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978-0-521-86204-2 - Understanding Crime Statistics: Revisiting the Divergence of the NCVS and UCR

Edited by James P. Lynch and Lynn A. Addington

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## UNDERSTANDING CRIME STATISTICS

In *Understanding Crime Statistics*, James P. Lynch and Lynn A. Addington draw on the work of leading experts on U.S. crime statistics to provide much-needed research on appropriate use of these statistics. Specifically, the contributors explore issues surrounding divergence in the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), which have been the two major indicators of the level and of the change in level of crime in the United States for the past 30 years. This book examines recent changes in the UCR and the NCVS and assesses the effect these have had on divergence. By focusing on divergence, the authors encourage readers to think about how these data systems filter the reality of crime. *Understanding Crime Statistics* builds on this discussion of divergence to explain how the two data systems can be used as they were intended – in complementary rather than competitive ways.

James P. Lynch is coauthor (with Albert D. Biderman) of *Understanding Crime Incidence Statistics: Why the UCR Diverges from the NCS* and (with Rita J. Simon) of *Immigration the World Over: Statutes, Policies, and Practices*. He has published in many journals, including *Criminology*, *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, and *Justice Quarterly*.

Lynn A. Addington's recent work has appeared in the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* and *Homicide Studies* and has been supported by grants from the American Education Research Association (National Center for Education Statistics – National Science Foundation), the American Statistical Association, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the National Institute of Justice.

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# Understanding Crime Statistics

## Revisiting the Divergence of the NCVS and UCR

Edited by

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John Jay College of Criminal Justice

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This book would not have been possible without the active encouragement and support of Alfred Blumstein. For more than 30 years, Al has appreciated the importance of crime statistics for building data-driven policy in the area of crime and justice and has worked to ensure that these data are both available to researchers and of high quality.

The idea for this book arose from a 2004 conference, “Understanding Crime Statistics: Revisiting the Divergence of the NCVS and the UCR,” which was sponsored by the National Consortium of Violence Research (NCOVR). In addition to NCOVR, American University provided space and logistical support for the meeting. We appreciate the contributions from both of these organizations to this important work. Most of the authors in this volume presented the first draft of their papers at this conference. These preliminary studies benefited from insightful comments by other conference attendees, specifically David Cantor, Laura Dugan, Janet Lauritsen, William J. Sabol, and Brian Wiersema. Most of all, we are thankful to the contributors to this volume for the quality of their initial work and for their perseverance through the editorial process.

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foundation upon which to build this volume. His unique and forward-thinking ideas more than anyone else's have shaped – and continue to shape – crime statistics in the United States. We hope that current and future generations of criminologists and crime statisticians do not squander Al's legacy.



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and Program Participation, Rand has been immersed in the NCVS since its inception in 1972, first at the Census Bureau and since 1978 at BJS. He has directed the Victimization Statistics Branch since 1995. He is the author or coauthor of several published articles and BJS reports on the extent and nature of crime victimization and crime's impact on victims. His recent work has focused on intimate partner violence, rape, and repeat victimization.

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