

SOC 3290 Deviance
Overheads Lecture 18: Measuring Deviance & Crime 2:
Survey Research & Qualitative Methods

* Today we continue our discussion & critique of methodology with attention to:

- (1) Survey Research
- (2) Qualitative Methods

(1) Survey Research:

*Victimization surveys have been the preferred methodological tool of victimologists since 1970's.

*Information gathered directly from victims. In past little known relative to offenders

* Focus on crimes: - With direct, identifiable victims
 - Direct, potentially identifiable offender
 - Victimizations for which information available

* Canadian Urban Victimization Survey (1981)

- Gender differences (assault)
- Age and risk (youth)
- Income
- Lifestyle (nights out on town)
- Fear of crime
- Only 42% of crimes reported
- Reasons not reported:
 - “Too minor”
 - “Police can’t do anything”
 - “Inconvenient”

- Variation in sexual assaults
- Most likely to report when large financial loss

* General Social Survey & Violence Against Women Survey (1993)

- 24% of Canadians victimized in year previous
- 23% of women have been sex/physically assaulted
- Public fearful despite lower crime rate
- Male against female violence most common
- Males twice as likely to suffer stranger violence

*International Crime Victimization Survey (1989; 1992; 1996 & 2000)

- 25% of Canadian population reported victimization prior year
- Shows slight decrease in crime rate
- Property crimes rated more serious (reflecting limited offences)
- 52% of crimes reported in Canada
- Property crimes more frequently reported than violent ones

- Reasons for not reporting:
 - “Not serious”
 - “Solved myself”
 - “Police couldn’t help”

- Reasons for reporting:
 - Insurance
 - “Should report”
 - “Want offender caught”
 - “To recover property”
 - “To stop it”

- Priority of reasons varied between property and violent offences

Surveys: Methodological Assessment:

*** Advantages:**

- Respondents asked about theoretically relevant issues
- Weed out public decisions not to report
- Weed out police decisions not to record
- Improve estimates of crime and victimization

*** Problems:**

- Victims have to know they have been victimized
- Standardized survey questions can be interpreted differently
- Dishonesty in responses
- Faulty memories of respondents
- Giving most socially desirable answers
- Limiting offences inquired about affects outcome
- Selection of respondents
- Large samples needed/ inflates cost

(2) Qualitative Methods:

* *Participant observation*: observing people's behavior in natural environments, carefully documenting interactions & behavior

- * Advantages:
- detail of description
 - depth of understanding

- * Disadvantages:
- inapplicable to large social settings
 - few safeguards against researcher bias
 - selective perception & memory
 - selectivity in data collection
 - presence of researcher changing dynamics
 - difficulty replicating studies
 - ethical problems/dangers
 - accessibility to & forthrightness of subjects
 - violations of privacy

- difficulty generalizing results
- methods time consuming & demanding
- keeping proper distance between self/subjects
- becoming “accessory to crime?”

* *Intensive Interviewing*: Informal, unstructured, detailed interviews

- * Advantages:
- less chance of misunderstanding than surveys
 - potential for more accurate responses
 - tailoring questions to respondents’ understanding
 - more intimate & comprehensive picture of individual respondents
 - some groups more accessible by such methods
 - speed of data collection

* Disadvantages:

- small, nonrandom samples limit generalization
- lack of standardization in questions
- difficulty replicating studies
- interviewer bias/respondents pleasing them
- biases likely not noticed by researcher
- lack of standardization in analysis

Conclusion:

* We have reviewed strengths & weaknesses of official police data, survey research, & qualitative methods

* No method is perfect, & first two are geared more to positivism; the latter to interpretive understanding

* Methods must be used in combination to give most well-rounded account (“triangulation”)

* It is necessary to be critical of information obtained, not reify it as the “Truth,” but as the best account one can give of deviance

