

# Primary crime data sources in the united states



U. S. Crime Data Sources The two most comprehensive sources of statistical data on crime in the United s are the Federal Bureau of Investigations Uniform Crime Reports and the National Incident-Based Reporting System. The most recent edition of the former covers 2009 while the most recent edition of the later covers 2008. The following brief discussion will compare and contrast these two data sources with particular attention to any weaknesses or potential problems with the data and its used in criminological research.

According to Rand and Rennison (2002) the Uniform Crime Reports are derived only from reported crimes. This means that unreported crimes are not covered by the data. Therefore, the Uniform Crime Reports can not be said to cover all crimes but only reported crimes. They conclude that alone the Uniform Crime Reports do not provide comprehensive and conclusive data on incidence of crime in the United States so they must be considered only one part of an analysis of crime an supplemented with other sources of evidence.

While they do not consider the National Archive of Criminal Justice Datas National Incident-Based Reporting System the same could be said of it. Its data is based on reported crime and leaves unreported crime unconsidered and unaccounted for. No official publications on crime rates consider unreported crime.

Arguably, by definition, unreported crime cannot be considered using strictly quantitative measures. Unreported crime is best studied using other research methods such as interviews with residents of and employees of social service agencies in the city or area under examination. They may be particularly true in areas where law enforcement agencies and the criminal

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justice system are distrusted or feared.

Lynch and Jarvis (2008) point to an even greater problem with academic statistical analysis of the Uniform Crime Reports. They note that the data is produced by and for law enforcement agencies and is intended to provide broad indicators of crime trends to law enforcement agencies. They also note that the data is not statistically rigorous, nor does it claim to be, because it was never conceived as a tool for academic analysis.

Unlike the Uniform Crime Reports the National Incident-Based Reporting System also includes data on clearance or the disposition of incidents. This is particularly useful data for researchers and is not impaired by the fact that only reported incidents are included in the data set. For example, Jarvis and Regoezci (2009) used the National Incident-Based Reporting System to analyze the homicide clearances from 1996 to 2002 inclusive. Their research allowed them to conclude that a wide range of factors including race, gender and age are important variables in exceptional clearances and that exceptional clearances are not primarily influenced by political factors as previously asserted. A conclusion of this nature cannot be derived from the Uniform Crime Reports alone as they do not include clearance data.

Recognizing the weaknesses in both data sets they can be used in international comparisons provided that the data from the second country is similar to the American data. For example, Roberts (2008) used the National Incident-Based Reporting System data, and similar data from Japan to compare the homicide clearance rates in Japan and the United States.

The most important similarity, and shortcoming, is that both data sets only involve reported crime. Within that restriction they are useful for international comparisons provided that the data from the second country is

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similarly based only on reported crime. The most important difference is that the National Incident-Based Reporting System data includes incident clearance information. Also, the Uniform Crime Reports were never intended to be academically rigorous and employed in statistical micro-analysis while the National Incident-Based Reporting System data is

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