

DISCUSSION

by

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MR. CHAIRMAN, DOCTOR JOHN GRIFFIN, LADIES
AND GENTLEMEN:

I come before you as a representative of the field of law enforcement to serve as a discussant of the paper that has just been presented by the previous speaker, Doctor John Griffin. The time schedule that has been established for these sessions does not permit any detailed discussion of "Current Problems in Police Statistics" hence I will only be able to touch upon a few of the many items in Doctor Griffin's paper.

I found the presentation of considerable interest and must admit that it demonstrates that the author has an appreciable knowledge of many basic problems that have tended to limit the past development of meaningful crime statistics. I am in agreement with Doctor Griffin on a number of his observations however I find that I must voice some exception to several comments and at the same time make specific reference to one or two of his statements that might be misunderstood by a lay audience.

COMMENTS

1. Dr. Griffin related that if we were to review the index to the Journal of the American Statistical Association we would find that data pertaining to crime statistics are practically non-existent.

If this statement is true, and I accept the speakers statement on face value, then I would like to emphasize that THE FAILURE TO FIND MANY REFERENCES TO CRIME STATISTICS IN THE JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN STATISTICAL ASSOCIATION SHOULD NOT IN AND OF ITSELF BE ACCEPTED AS EVIDENCE OF ANY OR ALL OF THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS:

- A. Crime statistics do not merit serious consideration, or
- B. No problem exists with respect to the complete and satisfactory treatment of crime data, or
- C. No serious attempts have been made toward the development of sound crime statistics, or
- D. The law enforcement services are not interested in the analysis of crime data, or
- E. The police service is incapable of applying acceptable statistical analysis in the solution of police problems.

The fact that crime statistics have not been the subject of more attention by the American Statistical Association must be attributed to causes other than disinterest on the part of law enforcement. On the contrary, the principal source of available crime data is the result of

individual and cooperative effort of the many law enforcement agencies. The Uniform Crime Report Procedure followed by most law enforcement organizations is currently supervised by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The program was in fact originally developed by the International Association Chiefs of Police. The Uniform Crime Reporting System is itself subject to continuous study and review. Every police association that is worthy of the name devotes some measure of attention to the up-grading of police records and statistical processes.

The charge that police administrators generally lack an adequate understanding of the true nature and limitations of statistical standards is well taken. Some of the factors that account for this deficiency have been touched upon by Doctor Griffin. I will also comment briefly on this problem in a few minutes.

2. Dr. Griffin mentioned in his paper that one of the major impediments blocking the development of a sound and acceptable system of crime statistics is the deep seated concern for "home rule" that is exhibited by law enforcement agencies.

This element of "home rule" (local independence of action) does exist in all jurisdictions to a varying degree. Blind adherence to this socio-political philosophy promotes the same inadequacy and shortsightedness that can be identified with other areas of sterile in-breeding that is frequently encountered in human affairs. From the practical standpoint the local police administrator faces the constant task of making one of two choices. Either he will decide to confine his policy and operations to such limits as will satisfy local attitudes - thereby keeping the local body politic temporarily happy - or, he will expand his horizon beyond the immediate confines and accept the challenge to explore activities that offer some promise of greater gain but grant no immediate return.

This administrative problem arises in all of its manifest distortion when periodic crime rates and reports are issued that call public attention to police statistics. With the passage of time the advocates of the "home rule" philosophy find their hallowed position less tenable as they are more or less compelled to conform certain statistical standards. The trend is toward regional or statewide statistical procedures. The arguments in support of this trend become increasingly formidable as we consider each of the potential advantages of such a program. Among the more obvious benefits would be the following:

- A. Larger sample areas for the collection of source data.

- B. The availability of more statistical units.
- C. Less distortion of data due to unusual incidents.
- D. Better classification of data.
- E. Greater stability and reliability of the statistical end-product.
- F. A more rational basis for comparative statistics.
- G. More accurate identification of the nature and magnitude of unique local influence.
- H. True identification of the crime problem as being a product of the local society and not the end result of the efficiency (or lack of efficiency) of any particular law enforcement agency.

-- There are many others --

3. Dr. Griffin also commented upon the important fact that before any major advancements can be made in police statistics - "the attitude of police commanders must be changed to the point that they recognize and accept statistical methods as a useful administrative tool." He further stated that in general police administrators are impatient and view records and statistical processes as a chore.

There is considerable substance to this observation, however, I would urge that the tone of these statements be modified so that fair credit may be given to law enforcement for the significant shift in attitude that has taken place within the last decade. This change in attitude has been notable along the Pacific Coast area and can be amply demonstrated here in California. The manhours of personnel time devoted to records keeping and the status of the statistical duties have advanced at a faster rate than activities in any other phase of police operations.

Police "planning and research" units were the subject of academic debate prior to 1950. At this date the existence of such an administrative unit in a major police agency is either a fact or one is in the process of organization.

Here I would like to deviate for a moment to express the prayerful hope that the police administrator that has taken the forward step to initiate a Planning and Research Unit within his department will also follow through by securing the employment of statistically qualified personnel. I believe Dr. Griffin will echo the same sentiment.

The movement toward a more extensive application of statistics within police agencies has occurred, in part, due to the need to justify the budgetary request. The results obtained where a proper use has been made of the statistical tool has been encouraging and has paved the way to consider statistical analysis in seeking the solution to other police problems.

4. Dr. Griffin stated that the police service is of the conviction that the "truth cannot be reported".

I am somewhat concerned that this statement might be readily accepted by those who are not acquainted with current police trends and who are equally not aware of the many limitations placed upon law enforcement. I admit that in raising this protest I am speaking from a personal conviction based upon my own limited experience. However, if twenty years of continuous service with a major metropolitan police department is any qualification, and if my working acquaintance with many representatives of law enforcement agencies in the Western states grants any weight to my opinion - then I must suggest that this statement of Dr. Griffin be modified.

There is an old adage that has been bantered about to the effect that "a community gets the amount and quality of police service that it demands". Another statement that is frequently annunciated points out that "the police agency can only apply that degree of enforcement pressure that the public will accept". Both of these statements contain a high measure of truth. They should be kept in mind when any evaluation of police attitudes or administrative policy are under consideration. In the modern era the truth regarding crime and police services cannot be suppressed by the police alone. No police agency can hide the fact in the face of a "free press", an "enlightened public", or where interagency cooperation is the necessary ingredient to daily operation.

5. I am in complete accord with the suggestion made by Dr. Griffin that law enforcement should explore fully four areas of statistical application namely effective presentation, small area sampling, sample surveys, and the use of electronic data processes. Some progress has already been made in certain of these areas. Much remains to be done.

6. Dr. Griffin clearly reveals a principal sore spot in the present use of police statistics. This sensitive area relates to the tendency to use police statistics developed by independent agencies to make comparative analyses.

The very fact that crime statistics are prepared and published invites the reader to use the data for comparative purposes. The use may not be proper and the conclusions may be without substance nevertheless these comparisons go on. This problem became so critical that it was one of the major factors that led to recent changes in the form and content of the Uniform Crime Reports prepared by the Federal Bureau of Investigation from reports received from local law enforcement agencies. The comparisons continue to be made.

The major problem lies not so much in the

fact that comparisons are made as in the invalid and unsupported conclusions or evaluations that are attempted by persons who know little of the true significance of the data but are impressed by the array of numbers. Comparison is inevitable in our dynamic society therefore our every effort should be directed toward the development and acceptance of a properly conceived system of statistical procedure that will serve the operating needs of law enforcement and at the same time allow certain reasonable avenues for the measurement of service efficiency, etc. The present reluctance of law enforcement to use existing data for comparisons flows from the awareness that all police agencies are not exercising the same degree of discretion in the scoring and classification of police incidents.

At this point I wish to conclude my remarks with respect to the paper presented by Dr. Griffin and touch upon a few additional points that I believe should be subject to your consideration at this time. As you are well aware social statistics impose certain limitations upon the analytical processes due to the nature of the basic data under study. This same character of limitation is to be found in police statistics. The problem grows out of the difficulty of establishing valid definitions, identifying characteristics, determining status in a subject undergoing change, etc. May I make specific reference to a few examples.

1. UNCERTAINTY OF BASIC POLICE DATA.

When we attempt to gather and classify police statistics we are identifying and counting units that possess many unknown characteristics. When statistical processes are applied in business and industry the analyst has the advantage of working with unit that identified with a high level of consistency. In addition, the units under study are subject to a measure of restriction and control that is not commonly found in the realm of social statistics. The units are highly similar with respect to the more important basic characteristics. Each of these attributes tend to promote the use of statistical processes. In law enforcement we are frequently required to depend upon social data that is incomplete, inconsistent, and what is more challenging it is highly unpredictable. Our samples are seldom subject to pre-test control.

2. LACK OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL.

Our opportunity to control the environment wherein our sample subjects operate is severely limited. The police services deal with human conduct which is as varied as the individuals that are encountered. Our heritage of a "free society" does not encourage police controls even in those instances where the object of the control is known to be dangerous and prone to engage in anti-social acts.

3. THE MEANING OF NUMBERS.

The police administrator must be taught to understand the true meaning of a number and its relation to a statistical report. Too many persons attach an unrealistic significance to a number. It should always be borne in mind that a number is a conventional symbol and has no meaning in and of itself. It has meaning only in relation to that which it describes. It is a semantic medium whereby persons communicate quantitative information from one to another. The number must be distinguished from the incident or class of event that it counts. A number can be in error just as any other descriptive determination. The fact that a number has been assigned to an event or incident does not change the event nor does it prove its existence.

4. A TREND IS INTIMATELY RELATED TO THE BASE.

While it seems that this statement should not have to be made experience has proven that quite frequently statistical studies are attempted and reports prepared only to find that no proper base or plane of reference was established upon which the collected data could be properly arrayed for analysis. This statement also has another important connotation which underlies all statistical processes. That statement is "the end product in a statistical analysis has no more validity than the initial premise upon which the study is based". No amount of mathematical computation will correct for inadequate sampling or the use of an erroneous base.

5. THE PRESENT UNIFORM CRIME REPORT SYSTEM MUST STILL BE IMPROVED AND EXTENDED.

The present system of Uniform Crime Report classification leaves much to be desired. The broad crime groupings are used to score major offenses which differ according to some element in their definition. This is a mechanical separation that does not distinguish between crime that fall into a general definition but vary greatly in some other aspects which are significant to the police. Take for example the following situations:

- A. Two juveniles while on school vacation break into a neighbors barn, steal some nails, a hammer, and a saw in order to build a tree house nearby.
- B. A prowler sneaks into an unoccupied bedroom and rummages for money or jewelry while the occupants are having dinner downstairs.
- C. A team of thugs, armed and with heavy burglar tools force entrance into a office and attack a safe.

Each of the above cases would be scored as one "burglary" according to current police statistical

practices. From the standpoint of practical law enforcement operation each case offers a different challenge both from the standpoint of police protective services and as far as threat of danger to life or property. While these three cases have significant differences in fact they would be indistinguishable in the formal statistical tabulation. Other examples could be given for each of the other major crime classifications - rape, robbery, auto theft, aggravated assault, etc.

6. THE EVALUATION OF PROPERTY.

Another problem that is demanding renewed attention relates to the present practices employed by police agencies in the evaluation of property that has been reported as lost or stolen. Most departments use an arbitrary system that is skewed toward the conservative scale. As long as the evaluation formula is used consistently within an agency no great harm will result. If the formula is subject to frequent or periodic change then the true meaning of property values is lost or subject to serious question. Property values as reported by various police agencies cannot be subjected to comparative analysis under the present procedures. However, the Federal Bureau of Investigation asks for and receives reports of property value from individual departments each month and publishes some of this data. This will continue to be an area of irritation and some complaint until some general formula for the evaluation of property can be developed and adopted by all agencies.

7. PREMATURE RELEASE OF STATISTICAL REPORTS.

One failing found among police officials is the tendency to rush the release of statistical

data particularly when that data reflects favorably as to the accomplishments of the organization. This is a practice that can have serious consequences if not held in check. I favor the early employment of statistical determinations as they will tend to be more in harmony with the current events that are demanding control. However no administrator should pass statistical analysis reports relating to his department until he has given the report proper attention. Despite the excellence of the statistical product, its form or findings it will often require some degree of interpretation. This interpretation should be developed by the administrator or under his immediate direction.

Statistical determinations are viewed with indifference by too many administrators. They exhibit interest only when the reports reveal that police incidents are on the decline which they find favorable. When the tabulations show that police incidents are on the rise they become unhappy with the statistical process and tend to discount its significance. The process should be based upon sound statistical practices which will produce valid measures of the occurrence of events and services performed that can be accepted by the administrator whether the trend be up or down.

With these comments I will conclude my part in this program as a discussant for the paper presented by Dr. Griffin concerning "police statistics". I am in general agreement with the greater portion of Dr. Griffin's paper and have tried to touch briefly upon areas where I felt some additional discussion was warranted.

I wish to thank the Chairman for the opportunity to speak before you and wish to thank you for the courtesy extended to me this day.