



RESEARCH BRIEF: September 3, 2024

Crime, Violence, and Marriage in Maryland - What the Research Says

David J. Ayers, Ph.D.

KEY TAKEAWAYS
While the crime rate in Maryland is lower than the U.S. as a whole, Maryland counties vary widely in their crime rates.
Research shows that marriage reduces criminal tendencies.
There is an inverse relationship between marriage and crime rates across counties in Maryland.

In the wake of escalating violence, especially in cities, over the past few years, the examination of crime is an important social pathology that needs to be addressed. We will examine crime and violence in Maryland in this research brief. So how is Maryland doing? How much are its communities characterized by households headed by married couples, and how much are its children being born into them and otherwise raised within them?

At least so far as the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) *Uniform Crime Report* (UCR) data is concerned, compared to the United States as a whole, Maryland trends for violent and property crime rates are not bad (1). For example, both trended down between 2019 and 2020, while the overall U.S. violent crime rate increased. Moreover, violent and property crime in Maryland has consistently been lower than the U.S. average for some time. These facts are clear in Figures

1 and 2, on the following page. In a ranking of states using UCR data, out of 51 that includes all states plus the District of Columbia, Maryland ranks #24 in violent crime and #37 in property crime (2).

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at www.MarylandFamily.org

Maryland Family Institute | PO Box 1841 | Annapolis, MD 21404 | 410-449-0444 | MarylandFamily.org
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Figure 1: Uniform Crime Report Violent Crime Rate Trends for United States and Maryland, 2011-20. Chart generated on UCR Data Explorer. Rates are per 100,000.

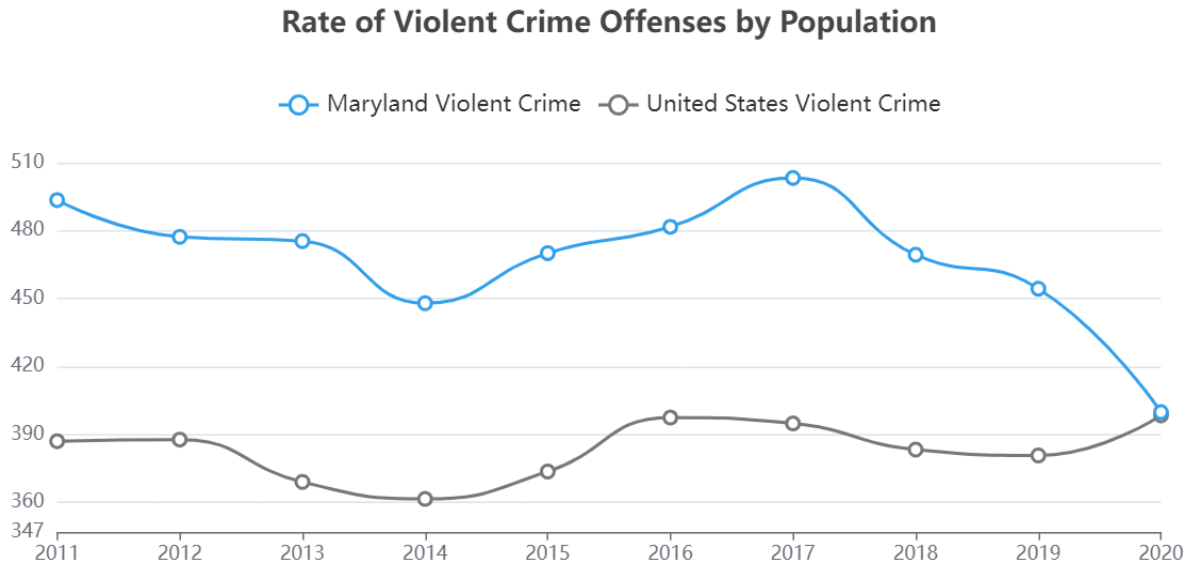


Figure 2: Uniform Crime Report Property Crime Rate Trends for United States and Maryland, 2011-20. Chart generated on UCR Data Explorer.

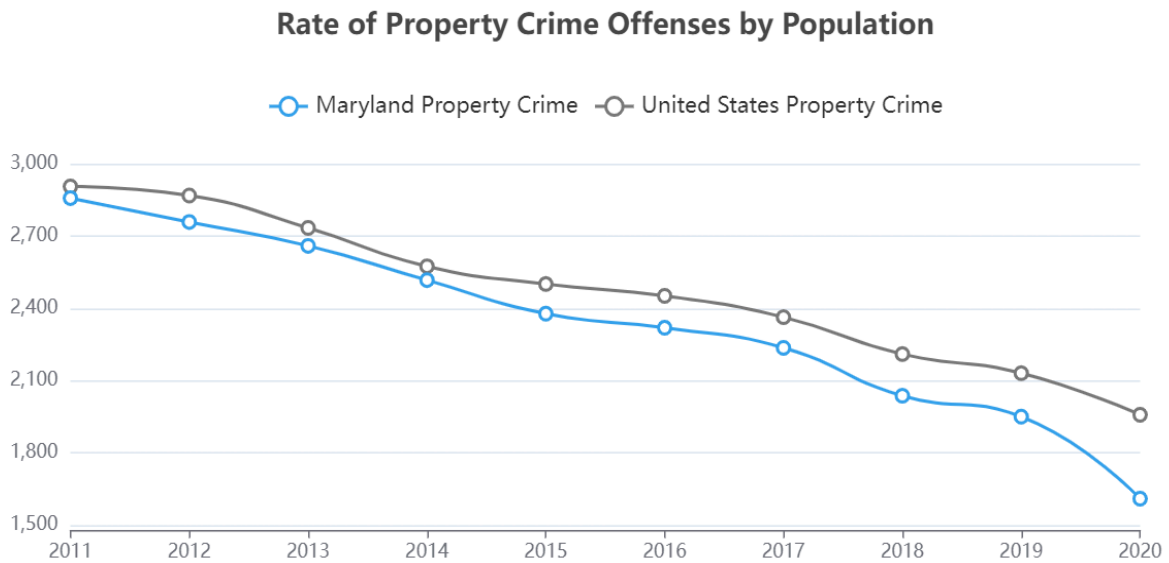


Table 1 shows the violent and property crime rates by county for 2020. This comes from the Maryland Crime Dashboard, which uses UCR data (3).

Table 1: Violent and Property Index Crime Rates per 100,000, UCR

COUNTIES	<u>Violent</u>	<u>Property</u>
Allegany	331.4	1862.3
Anne Arundel	312.2	1480.6
Baltimore (Co.)	462.5	1961.3
Baltimore (City)	1610.6	3171.5
Calvert	151.2	783.8
Caroline	189.0	1187.9
Carroll	111.3	705.8
Cecil	264.8	1708.7
Charles	328.1	1293.4
Dorchester	652.1	2441.6
Frederick	171.2	849.6
Garrett	222.2	1017.5
Harford	160.7	706.1
Howard	120.7	1093.0
Kent	134.9	653.8
Montgomery	166.7	1404.8
Prince George's	346.9	1782.2
Queen Anne's	186.1	679.1
St. Mary's	188.5	1340.9
Somerset	283.0	1281.4
Talbot	294.7	995.1
Washington	316.0	1174.1
Wicomico	477.9	1643.6
Worcester	448.4	2494.7

Though the relationship and research can be complicated, the overwhelming majority of studies suggest that marriage reduces the propensity to engage in crime (4). Moreover, marriage greatly reduces the risk of crime victimization. For example, in 2021, as in every other year, violent crime victimization for never married, divorced, and separated each were much higher than for those who were married (5).

Figures 3a and 3b are scatterplots showing the relationship between both crime rates and the total percentages of households headed by married couples. As the percentages of households headed by married couples increases, both crime rates generally decrease, as we would expect (6).

Figure 3a: Association Between Percentage of Households Headed by Married Couples (ACS 5 Year Estimates) and Violent Index Crime Rates, Among Maryland Counties, UCR, Maryland Crime Dashboard

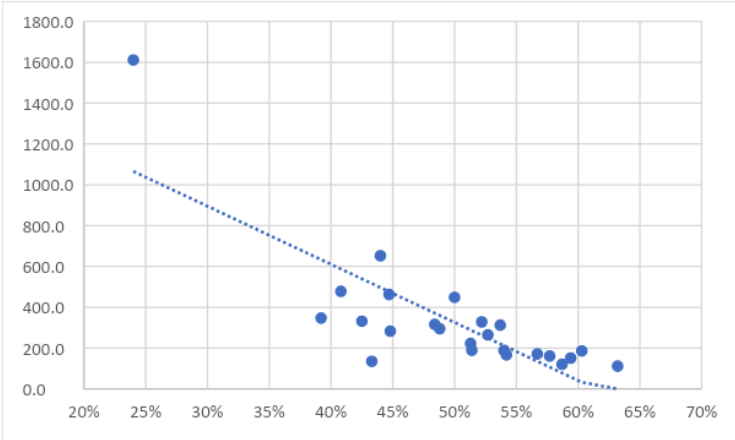
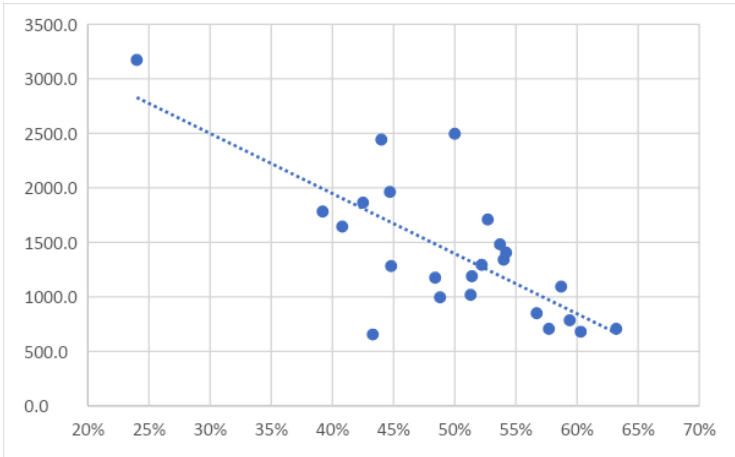


Figure 3b: Association Between Percentage of Households Headed by Married Couples (ACS 5 Year Estimates) and Property Index Crime Rates, Among Maryland Counties, UCR, Maryland Crime Dashboard



The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is a major component of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. This survey has been conducted every other year on private and public students nationally since 1991. It is a treasure trove of information on the status and welfare of American high and middle school students. Moreover, results are broken down by state. And especially valuable here, Maryland maintains its own comprehensive YRBS website that provides access to all statewide and county results back to the 2012-13 survey through the most recent. The last YRBS (2021-22) surveyed over 35,000 Maryland high school students.

Survey items for high school students include several that clearly measure violence or threat of violence. Each of these items show large gender differences, and the results shown here are each for the gender with the highest incidences of each.

These are, carried a weapon (gun, knife, club, etc.) on school property in the last 30 days (male). Then, in the past 12 months: carried a gun for reasons other than hunting or sport (male), were threatened or injured with a weapon on school property (male), were in a physical fight on school property (male), were intentionally physically hurt by a dating partner (female).

Statewide versus national trends for these items are shown in Figures 4a-4e below. Not all are available for all of the years between 2010-11 and 2021-22. Thankfully, these show declining percentages in recent years, with the exception of females who had ever dated suffering dating violence, which has been roughly stable.

Figure 4a: Percentages of Males Carrying Weapons on School Property in Last 30 Days, High School Students, United States versus Maryland, YRBS 2011-21.

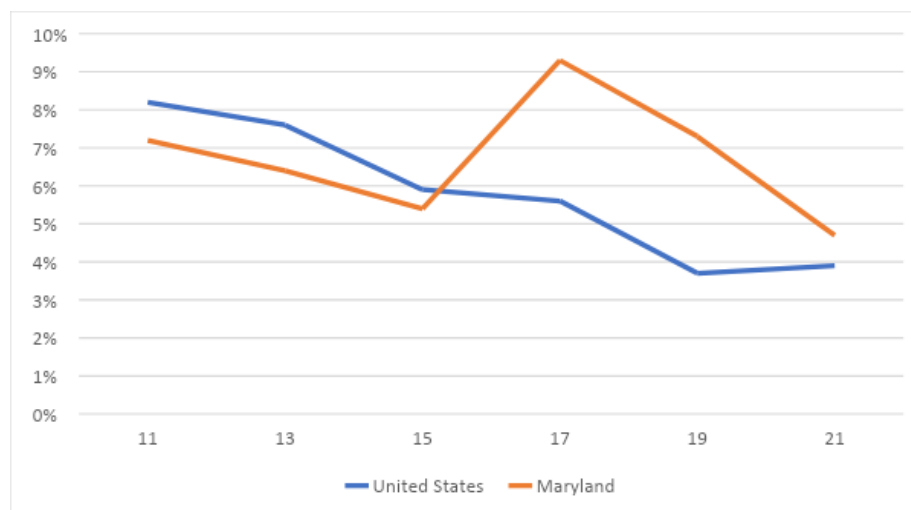


Figure 4b: Percentages of Males Carrying a Gun for Reasons Other Than Hunting or Sport in past 12 Months, High School Students, United States versus Maryland, YRBS 2017-21.

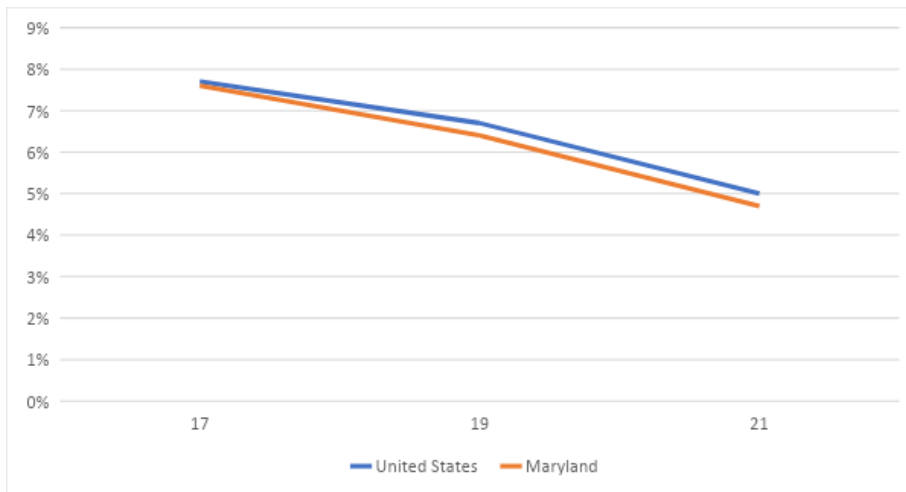


Figure 4c: Percentages of Males Threatened or Injured with a Weapon on School Property in past 12 Months, High School Students, United States versus Maryland, YRBS 2011-21.

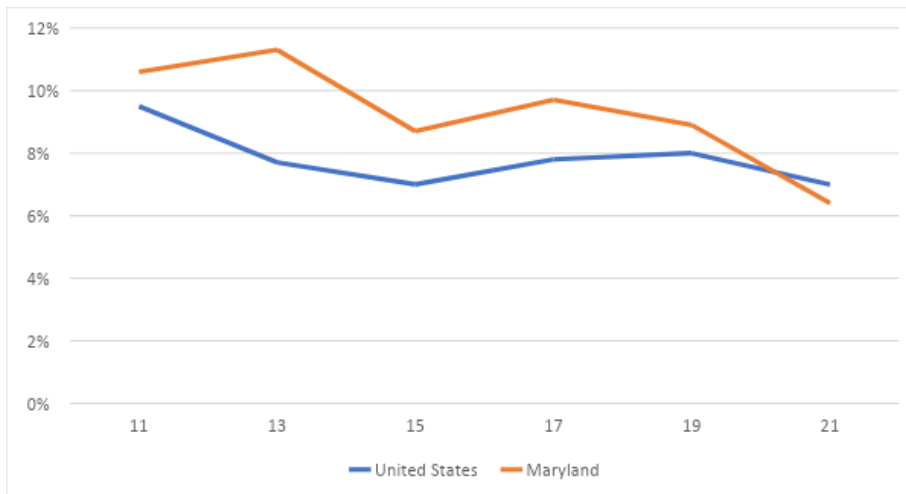


Figure 4d: Percentages of Males in a Physical Fight on School Property in past 12 Months, High School Students, United States versus Maryland, YRBS 2011-21.

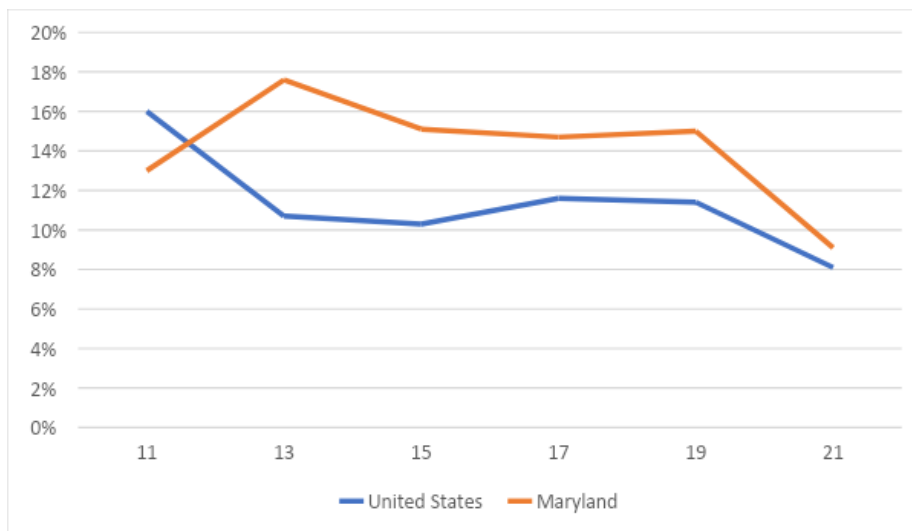
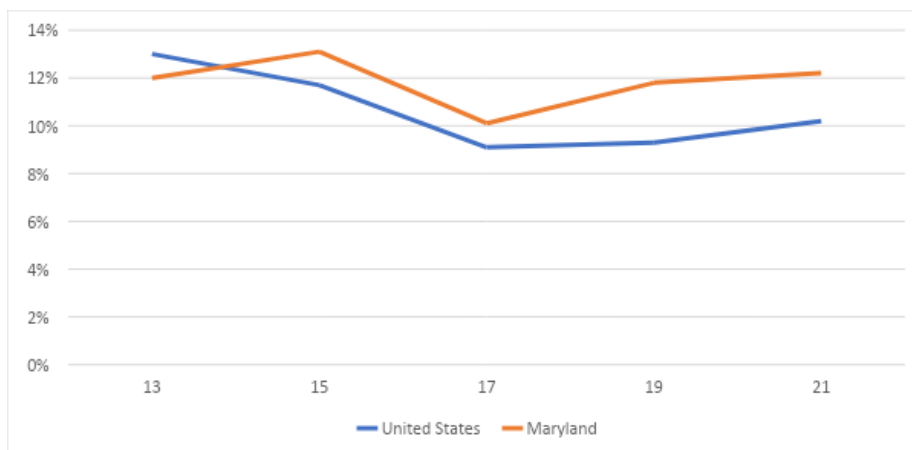


Figure 4e: Percentages of Females Deliberately and Physically Hurt by Dating Partners in past 12 Months, High School Students, United States versus Maryland, YRBS 2013-21.



In Table 2 on the following page, we see the breakdowns in these five measures by county. These are for the 2018-19 survey year, as this corresponds best with the all of the county-level data we have on family type and children, which are Census ACS 5-year estimates encompassing 2017-21. As was true in previous county tables in this report, the variation among these places is substantial. And despite the good news we saw in Figure 4, this table shows some disturbing levels of violence and disruption in some of these counties. For example, in Baltimore City, a quarter of the males had been in a physical fight at school, and another fourteen percent had been threatened or injured with a weapon, in the past 12 months. Or there is the fact that fifteen

percent of high school females in Dorchester County who had dated had experienced dating violence in the past 12 months. Scanning this table shows the need for improvement, in some places more than others, in these outcomes.

Table 2: Violent Outcomes, High School Students, 2018-19 YRBS

COUNTIES	<u>Weapon on School Property-Male</u>	<u>Carried Gun-Male</u>	<u>Threatened or Injured with Weapon-Male</u>	<u>Physical Fight at School-Male</u>	<u>Dating Violence-Female</u>
Allegany	6.3%	7.3%	7.1%	12.5%	13.3%
Anne Arundel	6.9%	6.8%	8.7%	14.6%	12.2%
Baltimore (Co.)	8.6%	5.1%	11.0%	15.6%	14.8%
Baltimore (City)	14.5%	9.3%	13.6%	24.6%	14.2%
Calvert	5.5%	7.4%	8.0%	12.4%	10.6%
Caroline	6.1%	9.2%	15.4%	11.8%	14.6%
Carroll	5.3%	5.1%	8.1%	9.4%	11.4%
Cecil	5.8%	7.2%	8.4%	13.1%	14.5%
Charles	8.8%	9.3%	10.8%	17.1%	13.7%
Dorchester	9.9%	11.4%	14.6%	14.0%	15.0%
Frederick	5.7%	5.4%	8.1%	12.3%	10.2%
Garrett	8.7%	9.9%	9.8%	14.5%	12.3%
Harford	5.0%	5.9%	6.5%	12.5%	13.0%
Howard	4.2%	5.3%	7.0%	11.5%	6.9%
Kent	12.5%	12.1%	11.5%	16.7%	9.7%
Montgomery	5.1%	3.0%	5.4%	12.8%	7.9%
Prince George's	9.0%	8.9%	10.5%	18.5%	12.8%
Queen Anne's	5.6%	7.5%	10.3%	12.6%	9.6%
St. Mary's	5.6%	7.7%	9.1%	12.8%	11.9%
Somerset	10.8%	10.1%	7.2%	20.8%	16.3%
Talbot	5.9%	6.0%	5.8%	10.3%	9.7%
Washington	6.7%	6.7%	9.2%	13.3%	10.7%
Wicomico	9.6%	10.4%	13.4%	16.2%	12.5%
Worcester	7.7%	8.8%	10.2%	14.7%	9.9%

The relationship between each of these five outcomes, and the percentage of children in families who were living with married couples, was investigated using correlations. Table 3 shows each correlation and its significance, which held up when race was controlled where appropriate (7).

Table 3: Correlations Between the Percent of Children in Families Living with Married Couples, and the Five YRBS Outcomes Shown in Table 8, Among Maryland Counties.

Weapon on School Property-Male	Carried Gun-Male	Threatened or Injured with Weapon -Male	Physical Fight at School-Male	Dating Violence-Female
-.825; Sig. <.001	-.713; Sig. <.001	-.710; Sig. <.001	-.662; Sig. <.001	-.540; Sig. .006.

Table 3 suggests that in counties where greater proportions of children live in families with married couples, there is lower likelihood of youth engaging in these negative behaviors or experiencing these violent outcomes. More investigation is certainly needed before firm conclusions can be drawn but this at least suggests that in some (but not all) important ways Maryland high school students are safer in counties where more of the children in families are living with married couples.

One final note on this YRBS data. Sadly, there are serious gaps in Maryland YRBS data relative to that collected and made public by many other states. These include a measurement of whether students have ever seen someone shot, stabbed, or physically attacked in their neighborhoods. And inexcusably, Maryland currently excludes all three items addressing rape and sexual violence.

Conclusion

While Maryland property and violent index crime rates have improved, and the state has consistently done better in these than the nation as a whole, there is substantial variation among counties in how well they are doing. Moreover, county-level data shows a robust negative association between these crime rates and the percentage of the population living in married households. This is consistent with a great deal of evidence that, when it comes to crime, married people are much better off than those of other marital statuses.

YRBS items that directly measure some key aspects of violence experienced or engaged in by Maryland high school students are also instructive. On the one hand, across the state, on these measures, things have improved or at least not gotten worse over the past decade or so. On the other hand, there are dramatic differences among counties, some of which display disturbing percentages in some of these measures.

Obviously, where there is violence in schools and in their personal relationships, Maryland youth are going to find it harder to succeed academically and elsewhere. Safety for our kids must be, and is, a key priority. Moreover, there are relationships between some key YRBS violence measures and the percentages of children living in married families. This suggests that in some ways, our high school students may be safer in counties where the latter are higher. This is at least something that should be explored, not ignored.

David J. Ayers, Ph.D (NYU) is Professor of Sociology (Retired) at Grove City College, and Adjunct Professor of Sociology at Franciscan University. He was born and raised in Montgomery County and serves on the Academic Advisory Council of the Maryland Family Institute.

Endnotes

- (1) These are violent and property index crimes as defined by the UCR. The violent crime index includes murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Violent crimes are defined in the UCR Program as those offenses that involve “force or threat of force.”
<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/violent-crime>. The property crime index includes burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft. Arson is technically in this index but for various reasons is not part of volume reports. Such crimes are directed toward money and property.
<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/property-crime>.
- (2) Statista, “Reported violent crime rate in the United States in 2020, by state,”
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/200445/reported-violent-crime-rate-in-the-us-states/>; and “Property crime rate in the United States in 2020, by state,”
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/232575/property-crime-rate-in-the-us-by-state/>.
- (3) <https://goccp.maryland.gov/data-dashboards/crime-dashboard/>. Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services.
- (4) See for example Aaron Gottlieb and Naomi F. Sugie, “Marriage, Cohabitation, and Crime: Differentiating Associations by Partnership Stage,” *Justice Quarterly* 36, No. 3 (2019): 503-31. See also the research review by Torbjørn Skardhamar, Jukka Savolainen, Kjersti N. Aase, and Torkild H. Lyngstad, “Does Marriage Reduce Crime?,” *Crime and Justice* 44 (2015): 385-446.
- (5) Alexandra Thompson and Susannah N. Tapp, “Crime Victimization, 2021,” Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, September, 2022, revised July 5, 2023, 4, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv21.pdf>
- (6) For Figure 10a, $r = -.802$. For Figure 10b, $r = -.733$. Both have a chance of error of less than .001. The percentage of the population that is white was significantly positively correlated with the percentage of households headed by married couples (.480; Sig. .018), and significantly negatively correlated with both the violent (-.436; Sig. .033) and property (-.422; Sig. .04) crime rates. And the percentage of the population that is African American was significantly negatively correlated with the percentage of households headed by married couples (-.659; Sig. <.001), and significantly positively correlated with both the violent (.601; Sig. .002) and property (.534; Sig. .007) crime rates. So both correlations between household marital status and crime rates were re-analyzed using linear regression to control for both the percentages white and African American. Even with these controlled, both correlations between household marital status and crime remained highly significant: for violent crime rates Beta was -.674; Sig. .002, and for property crime rates it was -.705; Sig. .005.
- (7) The percentage of African American was significantly negatively correlated with the percentage of children in families who were living with married couples (-.537; Sig. .007). And it was significantly positively associated with males carrying weapons at school (.623; Sig. <.001), males having physical fights at school (.807; Sig. <.001), and females experiencing dating violence (.411; Sig. .046). So, these three associations were reanalyzed using linear regression to control for the percentage African American. Even with this control, the association between percent of children in married households and carrying weapons (Beta = -.683; Sig. <.001), having physical fights (Beta = -.321; Sig. .028), and females suffering dating violence (Beta = -.448; Sig. .049) remained significant.