**Bureau of Justice Statistics**

**Measuring Crime**

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 likely they 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 from local police records since 1930. These statistics are published annually in the Uniform Crime Reports: The UCR program provides a way of looking at crime and its consequences. The most obvious is that police cannot present statistics on victims of crime and its administration of justice. The Bureau welcomes comments on the Bulletin, particularly suggestions for topics to be included in the Bulletin. Harry A. Snow, Director

With this issue, the Bureau of Justice Statistics begins a monthly publication series of issues and facts in crime and justice statistics aimed at decision-makers. Although Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin will deal with a variety of topics, the intent of the series is to make available objective, non-technical, statistical analyses about the nation's criminal justice programs. The Bulletin is intended to provide a forum for scholarship, analysis, and discussion of topics that affect crime and justice in the United States. Each issue will be devoted to a particular topic or crime and the analysis of that topic or crime. The Bulletin will be published monthly except during August, December, and January. The Bulletin welcomes comments on the Bulletin, particularly suggestions for topics to be included in the Bulletin. Harry A. Snow, Director

By using 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 count all crimes 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 a complete census costing billions of dollars. Geographic detail is available through the Uniform Crime Reports program of the National Crime Survey. Both programs are intended to measure crime and complement each other in ways that enhance our understanding of crime.

**Crimes measured**

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

1. **Murder and Nonnegligent Manslaughter**
   - The murder and nonnegligent manslaughter index is composed of all completed murder and nonnegligent manslaughter offenses, regardless of whether they are reported to the police. The murder and nonnegligent manslaughter index includes only offenses committed against human beings. The murder and nonnegligent manslaughter index is the most serious index offense. All other index offenses are measured against this crime.

2. **Rapes**
   - Rapes are offenses against females that involve penetration of the vagina (including rape by force, attempt, and indecent assault) and involve nonconsent. Rapes are measured as completed offenses, regardless of whether they are reported to the police. The rape index is the second most serious index offense.

3. **Robberies**
   - Robberies are offenses in which force or threat of force is used or attempted in order to obtain property from another person. Robberies are measured as completed offenses, regardless of whether they are reported to the police. The robbery index is the third most serious index offense.

4. **Burglaries**
   - Burglaries are offenses in which force or threat of force is used or attempted in order to gain access to the property of another person. Burglaries are measured as completed offenses, regardless of whether they are reported to the police. The burglary index is the fourth most serious index offense.

5. **Forcible Rapes of Households**
   - Forcible rapes of households are offenses in which force or threat of force is used or attempted in order to gain access to the household of another person. Forcible rapes of households are measured as completed offenses, regardless of whether they are reported to the police. The forcible rape index of households is the fifth most serious index offense.

6. **Assaults**
   - Assaults are offenses in which force or threat of force is used or attempted in order to cause injury to a person. Assaults are measured as completed offenses, regardless of whether they are reported to the police. The assault index is the sixth most serious index offense.

7. **Arson**
   - Arson is an offense in which property is set on fire or otherwise injured by acts of persons with the intent to cause damage to property. Arson is always reported even if other index offenses occur during the same incident. Arson is the index crime which is classified as serious that occurred, using a seriousness ranking corresponding to that for UCR index offenses. Information on offenses that occurred at the same time, however, is collected in the NCS and presented in some reports. Six crimes are measured in the National Crime Survey: murder, assaults, property theft, burglary, business establishments, and motor vehicles theft.

**Frequency of Crime**

UCR and NCS are defined in the same manner in both series, except for the inclusion of offenses reported to the police. The UCR measures the occurrence of actual offenses, whereas the NCS does not.

**UCR and NCS Comparison**

UCR and NCS statistics are based on the same data sources and are comparable in most respects. Both programs measure the same offenses in the same manner, except for the inclusion of offenses reported to the police. The UCR measures the occurrence of actual offenses, whereas the NCS does not.

**Source**

Uniform Crime Reporting Handbook, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, 1979. Additional data is available on the UCR program and the NCS program. The Bureau of Justice Statistics welcomes comments on the Bulletin, particularly suggestions for topics to be included in the Bulletin. Harry A. Snow, Director

**Notes**

2. Although the terms "Part I" and "Crime Index" are often used interchangeably, they are not identical. Part I of Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reports, contains the Official Crime Index. Part II of the NCS contains the Correctional Population, which is based on a survey of state prison inmates and state and federal prison inmates. The Correctional Population is used to determine the correctional population in each state and the United States, as well as the number of state and federal inmates at each prison. The Correctional Population is not measured as part of the NCS.

**References**

UCR include statutory rapes in reporting offenses. The NCS definition of rape does not require that the victim be physically attacked. The UCR definition requires that the victim be penetrated with a sexual organ.

Robbery involves theft directly from a person or an establishment, while the National Crime Survey is limited to households. Therefore, commercial establishments are not included in the UCR. Both the National Crime Survey and the Uniform Crime Reports divide robbery into armed robbery and unarmed robbery.

Armed robbery (UCR) is defined as a crime involving the use of a weapon or any object that, in the perpetrator's opinion, is a weapon, while the National Crime Survey includes under "violent crimes" any physical contact by the perpetrator with the victim intended to cause or to result in the immediate harm or injury of the victim. Armed robbery also includes thefts of motor vehicles obtained by using force, intimidation, theft from the use of a vehicle, or theft of a motor vehicle—simply taking possession of a vehicle.

Larceny-theft occurs when someone unlawfully obtains control of another's property. The NCS survey includes larcenies, but not larcenies of motor vehicles. The UCR survey includes larcenies, including thefts of motor vehicles and motorized vehicles allowed on public roads (e.g., snowmobiles and golf carts). The survey conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics includes thefts of motorized vehicles only.

The survey conducted by the National Crime Survey includes a large number of offenses, while the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) are limited to a smaller number of offenses. The NCS includes statutory rape in reporting offenses, while the UCR does not. The NCS is broader, including snowmobiles and golf carts. Neither program includes simples or note thefts. In both UCR and UCR, 10-year-old cases are included in the survey. In both programs, the incidence of thefts from the use of a motor vehicle—simply taking possession of a vehicle—is broader, including snowmobiles and golf carts.
Total population (about 2 percent), the UCR conducts an ongoing effort to increase reporting jurisdictions.

Geographic data
UCR statistics are reported for local geographical areas, since the local law enforcement agencies are the basic reporting units. 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 SSSA's and "other cities" boroughs identified in UCR statistics as outside SSSA's, most of which are incorporated. For crimes reporting purposes, rural areas are made up of the unincorporated portions of counties and outside urban places and SSSA's. To prevent duplicate reporting of a single crime, sheriffs, county police, and State Police report only crimes committed within the limits of the counties but outside cities, while local police report only on crimes committed within city limits.

The crime geographic detail of the UCR data makes it possible to compare crime rates among cities of similar size, 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 provide valuable information for policymakers, research scientists, and practitioners. They present current trends in crimes of violence and theft. They tell us who commits crimes (more precisely, who is arrested), who is the victim of crime, and where crimes occur. They tell us which crimes police know about, which crimes they don't know about, and why.

Frequently, the information from both the National Crime Survey and the Uniform Crime Reports is presented in the form of rates. Crime rate is a useful way of telling us whether crime is growing faster, slower, or at the same pace as the population. Crime rates are generally expressed per 1,000 people for every 1,000 people (per person crime) and the number of crimes for every 1,000 households (per household crime). 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 35- to 44-year-olds, or burglary rates for 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, from simply measuring differences among groups or over time to testing hypotheses or developing theories about crime. Data from the National Crime Survey have been used extensively in the simpler forms of analysis, but the realization of their full potential by the application of more complex analytic techniques is just beginning. Careful analysis of data from the National Crime Survey in conjunction with data from the Uniform Crime Reports is also producing promising results.

Whatever the analytic techniques used, it is clear that the government's progress in measuring crime can only increase our ability to understand crime, which is the first step in controlling it.

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.