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THE USE OF OFFENDER BASED TRANSACTION STATISTICS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE PLANNING

John R. Longley
Executive Director, Central California
Criminal Justice Planning Region
Tulare, California

Because I am a public administrator and not a systems analyst, I hope to give you an administrative, not a technical, report describing the development and implementation of a criminal justice statistics system, using the new concept of offender tracking. This concept has been demonstrated at other times, but to my knowledge no attempt has been made before to collect actual offender data for the specific purpose of analyzing the administration of criminal justice to provide information for criminal justice planning and program evaluation.

I shall relate to you the experiences of the organization I represent — the Central California Criminal Justice Planning Region. To give you some perspective of the magnitude of the study, the Region contains five counties, thirty-nine cities, and well over one million people.

To plan for the "overall improvement of the performance of the criminal justice system" requires that we understand the functioning of all agencies which, although acting to satisfy separate goals, must work in concert toward system objectives if system improvements are to be realized. This understanding can come only from information which describes the ways in which the system operates as it processes individual defendants and offenders.

As more criminal justice agencies and programs compete for limited resources, planning and overall coordination activities become critical. And, because crime and criminality are primarily local problems, planning must be done on a county and regional basis. Therefore, as the planning region works to develop a comprehensive plan for criminal justice, it must begin to develop programs addressed at the priority system problems within its counties with the intention of "parlaying one program on another with each program reinforcing the next to geometrically achieve the improved programming necessary to reduce the incidence of crime and delinquency."

Such a planning effort is immediately confronted by the fact that present data cannot provide the needed information for uses ranging from

daily decision-making to long-range policy considerations. Today's criminal justice statistics detail agency workloads and represent only the number of actions taken during time periods that usually coincide with budgetary periods. Few practitioners have ever attempted to reconcile their output data with that of agencies on other levels, and as a result the inputs of agencies cannot be related to the outputs of agencies which precede them in the sequence of criminal justice processing. These relationships are further obscured because the unit of count is often different for different processes. For example, the police count arrests, the courts count cases, and corrections count people. Consequently, present data do not show the proportions of defendants who are released at various levels of processing, or the types and frequency of charges and pleas, or the dispositions at various agency levels. Thus, the efficiency of criminal justice processing cannot be accurately appraised.

Similarly, it is impossible to account for the time it takes for the criminal justice system to carry out its functions. This lack of information about the passage of time precludes the changing of procedures in order to prevent resource and human waste. Likewise, penalty levels and correctional programs cannot be evaluated and their effects on individuals cannot be determined.

Lastly, present criminal justice statistics do not describe the "clients" of the system. Multiple actions toward the same offender cannot be accounted for. Therefore, programs cannot be designed specifically for certain categories of offenders and evaluated on the basis of their more limited impact. For example, it might be advantageous to institute correctional programs directed toward repeaters or toward specific crime types and to evaluate these programs on their success in accomplishing more carefully defined objectives.

Recognizing these limitations, a new approach — offender based transaction statistics (OBTS) — has developed from demonstrations sponsored by Project SEARCH. The OBTS concept focuses on the individual person and "tracks" the processing of the individual from point of entry in the criminal justice system to point of exit. Because the individual is the only unit of count common to all criminal justice agencies and processes, he is the thread that holds the system together. By monitoring the

various paths that offenders take, we are able to describe the functioning of the criminal justice system in terms of the aggregate experiences of those who have passed through it.

This concept loses none of the advantages of older systems. In addition, the design produces information about:

- How the criminal justice system operates to process defendants, and how agencies and functions relate to one another.
- How much time it takes for the criminal justice system to process individuals, and
- Who the clients of the criminal justice system are.

Offender-based transaction statistics have the disquieting characteristic of raising questions about the administration of criminal justice. Because this information is completely descriptive with regard to individuals, criminal justice processing relationships, and time, its function is to picture existing operations, and by so doing, to expose problem areas that deserve attention. At first thought, it might be alarming to generate data which poses additional questions in an already confusing field. This, however, is exactly the stimulus necessary for effective planning.

The questions raised by transaction statistics pertain to matters of fact in the on-going operations of the criminal justice system. No longer must planners rely solely on subjective state and agency priorities but can begin to concentrate resources in areas of known needs. Further, as the relationships among agencies and functions become known, the *system* implications of specific programs become clearer and the potential impact to all criminal justice agencies is calculable.

The type of transaction statistics being developed forms a baseline to monitor criminal justice operations and to high-light trends. In this way, trend shifts might be related back to programs instituted during a prior time period or might indicate new problems and foretell a reordering of priorities. As a tool, the statistics are indispensable for documenting the existence of criminal justice needs.

It must be emphasized that this is a *criminal justice statistics* system, not a police system, nor a judicial system, nor a correctional system. As a tool for planning, the data must be analyzed and synthesized; hypotheses once developed must be tested and evaluated. In short, it is aimed at system improvement.

The plan for the implementation of the criminal justice statistics system was unique in that it incorporated data routinely collected at the state level with data collected by Regional Planning staff from agencies within the five counties comprising

the Region. Overall coordination and analysis was provided by Public System, Inc., a Sunnyvale based consulting firm.

For purposes of the study, the levels of criminal justice processing have been labeled Police/Prosecutor, Lower Criminal Court, and Superior Court. The system has been designed to track the defendant from point of arrest through disposition, either by exit from the system or commitment to corrections. The cycling of offenders through various correctional programs has not been detailed at this time.

Exhibit 1 is an example of how offender based data can be displayed.

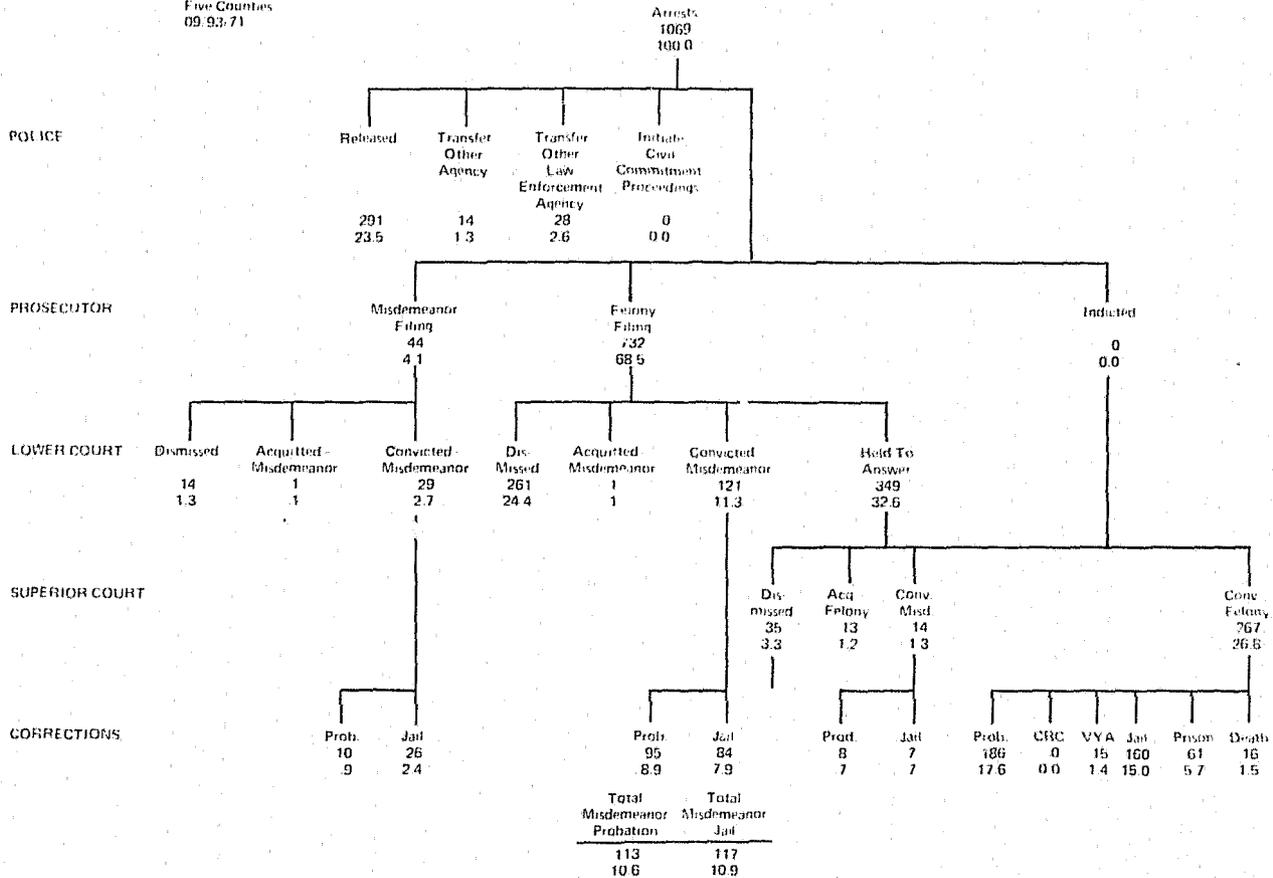
Superior court data is routinely collected from every California county each year by the Bureau of Criminal Statistics, State Department of Justice. The Bureau of Criminal Statistics (BCS) is a state agency created by the California Legislature in recognition of the need for centralized statistics. I would like to state now, by way of acknowledgement, that BCS was completely cooperative and of tremendous assistance to our project.

Superior court statistics developed by BCS identify all proceedings in the state's superior courts by tracing each criminal defendant's progress through the court segment of the justice system. This "tracing" is consistent with the concept of transaction statistics. To duplicate accurate data collected by an authorized state agency would have been wasteful and inefficient, consequently, BCS agreed to provide the Region with the Superior Court segment of the data record for every felony defendant tracked whose path led to this court. With the Superior Courts taken care of, the development of total system transaction statistics additionally required the design and collection of the Police/Prosecutor and Lower Criminal Court data modules.

The plan described above was developed to track felony defendants — those individuals arrested for the more serious crimes. Criminal Justice agencies, however, spend a great deal of their time and resources on the less serious or misdemeanor cases. A set of these cases was tracked using the same methodology. Since misdemeanor cases are adjudicated at the lower criminal court, exit or disposition must have taken place by that point; so there is no superior court data for misdemeanors.

With the individual defendant defined to be the unit of count, felony and misdemeanor defendants were tracked during the development of the transaction statistics. A 20% random sampling of defendants was tracked through the criminal justice

FELONY PROCESSING



PSI PUBLIC SYSTEMS INC

EXHIBIT 1

systems of Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera and Tulare Counties and later aggregated to provide a regional picture of the administration of criminal justice.

The planning staff of the region, under supervision of PSi, was responsible for data collection. This has a number of advantages — First, because the staff is responsible for guiding the development of programs and the establishment of priorities, they are intimately familiar with the criminal justice agencies. Functions, policies, and practices of working with an agency's files provide some of these insights. Second, the agency personnel are familiar with the planning function and those who carry it out. The close working relationship developed during a sustained data collection activity provides an opportunity for interpersonal involvement and discussion. Third, it is more economical for the planning staff to work in the agencies than it is to hire a consultant to perform the work. In

addition, operating agencies are much more willing to cooperate with fellow practitioners. Finally, the exercise of data collection gives the staff a better appreciation of the difficulties involved in securing the needed data and the problems encountered in consistency, completeness, and interpretation of records.

The structure of the offender-based transaction statistics data base lends itself to an almost infinite variety of processing and analyses, and is directed specifically at the questions previously mentioned, — to repeat:

- How does the criminal justice system operate to process defendants?
- How much time does it take for the criminal justice system to process individuals?
- Who are the "clients" of the criminal justice system?

As these questions are answered, planning and ultimately policy questions are posed. Examples of

questions brought into sharp focus by analysis of offender-based statistics are:

- What portion of the felony processing time is controllable by increasing the number of prosecutors? Number of judges?
- What effect would decreases in processing time have on jail population? On court recorder workload? On witness availability? On conviction rate?
- If proposed removal of drunkenness from the penal code passes, what will be the effects on court loading? Prosecutor workload? Jail population and parole workload?
- Is the fact that almost half of all felony arrests result in release/dismissal desirable? Acceptable? Unacceptable?
- Would changes in arrest policy or case preparation procedures significantly change these figures?
- Would such changes result in lower clearance rates? Lower conviction rates? More crowded court calendars?

These are but a few of the many questions that might result from analyses that are possible using offender-based transaction data — impossible using existing criminal justice statistics.

Planners and administrators within the criminal justice system will find a great number of applications for a data base configured as described. The improved descriptive statistics — through better system definition and resolution of ambiguities — can only increase the potential for targeting improved strategies and directing available resources.

In addition, the data and the information it produces will be invaluable to program evaluation. Costs and benefits of individual programs with respect to objectives can begin to be monitored by interrelationships among agencies and the effects of directed programs on other parts of the criminal justice system cannot be known.

Finally, in the area of general research, the data base lends itself to many methods of data aggregation. Because each record represents an individual, there is the flexibility necessary for various re-

search designs and the ability to perform multi-dimensional analysis with the hope of isolating causal relationships. This is a data system with great and varied potential.

There is another very important reason for the continued development and use of offender-tracking statistical systems. Usually, when a system is designed, a set of specifications for its operation is established and, when the system is put into operation it is monitored for deviation. The criminal justice system, however, came into being without formal design. There are no specifications against which to measure performance. Offender-based transaction statistics describe the system as a function of the processing of those who pass through it and by so doing, provide the necessary "control" or baseline description. The baseline, periodically collected, will provide all the planning, management, and research benefits previously presented and, in addition, will permit a trend monitoring of changes attributable to new programs or a changing environment. Knowledge of these trends is necessary to assure that planning is directed toward current problem areas.

The sampling approach to data collection is efficient; as more experience is gained, data can be compiled more quickly and a full system description can be generated within a few months. If done yearly, a continuing picture of the administration of criminal justice will be available.

I hope that what I have presented to you will give you some ideas of the potential of offender-based transaction statistics. We believe they are an absolute necessity if the subjective factors of whim and fancy are to be minimized in criminal justice planning.



END