

Sociology 3290: Deviance

Lecture 16 : Measuring Deviance 1: Official Police Data

Over the next few classes we will review:

- Official police data on crime
- Problems with the accuracy of such data
- Data from victimization surveys
- Problems with the accuracy of such data

Official Police Statistics (UCR data):

- The crime rate is calculated by dividing:

$$\frac{\text{Number of incidents in year}}{\text{Population in area}} \times 100,000 = \text{crime rate}$$

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- This is useful in classifying, analyzing, and clarifying crime trends
- It is helpful in planning, implementing, and assessing programs
- Problems:
 - Differences in data collection procedures (between police forces and over time)
 - Lack of sociological detail
- Uniform Crime Reports (since 1962) attempted to solve these problems with standard reporting practices
- The Crime Severity Index (CSI) was developed in the 1990's to address the limitation of the police-reported crime rate being driven by high-volume, relatively less serious offences. It not only takes into account the volume of crime, but its relative severity.
- To calculate the CSI, each violation is assigned a weight. CSI weights are based on the violation's incarceration rate,

and the average length of prison sentence handed down by courts. The more serious the average sentence, the higher the weight assigned to the offence (i.e. the more serious offences have a greater impact on the index. Unlike the traditional crime rate, all offences, including *Criminal Code* traffic violations and other federal statute violations, get included.

- To calculate the CSI, the weighted offences are summed and then divided by the population. To allow for ease of comparison, the CSI is then standardized to a base year of “100” (for the CSI, the base year is 2006). All CSI values are relative to the Canada-level CSI for 2006. Data are available back to 1998.

UCR

Data 2019

Highlights

- Police-reported crime in Canada, as measured by the Crime Severity Index (CSI), increased 5% from 75.6 in 2018 to 79.5 in 2019, but the index was 9% lower in 2019 than a decade earlier in 2009. The CSI measures the volume and severity of police-reported crime in Canada, and it has a base index value of 100
- All measures of the CSI – the overall CSI, the Violent CSI and the Non-violent CSI – increased for the fifth consecutive year. The change in the overall CSI in 2019 was the result of increases in police-reported rates of numerous offences, both violent and non-violent, most notably fraud (+8%) and child pornography (+46%), as well as uttering threats (+20%), mischief (+8%), sexual assault (level 1) (+7%), and shoplifting of \$5,000 or under (+11%). A 1% decline in the rate of breaking and entering, among other

offences, partially mitigated the impact of these increases on the CSI. An increase in importation or exportation under the *Cannabis Act* was partially mitigated by a concomitant decrease in trafficking, production, importation or exportation of cannabis (CDSA).

- There were over 2.2 million police-reported *Criminal Code* incidents (excluding traffic) reported by police in 2019, about 164,700 more incidents than in 2018. At 5,874 incidents per 100,000 population, the police-reported crime rate—which measures the volume of crime—increased 7% in 2019. This rate, however, was still 9% lower than a decade earlier in 2009.
- In 2019, the overall volume and severity of violent crime, as measured by the Violent Crime Severity Index (VCSI), was 89.7, a 7% increase from 2018, but 5% lower than in 2009. The overall volume and severity of non-violent crime—as measured by the Non-violent CSI (NVCSI)—increased 4% in 2019, but was 11% lower than in 2009.
- In 2019, police reported 678 homicides, 20 more than the previous year. The national homicide rate increased 2% from 1.78 homicides per 100,000 population in 2018, to 1.80 homicides per 100,000 population in 2019. The number of firearm-related (+10) and gang-related (+6) homicides increased in 2019.
- In 2019, police reported 174 Indigenous victims of homicide, an increase from 141 in 2018. This represents a rate approximately six and a half times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous homicide victims (8.82 homicides per 100,000 compared to 1.34 per 100,000).
- The rates of violent and non-violent offences specific to firearms increased for the fifth consecutive year in 2019. The number of violent offences specific to firearms increased by 642 (from 2,861 in 2018 to 3,503 in 2019), a 21% rate

increase, with increases across all three violent firearm violations: discharging a firearm with intent (+28% increase in rate, +341 incidents), pointing of a firearm (+17%, +223 incidents), and using a firearm in the commission of an indictable offence (+14%, +78 incidents). Additionally, the rate of non-violent weapons violations increased 11% to 50 incidents per 100,000 population. The vast majority (91%) of these violations were related to possession of weapons and weapons possession contrary to an order.

- Police-reported rates of all cannabis-related drug offences have declined every year since 2012, with precipitous declines in 2018 and 2019. Starting October 17, 2018 with the enactment of the *Cannabis Act*, police have reported a total of 18,097 incidents under the legislation. Following more than 14 months of enforcement, the most common types of offences under the *Cannabis Act* were related to importation or exportation (64% of all *Cannabis Act* offences), possession (13%), and sale (7%). In 2019, there was a national increase in the rates of drug offences related to opioids (+48%), cocaine (+3%) and methamphetamine (crystal meth) (+3%).
- The rate of police-reported impaired driving (alcohol, drugs and unspecified) increased 19% in 2019, to 228 incidents per 100,000 population. The increase was primarily due to increases in both alcohol-impaired (+9%) and drug-impaired driving (+43%). New impaired driving legislation, which came into force in 2018, provided police with greater authority to conduct alcohol and drug screening, which may have allowed police to detect more instances of impaired driving. Under this legislation, a relatively high number (4,618) of incidents were reported in 2019 as impaired driving caused by a combination of alcohol and drugs.

2020 Update

- During the first 4 months of the COVID-19 pandemic, 17 police services in Canada reported a 16% decrease in selected criminal incidents, compared with the same period the year before. In contrast, the number of calls for service increased 7% during the early months of the pandemic, particularly wellness checks by these police services and calls to attend domestic disturbances.

A Critique of Official Police (UCR) Data:

* While UCR data are often useful in classifying, analyzing, and clarifying crime trends, as well as for planning, implementing, and assessing programs, there are many problems:

- Not all crimes are detected
- Not all crimes are reported
- Not all crimes are “founded”
- Demeanor of victims & offenders/ familiarity with police affects
- Shrinkage throughout CJS processes
- Size, organization, and enforcement style of police force affects
- Unofficial practices (e.g. overcharging, entrapment)
- Perceptual biases (e.g. racial stereotypes)
- Shifting political enforcement priorities (e.g. crackdowns)
- Manipulation of statistics for agency gain (e.g. need more staff)
- Some offenders more visible than others (e.g. street prostitutes)
- Interactional dynamics of labelling (e.g. presence of complaint)
- Changes in how incidents recorded (e.g. 1 offender/1 victim or not)
- Changes in base population figures between 1 Census and another
- Variations in unit at risk (e.g. cars per population for auto theft)

Therefore, official (UCR) police statistics must be:

- Seen as social constructions

-Used critically, with other sources

In order to construct more informed, well-rounded estimates /accounts of crime and victimization.