

## Sociology 4099: Victimology

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### Overheads Class 2.2: A Critique of Official Police Data

- UCR crime rates calculated by dividing:
- $\frac{\text{Number of incidents in year}}{\text{Population in area}} \times 100,000 = \text{crime rate}$
- \* Useful in classifying, analyzing, and clarifying crime trends
- \* Useful 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 attempted to solve these problems.

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