



Expanding Research by Sharing Data

by NIJ staff

NIJ makes data available for future research.

Collecting, cleaning, organizing and analyzing data are expensive and time-consuming, but these activities are essential to scientific inquiry. NIJ created the Data Resources Program to preserve data produced by NIJ-funded studies and to make them available for secondary analysis by other researchers. The Data Resources Program extends the value of NIJ's initial investment in the original data and ultimately the reach of the research.

When an NIJ-funded study ends, researchers submit their data to the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data, which has been collecting data since 1978. The National Archive was created as part of the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan. ICPSR provides access to the world's largest archive of computer-readable social science data and offers training in both basic and advanced methods of quantitative analysis in social science research.

Archiving data and making them available to other scientists contribute to NIJ's efforts to:

- Increase transparency
- Replicate findings
- Extend research to the field

Increase Transparency: Making data and analytic methods available for scrutiny by others increases the transparency of the research process, gives other researchers the chance to validate findings, and enhances scientific integrity. Such openness, in turn, leads to more rigorous and credible science. This is especially important when research informs policies, practices and programs that are controversial or complicated — such as the impact of sex offender notification policies or the arrest practices employed in domestic violence cases.

Replicate Findings: When original research is replicated, policymakers and practitioners can make more informed decisions about applying research to their own work. Successful replication can give them greater confidence in the original findings.

Extend Research to the Field: Today's research is the cornerstone of tomorrow's better ideas. By con-

ducting research with data collected by others, by applying statistical techniques that did not exist when the data were originally collected or by combining crime data with those from other fields (such as health, housing and education), researchers extend the value of the data and make the resulting knowledge useful to a wider audience. Having other researchers look at data from different angles can also provide insight into other ways to make the data relevant to practice.

Problems in society are complex and interconnected. Patterns in crime and housing, for example, share a connection to patterns in stress and health. The distribution of schools and patterns of neighborhood density are related to patterns of crime and delinquency. When researchers archive their criminal justice data, they create opportunities for others to draw connections to research from different disciplines and to study to complex issues in greater depth or from a new perspective.

Making criminal justice data available in a systematic way opens the door to further exploration.

NIJ-funded researchers have contributed more than 800 data sets, both large and small, to the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data. The National Archive allows researchers from all disciplines to perform meta-analytic studies and combine criminal justice data with other publicly available data, such as those from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Researchers participate in NIJ's Data Resources Program in three ways:

- 1. Submitting data when research is finished.** Most data collected with funding from NIJ must be archived and made available through the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data.
- 2. Applying for funding to conduct new research through NIJ's annual solicitation, "Data Resources Program: Funding for the Analysis of Existing Data."** NIJ receives roughly 30 applications annually for funding to conduct secondary analysis using data in the archive. External, anonymous peer reviewers and NIJ staff select two to six proposals that ask the most compelling questions or test the best new hypotheses. In many instances,

applicants combine criminal justice data sets with another publicly available data set.

- 3. Using the data.** Many researchers have used data from large data sets in the archive, such as the U.S. Sentencing Commission's data sets, or data from longitudinal studies, such as the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), to extend knowledge gained from the original data. PHDCN, for example, offers data from several sources. These include community surveys, systematic social observation and a longitudinal cohort study. When researchers wanted to know more about the consequences of childhood exposure to intimate partner violence, they used data from the PHDCN's longitudinal cohort study.

To help aspiring researchers use the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data, NIJ supports a summer workshop program every year. In 2010, the 4-and-a-half-day workshop focused on reentry and recidivism, using the evaluation of the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative. Pam Lattimore, one of the evaluation's principal investigators, showed students in the workshop

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how to access, manipulate and analyze the data set that her team compiled over several years.

Through secondary data analysis, researchers can build on existing findings, replicate results and conduct new analyses — all ways to build a broader and deeper scientific understanding of crime and justice.

Several NIJ staff contributed to this article, including Jolene Herson, Jade Stasulli and Ron Wilson.

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For more information:

- Data Resources Program
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/funding/data-resources-program
- National Archive of Criminal Justice Data
<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/>
- Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research
<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/index.jsp>
- ICPSR's Summer Program in Quantitative Methods of Social Research
<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/sumprog/>
- Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods
<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/PHDCN/>