SOC 3290 Deviance
Overheads Lecture 17: Measuring Deviance & Crime 1:   Official Crime Statistics:

*   Over the next few classes we will review:

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

Official Police Statistics (UCR data):

 The crime rate is calculated by dividing:

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

* This is useful in classifying, analyzing, and clarifying crime trends

* It is helpful in planning, implementing, and assessing programs

* Problems:

- Differences in data collection procedures (between police forces
  and over time)
- Lack of sociological detail

 Uniform Crime Reports (since 1962) attempted to solve these problems with standard reporting practices

UCR Data (2007)

* In 2007 about 2.3 million Criminal Code incidents were reported to police (a 30 year low). These don't include traffic incidents & other federal statute violations. Breakdown:

> 13 % violent crime
> 48% property crime
> 39% "other" criminal code offences (e.g. mischief, bail violations)

* Historically, property crimes have been losing ground to violent & "other" offences (e.g. in 1980 these were 8%, 65% & 27% respectively)

* The overall crime rate decreased 7% in 2007, driven by declines in virtually all high-volume offences: theft under $5000, mischief under $5000, B & E, common assault, car theft, disturbing the peace, fraud and counterfeiting. There has been a general downward trend in the crime rate since 1991.

* Historically crime rates were highest in the west/ lowest in the east. Since 2002, while the west retained the highest rates, central Canada had lower rates slightly lower than most Atlantic provinces. Saskatchewan had the highest crime rate, Ontario the lowest. In 2007, Newfoundland, after having the lowest provincial crime rate for well over 20 years, fell to 5th place.

∗ Declines were reported in most of Canada's census metropolitan areas, including the nine largest. The biggest decreases were in Kitchener, Montreal and Winnipeg. Most of the 18 smaller cities also reported drops in crime. The only areas to report increases were the smaller CMA's of St. John's, Saguenay, St. John and Gatineau.

* As in other years, the highest crime rates were in the Western CMA's, most notably Saskatoon & Regina. The lowest were found in central CMA's, Saguenay, Toronto and Trois Rivieres.

Violent Crime

∗ The rate of violent crime fell by 3% in 2007, the lowest rate in nearly 20 years. It has been falling since the mid-1990's, after increasing fairly steadily for 30 years before that.

∗ This drop was largely due to decreases in common assault, robbery and sexual assault. Following increases in most serious violent crimes over the past 2 years, 2007 rates of homicide, attempted murder, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, assault with a weapon, forcible confinement or abduction declined or remained stable.

∗ The highest violent crime rate was in Saskatchewan; the lowest PEI. Newfoundland was the only province to report an increase in violent crime, up 11% (largely common assaults). St. John's violent crime was up 20%.

∗ Homicide was down 3% in 2007. The rate (1.8 per 100,000 population) has been generally declining since the 1970's. All provinces showed drops except N.B., Ontario and Manitoba. There was a substantial increase in Manitoba, largely occurring in small urban and rural areas.

∗ Toronto had most homicides; yet when population was taken into account, the highest rates occurred in Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary. Trois-Rivieres, Sudbury, Regina and Vancouver.

∗ Robberies declined 5% in 2007, have been declining since the 1990's, but have remained relatively stable since 2000.

    60% committed without a weapon
    11% involved firearms (down 5%)
    29% involved another weapon (up 1%)

∗ Declines were reported everywhere except NL, Alberta, B.C. and N.B. Robberies in the west were well above the rest of the country (esp. Manitoba and Saskatchewan).

Property Crime:

∗ In 2007 property crimes were down 8%). The overall property crime rate was the lowest since 1969. This decline was driven by drops in nearly all types of property crime. B & E's were at their lowest level in 40 years, dropping 9% in 2007. Likewise, car thefts declined by 9%.

Other Offences:

* Among the few crimes to increase in 2007 were drug offences and impaired driving, both of which tend to be influenced by police enforcement practices. Drug offences were up 4%, with cannabis possession responsible for most of the increase. Impaired driving rose 3%, following 2 consecutive annual decreases.

* The youth crime rate dropped 2% in 2007, following a 3% increase in 2006. Youth violent crime remained stable, with declines in most non-violent offences.

* There was a 2% increase in the rate of youth charged by police, yet the rate of youth cleared by other means, such as through diversion programs, dropped 4%.

(2) Official Crime Statistics: Drawbacks:

Nevertheless:

  -Not all crimes are detected
  -Not all crimes are reported
  -Not all crimes are "founded"
  -Demeanor of victims & offenders/ familiarity with police affects
  -Shrinkage throughout CJS processes
  -Size, organization, and enforcement style of police force affects
  -Unofficial practices (e.g. overcharging, entrapment)

-Perceptual biases (e.g. racial stereotypes)
-Shifting political enforcement priorities (e.g. crackdowns)
-Manipulation of statistics for agency gain (e.g. need more staff)
-Some offenders more visible than others (e.g. street prostitutes)
-Interactional dynamics of labelling (e.g. presence of complaint)
-Changes in how incidents recorded (e.g. 1 offender/1 victim or not)
-Changes in base population figures between 1 Census and another
-Variations in unit at risk (e.g. cars per population for auto theft)

Therefore, official (UCR) police statistics must be:

-Seen as social constructions
-Used critically, with other sources

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