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3.6 MILLION U.S. HOUSEHOLDS LEARNED THEY WERE IDENTITY THEFT VICTIMS DURING A SIX-MONTH PERIOD IN 2004

WASHINGTON, D.C. — An estimated 3.6 million households, or about 3 percent of all households in the nation, learned that they had been the victim of at least one type of identity theft during a six-month period in 2004, the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) announced today. Forty-eight percent had experienced an unauthorized use of credit cards; 25 percent had other accounts, such as banking accounts, used without permission; 15 percent experienced the misuse of personal information and 12 percent experienced multiple types of theft at the same time. These findings represent six-month estimates based on interviews conducted from July through December 2004 for the BJS National Crime Victimization Survey.

Households headed by young people (18-24 years old), those in urban or suburban areas and those with incomes of \$75,000 or more were the most likely to experience identity theft. Victimization did not differ by race or ethnicity.

About one-third of households that were identity theft victims discovered the loss by noticing missing money or unfamiliar charges on an account, and about one-quarter were contacted by a credit bureau. The estimated loss during the 6-month period was about \$3.2 billion. This included losses that may have been reimbursed by credit card companies, insurance companies or other financial institutions.

About two-thirds of the households said they lost money. The average loss was \$1,290. Some households for which misuse was still ongoing at the time of the interview may have continued to suffer losses.

About one-quarter of all victimized households said the misuse had not stopped. The misuse was more likely to have stopped for households experiencing credit card theft (78 percent) than those experiencing theft of other existing accounts (65 percent) or the misuse of personal information (54 percent).

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One-third of the victimized households experienced one or more problems caused by identity theft. The most common problem was being contacted by a debt collector (34 percent), followed by problems with bank accounts (31 percent) and credit cards (26 percent).

About one in five households spent at least one month resolving their problems. One-third said the problems were resolved in one day. At the time of the interview about one-sixth said the misuse was still causing problems.

The survey questions were asked of one household member, who provided information about other property crimes the entire household may have suffered. The survey did not obtain information on which household members were victims.

Identity theft questions were added to the BJS crime survey in July 2004. Only 6 months of data were available for analysis. Annual prevalence estimates will be published when data are available for 2005.

The report, "Identity Theft, 2004" (NCJ-212213), was written by BJS statistician Katrina Baum. Following publication this document can be accessed at: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/it04.htm.

For additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics statistical reports programs, please visit the BJS website at: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs.

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