

DISCUSSION

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The general situation in criminal statistics is such that there are many areas to which a great deal of attention and work must be devoted to improve our present knowledge. Briefly, I would like to mention just five of these areas at this time.

First, a great deal more effort must be given to the uniform definitions, classifications, and descriptions of criminal offenses. At the present time, most of our criminal statistics are gathered in terms of broad offense groupings. These do not distinguish some of the significant differences that must be observed if we are to evaluate our criminal problem. For example, the term burglary covers all kinds of offenses that include breaking and entering, and in some instances merely entering an enclosed area with intent to steal or commit some other offense. This means that in the burglary classification there are literally thousands of cases that are relatively insignificant violations of the law together with very serious cases involving safe cracking and breaking and entering with large-scale theft of property. Until we can subclassify and account for the more serious offenses in these general classifications as distinguished from the rather minor and less serious offenses, we will not be in a position to observe the changes and trends in serious crime with which we are chiefly concerned. The need for these subclassifications involves all offenses, not just burglary. In all of them the problem of what is serious, what is run-of-the-mill, and what is minor is not now well distinguished in our collections of criminal statistics.

A second area that requires a great deal more study and exploration, and which is related to more exact definitions of crime, is that of accounting for the activity in our criminal law control at the police level. Law enforcement is primarily a local affair. This means that in California, for instance, we have over 400 independent police departments and sheriffs' offices. To obtain uniform and complete coverage of the data on offenses and offenders from so many agencies poses a real problem. Today we have summary reporting, but such a method does not permit any assurance that the material reported from all of the sources is in exactly the same terms despite uniform instructions. Much more accurate information will be obtained when it is possible to gather at one central location, individual reports on offenses and offenders so that a consistent uniform classification can be given to all the information, and the many details relating to the offense and the offender can be classified, summarized, and analyzed.

A third area where a great deal of progress can be made, particularly if the first two discussed are sufficiently developed, is the accounting for each person charged with a crime

individually throughout the process of criminal justice until the final disposition. Then, it will be possible to analyze and determine what kinds of persons involved in what kinds of offenses, are released at the police level, or are eliminated from the process during the period of prosecution, or are given different types of criminal treatment. Furthermore, such a development would make possible the use of mortality tables in terms of what happens to persons arrested and charged with crimes throughout the total process.

A fourth point that will be just briefly mentioned relates to examining more carefully the social and environmental factors surrounding criminal behavior. In recent years a great deal of emphasis has been given to psychological and personality factors which seem to be inherent in persons who commit crimes. A great deal more attention should be given, however, to the environmental conditions and other factors outside the person that may relate to criminal conduct. We are all aware that carelessness in leaving automobile keys in cars will contribute to the greater possibility of auto theft. What of the many other situations in the criminal field that have some effect on the volume and kind of offenses that may be committed? Particularly do we recognize how loose conditions contribute to the spread of worthless checks, and there are undoubtedly conditions of this type that contribute to the great amount of theft and burglary that exists.

My final point is to give emphasis to the matter of developing state responsibility in the collection of criminal statistics. Each of the fifty states of this country is sovereign in its control of crime. Each has its own set of criminal codes and its own established criminal procedures. It is almost impossible to conceive the collecting of national statistics from these fifty states, the District of Columbia, and the special Federal jurisdiction by one agency unless each of these sovereign divisions takes the full responsibility for developing complete and comprehensive reporting within each state or jurisdictional border. Our failure to obtain satisfactory national statistics of crime to the present time basically is because the states have not, to any large extent, assumed the full responsibility of developing the reporting, summarization, and analysis of the data on crime and delinquency within their own boundaries.