

DEFINING & MEASURING CRIME

Defining Crime

- Consensus View
 - The will of the majority shapes law/defines crime
 - Generally, there is agreement on “right” and “wrong”
 - Certain behaviors must be outlawed/controlled
 - Laws apply to all citizens equally
 - Criminal law is designed to protect citizens from harm
 - Defining crime
- Conflict View
 - Criminal law is a tool of the ruling class
 - Controls the underclass
 - Protects the social, economic, and political hierarchy
 - Laws do not apply to all citizens equally.
 - Defining Crime
- Interactionist View
 - Criminal law reflects the values and morals of those who hold social power in a legal jurisdiction
 - The definition of crime is subjective and fluid
 - Criminal labels are life-transforming events

Defining Crime

- There is general agreement among these views on the following:
 - Criminal law defines crime
 - The definition of crime is constantly changing
 - Social forces shape the definition of crimes
 - Criminal law has a social control function

Types of Crime

- Violent Crimes
 - Murder, rape, robbery, kidnapping, assault

- Property Crimes
 - Larceny, arson, trespassing, receiving stolen property
- Public Order Crimes
 - Prostitution, substance abuse, disorderly conduct
- Economic Crimes
 - Fraud, tax evasion, money laundering
- Organized Crimes
 - Drug trafficking, human trafficking, racketeering

Measuring crime

- Sources of crime data:
 - Uniform Crime Report (UCR)
 - Supplemental Homicide Report (SHR)
 - National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)
 - National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)
 - Self-report surveys

Uniform Crime Report

- Established as a method of uniformly collecting information about crime across jurisdictions
- Compiled by the FBI
 - Crime data from over 18,000 law enforcement agencies
- Records instances of crime reported to the local, state, and federal law enforcement

Uniform Crime Report

- The Supplemental Homicide Report (SHR)
 - Addition to the UCR that provides detailed information about homicides
 - Victim's age, sex, and race
 - Offender's age, sex, and race
 - Weapon type
 - Victim/offender relationship
 - Circumstances that led to homicide

Uniform Crime Report

- Advantages
 - Captures homicide and arrest data
 - National sample
 - Collected annually
- Disadvantages
 - Omits crimes not reported to police
 - Omits drug use
 - Reporting errors
 - *Hierarchy rule*

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)

- Law enforcement agencies provide detailed narratives along with victim and offender information for incidents and arrests
- Reporting is voluntary
- Allows for all crimes committed during a criminal event to be reported

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)

- Advantages
 - Offers information on all reported crimes occurring during a criminal incident
 - Data can be stratified by victim, offender, and incident characteristics
- Disadvantages
 - Only reflect crimes known to the police
 - Lack of or incomplete reporting
 - Data can be manipulated for ulterior purposes

National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)

- Administered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics
- Telephone survey of selected households
 - ≈ 135,000 households
 - ≈ 225,000 people
- Surveys people about experiences of victimization

- Nonfatal personal victimization
 - Rape/sexual assault, assault, robbery
- Household property victimization
 - Burglary, theft, motor vehicle theft

National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)

- Advantages
 - Includes crimes not reported to police
 - Uses careful sampling techniques
 - Collected annually
- Disadvantages
 - Relies on victims' memory and honesty
 - Omits substance abuse

Self-report surveys

- Asks offenders themselves about their criminal behavior
- Attempts to uncover "hidden crime"
- Advantages
 - Captures non-reported crimes and substance abuse
 - Gathers offenders' personal information
- Disadvantages
 - Relies on offenders to be honest
 - Offenders who are least likely to participate are often the offenders who commit the most crime