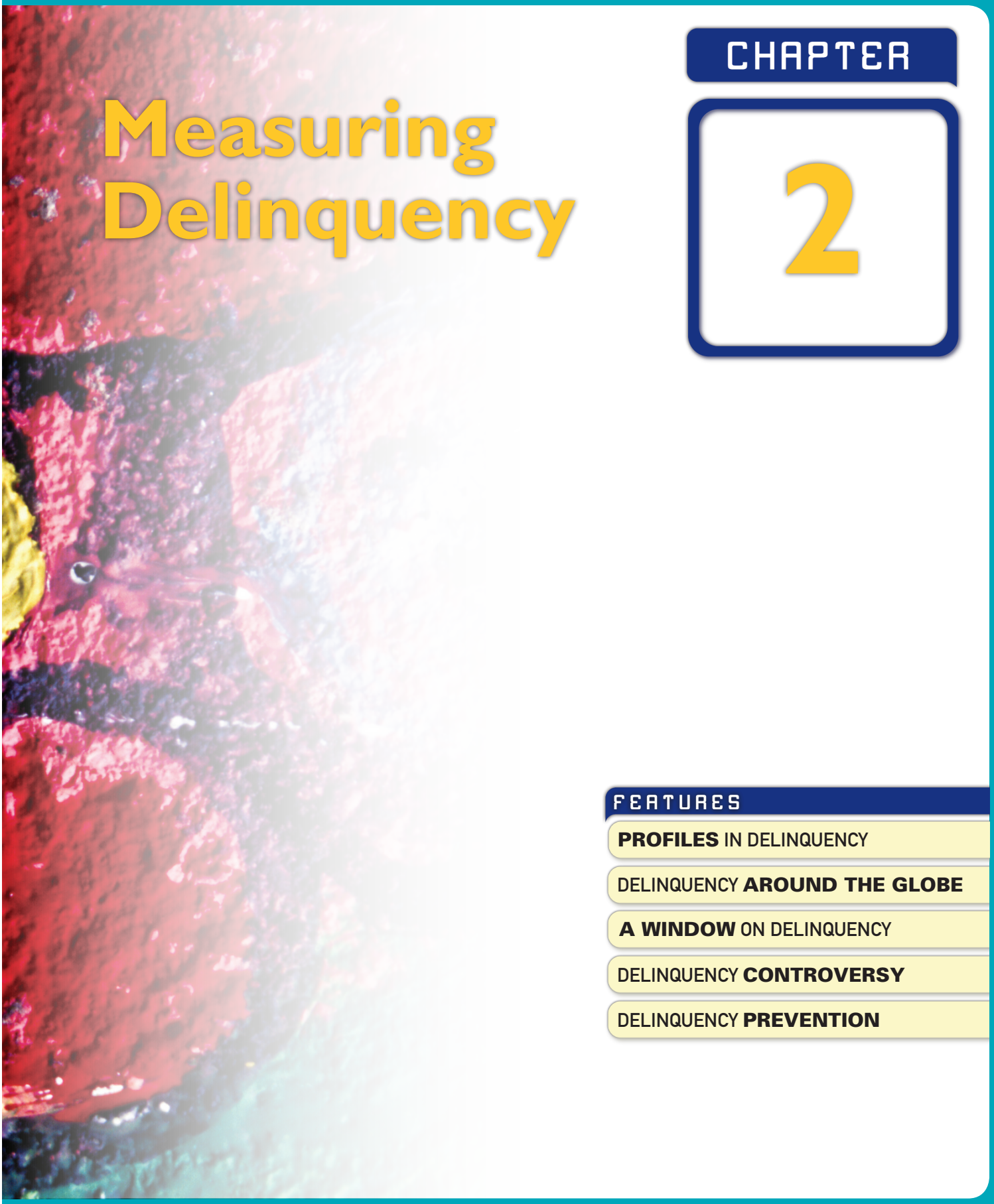
OBJECTIVES

- Understand the ways that law enforcement agencies have measured crime in the United States.
- Explore victimization surveys and the ways that victimization data overlap with official statistics.
- Examine self-reports from delinquents as a way to measure delinquency.
- Identify trends in terms of how much delinquency exists and which social groups are involved.
- Understand the special characteristics of serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders and major research initiatives that study them.



CHAPTER

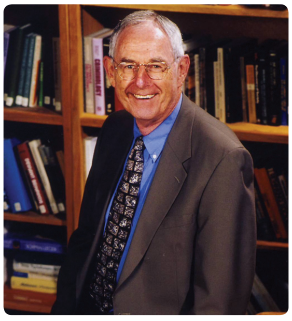
2

Measuring Delinquency

FEATURES

- **PROFILES** IN DELINQUENCY
- DELINQUENCY **AROUND THE GLOBE**
- **A WINDOW** ON DELINQUENCY
- DELINQUENCY **CONTROVERSY**
- DELINQUENCY **PREVENTION**

PROFILES IN DELINQUENCY



Delbert Elliott, PhD
University of Colorado

While still in graduate school, I was convinced that the future of criminological research lay in longitudinal and experimental research designs.

My first major research project right out of graduate school was a longitudinal study of delinquent behavior and school dropouts (Elliott and Voss, *Delinquency and Dropout*, 1974), and virtually all of my subsequent research has involved longitudinal designs. The longest-running study I have directed is the National Youth Survey, involving a representative national sample of 11- to 17-year-old youth. This study has produced 12 waves of data spanning the years 1976 to 2004 and ages 11 to 45 for panel members, and it includes interview data from both the parents and the children of panel members. Some of the other longitudinal/experimental studies include the Denver Youth Survey, the Omaha Replication of the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment, and randomized control trials of several violence prevention programs.

My career took a new direction in 1993, when I received a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to establish the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado. The Center's mission was to address the gap between basic research on youth violence and the development and implementation of policy and practice in the area of youth violence. This led to some new challenges for me, such as having to talk to reporters and politicians, trying to summarize whole bodies of research knowledge in a five-minute presentation or two-page handout, and avoiding professional jargon and the long lists of caveats that characterize articles published in our professional journals. While my basic research continued, this new interest led to my development of research-based position papers to inform policy and a search for effective violence prevention and intervention strategies and programs. The general quality of evaluation research on delinquency prevention/intervention programs in the mid-1990s was very low; it was a challenge to find any credible scientific evidence for a program's effectiveness in changing violent behavior, drug use, or other types of delinquent behavior.

The poor state of evaluation research in violence prevention led directly to what is now known as the Blueprints for Violence Prevention Initiative. In this initiative, we sought to establish a clear, compelling scientific standard for certifying programs as effective or "evidence-based" programs. We then applied this standard to the existing body of evidence for specific programs, certifying those that met this standard as Blueprint Model or Promising programs. The Blueprint standard is considered by many to be the gold standard for violence prevention programs. While there were (and continue to be) several federal agency lists of "effective" programs, the scientific standard for being included on these lists, when specified, was (and still is) very low. We have now reviewed more than 800 programs that claim to be violence, drug, delinquency, or antisocial behavior prevention programs and have certified only 13 Blueprint Model and 18 Promising programs using the Blueprint standard (see www.colorado.edu/cspv for the scientific standard and certified Blueprint programs).

The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence's work also includes rigorous evaluations of violence prevention programs. We currently are involved in two randomized control trials of programs that have been certified as Promising programs, hoping to upgrade them to Blueprint Model status, and in a quasi-experimental study of another prevention program that could qualify it for Promising status. The good news is that we have some violence and drug prevention programs that are very effective. Unfortunately, there are very few programs that meet this standard.

Historically, it has been difficult to measure juvenile delinquency. Years ago, the economist Sir Josiah Stamp said about crime statistics that they "come in the first instance from the village watchman, who just puts down what he damn pleases."[1] Criminologists have drawn the same conclusion. In 1947, Edwin Sutherland wrote that "the statistics of crime and criminals are the most unreliable of all statistics."[2] Twenty years later, Albert Biderman and Albert Reiss concluded that crime statistics involve "institutional processing of people's reports . . . the data are not some objectively observable universe of 'criminal acts,' but rather those events defined, captured, and processed by some institutional mechanism."[3] It is even difficult to measure the most severe forms of delinquent and antisocial behavior, such as murder. For example, a recent review of the various types of law enforcement data, death certificate data, and coroner/medical examiner data used in the National Violent Death Reporting System found that approximately 70 percent of the time, these assorted data sources matched. Of course, this also means that for roughly 30 percent of violent deaths, there were discrepancies in their measurement.[4]

Measuring crime and delinquency is also not something that most people focus on. As a result, citizen perceptions of delinquency can be wildly off base—including estimates made by students in juvenile delinquency and criminology courses. For proof of this notion, consider the work of Margaret Vandiver and David Giacopassi, who administered questionnaires to nearly 400 students in an introductory criminology course and seniors majoring in criminal justice to determine how well they grasped the magnitude of the crime problem relative to other mortality conditions. They found that almost 50 percent of the introductory-level students believed that more than 250,000 murders were committed annually in the United States (there were actually some 17,000 murders and fewer than 1000 murders committed by juveniles during the year of their study). Fifteen percent of the students estimated that more than 1 million people were murdered each year.[5] For many reasons, but perhaps most notably because of the extensive media focus on crime, students overestimated the likelihood of being murdered but underestimated the prevalence of other causes of death that were less sensationalistic, such as accidents.

There are other reasons why gathering and verifying crime data have proven problematic. For example, crime is both *context* and *time* specific. Behavior is evaluated differently depending on where and when it occurs. For instance, sexual promiscuity was judged differently in the Victorian period of the nineteenth century than it is today.[6] Additionally, some adolescents may commit crimes at relatively high levels but are never "caught" and punished for their misdeeds, whereas other youths are arrested on their first offense. Thus arrest records do not necessarily always reflect actual delinquent behavior.

Today, to overcome these data-related problems, criminologists measure delinquency using multiple yardsticks. When these measures are put together, they provide a respectable approximation of the extent and nature of delinquency (for an example of "counting crime," see the "A Window on Delinquency" feature). The most popular sources of data for estimating delinquency are the *Uniform Crime Reports*, victimization surveys, and self-report studies.

Uniform Crime Reports

The *Uniform Crime Reporting Program* is a nationwide, cooperative effort of more than 17,000 city, county, and state law enforcement agencies that voluntarily report, to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), data on crimes brought to their attention. The data are published in an annual report titled *Crime in the United States*,

A WINDOW ON DELINQUENCY

Counting the Victims of Serial Murderers

Perhaps the most dramatic example of the difficulty of quantifying crime is estimating the number of people who are killed by serial killers. Some serial killers make exaggerated claims about the number of people whom they have murdered. For instance, Henry Lee Lucas once claimed more than 600 victims but actually killed only 10 or so people. Still other serial killers never divulge how many victims they murdered, even though many of them are linked to significantly more homicides than their convictions would suggest. Criminologists have produced wide-ranging estimates of the number of people killed each year by serial killers. Early estimates suggested that more than 500 serial killers murdered more than 6000 victims each year in the United States. More recent and conservative estimates placed the number of serial murder victims at between 40 and 180 each year.

Kenna Quinet suggests that the earliest, more shocking estimates of serial murder victims may actually be more accurate. When she analyzed data sets of missing persons, prostitutes, foster and runaway children, and unidentified deceased persons, she found a minimum estimate of 182 annual serial murder deaths and a maximum estimate of 1832 such deaths. Quinet refers to many of these victims as "the missing missing" because serial murderer victims are often seen as throwaway people at the margins of society, such as prostitutes. Research has found that prostitutes have a homicide mortality rate that is 18 times higher than that for the general population. Moreover, between 35 and 75 percent of prostitutes are killed by serial murderers. In short, even for the most serious crime of murder, providing valid and reliable estimates is difficult.

Sources: Kenna Quinet, "The Missing Missing: Toward a Quantification of Serial Murder Victimization in the United States," *Homicide Studies* 11:319–339 (2007); John Potterat, Devon Brewer, Stephen Muth, Richard Rothenberg, Donald Woodhouse, John Muth, Heather Stites, and Stuart Brody, "Mortality in a Long-Term Cohort of Prostitute Women," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 159:778–785 (2004); Devon Brewer, Jonathan Dudek, John Potterat, Stephen Muth, John Roberts, and Donald Woodhouse, "Extent, Trends, and Perpetrators of Prostitution-Related Homicide in the United States," *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 51:1101–1108 (2006).

also known as the ***Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)***. The *UCR* contains data on the following items:

1. *Crimes known to the police*. These are crimes that police know about, either because the crimes were reported to police or because the police discovered the crimes on their own.
2. *Number of arrests*. The *UCR* reports the number of arrests police made in the past calendar year. The number of arrests is not the same as the number of people arrested because some people are arrested more than once during the year. Nor does the number of arrests indicate how many crimes the people who were arrested committed, because multiple crimes committed by one person might produce a single arrest, or a single crime might result in the arrest of multiple persons.
3. *Persons arrested*. The third section of the *UCR* reports the number of persons arrested, the crimes for which they were arrested, and the age, sex, and race of those arrested.

A large number of the nation's law enforcement agencies participate in the *UCR* program, representing more than 93 percent of the total U.S. population.

Since 1930, the FBI has administered the *UCR* Program. Its primary objective is to generate reliable information for use in law enforcement administration, operation,

and management; however, over the years, the *UCR* data have become one of the country's leading social indicators. The American public looks to the *UCR* for information on fluctuations in the level of crime, and criminologists, sociologists, legislators, municipal planners, the media, and other students of criminal justice use the statistics for varied research and planning purposes.

The *Uniform Crime Reports* are the primary measure of crime and delinquency yet they only measure crimes known to the police. All measures of crime—even the UCR—are weakened by measurement error.

Historical Background

Recognizing a need for national crime statistics, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) formed the Committee on Uniform Crime Records in 1927 to develop a system of uniform crime statistics. Establishing offenses known to law enforcement as the appropriate measure, the Committee evaluated various crimes on the basis of their seriousness, frequency of occurrence, pervasiveness in all geographic areas of the country, and likelihood of being reported to law enforcement. After studying state criminal codes and making an evaluation of the record-keeping practices in use, the Committee completed a plan for crime reporting that became the foundation of the *UCR* Program in 1929.

Seven main offense classifications, called Part I crimes, were selected to gauge the state of crime in the United States. These offense classifications, which eventually became known as the **Crime Index**, included the violent crimes of murder and nonmanslaughter death, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and the property crimes of burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. By congressional mandate in 1979, arson was added as the eighth Crime Index offense.

During the early planning of the *UCR* Program, it was recognized that the differences among criminal codes in the various states precluded a mere aggregation of state statistics to arrive at a national total of crimes. Further, because of variances in punishment for the same offenses in different state codes, no distinction between felony and misdemeanor crimes was possible. To avoid these problems and to provide nationwide uniformity in crime reporting, standardized offense definitions by which law enforcement agencies were to submit data without regard for local statutes were formulated.

In January 1930, 400 cities representing 20 million persons in 43 states began participating in the *UCR* Program. For more than 75 years, the *UCR* Program has relied on police agencies to forward information to the FBI, either directly or through a state-level crime-recording program. Police tabulate the number of offenses committed each month, based on records of all reports of crime received from victims, from officers who discover violations, and from other sources. The data are forwarded to the FBI regardless of whether anyone was arrested, property was recovered, or prosecution was undertaken.[7] The FBI audits each agency report for arithmetical accuracy and for deviations from previous submissions. An agency's monthly report is also compared with its earlier submissions to identify unusual fluctuations in crime trends. Large variations from one month to the next might indicate changes in the volume of crime being committed, or they might be due to changes in an agency's recording practices, incomplete reporting, or changes in the jurisdiction's geopolitical structure (e.g., land might have been annexed).

Recent Developments

Although *UCR* data collection had originally been conceived as a tool for law enforcement administration, by the 1980s the data were widely used by other entities involved

in various forms of social planning. Recognizing the need for more detailed crime statistics, U.S. law enforcement agencies called for a thorough evaluative analysis that would modernize the *UCR* Program. These studies led to the creation and implementation of the *National Incident-Based Reporting System* (*NIBRS*) in 1989.

The *NIBRS* collects data on each single incident and arrest (see the "A Window on Delinquency" feature). For each offense known to the police within these categories, incident, victim, property, offender, and arrestee information are gathered. In total, 53 data elements on crimes in 22 categories are recorded. The detailed, accurate, and meaningful data produced by *NIBRS* benefit local agencies. Armed with comprehensive crime data, these agencies can make a stronger case when it comes time to acquire and effectively allocate the resources needed to fight crime.

Currently, almost 6000 law enforcement agencies contribute *NIBRS* data to the national *UCR* Program. The data submitted by the agencies represents 20 percent of the U.S. population and 16 percent of the crime statistics collected by the *UCR* Program. The current timetable calls for all U.S. law enforcement agencies to be participating in the *NIBRS* Program by 2010.[8]

The *NIBRS* has several advantages over the *UCR* Program:

1. *NIBRS* contains incident- and victim-level analysis disaggregated to local jurisdictions and aggregated to intermediate levels of analysis. By comparison, the *UCR* is a summary-based system.
2. *NIBRS* provides full incident details, which permits the analysis of ancillary offenses and crime situations. By comparison, the *UCR* hierarchy rule counts only the most serious offenses.
3. *NIBRS* data permit separation of individual, household, commercial, and business victimizations.
4. *NIBRS* offers data on incidents involving victims younger than age 12. By comparison, the *National Crime Victimization Survey* (*NCVS*—discussed later in this chapter) covers only victims 12 and older.
5. *NIBRS* offers a broader range of offense categories.
6. *NIBRS* contains victimization information beyond which the NCVS provides.
7. *NIBRS* yields individual-level information about offenders based on arrest records and victim reports, thereby yielding residual information on victims and offenders.[9]

Three other reforms that have improved the quality of *UCR* data are especially noteworthy. First, in 1988, to increase participation in the *UCR* program, Congress passed the *Uniform Federal Reporting Act*. This legislation mandated that all federal law enforcement agencies submit crime data to the *UCR* program.

Second, in 1990, to facilitate the collection of data on a wider range of crimes, Congress passed the *Hate Crime Statistics Act*. In its annual *Hate Crime Statistics* report, the FBI now publishes data on the number of crimes motivated by religious, ethnic, racial, or sexual-orientation prejudice.

Third, in 1990, in response to increasing crime on college and university campuses across the nation, Congress passed the *Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act*. This law requires colleges to tally and report campus crime data to the *UCR* program. It was passed after Jeanne Clery, a 19-year-old freshman at Lehigh University (Pennsylvania), was raped and murdered while asleep in her residence hall on April 5, 1986. When Jeanne's parents, Connie and Howard, investigated the crime, they discovered that Lehigh University had not told students about 38 violent crimes on the Lehigh campus in the three years before Jeanne's murder. The Clerys joined with other campus crime victims and persuaded Congress to pass this law.[10] Today, every college in its annual

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National Incident-Based Reporting System

NIBRS records the following information for each crime incident:

Administrative Segment
Originating agency identifier (ORI) number
Incident number
Incident date/hour
Exceptional clearance indicator
Exceptional clearance date

Offense Segment
UCR offense code
Attempted/completed code
Alcohol/drug use by offender
Type of location
Number of premises entered
Method of entry
Type of criminal activity
Type of weapon/force used
Bias crime code
Race of arrestee

Property Segment
Type of property loss
Property description
Property value
Recovery date
Number of stolen motor vehicles
Number of recovered motor vehicles
Suspected drug type
Estimated drug quantity
Drug measurement unit

Offender Segment
Offender number
Age of offender
Sex of offender
Race of offender

Arrestee Segment
Arrestee number
Transaction number
Arrest date
Type of arrest
Multiple clearance indicator
UCR arrest offense code
Arrestee armed indicator
Age of arrestee
Sex of arrestee
Ethnicity of arrestee
Resident status of arrestee
Disposition of arrestee younger than age 18

Victim Segment
Victim number
Victim *UCR* offense code
Type of victim
Age of victim
Sex of victim
Race of victim
Ethnicity of victim
Resident status of victim
Homicide/assault circumstances
Justifiable homicide circumstances
Type of injury
Related offender number
Relationship of victim to offender

Source: Ramona Rantala and Thomas Edwards, *Effects of NIBRS on Crime Statistics, Special Report* (Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Justice, 2000).

Beginning in 1991, the UCR has published data on the number of crimes motivated by hate reported by law enforcement. From 1991 to 2006, roughly 100,000 hate crimes have been reported. How do children learn to hate others and to commit crimes against them?

campus security report publishes crime data that are available to all students, parents, and the public.

The most recent change to the *UCR* Program was implemented in 2004, when it was decided that the Crime Index would be discontinued. However, the FBI will continue to publish in the *UCR* a serious *violent* crime total and a serious *property* crime total until a more viable index is developed. The serious violent crime total includes the offenses of murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault; the crimes included in the serious property crime total are burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson (see the "A Window on Delinquency" feature).

Although the Crime Index was first published in 1960, it has never been a true indicator of the degree of criminality in the larger society. The Crime Index was simply the title used for an aggregation of offense classifications, known as Part I crimes, for which data have been collected since the *UCR* Program's implementation. The Crime Index was driven upward by the offense with the highest number of occurrences—specifically, larceny-thefts. This methodology created a bias against jurisdictions with high numbers of larceny-thefts, but low numbers of other serious crimes, such as murder and forcible rape. Currently, larceny-theft accounts for nearly 60 percent of all reported crime in the United States; thus the sheer volume of those offenses overshadows more serious, but less frequently committed offenses.

Criticisms of *UCR* Data

Criminologists disagree on whether the *UCR* is a valid measure of crime. Walter Gove and his associates suggest that the *UCR* is "a valid indicator of crime as defined by the citizenry."[11] Other criminologists believe that because the *UCR* reports only "crime known to the police," it grossly underestimates the number of delinquent acts committed (**incidence**) and the number of juveniles who engage in delinquency (**prevalence**). A recent report published by the U.S. Department of Justice found that only 42 percent of all crime was reported to the police. Victims did not report crime for a variety of reasons, including that they considered the crime to be a private or personal matter, that it was not important enough, or that they feared reprisal.[12]

Because most crime is not reported, there exists an extremely large **dark figure of crime**, which is the gap between the actual amount of crime committed and the amount of crime reported to the police. One early criminologist who had observed the so-called dark figure was the nineteenth-century scholar Adolphe Quetelet, who wrote, "All we possess of statistics of crime and misdemeanors would have no utility at all if we did not tacitly assume that there is a nearly invariable relationship between offenses known and adjudicated and the total unknown sum of offenses committed.[13] A century later, Edwin Sutherland suggested that the *UCR* was invalid because it did not include data on "white-collar criminals."[14] In his work on female criminality, Otto Pollack reported that females were underrepresented in *UCR* because police treated them more leniently.[15] It is fair to draw the conclusion that the *UCR* might have more to say about police behavior as it responds to criminality than it does about criminality itself.

Another major limitation of the *UCR* is its reliance on the **hierarchy rule**, whereby in a multiple-offense situation police record only the most serious crime in the incident. If someone robs a person at gunpoint, forcibly rapes the victim, and then steals the victim's car, only the forcible rape is reported in the *UCR* totals; the less serious offenses of robbery and motor vehicle theft are not counted. The hierarchy rule does have an exception: It does not apply to arson, which is reported in all situations.

Its limitations aside, the *UCR* statistics are widely used. The *UCR* Program is one of only two sources of data that provide a *national* estimate of the nature and extent of

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Uniform Crime Reports Offenses

The *UCR* is divided into eight "serious" violent and property crimes and 21 "other" offenses. Law enforcement agencies report data on the number of serious violent and property offenses known to them and the number of people arrested monthly to the FBI.

Serious Violent and Property Offenses

1. *Murder and non-negligent manslaughter:* The willful killing of one human being by another.
2. *Forcible rape:* The carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will.
3. *Robbery:* The taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear.
4. *Aggravated assault:* The unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury.
5. *Burglary:* The unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft.
6. *Larceny-theft:* The unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of others. Examples include thefts of bicycles or automobile accessories, shoplifting, and pocket-picking.
7. *Motor vehicle theft:* The theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle.
8. *Arson:* Any willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn, with or without intent to defraud, a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle or aircraft, or the personal property of another.

Other Offenses

1. Other assaults
2. Forgery and counterfeiting
3. Fraud
4. Embezzlement
5. Stolen property—buying, receiving, possessing
6. Vandalism
7. Weapons—carrying, possessing
8. Prostitution and commercialized vice
9. Sex offenses (except forcible rape and prostitution)
10. Drug abuse violations
11. Gambling
12. Offenses against the family and children
13. Driving under the influence
14. Breaking liquor laws
15. Drunkenness
16. Disorderly conduct
17. Vagrancy
18. All other offenses (except traffic)
19. Suspicion
20. Curfew and loitering violations
21. Runaways

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2008* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2009).

delinquency in the United States. Criminologists who use *UCR* data assume that the inaccuracies are consistent over time and, therefore, that the data accurately depict delinquency trends. In other words, while *UCR* data might be flawed, they may be stable enough to show year-to-year changes.

In fact, recent research supports the validity of the *UCR* and of official crime data generally. Ramona Rantala, a statistician with the Bureau of Justice Statistics, and Thom-

as Edwards, an FBI systems analyst, recently compared the *UCR* and *NIBRS* systems to determine if they produced similar estimates of crime. They concluded that they do. Rantala and Edward found that when comparing data from the same year, *NIBRS* rates differed only slightly from summary *UCR* rates. Murder rates were the same. Rape, robbery, and aggravated assault rates were approximately 1 percent higher in the *NIBRS* than in the *UCR*. The *NIBRS* burglary rate was a mere 0.5 percent lower than the *UCR* rate. Differences crime rates amounted to slightly more than 3 percent for theft and just 4 percent motor vehicle theft. The convergence of *NIBRS* and *UCR* data suggests that both programs produce reasonable estimates of crime in the United States.[16]

Victimization Surveys

Research focusing on crime victims was developed in the late 1960s in response to the weaknesses of the *UCR*, particularly in regard to the "dark figure of crime." One popular measure of crime from victims' perspective is the **victimization survey**. Instead of asking police about delinquency, victimization surveys ask people about their experiences as crime victims.

National crime surveys have several advantages over the *UCR*. Specifically, they are a more direct measure of criminal behavior. In addition, victim surveys provide more detailed information about situational factors surrounding a crime—for example, the physical location of the crime event, the time of day when the crime occurred, the weapon (if any) used, and the relationship (if any) between the victim and the offender.[17]

National Opinion Research Center Survey

In 1967, the **National Opinion Research Center (NORC)** completed the first nationwide victimization survey in the United States. Interviews were conducted with 10,000 households, which included approximately 33,000 people. In each household, a knowledgeable person was asked a few short "screening" questions—for example, "Were you or was anyone in the household in a fist fight or attacked in any way by another person—including another household member—within the past 12 months?" If the respondent answered "yes" to the question, the victim was interviewed. What director Philip Ennis found was that the victimization rate for Crime Index offenses as reported through the NORC survey was more than double the rate reported in the *UCR*.[18] This finding triggered both surprise and alarm, and interest in victimization surveys soared, prompting the development of a much larger effort, the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), a few years later.

National Crime Victimization Survey

In 1972, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics launched the *National Crime Survey*. In 1990, this effort was renamed the **National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)**, to emphasize more clearly the measurement of victimizations experienced by U.S. citizens. The NCVS was redesigned in 1992, making it problematic to compare results from surveys conducted in 1992 and later with those conducted from 1972 to 1991.[19]

The NCVS is the most comprehensive and systematic survey of victims in the United States, producing data on both *personal* and *household* crimes. The personal crimes are divided into two categories: crimes of violence (rape, robbery, and assault) and crimes of theft (larceny, with or without contact). (Murder is *not* measured by the NCVS because the victim cannot be interviewed.) Household crimes targeted by the survey include burglary, household larceny, and motor vehicle theft. These eight offenses, which are known as the **crimes of interest**, were selected because victims are likely to report them

to police and victims are typically able to recall the incidents when Census Bureau interviewers question them.

NCVS data are obtained from interviews with more than 75,000 people who represent nearly 50,000 households. Only people age 13 and older are interviewed. (Information on people age 12 and younger is obtained from older household members.) Each interviewee is asked a few screening questions to determine whether he or she was a victim of one or more of the crimes of interest (see the "A Window on Delinquency" feature). Respondents who answer "yes" to any of the screening questions are asked additional questions that further probe the nature of the crime incident. On the basis of the responses received, the interviewer classifies the crime incident as falling into one of the crimes of interest categories.

Often seen as the forgotten part of the criminal justice system, victims of crime provide another important way to measure delinquency.

Households are selected for inclusion using a rotated panel design. Every household—whether urban or rural, whether living in a detached single-family house or an efficiency apartment, whether consisting of a family or unrelated people—has the same chance of being selected. Once chosen for inclusion, the household remains in the survey for three years. If members of the household move during this period, that address remains part of the survey and the new occupants enter the sample. No attempt is made to follow past occupants who move to new addresses. After three years, a participating household is replaced with a new one, so new households are always entering the sample.

NCVS data are a very useful source of information, particularly in terms of increasing our understanding of the dark figure of crime. Edward Wells and Joseph Rankin observed that NCVS data have the following utility:

1. They confirm that a considerable amount of delinquency is unknown to police.

A WINDOW ON DELINQUENCY

The National Crime Victimization Survey

The NCVS asks juveniles directly about crimes committed against them during a specific time period. The questions children are asked are similar to those presented here:

1. Did you have your (pocket picked/purse snatched)?
2. Did anyone try to rob you by using force or threatening to harm you?
3. Did anyone beat you up, attack you, or hit you with something, such as a rock or bottle?
4. Were you knifed, shot at, or attacked with some other weapon by anyone at all?
5. Did anyone steal things that belonged to you from inside any car or truck, such as packages or clothing?
6. Was anything stolen from you while you were away from home—for instance, at work, in a theater or restaurant, or while traveling?
7. Did you call the police during the last six months to report something that happened to you that you thought was a crime? If yes, how many times?

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 2008* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2009).

2. They have uncovered some reasons why victims do not report crime incidents to police.
3. They demonstrate that the amount of variation in the official reporting of delinquency changes across type of offenses, victim–offender relationships, situational factors, and characteristics.
4. They have drawn theoretical attention to delinquency often being the result of social interaction between a victim and an offender.[20]

Like any measuring tool, the NCVS has some flaws. Obviously, the small number of crimes of interest is problematic. While it is important to collect data on the crimes of interest, those offenses represent only a small fraction of all crimes committed in the United States. Most arrests are for crimes involving alcohol and illegal drugs, and many robberies, burglaries, and larcenies are committed against businesses, rather than against individuals.[21] Because it excludes these and other crimes, the NCVS provides data on just a small subset of all crime incidents in this country.

As mentioned previously, the NCVS is based on answers people give to questions regarding past and sometimes troublesome events. At least five known problems might affect the reliability of data for that reason:

1. *Memory errors*. People might have difficulty recalling when or how many times an event occurred.
2. *Telescoping*. Interviewees might "remember" a crime of interest as occurring more recently than it did because the event remains vivid in their memories.
3. *Errors of deception*. It may be difficult for victims to report events that are embarrassing or otherwise unpleasant to talk about or events that might incriminate them. In addition, some people might potentially fabricate crime incidents.
4. *Juvenile victimizations*. Adolescents might be less likely to discuss their victimizations with an adult stranger, particularly if their victimizations involve peers or family members.
5. *Sampling error.* When samples are used to represent populations, there always is the possibility of a discrepancy between sample estimates of behavior and the actual amount of behavior. For instance, because the sampling unit in the NCVS is the household, homeless children—who are at greater risk of victimization—are excluded from the sample.

To improve the likelihood that respondents will recall events accurately, the managers of the NCVS eventually changed the survey's methodology. The revised survey includes questions and cues intended to help refresh the memories of victims. In addition, interviewers ask more explicit questions about sexual victimizations. For instance, interviewees are now asked the following question:

> Have you been forced or coerced to engage in unwanted sexual activity by (a) someone you didn't know before, (b) a casual acquaintance, or (c) someone you know well?

Findings from the redesigned survey were first published in 1992. One of the most significant findings from the redesigned survey was that victims recalled and reported more types of crime incidents, particularly more incidents of rape, aggravated assault, and simple assault.

Do Official Crime Data and Victimization Data Match?

To what degree do official and victimization data paint the same picture about the extent of crime in the United States? This is an important question. If official and victimization

reports conflict widely, then we would have little confidence in our understanding of the true magnitude of crime. If official and victimization data converge, then we are likely measuring the crime problem with confidence, validity, and reliability.

Fortunately, official and victimization data generally match. For example, Janet Lauritsen and Robin Schaum recently compared *UCR* and NCVS data for robbery, burglary, and aggravated assault in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York from 1980 to 1998. Given that these three locales are the three largest cities in the country this sampling method represents the bulk of crime that is committed in the United States. Lauritsen and Schaum found that for burglary and robbery, *UCR* crime rates were generally similar to NCVS estimates over the study period. Police and victim survey data were more likely to show discrepancies in levels of and trends related to aggravated assault. Lauritsen and Schaum also found that even when *UCR* and NCVS data were different, the differences were not statistically significant.[22] Substantively, the *UCR* and NCVS tell the same story about the extent of these three serious crimes in the nation's three biggest metropolitan areas. Indeed, for more than 30 years, criminologists have found that official and victimization data generally tell the same story about the incidence of crime and delinquency in the United States.[23]

Official ways to measure delinquency, such as the *UCR*, *NIBRS*, and victimization surveys (e.g., the NCVS), paint a very broad picture of the amount of delinquency occurring in the United States. But there is another way to evaluate whether official and victimization measures of delinquency overlap: We can evaluate at the individual level whether there is convergence of data. In other words, are the adolescents who are at the greatest risk for committing delinquency also at the at greatest risk for being victims of delinquent acts? Similarly, are youths who have many protective factors and who are not involved in delinquency less likely to be victimized as well? The answer to both of these questions is "yes." The youths who are most involved in committing delinquency also are, generally speaking, the youths most likely to be victimized. Put simply being antisocial increases the odds of all forms of antisocial interactions. The same logic applies to youths who are prosocial and engaged in conventional activities, such as going to school, playing sports, working, and associating with their friends. Researchers have found that both prosocial and antisocial behaviors seem to cluster in the same youths. Whereas most youths lead lives that are relatively free from delinquent offending and victimization, others have multiple problems and are troubled on both fronts.[24]

For decades, criminologists have noted the overlap between being a perpetrator and being a victim of delinquency. According to Albert Cohen and James Short:

> Any act—delinquent or otherwise—depends on "something about the actor," that is, something about his values, his goals, his interests, his temperament, or, speaking inclusively, his personality, and it depends also on "something about the situation" in which he finds himself. Change either actor or situation and you get a different act for delinquent acts always depend on appropriate combinations of actor and situation.[25]

The reasons that delinquency and victimization coincide are twofold. First, the most serious delinquents (discussed later in this chapter and in Chapters 4 and 11) are so immersed in antisocial behaviors that they have increased opportunities to both offend and be targeted by offenders. This link segues into the second reason for overlap between offending and victimization, which pertains to lifestyle factors. Adolescents who commit delinquency are more likely to associate with peers who commit delinquency, more likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs, more likely to have their "misbehavior" interfere with school success, and overall more likely to engage in diverse forms of crime.[26] Janet Lauritsen and her colleagues suggest that juvenile delinquents and victims of delinquency are basically drawn from the same population pool. For example, using

data from the National Youth Survey (described later in this chapter), Lauritsen and her associates found that delinquency was the strongest predictor of being the victim of assault, robbery, larceny, and vandalism. The effect of a youth's involvement in a delinquent lifestyle even accounted for significant effects of other important correlates of delinquency, such as gender.[27]

The overlap between delinquency and victimization (and by extension, the overlap between official and victimization measures of delinquency) is not limited to an American context. For instance, Robert Svennson and Lieven Pauwels compared the risky lifestyles of nearly 3500 adolescents selected from Antwerp, Belgium, and Halmstad, Sweden. They found that both delinquent propensity and involvement in a risky lifestyle characterized by substance use, having many delinquent peers, and socializing late at night predicted delinquent interactions. Youths with the greatest delinquent propensity were particularly likely to get into trouble when they engaged in a risky lifestyle.[28]

The same overlap is also found with repeat offending and repeat victimization. Based on data from a longitudinal study of young people in Brisbane, Australia, Abigail Fagan and Paul Mazerolle found that adolescents who were repeat victims of delinquency also engaged in repeated, serious forms of delinquency. In fact, more than half of all youths who had been victimized during two separate periods of data collection also were serious delinquents at both phases.[29] To reiterate a point made earlier, the importance of the behavioral overlap between offending and victimization is that it reinforces the notion that official and victimization data are measuring the same phenomenon.

Self-Report Studies

A third source of information on the nature and extent of delinquency comes from **self-report studies**, which ask juveniles directly about their law-violating behavior. The advantage of self-report studies is that the information criminologists receive from juveniles regarding their involvement in crime has not been filtered through the police or through any other criminal or juvenile justice officials; rather, it consists of raw data.

This strength, however, is also the principal weakness of self-reports. The reports of crimes that adolescents say they have committed may or may not be accurate for some of the same reasons that victimization surveys are flawed—for example, memory errors, telescoping, and lying.

Historical Background

In 1946, Austin Porterfield published the first self-report study of delinquent behavior. He compared the self-reported delinquency of 337 college students with that of 2049 youths who had appeared before the juvenile court. Porterfield found that more than 90 percent of the college students surveyed admitted to at least one felony.[30] The next year James Wallerstein and J. C. Wyle conducted a survey of self-reported delinquent behavior using a sample of 1698 adult men and women, focusing on behavior the survey respondents had committed when they were juveniles. They discovered that 99 percent of the sample admitted to committing at least one offense they could have been arrested for had they been caught.[31] In 1954, James Short reported findings from the first self-report study to include institutionalized juvenile delinquents.[32] In 1958, Short and F. Ivan Nye published a study of (1) juveniles in three Washington communities, (2) students in three Midwestern towns, and (3) a sample of delinquents in training schools. They found that delinquency was widespread across these social groups.[33]

A WINDOW ON DELINQUENCY

Self-Report Delinquency Survey

A self-report survey asks juveniles directly about their participation in delinquent and criminal behavior during a specific time period. In the example below, respondents are asked to indicate in the past 12 months how many times they have committed each offense in the following list by checking the best answer.

Offense	*Never*	*1*	*2–5*	*6–9*	*10 or More*
1. Petty theft	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Forgery	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. Used cocaine	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. Used marijuana	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. Gambling	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. Weapon violation	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. Burglary	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. Fighting	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. Used fake ID	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. Vandalism	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
11. Truancy	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
12. Runaway	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
13. Curfew	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
14. Liquor violation	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
15. Drunk driving	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

These findings inspired more systematic research. In 1963, Maynard Erickson and LaMar Empey interviewed boys between the ages of 15 to 17 and included four subsamples: (1) 50 boys who had not appeared in court, (2) 30 boys who had one court appearance, (3) 50 boys who were on probation, and (4) 50 boys who were incarcerated. They found that there was a tremendous amount of hidden or undetected delinquency, and those who had been officially labeled "delinquent" admitted to committing many more offenses than those who had not been so labeled (see Chapter 7).[34]

Some years later, Jay Williams and Martin Gold conducted the first nationwide self-report study of delinquency in 1967. Using interviews and official records of 847 thirteen- to sixteen-year-old boys and girls, they discovered that 88 percent of the teenagers admitted to committing at least one chargeable offense in the past three years.[35]

The most comprehensive and systematic self-report study conducted to date in the United States is the **National Youth Survey (NYS)**, which was begun in 1976 by Delbert Elliott. The NYS is a nationwide survey of more than 1700 youths who were between the ages of 11 and 17 at the time of their first interview. Coming from more than 100 cities and towns, the respondents represented every socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic group. For more than 30 years, this original group of respondents (now 30 to 40 years old) has reported to Elliott how often during the past 12 months (from one

Christmas to the next) they have committed certain criminal acts, ranging from felony assaults to minor thefts.[36]

Strengths and Weaknesses of Self-Report Studies

Criminologists have learned a great deal about delinquency from self-report surveys. It is now widely accepted that more than 90 percent of juveniles have committed an act that, if they had been caught and prosecuted to the full extent of the law, could have had them incarcerated. Self-report studies have also made criminologists more aware of how large the dark figure of crime might actually be: The amount of delinquency hidden from the criminal justice officials is between 4 and 10 times greater than the amount reported in the *UCR*. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, self-report research has produced consistent evidence that is suggestive of a racial and ethnic bias in the processing of juveniles who enter the juvenile justice system.[37]

The criticisms of the self-report method are similar to the ones leveled at survey methodology generally. One complaint focuses on how the data are collected. Another concern is whether it is reasonable to expect that juveniles would admit their illegal acts to strangers. Why should they? Other problems pointed out by critics of the self-report method include the same concerns that are raised regarding victimization surveys. When juveniles are asked about their involvement in delinquency, they may forget, misunderstand, distort, or lie about what happened. Some teenagers may exaggerate their crimes, while others may minimize theirs.

These concerns have caused criminologists to design methods to validate the findings from self-report studies. One approach is to compare each youth's responses with official police records. Studies using this technique have found a high correlation between reported delinquency and official delinquency.[38] Other techniques criminologists have used to validate self-reports include having friends verify the honesty of the juvenile's answers, testing subjects more than once to see if their answers remain the same, and asking subjects to submit to a polygraph test.[39]

Findings from studies implementing one or more of these validity checks have provided general support for the self-report method as a means to accurately characterize juvenile delinquency. In a comprehensive review of the reliability and validity of self-reports, Michael Hindelang and his colleagues concluded:

> The difficulties in self-report instruments currently in use would appear to be surmountable; the method of self-reports does not appear from these studies to be fundamentally flawed. Reliability measures are impressive and the majority of studies produce validity coefficients in the moderate to strong range.[40]

Despite the strong support for the self-report method, it has one glaring weakness—namely, the worst delinquents rarely participate in these surveys. For instance, Stephen Cernkovich and his colleagues suggest that self-report studies might exclude the most serious chronic offenders and, therefore, provide a gauge of delinquency among only the less serious, occasional offenders. They reached this conclusion after comparing the self-reported behavior of incarcerated and non-incarcerated youths. The researchers detected significant differences in the offending patterns of the two groups, leading them to make the following statement: "Institutionalized youth are not only more delinquent than the 'average youth' in the general population, but also considerably more delinquent than the most delinquent youth identified in the typical self-report."[41]

The potential omission of the most serious and chronic delinquents is a critical issue for two reasons. First, surveys that lack the most active delinquent offenders, by definition, do not produce valid estimates of delinquency. Second, the failure to include

the worst delinquents results in a mischaracterization of delinquency trends because the behavior of chronic delinquents is significantly different from that of "normal" delinquents. The importance of chronic delinquents is discussed later in this chapter.

Despite its shortcomings, the self-report method provides "expert" perspective because no one is more familiar with the ways that delinquency occurs than delinquents themselves. For instance, Scott Decker has examined how tapping into the antisocial expertise of criminal offenders can yield payoffs as to how the criminal justice system combats crime. Decker's research has produced a wealth of information about crimes, motives, and techniques among active criminals. For example, serious delinquents are versatile in that they commit lots of different types of offenses. Drug offenders, in particular, are likely to commit violent, property, and drug crimes. Serious offenders also commit delinquency in "peak and valley" patterns and are often unpredictable. Partying, status maintenance, group dynamics, self-protection, and retaliation are the primary motives for committing crimes; according to Decker, few delinquents commit crimes to meet rational economic needs such as the need to pay the rent or buy groceries.

By talking directly to delinquents and criminals, researchers are able to more accurately measure delinquency, in addition to learning about the criminal lifestyle directly from the source.

A delinquent's lifestyle plays an important role in offending. The rate of victimization is extremely high among offenders, and incidents of victimization often motivate further offending. In a certain sense, crimes can be understood as a series of advances and retaliations between criminals and victims. Although delinquents respond to specific criminal justice policies such as concentrated police stings, they are largely unfazed by the deterrent effects of the criminal justice system.[42] In sum, the self-report method provides a complementary perspective to official and victim accounts of crime to arrive at the most valid and reliable way to measure delinquency.

Delinquency Trends

More than 305 million people live in the United States and 26 percent (78 million) are **juveniles**, or persons younger than age 18.[43] In this country, a violent crime is committed every 22.4 seconds, a forcible rape every 5.8 minutes, and a murder roughly every 31 minutes. Who is primarily responsible for this crime? Are the offenders more likely to be adults or juveniles? Are offenders more often males or females? Wealthy? Poor? African American? White? Hispanic? When the offender is a child, adults ask a lot of questions. Are more children committing crime today than 10 years ago? Is the criminal behavior of girls becoming more like that of boys? Do African Americans commit more crimes than whites? Are age and delinquency related? How does social class influence involvement in delinquency? These and other important questions are answered in this section.

In 2007, U.S. police made more than 14 million arrests; approximately 15 percent of *all* those persons arrested were juveniles. Among both adults and juveniles who were arrested, most persons were arrested for relatively minor crimes. For instance, juveniles were most commonly arrested for larceny-theft. The most recent data indicate that young people were arrested for 15 percent of *all* crimes and for 16 percent and 26 percent of serious *violent* and *property* offenses, respectively. Juveniles were most likely to be arrested for **status offenses**, or behaviors that are deemed unlawful only

for children (see Chapter 1). The *UCR* reported more than 106,000 juvenile arrests for liquor law violations, nearly 110,000 arrests for curfew violations, and nearly 83,000 arrests for running away. (Arrests for truancy, incorrigibility, and other status offenses are not reported in the *UCR*.) The juvenile proportion of arrests reported in the *UCR* for all offenses appears in **Table 2–1**.[44]

TABLE 2–1 Percentage of All Crimes Resulting in a Juvenile Arrest

Offense Charged	*Juvenile Arrests (%)*
Murder and non-negligent manslaughter	10.0
Forcible rape	15.1
Robbery	27.2
Aggravated assault	13.3
Burglary	26.9
Larceny-theft	25.6
Motor vehicle theft	25.0
Arson	47.4
Violent crime	**16.3**
Property crime	**26.0**
Other assaults	18.4
Forgery and counterfeiting	3.0
Fraud	3.1
Embezzlement	7.6
Stolen property	18.3
Vandalism	38.3
Weapon violation	23.2
Prostitution	2.0
Other sex offenses	18.4
Drug abuse violations	10.6
Gambling	17.3
Offenses against family	4.7
Driving under the influence	1.3
Liquor laws	22.3
Drunkenness	2.9
Disorderly conduct	28.4
Vagrancy	11.4
All other offenses (except traffic)	9.6
Suspicion	19.1
Curfew and loitering violations	100.0
Runaways	100.0
Total	**15.4**

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2007* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2008).

Is Delinquency Decreasing or Increasing?

The rise and fall of the crack cocaine epidemic played a significant part in the massive increase in violent delinquency, the increased use of prisons, and reduced violent delinquency over the past 15 years.

Less delinquency is committed today than in earlier years. As shown in **Figure 2–1**, current violent victimizations by juvenile offenders are approximately 40 to 60 percent *below* the average over the past quarter century. From the peak of violent victimizations with juvenile offenders in 1993, the current levels are down approximately 120 percent. Juvenile violent Crime Index arrests tell a similar story. Current data indicate that adolescents are arrested for murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault at a rate nearly 20 percent *below* the historical average. From the peak juvenile violent Crime Index arrest rate in 1993–1994, the current levels are down nearly 80 percent.[45] At midyear 2008, violent crime was down 3.5 percent.[46]

According to the NCVS, from 1993 to 2005 the violent crime rate fell 58 percent, from 50 to 21 victimizations per 1000 persons age 12 or older. Property crime declined 52 percent over the same period, from 319 to 154 crimes per 1000 households. The greatest recent declines in victimization occurred among persons ages 16–19, whose victimization rates dropped 19 percent. Overall, in the early twenty-first century, crime and victimization rates were at their lowest point in several decades.[47] Although there are slight fluctuations on a year-to-year basis, juvenile delinquency and victimization totals today pale with the corresponding data for the last 30 years of the twentieth century.

The explanations most often given for the decline in the crime rate are the legalization of abortion (see the "Delinquency Controversy" feature), the economy, increased use of prisons, better policing, an aging population, and a decline in youth involvement in the crack market and gang involvement in crack distribution.[48] These different reasons are briefly explained next:

- *The Economy.* Reductions in delinquency have been attributed to the economy regardless of whether it is in recession or expansion. In "bad times," the economy may lead to fewer crimes because unemployed parents are more likely to be

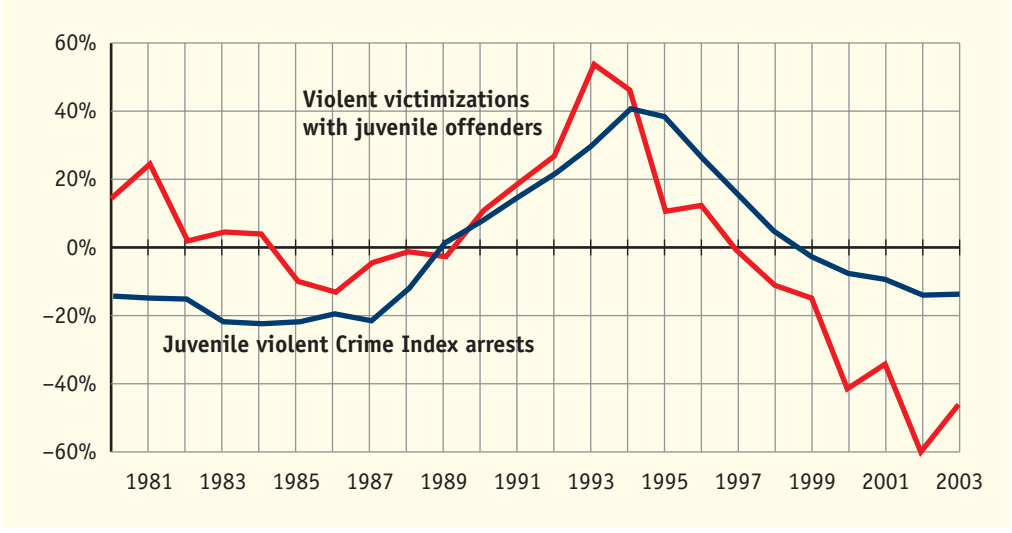


FIGURE 2–1 Juvenile Violent Crime, 1981–2003

Source: Howard Snyder and Melissa Sickmund, *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report* (Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2006).

Telephones that can film video and take photographs can capture delinquent acts that previously were never discovered, such as these girls fighting. Is this type of technology a way for criminologists and law enforcement to more accurately measure delinquency? (Note: The photograph is blurred because of the poor video resolution.)

home supervising their children (see Chapter 9). In "good times," the economy provides young people with more legitimate opportunities to earn money, making it less likely that they will see crime as a necessary or desirable option.[49]

- *Prisons.* Incarcerating more offenders for a longer period of time and with greater certainty reduces the crime rate. In fact, criminologist James Q. Wilson suggests that putting offenders in prison is the single most important thing society can do to decrease crime. Since 1985, the U.S. incarceration rate has increased fivefold. During this era, the amount of time served behind bars has increased dramatically as most states have adopted the 85 percent federal truth-in-sentencing standard. These policies and practices have resulted in more active and chronic offenders being sentenced to prison and staying there for longer periods of time. Criminologists have feverishly studied the effects of prison expansion on crime, and the bottom line is that the prison boom explains between 13 and 54 percent of the recent crime decline.[50]
- *Policing.* Better policing is sometimes cited as a reason for the drop in crime. One effective strategy is based on the "broken windows" hypothesis, which argues that just as a broken window left unattended is a sign that nobody cares and will lead to more broken windows, so ignoring small crimes such as vandalism and public urination will lead to more serious crimes being committed if the lesser offenses go unpunished.[51]
- *Age.* Crime rates often change in response to changes in the age distribution of the population. The people who are most likely to commit crimes are young males, ages 15 to 24. When a smaller percentage of the population is in the "crime-prone years," the overall crime rate naturally decreases.[52]
- *Crack.* The United States experienced a crack cocaine epidemic in the 1980s and early 1990s. About the same time, violent juvenile crime skyrocketed. The increase in violent delinquency was blamed on factors related to crack, such as gang turf wars and street-corner crack markets. For many reasons, including the "younger brother syndrome," whereby today's teen witnessed the ravaging effects of crack addiction on an older sibling, crack cocaine has become less popular.[53]
- *Abortion.* A recent and controversial argument is that the legalization of abortion in 1973 reduced the number of children who would have been at greater risk for delinquency. Because millions of unwanted children never reached their crime-prone years, a crime decline would be expected in the early to middle 1990s—precisely when it did occur.

While there is no single reason why juvenile delinquency is less common today than it was in the recent past, the explanations discussed above are likely some of the most important factors.

Is Sex Related to Delinquency?

Delinquency is primarily a male phenomenon. Boys are arrested more often than girls for *all* crimes, with the exception of prostitution and running away. Nine out of every 10 persons arrested for murder, forcible rape, robbery, carrying and possessing weapons, sex offenses (except prostitution and forcible rape), and gambling are boys. Gender is so strongly related to delinquency that sociologist Anthony Harris concluded:

DELINQUENCY CONTROVERSY

The Criminal Unborn

Since 1993, the percentage of juveniles arrested for serious violent and property offenses in the United States has declined by almost 30 percent. Many explanations for the decline have been offered, including the heath of the U.S. economy, population changes, aggressive police practices, and increased incarceration of chronic offenders. However, no explanation is more controversial than that offered by John Donohue and Steven Levitt. They attribute the decrease in crime to the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalized abortion.

Donohue and Levitt offer evidence that legalized abortion has contributed significantly to recent reductions in crime rates. The relationship between legalized abortion and crime is straightforward: A steep rise in abortions after 1973 has meant that many persons who would be prone to criminal activity in the 1990s were never born. Two reasons for this relationship have been cited:

- Abortion shrinks the number of people who reach the age where they are most prone to commit crimes.
- Abortion is not random. Teenagers, unmarried women, the poor, and African Americans are proportionally more likely than others to have abortions; they are also proportionally more likely to have children who are "at risk" for committing crimes later in life.

Similarly, women with unwanted pregnancies are less likely to be good parents and may harm their fetuses during pregnancy by drinking alcohol and taking legal and illegal drugs that increase the likelihood of future criminality.

Donohue and Levitt present three strands of evidence in support of their claim:

1. The precipitous drop in crime across the United States has coincided with the period in which the generation affected by *Roe v. Wade* would have reached the peak of its criminal activity.
2. The five states that legalized abortion in 1970, three years before *Roe v. Wade*, were the first to experience the drop in crime.
3. States with high abortion rates from 1973 to 1976 have seen the largest decrease in crime since 1985, even after controlling for incarceration rates, racial composition, and income.

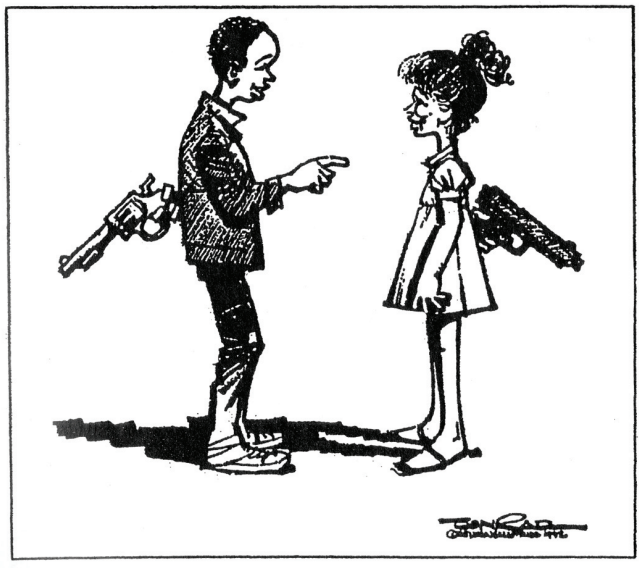
These authors conclude that current crime rates in the United States would be 10 to 20 percent higher if abortion had not been legalized. They estimate that legalized abortion may account for as much as 50 percent of the recent drop in crime. Furthermore, in terms of costs of crime, Donohue and Levitt believe that legalized abortion has saved Americans more than $30 billion annually.

Although the abortion–crime reduction hypothesis has generated much debate, criminologists have only recently attempted to replicate Donohue and Levitt's research. Carter Hay and Michelle Evans, for instance, used data from a national panel study of American children to explore the abortion hypothesis. They found that being born of an unwanted pregnancy *did* increase the risk for status offending, general delinquency, substance abuse, and serious delinquency. However, these effects occurred only for very young mothers. Even though their findings lend empirical support to Donohue and Levitt's thesis, Hay and Evans called for more research in this area.

In 2008, Mitchell Chamlin and his associates examined data from the National Center for Health Statistics to assess the effect of legalized abortion on birth rates among teenage or unmarried women—those who presumably would produce children at risk for delinquency. They found *no* support for the abortion thesis.

Today, the controversy surrounding the effect of abortion on crime rates rages on, and the issue is far from settled.

Sources: Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner, *Freakonomics*, revised edition (New York: Harper, 2006); John Donohue and Steven Levitt, "The Impact of Legalized Abortion on Crime," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 116:379–420 (2001); Carter Hay and Michelle Evans, "Has *Roe v. Wade* Reduced U.S. Crime Rates? Examining the Link Between Mother's Pregnancy Intentions and Children's Later Involvement in Law-Violating Behavior," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 43:36–66 (2006); John Donohue and Steven Levitt, "Further Evidence That Legalized Abortion Lowered Crime: A Reply to Joyce," *Journal of Human Resources* 39:29–49 (2004); Steven Levitt, "Understanding Why Crime Fell in the 1990s: Four Factors that Explain the Decline and Six That Do Not," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18:163–190 (2004); Mitchell Chamlin, Andrew Myer, Beth Sanders, and John Cochran, "Abortion as Crime Control: A Cautionary Tale," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 19:135–152 (2008).



I'll show you mine, if you'll show me yours.

> That the sex variable in some form has not provided the starting point of all theories of criminal deviance has been the major failure of deviance theorizing in the century. It appears to provide the single most powerful predictor of officially and unofficially known criminal deviance in this society and almost certainly in all others.[54]

However, the arrest gap between the sexes is closing. On the surface, girls seem to be catching up. Since 1960, the difference in the sex-arrest ratios for serious violent and property offenses has steadily declined. In 1960, the sex-arrest ratio for violent offenses was 14 to 1; that is, 14 boys were arrested for each female arrested. By 1970, the ratio had declined to 10 to 1, and by 1980 it had dropped to 9 to 1. In the past decade, from 1996 to 2005, the sex-arrest ratio for serious violent offenses has dropped to 4 to 1, one-third of what it was in 1960.

The trends shown in **Table 2–2** indicate mostly dramatic reductions in juvenile arrests among males but tell a different story about crime trends for females. From 1998 to 2007, female juvenile arrests increased for other assaults, weapons violations, prostitution, other sex offenses, drug abuse violations, driving under the influence, and disorderly conduct.

Self-report studies confirm the *UCR* arrest data: Boys admit to committing more delinquency, and more boys commit delinquency than do girls. Studies also report a higher sex-arrest ratio (in favor of boys) for serious rather than less-serious crimes.[55] Data from the NYS also reveal that the gap in juvenile male–female behavior is closing. According to James Short:

> Research demonstrates that the decline in gender ratios for most crimes has been especially pronounced for persons under age 18. That is, arrests of young females—compared to young males—have experienced greater increases than is the case for gender comparisons of older persons, and they have been greater for property crimes than for violent crimes.[56]

A similar pattern of convergence has been reported by Roy Austin, who compared the sex-arrest ratios based on juvenile arrest data between 1963 and 1986. Austin found that "there was convergence of male and female arrest rates over these 22 years for total [Crime] Index offenses, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, auto theft, and arson."[57] Our own inspection of the *UCR* data and the NCVS results reveals that the trend identified by Austin has continued. Whether it will persist throughout the twenty-first century likely depends on whether sex roles become more or less differentiated over time. If they become less differentiated, the behavior of males and females—and consequently their incidence of arrest—should become more similar. Conversely, if sex roles become more differentiated, the present trend may reverse itself.

Data on the percent change in arrests over the past decade generally corroborate this conclusion. Between 1998 and 2007, male arrests for serious *violent* crimes decreased by 14 percent, while female arrests declined only by 12.7 percent. In the same period, 1998 to 2007, male arrests for serious *property* crimes declined by 39 percent and female arrests dropped by 18 percent. Yet, even though there is consistent support for the idea that the behavior of boys and girls is becoming more similar, we must caution against misunderstanding gender differences in delinquency. Even though girls are "catching up" to boys in terms of delinquent involvement, arrest rates for males are *still several hundred percent higher* than for girls. Gender differences are even more pronounced for the most violent crimes. Joycelyn Pollock and Sareta Davis suggest that the idea that

TABLE 2–2 Ten-Year Arrest Trend for Juveniles, by Sex, 1998–2007

Offense Charged	*Females*	*Males*
Murder and non-negligent manslaughter	–40.0	–21.8
Forcible rape	–52.5	–31.2
Robbery	+16.6	+5.0
Aggravated assault	–17.3	–22.5
Burglary	–24.2	–31.1
Larceny-theft	–15.2	–41.0
Motor vehicle theft	–50.2	–48.6
Arson	–11.1	–19.7
Violent crime	**–12.7**	**–14.3**
Property crime	**–17.7**	**–38.9**
Other assaults	+10.1	–4.4
Forgery and counterfeiting	–63.0	–58.4
Fraud	–22.2	–28.2
Embezzlement	+2.5	+7.5
Stolen property	–6.2	–37.5
Vandalism	–3.9	–15.3
Weapon violation	–0.8	–8.5
Prostitution	+56.1	–51.3
Other sex offenses	–.08	–16.0
Drug abuse violations	+5.9	–7.9
Gambling	–18.8	–27.6
Offenses against family	–42.8	–48.3
Driving under the influence	+13.8	–23.7
Liquor laws	–2.0	–28.3
Drunkenness	–3.0	–33.4
Disorderly conduct	+20.1	–4.6
Vagrancy	+167.3	+27.4
All other offenses (except traffic)	–19.3	–23.1
Suspicion	–69.6	–72.4
Curfew and loitering violations	–30.5	–30.1
Runaways	–38.8	–33.1
Total	**–13.5**	**–23.0**

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2007* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2008).

females are becoming increasingly more violent than (or as violent as) males is a myth, and note that statistical increases for girls are relatively small when considering the total perspective of gender differences in crime.[58] There is also recent evidence that girls' involvement in violent delinquency is often dependent on exposure to violent boys and peer networks where girls have a larger proportion of friends who are boys.[59]

For a variety of reasons, including gender socialization, differential treatment by the juvenile justice system, and biological differences between males and females, girls account for significantly less delinquency than boys. But in recent years, female delinquency rates have been increasing.

Still another explanation for a narrowing of the gender gap of delinquency relates to how closely the police are monitoring crime among females. If the police are either more stringently monitoring female crime or if women have become more antisocial, then there should be differences between official and self-report measures of female crime. Recently Jennifer Schwartz and Bryan Rookey evaluated 25 years of crime data, taking a particular interest in drunk-driving behavior among men and women. They found that women of all ages were making arrest gains on men for the crime of drunk driving or driving under the influence (DUI). However, self-reported and supplementary traffic data indicated little to no systematic change in the drunk-driving behavior of women. This finding suggests that a narrowing gender gap for DUI is not reflective of increased female delinquency, but rather illustrative of the social control of drunk driving among women.[60]

Is Race Related to Delinquency?

The study of race and delinquency has traditionally reflected larger social concerns. Throughout history, one or more oppressed groups of people have been assigned the brunt of the responsibility for crime. Today, much of the delinquency problem is blamed on young African American males. A recent study attributes this perception to the news media's routine portrayal of young African American males as disproportionate perpetrators of crime. This negative characterization has made many whites fearful of being victimized by African American juveniles. Twice as many whites than African Americans believe they are more likely to be victimized by an African American than by a white, even though whites are three times more likely to be victimized by a white than by an African American.[61]

These stereotypes are not limited to whites, however. A major study conducted by Robert Sampson and Stephen Raudenbush evaluated racial and ethnic differences in

opinions about race, disorder, and crime. These researchers found that whites, African Americans, and Hispanic Americans perceived that as the populations of neighborhoods changed to include a larger proportion of African Americans, they were also increasingly characterized by disorder and crime net the effects of the respondent's individual characteristics and actual neighborhood conditions. In other words, *all people*—at least among the three largest racial and ethnic groups in the United States—perceive disorder, vice, and crime as being greater threats when they see that the composition of a neighborhood mostly consists of African Americans.[62]

Cultural values that are deeply rooted in more than 250 years of history contribute to many of our beliefs. From the early colonial period to the mid-twentieth century in the United States, whites have oppressed African Americans. Along with oppression came the presumption by whites that African Americans are lazy, aggressive, inferior, subordinate, and troublemakers.[63] The transmission of such a racist ideology, which is passed from generation to generation, has contributed to myriad negative effects on African American children. For instance, the percentage of African American children living in poverty is three times greater than the corresponding percentage of white children. The effects of living in poverty go far beyond malnourishment and the ruinous consequences of poor nutrition; they also mean that many of these children are more likely to endure family stress and depression, have access to fewer resources for learning, and experience severe housing problems.[64]

Nearly 16 percent of all children in the United States are African American. There are *five* times more white children than there are African Americans in this country.[65] An inspection of the *UCR* reveals that a disproportionate number of African American juveniles are arrested for all serious violent and property offenses and for most of the less serious crimes. African American children are twice as likely as white children to be arrested overall; when it comes to murder and robbery, they are more than 7 and 11 times more likely to be arrested, respectively (see **Table 2–3**).

This leads to another important conclusion about the relationship between race and delinquency: African American youths *are* more delinquent than youths from other social groups. This effect is strongest for the most serious forms of delinquency, including armed robbery and murder. In a study that demonstrated this relationship, James Alan Fox and Morris Zawitz examined race differences in homicide offending and victimization among various age groups from 1976 to 2004. As shown in **Figure 2–2**, African American males between the ages of 14 and 24 accounted for approximately 1 percent of the U.S. population during that period, but represented between 10 and 18 percent of the murder victims. In terms of offending, African American males ages 14–24 constituted between 15 and 35 percent of the homicide offender population! By contrast, white males between ages 14–24 accounted for between 5 and 10 percent of the population but were over-represented as both murderers and murder victims.[66]

Self-report data offer a "mixed bag" of findings regarding the relationship between race and delinquency. Some studies have reported that African American juveniles and white juveniles are equally involved in delinquency.[67] By contrast, in their nationwide survey of adolescent drug use, Lloyd Johnston and his colleagues found that African American juveniles have substantially lower rates of illicit drug use than white adolescents.[68] Yet, according to the *UCR* data shown in Table 2–3, African Americans are twice as likely as whites to be arrested for drug abuse violations.

Other self-report studies tell a different story, however. Jay Williams and Martin Gold found that while African Americans and whites report committing delinquency at roughly the same rate, African Americans report greater involvement in more serious forms of delinquency.[69] Similarly, using NYS data, Delbert Elliott and Suzanne Ageton discovered significant race differences in terms of total delinquency and predatory

TABLE 2–3 Race-Arrest Ratio for African American and White Juveniles

Offense Charged	*African American–White Arrest Ratio*
Murder and non-negligent manslaughter	7:1
Forcible rape	3:1
Robbery	11:1
Aggravated assault	4:1
Burglary	3:1
Larceny-theft	2:1
Motor vehicle theft	4:1
Arson	1:1
Violent crime	**6:1**
Property crime	**2:1**
Other assaults	3:1
Forgery and counterfeiting	2:1
Fraud	3:1
Embezzlement	3:1
Stolen property	4:1
Vandalism	1:1
Weapon violation	3:1
Prostitution	7:1
Other sex offenses	2:1
Drug abuse violations	2:1
Gambling	117:1
Offenses against family	2:1
Driving under the influence	1:5
Liquor laws	1:4
Drunkenness	1:2
Disorderly conduct	4:1
Vagrancy	3:1
All other offenses (except traffic)	2:1
Suspicion	3:1
Curfew and loitering violations	2:1
Runaways	2:1
Total	**2.4:1**

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2007* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2008).

crimes against persons.[70] They concluded that African Americans are arrested more often because they are the more frequent and more serious offenders.

Related studies further suggest that African American males are less likely to report involvement in the serious crimes for which they have been arrested.[71] Research has questioned the truthfulness of the offending rates they report. Terence Thornberry and

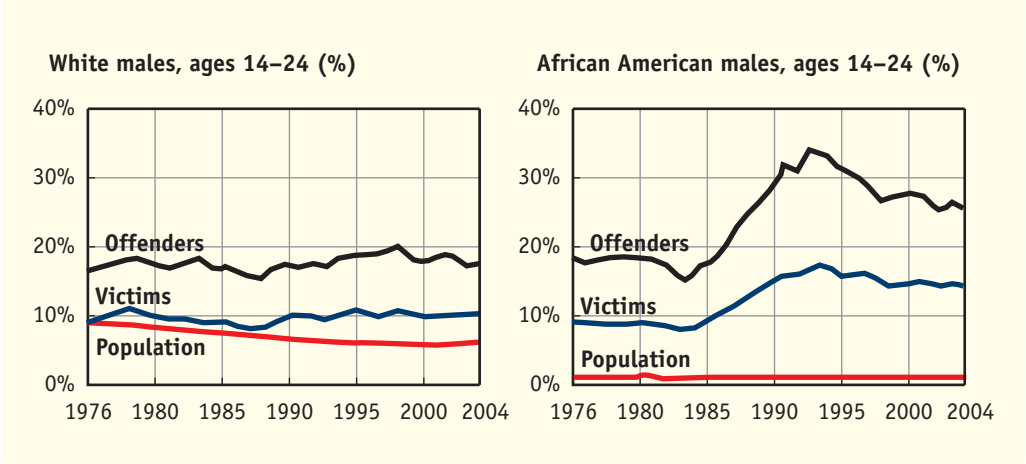


FIGURE 2–2 Young Males As a Proportion of the Population, Homicide Victims, and Homicide Offenders, 1976–2004

Source: James Alan Fox and Morris Zawitz, *Homicide Trends in the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2006).

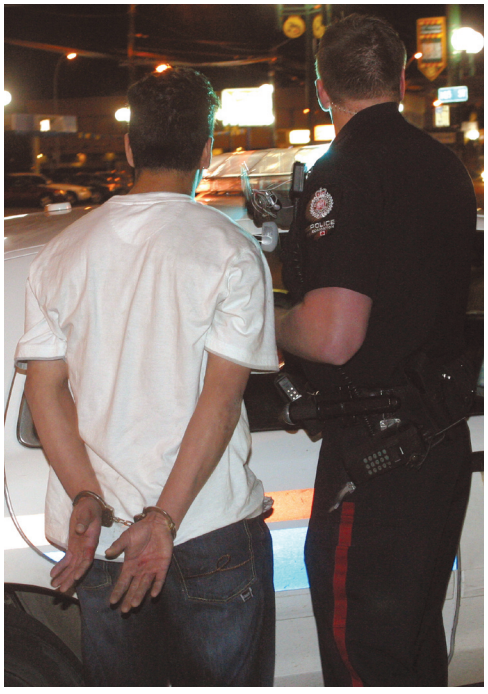
Marvin Krohn discovered that African American males substantially underreport their involvement in delinquency, a finding consistent with the work of Barbara Mensch and Denise Kandel, who detected differences among races in terms of their level of their truthfulness when answering survey questionnaires.[72] If these researchers are correct, African Americans are likely to appear *less* delinquent than they actually are.

Findings from the NCVS complement both *UCR* data and self-report survey results. Recent analyses of NCVS data for 1980 through 1998 have compared the rates of offending for African American and white juveniles as reported by crime victims. One study focused on the serious violent crimes of aggravated assault, robbery, and rape—all crimes in which victims have face-to-face contact with offenders. Data from victims indicate that the serious violent offending rate for African American juveniles is higher than the corresponding rate for white juveniles.[73] From 1980 to 1998, the offending rate for African American juveniles was, on average, more than four times the offending rate for white juveniles. In comparison, the African American-to-white ratio of arrest rates reported in the *UCR* for these same offenses shows greater disparity than was found in victim surveys. The average arrest rate for 1980–1998 was almost six times higher for African American juveniles than for white juveniles. For both offending rates and arrest rates, though, the ratios of African American to white rates have declined slightly in recent years. From 1992 to 1998, the African American-to-white rates were very similar for arrests and offending. On average, African American juveniles had arrest and offending rates that were five times greater than the corresponding rates for white juveniles.

What do these data suggest about race and delinquency? Why are African American juveniles more involved in crime than whites as both offenders and victims? Three interrelated theoretical explanations have been advanced to explain the disproportionate involvement in delinquency among African Americans specifically, and among racial minorities generally: economic deprivation, family breakdown, and cultural factors.

Economic Deprivation

In a series of landmark books, sociologist William Julius Wilson argued that African Americans—more than whites or any other minority group—face an acute shortage of economic opportunities as the result of the inequitable distribution of services and wealth. During the latter part of the twentieth century, as the U.S. economy shifted from



Police departments have initiated street sweeps of suspected gang members in an effort to combat delinquency. Are such programs effective in controlling gang delinquency?

manufacturing to service-oriented jobs, those workers without the necessary credentials or skills were left behind. Over time, middle-class citizens left urban centers and migrated to the suburbs. At first, whites moved from the cities because of the new job opportunities found there and also because of their prejudice against African Americans. Soon, however, middle-class minorities relocated to the suburbs for much the same reasons.[74]

The economic problems and residential segregation created **concentrated disadvantage**—that is, small areas characterized by extreme poverty and high-crime rates in largely African American neighborhoods in cities. This situation has caused frustration, stress, and a sense of fatalism among many African Americans in their pursuit of cultural goals through legitimate means, which contributes to higher delinquency rates among African Americans.[75] The social problems caused by concentrated disadvantage affect all African Americans youths residing in troubled neighborhoods. For instance, Jennifer Cobbina, Jody Miller, and Rod Brunson found high levels of fear of crime and perceptions of danger among adolescents living in high-risk areas of Saint Louis, Missouri. The various risks associated with exposure to concentrated disadvantage also contribute to delinquency, which may be perceived as a means of protecting oneself against the hostile environment.[76]

Family Breakdown

Economic deprivation creates a host of strains that contribute to family breakdown in the African American community, resulting in approximately 70 percent of African American children being born to unmarried parents, many of whom are still teenagers. Other characteristics of family breakdown include the availability of few positive male role models, absentee fathers, overworked single mothers, children who must largely raise themselves, and children who associate with friends who often share their family background.[77] Disruptions in family structure negatively affect school performance, which in turn contributes to the seemingly endless cycle of poverty.[78] As a result, children raised in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage are poorly equipped to succeed in American society.[79]

Karen Parker and Tracy Johns have found that family disruption is a significant predictor of homicide, particularly among racial minorities living in large American cities.[80] Conversely, greater stability in the family can serve as a buffer against delinquency. For example, Parker and Amy Reckdenwald found that the presence of a traditional male role model—or father figure—reduced rates of youth violence among African Americans.[81]

Family breakdown is often viewed as a "big city" problem, but researchers have also shown that family variables are related in important ways to delinquency everywhere. For example, Alexander Vazsonyi and his colleagues studied nearly 1000 African American adolescents living in either rural or urban settings in an attempt to evaluate the ways that parenting and neighborhood factors influence delinquency. They found that parenting measures relating to the ways that parents monitored, supported, and communicated with their children were stronger predictors of delinquency and maladaptive behaviors than neighborhood characteristics.[82]

Cultural Factors

The *culture of poverty* also contributes to serious and violent forms of delinquency. For example, John MacDonald and Angela Gover found that economic and cultural problems were particularly closely related to homicide committed by adolescents and young adults.[83] In fact, criminologists have provided compelling evidence to support the

idea that concentrated disadvantage—that is, life in the most economically impoverished, racially segregated neighborhoods—is related to delinquency. Far from being a pervasive problem, serious delinquency and violence among African Americans are overwhelmingly limited to the "worst" neighborhoods in the United States, the very places that define concentrated disadvantage.[84]

Another explanation for why African Americans are proportionately more likely to commit crime suggests that their life-experiences have contributed to the development of a hostile view of larger society and its values. According to this perspective, African Americans have constructed a culture with distinctive modes of dress, speech, and conduct that are at odds with the cultural trappings of the larger society. Crime, then, is the result of African Americans not respecting the values of the larger society and being more willing to flaunt social norms.

Some criminologists suggest that the culture of poverty may place tremendous importance on personal appearance and self-respect because economic deprivation is so pronounced. Consequently, youths interpret signs of disrespect or other seemingly trivial affronts as serious threats. Elijah Anderson calls this concept the "code of the street," in which violence—even murder—is viewed as a normative response to signs of disrespect.[85] Arguments, fights, and even homicides stemming from trivial confrontations, such as bumping into another person or staring at another person in a threatening manner, are likely to lead many youths to subscribe to a subcultural code of the streets.[86] Research by Eric Stewart, Christopher Schreck, and their colleagues suggests that youths who adopt the code of the street set themselves up for greater involvement in both violent delinquency and victimization as the targets of violence.[87]

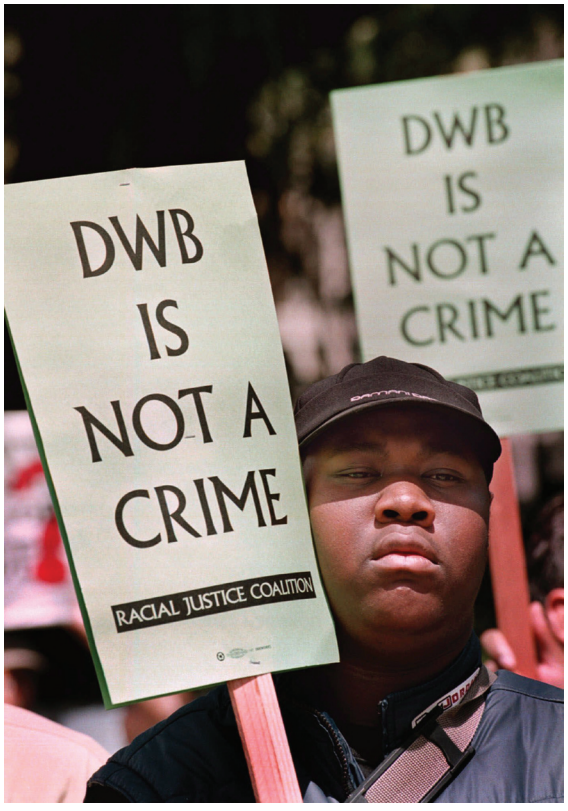
Elijah Anderson's "Code of the Street" describes the delinquent subculture where violence—even murder—is viewed as a normative response to signs of disrespect.

To further illuminate this relationship, Sally Black and Alica Hausman interviewed young African American males who were involved in a firearms reduction program to explore their attitudes about the use of guns. Youths reported that guns were carried for a variety of reasons, including to protect themselves during drug dealing, to protect themselves about bullying from criminals in their neighborhood, and to guard against disrespect. Several youths reported that carrying, displaying, and even using firearms was fun and exciting and evidence that they were active players in the street crime scene.[88]

In *Crime and Human Nature*, James Q. Wilson and Richard Herrnstein reject these explanations and instead suggest that differences in the arrest rates between the races can be traced to differences in intelligence.[89] Their argument is based on evidence that shows the IQ scores of African American are, on the average, 12 to 15 points lower than the IQ scores of whites. Wilson and Herrnstein also reject the notion that cultural bias explains the differences in IQ scores: "If lower measured intelligence is associated with crime independently of socio-economic status, and if Blacks, on the average, have much lower scores, then these facts may help explain some of the Black–White differences in crime rates."[90] (See the discussion of intelligence in Chapter 3.)

Many criminologists disagree with Wilson and Herrnstein.[91] As an alternative theory, they propose that the race-arrest differences are a function of differential law enforcement—namely, that more police patrolling African American neighborhoods and more calls for service from residents of African American neighborhoods result in more police–citizen interactions.[92] Critics of Wilson and Herrnstein also contend that police bias results in **racial profiling**, a practice where police use race as an explicit factor in creating "profiles" that then guide their decision making (see Chapter 13).

Approximately half of all African American men say they have been victims of racial profiling. Police justify racial profiling on the basis of arrest statistics that suggest



Evidence suggests that African Americans are more likely than whites to be stopped by police for traffic offenses but no more likely than whites to have committed a crime, for example, possessing contraband.

African Americans are more likely than whites to commit crime. Studies of racial profiling, however, indicate this is not necessarily the case. For example, in Maryland, 73 percent of those drivers stopped and searched on a section of Interstate 95 were African American, yet state police reported that equal percentages of the whites and African Americans who were searched, statewide, had drugs or other contraband. Other research also supports the contention that police use racial profiling on a routine basis. Nationally, citizens report that police make traffic stops of African American male drivers more frequently than traffic stops of drivers from other ethnic groups. African American drivers are more likely to report the police did not have legitimate reasons for stopping them and that police acted improperly during the traffic stop. In addition, African Americans are significantly more likely than whites to be searched after a traffic stop. Many studies of racial profiling have concluded that police actions are discriminatory and reflect the racial prejudice of individual officers or organizational racism found in police departments.[93]

Even when legally relevant variables, such as the seriousness of the current offenses or the youth's delinquent history are taken into account, a young person's race still matters when determining his or her treatment within the juvenile justice system. Specifically, when that person is African American, male, and young, the odds are significantly higher that those statuses will influence his legal treatment.[94] Indeed, the notion that African Americans are more greatly involved in delinquency and, therefore, subject to greater social control can even affect non-African Americans. For example, Kenneth Novak and Mitchell Chamlin reported that in neighborhoods where the racial composition is mostly African American, the police tend to conduct more searches of all citizens. This effect was observed only for white motorists who were driving in mostly African American neighborhoods; the logic was that police perceived that those whites were engaged in delinquency, such as buying drugs, when they were in neighborhoods where they were the minority.[95]

In sum, the relationship between race and delinquency is complex. The existing data tell a mixed story. Based on data produced for the *UCR*, from self-report studies, and from the NCVS, the conclusion that more African American juveniles are involved in delinquency than are whites is warranted. By contrast, studies of racial profiling while not directly studying police–juvenile interactions are strongly suggestive of the possibility that a juvenile's race influences the decision by an officer regarding whether to arrest (see Chapter 13). At the same time, profiling by officers would not account for the race-offense differences found in self-report studies and the NCVS.

Is Social Class Related to Delinquency?

By now you should not be surprised to read that studies reporting on delinquency and social class have produced mixed results. Some studies report a direct relationship between social class and delinquency, whereas others have found no relationship or at best a very weak one.[96]

Research based on official data (e.g., the *UCR*) has typically found that lower-class youths are arrested and incarcerated more often than middle- and upper-class adolescents. A landmark study examining the relationship between delinquency and social class was published in 1942. Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay observed a very strong relationship among delinquency rates, rates of families on relief, and median rental costs in 140 neighborhoods.[97] Follow-up research reported similar findings for a variety of measures of social class.

Of course, relationships at the neighborhood level do not mean those factors are related at the individual level. To assume that they are is to commit the **ecological fallacy**, which could occur for a variety of reasons:

1. Police could be biased, arresting juveniles in lower-class neighborhoods for behavior (e.g., loitering) that they would ignore in other neighborhoods.
2. People could leave their middle- and upper-class neighborhoods and go to lower-class neighborhoods to commit crimes (e.g., illegal drug sales).
3. Only a small number of juveniles might be committing most of the offenses in a lower-class neighborhood.

Are social class and delinquency related? Does growing up poor increase the likelihood a child will commit crime?

For these reasons, in the 1950s criminologists started to use self-report surveys to evaluate the relationship between delinquency and social class. These early studies revealed there was *no* relationship between the two conditions. This conclusion stirred considerable controversy. Some criminologists contended that the self-report method was not a reliable or valid tool. Other criminologists were sufficiently intrigued to conduct their own research, using other samples, to see if they would find the same thing. Often they did: Delinquency was as common among middle- and upper-class juveniles as it was among lower-class teenagers.[98]

The debate surrounding delinquency and social class has not been resolved. Today criminologists have tried to clarify and summarize what is known. Charles Tittle and his colleagues report that the relationship between delinquency and social class depends on *when* and *how* the research was conducted. Not only did the relationship vary from decade to decade, but use of a self-report data collection methodology yielded different results than did collection of official data.[99] Official data in the 1940s showed a strong correlation between delinquency and social class, but the correlation weakened in later decades and fell to practically zero in the 1970s. In self-report studies, the average correlation between social class and delinquency was never high. Before 1950, there were no self-report studies examining this relationship, and afterward the correlation was only very weak.[100]

These findings lend themselves to different interpretations. Perhaps the official data of the 1940s and 1950s are invalid and should be rejected. Or maybe the official data are accurate, and lower-class juveniles during those eras did have a monopoly on delinquency, but middle- and upper-class teenagers have now caught up.

Tittle and his colleagues reject both of these possibilities. They think self-report data are probably correct in showing that the relationship between delinquency and social class has not changed very much over the years and that lower-class adolescents are only slightly more likely than others to commit crime. They also suggest that the official data reflect bias. According to these researchers, police and court officials have frequently discriminated against lower-class juveniles, arresting and referring them to court more often—particularly in the 1940s and 1950s—than was the case for other children. Tittle and colleagues' contention has been supported by research conducted by Robert Sampson, who examined arrest decisions and found that for most offenses committed by teenagers, official police records and court referrals were structured not just by the act, but also by the juvenile's social class.[101] Similarly, John Hagan discovered that police characterize lower-class neighborhoods as having more criminal behavior than other areas.[102] Douglas Smith perhaps captured the dynamic of the ecological fallacy "in action" best when he observed:

> Based on a set of internalized expectations derived from past experience, police divide the population and physical territory they must patrol into readily understandable categories. The result is a process of ecological contamination in which all persons encountered in bad neighborhoods are viewed as possessing the moral liability of the area itself.[103]

The conclusions of Tittle and his colleagues and those researchers whose work supports their claims have been soundly criticized. For example, Michael Hindelang and his associates observed a rather consistent relationship between delinquency and social class for serious crimes.[104] John Braithwaite wonders whether Tittle and his associates really take their conclusion of no relationship between delinquency and social class seriously and has questioned whether they "adopt no [more] extra precautions when moving about the slums of the world's great cities than they do when walking in the middle class areas of such cities."[105] Braithwaite contends that the evidence overwhelmingly supports the notion that delinquency and social class are related.[106] Even though the connection between delinquency and social class is sometimes inconsistent, more research has identified the presence of a significant class difference than would be expected by chance. When you consider that self-report studies exaggerate the proportion of delinquency committed by middle-class juveniles by paying too much attention to minor infractions, the "true" relationship between delinquency and social class begins to emerge. Studies of delinquency and social class based on official records, for example, have consistently found sizable class differences.

One study examining the relationship between delinquency and social class was able to test the conflicting opinions by using such a large sample that it could include serious offenses. Delbert Elliott and Suzanne Ageton compared the self-report data of more than 1700 juveniles from lower-class, working-class, and middle-class backgrounds. They concluded that the self-reported behavior of adolescents was similar, *except for predatory crimes against persons* (robbery and aggravated assault). For these crimes, the differences observed across the social classes were profound. For every such crime reported by middle-class juveniles, three of these crimes were committed by working-class youths and four of the crimes were reported by lower-class juveniles. This finding led Elliott and Ageton to conclude that the behavior of lower-class teenagers is similar to the behavior of adolescents for "run-of-the-mill offenses" but that lower-class juveniles commit many more serious crimes.[107]

In 1982, Gary Kleck reported that lower-class juveniles had a tendency to underreport their involvement in crime in self-report studies. Tittle and his colleagues responded by saying, "Kleck (and others) . . . believe that poor people are not only more criminal than those of other classes but bigger liars as well."[108] As this jousting suggests, the jury is out on the exact nature of the delinquency–social class relationship. Based on their research in 1990, Tittle and Robert Meier observed that criminologists today are no closer to understanding the relationship between delinquency and social class than they were 50 years ago. A decade later, in 2000, Gregory Dunaway and his colleagues reached a similar conclusion, when they reported that the effects of social class on criminality are negligible.[109] Now the delinquency–social class debate has entered the twenty-first century absent any agreement among criminologists.

Is Age Related to Delinquency?

Age and delinquency are related. The association between them was originally observed by the nineteenth-century French criminologist, Adolphe Quetelet, who noted that crime peaks in the late teens through the mid-twenties.[110] Today, the **age–crime curve** is a well-established fact; it states that crime rates increase during preadolescence, peak in late adolescence, and steadily decline thereafter.[111] The high point of the curve is

slightly different for serious violent and property offenses. Arrests for serious violent crimes peak at age 18 and then steadily decline; by comparison, arrests for serious property crimes top out at age 16 and decrease consistently thereafter. Juveniles whose behavior fits this pattern are called **adolescence-limited offenders** because their delinquency is restricted to the teenage years.[112]

The general age–crime curve does not apply to all juveniles. Some children begin and end their involvement in delinquency at earlier and later ages (see Chapter 7). Variation in offending patterns among juveniles has been observed across offense type, by sex, and by race. For instance, (1) violent offending by girls peaks earlier than violent offending by boys and (2) African American children are more likely than whites to continue offending into early adulthood.[113] What is constant across all categories of juveniles is that they commit fewer crimes as they grow older—a process that criminologists call the **aging-out phenomenon**.[114]

Several competing explanations have been put forth regarding why crime diminishes with age:[115]

- Personalities change as juveniles mature. Once-rebellious adolescents often become adults who exercise self-control over their impulses.
- Adolescents become aware of the costs of crime. They start to realize they have too much to lose if they are caught and too little to gain.
- Peer influences over behavior weaken with age. As juveniles grow older, the importance of their peers' opinions of them decreases.
- For males—inasmuch as aggression is linked to levels of testosterone, a male sex hormone—as they grow older, the level of testosterone in their body decreases, as does their aggressiveness.
- Some crimes, such as strong-arm robbery and burglary, decline with age because older people lack the physical strength or agility to commit them.
- The need for money decreases. It is much more difficult for juveniles to get money than adults. As adolescents grow older, their prospects for full-time employment increase.

Although most children age out of delinquency, others do not. The latter individuals often become **chronic offenders**, also known as serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders. Typically, chronic offenders are juveniles who begin offending at a very young age and continue to offend as adults.

Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders

Recall from Chapter 1 that the first juvenile court in the United States was established in 1899 in Cook County (Chicago), Illinois. Judge Merritt Pinckney, one of the judges who presided over this court, had the following to say about some of the youths he met:

> A child, a boy especially, sometimes becomes so thoroughly vicious and is so repeatedly an offender that it would not be fair to the other children in a delinquent institution who have not arrived at his age of depravity and delinquency to have to associate with him. On very rare and special occasions, therefore, children are held over on a *mittimus* to the criminal court.[116]

Now consider this assessment from criminologist Terrie Moffitt, who developed the developmental taxonomy consisting of "adolescence-limited offenders" and "life-course persistent offenders" (LCPs) (see Chapter 7):

> Longitudinal research consistently points to a very small group of males who display high rates of antisocial behavior across time and in diverse situations. The professional nomenclature may change, but the faces remain the same as they drift through successive systems aimed at curbing their deviance: schools, juvenile justice programs, psychiatric treatment centers, and prisons. The topography of their behavior may change with changing opportunities, but the underlying disposition persists throughout the life course.[117]

Although nearly a century separates these two quotations, both address the same recurrent problem in delinquency: *chronic offenders*. Today these persons are referred to as serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders. In fact, it has always been the case that a small group of serious violent youths are responsible for the overwhelming majority of serious violent crime occurring in a population. These youth have lengthy delinquent careers (duration), commit crimes at very high rates (frequency), are deeply committed to antisocial behavior (priority), and are most likely to commit crimes such as murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault (seriousness).

Major Delinquent Career Research

From very early in life, chronic offenders separate themselves from others based on their recurrent maladaptive, antisocial, and, later, delinquent behaviors. The childhood and adolescence of the average chronic offender are typically characterized by a host of risk factors that have important implications for antisocial behavior:

- Poor central nervous system development
- Extreme fussiness
- General irritability
- Difficult to soothe
- Less parental bonding during infancy
- Hyperactivity
- Impulsivity
- Rejection by peers
- Language difficulty
- Reading problems
- Physical aggression
- Lying and stealing during childhood
- Limited impulse control
- Failure at school
- Poor relationship quality
- Deviant peers
- Hostility or aggressive bias against others
- Use of alcohol and drugs
- Manipulation of others
- Juvenile justice system involvement during adolescence[118]

Chronic offenders often commit their first serious crime before age 10 and by age 18 have achieved a lengthy police record. (See "A Window on Delinquency" for a profile of Keith, a chronic offender.) Importantly, the general profile of the chronic delinquent is remarkably similar regardless of whether the study group is from the United States or some other county. For all intents and purposes, the most delinquent and violent

A WINDOW ON DELINQUENCY

Profile of a Chronic Offender

Keith was 16 when he was sentenced to 27 years to life for robbery and murder. He had a long history of violence. Keith was the only child of parents who had never lived together. By age 7, he was uncontrollable and would run away from home. His mother fought with her live-in boyfriends over Keith's behavior. Nearly every adult male with whom Keith came in contact physically abused him.

Problems in school led to a suicide attempt by Keith to "get back" at his mother for spanking him. Keith and a friend stole an automobile at age 12 and were arrested after they wrecked it. Within days, Keith was suspended from school for assaulting a student who refused to loan him a pencil. He and a friend tortured and hanged a lamb at a nearby school.

At age 13, Keith was placed in a boys' home. At the home, Keith was disruptive and hostile, and escaped several times. During one escape, he physically assaulted two girls who were 11 and 12 years old. Afterward, Keith was captured and placed in a juvenile detention center, where his stay was marked by several escapes, misconduct, and fighting. Keith's final escape ended in a siege in which Keith held detention center staff and police at bay with a tire iron. The net result of all these incidents was, astonishingly, that Keith was placed on probation.

Instances of vehement tantrums, vandalism, assaults, and attempted suicide followed in an escalating pattern of violence. Keith was sentenced to 20 months in a detention facility for attacking his 21-year-old cousin with a hammer; he was 15 at the time. After serving one year, Keith was returned to his home, where his truancy, disruptive behavior, and drug use continued. One day Keith skipped school with two of his friends. He stopped his car at a shopping center to "get some money." Keith entered a bakery, demanded money from the woman owner, and then shot her in the face when she refused to open the cash register. Keith's excuse: "The bitch should have given me the money; it was her fault."

Source: Timothy Crowe, *Habitual Juvenile Offenders* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 1994), pp. 9–11.

youthful offenders are the same type of persons across different societies and social contexts.[119] The remainder of the chapter explores some of the most important studies of delinquent careers and serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders.

Sheldon Glueck and Eleanor Glueck

The first criminologists to study chronic offenders were Sheldon Glueck and Eleanor Glueck, who conducted their research during the 1930s. Their study included 500 delinquent white males between the ages of 10 and 17 who had been committed to two Massachusetts correctional facilities, the Lyman School for Boys and the Industrial School for Boys. The Gluecks collected an array of data and created offender dossiers for each boy, including deviant and criminal history, psychosocial profile, family background, school and occupational history, and other life events such as martial and military history. The delinquent sample was matched on a case-by-case basis to 500 nondelinquent boys from the same area. Members of both samples were followed until age 32. The study design permitted the researchers to examine the long-term effects of early life-experiences on subsequent social and antisocial behavior. In fact, the Gluecks' data set is so impressive that it was resurrected by Robert Sampson and John Laub in 1988 and used for more sophisticated data analysis.

The Gluecks' research produced some important findings. For example, an early onset of problem or antisocial behavior strongly predicted a lengthy criminal career

characterized by high rates of offending and involvement in serious criminal violence. The Gluecks used the phrase "The past is prologue" to capture the idea of the stability in these males' behavior. However, the Gluecks also found that even high-rate offenders usually reduced their propensity for offending after they passed through adolescence into early adulthood. Similarly, even serious offenders could desist from crime, and seemingly ignore their own criminal propensity, by participating in conventional adult social institutions such as marriage, work, and military.[120]

The Gluecks were also among the first criminologists to focus on psychopathy among serious delinquents. **Psychopathy** is a personality disorder that results in severe affective, interpersonal, and behavioral problems, such that psychopaths can victimize and manipulate others seemingly without conscience (see Chapter 4). The Gluecks found that psychopathy was a useful variable in differentiating delinquents from nondelinquents. They described psychopathic offenders as openly destructive, antisocial, asocial, and less amenable to therapeutic or educative efforts. Other characteristics included insensitivity to social demands or to others, shallow emotionality, self-centeredness coupled with a complete lack of empathy, impulsive behavior, lack of stress or anxiety over social maladjustment, gross irresponsibility, and emotional poverty. Psychopathic youth did not appear to respond to treatment or rehabilitative efforts, but instead seemed unconcerned about their consistent criminal behavior. The Gluecks also found that psychopathy was almost *20 times* more common among their delinquent sample than among the matched, nondelinquent control group.[121]

The relationship between psychopathy and serious, chronic, and violent delinquency that the Gluecks noted is still being studied today. For instance, Randall Salekin recently studied a cohort of 130 children and adolescents to examine the effect of psychopathic personality on legal problems and opportunities in life. Salekin found that psychopathy was stable across a four-year follow-up period, meaning that children who scored highly on psychopathic traits early in life tended to remain that way later in adolescence. Additionally, psychopathy was a significant predictor of both general delinquency and violent forms of delinquency. Even more impressive, the effects of psychopathy on serious delinquency withstood the competing effects of 14 other correlates of delinquency, including demographic characteristics, intelligence, prior delinquency, school problems, parental factors, drug use, and delinquent peers, among others.[122]

Marvin Wolfgang and the Philadelphia Birth Cohorts

The landmark study that established the contemporary understanding of career criminals was *Delinquency in a Birth Cohort*, published by Marvin Wolfgang, Robert Figlio, and Thorsten Sellin in 1972. This study followed 9945 males who were born in Philadelphia in 1945 and who lived in the city at least from ages 10 to 18. The significance of this longitudinal birth cohort design was that it was not susceptible to sampling error because every male subject was followed. The researchers found that nearly two-thirds of the youths never experienced a police contact, whereas 35 percent of the population of boys did have such contact. For the minority of persons who were actually contacted by police, the police contacts were rare occurrences, occurring just once, twice, or three times.

By contrast, some youths experienced more frequent interactions with police. In the work of Wolfgang and his associates, persons with five or more police contacts were classified as chronic or habitual offenders. Only 627 members or just 6 percent of the sample qualified as chronic offenders. However, these 6 percent accounted for 52 percent of the delinquency demonstrated by the entire cohort. Moreover, chronic offenders committed 63 percent of all Crime Index offenses, 71 percent of the murders,

73 percent of the rapes, 82 percent of the robberies, and 69 percent of the aggravated assaults.[123]

A second study examined a cohort of persons born in Philadelphia in 1958. Conducted by Paul Tracy, Marvin Wolfgang, and Robert Figlio, the second Philadelphia cohort contained 13,160 males and 14,000 females. Overall, members of the 1958 cohort committed crime at higher rates than members of the 1945 cohort and demonstrated greater involvement in the most serious forms of crime, such as murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Roughly the same proportion of persons (33 percent) of the later cohort was arrested prior to adulthood. Approximately 7 percent of the population members were habitual offenders, and they accounted for 61 percent of all delinquency, 60 percent of the murders, 75 percent of the rapes, 73 percent of the robberies, and 65 percent of the aggravated assaults committed by the group as a whole.[124] A few years later, Paul Tracy and Kimberly Kempf-Leonard collected criminal records for the 1958 sample up to age 26. Their analysis showed that juveniles who were actively involved in crime as children were more likely to be adult criminals, whereas nondelinquents generally remained noncriminals in adulthood.[125]

When Marvin Wolfgang and his colleagues tracked 974 persons from their Philadelphia cohort through adulthood to age 30, they discovered that more than 50 percent of the chronic offenders were arrested at least four times between ages 18 and 30. In comparison, only 18 percent of persons with no juvenile arrests were ever arrested as adults.[126] This continuation of antisocial behavior across stages of the life span is known as the **continuity of crime**.[127]

Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development

The most important European contribution to the study of delinquent careers is the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, a prospective longitudinal panel study of 411 males born in London in the years 1952–1953. Originally conceptualized by Donald West in 1961, the study continues today under the guidance of David Farrington. Now more than 50 years old, the study subjects have been interviewed nine times between the ages of 8 and 46, with their parents participating in eight interviews. Although the Cambridge study uses convictions rather than police contacts or arrests as its unit of analysis, its results relating to serious, violent, and chronic offenders are familiar. For example, 37 percent of the sample has been convicted of some criminal offense, most commonly theft or burglary. Six percent of the sample (25 youths) are chronic offenders who have accounted for 47 percent of all acts of criminal violence in the sample, including approximately 60 percent of the armed robberies.[128]

As shown in the "A Window on Delinquency" feature, thanks to the richness of the Cambridge panel data, Farrington has been able to publish widely on a variety of topics pertaining to chronic offenders, the criminal behavior of their siblings and parents and the processes by which criminal behavior are transmitted from one generation to the next. Youthful chronic offenders in this study presented with a number of risk factors that served as predictors for a life in crime—for example, having a parent who had been incarcerated and having delinquent siblings. Young chronic offenders also tended to be daring, prone to trouble, impulsive, and defiant; had low intelligence and low school attainment; and were raised in poverty. The most antisocial boys in childhood were similarly the most antisocial adolescents and adults. Crime also tended to "run in families," as chronic offenders often had children whose life trajectories reflected a similar syndrome of antisocial behavior.[129] These findings not only lend support to the Gluecks' idea that the "The past is prologue," but also show the dangers of not intervening in the lives of serious delinquents—life-course persistent criminality and lives of despair are the usual outcome.

A WINDOW ON DELINQUENCY

Childhood Predictors of Serious, Violent, and Chronic Delinquency

Behavioral Characteristics

Troublesome
Dishonest
Antisocial

Individual Characteristics

High daring/low fear
Lacks concentration
Nervous
Few friends
Unpopular
Low nonverbal IQ
Low verbal IQ
Low attainment

Family Characteristics

Convicted Parent
Delinquent sibling
Harsh discipline
Poor supervision
Broken family
Parental conflict
Large family size
Young mother

Socioeconomic Characteristics

Low SES
Low family income
Poor housing

Source: David Farrington, "Origins of Violent Behavior over the Life Span," pages 19–48 in Daniel Flannery, Alexander Vazsonyi, and Irwin Waldman (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Violent Behavior and Aggression* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Human Development Study

The Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Human Development Study is a longitudinal investigation of the health, development, and behavior of a complete cohort of births between April 1, 1972, and March 31, 1973, in Dunedin—a medium-sized city with a population of approximately 120,000, located on New Zealand's South Island. Perinatal data were obtained at delivery, and the children were later traced for follow-up beginning at age 3. More than 90 percent of these births—more than 1000 people—are part of the longitudinal study. The study group members are now 36–37 years old, and the study also interviews their friends, spouses, children, and peers.[130]

Terrie Moffitt, Avshalom Caspi, and their colleagues have produced an impressive array of publications from the Dunedin data. These reports highlight the ways in which serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders (in Moffitt's theory, they are known as life-course persistent (LCP) offenders) develop. For instance:

- As early as age 3, several characteristics have been identified that predict LCP status, including an undercontrolled temperament, neurological abnormalities, low intellectual ability, hyperactivity, and low resting heart rate.
- LCP offenders are more likely to have teenage single mothers, mothers with poor mental health, mothers who are harsh or neglectful, parents who inconsistently punish them, and families characterized by a great deal of conflict.
- LCP offenders are youths who are usually the most aggressive and problematic across all life stages, ranging from childhood to adolescence and into adulthood.[131]

National Youth Survey

The National Youth Survey was launched in 1976 by Delbert Elliott and his collaborators. This prospective longitudinal study focuses on the delinquency and drug use patterns among American youth. The sample contains 1725 persons from seven birth cohorts between 1959 and 1965, and multiple waves of data have been collected since the study's inception. The National Youth Survey has yielded plentiful information about the prevalence, incidence, correlates, and processes related to delinquency and other forms of antisocial behavior.

Chronic offender information based on NYS data is generally similar to information derived from studies employing official records. For most persons, involvement in crime generally and violence specifically proved short-lived and limited in scope, although individual offending rates varied greatly. Delinquents tended to dabble in a mixed pattern of offenses, rather than focusing on one type of crime.

A small proportion of the NYS sample was habitual in its delinquency. For example, approximately 7 percent of youths in the survey were serious career offenders, defined as persons who committed at least three Crime Index offenses annually. These youth accounted for the vast majority of antisocial and violent behaviors in the sample and often committed many times the number of assaults, robberies, and sexual assaults than non-career offenders. By comparison, only 2 percent of those identified as self-reported career criminals were identified as such using official records. This discrepancy suggests that serious and violent chronic offenders commit significantly more crime than their official records would indicate.

Additionally, information from offender self-reports suggests that there might be more career offenders at large than previously thought. For example, later research using additional waves of data found that 36 percent of African American males and 25 percent of white males aged 17 reported some involvement in serious violent offending.[132]

Program of Research on the Causes and Correlates of Delinquency

In 1986, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention created the Program of Research on the Causes and Correlates of Delinquency. The result was three prospective longitudinally designed studies: the Denver Youth Survey, the Pittsburgh Youth Study, and the Rochester Youth Development Study.

- The Denver Youth Survey was a probability sample of 1527 youth living in high-risk neighborhoods in Denver. Survey respondents included five age groups (7, 9, 11, 13, and 15 years old), and both they and their parents were interviewed between 1988 and 1992. This study was designed to obtain longitudinal data covering the 7- to 26-year-old age span to examine the effects of childhood experiences and neighborhood disadvantage on problem behaviors.
- The Pittsburgh Youth Study focused on 1517 boys in grades 1, 4, and 7 in public schools in Pittsburgh during the 1987–1988 school year. Data on delinquency, substance abuse, and mental health difficulties were obtained every six months for three years via interviews with the subjects and their parents and teachers.
- The Rochester Youth Development Study includes 1000 youths (75 percent male, 25 percent female) sampled disproportionately from high-crime neighborhoods. Interviews with multiple sources are ongoing to gather data on criminal offending and related behaviors.

Each study has included a "core measurement package" that encompasses official and self-reports of delinquent behavior and drug use; neighborhood characteristics; demographic characteristics; parental attitudes and child-rearing practices; attitudinal measures of school performance; information about peer and social networks; and views about committing crime.[133]

The Denver, Pittsburgh, and Rochester studies have provided a substantive glimpse into the lives of youth who face multiple risk factors in these three cities. Not surprisingly, they have produced nearly identical findings about the disproportionate violent behavior of chronic offenders. Between 14 percent and 17 percent of the youth are habitual offenders who have accounted for 75 percent to 82 percent of the incidence of criminal violence. Just as Delbert Elliott and his colleagues found with respondents in the National Youth Survey, these researchers have found that 20 to 25 percent of adolescents in Denver, Pittsburgh, and Rochester are "multiple problem youth" who have experienced an assortment of antisocial risk factors, such as mental health problems, alcoholism and substance abuse histories, and sustained criminal involvement.

A small minority of youth in the Denver, Pittsburgh, and Rochester samples have been identified as the most frequent, severe, aggressive, and temporally stable delinquent offenders. These youths—all of whom are males—were reared in broken homes by parents who themselves had numerous mental health and parenting problems. These boys are also characterized by their impulsivity, emotional and moral indifference, and total lack of guilt with which they committed crimes. Indeed, as children they showed many of the characteristics of psychopathy.[134]

Other Studies of Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders

Two other important studies of delinquent careers and serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders are the Dangerous Offender Project and the Racine, Wisconsin, birth cohorts.

Under the guidance of Donna Hamparian, Simon Dinitz, John Conrad, and their colleagues, the Dangerous Offender Project examined the delinquent careers of 1238 adjudicated youth born in Columbus, Ohio, between 1956 and 1960. Overall, these youths committed a total of 4499 offenses, 1504 crimes of violence, and 904 violent Crime Index crimes. Even among violent juvenile offenders, a small minority whom the researchers dubbed the "violent few" accounted for the majority of crimes. For instance, 84 percent of the youths were arrested only once for a violent crime as adolescents; 13 percent were arrested twice. The remaining 3 percent—*the violent few*—accumulated significantly more police contacts for violent crimes. In fact, they were arrested between 3 and 23 times.[135]

Lyle Shannon selected 1942, 1949, and 1955 birth cohorts from Racine, Wisconsin, that yielded 1352, 2099, and 2676 respondents, respectively, in an effort to examine the relationships between poverty, family structure, and delinquent criminal careers over time. Shannon followed the birth cohorts well into adulthood to further explore continuity in criminal behavior. This study included follow-up of the 1942 cohort to age 30, the 1949 cohort to age 25, and the 1955 cohort to age 22. As in prior studies, Shannon found that a small cohort of chronic offenders committed the preponderance of offenses.[136]

Because of the importance of serious, violent, and chronic delinquents to society, the juvenile justice system has taken special steps both to prevent serious delinquents from developing and to strengthen the juvenile justice system's response to them. The juvenile justice system's strategy for handling the most serious delinquents is discussed in Chapter 13, and primary prevention programs aimed at stopping serious delinquency before it starts are discussed in Chapter 14.

WRAP UP

THINKING ABOUT JUVENILE DELINQUENCY: CONCLUSIONS

No one can say how much delinquency is committed or how many children commit delinquent acts. The uncertainty about delinquency rates arises because most crime never comes to the attention of police, but rather is hidden from them. As a consequence, criminologists are forced to estimate the nature and extent of delinquency by using a variety of measures, such as the *Uniform Crime Reports*, National Crime Victimization Survey, and self-report studies, such as the National Youth Survey.

Clearly, some groups of children are arrested more often than others. All types of data show that boys commit more delinquency than girls, racial and ethnic minorities commit more serious delinquency than whites, and more serious offending is concentrated among youths from lower socioeconomic classes. Although nearly all children commit fewer crimes as they grow older, not all juvenile offenders completely stop committing crimes. Indeed, some children become chronic offenders.

The next six chapters of this book explore explanations of delinquency from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Chapter 3 examines biosocial theories of delinquency, which attribute human behavior primarily to the functioning of the brain and show how innate characteristics interact with the environment to produce delinquency.

Chapter Spotlight

- Delinquency is an inherently difficult concept to measure. Over the years, several official, victimization, and self-report methodologies have been developed to quantify this issue.
- The *Uniform Crime Reports* Program is the most well-established way to measure delinquent and criminal behavior in the United States.
- The National Crime Victimization Survey is a nationally representative survey of persons ages 12 and older in U.S. households that measures annual delinquency victimization.
- The National Youth Survey is the longest-running self-report survey of delinquent behavior in the United States.
- From the 1960s until about 1993, there were dramatic increases in crime, delinquency, and youth violence in the United States. Today, delinquency levels are at their lowest level in several decades.
- All forms of crime data indicate that youths, males, nonwhites, and persons in lower socioeconomic groups have greater involvement in serious delinquency than do older adolescents, females, whites, and persons in higher socioeconomic status groups.
- Several studies have documented the existence of a small group of youths—less than 10 percent of the overall population—who are serious, chronic, and violent offenders.

Critical Thinking

1. The police have a great deal of discretion in deciding which acts of delinquency to respond to. Is there any way to limit police discretion in crime reporting? Does the use of discretion taint official measures of delinquency, such as the *UCR* data?
2. All measures of delinquency are susceptible to measurement error, but especially self-reports. Would you tell strangers the truth about crimes you committed? If so, would you exaggerate or minimize your involvement? Why might people lie?

3. What do you think about the reported link between abortion and delinquency reduction? Proponents of this view might suggest that abortion is a merciful salvation from a life of delinquency. Do you agree?
4. There is evidence of a closing gender gap in delinquency and evidence that the today's police are responding more harshly to female offending than they have in the past. Based on behavioral differences between boys and girls, should they be treated differently by the juvenile justice system?
5. What are some of the reasons that have been advanced for racial and ethnic differences in delinquency? Why is the link between race and delinquency so controversial? Does controversy similarly characterize the links between age, gender, and social class and delinquency? Why or why not?

Key Terms

adolescence-limited offenders Juveniles whose law-breaking behavior is restricted to their teenage years.

age–crime curve The empirical trend that crime rates increase during preadolescence, peak in late adolescence, and steadily decline thereafter.

aging-out phenomenon The gradual decline of participation in crime after the teenage years.

chronic offenders Youths who continue to engage in law-breaking behavior as adults. They are responsible for the most serious forms of delinquency and violent crime.

concentrated disadvantage Economically impoverished, racially segregated neighborhoods with high crime rates.

continuity of crime The idea that chronic offenders are unlikely to age-out of crime and more likely to continue their law-violating behavior into their adult lives.

Crime Index A statistical indicator consisting of eight offenses that was used to gauge the amount of crime reported to the police. It was discontinued in 2004.

crimes of interest The crimes that are the focus of the National Crime Victimization Survey.

dark figure of crime The gap between the actual amount of crime committed and the amount of crime reported to the police.

ecological fallacy The mistake of assuming relationships found at the neighborhood level mean those factors are related at the individual level.

hierarchy rule The guideline for reporting data in the Uniform Crime Reports, in which police record only the most serious crime incident.

incidence The number of delinquent acts committed.

juvenile A person younger than age 18.

National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) An annual nationwide survey of criminal victimization conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

National Opinion Research Center (NORC) The organization that conducted the first nationwide victimization survey in the United States.

National Youth Survey (NYS) A nationwide self-report survey of approximately 1700 people who were between the ages of 11 and 17 in 1976.

prevalence The percentage of juveniles committing delinquent acts.

psychopathy A personality disorder that results in affective, interpersonal, and behavioral problems, including violent criminal behavior that is committed without conscience.

racial profiling A practice in which police use race as an explicit factor to create "profiles" that then guide their decision making.

self-report study A study that yields an unofficial measure of crime, and in which juveniles are asked about their law-breaking behavior.

status offenses Behaviors that are unlawful only for children—for example, truancy, curfew violations, and running away.

Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) The annual publication from the Federal Bureau of Investigation that provides data on crimes reported to the police, number of arrests, and number of persons arrested in the United States.

victimization survey A method of producing crime data in which people are asked about their experiences as crime victims.

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