We have all grown accustomed to seeing reports about crime rates in the newspapers and on television. But where do these statistics come from? Most probably there are a count of the number of crimes reported to local law enforcement agencies and sent to the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) program. The UCR program has been developing national statistics on crime since 1930. These statistics are published annually in the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and sent to the attention in the media because of the number of crimes and its effect on our lives.

You may have also been articles that present statistics on victims of crime and discuss victimization rates for the United States. These statistics come not from police agencies but directly from the victims themselves and provide another way of looking at crime and its consequences. Since 1973, victimization data have been collected from households across the Nation through the National Crime Survey (NCS). Both programs, the UCR operated by the FBI and the NCS operated by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, are located within the Department of Justice.

Measuring Crime

Two programs to measure crime is not redundant. The National Crime Survey was developed in response to the growing recognition that police statistics, for all their importance, have inherent limitations. The most obvious is that police cannot measure crime that do not come to their attention. Crime victims, however, can describe what happened to them, whether they reported the crime to the police or not. On the other hand, obtaining separate crime statistics for the thousands of local communities across the country through a victimization survey is impractical because it would require almost complete census costing billions. However, a complete census costing billions and geographically detailed information is available through the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), run by the FBI. The UCR and the National Crime Survey (NCS) are separate crime statistics for the thousands of local communities across the country through a victimization survey.

Crime measured

Seven crimes were originally designated, on the basis of their seriousness and frequency, to compose the Uniform Crime Reports Crime Index.

1. They are murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible
rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, and motor vehicle theft.

The term "Crime Index" is used to denote these seven crimes. They are murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible
rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, and motor vehicle theft. The term "Crime Index" is intentional and is even more appropriate to denote these seven crimes than the term "serious crimes" or "index crimes". These crimes are, in general, less serious crimes for which the victimization survey can be more accurately measured. The National Crime Survey cannot measure accurately the number of violent crimes.

Six crimes are measured in the National Crime Survey: rape, robbery, assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and motor vehicle theft.

The difference between these crimes and the UCR Index crimes is intentional and is even closer than may first appear. Of the two crimes totally missing from the National Crime Survey, murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, are usually measured through surveys of violent crimes because obviously the victim is dead, and rape cannot be measured well through victim surveys because the presumed victim (the property owner) may in fact be the perpetrator, particularly if collection of insurance is the motive for the crime. Professional expertise is often needed to determine that a suspicious fire is indeed arson and therefore a crime, another factor complicating its measurement. Both UCR and NCS cover crimes all attempts as well as successfully completed crimes.

The UCR collects these separately so that totals are available for both actual offenses and attempted offenses, whereas the UCR does not.

UCR and NCS crime rates are defined in the same manner in both series, but the UCR defines crimes and the National Crime Survey defines attempted crimes.

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UCR includes statutory rape in reporting offenses. The NCS definition of rape does not include statutory rape, unless it is committed within the legal framework of the U.S. A complete review of statutory rape requires more detail.

Robbery involves theft directly from a person or establishment, and the National Crime Survey is limited to individuals and households. Many commercial establishments are not included in the NCS. Both the National Crime Survey and the Uniform Crime Reports divide robbery into armed robbery and simple robbery.

 Assault (NCS) is divided into simple assaults and those with the latter corresponding to the UCR index offense aggravated assault. Aggravated assault is a physical attack with a weapon or an object that results in a physical injury. The National Crime Survey includes a physical attack with a weapon or an object that results in a physical injury.

The National Crime Survey conducts a survey every 4 years on a sample of households throughout the United States. In each household, all persons 12 years of age or older are interviewed directly, and information on 10-12 and older is obtained from an older household member.

The victimization survey not only provides information about the crimes defined earlier, but also data about the characteristics of the victim, the crime itself, and in some cases, offenders. It provides demographic characteristics of the victim such as age, sex, race, education, and occupation. The crime characteristics include where and when it occurred, severity of injury and economic loss suffered by the victim, the relationship between the victim and the person committing the crime, the characteristics of the person committing the crime as perceived by the victim, and whether or not someone reported the crime to the police.

The survey also asks why crimes were not reported to the police. Recently, to develop a better understanding of why crimes are not reported to the police, we have asked in the UCR report in which the police and other persons were asked if they suspected or knew of a crime.

When asked which crimes were reported to the police, data are collected on the specific crimes and specific situations in which crimes occur, data are available on the specific crimes and specific situations in which crimes occur. These data are collected on the specific crimes and specific situations in which crimes occur, data are available on the specific crimes and specific situations in which crimes occur. These data are collected on the specific crimes and specific situations in which crimes occur.

Motor vehicle theft is the stealing of a motor vehicle, either from a public or private property, and the organized theft of motor vehicles owned by a person or business. The National Crime Survey includes the theft of a motor vehicle, whether it is reported to the police or not.

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To understand crime, which crimes police know about, which crimes they don't know about, and why.

- Conducts an ongoing effort to increase total population (about 2 percent), the Geographic data geographical areas, since the local enforcement agency is the basic reporting unit. In compiling data by geographical region, the UCR Program follows as closely as possible the definitions used by the Bureau of the Census for geographical entities. Data are included on SMSAs and "other cities" (which are identified in UCR statistics as those outside SMSA's, most of which are incorporated). For crime reporting purposes, rural areas are made up of the unincorporated portions of counties outside urban places and SMSAs. To prevent duplicate reporting of a single crime, sheriffs, county police, and State police report on crimes committed within the limits of the counties but outside cities, while local police report only on crimes committed within city limits.

The crime geography detail of the UCR data makes it possible to compare crime rates among cities of similar sizes, to study urban-rural differences in crime rates in different States and sections of the country, or to determine the geographic dispersion of crime. It provides research scientists with the opportunity to look at crime in the context of other social and economic statistics available at the State or county level.

Analyzing crime

Crime statistics from the National Crime Survey and the Uniform Crime Reports are presented in the form of rates. Crime rates are a useful way of telling us whether crime is growing faster, slower, or at the same pace as the population. NCV rates are generally expressed as the number of crimes for every 1,000 people (for personal crimes) and the number of crimes for every 1,000 households (for households crimes). Rates can be constructed both for specific crimes and for specific groups in the general population. For example, the rates for robbery victimizations of 15- to 19-year-olds can be compared with the rate of robbery victimizations of 20- to 24-year-olds or burglary of white households can be compared to burglary rates for black households. The UCR Crime Index rates are usually presented as the number of crimes per 100,000 people. The UCR regularly publishes rates for each index crime as well as for the Crime Index total. It is important to remember that an increase in the Crime Index total can result from any increase in any of the crimes in the index, ranging from murder to minor theft.

- The analysis of crime can take many forms, simply measuring differences among groups or over time to testing hypotheses or developing theories about crime.

Further reading

The concepts, definitions, and methodology presented in this bulletin have been intentionally simplified and abbreviated. The reader who would like more information may find these publications helpful. The more technical presentations of the National Crime Survey and the Uniform Crime Reports are asterisked.

- Uniform Crime Reports, December 1975.