

A Critical Note on the Validity of Official Crime Statistics

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Abstract: Law breaking events indicate state of social conditions, public trend and performance of educational and crimes controlling institutions. Statistics about crimes and delinquency are notoriously untrustworthy and unreliable, particularly in developing countries where a great numbers of crimes do not come on record for many reasons but generally these figures are used for measuring crime rate all over the world. In this study a comprehensive critical analysis on validity of official crime statistics was presented including pinpointing deficiencies and disadvantages which distort the police record about crimes and advantages for that these statistics are used.

Key words: Official crime statistics, deficiencies, disadvantages public statistic

INTRODUCTION

Official Crime figures reflect strength and acceptance of Social System and matter of application of right and wrong measuring criteria. This paper is designed to evaluate and estimate validity and creditability of official crime statistics that to what extent home office published offence figures are reliable and trustworthy and to point out and eliminate the loopholes and pitfalls which tarnish the validity of official crime statistics to derive out true crime rate to formulate comprehensive ideal criminal justice policy for peace, public security and smooth running of society. There is need to attract attention of crime controlling agencies, intellectuals and researchers to contrive schemes to study this major social indicator because no such research work is available.

Kidder^[1] claims that for true conclusion valid research is required. Reliability and validity are compulsory part for both design and results.

May^[2] provided criteria for valid and reliable statistics that no discretion should be used in registering, compiling and classifying law breaking event, if used then in same manner, so as to produce the same classification. Secondly he stress at those two types of incidents cannot be classified in same manner. Finally all committed offences must be classified and recorded within the official figures.

Generally following sources are used for deriving crime rate: Official statistics, self report studies, victim/offenders survey.

Official crime statistics, comprised on police and courts information,

Police statistics, known to the police, include all law

violating events that come into notice of police and recorded whether or not offenders are caught.

Court statistics: crimes known to the courts (offenders charged, convicted or guilty by various courts,) which are divided into indictable or more serious offences tried in higher courts, and non indictable or less serious tried in lower courts. Court information is more reliable than police, but each of the two has its merits and demerits. Data supplied and prepared by the police portrays comprehensive out-line and reflects the whole law and order state but due to conventional and traditional methods of recording many law violations incidents missed and details of offenders are not supplied as well.

Court facts and figures offer a clearer and detailed picture that not only procures about crimes but also various aspects of offender's age sex, education and marital status etc.

Self report studies: In self report studies it is asked people to volunteer their previous unlawful actions which were not brought to police notice through questionnaire or interview privately. Wallerstein and Wyhle, 1947, found that 91% of their research samples admitted for committed imprisonable crimes. Elmhorn, 1965, gave results of study of schoolboys that he conducted in mid sixties that 57% of respondents had perpetrated at least one serious crime, of these 93% had not been caught. According to his finding total 1430 offences were occurred but true culprit to police in a mere 41 instances. Victim survey means to collect the statistics of individuals who had been victims of any offence, avoiding the rambling of police figures during noting the Victims responses.

Table 1: Distribution of police reported crimes year wise categorically

Offences/years	2001	2002	2003	2004 (upto 20-11-04)
Murder	105	104	99	87
Dacoity	18	11	16	12
Robbery	80	64	83	56
Burglary	191	277	279	190
Theft	132	193	198	212
Trespass	226	301	361	339
Hurt	236	283	252	214
Riot	267	243	271	255
Abduction	99	136	119	121
Arms act	590	484	437	371
Narcotics	555	493	533	575
Others	1887	1937	2092	2348
Total	4386	4526	4740	4780

Offenders Survey: Another alternate used for collecting information about crime commission, is to concentrate on offenders rather than victims. It is helpful and leads to estimate not only of the incidence of law violations but also their prevalence mean knowing number of offences offenders.

Preparing this paper various concerning materials such as texts, research articles, reports of Police Department and newspapers were studied including self observation plus interviews of police personnel, victims and offenders and Home office Govt of Azad kashmir. published crime data was presented for supporting and strengthening arguments.

The most critical question is how far we can believe on official statistics for error free measuring crimes rate with knowing the way and facts by which figures are collected and compiled. The complication is whether we should count total law deviating events or rely on published crimes data, premier is problematic, therefore no choice for one except to utilize the Police recorded information for research purpose, in spite of having following loopholes which challenge the validity and creditability of findings derived and deduced from these statistics:

Firstly, there are mistakes or errors which occur in collection, organizing, presentation and compilation of crime statistics. For instance an attempt of robbery in a bank is made, criminal fires on police and damages the property of anybody who comes in his way. Should three crimes be recorded or only one? Or a criminal was caught for one offence, he disclosed many others offences that he committed which were not reported or in riots and turmoil cases, how many should be registered.

Secondly, there are some basic errors that neither all misdemeanors are recorded nor all offenders are caught by police for various reasons. This unknown and unreported amount is usually called the Dark Fig.

All types of crime statistics do not present clear crime picture. The major elements which play vital role in

preparing crime statistics are classified in to three components: the Public, the Victim or Criminals themselves and the Police. Change in attitude and intention of any group changes the statistics. Bottomly and Pease^[3], argue that crime data collection and classification is a matter of administrative value and suitability rather than factual position and consideration of relative social and personal effects of offences and their varying kinds.

There are Dark Fig. of crime sufficiently large to render reported and recorded offences highly suspect as a basis upon which to make inferences upon criminal behavior in general .

For determination of crime and criminals, definition and detection problem is involved. According to law act must be defined as criminal and someone apart from the offender must know it took place. Crime and criminal are relative terms, not only vary between societies but also within some society, as the culture, values and attitude vary over time .May^[2], pointed out, the definition of criminals is not static but will change over time. It is a Diachronic not synchronic concept.

Public and victim: Majority of crimes known to the police are brought to their notice by victims, member of the public, and rarely by offenders, observer of violation of law decides whether or not report to the police, as:

Sometimes people who are involved in misdeed may not be aware of committing a transgression, e.g. many children or adults commit criminal assaults and indecencies on each other with out knowing that they broke law. (A motorist can transgress many prohibitions without realizing it, his silencer, brake, and lights may be criminally defective, he may be exceeding the speed limit without feeling it. Those who may know an illegal action has been done but have not been party to it, as with cases of homosexual incidents, illegal abortion. A moment or two a victim may not be realizing an offence has been made with him, the owner of business or large departmental stores may not know that he is a victim of pilfering or embezzlement by one of his employees, in some criminal cases there are no victims, as prostitutions, drug addicts, homosexuals, abortion, and suicide, alternatively with several offences the victim may view it as his business rather than that of the law. (Table 1) .Hough and Mayhew, criticize the home office prepared and published crime statistics which heavily underestimate the real extent of crime, for many offences not reported to police, often are not considered serious one by victims and some victims feel it should be dealt personally rather than involving police^[4].

For a while sufferer may become sympathetic toward the offender who may be relative or friend, may be afraid

Table 2: Distribution of crimes by nature since 2001- 2004

Nature of offences	Years.				Total
	2001	2002	2003	2004	
Serious,including Murder, dacoity, Robbery, burglary and theft.	589	602	675	557	2423
Others, trespass, hurt Riot,abduction,arms act,narcotics and monirs.	3797	3924	4065	4223	16009
Total	4386	4526	4740	4780	18432

or frighten of retaliation from the offender if he reports the crime to the police.

While initial concerns about sexual danger focused on the Malevolence of faceless men.....

intimates, acquaintances, authority and service providers, pose the great threat to women’s physical and sexual safety^[5].

The commission of an offence may become known to others or at least suspected by them, but the authorities are not informed because of fear or reprisals or shame or public disapproval, which later plays a large part in the case of rape and indecent assault or to spear a child the experience of having to appear in court as a witnesses or simply because of indifference and laziness.

Secondly, the death of a person or disappearance of an article may be noticed but explained in innocence / harmless way, for example murdered may be cleverly disguised as a death by accident or suicide. The commission of an offence may remain altogether unknown, for example the disappearance of a murdered person may not be noticed , which easily can happen in the case of a person living alone, and having no relations with neighbors or friends or of tramps and vagrants or persons traveling abroad.

Croall^[6], found that crimes at work are often not reported for fear of losing job or avoid for company adverse publicity or simply lack of public confidence in the ability of appropriate agencies to deal effectively with the crime, because in fact employer or organization seen content to face losses and ready to deal with it by a manner or procedure but do not want to indulge themselves in criminal law. Further more the white collar crimes are also left to intelligence agencies for detection and prosecution who seldom trace few cases and bring to court for justifying their existence and performance, another category of domestic offence which also were not reported or misreported.

Numerous misdeeds are hashed up by the high ups of the community and many are not reported to the police station for reasons of long adjudicating and customary investigation system of police, woman and relatives involved cases for shame and insult, particularly in Pakistani Society majority residing in rural localities with a fixed old conventional and conservative social system which discourage them to report to Police. Radford^[8]

concluded routine harassment and assault, such as being followed, flashed at or verbally abused are such regular experiences for women and so readily dismissed as trivial or discounted on the ground that nothing actually happened.

Police: Police is next important component in providing crime information; they decide what to be reported and what not to be recorded^[7], expresses that all factors are considered for decision to report a crime such as where it was placed, who perpetrated, and is it suitable for reporting. He also shows that circumstances of incidents are not only reason for that police officer decides to do something, but also he considers organizational polices which are framed to follow and the culture of the police organization itself.

According to Box s’ Liberal scientific perspective, police adopt two strategies which fundamentally affect crime statistics: 1st that of differential deployment, secondly methodological suspicion. Area where police concentrate more they record more number of crimes and suspicious become target on previous record base.

Stanko^[5] has presented that women tend to hide and conceal such experiences-often fearing the physical, emotional and material repercussions of reporting. Further more, the decision to report will also be matter of police practices and their associate willingness to deal and act upon such information.

Changes in the police management affect the official crime statistics. Sometimes police don’t record offence without solve it before or knowing the actual culprit. In addition police also consider the distinct priorities of magistrates or justice line in connection to certain offences and offenders- on this ground they may decide not to waste time for arresting and prosecuting those offenders who are likely to get-off any way.

Many incidents of law violation come in to notice of police but not recorded for no prosecution has been possible because of insufficient evidence. Minor and trivial offences which are not backed and pushed by any influential of communities are turned down for reasons of parties cannot bear the expenses of police and for their transports, or for apprehension of parties to agree with each other at their community level later on, or involvement of any effective person with the claim of

disposing it. Specifically minor violations of traffic regulations are ignored or over looked. Often Police personnel below officer's rank when assigned special night duties on check posts repeatedly they leave or over look the offenders for grease of palm or for having acquaintance.

Police various times start special drives against particular type of crime so they appeared more in statistics in comparison to others, such as drug addiction, smuggling, human trafficking etc.

"Even if a crime is reported to the police it does not automatically follow that it will appear on official statistics. The police have great deal of discretion over whether crime reported to there are recorded or such and there are number of reasons why a reported crime may not become a recorded crime"^[4].

Isidore Silver^[9] writes that police have discretion to classify the reports which affect the crime rate. He also hints another loophole of legal definition of crime create ambiguity so public and police use their will keeping in view their own interest and goals, such as Mugging may be either robbery or larceny, depending upon nature of incidents and individual police officer's interpretation.

Advantages: The previous criticism shows that official crime statistics is not entirely reliable or flawed but for such following plus points researchers or social scientists use these statistics:

These statistics or figures are routinely and formally collected and compiled by the govt. and published annually. Any person can easily and freely access to this data further more these information are objective, systematically and formally organized, with no special interest.

The compiler (Police and Home office) records and publishes the figures considering the recognized official criteria or formal definition instead of what is researcher and victim's opinion.

Before coming in hand of researcher for analysis it is ascertained, sifted and scrutinized by someone else.

This information serves one more benefit for researcher and social scientist that they can use these figures with out bearing labor and expenses for surveying and collecting.

Theoretical view: This particular section presents various thoughts regarding the credibility of official statistics. Institutional School of Thought does not accept the validity and reliability of official offence figures because such statistics reflect the behavior and discretion of originations and individual, that they present less numbers than actual happened. Police, official and victim play key role in this connection. Each experience is unique

and subjective to each individual in variety of ways. This thought is decreasing the validity of police compiled data for discrimination, discrepancies qualities which applied in recording and compile in crime statistics.

Radical Theory agrees with the claim of institutionalism who wants to trace these with in wider perspective of the dynamics and structure of society. In support of this notion^[10] argue police concentrate more on working class crime due to visible than middle classes. ^[11] suggest that official figures are in need of " Demolition and Demystification.

The Realist School is opposite to Radical and institutional and see the official figures objective and indicator of social phenomenon. The defenders of this approach claim that the deficiency mentioned regarding statistics could be compensated and improved by using more efficient and scientific source and method of data collection. They do not agree with that these figures are results of power and discretion. They claim these are product of technical incompetence.

Taylor^[12] pillar of Marxist school of Thoughts pleads the processing of the working class as Symptomatic of wider capitalist structures. This school inclined to understand that it is biasness and prejudice ness of police, judicial and other agencies against weaker and poor groups' only those become victim who cannot save themselves .Cohen^[13] states, Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic-such phenomenon he says is presented in a styli shed and stereotyped fashion by the mass media

Further they present that these production of groups preferences/or police figures feeding of mass media to engender moral panics and crimes waves.

Left realist critique provides very important substitute aspects of four definitional elements of crimes, Victim, offender, formal control and informal control. Not only these four elements generate crime rate but social relationship between them produce results. Left Realist criminologist hints that crime rates are not only the result of changes in behavior and social forces but also the definitional aspect is involved. All the theoretical explanations apart from Realists present that crime statistics emerged out of complex process of social interaction between offenders, victims, member of the public and the formal agencies of social control. So crimes figures are reflection of official agencies' activities and based on terms of crimes and criminals which construct the phenomenon.

Table 1 Presents total number of crimes categorically year wise recorded and compiled by police and Home office along with all types of crimes except rape, child abuse, homosexual, embezzlement, fraud, gambling, women harassment, domestic violence, mean either these offences are not attempted or not reported or recorded.

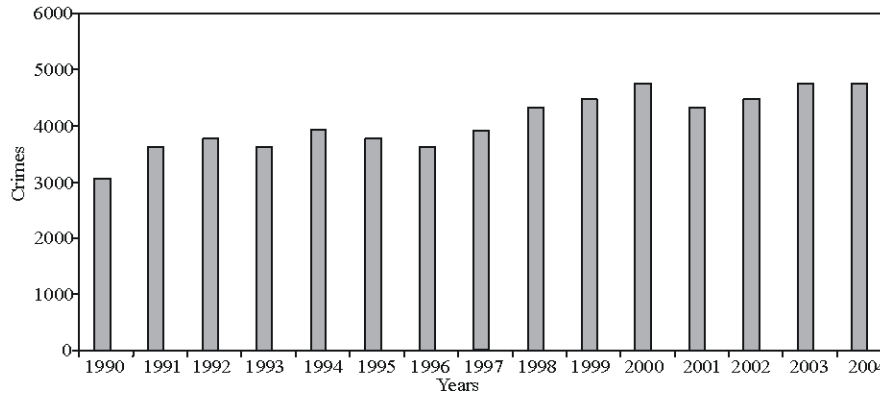
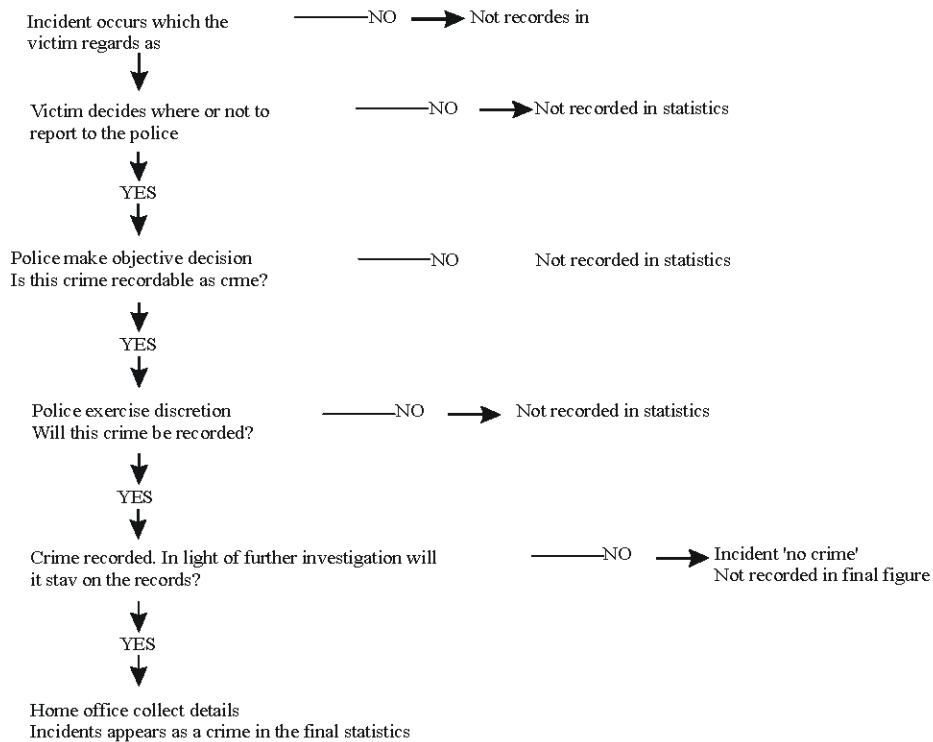


Fig. 1: Numbers of recorded crimes year wise since 90-04



Doherty^[14] presents the following model or chart for indicating the process or steps involved in production of crimes statistics

Former is not possible, later affect the crimes Fig. Figure 1 reflects a crime trend of last fifteen years (90-04) year wise offence figures seem slightly increasing and indicating disbelief and looks controlled and designed. Both table and graph .decrease and tarnish the validity of statistics. Like Table 1 and Fig. 1 Table 2 present a big gap between serious and others minor offences which also support notion that crime statistics reflect the influence of high ups and police discretion.

CONCLUSION

The validity of sources used for collecting crime statistics are challenged and criticized because more than 25% unlawful actions are missing from statistics so consequently crime rate is effected. Nowhere total cases of law breaking can be gathered there fore researchers rely on home office printed crime figures or alternative means which provide sufficient material ascertaining public trend and condition of society.

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