
20-29	18	42	31	53	56	34
30-39	14	17	11	19	25	40
40-49	10	7	4	9	8	17
50-59	10	3	2	4	3	7
60+	16	1	2	1	1	2

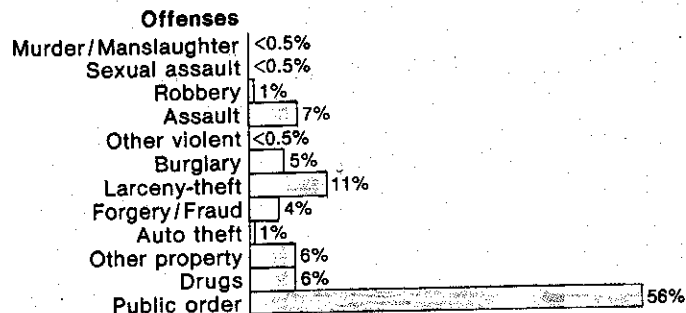
*Less than 0.5%.

Sources: Statistical Abstract of the United States 1981. Crime in the United States, 1981, 1982. Profile of inmates of local jails, 1980. Prisoners in State and

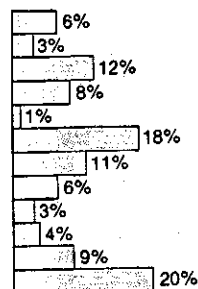
Federal institutions on December 31, 1981, 1983. Unpublished revised U.S. Census data. Unpublished age data for State and Federal prisoners.

For what mix of offenses are persons arrested, jailed, and imprisoned?

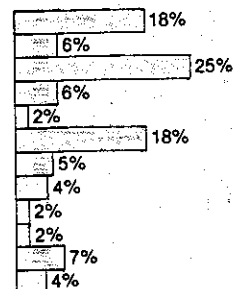
Arrestees
include many later released
—most arrests are for less serious offenses



Jail inmates
include those awaiting trial or sentencing and those serving short sentences for less serious crimes



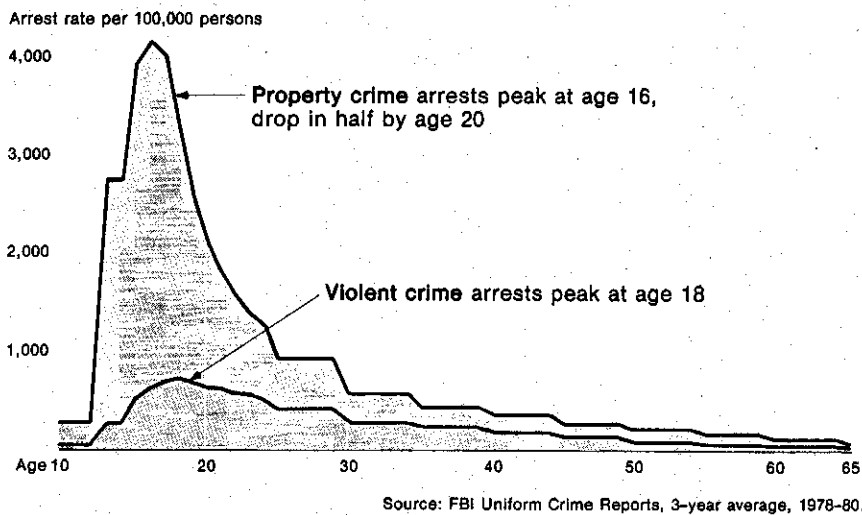
Prison inmates
are those sentenced to more than one year—generally for serious crimes



Sources: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1980. Survey of jail inmates 1978. Survey of prison inmates 1979.

What is the role of youth in crime?

Serious crime arrests highest in young age groups



Data for the 1970's reveal a drop in the total number of arrests of youths under age 18

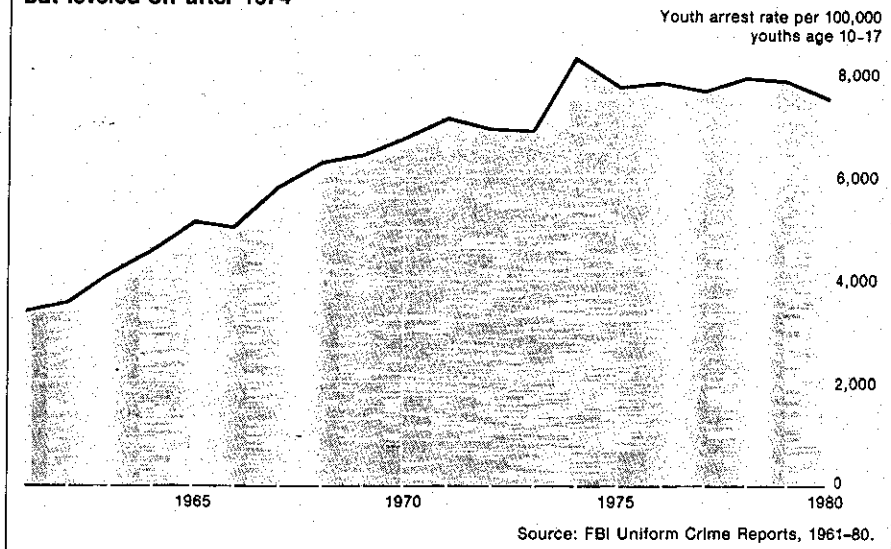
At the same time the number increased by 14% for persons age 18 and older. The drop in total arrests of youths under age 18 is due partly to a decline in the number of youths age 10-17 in the U.S. population after 1974. The rate of youth arrests leveled off during the 1970's, following a sharp rise in the 1960's.

However, between 1972 and 1981, arrests increased for UCR Index Crimes (both violent and property crime) for youths under age 18, but the increases were smaller than for persons age 18 and older—31% vs. 66% for violent crimes, and 22% vs. 112% for serious property crimes.

Participation in crime declines with age

Except for a minority of offenders, the intensity of criminal activity slackens, perhaps beginning after the mid-20's. When repeat offenders are apprehended, they serve increasingly longer sentences, thus incapacitating them for long periods as they grow older. In addition, a study of habitual offenders by the Rand Corporation shows that the success of habitual offenders in avoiding apprehension declined as their criminal careers progressed. Even though offense rates declined over time, the probabilities of arrest, conviction, and incarceration per offense all tended to increase.

Youth arrest rate rose during the 1960's, but leveled off after 1974



Property crimes are more typical of youths than of older offenders

Arrest records for 1981 show that youths under age 18 were more likely than older persons to be picked up for property crimes (36% vs. 14%); about the same proportion of each age group was arrested for violent crimes (4% vs. 5%). Because of the heavy involvement of youth in serious property crime, the UCR Index Crimes accounted for a far greater proportion of crime committed by youths under age 18 than of those committed by older persons. Arrests, however, are only a general indicator of criminal activity. The greater likelihood of arrests for young people may be due partly to their lack of experience in offending and also to their involvement in the types of crimes for which apprehension is more likely, for example, purse snatching vs. fraud. Moreover, since youths often commit crime in groups, the resolution of a single crime may lead to several arrests.

Violent juvenile offenders and adult felons have very similar characteristics

Several comprehensive studies, including Hamperian's profile of violent juvenile offenders in an urban Ohio county, have revealed a striking resemblance between the serious juvenile offender and the adult felon. The findings of these studies suggest that, while the subclass of chronic violent juvenile offenders is small, there is a strong probability of progression from serious juvenile to serious adult criminal careers.

Serious juvenile offenders, like adult felons—

- Are predominantly male
- Are disproportionately black and Hispanic as compared to their proportion of the population
- Are typically disadvantaged economically
- Are likely to exhibit interpersonal difficulties and behavioral problems both in school and on the job
- Often come from one-parent families or families with a high degree of conflict, instability, and inadequate supervision.

Gang membership is a major difference between youth and adult criminals

A major difference between juvenile and adult offenders is the importance of gang membership and the tendency of youth to engage in group criminal activity.

A recent national survey of law enforcement officers found that, while the problem is disproportionately large in the largest cities, gangs are also found in cities of less than one-half million population. Gang members are more likely than other young criminals to engage in violent crime, particularly robbery, rape, assault, and weapons violations.

NCS data show that personal crimes of violence by multiple offenders rather than by lone offenders are more likely to involve juvenile offenders. However, during the 1973-80 period there was some decrease in the tendency of young criminals to operate in groups.

There is conflicting evidence on escalation of seriousness

There is conflicting evidence on whether juveniles tend to progress from less to more serious offenses. Much evidence suggests that violent adult offenders began their careers with violent juvenile crimes; thus, they began as, and remained, serious offenders. However, minor offenses of youths are often dealt with informally and may not be recorded in crime statistics.

Juvenile delinquents are predominantly male

However, because of the important role played by status offenders in juvenile crime, the male/female disparity is not quite so strong as in the case of adults. (Status offenses are acts that would not be considered criminal if committed by adults, for example, running away from home, incorrigibility, or truancy.)

Females in jails and prisons make up a smaller proportion of the inmate population (6%) than they do in juve-

nile institutions (20%). The total number of girls in custody declined by 28% during the 1970's (1974-79); the number of boys in custody increased 1%. Girls, by the nature of their offenses, were more affected by the trend toward deinstitutionalization of the status offender.

Girls are more likely than boys to be held for noncriminal offenses

Detention status	Boys	Girls
Delinquent: adjudicated by juvenile court	75%	39%
Status offender: held for acts that would not be crimes for adults	9	28
Voluntary admission: commitment without court adjudication	8	15
Dependent, neglected, or abused	6	14
Emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded	2	4

Source: *Children in custody: A report on the juvenile detention and correctional facility census of 1979.*

Proportionately fewer blacks are in juvenile custody than in jail or prison

This is largely because juvenile institutions house so many female status offenders, most of whom are white. In 1979, blacks accounted for one in three residents of public juvenile facilities and one in five residents of private facilities. Nonetheless, the proportion of black juveniles in custody (27%) was nearly twice as high as that of blacks age 10-19 (14%) in the U.S. population.

A small group of career criminals commits the vast majority of crimes

Relatively few offenders are career criminals

Many studies have shown that only a small group of any criminal subset are repeat offenders. The Wolfgang Philadelphia studies found that for males born in 1958, 23% of those with one or more arrests could be defined as chronic offenders (that is, they had five or more nontraffic arrests by age 18). This relatively small proportion contrasts with the following proportions of males and females in the study who had no arrests or fewer than five arrests:

	Males	Females
Never arrested	67%	86%
Arrested only once	14	8
Arrested 2-4 times	11	5
Arrested 5 or more times	7	1

The proportion of chronic offenders was higher for nonwhite males (11%) than for white males (4%) and for nonwhite females (2%) than for white females (1%).

Probability of arrest increases with each subsequent arrest

Long-term studies show that once a person is arrested, the likelihood of further arrest increases with each subsequent arrest. Wolfgang's Philadelphia data revealed the following probabilities of rearrest for young men:

- 33% of the entire group had one arrest.
- 53% of those with one arrest went on to a second arrest.
- 62% of those with two arrests went on to a third.
- 71% of those with three arrests went on to a fourth.

Once a youth had gotten beyond the third crime, the likelihood of further criminality remained at about 71%.

Career criminals, though few in number, account for most crime

Even though chronic repeat offenders (those with five or more arrests by age 18) make up a relatively small proportion of all offenders, they commit a very high proportion of all crimes. The evidence includes data for juveniles and adults, males and females, and for urban and rural areas. In Wolfgang's Philadelphia study, chronic offenders accounted for 23% of all male offenders in the study, but they had committed 61% of all the crimes. Of all crimes by all members of the group studied, chronic offenders committed:

- 61% of all homicides
- 76% of all rapes
- 73% of all robberies
- 65% of all aggravated assaults.

Repeat offenders commit a disproportionately large number of street crimes in urban areas

A Washington, D.C., study confirmed the great extent of criminal activity by career criminals. In that study, persons who had four or more arrests between 1971 and 1975 made up 24% of all the arrests during this period.

Repeat criminality is not limited to urban settings

Polk's study of a nonmetropolitan Pacific Northwest county showed that there is a very high likelihood of adult arrests among boys who had a delinquency charge by age 18.⁵

Few repeaters are full-time criminals

Few chronic offenders can be considered "career" criminals in the sense that crime is their full-time occupation. A recent Rand Corporation study showed that most repeat offenders had other irregular sources of income and used periods of unemployment to commit crime. Other studies indicate that habitual criminals do not want conventional employment and that, after release from prison, most convicted felons return to crime.⁶

Chronic violent offenders start out and remain violent

Violent offenders typically begin their criminal careers by committing violent crimes as juveniles. The 1958 Wolfgang Philadelphia study, for example, shows a high probability of violent recidivism. That is, the more injury-offenses the youths committed, the more likely they were to commit further injury-offenses. For males—

- 26% of the entire group had one violent offense
- 34% of this group went on to a second violent offense
- 43% of the three-time violent offenders went on to a fourth violent offense.

For males, the probability of subsequent offenses continues to increase as the number of offenses rises at least up through six offenses, given five prior offenses. For females who were three-time offenders, the data also show a higher probability of a fourth violent offense, and of a fifth violent offense, given four.

Prior criminal behavior is one of the best predictors of future criminality

Age at first contact with police (arrest or otherwise) is also very important. Research shows that youths whose first police contact was in their early teens had a greater number of future police contacts than those whose first contact was later.

Relatively few offenders specialize

Most criminals engage in several types of crime:

- Repeat offenders tend to switch between misdemeanors and felonies and between violent and property crimes, often engaging in related types of crime such as property and drug offenses.^{7,8}

• It appears that juveniles, even more than adults, are generalists. This may be due partly to the random, unplanned nature of much juvenile crime.

How many offenders are female?

Relatively few offenders are female

	Females in group
All arrests (adults and juveniles)	16%
Index crime arrests	19
Violent crime arrests	10
Property crime arrests	21
Larceny	29
Nonlarceny	7
Under correctional supervision	
Juveniles	20
Jail inmates	7
Prison inmates	4

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1981. *Children in custody: A report on the juvenile detention and correctional facility census of 1979*. *Jail inmates 1982*, BJS bulletin, February 1983. *Prisoners in 1982*, BJS bulletin, April 1983.

The number of women in prison grew at a near record rate in 1981

The 15% increase in the number of women in State and Federal prisons was second only to the alltime record increase set in 1975. The 1981 increase for females exceeded that of males, and between 1970 and 1981 the number of females rose by more than 150% while that of males increased by 78%. Yet, because their number was so much smaller than that of men, women's share of prisoners remained at 4%. Similar patterns were found in the jail population.

Offense patterns differ for males and females

Men commit more crimes and are arrested for the more serious crimes. Arrest, jail, and prison data all suggest that women have a stronger relative involvement than men in property crimes such as larceny, forgery, fraud, and embezzlement, and in drug offenses. Men are more likely than women to be involved in robbery or burglary.

In both jail and prison, burglary was the charge or conviction of 19% of the men, but only 5% of the women. These proportions were reversed in the case of forgery, fraud, and embezzlement. Almost twice the proportion of women as of men were incarcerated for some type of drug offense.

While most arrests are of males, the share of arrests that are of females is highest for larceny-theft

UCR Index Crimes	Males	Females
Murder	87%	13%
Rape	99%	
Robbery	93%	7%
Aggravated assault	87%	13%
Burglary	94%	6%
Larceny-theft	71%	29%
Motor vehicle theft	91%	9%
Arson	89%	11%

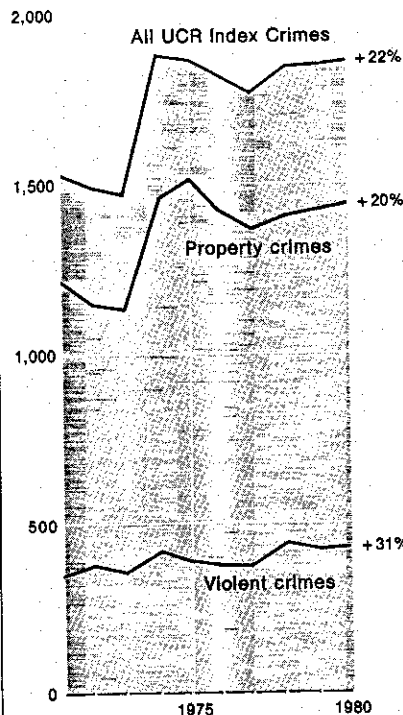
Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1981.

For UCR Index Crimes, the rate of arrest of females is much lower than that of males, but has risen faster

Males

Arrest rate per 100,000 resident population

% change (1971-80)



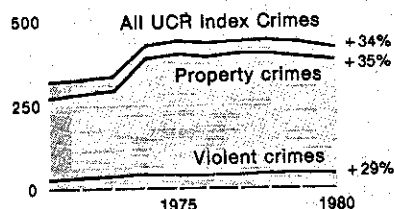
The increase in the rate of arrests of females —

- Resulted mainly from increases in property crimes, especially larceny
- For violent crime was similar to that for males
- For all crimes, including non-Index Crimes, was almost twice that for men

Females

Arrest rate per 100,000 resident population

% change (1971-80)



Source: Published and unpublished UCR data for 1971-80, adjusted for population coverage.

A relatively large proportion of offenders come from minority groups

The numbers of black victims and of black criminals were disproportionately high

Blacks were victimized by crime, especially violent crime, at a higher rate than whites. Black males sustained the highest victimization rate of any race/sex group, largely because of their vulnerability to robbery.

The proportion of blacks among offenders varied considerably among arrestees, jail inmates, and prison inmates. Blacks, who constituted 12% of the U.S. population in 1980, accounted for—

- 26% of all arrests in 1981.
- 34% of all UCR Index Crime arrests.
- 46% of all arrests for violent crimes.

The proportion of blacks in local jails was 40% and in State prisons, 47%. According to Blumstein, the disproportion of blacks in the prison population is mostly attributable to age, seriousness of crime, prior criminal record, and other legally relevant factors. This finding neither rules out nor confirms the possibility of some discrimination in the criminal justice system.

Victim reports confirm pattern of arrests by race

The pattern of racial involvement in arrests shown in police records closely parallels that reported by victims of crime in the National Crime Survey. For example, about 40% of the persons arrested for robbery in 1979 were black males age 18 or older; victim reports for the same year suggested that 44% of all robbers were black males age 18 or older.

Lifetime probability of incarceration is three times higher for blacks

The likelihood that any adult male will have served time in a juvenile or adult jail or prison by age 64 is estimated to be 18% for blacks and 3% for whites.⁹ However, after the first confinement, the likelihood of further commitments is similar for white and black males. About a third of each group who have ever been confined will have experienced four confinements by age 64.

The proportion of black State prisoners in the South is most consistent with their share of the U.S. population

	Blacks as a percent of prison population	Blacks as a percent of U.S. population	Ratio of prison proportion to U.S. proportion
United States	47%	12%	4 to 1
Northeast	50	10	5 to 1
North Central	47	9	5 to 1
South	53	19	3 to 1
West	26	5	5 to 1

Source: *Prisoners in State and Federal institutions on December 31, 1981.*

Black arrest rates were higher for violent than for property crimes

During 1981, 26% of all arrests involved blacks (73% involved whites and 1%, members of other races). Among UCR Index Crimes, the arrest rate of blacks was higher for violent than for property crimes:

	Whites	Blacks
All Index Crimes	64%	34%
Violent crimes	53	46
Murder	50	49
Rape	50	48
Robbery	39	60
Assault	61	37
Property crimes	67	31
Burglary	69	30
Larceny-theft	66	32
Motor vehicle theft	68	30
Arson	78	21

Note: Percentages do not add to 100% because arrests of persons of other races are not shown.

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1981.

Consistent with their arrest pattern, blacks were more likely than whites to have been sentenced to prison for violent crimes, particularly robbery, and less likely to have been sentenced for property crimes, particularly burglary.

The proportion of Hispanics in prisons and jails is greater than in the total U.S. population

Fifteen million Hispanics make up 6% of the U.S. population. This number is divided about equally between males and females.

Hispanics (both white and black)—

- Accounted for 12% of all arrests for violent crimes and 10% of all arrests for property crimes in 1981.
- Made up 10% (25,005) of the male prison population in 1979 and 11% (15,667) of the jail population in 1978.
- Made up 7% (811) of the female prison population in 1979 and 7% (682) of the jail population in 1978.
- Were more likely than non-Hispanics to be serving time for violent crimes, but overall they resembled whites rather than blacks in the types of crimes for which they were in prison.

Many offenders have backgrounds that include a turbulent home life, lack of family ties, and poor education

Knowing about offenders' backgrounds tells us about their lives, not necessarily why they committed crime

While turbulent home life, lack of family ties, and poor education are frequently present in the backgrounds of offenders, these factors may or may not contribute to crime. Some theories suggest that some of these factors are symptoms of maladjustment as is criminal behavior. Clearly, most persons who share these factors in their backgrounds are not criminals.

A high number of offenders come from unstable homes

Research shows a higher incidence of unstable homes among delinquents than among nondelinquents. State prison inmates were more likely than not to have grown up in a home with only one parent present or to have been raised by relatives. Forty-seven percent of all inmates grew up in a two-parent household; in contrast, 77% of all children under age 18 in 1979 were living with two-parent families.

Because criminal careers typically begin at a young age, the identification of characteristics that distinguish delinquents from nondelinquents has been given considerable attention and has focused largely on what researchers term "under the roof culture"—the interactions of love, discipline, and supervision that occur between parents and children in the home.¹⁰

Violent behavior is linked to abuse as children and to neurological abnormalities

Violent behavior and physical and psychological abnormalities often appear among children and adolescents subjected to extreme abuse and violence in their families. Lewis and others in a study comparing an extremely violent group of delinquent boys with a group of less violent delinquent boys found striking psychological and neurological differences between the two groups. The more violent group exhibited a wide range of neurological abnormalities, were significantly more likely to have paranoid symptoms, and were more

likely to have suffered and to have witnessed physical abuse. They also had far more severe verbal deficiencies.

Prison inmates were likely to have relatives who served time

Forty percent of prison inmates had an immediate family member (father, mother, brother, or sister) who had served time in jail or prison. Similar data are not available for noncriminals, but it is highly unlikely that the proportion is as high.

Most offenders were not married

Among jail and prison inmates—

- About half had never been married and another 20% were divorced or separated (vs. about half unmarried and 4% divorced or separated among U.S. males age 20-29).
- 20% were married (vs. 47% of the comparable U.S. population).

The proportion of divorced and separated whites was much higher in jails and prisons than in the U.S. population; the marital status of black inmates was closer to that of blacks in the U.S. population.

Most inmates had dependent children

Despite the high proportion of unmarried inmates, more than half had children, almost all of them under age 18. More than a third had three or more children. In most cases, children were cared for by the inmate's immediate family while the inmate was in jail or prison.

The level of education reached by jail and prison inmates was far below the national average

These data overrepresent street criminals as opposed to white-collar criminals; only about 40% of all jail and prison inmates had completed high school (vs. 85% of 20- to 29-year-old males in the U.S. population).

- The proportion of high school dropouts (those who started but did not complete high school) was about 3 times larger among the incarcerated.
- Fully 6% of all prisoners had no schooling or only kindergarten. Their

rate of incarceration was more than 3 times that of high school dropouts, the group with the next highest incarceration rate.

- College graduates had an extremely low incarceration rate.

Incarceration rate (per 1,000 U.S. males age 20-29)

No school/kindergarten	259
1-7 years	83
8th grade	70
9-11 years	46
12th grade	11
13-15 years	6
16 or more years	1

Educational level was closely related to type of offense

- For whites, drug offenses and property crimes such as forgery, fraud, and embezzlement were more characteristic of those with at least 12 years of formal schooling than of those with less than 8 years.
- Confinement for public order crimes or for burglary was more apt to be associated with the lower educational levels.
- Imprisonment for drug offenses or for robbery was more commonly associated with high school graduates.
- Prisoners who had some college prior to incarceration were more likely than those with less education to have been convicted of a nonviolent offense and less likely to have had a past record.

Prior to arrest many inmates had little or no legal income

Unemployment was experienced by many offenders

About 40% of all males in jail had been unemployed at the time they entered jail. Among the 60% who were working, 12% were working only part time. This compared with an 84% employment rate for the U.S. male population age 18-54 and with only 3% limited to part-time work.

Many prison inmates were unemployed prior to arrest. The highest incarceration rate among U.S. males age 16-64 was among those who were unemployed:

	Incarceration rate per 100,000 U.S. population
In labor force	396
Employed	356
Unemployed	933
Not in labor force	442
Total	405

Source: *Prisons and prisoners*, January 1982.

A high proportion of adult felons lacked steady employment

Adult felons were more likely than the general population to have never worked at all or to have held a wide variety of short-term jobs. Some 40% of a group of prisoners in a Rand Corporation study were evenly divided between these two extremes. On the average, these felons committed more crimes, particularly more property crimes, than the 60% who had a more stable employment history.

As noted by Freeman, research shows some connection between crime and unemployment, but fails to show a well defined, clearly quantifiable linkage.¹¹ He adds that stronger evidence exists that shows criminal sanctions having a greater impact on crime than labor/market factors and that the widely different crime rates of cities and States are loosely linked to labor/market conditions. As with other characteristics, most unemployed people do not become criminals.

Motivations for crime range from thrill-seeking to need for money

Juveniles who went on to have adult criminal careers have stated that their main motives for crime were thrill-seeking, status, attention-getting, or peer influence, according to a Rand Corporation study of habitual felons. As criminals approach adulthood, the reasons cited shift to financial needs, especially to money for drugs and alcohol.

Average inmate was at the poverty level before entering jail

Almost half of all male inmates in jail in 1978 said they had incomes under \$3,000 prior to arrest. Thus the median income (for those reporting any income at all) was roughly a third of that for the general population. The median income for both male and female jail inmates was near the "poverty level" as defined by the U.S. Government (\$3,147 for persons age 14-64 in 1977).

The relationship between poverty and crime is widely debated. Hirschi concludes that research finds many delinquents to be better off than other adolescents in their immediate area.¹² Wilson also notes in *Thinking about crime* that crime may be seen to increase in poor neighborhoods; however, it does not increase in neighborhoods that experience a depression nor decrease as they experience prosperity.

The proportion of blue-collar workers was higher in prison than in the general population

Occupation	Prison population	U.S. population age 16-64
White-collar	15%	40%
Blue-collar	69	47
Farm	3	5
Service	10	8

Note: 3% of prison inmates did not report occupation.

Source: *Profile of State prison inmates: Sociodemographic findings from the 1974 survey of inmates of State correctional facilities*, 1979.

Few prison inmates had been working in their customary occupation

Before their arrest, 40% of all prisoners who were working were employed outside what they considered to be their customary occupation. For many, this suggests their inability to find work in their chosen field, and it also suggests some degree of under-employment.

Many inmates had income from nontraditional sources before entering jail

Among jail inmates—

- 25% had no source of income prior to arrest or depended on welfare, Social Security, or unemployment benefits.
- Only 4% said that their main source of income was illegal.
- 70% said that their main source of income had been a wage or a salary.

Relatively more female than male inmates—

- Depended on welfare, unemployment benefits, or Social Security (30% vs. 11%); many received Aid to Families with Dependent Children.
- Depended on family, friends, or loans from third parties for their subsistence (25% vs. 14%).
- Admitted that their main income was from illegal activities (6% vs. 4%).

Almost twice as many black as white women had income other than wages or salaries, mainly unemployment and social welfare funds.

The drug abuse-crime link is complex

Research on the link between crime and drug abuse has yielded what often appear to be conflicting conclusions. Studies show that, among prison inmates, the drug abusers, more than others, tended to be involved in money-producing crimes.

The Rand career criminal study found that, among felons, drug abusers committed *more* burglaries, con-type crimes, and drug sales than burglars, con-men, and drug dealers who did not use drugs. For other crimes, there were no appreciable differences between drug users and nondrug users in either the number of prisoners involved or in the number of crimes they committed.

Similar findings emerged from the 1979 national survey of State prisoners. Among violent criminals, only robbers had a relatively high proportion (38%) of inmates who said they had been under the influence of drugs, and most of these said they had been under the influence of marijuana.

Ball's study of Baltimore addicts showed that drug users committed an enormous *number* of crimes, mainly theft and drug dealing, and that, on the average, the typical addict committed a crime every other day. However, other research shows that most heroin-addicted criminals were involved in crime *before* they became addicted and that traditional income sources, rather than street crimes, are the *major* source of support for the drug habit.¹³

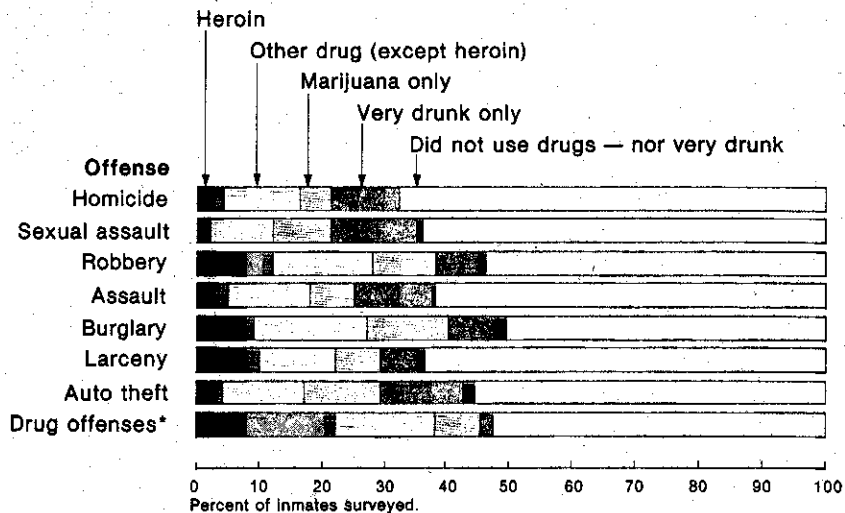
Drug and alcohol abuse was far greater among offenders than among nonoffenders

According to findings from a 1979 survey of prison inmates—

- More than 75% of all State prisoners had used one or more illicit drugs in their lifetime, about double the rate for the U.S. population, reported by the National Institute of Drug Abuse.

- Heroin, used by only 4% of all youths age 18-25, was used by 28% of all inmates, most of whom used it

2 out of 5 prison inmates reported they were under the influences of drugs or were very drunk around the time of the offense



*Includes trafficking and possession.

Source: Survey of State prison inmates, 1979.

at least once a week before they entered prison.

- Cocaine, used by 41% of the prisoners, was also widely used by 18-to-25-year-olds outside prison (28%).

- Marijuana was the most commonly used drug, both by inmates and by persons outside prison. Of all prisoners, 86% had used it, compared with 68% of the general population age 18-25. The number of young people who had used only marijuana and no other drug was the same for inmates and the general population—one out of five.

- Amphetamines and barbiturates were used by close to 40% of the prisoners, about twice the proportion who used it outside prison.

- More than a third of all inmates drank heavily; that is, at any one drinking session they typically drank the equivalent of eight cans of beer, seven 4-ounce glasses of wine, or nearly nine ounces of 82-proof liquor; during the year before their arrest, two-thirds drank heavily every day.

At the time of their offense, a third of the prisoners had been under the influence of a drug

- Most were under the influence of marijuana, but usually in combination with another more serious drug such as heroin.

- 9% were under the influence of heroin.

- 5% were under the influence of cocaine, amphetamines, or barbiturates.

- Among inmates, women were more likely than men to have been under the influence of heroin (14% vs. 8%).

- White inmates were more likely than black inmates to have been drinking heavily (35% vs. 15%).

Drinking problems were common for career criminals

- Prison inmates with a large number of prior convictions were more likely than other inmates to have been drinking just prior to their current offense.

- Habitual offenders drank more frequently, consumed more at one session, and were more likely to get drunk than one-time offenders.

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