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### What You Should Know!

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To this point, this textbook has described how to structure a study, from choosing a topic to selecting a sample to determining a research design. The selected research design will determine the appropriate data collection technique. As with sampling strategies and research designs, each data collection strategy has strengths and weaknesses. This chapter examines a variety of methods for collecting data. Keep in mind that some of the data collection strategies can be used with multiple research designs whereas other strategies are more specific. After completing this chapter, the reader should be able to:

1. Identify and describe the four primary data collection techniques.
2. Explain the advantages and disadvantages of mail surveys.
3. Describe the advantages and disadvantages of Internet surveys.
4. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews.
5. Compare and contrast face-to-face and telephone interviews.
6. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of field observation.
7. Explain the advantages and disadvantages of analyzing secondary data.
8. Describe the advantages and disadvantages of content analysis.

One of the most crucial aspects of the research effort is data collection. Improperly collected or incorrect data can delay or even cause the cancellation of the research effort. Therefore, before researchers begin any type of data collection, they must be sure to choose the right data collection technique based on the selected sampling strategy and research design. Although one of the best

methods of collecting data is through the experimental design, this method is not conducive to social science research. However, there are effective and efficient alternatives. In criminal justice and criminological research, four types of data collection techniques are commonly used: (1) survey, (2) interview, (3) observation, and (4) secondary data methods. Interviews have been broken out of survey research for discussion purposes in this chapter, but keep in mind that interviews are usually considered to be a component of or related to survey research. These research methods have been discussed in detail in previous chapters. The focus in this chapter is on the issues involved in using these data collection strategies.

## Survey Research

The most frequently used method for data collection is the survey. A survey is an excellent tool for gathering primary data and is quite useful in both descriptive and correlational studies. In criminal justice and criminology, some of the uses for surveys include measuring attitudes, fears, perceptions, and victimizations. The data collection device for a survey is a questionnaire. One reason that a questionnaire is so useful in data collection is that it can be self-administered, thus an interviewer or researcher does not have to be present while an individual answers the questions. Perhaps the most commonly used method of distributing a self-administered questionnaire is through the mail.

### Mail Distribution of Surveys

Mail distribution of surveys allows for the use of larger samples, broader area coverage, and minimized cost in terms of time and money as compared to other data collection methods. Additional advantages include that no field staff is required, the bias effect possible in interviews due to the presence of an interviewer is eliminated, and respondents are allowed greater privacy to answer the questions. With fewer time constraints on respondents, they can give more consideration to their answers.

The mail survey method also poses several disadvantages. One of the most frustrating is the lack of responses. The percentage of subjects who complete and return the questionnaire is known as the *response rate*; this rate is determined by dividing the number of responses by the total number of possible responses. It is common to send reminders to participants to increase the likelihood of subject participation. For example, a researcher may plan to send follow-up postcard reminders to subjects who had not responded at three-week intervals or follow up with a phone call. Although following up with subjects helps increase the number of respondents, it also can add to the costs; experienced researchers know to include the follow-up as part of the original research plan. Low response rates can lead to the delay or cancellation of a study. Another disadvantage is the possible differences that might exist between the respondents and nonrespondents. Individuals may not respond for any

number of reasons. The survey may have gotten lost, or respondents might not have time to complete it. The likelihood of bias is increased if the reason an individual did not respond to the survey has to do with the survey itself. If only individuals who had an interest in the topic responded, then the findings might be biased toward a particular response, which would not provide valid and reliable information. For example, if a survey was mailed to individuals in a specific neighborhood about building a halfway house for newly released prisoners and only those who were opposed answered, the results would be biased.

The key to data collection for a mail survey is to attain the highest response rate possible. In addition to following up with subjects, other ways to increase response rates include (Adler & Clark, 2007; Bachman & Schutt, 2008; Dunn, 2009; Frankfort-Nachmias & Leon-Guerrero, 2008; Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, & Zechmeister, 2008):

1. Using an attractive and shortened format. It is surprising how much more likely an individual is to respond to a questionnaire that is visually interesting. Furthermore, keeping the format short and simple is more likely to generate a better response than a lengthy questionnaire, which respondents may start but not finish. Or they may be dissuaded from starting in the first place due to the length of the survey.
2. Offering some type of remuneration or "reward" for completing the survey. One popular reward is to offer a cash incentive, such as a gift certificate or the chance to win free groceries, if the survey is completed.
3. Appealing to respondents' altruistic side or sense of civic duty with the message that their response will be extremely helpful in learning more about the subject of the research. This strategy is more likely to work if respondents are already interested in the subject.
4. Indicating that the survey is sponsored or endorsed by a recognizable entity, such as a college or university. Respondents may be more encouraged to complete a survey when they recognize and respect an entity supporting the research.
5. Personalizing the survey. Addressing the questionnaire to a specific person often adds more legitimacy to the research as opposed to addressing the survey to "Dear occupant or resident."
6. Timing the survey carefully. When a survey is sent could be extremely important. For example, many individuals spent hours and hours watching the O.J. Simpson trial. Research geared toward public perceptions of the court process as observed in the trial probably would have received much better response immediately following the completion of the trial than if such a study had been conducted in 2015. However, if a survey were to be conducted today, we may find the results to be significantly influenced by 2016's *The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story* television series.

**FROM THE REAL WORLD**

To examine social determinants that explain correctional officer exposure to blood and bodily fluids, Alarid (2009) conducted a study of experienced correctional officers from five prisons. The correctional officers were selected at random and sent an anonymous mail survey regarding situations that may have placed them at risk for exposure to HIV while at work. Although a total of 500 officers were selected, only 192 officers returned the surveys for a response rate of 38.4%. Sixteen of those surveys were not included because of a disproportionate number of incomplete responses, making the final sample size 176.

***Acceptable Mail Survey Response Rates***

The previous section discussed the frustration of dealing with low response rates and provided recommendations for enhancing return rates. Perhaps the best way to cope with low return rates is (in addition to following the recommendations that were provided) to allow for them in the research design. In Chapter 5, one recommendation for dealing with a low response rate is to oversample the population to meet sample size requirements. In mail surveys a 20% oversampling rate may not be enough. Researchers (Adler & Clark, 2007; Dunn, 2009; Frankfort-Nachmias & Leon-Guerrero, 2008) suggest these expectations for response rates for mail surveys: (1) 40% within 2 weeks, (2) 20% within 2 weeks of a follow-up letter, and (3) 10% within 2 weeks of the final contact. Response rates of 50% are considered adequate for analysis and reporting; however, 60% is good, and 70% is very good (Adler & Clark, 2007; Dunn, 2009). Note that based on the return rate indicated previously, it may require several follow-ups to obtain a good or even adequate response rate.

The response rate may vary depending on the type of survey and the targeted respondents. Ordinary citizens are far less likely to respond to a general survey than are members of a constituent group being polled by an organization in which they hold membership. Overall, a mail survey can be very effective and efficient.

***Surveys and the Internet***

Although survey data collection through the mail has long been a popular method of obtaining data, technology has provided other methods of delivery. The technological changes over the last few decades have touched many aspects of our lives, and the way data is collected for research is no exception. Through the Internet, researchers can now reach target populations that are literally located throughout the world or simply within a single country or state. A popular Internet site for conducting surveys is Survey Monkey. SurveyMonkey.com allows the researcher to create a survey study by providing choices related



to design, question type, and analysis. Surveys provided through Internet sites provide quick access for respondents, allowing them to complete a survey at their convenience, and follow-up with nonrespondents can be completed through email. Dantzker (2010) used an Internet survey delivery method to conduct his study among clinical psychologists in the United States by setting up the questionnaire on SurveyMonkey.com, sending the sample members a link to the questionnaire, and providing a date by which the questionnaire had to be completed. This strategy allowed respondents to complete the survey at their leisure.

Surveys through the Internet have the same advantages of mail surveys, including targeting large samples, covering wide geographic areas, cost efficiency, and the ability to address a wide variety of topics. Additionally, collecting survey data through the Internet makes data processing considerably easier than traditional mail surveys. The data collected through Internet sites automatically populates a database; thus, it does not require an individual to type in the information.

Internet surveys also have the same disadvantages as mail surveys, including a low return rate, nonresponse to some questions, and misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the questions. The return rate may be even lower than that

## FROM THE REAL WORLD

Hunter's (1988) study of convenience store robberies used mail surveys that were sent to approximately 130 law enforcement agencies seeking robbery data on the 200 stores in the sample. The letter requesting assistance was from the Florida Attorney General to the Sheriff or Chief of Police of the agency stating their mutual interest in combating the crime of robbery and requesting assistance. The letter from a high-ranking state official, the brevity of the survey, and interest in the survey topic resulted in an initial response rate of approximately 67%. A follow-up packet containing the original letter from the attorney general and a new survey was sent after one month. A one-month response expectation is not unreasonable when requesting information from agencies that must be looked up or calculated since these actions must be done in addition to the day-to-day activities of the agency. The follow-up resulted in an overall response rate of 92% by the end of the second month.

A follow-up telephone call was then made to the 8% of agencies that had not responded. In the telephone calls respondents were asked either to respond by mail or by telephone in the next week. All but two agencies did so. Another follow-up telephone call to those agencies finally resulted in the information. A survey from a student or a professor without a connection with the attorney general was able to have achieved a 60% response rate.

### FROM THE REAL WORLD

Lurigio, Greenleaf, and Flexon (2009) explored whether the police-related views of African American and Latino students differ with respect to attitudes, feelings, and behavioral intentions toward the police. The survey data were obtained from students who were enrolled in 18 Chicago public schools. Student surveys were anonymous; due to confidentiality concerns, information was not collected on the characteristics of the individual schools. The questionnaire consisting of 131 items in open- and closed-ended response formats was distributed during advising periods that the school had reserved for standardized test administration.

for mail surveys because individuals may not receive the email announcement about the survey due to spam filters. *Spam* refers to unwanted or unsolicited emails. Overall, mail and Internet surveys offer an economical and efficient method for collecting data.

As useful as mail and Internet surveys are, some populations will not be accessible through these methods. For example, the population may consist of subjects to whom access is restricted, such as prison inmates; others may wish to remain anonymous or do not want to allow personal contact with researchers (e.g., police officers). However, these types of populations can offer vital data regarding numerous research topics. In these cases, a researcher may need to provide a written questionnaire that is distributed to the selected sample in a structured environment. Respondents are allowed to complete the survey within a given time period, and then they return it to the researcher or a representative of the researcher. For example, Gershon, Barocas, Canton, Li, and Vlahov (2009) used a hand-delivered survey to examine the impact of a wide range of police stressors on potential health outcomes while controlling for various coping strategies in a large sample of urban police officers. The sample was recruited during roll calls at each of the department's nine districts and at three other major divisions, including headquarters. Officers completed the questionnaires before going out on their shift.

These types of survey do not typically allow for in-depth responses or for the researcher to follow up on why a particular response was given. If this information is vital, then interviewing may be a more appropriate data collection strategy.

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## Interviews

For the purpose of this text, interviewing is viewed as the interaction between two individuals where one of the individual's goals is to obtain recognizable responses to specific questions. Interviewing is not an easy task and to be

reasonably good at it often requires years of training. However, this does not preclude many researchers from trying this method. Interviews may be (1) structured, (2) semi-structured, or (3) unstructured. Typically, interviews are completed face-to-face, but can also be completed by telephone, Skype, and other teleconferencing activities.

### Face-to-Face Interviews

Face-to-face interviews provide contact between the researcher and the respondent. This contact can be positive reinforcement for participating in the research. Often simply receiving a questionnaire in the mail can be sterile; because of that lack of personal touch, would-be respondents may simply ignore the survey. The interview also can usually guarantee a higher response rate.

Another advantage to this type of interview is that any misunderstandings or confusion can be cleared up. This procedure helps ensure that the responses are accurate. It also allows for the researcher to act as an observer, giving the interviewer the opportunity to focus on nonverbal cues. The other advantages to the face-to-face interview include being able to use audiovisual aids, schedule additional interviews, make use of language the respondent can relate to, and show discretion.

Although the advantages clearly outweigh the disadvantages, the latter must be considered in planning and implementing face-to-face interviews. One disadvantage is that face-to-face interviews are time consuming and costly because the interviewer has to travel to the interview. Another disadvantage is that the presence of the interviewer may impact the interviewee's response. For example, if the interview is focused on illegal behavior, the subject may be less likely to be honest. There is also the possibility of interviewer bias or error, which threatens the validity of the study. Finally, the interviewer's skill or lack thereof could be detrimental to data collection (Bachman & Schutt, 2008; Dunn, 2009; Shaughnessy et al., 2008).

It is common for researchers to use graduate students as interviewers. However, few graduate students come equipped with the skills required to conduct a good interview. Failing to provide or hone the necessary skills negatively affects the data. To avoid interviewer errors it is important to properly train interviewers who will be conducting the interview, which can be enhanced through the use of audio and video recording.

### Structured, Semi-structured, and Unstructured Interviews

The most used type of interview in criminal justice research is the structured interview. One type of structured interview, associated with quantitative research, uses closed-ended questions that every individual interviewed must be asked in the same order. Responses are set and can be checked off by the interviewer. The advantage to this type of interview is that it can be easily administered, has

high response rates, and makes data processing much easier. In effect, this is an orally administered questionnaire with the interviewer completing the form for the respondent. Two disadvantages are that it does not allow for further exploration of the responses and can limit the types of responses given.

Another type of structured interview uses a standardized list of open-ended questions, which allows the interviewee to provide detailed responses. One disadvantage to this strategy is that since the list is standardized, the interviewer cannot deviate and ask follow-up questions. Another disadvantage, which is shared by the interview data collection strategies that use open-ended questions, is that it is much more difficult to analyze the data and interpret the results as compared to data collected using close-ended questions. Additionally, studies that use interviews based on open-ended questions typically have smaller sample sizes, but the trade-off is that more detailed information is acquired from subjects.

The semi-structured interview consists of an original set of open-ended questions. It differs from the structured interview in that the interviewer can further explore why the response was given by asking additional questions. The advantage to this method of interviewing is that a substantial amount of information can be obtained and clarification and follow-up can be completed during the interview if needed.

In comparison to the structured and semi-structured options, the unstructured interview is more like a conversation in which appropriate open-ended questions are developed during the actual interview. The advantage to the unstructured interview is that it can lead to unexpected, but highly important topics that would not have been reached through a more structured approach. A disadvantage is that it is more susceptible to intervening or biasing elements. Unstructured interviews require an experienced and disciplined interviewer to be successful.

The face-to-face interview can be a useful data collection technique. However, there are times when it is not possible to conduct face-to-face interviews, but the interview method is still necessary. This is when the telephone survey is useful.



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### **FROM THE REAL WORLD**

To study how academic researchers gain access to data, Flanyak (1999) used semi-structured interviewing. This method provided a high response rate and allowed the researcher to have personal contact with the subjects and to observe them during the interview. To assist in conformity, Flanyak made use of an interview guide instrument, which provided her with the opportunity and discretion to explore or probe respondents for detail in specific areas. Most interviews lasted from 45 to 75 minutes, with the longest being two hours in length. Follow-up interviews were completed as needed and lasted approximately 15 minutes.

TABLE 10-1

Comparison of Survey and Interview Methods

| Criteria             | Mail     | Internet | Face-to-Face | Telephone |
|----------------------|----------|----------|--------------|-----------|
| Cost                 | Low      | Low      | High         | Moderate  |
| Response rates       | Moderate | Moderate | High         | High      |
| Control              | None     | None     | High         | Moderate  |
| Diverse population   | High     | Moderate | Moderate     | Moderate  |
| In-depth information | Low      | Low      | High         | Moderate  |
| Timelines            | Slow     | Moderate | Fast         | Fast      |

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## Telephone Interviews

There are several advantages to using telephone interviews. One is the ability to eliminate field staff, which can be replaced with a smaller in-house staff. It is also easier to monitor interviewer bias in telephone interviews, and the impact of nonverbal cues is eliminated. Although not common, unstructured interviews could be completed by telephone. Finally, the telephone interview is less expensive and can be completed more quickly than face-to-face interviews.

Disadvantages to the telephone interview include: (1) limitations in the scope of research, (2) difficulty in obtaining in-depth responses, (3) elimination from the sample of anyone without a telephone, and (4) possible high refusal rates (Adler & Clark, 2007; Bachman & Schutt, 2008; Dunn, 2009; Shaughnessy et al., 2008). The increased use of cell phones as an individual's primary number has resulted in the inability to create a full sampling frame, and the ability to identify and block callers allows possible subjects to avoid the calls of researchers.

There are advantages and disadvantages to the different types of survey and interview methods, and a brief comparison of the methods is useful (Table 10-1).

## Field Observation

Assume criminal justice researchers want to understand the inner workings of a gang or the impact of particular patrol techniques on citizen satisfaction. They could conduct interviews or create a self-administered survey, but neither of these methods may be able to give a complete picture because the researchers may not know everything that needs to be asked in advance. In such cases, observation may be the best method for collecting data.

### FROM THE REAL WORLD

Cavacuiti et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured phone interviews to examine road rage incidents from the victims' perspectives in Toronto. Newspaper advertisements were used to recruit participants who identified themselves as road rage victims and were at least 18 years old. The researchers completed 30- to 60-minute interviews with 29 subjects. Of the 29 subjects, 20 were in a motor vehicle and 9 were either pedestrians or cyclists at the time of the road rage incident. The interviewer asked the participants to describe the events before, during, and after the road rage incident with a specific focus on environment (e.g., weather) and situational (e.g., being in a hurry) factors.

Field observation typically falls into one of four approaches: (1) full participant, (2) participant researcher, (3) researcher participant, and (4) complete researcher (Senese, 1997). Regardless of which approach is used, observation allows the researcher to see firsthand how or why something works. It provides an opportunity to become aware of aspects unfamiliar to those who do not have firsthand experience.

To conduct observational data collection, the researcher needs to make several decisions: (1) where the observations are to be done, (2) what the focus of the observations will be, and (3) when the observations will be conducted (Senese, 1997; Shaughnessy et al., 2008).

A choice of where observations are to be done is determined by the goal of the research study. For example, to observe how incarcerated juvenile offenders respond to a particular treatment program may only be possible in the institutional setting. However, if the program is expanded to include nonincarcerated juvenile offenders, then the observations may also take place in a public setting (e.g., school). Selecting the wrong setting generally means an unsuccessful research venture, just as asking the wrong questions during an interview would lead to a failed study.

First, it must be asked: What is it that one wants to know? Deciding what aspect to observe is another important element. If researchers know absolutely nothing about a phenomenon or entity, they may end up trying to observe everything about it. Researchers need to have an idea of what aspects are to be studied and how to do so. This process is similar to the first rule of creating a questionnaire (Chapter 9). The structure of field observation differs between qualitative and quantitative research. For qualitative research, it may be enough to be in the setting and record observations. However, quantitative research requires more preparation. If the research is quantitative, then the researcher needs to create a checklist in advance. Hunter (1988) created a checklist for use in

## Other Data Collection Techniques

Store: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_  
 County: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Law Enforcement jurisdiction: \_\_\_\_\_

## Variable Score:

|                                        |            |           |          |       |
|----------------------------------------|------------|-----------|----------|-------|
| 1. Location of cashier:                | 1<br>Cent. | 2<br>Side | 3<br>One | _____ |
| 2. Number of clerks:                   | Three      | Two       | _____    | _____ |
| 3. Visibility within:                  | Good       | Poor      | _____    | _____ |
| 4. Visibility from outside:            | Good       | Poor      | _____    | _____ |
| 5. Within two blocks of major street:  | No         | Yes       | _____    | _____ |
| 6. Amount of vehicular traffic:        | Heav.      | Mod.      | Light    | _____ |
| 7. Type of land use nearby:            | Com.       | Res.      | Unused   | _____ |
| 8. Concealed access/escape:            | No         | Yes       | _____    | _____ |
| 9. Evening commercial activity nearby: | Yes        | No        | _____    | _____ |
| 10. Exterior well lighted:             | Yes        | No        | _____    | _____ |
| 11. Gas pumps:                         | Yes        | No        | _____    | _____ |
| 12. Security devices in use:           | Yes        | No        | _____    | _____ |
| 13. Cash handling procedures:          | Good       | Poor      | _____    | _____ |
| 14. Hours of operation:                | Day        | 6-12      | 24 hr    | _____ |

Note that the checklist provides for either circling answers or edge coding (answers are written on the edge of the paper instrument) as an aid in the later inputting of data. Also, the order of attributes (Yes No, No Yes) are reversed in some questions to ensure that the numerical coding 1, 2, or 3 is consistent with increasing vulnerability to robbery.

**Figure 10-1** On-Site Evaluation Form.

Source: Reproduced from Hunter, R. D. (1988). *The effects of environmental factors upon convenience store robberies in Florida*. Tallahassee, FL: Florida Department of Legal Affairs. Courtesy of the Florida Department of Legal Affairs.

his study of the impact of environmental factors on convenience store robberies (Figure 10-1). Examples of items on the checklist include the location of the cashier (center or side), the number of clerks (one, two, or three), and security devices in use (yes or no). Finally, the time frame or period when the observations are to be conducted should be determined to provide the best possible opportunity of collecting the desired data.

Like survey and interview research, observational research has its advantages and disadvantages. One of the greatest advantages is the direct collection of the data. Rather than having to rely on what others have seen, the researcher relies only on his or her own observations. However, this advantage could also serve as a disadvantage because of researcher misinterpretation or misunderstanding



### FROM THE REAL WORLD

Rydberg and Terrill (2010) examined the impact of officer education on arrest, search, and use of force decisions using researcher participant field observation. The field observations were collected as part of the Project on Policing Neighborhoods (POP-N) in two medium-sized cities (Indianapolis, Indiana, and St. Petersburg, Florida). During 1996–1997, two beats were selected from each city based on the socioeconomic index (percentage of female-headed families, percentage of adults unemployed, and percentage of the population living below 50% of the poverty level). In the researcher participant role, the observers' identities as researchers were known, but they made no effort to participate in the events being observed. The observers (university students) were trained for the study and took notes on the specifics of officer–citizen encounters, including the people involved and the events that occurred. In all, 11,985 officer–citizen encounters were observed. In addition to the field observations, researchers also interviewed the officers. The results of the study indicated that higher education reduced the likelihood of force occurring but did not impact arrest or search decisions.

of what is seen. An extremely important part of field observation is recording the observations either in field notes, with an audio recorder, or by video as quickly and as accurately as possible, which also helps reduce inaccuracy and inconsistency. It is further recommended that one transcribe field notes as soon as possible afterward to ensure an accurate interpretation of hurried handwriting and any abbreviations that were used while they are still fresh in one's mind. The fact that the research is being conducted in the phenomenon's natural environment is a bonus. Recall that a shortcoming of experiments is that the environment is controlled, perhaps biasing results.

Observational research takes place in the real world, legitimizing the observations—"This is what actually happened" rather than "This is what should happen" or "This is what was thought to have happened." However, observational, survey, and interview data collection may not be used in all circumstances. What happens when a topic deals with a phenomenon that has already occurred and can no longer be observed or surveyed? This type of data collection may need to rely on using secondary data.

## Secondary Data

Analysis of secondary data is an efficient way to conduct criminal justice or criminological research. Data are often available through a variety of sources, including government agencies, research groups, or other researchers (Box 10-1). Rather than gathering new data, researchers obtain and reanalyze the existing

data that have been collected by the sources for their own purposes. For example, a corrections agency may have individual data on the length of individual sentences and recidivism based on reincarceration following release. However, it is the responsibility of researchers to verify that the data is appropriate for their purposes. The majority of data available for secondary analysis, particularly through government agencies, are quantitative; however, some qualitative data is also available. Data can also be collected from social artifacts, such as written documents or recordings, for the purpose of completing a content analysis.

The use of secondary data is a form of *unobtrusive research*. Unobtrusive research does not require researchers to be directly involved with the subjects of their studies. It also does not involve observation of or interaction with the individuals or groups because the data have already been gathered by someone else or the data are available in a format that does not require such interaction. Compared to other fields of study, criminal justice has a considerable amount of data available for secondary analyses.

### Sources of Secondary Data

Criminal justice and criminology researchers have a wide variety of official statistics and records available for the purposes of research. Government agencies collect a considerable amount of information, and some of the information is then in turn released for public use. One of the best known sources for criminal justice information is the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) published annually by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Police agencies from all over the country voluntarily provide data for the UCR on a monthly basis. The UCR include data on arrests, clearances, and law enforcement employees. In addition to analyzing national data, researchers can also access data for each state or even the individual law enforcement agency. By using the UCR crime data, researchers could do an in-depth analysis of crime patterns or arrest characteristics without the arrestees or victims having any knowledge of the research in progress.

In addition to the FBI, several other federal agencies provide data to the public for secondary analysis, such as the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Bureau of Justice Statistics. The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97) is a panel study of a nationally representative sample of youth who were 12 to 16 years old as of December 31, 1996, that is collected through the U.S. Bureau of Labor. The first NLSY97 survey of the selected youth and their parents took place in 1997, and the youth continue to be surveyed periodically. The purpose of the study is to collect information regarding entry into the workplace; the data include a substantial number of criminal justice-related variables, such as alcohol and drug use, illegal behavior, criminal justice contact, peer behavior, and perceptions of the future. Illegal behavior questions range from the destruction of property and stealing (less

than \$50) to robbery and assault; questions regarding criminal justice system contact focus on charges and convictions. Even though the study itself is not focused on criminal justice, these factors can influence entry into and success in the workforce.

According to the mission statement for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), its mission is: "To collect, analyze, publish, and disseminate information on crime, criminal offenders, victims of crime, and the operation of justice systems at all levels of government. These data are critical to federal, state, and local policymakers in combating crime and ensuring that justice is both efficient and evenhanded" (BJS, 2016). BJS provides data collections related to crime, courts, corrections, victims, and law enforcement in addition to other topics. The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) is a widely used source of information associated with the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Data for the NCVS is collected through a self-report survey in which subjects answer questions related to victimization incidents within the last six months, including the number of incidents, crime characteristics, and reports of crime to police. For certain types of crime, such as sexual assault, there are differences between the crimes reported to the police and crimes not reported to police.

Criminal justice data can also be available through state and local agencies for secondary analysis. These data may be collected for the purpose of providing information to the public, but they will largely include information for the management of day-to-day operations. For example, the Bureau of Research and Data Integrity at the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice is tasked with gathering and analyzing data to provide information on juvenile

### FROM THE REAL WORLD

Janku and Yan (2009) conducted a study to determine whether objective assessment of the risks and needs of court-involved youth leading to judicial processing is less vulnerable to actual or perceived racial discrimination. Data for the study was acquired from the automated Missouri Justice Information System (JIS), which is maintained by the Office of the State Courts Administrator. "Because of the wide differences across circuits in court location, court culture, and caseload size, we chose one midsized circuit in Missouri for this study to avoid potential noise created by those differences. The rationale for selecting this particular circuit is threefold: First, the caseload contains equal proportions of Caucasian and African American juveniles; second, the circuit contains a mix of metropolitan and rural areas; and third, the circuit has been on the JIS long enough to provide relatively reliable data" (p. 405). The researchers found that African Americans were overrepresented in the juvenile justice system.



delinquency trends, the root causes of juvenile delinquency, and assessments of juvenile delinquency prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies. This information is also valuable to researchers who are interested in juvenile justice issues. State and local agencies tend to be more topic-specific in the data that are collected and made available compared to the federal agencies that may collect data on a variety of topics.

Data for secondary analysis may also be available through research groups that are not tied to a specific government agency. NORC (formerly the National Opinion Research Center) at the University of Chicago conducts the General Social Survey (GSS). Data is collected through face-to-face interviews. Between 1972 and 1994, data were collected annually, but now data are collected every other year. The purpose of the GSS is to collect and analyze data related to the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of adults living in the United States. Information is available on a variety of topics, such as attitudes towards capital punishment.

Individual researchers may collect data for their own purposes. They may be willing to share the data (upon request) with other researchers. The original researchers may decide to make the data available through repositories, such as the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) associated with the University of Michigan. The ICPSR collects and manages data for the purpose of making it available for secondary research. The amount of data available in depositories can be overwhelming to new researchers; it is extremely useful to have a specific idea or topic in mind when reviewing the data available.

As valuable as criminal justice data available for secondary analysis can be, a disadvantage is that it can be more difficult to establish validity and reliability, which is based on the summary information provided by the original researchers. Another disadvantage is that data may not be available for a specific topic of interest. It is important to keep in mind that you cannot manipulate the available data or variables to make them fit your study. Not only will the results be questionable if not outright useless, but this type of manipulation is also unethical (Chapter 2).

## Content Analysis

Content analysis is the study of social artifacts to gain insights about an event or phenomenon. Even though it uses unobtrusive methods, it differs from the previously discussed use of secondary data. Secondary data analysis is focused on data that was collected for management and research purposes on a specific topic. Content analysis focuses on the coverage of an event or phenomenon by the particular medium being evaluated (books, magazines, television programs, news coverage, and so forth) rather than the event or phenomenon itself. It is a favorite strategy among researchers who wish to compare social events from different eras.



Data for content analysis is often found in two types of records: public and private. Public records include actuarial, political, judicial, and other governmental documents and publications and broadcasts from mass media. Private records include diaries, letters, and autobiographies. One of the biggest problems with private records is proving the authenticity of the data. Data collection for content analysis allows researchers to be less intrusive than other methods and usually offers sufficient data to assess the phenomenon even if it can no longer be observed. One of the benefits of content analysis is that there are many possible sources of information; however, access or even knowing the data source exists can create problems. This obstacle can be overcome by making the right inquiries and making the time to wade through the bureaucratic processes.

Depending on how the research is conducted, content analysis may be either qualitative or quantitative in nature. Qualitative content analysis emphasizes verbal rather than statistical analysis of various forms of communication. For example, Klinger and Brunson (2009) conducted a content analysis of detailed accounts by police officers of how they perceived what transpired during incidents where they shot citizens. When engaging in quantitative content analysis, it is recommended that researchers try to create a quantifiable instrument to use. This strategy requires serious thought about the issue being researched and the creation of a code sheet or checklist to record observations. A summary sheet or form that permits the code sheets to be easily totaled is also recommended. These summary forms can then be used to input data for analysis.

For example, terrorism is considered a priority topic. However, the media coverage tends to wax and wane based on recent terrorist events. There is a surge of media coverage soon after events, but then the media coverage focusing on terrorism usually drops substantially within a few days or weeks. If a researcher is interested in quantitative analysis of the media coverage of terrorism, then a code sheet could be created that keeps track of specific information, such as the number of mentions or the emotional intensity of news coverage. Emotional intensity could be evaluated based on a 10-point scale with 1 being the least emotionally intense and 10 being the most emotionally intense. In contrast, a qualitative content analysis would focus on describing the characteristics of the emotional intensity and the possible impacts on viewers.

There are a variety of methods for collecting data. Ultimately, it is the task of the researcher to be able to properly choose one or more methods that provide the best access to the required data (Table 10-2). When choosing a research design, it is essential to keep the data collection process in mind. If you are not able to actually collect the data you need or will not have access to the data, then you will not have a successful research study.

|                                                                                                   |                                                   |                                                                                         |                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Misinterpretation<br>Nonresponses<br>Low return rates<br><br>No clarifying<br><br>Limited answers | Misinterpretation<br>Interviewer biases<br>Costly | Observer influence<br>Current behaviors only<br>Costly<br><br>Unobservable<br>behaviors | Misinterpretation<br>Researcher biases<br>Limited to<br>availability<br>No clarifying<br><br>Limited answers |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

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## Summary

Data can be collected using a variety of methods. Survey research is the most popular method in criminal justice and criminological research. Surveys are often mailed but increasingly are also electronically sent using the Internet. Data can also be collected through interviews, which can be conducted in person (face-to-face) or over the telephone. The interview may be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured depending on the level of control within the design. Other methods of collecting data include field observation, analysis of secondary data, and content analysis.

TABLE 10-2

| Survey                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Interview                                                                                                                                                                  | Observation                                                                                                                                                                            | Secondary                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Advantages</b><br>Wide variety of topics<br>Simple to administer<br>Cost effective<br>Anonymous<br><br>Comparable<br><b>Disadvantages</b><br>Misinterpretation<br>Nonresponses<br>Low return rates<br><br>No clarifying<br><br>Limited answers | Wide variety of topics<br>Can give complex answers<br>Clarifications<br>Increase response rates<br>Nonverbal cues<br><br>Misinterpretation<br>Interviewer biases<br>Costly | Actual observation of behaviors<br>Ability to link behavior to concept<br>Can be anonymous<br><br>Observer influence<br>Current behaviors only<br>Costly<br><br>Unobservable behaviors | Wide variety of topics<br>Simplicity<br>Cost effective<br>Anonymous<br>Comparable<br><br>Misinterpretation<br>Researcher biases<br>Limited to availability<br>No clarifying<br><br>Limited answers |

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## APPLICATION EXERCISES

1. As an employee of a violence prevention program, you would like to do a study on the topic of school bullying. When you take the idea to the program directors, they ask you to expand the topic to workplace and school bullying and to provide different strategies for the collection of data. How would you begin?