

Crime Statistics

3 Sources of Information about Crime

1. Uniform Crime Report (URC)
 - FBI crime data
2. National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)
3. Self-Report Surveys (SRS)

Uniform Crime Reports (URC):

- Crime statistics are collected by branches of the criminal justice system (police departments)
- Crime statistics are compiled and shared by the FBI
- Data are accumulated nationally as police officers report calls, crimes, and arrests, etc

Strengths of UCR:

- Shows trends and patterns of crime over time
- Provides crime data at different levels

Weaknesses of UCR:

- Recording practices are inconsistent
 - Police departments are inconsistent in how they document crime (discretion in arrests, reports, and in what to record)
- Multiple offenses are not recorded, only the most serious crime
- Different police departments and police officers may define a type of crime differently
- Not all jurisdiction report crime statistics to the FBI
 - Rural, small police departments, ect
 - Sending in data is completely voluntary
- Not all crimes are reported to the police- **BIGGEST WEAKNESS**
 - **Dark Figure of Crime:** refers to those crimes that go unreported to officials
 - Lowest reported crime to the police is rape
 - Aggravated assault is the second lowest crime reported to the police

NIBRS- new UCR being created by the FBI; taking over due to more detailed reports captured in NIBRS

National Crime Victimization Survey

- Provides estimates of the victimization experiences for the entire U.S. population
- Designed to show the amount of criminal victimization occurring in the U.S., even when such victimization does not come to the attention of the police

NCVS Strengths

- Gets at the Dark Figure of Crime and why crimes go unreported
- Provides information on the victims of crime (attitudes, cost of crime, injuries, weapon use, beliefs about crime and punishment)
- Based on probability sampling (random and representative)
 - Unique to the NCVS
 - Use a probability sampling design to ensure that the households selected to complete the survey represent the results of the entire population

NCVS Weaknesses

- High costs
- The data are dependent on the recall of the respondents
- Respondents are not likely to report failed attempts (URC does)
- People may define crime differently than the criminal justice officials
- Respondents often fail to report certain types of crime and/or crimes that involve acquaintances or relatives of the victim
- In collecting information, only one person per household is interviewed
 - Have to be at least 12 years old to answer the interview questions
- Major variation noted in reporting by respondent's race, sex, age, income, and education

Self- Report Surveys (SRS)

- Ask people to state if (and how often) they have engaged in acts that could be defined as criminal or delinquent

Strengths:

- Gets at the Dark Figure of Crime
- Provides detailed demographic information on offenders (school attendance, family situation, conventional activities, and other individualized and theoretical information)
- A source of information on attitudes and beliefs of those who engage in criminal activity

Weaknesses:

- Lack of standard reporting format; vague measures of criminal involvement are often used (never, often, and sometimes)
- Asks only about trivial offenses (general delinquency, status offenses, etc.)
- Dependent on the recall of the respondents
- Dependent on the willingness of respondents to answer truthfully
 - Lack of validity- tendency to falsify info or exaggerate involvement in the crime