

## EXERCISE 8

# How Much Crime Is There?

### PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE VERSUS OFFICIAL KNOWLEDGE

This is a mini-research problem. You may wish to work with one or more class members in collecting and compiling the required data. We are interested in finding out how much similarity exists between newspapers' reporting of crime and actual criminal activity going on in the community as reflected by crimes known to the police. What kinds of crime, if any, are "over" and "under" reported by the media? To do this research, you will look at newspapers and see how they report crime. What kinds of crimes are reported and how much emphasis do various kinds of crimes receive? It is important that everyone follow a standardized set of procedures so that the results will be comparable and accurate.

#### 1. Which Papers to Read

Fairly large papers published daily in your area are the best. These are readily available on microfilm at your school or public library. The Ayers Directory of Publications may be useful to you in locating suitable papers.

Once a paper is selected develop a sampling procedure. One such procedure is outlined below. This was utilized in studying a major metropolitan daily. Select papers from a study year at least 18 months prior to the date you begin this assignment, as publication of police data is usually delayed for this length of time.

In developing your sample, try to ensure that each day of the week and each month of the year are equally represented. Be alert to the bias that may be introduced by an overrepresentation of holidays, pay days, and other periods of high crime potential.

## EXAMPLE OF SAMPLING SCHEME

1980	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa	Su
January	27	14	22	23	10	18	26
February	3	25	5	6	28	8	16
March	9	31	4	26	13	14	1
April	13	7	29	23	3	11	12
May	4	5	6	14	1	2	24
June	8	9	24	4	5	20	28
July	27	28	22	30	17	18	12
August	31	4	26	13	14	15	16
September	14	1	16	17	18	26	20
October	12	27	21	22	30	31	4
November	30	3	18	26	13	14	29
December	14	22	2	17	25	12	20

### 2. Classifying Crime

You need to know whether a particular article is discussing crime and what kind of crime is being mentioned. To do this you can use the FBI Uniform Crime Reports definitions found in the first section of any of the annual Uniform Crime Reports. Currently, there are 8 Part I and 21 Part II crimes defined by the FBI. Familiarize yourself with these definitions. These are the acts you will call "crime." If an article discusses one or more of these "index" crimes, you can say it is about "crime" for the purposes of this project. By reading the headline and the first paragraph, you can determine if an article is about crime. NOTE: This *includes* articles investigating crimes, criminal trials, and appeals. Do not depend upon just the headline but read at least the first paragraph to find out if the article discussed a crime topic. Once you have located an article on crime, you need to classify it according to the type of crime discussed.

### 3. Coding

To make sure that all information is properly recorded, design a coding form to keep track of the crimes discussed in each article. The items you will need to code for each crime article are: (a) name of newspaper, (b) date of paper, (c) the number of square inches of space devoted to the article, and (d) classification of the crime(s) discussed.

To determine item (c), you will need a ruler. Include headings, photos, and captions, if any, as part of the article. Measure across the top of the column and down the side. Estimate to the nearest inch to make your calculations easier. Now multiply the two figures together. The result is the number of square inches for that article. Sometimes articles are continued in another column or on another page. Measure each of these columns in the same way and add all your results together to get the total square inches for the article. You may also need to divide some articles into imaginary rectangles like "A" and "B" in Figure 8.1. Treat these as separate parts of the same article and sum them for the article total.

To determine (d), use the FBI Uniform Crime Reports categories of crime to classify the article according to the crime. A brief description of these categories may be found in *The Uniform Crime Reports of the United States*, prepared by the Department of Justice and available in most school libraries. Some articles will discuss more than one crime. Read through and decide which is the central concern of the reporter. If uncertain, select the crime that is given the most space within the article. If you believe that two or more crimes are given about equal space in the same article, pick out the one which is the more serious - predatory, personal, and purposeful crimes over nonpredatory, property, and negligent crimes; Part I crimes are more serious than Part II crimes, and so on. When you have finished coding all the articles that discuss crime, you are ready to compare your data with the police statistics for that same jurisdiction and period of time.

#### 4. Comparison

- a. First, make a list of the 7 (or 8) Part I and 22 (or 21) Part II crimes, depending on the classification of arson in the year you are studying.
- b. Second, next to this list write the percentage of total crimes reported to police for the year each category represents in the jurisdiction you are studying. (Crimes in this category -- Total crime X 100 = percent in this category; Figure 8.2). Now, make a second list, putting these types of crimes in order of occurrence, with the most frequent first (Figure 8.3).
- c. Third, make another list of FBI index crimes across the *top* of one or two pages. Give yourself plenty of room (Figure 8.4).
- d. Go through the coding forms you have collected. Note which crime classification appears on the coding form. Find this classification at the top of the page on your index crimes list. Note the number of square inches of space devoted to that article and write that figure on your index crime list in the column beneath the appropriate crime classification.
- e. When you have finished entering the space measurements for all coding forms, add the figures in each column. This will give an estimate of the total space devoted to a particular type of crime in the newspaper you studied.
- f. Convert these square-inch totals to percentage figures by adding all the totals of all the columns together to get a grand total of space devoted to crime during the year. Now divide each column total by this figure to find the percentage of the total space devoted to crime that each classification represents.
- g. Make another list of the FBI index crimes down the lefthand side of a page similar to the one you made in step (a) above. Beside this list enter the percentage for each crime category represented by the various newspaper articles.
- h. Finally, make a list of the index crimes in order of the space devoted to them, with the category receiving the most space at the top.

#### 5. What Gets Turned In

At this point you should have constructed two lists:

- a. *Crimes known to the police* - converted to "percentage of total arrests for the year" by type of crime and ranked from largest to smallest percentage.
- b. *Media coverage of crime* - classified by type of crime and the total number of square inches of space devoted to each crime type. These total square-inch figures are then converted to percentage of total square inches of all crime coverage and ranked from largest to smallest percentage. The coding forms on which you have recorded the information for each article on crime and the two comparison lists should be turned in with your final report. Please put *all* completed forms and lists in a *manila envelope* marked with the names of all contributing students and hand them in on the date due. On the comparison lists be sure to *label* each chart, including the names of contributing students, percentages, square inches, and footnotes explaining any excluded or missing data. You need not turn in a separate set of lists for each student. Just put all participants' names on each list.

## 6. Final Write-Up

Your write-up for this exercise should take the form of a *letter to the editor* of the newspaper you studied.

All letters are to be typed, single or one-and-a-half spaced, and accompanied by a correctly addressed, stamped business-size (4" x 9-1/2") envelope. All letters are to be signed with the full names of the student(s) preparing them. Normally none should exceed 2,500 words or 5 pages in length. Note: This is not a minimum requirement but a maximum length suggestion. This may be augmented by tables or appendices as you choose.

Suggested topics to be included in the letter are outlined below. Follow the general directions at the end of the Media Violence project for personal responsibility format and what to turn in.

First, look at your two lists. Consider the crimes "known to the police:" the "arrest" list. Are there two, three, or four categories of crime that constitute a large proportion of total crimes? For example, in Los Angeles in 1977, three types of crimes, drunkenness, traffic, motor vehicle violations, and driving while intoxicated, accounted for more than 60 percent of all arrests. Adding a fourth category, narcotic drug violations, brought the total to almost 75 percent. So 4 crimes made up about three-quarters of the arrest activity, while the remaining 25 crimes accounted for only one-quarter of all arrests. What kinds of crime are most often reported to the police? Are they personal or property offenses, predatory or nonpredatory, more serious or less serious, intentional acts or criminal negligence? Are these the kinds of offenses about which there might exist some disagreement as to whether or not they are "criminal" or would we expect widespread consensus concerning them? Have these acts always been considered crimes?

Now look at the "media coverage of crime" list. Again, are there two, three, or four types of crime that constitute a sizable proportion of the crime reporting in the media? Which crimes are those and what proportion of the total coverage does this account for? How do they compare with the most frequent "arrest" categories?

Do the news media emphasize crimes that are reflected in police data or are there significant differences? What are the principal differences, if any, between these two pictures of crime? Why might the media choose to emphasize different types of crime than actually predominate? Why might they ignore or deemphasize other kinds of crime even though these deemphasized crimes account for a substantial portion of police arrest activity? Are they predatory or nonpredatory, personal or property offenses, intentional or negligent, and so on? Recall the newspaper articles that you read. Who are the victims of crime, if any, according to media reports: rich or poor, famous people or ordinary citizenry, young or old, male or female? What social class would you say most of these victims are? How accurate is this picture when compared with the discussion of crime victims in your text? How much discussion of victims is there?

Next, decide how well the "known to the police" and "media coverage" lists compare with each other. Do the news media emphasize the same sorts of crime that are reflected in police report data, or are they significantly different? What are the principal differences, if any, between these two pictures of crime? Why might media choose to emphasize different types of crime than actually predominate? Why might they ignore or deemphasize other crimes, even though these deemphasized crimes account for a substantial portion of the police crime reports?

Be sure to answer each of these questions in your write-up:

- What might the impact on public opinion concerning the nature and extent of crime be if there is a serious and consistent difference between news coverage of crime and actual arrests?
- As public opinion often influences legislation and budgetary appropriations, how might the media bring about a change in these priorities?
- What kind of personal feelings would you expect people to have if they accepted uncritically the media coverage of crime?
- How might the image of crime presented by the media offer some potential for the underreporting of the types of crime that people experience?
- How might people view their own victimization? Do they feel the crime wasn't "important" enough to report to the police?
- What steps might an individual take to protect himself or herself from crime and how might these lead to an increase in violence?
- What problems arise when legislation, funding, and support for law enforcement are not directed toward the actual problems faced by police and other social control agents in performing their daily tasks?

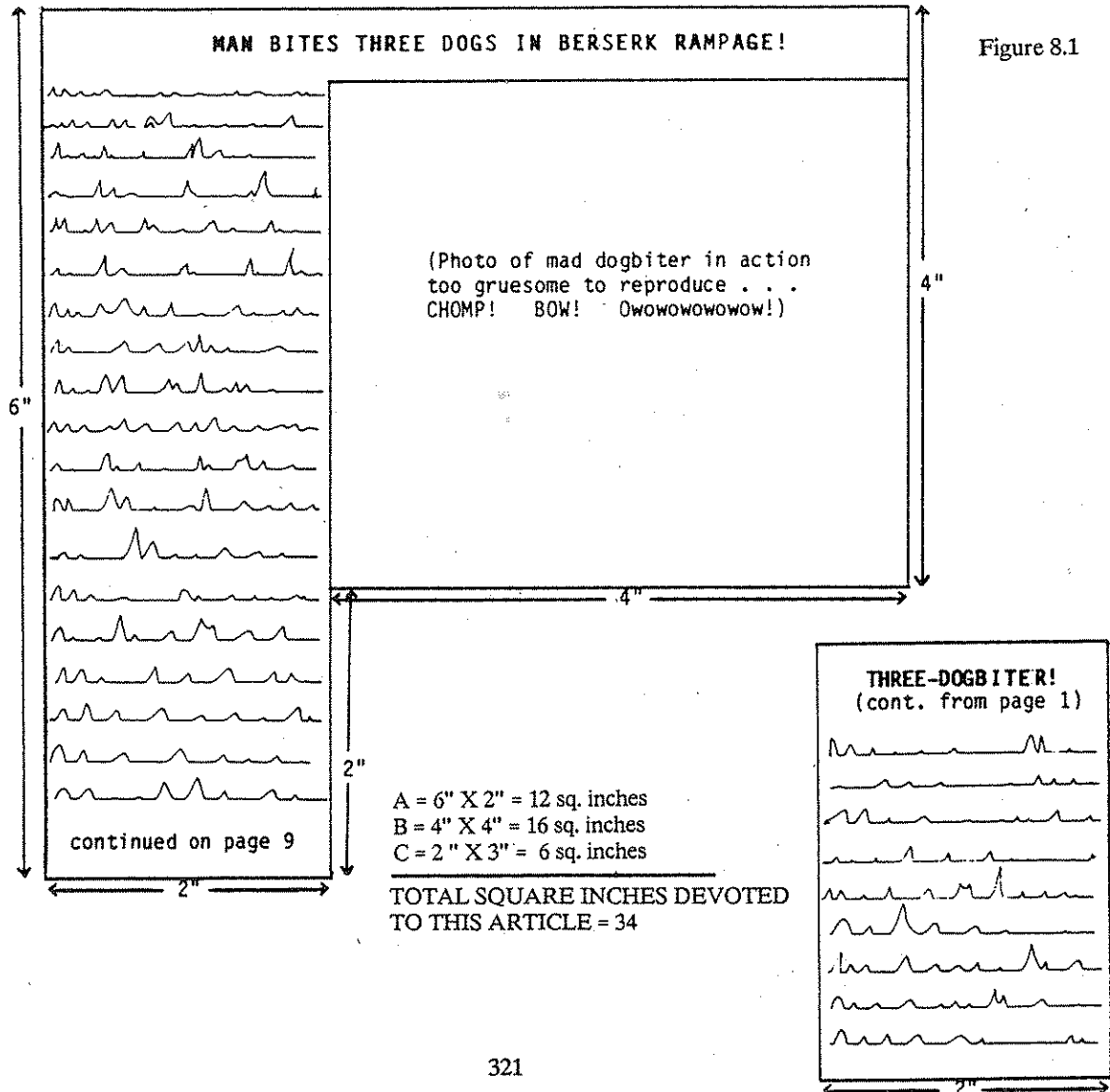


Figure 8.2.

<u>Index Crimes</u>	<u>Number of crimes in jurisdiction for comparison period</u>	<u>Percentage of crimes reported to the police (crimes/population) represented by this category</u>
Murder	100	$100/20,000 \times 100\% = .5\%$
Rape	500	$500/20,000 \times 100\% = 2.5\%$
Robbery	1,000	$1,500/20,000 \times 100\% = 7.5\%$
Aggravated Assault	1,000	$1,750/20,000 \times 100\% = 8.8\%$
...etc.		
Total	20,600	100.0%

Figure 8.3.

Percentage of crimes reported to police (in order of frequency)

Larceny	19.4%
Drunkedness	17.2%
Narcotic Drug Laws	10.3%
Embezzlement	9.3%
Aggravated Assault	8.8%
...etc.	
Total	100.0%

Figure 8.4

Square inches of space devoted to crime coverage. Enter the total for each article in the appropriate column.

	MURDER	RAPE	ROBBERY	AGGRAVATED ASSAULT	Etc.	
						Grand Total
Total Square Inches						