CHAPTER 2

Measuring Delinquency

Key Terms

Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) 32
Crime Index 34
incidence 37
prevalence 37
dark figure of crime 37
hierarchy rule 38
victimization survey 39
National Opinion Research Center (NORC) 39
National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) 39
crimes of interest 40
Developmental Victimization Survey (DVS) 41
self-report study 43
National Youth Survey (NYS) 44
juvenile 46
status offenses 46
concentrated disadvantage 51
racial profiling 52
ecological fallacy 53
age–crime curve 55
adolescence-limited offenders 55
aging-out phenomenon 56
chronic offenders 56
psychopathy 57
continuity of crime 59

Objectives

- Understand the ways that law enforcement agencies have measured crime.
- Explore victimization surveys and the ways 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.

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% of the time, these assorted data sources matched. Of course, this also means that there were discrepancies in the measurement of roughly 30% of violent deaths.[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% 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 1,000 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]

One explanation for the "mismeasure" of crime is that single incidents of delinquency and violence affect people's subjective assessment of the crime problem. Usually, subjective assessments are very different from larger trends in crime data. The United States, for example, is currently enjoying one of its safest eras in terms of delinquency and violence. The overall declines in delinquency, crime, and violence in the United States are so apparent that in 2012, for the first time in nearly a half century, homicide dropped off of the list of the 15 most common causes of death. The top two causes of death, heart disease and cancer, account for more than half of all deaths annually.[6] 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, in the United States, sexual promiscuity was judged differently in the Victorian period of the 19th century than it was during the 1950s, the 1960s, and today. Behavioral norms that exist in Los Angeles and New York might be less accepted in other regions of the country. 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 **Box 2.1** 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*, 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

Box 2.1 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 6,000 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 1,832 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% 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); Timothy Keel, John Jarvis, and Yvonne Muirhead, "An Exploratory Analysis of Factors Affecting Homicide Investigations," *Homicide Studies* 13:50–68 (2009).

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% 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.

Historical Background

Recognizing a need for national crime statistics, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) formed the Committee on Uniform Crime

KEY TERM

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.

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 80 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).

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.

KEY TERM

Crime Index

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

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 **Box 2.2** 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 group A offenses and 11 group B

offenses 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 6,000 law enforcement agencies contribute *NIBRS* data to the national *UCR* Program. The data submitted by the agencies represent 20% of the U.S. population and 16% 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 2015. Ten states are currently 100% NIBRS-reporting, which means that all agencies in the state participate in the program. These states are South Carolina, Idaho, Iowa, Vermont, Virginia, Michigan, Tennessee, West Virginia, Montana, and Delaware (the ordering here of the states reflects the date of their full NIBRS compliance). Twenty additional states are certified and working toward 100% NIBRS-reporting.[8]

Box 2.2 A Window on Delinquency

National Incident-Based Reporting System

NIBRS records the following information by Segment Type for each Group A offense:

Administrative Data	***Offender Data***
Originating agency identifier (ORI) number	Offender sequence number
Incident number	Age of offender
Incident date/hour	Sex of offender
Exceptional clearance indicator	Race of offender
Exceptional clearance date	
Offense Data	***Arrestee Data***
UCR offense code	Arrestee sequence number
Attempted/completed code	Transaction number
Alcohol/drug use by offender	Arrest date
Type of location	Type of arrest
Number of premises entered	Multiple clearance indicator
Method of entry	*UCR* arrest offense code
Type of criminal activity	Arrestee armed indicator
Type of weapon/force used	Age of arrestee
Bias crime code	Sex of arrestee
	Race of arrestee
	Ethnicity of arrestee
	Resident status of arrestee
	Disposition of arrestee younger than age 18

(*continued*)

National Incident-Based Reporting System (*continued*)

Property Data	***Victim Data***
Type of property loss	Victim number
Property description	Victim *UCR* offense code
Property value	Type of victim
Recovery date	Age of victim
Number of stolen motor vehicles	Sex of victim
Number of recovered motor vehicles	Race of victim
Suspected drug type	Ethnicity of victim
Estimated drug quantity	Resident status of victim
Drug measurement unit	Homicide/assault circumstances
	Justifiable homicide circumstances
	Type of injury
	Related offender number
	Relationship of victim to offender

Source: Lynn Addington, "Studying the Crime Problem with the NIBRS Data: Current Uses and Future Trends," pages 23–42 in Marvin Krohn, Alan Lizotte and Gina Penly Hall (eds.), *Handbook of Crime and Deviance* (New York: Springer, 2011).

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.

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 3 years before Jeanne's murder. The Clerys joined with other campus crime victims and persuaded Congress to pass this law.[9] Today, every college in its annual campus security report publishes crime data that are available to all students, parents, and the public.

An important 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 nonnegligent 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 **Box 2.3** 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% of all reported crime in the United States; thus the sheer volume of those offenses overshadows more serious, but less frequently committed offenses.

The most recent, substantive, and long overdue change in the *UCR* occurred in 2012 when the crime of forcible rape was refined to capture a truer sense of victims of sexual assault. Based on the recommendation from an FBI advisory panel, Attorney General Eric Holder announced that any kind of nonconsensual penetration regardless of the gender of the attacker or victim would constitute rape (the redundant and somewhat insensitive adjective "forcible" has been dropped). Today, the crime of rape is defined as "penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim." The improved definition encompasses the full extent of types of sexual assault as well as consideration of all victims of the crime, not just female victims of male rapists.

In the wake of high profile incidents, such as the Penn State University sexual assault scandal surrounding the former football defensive coordinator, Jerry Sandusky, the new *UCR* conceptualization of rape more accurately portrays the occurrence of the crime in society.

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."[10] 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 report published by the U.S. Department of Justice, for instance, found that only 42% 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.[11]

More recently, criminologists examined the statistical accuracy of the *UCR* using data from 12 large municipal police departments. There was evidence of undercounting of more serious index and violent crimes, and there was evidence of overcounting of less serious forms of delinquency. However, the overall error rate in the *UCR* data was less than 1%, which suggests these data are representative measures of the crime problem.[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

KEY TERMS

incidence
The number of delinquent acts committed.

prevalence
The number of juveniles committing delinquent acts.

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

Box 2.3 A Window on Delinquency

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 nonnegligent manslaughter:* The willful killing of one human being by another.
2. *Rape:* Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.
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

and the amount of crime reported to the police. One early criminologist who had observed the so-called dark figure was the 19th-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 the *UCR* because police treated them more leniently.[15] From certain perspectives, 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

KEY TERM

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

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 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, although *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 Thomas 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 Edwards 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% higher in the *NIBRS* than in the *UCR*. The *NIBRS* burglary rate was a mere 0.5% lower than the *UCR* rate. Differences in crime rates amounted to slightly more than 3% for theft and just 4% 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.

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*.[17] 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

KEY TERMS

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

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

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

conducted in 1992 and later with those conducted from 1972 to 1991.[18]

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/sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault, and simple assault) and personal theft. 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 nearly 75,000 people who represent nearly 41,000 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 **Box 2.4** 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. In the most recent wave of data collection for the NCVS, the response rate was over 92% of households and 88% of eligible individuals.[19]

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

KEY TERM

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

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 3 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 3 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. For instance, NCVS data:

- Confirm that a considerable amount of delinquency is unknown to police.
- Uncover some reasons why victims do not report crime incidents to police.
- Demonstrate that the amount of variation in the official reporting of delinquency changes across type of offenses, victim–offender relationships, situational factors, and characteristics.
- Focus theoretical attention to delinquency often being the result of social interaction between a victim and an offender.

Like any measuring tool, the NCVS has some flaws. Obviously, the small number of crimes of interest is problematic. Although 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. 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

Box 2.4 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 theatre 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: Jennifer Truman, *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 2010* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2011).

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.

The NCVS is an essential tool for quantifying the delinquency and violence problem in the United States. Although it continues to be the primary victimization measure of crime, other surveys have also been developed. One of the most comprehensive and important is the Developmental Victimization Survey that is explored next.

Developmental Victimization Survey

The **Developmental Victimization Survey (DVS)** is a telephone interview survey of a nationally representative sample of 2,030 children ages 2 to 17 years. The interviews are conducted with the primary caregiver (usually a parent) of the children below age 10. Children older than age 10 participate in the interview. The sample is equally split in terms of sex and age range of the children (51% were age 2 to 9 and 49% were age 10 to 17). About 34% of the sample have household incomes between $20,000 and $50,000 and 10% of the sample reported household incomes below $10,000. In terms of race and ethnicity, the sample is 76% White, 11% African American, 9% Hispanic, and 4% from other races including Asian Americans and American Indians.

The DVS measures 34 forms of victimization that occurred in the prior year. The victimizations are grouped into five areas. *Conventional crimes* include robbery, personal theft, vandalism, assault with weapon, assault without weapon, attempted assault, kidnapping, and bias attack. *Child maltreatment* includes physical abuse of caregiver, emotional abuse, neglect, and custodial interference or family abduction. *Peer and sibling victimization* includes gang or group assault, peer or sibling assault, nonsexual genital assault, bullying, emotional bullying, and dating violence. *Sexual victimization* includes sexual assault by a known adult, nonspecific sexual

KEY TERM

Developmental Victimization Survey (DVS)
A telephone interview survey of a nationally representative sample of 2,030 children ages 2 to 17 years to examine 34 types of victimization.

assault, sexual assault by a peer, rape, flashing or sexual exposure, verbal sexual harassment, and statutory rape. *Witnessing and indirect victimization* includes a host of indirect and vicarious exposures. These are witnessing domestic violence, witnessing parent assault of a sibling, witness to assault with a weapon (and without), burglary of family household, murder of a family member or friend, witness to murder, exposure to random shooting, and exposure to war or ethnic conflict.

The DVS indicates that 71% of children had experienced some form of victimization in the prior year. Certain forms of victimization especially relating to assault and bullying are exceedingly common with about half of children in various age ranges incurring these forms. Overall, the DVS provides an important lesson about the need for multiple measures of delinquency. According to David Finkelhor and his colleagues, "The findings from this survey of youth and parents do not support the impression that might be drawn from police statistics: a greatly accelerating rate of victimization in the teenage years. The aggregated burden of victimizations is high across the full span of childhood."[20]

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 question is important. 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 compared *UCR* and NCVS data for robbery, burglary, and aggravated assault in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York over a 2-decade span. 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.[21] 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 40 years, criminologists have found that official and victimization data generally tell a like story about the incidence of crime and delinquency in the United States.[22]

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 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.

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

> 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.[23]

Delinquency and victimization coincide for two reasons. First, the most serious delinquents (discussed later in this chapter) 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.[24] Janet Lauritsen and her colleagues suggest that juvenile delinquents and victims of delinquency are basically drawn from the same population pool. 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.[25]

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. Robert Svennson and Lieven Pauwels compared the risky lifestyles of nearly 3,500 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.[26]

Wesley Jennings and his colleagues recently examined 5 decades of research on the offending-victimization overlap to examine to what degree they converge. Of the 37 studies reviewed, 31 studies showed dramatically supportive evidence that offenders and victims were essentially the same individuals. The remaining six studies also showed support although the findings were more modest. In other words, none of the studies in their review found evidence that offending and victimization do not match. The two most frequent explanations for why offenders and victims overlap relate to antisocial traits, such as those implicated in self-control theory and risky, deviant situations that are associated with an antisocial lifestyle.[27]

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.[28] 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 (see **Box 2.5**, the "A Window on Delinquency" feature). 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 not be accurate for some of the same reasons that victimization surveys are flawed: 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 2,049 youths who had appeared before the juvenile court. Porterfield found that more than 90% of the college students surveyed admitted to at least one felony.[29] The next year James Wallerstein and J. C. Wyle conducted a survey of self-reported delinquent behavior using a sample of 1,698 adult men and women, focusing on behavior the survey respondents had committed when they were juveniles. They discovered that 99% of the sample admitted to committing at least one offense they could have been arrested for had they been caught.[30] In 1954,

KEY TERM

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

Box 2.5 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 following example, respondents are asked to indicate how many times in the past 12 months they have committed each offense in the 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	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

James Short reported findings from the first self-report study to include institutionalized juvenile delinquents.[31] 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.[32]

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.[33] 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 13- to 16-year-old boys and girls, they discovered that 88% of the teenagers admitted to committing at least one chargeable offense in the prior 3 years.[34]

The most comprehensive and systematic self-report study conducted in the United States is the **National Youth Survey (NYS)**, which was begun in 1976

KEY TERM

National Youth Survey (NYS)
A nationwide self-report survey of approximately 1,700 people who were between the ages of 11 and 17 in 1976.

by Delbert Elliott. The NYS is a nationwide survey of more than 1,700 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 nearly 40 years, this original group of respondents (now approaching middle adulthood) 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.[35] Today, the NYS is known as the National Youth Survey Family Study (NYSFS) and includes DNA data to examine the biosocial underpinnings of delinquency. The name change is also important because the NYSFS data allow researchers to study the intergenerational transmission of behaviors and explore the degree to which environmental and biological factors contribute to them.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Self-Report Studies

Criminologists have learned much about delinquency from self-report surveys. It is now widely accepted that more than 90% of juveniles have committed an act that, if they had been caught, arrested, charged, prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced 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.[36]

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, whereas 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. 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.[37]

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.[38]

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 nonincarcerated 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."[39]

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. 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.

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.[40] 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.

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.

KEY TERMS

juvenile
A person younger than age 18.

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

Delinquency Correlates

More than 314 million people live in the United States and 25% are **juveniles**, or persons younger than age 18.[41] Also in the United States, a violent crime is committed every 25 seconds, a forcible rape every 6 minutes, and a murder roughly every 36 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 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 the most recent *Crime in the United States* report, police made more than 13 million arrests and approximately 13% of *all* 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 13% of *all* crimes and for 14% and 23% 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, such as underage drinking and running away.[42] As is the case with adults, the United States has experienced dramatic declines in delinquency and violence for the past 2 decades (see **Box 2.6** the "A Window on Deliquency" feature). Yet, despite the unprecedented downturn in crime and violence, the basic correlates of delinquency have remained stable and are discussed next.

Sex/Gender

Delinquency is primarily a male phenomenon. Boys are arrested more often than girls for *all*

Box 2.6 A Window on Delinquency

The Great Delinquency Decline

The incidence of delinquency and violence in the United States has followed an interesting course over the past century. For the first 6 decades of the 20th century, delinquency and violence were relatively low and stable, and the criminal justice system was similarly small and stable in terms of the correctional population. A variety of factors in the middle to late 1960s disrupted this sense of prosperity. Social upheaval relating to race and gender rights, the Vietnam War, demographic changes, and broad shifts in American culture that produced a more liberalized society resulted in sharp upturns of delinquency, crime, and violence. These changes and the resultant increases in delinquency and violence continued throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and into the early 1990s.

A useful barometer of the amount of delinquency and violence in society is the homicide rate. As shown in **Figure 2.1**, the homicide rate increased dramatically during this era and remained high for the latter decades of the 20th century. In 1991, homicide hit its peak as nearly 25,000 Americans were murdered—nearly 70 per day! Overall delinquency and crime peaked in 1993, then something dramatic happened: delinquency and violence unexpectedly and significantly dropped. It continues today.

A variety of factors have been cited for the great delinquency decline, including economic expansion, more and better policing, the increased use of prison to remove more than 2 million offenders from society, demographic fluctuations, the legalization of abortion (which reduces the at-risk population), high mortality of persons involved in crime and drugs, and even better treatment programs. Whatever the explanation, the homicide rate today is near 1950 levels, and murder is no longer a top cause of death in the United States.

The decline of delinquency has also occurred in other nations and is broadly related to other forms of antisocial and delinquent conduct. For example, Sandeep Mishra and Martin Lalumière studied behavioral changes in Canada and the United States and found that, like delinquency, other social indicators such as traffic fatalities, accidents, school dropout, and risky sexual behavior have also sharply declined. When journalists ask criminologists for explanations for the great delinquency decline, criminologists are often left scratching their head. For instance, the Great Recession from 2008 to the present would seem to create conditions for increased delinquency and violence, but it has not occurred. As such, scholars strive for better and more refined explanations for the fortunate changes in crime and violence in society and hope that the great decline continues.

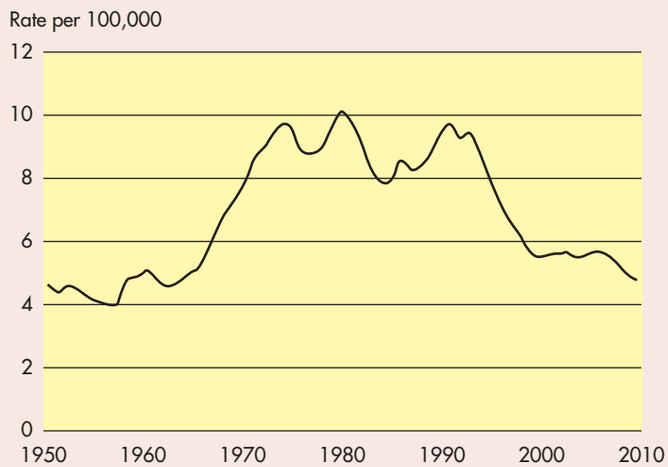

FIGURE 2.1

Homicide victimization rates, 1950–2010

Reproduced from: FBI, *Uniform Crime Reports*, 1950–2010.

Sources: Sandeep Mishra and Martin Lalumiére, "Is the Crime Drop of the 1990s in Canada and the USA Associated with a General Decline in Risky and Health-Related Behaviors?" *Social Science & Medicine* 68:39–48 (2009); Alfred Blumstein and Joel Wallman, *The Crime Drop in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Matt DeLisi, "The Criminal Justice System Works!" *Journal of Criminal Justice* 38:1097–1099 (2010); Steven Levitt, "Understanding Why Crime Rates Fell in the 1990s: Four Factors That Explain the Decline and Six That Do Not," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18:163–190 (2004); Alexia Cooper and Erica Smith, *Homicide Trends in the United States, 1980–2008* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2011).

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 gambling are boys. Gender is so strongly related to delinquency that sociologist Anthony Harris concluded:

> 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.[43]

That delinquency and antisocial behavior are much more common among boys than girls sometimes gets lost in discussions of crime trends that are associated with the measures of crime discussed in this chapter. For example, there is evidence that 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 dropped to 4 to 1, one-third of what it was in 1960. Today it is about 5 to 1.

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.[44]

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 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.[45] 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.[46]

A major explanation for the gender differences in delinquency centers on the assumptions about the different ways children are socialized according to gender expectations. It is assumed that boys are allowed to engage in "rough and tumble" play, are encouraged to be active, engaging, and assertive, and are given a pass on misbehavior. On the other hand, it is also assumed that girls are expected to behave in more refined and controlled ways, and parents are less tolerant of their lack of self-control. In a landmark study, Hugh Lytton and David Romney found that overall, boys and girls are parented very similarly and that evidence of gender socialization is modest at best.[47] Many other advantages that girls have over boys, such as greater self-regulation, greater effortful control, less direct aggression, more empathy, and other factors contribute to their lower involvement in delinquency.

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.

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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.

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.[48]

A final consideration of the sex/gender and delinquency relationship relates to seriousness of the behavior. Boys and girls might engage in similar amounts of low-level and often trivial forms of misbehavior. When the behavior in question becomes more serious; so too does the sex gap. For example, girls are dramatically less likely than boys to commit predatory forms of delinquency and these differences are seen across the life-course. According to the most recent correctional data provided by the U.S. Department of Justice, in the United States there are 3,173 people on death row. These are individuals who have been convicted of the most extreme forms of crime, most commonly multiple homicides or murders committed along with other serious felonies. Indeed, aggravating conditions are required for persons to be sentenced to death. Of the 3,173 condemned offenders, 3,113 are men and 60 are women. This is a sex ratio of more than 50 to 1![49]

Race

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 and increasingly, Hispanic, 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 or Hispanic juveniles even though all racial groups are more likely to be victimized by their own racial group (crime is mostly intraracial instead of interracial).

These stereotypes are not limited to whites, however. Research conducted by Robert Sampson and Stephen Raudenbush evaluated racial and ethnic differences in opinions about race, disorder, and crime. They 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, when controlling for 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.[50]

Cultural values that are deeply rooted in years of history contribute to many of our beliefs. From the early colonial period to the mid-20th 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. The transmission of such a racist ideology, which is passed from one generation to the next, 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.

The unique racial history of the United States persists to the present day in terms of beliefs about the causes of delinquency and violence. Shaun Gabbidon and Danielle Boisvert conducted a public opinion survey about crime causation and uncovered across the board differences between whites and African Americans about the factors that contribute to crime. African Americans were more likely to believe that stressful events, social inequality, and poverty were important causes of crime. Whites were more likely than African Americans to believe that genetic factors, psychological traits, neighborhood factors, social learning and peer effects, negative labeling, and social control best explained crime. In this way, perceptions about delinquency as it relates to race and ethnicity reflects a long history that is informed by official data, victimization data, media images, prejudice, and denial.[51] This leads to another important conclusion about the relationship between race and

delinquency: African American youths *are* more delinquent than youths from other racial groups. This effect is strongest for the most serious forms of delinquency, including armed robbery and murder. For example, Brendan O'Flaherty and Rajiv Sethi pointed to staggering data about race differences in homicide offending and victimization:

> African Americans are roughly six times as likely as white Americans to die at the hands of a murderer, and roughly seven times as likely to murder someone; their victims are black 82% of the time. Homicide is the second most important reason for the racial gap in life expectancy: eliminating homicide would do more to equalize black and white life expectancy than eliminating any other cause of death except heart disease.[52]

In another 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. Across 3 decades of data, African American males between the ages of 14 and 24 accounted for approximately 1% of the U.S. population during that period, but represented between 10 and 18% of the murder victims. In terms of offending, African American males ages 14–24 constituted between 15 and 35% of the homicide offender population! By contrast, white males between ages 14–24 accounted for between 5 and 10% of the population but were overrepresented as both murderers and murder victims.[53]

Unlike official estimates such as homicide data, 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, but early studies generally focused on trivial forms of misbehavior and did not validate the truthfulness of self-reports with information from other perspectives, such as the youth's mother, father, siblings, teachers, or peers. Self-report studies based on large-scale samples indicate significant race differences in terms of total delinquency and predatory crimes that are most likely to result in arrest.[54] Terence Thornberry and 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.[55] 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.[56] Over a 2-decade span, 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 was almost 6 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 5 times greater than the corresponding rates for white juveniles.

What do these data suggest about race and delinquency? Why are African American juveniles and to a certain degree, Hispanic, 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 20th century, as the U.S. economy shifted from 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 of the same reasons.[57]

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.[58] The social problems caused by concentrated disadvantage affect all African American 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.[59]

Family Breakdown

Economic deprivation creates a host of strains that contribute to family breakdown in the African American community, resulting in approximately 70% 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.[60] Disruptions in family structure negatively affect school performance, which in turn contributes to the seemingly endless cycle of poverty. As a result, children raised in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage are poorly equipped to succeed in American society.[61]

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. 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.[62]

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 instance, Alexander Vazsonyi and his colleagues studied nearly 1,000 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 were neighborhood characteristics.[63]

Cultural Factors

The *culture of poverty* also contributes to serious and violent forms of delinquency. John MacDonald and Angela Gover found that economic and cultural problems were particularly closely related to homicide committed by adolescents and young adults.[64] 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.[65]

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

KEY TERM

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

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 (see **Box 2.7** the "A Window on Delinquency" feature).[66] 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. 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.[67]

An alternative theory proposes 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.[68] This 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.

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 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% 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

Box 2.7 A Window on Delinquency

Code of the Street

For many years, explanations for the disproportionately high levels of delinquency and violence among African Americans, especially males, were convoluted, difficult to empirically examine, and also shrouded in political correctness. Elijah Anderson's code of the street thesis advanced that poverty, social dislocation, and racial discrimination contribute to antisocial attitudes, thought patterns, and behaviors that are oppositional to mainstream society and instead adhere to a street code. Those who subscribe to the street code are known as "street." Conversely, most African Americans who live in conditions of poverty not only do not subscribe to the street code, but also behave in ways that are consistent with conventional norms. Anderson referred to the nondelinquent citizens as "decent." In moral terms, decent people are conventional whereas street people are delinquent.

The code of the street is an important opportunity to shed light on the alarmingly high levels of violence. Eric Stewart and Ronald Simons found that decent families are less likely to engage in violent conduct. However, they found that street youth were not more violent until 2 years after they internalized the street code. This suggests that many African American males posture a "street" persona perhaps to protect themselves from conflicts, but over time this leads to violence.

Holli Drummond and her colleagues found that hopelessness was an important emotion in the street code process. Adolescents who report greater feelings of hopelessness in their life are more likely to subsequently identify with street code attitudes. In turn, this contributes to higher involvement in violent delinquency. This is an important finding because it is compatible with the fatalism inherent in the "kill or be killed" culture that typifies crime-ridden neighborhoods.

Sources: Eric Stewart and Ronald Simons, *The Code of the Street and African American Adolescent Violence* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2009); Holli Drummond, John Bolland, and Waverly Harris, "Becoming Violent: Evaluating the Mediating Effect of Hopelessness on the Code of the Street Thesis," *Deviant Behavior* 32:191–223 (2011); Mark Berg, Eric Stewart, Rod Brunson, and Ronald Simons, "Neighborhood Cultural Heterogeneity and Adolescent Violence," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 28:1–25 (2012).

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.[69]

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.[70] 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.[71]

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, although 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. At the same time, profiling by officers would not account for the race-offense differences found in self-report studies and the NCVS.

Social Class

Unsurprisingly, 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. 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.[72] 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:

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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.

KEY TERMS

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

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

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.

For these reasons, in the 1960s 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.[73]

The debate surrounding delinquency and social class has not been resolved. 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. 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.[74]

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.[75] Similarly, John Hagan found that police characterize lower-class neighborhoods as having more criminal behavior than other areas.[76] Douglas Smith perhaps captured the dynamic of the ecological fallacy "in action" best when he noted:

> 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.[77]

The conclusions of Tittle and his colleagues and those researchers whose work supports their claims have been soundly criticized. Michael Hindelang and his associates observed a rather consistent relationship between delinquency and social class for serious crimes.[78] John Braithwaite wonders whether Tittle and his associates really take their conclusion of no relationship between delinquency and social class seriously. He 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." Braithwaite contends that the evidence overwhelmingly supports the notion that delinquency and social class are related.[79] 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 1,700 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.[80]

Anthony Walsh effectively summarized the decades of dispute over the social class and delinquency relationship:

> The issue of the connection between social class and delinquent and criminal activity has been bedeviled by semantic and methodological deceit. Semantically, researchers have examined trivial misbehaviors and called it criminality, delinquency, and crime. Methodologically, they have searched for a type of subjects in places where they are not likely to find them and substitute another type simply because they are readily available. Those who deny the class-crime relationship ignore official statistics and ecological studies even though both data sources reveal a robust and ubiquitous negative class-crime relationship.[81]

The take-home message is that although all people can engage, do engage, and have engaged in delinquent conduct at some point in their life, it does nothing to destroy the inverse social class-delinquency relationship. When the most severe forms of delinquency are considered, such as murder, armed robbery, rape, and burglary, the delinquents are overwhelmingly more likely to come from impoverished backgrounds.

Age

Age and delinquency are strongly and negatively related. This means that involvement in delinquency is generally higher during adolescence and early adulthood and then sharply declines across life. The association between them was originally observed by the 19th-century French criminologist, Adolphe Quetelet, who noted that crime peaks in the late teens through the mid-20s. Nearly two centuries later, the basic observation from Quetelet stands. Patrick Lussier and Jay Healy examined recidivism among convicted sex offenders and found that measures relating to age were the strongest determinants of whether offenders would recidivate. In fact, an offender's age at release from prison was as strong of a predictor of recidivism as a sex offender classification tool.[82] 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.[83] 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.[84]

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. 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.[85] What is constant across all categories of juveniles is that they commit fewer crimes as they

KEY TERMS

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

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

grow older—a process that criminologists call the **aging-out phenomenon**.

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

- 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.

Of course, the most likely explanation for the age–delinquency relationship is one that combines many of these factors. For instance, personality is a stable, individual-level characteristic that also is adaptable to environmental conditions. This means that one's personality develops over the life course in response to biological and social changes that also occur across life. One of the most adaptable components is conscientiousness or constraint, which is characterized by self-discipline and the ability to regulate one's emotional and behavioral responses. Daniel Blonigen reviewed personality development as it relates to the age–crime relationship and found that studies show that between 10 and 34% of individuals experience increases in constraint and conscientiousness as they enter adulthood. This suggests that the age–crime curve represents a host of biological, psychological, and social changes that bear on personality.[86]

Although most children age out of delinquency, some do not. The latter group of children 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.

KEY TERMS

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.

Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders

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.[87]

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

> 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.[88]

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:[89]

- Underresponsive autonomic nervous system
- 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

Chronic offenders often commit their first serious crime before age 10 and by age 18 have achieved a lengthy police record. (See **Box 2.8** the "A Window on Delinquency" feature for a profile of chronic offenders who are institutionalized, or state delinquents.) Significantly, 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 youthful offenders are the same type of persons across different societies and social contexts.[90] 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.[91]

The Gluecks were also among the first criminologists to focus on psychopathy among serious delinquents. **Psychopathy** is a personality disorder

KEY TERM

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

Box 2.8 A Window on Delinquency

State Delinquents

Serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders are unlike most juveniles in that their conduct problems emerge at remarkably early ages, such as during the preschool years, their delinquency includes violent and more serious behaviors, their delinquency generally disrupts their social development at school, with peers, and within their family, and they recurrently are contacted by police and the juvenile court. Along with their extreme antisocial behaviour, juvenile chronic offenders also have breathtakingly severe victimization histories characterized by multiple forms of abuse (e.g., physical, sexual, and emotional), neglect, poverty, and exposure to unhealthy lifestyles and role models (e.g., parents involved in gangs, criminal activity, or substance abuse). Due to these overlapping risk factors, chronic offending juveniles frequently are committed to detention centers and in the most serious cases, confinement facilities for their delinquency.

Chad Trulson has referred to serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders as "state delinquents," because their antisociality has resulted in them becoming wards of the state. Using data from 2,520 incarcerated juvenile offenders, Trulson and his colleagues have demonstrated the seriousness of the behaviors of state delinquents and how their psychopathology negatively affects their development even when under juvenile justice system supervision. For instance:

- During this cohort's time in confinement facilities, they committed more than 200,000 incidents of minor misconduct and nearly 19,000 incidents of major misconduct. Youths who had more extensive juvenile records were more likely to be repeatedly noncompliant during confinement.
- Along with other indicators of the delinquent career, youths who continued to misbehave behind bars were more likely to have the adult component of their blended sentence invoked. Blended sentencing allows juveniles the opportunity to serve part of their sentence in the juvenile justice system, and if there is improvement, avoid a harsher adult sentence.
- On average, state delinquents were released from confinement facilities at age 19, and 50% of them were rearrested for a felony offense. This means, of course, that 50% of former state delinquents were not arrested again at follow-up.

In sum, a serious, violent, and chronic delinquent history is often the forerunner of a lifetime of antisocial behavior and criminal justice system involvement. Despite their youth, state delinquents represent the extreme of individual-level behavioral risk and family background disadvantage.

Sources: Chad Trulson, Matt DeLisi, Jonathan Caudill, Scott Belshaw, and James Marquart, "Delinquent Careers Behind Bars," *Criminal Justice Review* 35:200–219 (2010); Chad Trulson, Jonathan Caudill, Scott Belshaw, and Matt DeLisi, "A Problem of Fit: Extreme Delinquents, Blended Sentencing, and the Determinants of Continued Adult Sanctions," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 22:263–284 (2011); Chad Trulson, Matt DeLisi, and James Marquart, "Institutional Misconduct, Delinquent Background, and Rearrest Frequency among Serious and Violent Delinquent Offenders," *Crime Delinquency* 57:709–731 (2011); Chad Trulson, Darin Haerle, Matt DeLisi, and James Marquart, "Blended Sentencing, Early Release, and Recidivism of Violent Institutionalized Delinquents," *The Prison Journal* 91:255–278 (2011).

that results in severe affective, interpersonal, and behavioral problems, such that psychopaths can victimize and manipulate others seemingly without conscience. 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.[92]

The relationship between psychopathy and serious, chronic, and violent delinquency that the Gluecks noted is still being studied today. 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 4-year follow-up period, meaning that children who had high scores 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.[93]

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 9,945 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% 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% of the sample qualified as chronic offenders. However, these 6% accounted for 52% of the delinquency demonstrated by the entire cohort. Moreover, chronic offenders committed 63% of all Crime Index offenses, 71% of the murders, 73% of the rapes, 82% of the robberies, and 69% of the aggravated assaults.[94]

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%) of the later cohort was arrested prior to adulthood. Approximately 7% of the population members were habitual offenders, and they accounted for 61% of all delinquency, 60% of the murders, 75% of the rapes, 73% of the robberies, and 65% of the aggravated assaults committed by the group as a whole.[95] 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.[96]

When Marvin Wolfgang and his colleagues tracked 974 persons from their Philadelphia cohort through adulthood to age 30, they discovered that more than 50% of the chronic offenders were arrested at least four times between ages 18 and 30. In comparison, only 18% of persons with no juvenile arrests were ever arrested as adults.[97] This continuation of antisocial behavior across stages of the life span is known as the **continuity of crime**.[98]

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% of the sample has been convicted of some criminal offense, most commonly theft or burglary. Six percent of the sample (25 youths) is chronic offenders who have accounted for 47% of all acts of criminal violence in the sample, including approximately 60% of the armed robberies.[99]

KEY TERM

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.

As shown in **Box 2.9** 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.[100] 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.

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% of these births—more than 1,000 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.[101]

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 develop; in Moffitt's

Box 2.9 A Window on Delinquency

Childhood Predictors of Serious, Violent, and Chronic Delinquency

Behavioral Characteristics	***Family Characteristics***
Troublesome	Convicted Parent
Dishonest	Delinquent sibling
Antisocial	Harsh discipline
	Poor supervision
Individual Characteristics	Broken family
High daring/low fear	Parental conflict
Lacks concentration	Large family size
Nervous	Young mother
Few friends	
Unpopular	***Socioeconomic Characteristics***
Low nonverbal IQ	Low SES
Low verbal IQ	Low family income
Low attainment	Poor housing

Source: Rolf Loeber and David Farrington, *From Juvenile Delinquency to Adult Crime: Criminal Careers, Justice Policy, and Prevention* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

theory, they are known as life-course persistent (LCP) offenders. For instance:[102]

- 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.

National Youth Survey Family Study

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 1,725 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. In 2003, it was renamed the National Youth Survey Family Study to reflect additional data collection that included genetic information.

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% 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 noncareer offenders. By comparison, only 2% 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% of African American males and 25% of white males aged 17 reported some involvement in serious violent offending.[103]

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.[104]

- The Denver Youth Survey was a probability sample of 1,527 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 1,517 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 6 months for 3 years via interviews with the subjects and their parents and teachers.
- The Rochester Youth Development Study includes 1,000 youths (75% male, 25% 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.[104]

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 and 17% of the youth are habitual offenders who have accounted for 75 to 82% 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% 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.[105]

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 1,238 adjudicated youth born in Columbus, Ohio, between 1956 and 1960. Overall, these youths committed a total of 4,499 offenses, 1,504 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% of the youths were arrested only once for a violent crime as adolescents; 13% were arrested twice. The remaining 3%—*the violent few*—accumulated significantly more police contacts for violent crimes. In fact, they were arrested between 3 and 23 times.[106]

Lyle Shannon selected 1942, 1949, and 1955 birth cohorts from Racine, Wisconsin, that yielded 1,352, 2,099, and 2,676 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.[107]

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. These steps include primary prevention programs aimed at stopping serious delinquency before it starts.

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.

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% 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. Criminologists have offered a variety of reasons for the decline in delinquency since the mid 1990s, including better and more policing, greater use of imprisonment, demographic changes, the economy, and even abortion. Which of these likely has had the greater impact and why?
4. There is evidence of a closing gender gap in delinquency and evidence that today's police are responding more harshly to female offenders 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 controversial? Does controversy similarly characterize the links between age, gender, and social class and delinquency? Why?

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