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Measuring Crime and Criminal Behavior

A weary English bobby (a popular nickname for British police officers) patrolling his foot beat on a chilly November night hears the unmistakable sounds of sexual activity from the dark entranceway of a closed greengrocer's shop. He smiles to himself and tiptoes toward the sound. When he reaches the entranceway, he switches on his flashlight and booms out the favorite line of the stereotypical bobby: "What's goin' on 'ere then?" The squeaking couple immediately come to attention and adjust their dress before the young man—obviously still in a state of arousal—stammers, "Why, nothing, constable." The officer recognizes the woman as a local "slapper" (prostitute) and he vaguely recognizes the man (more of a boy of around 17, really) as a local supermarket worker. The constable reasons that he should arrest both parties for public indecency, but that would entail about an hour of paperwork (an hour in the warm police station with a nice cup of tea sounds good, though) and lead to the profound embarrassment of the poor boy. He finally decides to give the boy some sound advice about sexually transmitted diseases and a stern warning to the woman and sends them both on their way.

This short story illustrates that official statistics are measuring police behavior as much as they are measuring crime. Sir Josiah Stamp, director of the Bank of England in the 1920s, cynically stated this criticism: "The government are very keen on amassing statistics. They collect them, raise them to the n th power, take the cube root and prepare wonderful diagrams. But you must never forget that every one of these figures comes in the first instance from the village watchmen, who just puts down what he damn pleases" (quoted in Nettler, 1984, p. 39). I don't recommend this kind of cynicism, but I do counsel that you keep a healthy skepticism about statistics as you read this chapter.

Categorizing and Measuring Crime and Criminal Behavior

When attempting to understand, predict, and control any social problem, including the crime problem, the first step is to determine its extent. Gauging the extent of the problem means discovering how much of it there is, where and when it occurs most often, and among what social categories it occurs most frequently. It also helps our endeavors if we have knowledge of the patterns and trends of the problem over time. Note that we did not address “why” questions (why does crime occur, why is it increasing/decreasing, who commits it and why, and so on); such questions can only be adequately addressed after we have reliable data about the extent of the problem. However, all social statistics are suspect to some extent, and crime statistics are perhaps the most suspect of all. They have been collected from many different sources in many different ways and have passed through many sieves of judgment before being recorded.

There is a wide variety of data provided by government and private sources to help us to come to grips with America’s crime problem, all with their particular strengths and weaknesses. The major data sources that we have can be grouped into three categories: official statistics, victimization survey data, and self-reported data. *Official statistics* are those derived from the routine functioning of the criminal justice system. The most basic category of official statistics comes from the calls made to police by victims or witnesses and from crimes that the police discover on patrol. Other major categories of official crime data consist of information about arrests, about convictions, and about correctional (prison, probation/parole) populations.

The Uniform Crime Reports: Counting Crime Officially



▲ Photo 2.1 The J. Edgar Hoover building, headquarters of the FBI, in Washington, D.C. Annual Uniform Crime Reports are compiled by the FBI after local, county, and state criminal justice agencies send in their annual crime data.

The primary source of official crime statistics in the United States is the annual **Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)** compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The UCR reports crimes known to the nation’s police and sheriff’s departments and the number of arrests made by these agencies; federal crimes are not included. Offenses known to the police are recorded whether or not an arrest is made or if an arrested person is subsequently prosecuted and convicted. Participation in the UCR reporting program is voluntary, and thus all agencies do not participate. This is unfortunate for anyone hoping for comprehensive crime data. In 2009, law enforcement agencies active in the UCR program represented more than 295 million U. S. inhabitants—96.3% of the total population (FBI, 2010). This means that crimes committed in the jurisdictions of agencies representing about 4% of the population (about 12.5 million people) were not included in the UCR data.

The UCR reports the number of each type of crime reported to the police as well as the rate of occurrence. The rate of a given crime is the actual number of reported crimes standardized by some unit of the population. We expect the raw number of crimes to increase as the population increases, so comparing the number of crimes reported today with the number reported 30 years ago, or the number of crimes reported in New York with the number reported in Wyoming, tells us little without considering population differences. For instance, California reported 1,972 murders to the FBI in 2009, and Louisiana reported 530. In which state are you most likely to be murdered? We can't say unless we take the two states' respective populations into consideration. To obtain a crime rate, we divide the number of reported crimes in a state by its population, and multiply the quotient by 100,000, as in the following comparison of California and Louisiana rates.

$$\text{Rate} = \frac{\text{CA Murders} = 1,972}{\text{CA Population} = 36,961,664} = .000053 \times 100,000 = 5.3$$

$$\text{Rate} = \frac{\text{LA Murders} = 530}{\text{LA Population} = 4,492,076} = .000138 \times 100,000 = 11.8$$

Thus, a person in Louisiana is at over twice the risk (11.8 versus 5.3) of being murdered compared to a person in California. This statement is based on the statewide rate; the actual risk will vary widely from person to person based on such factors as age, race, sex, socioeconomic status (SES), neighborhood, and urban versus rural residence.

The UCR separates crimes into two categories: **Part I offenses** (or **Index Crimes**), and **Part II offenses**. Part I offenses includes four violent (homicide, assault, forcible rape, and robbery) and four property offenses (larceny/theft, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and arson). Notice that these are all universally condemned mala in se offenses. Part I offenses correspond with what most people think of as “serious” crime. Part II offenses are treated as less serious offenses and are recorded based on arrests made rather than cases reported to the police. Part II offense figures understate the extent of criminal offending far more than is the case with Part I figures because only a very small proportion of these crimes result in arrest.

Table 2.1 is a page from the 2009 UCR listing all Part I and II crimes broken down by sex and percentage change in rates from 1999 to 2008. This provides us with an estimate of the number of times a given crime was reported to the police in 2009, and the male/female differences in arrests (as well as the increases/

Table 2.1 Ten-Year Arrest Trends for Part I and Part II Crimes by Sex

Offense	Male			Female		
	1999	2008	Change	1999	2008	Change
Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter	6,636	6,292	-5.2	831	780	-6.1
Forcible rape	15,452	12,474	-19.3	179	148	-17.3
Robbery	54,658	64,844	+18.6	6,261	8,615	+37.6
Aggravated assault	228,525	202,645	-11.3	55,814	54,400	-2.5

(Continued)

Table 2.1 (Continued)

Offense	Male			Female		
	1999	2008	Change	1999	2008	Change
Burglary	149,875	157,341	+5.0	23,106	29,055	+25.7
Larceny-theft	461,632	431,212	-6.6	254,629	308,011	+21.0
Motor vehicle theft	60,540	43,801	-27.6	11,331	9,344	-17.5
Arson	8,317	7,116	-14.4	1,373	1,291	-6.0
Violent crime	305,271	286,255	-6.2	63,085	63,943	+1.4
Property crime	680,364	639,470	-6.0	290,439	347,701	+19.7
Other assaults	564,655	560,226	-0.8	169,665	196,577	+15.9
Forgery and counterfeiting	38,570	31,947	-17.2	24,253	19,631	-19.1
Fraud	114,020	80,973	-29.0	96,234	65,637	-31.8
Embezzlement	5,768	6,575	+14.0	5,634	7,039	+24.9
Stolen property; buying, receiving, possessing	56,110	53,172	-5.2	10,350	14,116	+36.4
Vandalism	135,146	137,165	+1.5	24,317	28,213	+16.0
Weapons; carrying, possessing, etc.	87,790	93,112	+6.1	7,492	7,480	-0.2
Prostitution and commercialized vice	19,762	12,133	-38.6	25,240	25,164	-0.3
Sex offenses (except forcible rape and prostitution)	48,800	40,876	-16.2	3,670	3,769	+2.7
Drug abuse violations	711,384	784,561	+10.3	155,256	185,201	+19.3
Gambling	4,481	2,227	-50.3	800	350	-56.3
Offenses against the family and children	65,172	51,268	-21.3	18,481	17,303	-6.4
Driving under the influence	714,457	667,017	-6.6	134,279	181,391	+35.1
Liquor laws	298,874	241,328	-19.3	84,444	89,999	+6.6
Drunkenness	370,924	347,399	-6.3	55,670	66,883	+20.1
Disorderly conduct	262,713	243,865	-7.2	82,332	89,530	+8.7
Vagrancy	13,302	12,037	-9.5	3,130	3,550	+13.4
All other offenses (except traffic)	1,687,374	1,724,690	+2.2	444,312	517,358	+16.4
Suspicion	3,563	790	-77.8	945	197	-79.2
Curfew and loitering law violations	56,843	40,275	-29.1	25,370	19,935	-21.4
Runaways	37,359	26,923	-27.9	54,048	34,363	-36.4

SOURCE: FBI (2010a).

decreases) provide interesting information regarding why these gender differences exist. Figure 2.1, the FBI's famous crime clock, further helps to put crime figures into perspective by indicating how often on an average day one of these crimes is committed. Remember that these are only rough estimates.

Cleared Offenses

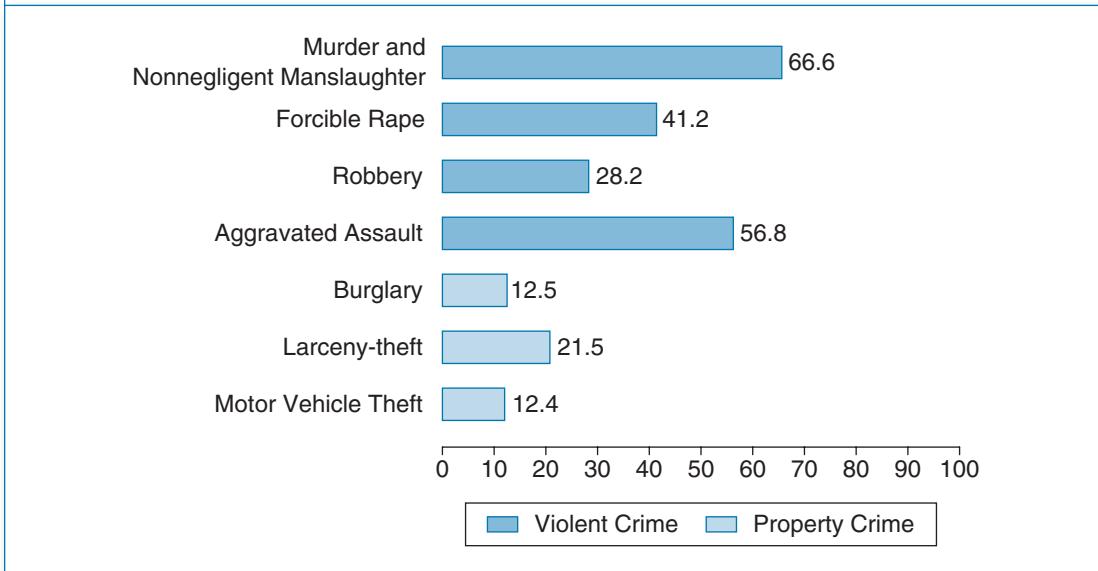
If a person is arrested and charged for a Part I offense, the UCR records the crime as *cleared by arrest*. A crime may also be *cleared by exceptional means* when the police have identified a suspect and have enough evidence to support arrest, but the suspect could not be taken into custody immediately or at all. Such circumstances exist when the suspect dies or is in a location where the police cannot presently gain custody. For instance, he or she is in custody on other charges in another jurisdiction or is residing in a country with no extradition treaty with the United States.

Figure 2.1 The FBI Crime Clock

Homicide	One person is murdered every 31 minutes.
Rape	One person is raped every 2.7 minutes.
Assault	One person is assaulted every 7.2 seconds.
Theft	One home is victimized by theft every 2.3 seconds.
Burglary	One home is burglarized every 9.1 seconds.
Domestic Violence	One women is victimized by an intimate partner every 1.3 minutes. One man is victimized every 6.7 minutes.
Child Abuse and Neglect	One child is reported abused or neglected every 35 seconds.
Drunk Driving	One person is killed in an alcohol-related traffic crash every 29 minutes.
Identity Theft	One person becomes a victim of identity theft every 8.7 seconds.
Elderly Abuse	One elderly person is victimized every 2.7 minutes.
Hate Crime	One hate crime is reported to the police every 73 minutes.

SOURCE: FBI (2010a).

Figure 2.2 Percentage of Crimes Cleared by Arrest or Exceptional Means in 2009



SOURCE: FBI (2010a).

As can be seen in Figure 2.2, which gives 2009 clearance rates, violent crimes are more likely to be cleared than property crimes because violent crime investigations are pursued more vigorously and because victims of such crimes may be able to identify the perpetrator(s).

Crime Trends

One thing about the UCR is that it is very useful for tracking crime trends. Table 2.2 shows trends from 1990 to 2009 (FBI, 2010a). Note that total crime dropped just over 40% ($5,802.7 - 3,465.5 = 2,337.2 / 5,802.7 = .40278$, or $\approx 40.3\%$) between those years. It is much easier to note that crime increased or decreased by some percentage over a specified time period than it is to explain why it did so, however. Despite the accumulation of tons of factual data, it is difficult to arrive at a sturdy conclusion that fits them together to everyone's satisfaction. Facts only describe events; they do not explain them. Any explanation for major fluctuations in crime rates requires that we have an understanding of the historical, social, political, economic, and demographic processes unfolding around the same time that increases or decreases in crime are recorded and how those processes interact. The effects of any particular process on crime may be immediate, such as a series of riots and general mayhem following some perceived injustice, or it may only be felt a decade or so down the road, such as an economic policy decision that later affects job creation. Whatever process or alleged cause we examine, you should keep in the forefront of your mind that just as there is no single cause of crime or criminality, there is no single cause that explains crime trends.

Examine the total UCR violent and property crime rates per 100,000 for 1963, 1993, and 2003, and ask yourself whether crime has gone up or down.

Year	Violent	Property
1963	168.2	2,021.1
1993	747.1	4,740.0
2003	475.8	3,591.2

If we compare 1993 with 2003, we conclude that crime dropped significantly, but if we take 1963 as our beginning year and compare it with 2003, we would conclude that crime has gone up significantly. Whether crime has “gone up” or “gone down” thus depends on where we choose to look. Interpretations of crime trends should be read with caution because the author may have chosen a beginning and ending year to support his or her favored explanation. So before we begin to congratulate or berate ourselves because the crime rate has gone up or down, it is wise to ask, “Compared to what year?”

Take also the murder rate trends from 1900 to 2006 presented in Figure 2.3. The graph looks like a rugged mountain range with peaks and troughs, indicating that at some points in American history murder rates were more than twice as high as they were at other points. The 1900 rate of 1.0 per 100,000 is highly suspect given the descriptions of life in such cities as New York and Boston at the turn of the century, as well as the still semi-civilized condition of much of the western United States. We should never take national statistics at face value unless we are very sure of their quality, and national reporting of crime statistics was in a terrible state in the early part of the 20th century.

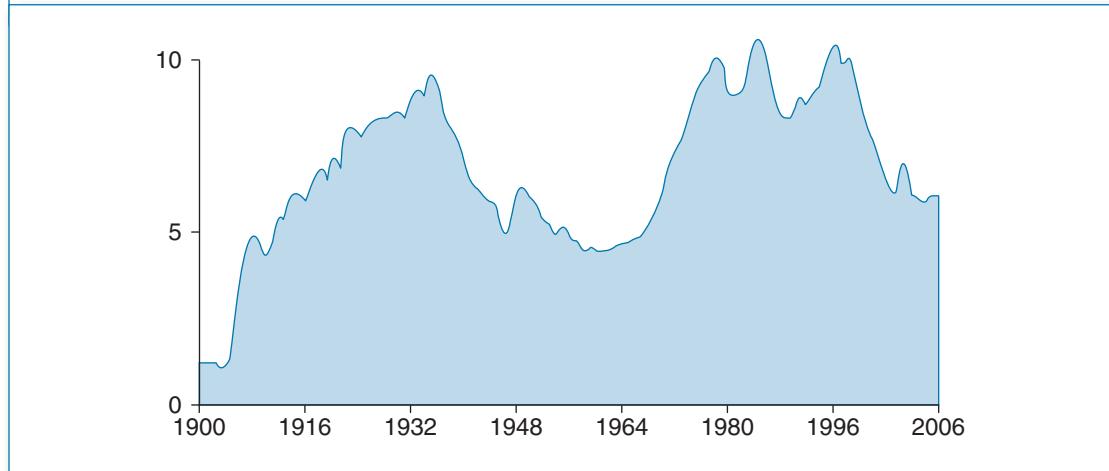
With the advent of the UCR in 1930, national data became somewhat more reliable. The homicide rate started a steep climb after the Volstead Act prohibiting the production and sale of alcohol was passed in 1920 as gangs fought over the lucrative illegal alcohol market. The rate started to fall with the repeal of

Table 2.2 Crime Rates, 1990–2009

Year	Crime	Violent Crime	Property Crime	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Burglary	Larceny-Theft	Motor Vehicle Theft
1990	5,802.7	729.6	5,073.1	9.4	41.1	256.3	422.9	1,232.2	3,185.1	655.8
1991	5,898.4	758.2	5,140.2	9.8	42.3	272.7	433.4	1,252.1	3,229.1	659.0
1992	5,661.4	757.7	4,903.7	9.3	42.8	263.7	441.9	1,168.4	3,103.6	631.6
1993	5,487.1	747.1	4,740.0	9.5	41.1	256.0	440.5	1,099.7	3,033.9	606.3
1994	5,373.8	713.6	4,660.2	9.0	39.3	237.8	427.6	1,042.1	3,026.9	591.3
1995	5,275.0	684.5	4,590.5	8.2	37.1	220.9	418.3	987.0	3,043.2	560.3
1996	5,087.6	636.6	4,451.0	7.4	36.3	201.9	391.0	945.0	2,980.3	525.7
1997	4,927.3	611.0	4,316.3	6.8	35.9	186.2	382.1	918.8	2,891.8	505.7
1998	4,620.1	567.6	4,052.5	6.3	34.5	165.5	361.4	863.2	2,729.5	459.9
1999	4,266.6	523.0	3,743.6	5.7	32.8	150.1	334.3	770.4	2,550.7	422.5
2000	4,124.8	506.5	3,618.3	5.5	32.0	145.0	324.0	728.8	2,477.3	412.2
2001	4,162.6	504.5	3,658.1	5.6	31.8	148.5	318.6	741.8	2,485.7	430.5
2002	4,125.0	494.4	3,630.6	5.6	33.1	146.1	309.5	747.0	2,450.7	432.9
2003	4,067.0	475.8	3,591.2	5.7	32.3	142.5	295.4	741.0	2,416.5	433.7
2004	3,977.3	463.2	3,514.1	5.5	32.4	136.7	288.6	730.3	2,362.3	421.5
2005	3,900.5	469.0	3,431.5	5.6	31.8	140.8	290.8	726.9	2,287.8	416.8
2006	3,838.3	480.6	3,357.7	5.8	31.7	150.6	292.6	735.2	2,221.4	401.1
2007	3,748.8	472.0	3,276.8	5.7	30.5	148.4	287.4	726.0	2,186.3	364.6
2008	3,669.0	457.5	3,211.5	5.4	29.7	145.7	276.7	732.1	2,164.5	315.0
2009	3,465.5	429.4	3,036.1	5.0	28.7	133.0	262.8	716.3	2,060.9	258.8

SOURCE: FBI (2010a).

the Volstead Act in 1933, which effectively removed criminals from the alcohol business. It dropped even further during World War II when most young men were in uniform and overseas, showed a sharp rise when they returned, and then settled into a relatively peaceful period during the 1950s–early 1960s. Murder rates then started a precipitous rise beginning in the late 1960s. The late 1960s–early 1970s was a period of huge changes in American society. Opposition to the Vietnam War combined with the civil rights and feminist movements led to the widespread questioning of many of the fundamental values of American society. When values and norms are questioned, they become weaker in their ability to regulate behavior. Behavioral deregulation led to all kinds of experimentation with alternative lifestyles, including the use of drugs. The emergence of crack cocaine in the early 1980s led to a period of gang wars over territory, just like the gang wars over alcohol did in the 1920s. Crack cocaine is easier to make, conceal, and sell than barrels of beer or bottles of whiskey, so crack dealing is more of an “equal opportunity” enterprise than supplying illegal

Figure 2.3 Murder Rates in the United States, 1900–2006

SOURCE: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010. *Key facts at a glance*. Available at <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/hmrt.cfm>

alcohol was. Numerous young “gangbangers” took advantage of the opportunity for easy money, sparking a decade-long street war with other like-minded individuals.

The decrease in the homicide rate in the early 1990s can be attributed to several factors including a large decrease in the crack market and in gang warfare as territories became consolidated by the strong pushing out the weak. Severe penalties for sale and possession of crack, and the danger from others trafficking in the same market, may have also driven out many dealers.

One of the biggest factors in the drop in homicide rates is medical and technological improvements. Cell phones for reporting incidents are everywhere, and emergency medical technicians are alerted and dispatched swiftly. Once hospitalized, victims have the benefit of all that medical experts have learned about treating violent traumas since the Vietnam War. It is estimated that we would be experiencing 5 times the murder rate today if medicine and technology were at the same level as in 1960 (Harris, Thomas, Fisher, & Hirsch, 2002), which is something to remember when comparing U.S. rates to those of less developed countries lacking America’s medical and technological advantages. Thus, many other factors known and unknown have contributed to the fluctuations in the homicide rate we have observed over the course of the 20th century, which makes it always difficult to explain crime trends to everyone’s satisfaction.

Problems With the UCR

UCR data have serious limitations that restrict their usefulness for criminological research, particularly research seeking to uncover causes of crime. Some of the more serious of these limitations are outlined below.

- The UCR data significantly underrepresents the actual number of criminal events in the United States each year. According to a nationwide victim survey, only 47% of victims of violent crime and 40% of victims of property crime indicated that they reported their victimization to the police

(Catalano, 2006). Victims are more likely to report violent crimes if injuries are serious, and are more likely to report property crimes when losses are high. Females (54.6%) are more likely than males (47%) to report violent victimization; males and females are about equally as likely (39%) to report property victimization.

- Federal crimes such as highly costly white-collar crimes such as stock market fraud, hazardous waste dumping, tax evasion, and false claims for professional services are not included in the UCR.
- Crimes committed in the jurisdictions of nonparticipating law enforcement agencies are not included in the data. Even with full voluntary compliance, all departments would not be equally efficient and thorough (or honest) in their record keeping.
- Crime data may be falsified by police departments for political reasons. The National Center for Policy Analysis (1998) reports that police departments in Philadelphia; New York; Atlanta; and Boca Raton, Florida, had underreported or downgraded crimes in their localities (and these are just the departments we know about).
- The UCR even underreports crimes that are known to the police because of the FBI's hierarchy rule. The **hierarchy rule** requires police to report only the highest (most serious) offense committed in a multiple-offense single incident to the FBI and to ignore the others. For instance, if a man robs five patrons in a bar, pistol-whips one patron who tried to resist, locks the victims in the beer cooler, and then rapes the female bartender, only the rape is reported to the FBI.

🚓 NIBRS: The “New and Improved” UCR

Efforts to improve the reliability and validity of official statistics are occurring all the time, with the most ambitious being the **National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)**. NIBRS began in 1982 and is designed for the collection of more detailed and comprehensive crime statistics than the UCR (which it is supposed to replace). As opposed to the current UCR, which monitors only a relatively few crimes and gathers few details associated with them, NIBRS collects data on 46 “Group A” offenses and 11 “Group B” offenses. There is no hierarchy rule under NIBRS; it reports multiple victims, multiple offenders, and multiple crimes that may be part of the same incident. It also provides information about the circumstances of the offense and about victim and offender characteristics, such as offender–victim relationship, age, sex, and race of victims and perpetrators (if known). As of 2009, a total of 31 states covering 25% of the U.S. population were reporting crime incidents to NIBRS (Justice Research and Statistics Association, 2010). Unfortunately, many police departments lack the staffing and technical expertise to collect and process the wide and detailed range of information that is part of each crime incident their officers deal with, and administrators see little benefit to their department to justify the effort (Dunworth, 2001).



▲ **Photo 2.2** The use of technology by police has been credited in part for crime reduction in the 1990s.

Because NIBRS data provide information about the offender and the victim (victims can identify physical characteristics of perpetrators), it can be used to try to resolve certain criminological issues. One issue is the disproportionately high rate of arrest for African Americans in the United States. The question for criminologists becomes this: Is the disproportion in arrests the result of disproportionately high black involvement in crime or the result of discriminatory arrest patterns of police?

This issue was explored by D'Alessio and Stolzenberg (2003) using NIBRS data from 17 states and 335,619 arrests for rape, robbery, and aggravated and simple assault. Their results indicate the odds of arrest for robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault were significantly greater for white offenders than for black offenders, but there was no significant racial difference in the probability of arrest for rape. In other words, white offenders were more likely to be arrested for violent crimes other than rape than black offenders. The researchers concluded that the disproportionately high black arrest rate is likely attributable to their disproportionately higher involvement in crime. For instance, African Americans committed 5,278 robberies in those states for which only 21.4% were arrested; whites committed 2,620 robberies for which 30.8% were arrested. Similar results based on NIBRS data were found in Pope and Snyder's (2003) analysis of 102,905 violent incidents committed by juveniles; that is, white juveniles were significantly more likely to be arrested than black juveniles.

Crime Victimization Survey Data and Their Problems

Crime victimization surveys involve asking large numbers of people if they have been criminally victimized within some specified time frame regardless of whether they reported the incident to police. U.S. Census Bureau personnel interview a national representative sample of people age 12 or over on behalf of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) twice each year. This survey is known as the **National Crime Victimization Survey** (NCVS), and in 2008, a total of 77,852 people from 42,093 households were interviewed (Rand, 2009). The NCVS requests information on crimes committed against individuals and households, the circumstances of the offense, and personal information about victims (age, sex, race, income, and education level) and offenders (approximate age, sex, race, and victim-offender relationship). Figure 2.4 presents highlights from the 2009 NCVS report.

Victimization surveys have their own dark figures as well as other problems that make them almost as suspect as the UCR. Some of these problems include the following:

- Crimes such as drug dealing and all “victimless” crimes such as prostitution and gambling are not revealed in such surveys for obvious reasons. And because murder victims cannot be interviewed, this most serious of crimes is not included.
- Because NCVS only surveys households, crimes committed against commercial establishments such as stores, bars, and factories are not included. This exclusion results in a huge underestimate of crimes such as burglaries, robberies, theft, and vandalism.
- Victimization data do not have to meet any stringent legal or evidentiary standards in order to be reported as an offense; if the respondent says he or she was robbed, a robbery will be recorded. UCR data, on the other hand, passes through the legal sieve to determine whether the reported incident was indeed a robbery.
- Other problems involve memory lapses; providing answers the respondent thinks the interviewer wants to hear; forgetting an incident; embellishing an incident; and any number of other misunderstandings, ambiguities, and even downright lies that occur when one person is asking another about his or her life experiences.

Figure 2.4 Criminal Victimization, 2007–2008

Type of crime	Number of victimizations		Rates ^a		Percent change
	2007	2008	2007	2008	2007–2003 ^b
All crimes	22,879,720	21,312,400	~	~	
Violent crimes^c	5,177,130	4,856,510	20.7	19.3	–6.9%
Rape/sexual assault	248,280	203,830	1.0	0.8	–18.5
Robbery	597,320	551,830	2.4	2.2	–8.3
Assault	4,331,530	4,100,850	17.3	16.3	–6.0
Aggravated	858,940	839,940	3.4	3.3	–2.9
Simple	3,472,590	3,260,920	13.9	12.9	–6.8
Personal theft^d	194,060	136,710	0.8	0.5	–30.1%
Property crimes	17,508,530	16,319,180	146.5	134.7	–8.1%*
Household burglary	3,215,090	3,188,620	26.9	26.3	–2.2
Motor vehicle theft	979,640	795,160	8.2	6.6	–19.9*
Theft	13,313,800	12,335,400	111.4	101.8	–8.6*

SOURCE: Rand, M. (2009).

NOTE: Detail may not add to total because of rounding. Total population age 12 or older was 250,344,870 in 2007 and 252,242,520 in 2008. Total number of households was 119,503,530 in 2007 and 121,141,060 in 2008.

~Not applicable.

*Difference is significant at the 95%-confidence level.

- Consistent with the above, there are suggestions that just as underreporting plagues UCR data, overreporting may plague NCVS data (O'Brien, 2001). Whatever the case may be, we find many anomalies when comparing the two sources of data. For instance, substantially more crimes appear in police records than NCVS victims claim to have reported to the police. The discrepancy is easily explained for burglary and motor vehicle theft because the NCVS does not include commercial establishments in their reports. It is more difficult to explain discrepancies in violent crime reports, however. One explanation is that the NCVS does not include victims who are under 12 years of age, whereas the UCR does, although it is difficult to believe that children under 12 account for 15 to 20% of the violent victimization known to the police.

NCVS researchers are aware of the many problems that arise when asking people to recall victimization and have initiated many interview improvements in their methodology, one of which is the *bounding interview*. This technique involves comparing reported incidents from the same household in the current interview with those reported 6 months prior. When a report appears to be a duplicate, the respondent is reminded of the earlier report and asked if the new report represents the incident previously mentioned or if it is different. Other techniques used to minimize some of the reported problems mentioned above are available on the NCVS website at www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/NCVS/. Figure 2.5 provides an example of the kinds of questions asked by NCVS workers.

Figure 2.5 Examples of NCVS Victimization Questions

<p>29. How were you attacked? Any other way? Mark (X) all that apply.</p> <p>FIELD REPRESENTATIVE – If raped, ASK – Do you mean forced or coerced sexual intercourse? If No, ASK – What do you mean?</p> <p>If tried to rape, ASK – Do you mean attempted forced or coerced sexual intercourse? If No, ASK – What do you mean?</p>	<p>646 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Raped * 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Tried to rape 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual assault other than rape or attempted rape 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Shot 5 <input type="checkbox"/> Shot at (but missed) 6 <input type="checkbox"/> Hit with gun held in hand 647 7 <input type="checkbox"/> Stabbed/cut with knife/sharp weapon * 8 <input type="checkbox"/> Attempted attack with knife/sharp weapon 9 <input type="checkbox"/> Hit by object (other than gun) held in hand 10 <input type="checkbox"/> Hit by thrown object 648 11 <input type="checkbox"/> Attempted attack with weapon other than * gun/knife/sharp weapon 12 <input type="checkbox"/> Hit, slapped, knocked down 13 <input type="checkbox"/> Grabbed, held, tripped, jumped, pushed, etc. 14 <input type="checkbox"/> Other – Specify _____</p>
<p>30. Did the offender THREATEN to hurt you before you were actually attacked?</p>	<p>649 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes 2 <input type="checkbox"/> No 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Other – Specify _____</p>
<p>31. What were the injuries you suffered, if any? Anything else? Mark (X) all that apply.</p> <p>FIELD REPRESENTATIVE – If raped and box 1 in item 29 is NOT marked, ASK – Do you mean forced or coerced sexual intercourse? If No, ASK – What do you mean?</p> <p>If attempted rape and box 2 in item 29 is NOT marked, ASK – Do you mean attempted forced or coerced sexual intercourse? If No, ASK – What do you mean?</p>	<p>655 1 <input type="checkbox"/> None – SKIP to 40 * 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Raped 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Attempted rape 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual assault other than rape or attempted rape 5 <input type="checkbox"/> Knife or stab wounds 6 <input type="checkbox"/> Gun shot, bullet wounds 656 7 <input type="checkbox"/> Broken bones or teeth knocked out * 8 <input type="checkbox"/> Internal injuries 9 <input type="checkbox"/> Knocked unconscious 10 <input type="checkbox"/> Bruises, black eye, cuts, scratches, swelling, chipped teeth 11 <input type="checkbox"/> Other – Specify _____</p>
<p>32. ASK OR VERIFY – Were any of the injuries caused by a weapon other than a gun or knife?</p>	<p>657 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes – Ask 33 2 <input type="checkbox"/> No – SKIP to 34</p>
<p>33. Which injuries were caused by a weapon OTHER than a gun or knife? Enter code(s) from 31.</p>	<p>658 <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> * Code Code Code</p>
<p>34. Were you injured to the extent that you received any medical care, including self treatment?</p>	<p>659 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes – Ask 35 2 <input type="checkbox"/> No – SKIP to 40</p>
<p>35. Where did you receive this care? Anywhere else? Mark (X) all that apply.</p>	<p>660 1 <input type="checkbox"/> At the scene * 2 <input type="checkbox"/> At home/neighbor's/friend's 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Health unit at work/school, first aid station at a stadium/park, etc. 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor's office/health clinic 5 <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency room at hospital/emergency clinic 6 <input type="checkbox"/> Hospital (other than emergency room) 7 <input type="checkbox"/> Other – Specify _____</p>

Areas of Agreement Between the UCR and NCVS

To the extent that two or more data sources tell us the same thing, our confidence in both is increased. The UCR and NCVS agree on the demographics of crime in that they both tell us that males, the young, the poor, and African Americans are more likely to be perpetrators and victims of crime than are females, older persons, wealthier persons, and persons of other races. Both sources also agree as to the geographic areas and times of the year and month when crimes are more likely to occur. Over a 3-year period, O'Brien (2001) found that NCVS victims reported that 91.5% of those who robbed them and 87.7% of their aggravated assault assailants were male, as were 91.2 and 84.3%, respectively, of those arrested for those offenses. Likewise, NCVS victims reported that 64.1% of those who robbed them and 40% of their aggravated assault assailants were African American. These percentages fit the UCR arrest statistics for race almost exactly: A total of 62.2% arrested for robbery were African American, as were 40% of those arrested for aggravated assault. Thus, the two data sets agree almost perfectly.

Comparisons of UCR and NCVS data have often proven very useful to resolve issues such as these. For instance, some feminist criminologists are of the opinion that women are becoming more “masculinized” as a result of assuming “male” roles in the workforce, and that this is reflected in the increased rates of female arrests for violent crimes. Darrell Steffensmeier and his colleagues (Steffensmeier, Zhong, Ackerman, Schwartz, & Agha, 2006) used a comparison of data trends reported in the UCR and the NCVS from 1980 to 2003 to explore the issue of whether the violent crime gap between males and females is closing. They found that both sources reported little or no changes in the gender ratio for violent crimes such as murder, rape, and robbery, but that the UCR reports indicated a sharp rise in assaults by females. Does this mean that women became more violent over the period examined, or does the increase reflect the behavior of the police more than the behavior of women? The authors conclude that net-widening policy shifts have escalated the arrest proneness of females for “criminal assault” (e.g., policing physical attacks/threats of marginal seriousness) rather than that women have become more violent. In other words, UCR increases in female arrests for assault are explained by changes in police policy, something that could not have been determined without examining both data sources. The addition of the NCVS and NIBRS to the nation's crime databases thus has great utility for settling some major quarrels among criminologists of different ideological persuasions, although not to the satisfaction of everyone.

Note from Table 2.1 that this trend was still in evidence when comparing UCR arrests for aggravated assault and simple (labeled “other” in the table) assault from 1999 to 2009. Female aggravated assault decreased by 2.5%, but female arrests for simple assault increased by 15.9%. The overall female increase in violent crime arrests of 1.4% is entirely a function of the huge increase in female robbery arrests over the period.

Self-Report Crime Surveys and Their Problems

Self-report surveys of offending provide a way for criminologists to collect data without having to rely on government sources. Questionnaires used in these surveys typically provide a list of offenses and request subjects to check each offense they recall having committed and how often, and sometimes whether they have ever been arrested, and if so, how many times. Self-report surveys have relied primarily on college and high school students for subjects, although prison inmates and probationers/parolees have also been surveyed.

Several studies have addressed the issue of the accuracy and honesty of self-reported offenses in various ways, and the results have generally been encouraging, at least for uncovering the extent of minor offenses.

On average, known delinquents and criminals disclose almost 4 times as many offenses as the non-delinquents. Cartier, Farabee, and Prendergast's (2006) study of methamphetamine use and self-reported crime and recidivism among 614 California parolees, for instance, found that meth use was significantly related to self-reported crime and claim a high level of agreement between self-reported crime and actual crimes committed. Had differences such as these not been found, the validity of the self-report procedure would have been in doubt.

The greatest strength of self-report research is that researchers can correlate a variety of characteristics of respondents with their admitted offenses that go beyond the demographics of age, race, and gender. For instance, they can attempt to measure various constructs thought to be associated with offending, such as impulsiveness, empathy, and sensation seeking, as well as their peer associations and their attitudes. The evidence indicates that self-reported crime measures provide largely accurate information about some illegal act that occurred at some time in the respondent's life. However, there are a number of reasons why self-report crime surveys also provide a distorted picture of criminal involvement.

- The great majority of self-report studies survey "convenience" samples of high school and college students, populations in which we don't expect to find many seriously criminally involved individuals. Most self-report studies thus eliminate the very people we are most interested in gathering information about. One strength of the self-report method, however, is that it appears to capture the extent of illegal drug usage among high school and college students, something that neither the UCR nor the NCVS attempts to do.
- Self-report studies typically uncover only fairly trivial antisocial acts such as fighting, stealing items worth less than \$5, smoking, and truancy. Almost everyone has committed one or more of these acts. These are hardly acts that help us to understand the nature of serious crime. A connected problem is that some researchers lump respondents who report one delinquent act together with adjudicated delinquents who break the law in many different ways and at many different times.
- Even though most people are forthright in revealing minor antisocial behaviors, most people do not have a serious criminal history, and those who do have a distinct tendency to underreport their crimes (Hindelang, Hirschi, & Weis, 1981). As the number of crimes people commit increases, so does the proportion of offenses they withhold reporting, with those arrested for the most serious offenses having the greatest probability of denial (Farrington, 1982).
- Males tend to report their antisocial activities less honestly than females and African Americans less honestly than other racial groups (Cernkovich, Giordano, & Rudolph, 2000; Kim, Fendrich, & Wislar, 2000). This evidence renders suspect any statements about gender or racial differences regarding antisocial behavior that are based on self-report data. When it comes to relying on self-report data to assess the nature and extent of serious crime, it does us well to remember the gambler's dictum: "Never trust an animal that talks."

We should not end on a pessimistic note about self-reports, however. Many of the major multi-million dollar longitudinal studies going on today have built-in safeguards against researchers naïvely taking subjects at their word. A number of studies verify self-report accounts with police records and other social agencies, a practice which further helps us to gain a grasp on the reliability of self-report studies. For instance, a large longitudinal (following the same people across the lifespan) cohort study (one that studies a set of individuals who share a common characteristic, such as being born in the same month in the same geographic area) showed that individuals from the lowest social class category reported 3.21 times more

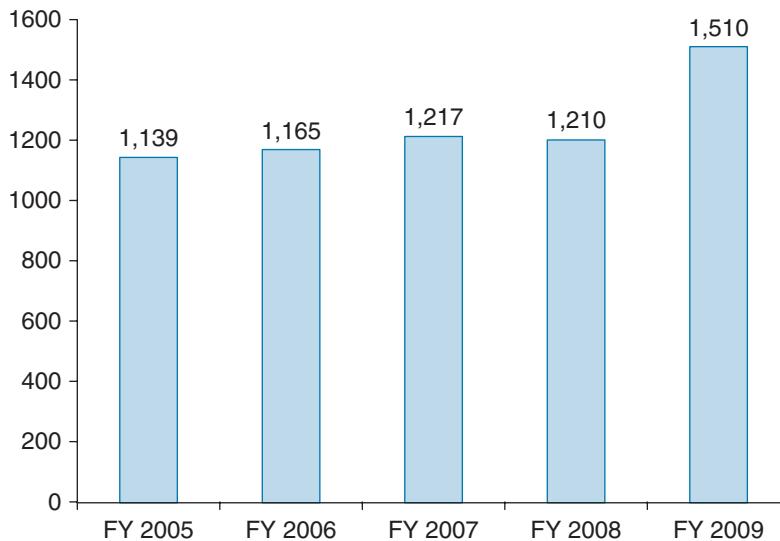
offenses than individuals from the highest social class category (Fergusson, Swain-Campbell, & Horwood, 2004). However, when researchers compared individuals from these two classes for official juvenile and adult convictions, the members of the lowest class had 25.82 times more officially recorded convictions than members of the highest class. Thus, the more actively involved delinquents/criminals do report more anti-social behavior than others, but they also tend to greatly underreport their antisocial actions.

White-Collar Crime: The FBI's Financial Crimes Report

The only “white collar” crimes, i.e., crimes committed by guile as opposed to force, listed in the UCR are embezzlement, forgery/counterfeiting, and fraud, which are mostly committed by individuals. There is, however, a separate accounting of major white-collar crimes committed by organized groups and corporations called the *Financial Crimes Report* (www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/financial-crimes-report-2009). This report is issued each year by the FBI and contains results of investigations carried out by the Financial Crimes Section (FCS) of the FBI. The role of the FCS is to oversee the investigation of financial fraud and to supervise the forfeiture of assets from individuals engaged in such crimes. The FCS is composed of the Asset Forfeiture/Money Laundering Unit (AF/MLU), the Economic Crimes Unit (ECU), the Health Care Fraud Unit (HCFU), the Forensic Accountant Unit (FAU), and the National Mortgage Fraud Team (NMFT).

In 2009, the FCS was investigating 1,510 cases of securities and commodities fraud and had recorded 412 indictments and 306 convictions. The FBI also conducted 350 investigations of money laundering, which resulted in 84 convictions. Corporate fraud is perhaps the major focus of the FBI today. Figure 2.6 shows

Figure 2.6 Corporate Fraud Pending Cases, 2005–2009



SOURCE: *Financial Crimes Report, 2009*. Available at www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/financial-crimes-report-2009

the number of pending cases from 2005 to 2009. In 2009, investigations resulted in 156 convictions of corporate criminals, and numerous other cases are pending trials and plea agreements, although this is likely a drop in the bucket compared to the actual number of crimes committed by corporate criminals. During 2009, the FBI secured \$6.1 billion in restitution orders and \$5.4 million in fines from corporate criminals (www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/financial-crimes-report-2009).

The Dark Figure of Crime

The dark (or hidden) **figure of crime** is that portion of the total crimes committed each year that never comes to light. Figure 2.7 presents three diagrams that show the different dark figures for the three major measures of criminal behavior. (The dark figures are represented by the dark shading in each diagram.)

Each diagram shows the degree to which crimes of various levels of seriousness are most likely to be detected by each measure (“victimless” crimes excluded). In the top diagram displaying UCR data, you can see that very few trivial offenses are reported in official statistics, and most of those that are will be dismissed as unfounded by the police. For official statistics, then, the dark figures are highly concentrated at the nonserious end of the crime seriousness spectrum.

The middle diagram reveals that the dark figures for victimization data are primarily concentrated in the nonserious end of the spectrum also, although to a lesser degree than in the case of official data. The failure of victimization data to pick up these minor offenses is largely due to survey subjects not remembering all incidences of victimization.

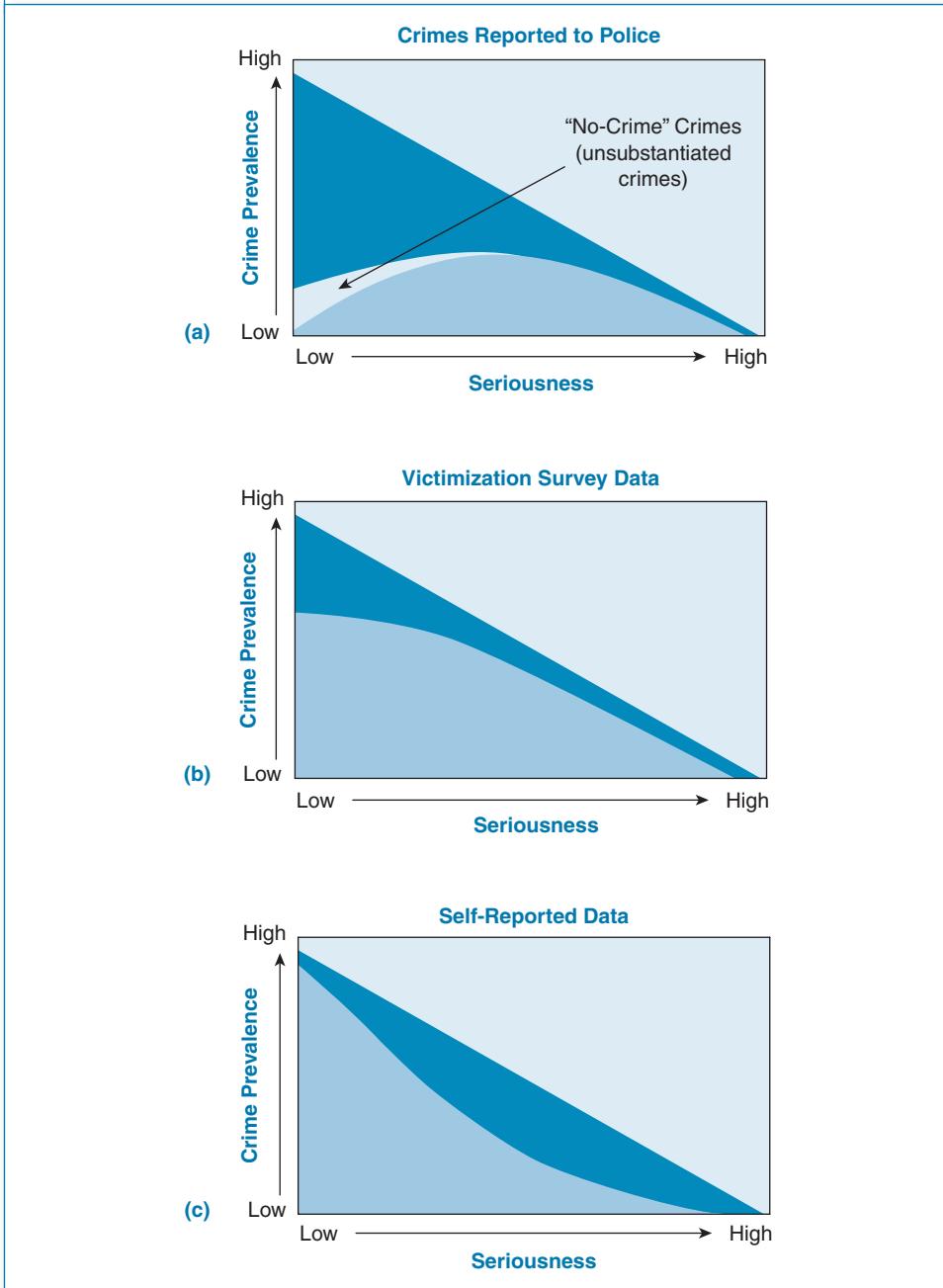
In the bottom diagram, we see that most of the dark figures in the case of self-reports are concentrated in the upper end of the seriousness continuum rather than the lower end. This is partly due to the fact that (a) nearly all self-report surveys exclude the most persistent serious offenders from their subject pools, and (b) many of the most serious offenders who remain in self-report subject pools do not reveal the full extent of their criminal histories.

What Can We Conclude About the Three Main Measures of Crime in America?

All three main measures of crime in America are imperfect measures, and which one of them is “best” depends on what we want to know. UCR data are still probably the best single source of data for studying serious crimes, and indeed, the only one for studying murder rates and circumstances. For studying less serious but much more common crimes, either victimization or self-report survey data are best. If the interest is in drug offenses, self-reports are the preferable data source.

Because all three data sources converge on some very important points about crime, they enable us to proceed with at least some confidence in our endeavors to understand the whys of crime. The basic demographics of crime constitute the raw social facts that are the building blocks of our criminological theories. If street crime is concentrated among the lower socioeconomic classes and in the poorest neighborhoods, we can begin to ask such questions as, does poverty “cause” crime, or does some other variable(s) cause both? Is social disorganization in a neighborhood independent of the people living in it, or completely dependent on the people living in it? Why do females always and everywhere commit

Figure 2.7 Differing Proportions of Reported/Unreported Crimes for the Three Major Measures of Crime



*Light shading = proportion of crimes reported. Dark shading = proportion not reported.

far fewer crimes (particularly the most serious crimes) than males? These and many dozens of other “why” questions can be asked once we have a firm grip on the raw facts supplied by the methods described in this chapter.

The FBI’s Ten Most Wanted

One of the more interesting bits of criminological data provided by the government is the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted list—a compilation of the worst of the worst criminals according to the FBI. The agency collects and distributes statistics on specific fugitive individuals wanted for particularly serious crimes. The “ten most wanted” individuals are listed every year and will change as fugitives are apprehended or die. Figure 2.8 provides the 2010 list, which includes a terrorist, a family murderer, major drug dealers, and organized crime figures.

Figure 2.8 The FBI’s 10 Most Wanted Fugitives

The screenshot shows the FBI's 'Ten Most Wanted' webpage. At the top is the FBI logo and navigation links. Below is a 'Wanted by the FBI' banner. The main section is titled 'Ten Most Wanted' and includes a list of 10 fugitives with their names and photos. A detailed profile for James J. Bulger is highlighted, showing his photo, name, a 'Captured' label, and a list of charges including RICO, Murder, Extortion, and Money Laundering. A reward of \$2,000,000 is offered for information leading to his arrest. The profile also includes a 'SUMMARY' section with links for 'SCARS & MARKS', 'ALIASES', 'DESCRIPTION', 'MORE PHOTOS', 'GET POSTER', and 'SUBMIT A TIP'.

SUMMARY

- Crime and criminal behavior are measured in several ways in the United States. The oldest measure is the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), which is a tabulation of all crimes reported to the police in most of the jurisdictions in the United States in the previous year. The UCR is divided into two parts: Part I records the eight Index crimes (murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny/theft, and arson), and Part II records arrests made for all other crimes.
- UCR data seriously underestimate the extent of crime because the UCR only records reported crimes, ignores drug offenses, and only reports the most serious crime in a multiple-crime event. The problems with the UCR led to the implementation of the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).
- The second major source of crime statistics is the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). This survey consists of many thousands of interviews of householders throughout the United States, asking them about their crime victimization (if any) during the previous 6 months. The NCVS also has problems because it leaves out crimes against commercial establishments and relies exclusively on the memory and the word of interviewees.
- The third source of crime data is self-report data collected by criminologists themselves. The advantage of self-report data is that they are derived “from the horse’s mouth,” and typically the questionnaires used ask about “victimless” offenses not covered in either the UCR or NCVS. The major problems with self-report data is that it does not capture serious criminal behavior and is subject to dishonesty in the form of underreporting, especially underreporting by those most seriously involved in criminal activity.
- The UCR, NCVS, and self-report data come to different conclusions on a variety of points, but they agree about where, when, and among whom crime is most prevalent, and the fact that crime has fallen dramatically in the United States over the past decade. Taken together, then, we have a fairly reliable picture of the correlates of crime from which to develop our theories about explanatory mechanisms.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Go to the website www.fbi.gov/wanted/topten/fugitives/fugitives.htm-1 for the FBI's ten most wanted fugitives, and research the background and crimes of one of the people listed there. Then write a one- to two-page summary and report to the class.
2. Do you think it wise to make “authoritative” statements or formulate theories of criminal behavior, especially serious criminal behavior, based on self-report data?
3. Can you think of other problems possibly associated with asking people about their delinquent or criminal behavior or their victimization other than those discussed in the chapter?
4. If you were the American “crime czar,” what would you do to get the various law enforcement agencies to fully implement NIBRS—and no, you can't just order them to do so.

USEFUL WEBSITES

Bureau of Justice Statistics. www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/

National Archive of Criminal Justice Data. www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/

National Crime Victimization Survey Resource Guide. www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/NCVS/

National Incident-Based Reporting System Resource Guide. www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/NIBRS/

Uniform Crime Reports. www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm

CHAPTER TERMS

Cleared offenses

Crime rate

Dark figure of crime

Hierarchy rule

National Incident-Based
Reporting System (NIBRS)

National Crime Victimization
Survey (NCVS)

Part I offenses (or index crimes)

Part II offenses

Self-report surveys

Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)