



CURRENT METADATA AND REGIONAL CRIME STATISTICS

Some Thoughts on Recent Experiences

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METADATA – IMPORTANT DIMENSIONS

- ☞ **Concepts and Definitions**
- ☞ **Units of Analysis**
- ☞ **Data Quality – Reliability and Validity Concerns**
- ☞ **Data Collection**
- ☞ **Data Structures**
- ☞ **Data Storage and Management**

SOME GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- There is a need to adhere as much as possible to formal definitions of the main concepts that underlie the production of crime statistics.
- In this regard, the definitions that follow are derived mainly from *Cox and Wade (1998)*, a book entitled The Criminal Justice Network – An Introduction, 3rd Edition, Mc Graw Hill.
- The presentation recognizes that definitions across the Caribbean Sub-Region are contingent upon country-specific legislative frameworks. This means that the thrust towards harmonization should be the location of best common denominators while respecting countries' wishes to serve their domestic statistical requirements.
- Beyond Concepts and Definitions, the paper presentation reflects my professional engagement, evaluation and recommendations for metadata requirements as they relate to the region's crime statistics.
- Specific reference will be made to my experiences in Trinidad and Tobago and to a lesser extent, Jamaica.

WHAT IS CRIME?

- **Crime – an intentional act or omission tantamount to a violation of criminal law, committed without defense or justification and sanctioned by the state as a felony or misdemeanor.**
- **Criminal law – law that is established to maintain peace and order by protecting society from the injurious acts of individuals.**
- **Misdemeanor – an offense punishable by up to one year in jail.**
- **Felony – an offense punishable by more than one year in jail.**

TYOLOGY OF CRIMES

Crimes against the Person

- **Murder**
- **Manslaughter**
- **Assault and Battery**
- **Rape**

TYOLOGY OF CRIMES

Crimes against Property

- Robbery
- Larceny /Theft
- Burglary
- Arson

TYOLOGY OF CRIMES

Quasi-Victimless Crimes

- Prostitution
- Drug Offenses
- Gambling
- White Collar Crime
- Fraud
- Organized Crime

CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

☛ Crimes against the Person

- **Murder – premeditated and unlawful killing of another person. It is premeditated insofar as it implies intention.**
- **Manslaughter – unintentional but unlawful killing of another person.**
- **Battery – intentional, unprovoked harmful physical contact by one person (or an object controlled by that person) with another.**
- **Assault – an act creating in one person reasonable fear of being battered by another by reason of threat or attempt to batter.**
- **Rape - sexual intercourse by force or threat of force without lawful consent.**

CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

☞ Crimes against Property

- **Robbery – illegal taking of the property from another by force or threat of force.**
- **Larceny/Theft – taking unauthorized control over the property of another with the intent to permanently deprive the rightful owner of the property.**
- **Burglary – breaking into and entering the premises of another with the intent to commit a felony (an offense punishable by a sentence of more than one year in prison).**
- **Arson – willful and unlawful burning of a building or structure.**

CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

☞ Quasi-Victimless Crimes

- **Prostitution – engaging in or agreeing to engage in sexual acts for compensation.**
- **White-collar crime – crime committed by guile, deceit, or concealment, typically by people in positions of trust.**
- **Fraud – an act that involves obtaining the property of another, with the intent of personally depriving the owner of the use of that property, by misrepresenting a material fact.**
- **Organized crime – criminal conspiracies providing illicit goods or services through the corruption of public officials and the use or threat of force.**

UNITS OF ANALYSIS

- ☞ **National Level**
- ☞ **Sub-National Level or Regional Level**
 - **Urban/Rural**
 - **Major Police Divisions**
 - **Minor Police Divisions – Police Stations/Districts/Precincts**
- ☞ **Elementary Level**
 - **Persons – Victims, Offenders**
 - **Households, Families**
 - **Dwelling Units, Business Premises**
 - **Business Establishments**

DATA QUALITY – RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY CONCERNS

Reliability

- Crime data are often considered to be sensitive data resulting in a concern for reliability.
- You often have different observation units reporting on the same case. This spawns a need to assess reliability using inter-rater consistency.
- Within questionnaires and data collection instruments there is also a need to evaluate and seek to enhance internal consistency.

Validity

- Hinges the extent to which a range of systematic errors are likely to be committed.
- These include specification error, frame error (here, the focus is on coverage), measurement error, non-response error and processing errors.
- The type of error hinges upon the data collection approaches that are used.

EVALUATING DATA QUALITY

- ❏ RELIABILITY relates to observations while VALIDITY relates to measures or operational definitions.
- ❏ Observations are valid if they have high reliability and based upon measures with high validity.
- ❏ The validity of observations are threatened if they have high reliability but are based upon measures with low validity.
- ❏ The validity of observations is low if they have low reliability irrespective of the level of validity associated with measurement processes.
- ❏ These concerns reinforce the need for systematic training, pilot testing of data collection and processing systems, familiarity with the strengths and weaknesses of data collection and processing systems especially in the context of linkages to research and applied social policy.

DATA COLLECTION

Official Statistics

- Collected by the police in several countries, mainly at the national level.
 - Constabulary Communications Network – Jamaica.
 - Modus Operandi and Record Bureau – Trinidad and Tobago.
- Reporting is voluntary so that there are several sources of error.
- There are some noteworthy problems to consider:
 - Some crimes are not detected or known of by anyone.
 - Some crimes are not reported to the police.
 - Some crimes, though reported are not recorded by the police.
 - Classification and processing errors at different stages.
- The magnitude of crimes is masked especially in the context of its nature.

DATA COLLECTION

Victimization Surveys

- Treats reasonably well with problems associated with the fact that crimes could be masked due to relying upon official statistics.
- In the United States, the National Crime Victimization Survey is conducted by the Department of Justice. It targets 100,000 respondents every six months on a national scale to discern levels of victimization in a specified period.
- Problems are as follows:
 - Cannot collect data on homicidal victimizations from victims.
 - Some under-reporting and over-reporting. Under-reporting is particularly evident in cases where respondents are unlikely to claim involvement in illegal activities.
 - Difficult to obtain responses to crimes such as rape as respondents are hesitant to respond.
 - Memory lapses.

DATA COLLECTION

Self Report Studies

- Distributed to persons who have been labeled as criminals and those who have not been so labeled in order to discern the extent of illegal behaviour – nature and frequency.
- Several studies have shown that there is little or no difference in involvement in illegal behaviour across social class.
- To treat with under-counting, there has been use of follow-up interviews and polygraph examinations.
- Cross-checking of outcomes of self reporting with police records.