

Crime Data

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What we know about crime is often the result of analysis of crime data and statistics. Crime data and statistics often come from various sources. The following are some of the most common and important forms of crime data.

Police Data – Police capture considerable information about crime, as they are the agency to which people report crime. Police will often be provided with information about location, time of offence and description of an offender. Police might also be provided with or gather information about the modus operandi of the offender and intelligence about particular activities.

Court Data – Court data provides information on the number of people appearing in the different courts (e.g. Children's, Local, District, Supreme) in a given period. Data from the courts can demonstrate sentencing patterns of magistrates or judges, the length of sentences imposed, the number of convictions for particular offences, characteristics of offenders and a range of other important information.

Prison Data – Information is routinely captured about the number of prisoners in NSW and Australia. A range of variables are frequently captured, including status (remand or sentenced to imprisonment), sentence length, gender, age, and ethnicity. Other variables about previous offending history, mental health and suicide ideation, for example, might also be captured through surveys of inmates and detainees.

Self-report Studies – In recognition of the limitations of police, court and prison data in identifying the actual levels of crime in a particular jurisdiction or area, surveying of groups within the community has been used to find out what offences they committed over a given period. These surveys demonstrate the often low rates of reporting and detection of various offences.

Community and/or Victim Surveys – Another source of information about crime is via victim surveys. Typically, these surveys involve asking members of the community whether they have been the victims of particular crimes in a particular period and whether they reported this to the police. These surveys assist in demonstrating the differences between actual experiences of victimization and recorded incidents of victimization. These surveys also help to demonstrate changes in willingness to report particular crimes to police. Over time, trends can be monitored to determine if people are more or less willing to report certain crimes.

Third-party Data Sources – Official crime statistics are often supported with non-criminal justice data. Insurance agencies maintain accurate records of insurance policy claims; hospitals keep records of accident and emergency admissions which might provide an insight into the number of admissions for alcohol-related assaults; public transport authorities monitor particular crime incidents on their networks; and theft prevention officers watch for and apprehend persons committing shoplifting in their stores. These are just some of the agencies and individuals that will routinely collect data that either does not get incorporated into crime statistics or is only partially reflected in crime statistics. Consequently, these data can be useful in constructing a 'true' picture of crime in a particular area.