

**METHODS OF CRIMINOLOGY AND  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH**

# SOCIOLOGY OF CRIME, LAW AND DEVIANCE

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SOCIOLOGY OF CRIME, LAW AND  
DEVIANCE VOLUME 24

**METHODS OF  
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RESEARCH**

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Emerald Publishing Limited  
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2019

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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78769-866-6 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-78769-865-9 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-78769-867-3 (Epub)

ISSN: 1521-6136 (Series)



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Environmental  
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ISO 14001:2004.

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ISO 14001



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# INTRODUCTION: MEASURING CRIME AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Mathieu Deflem and Derek M. D. Silva

It is not true that the scientific nature of scholarship is primarily determined by its methods. It is a common misconception of science, hopefully made more by non-scientists than by those who practice it, to refer to the merits of scholarship by virtue of the so-called “scientific methods” that are used in a particular field of study. Nothing could be less scientific. In truth, a scientific discipline is defined primarily by the systematic nature in which it builds knowledge about a particular part of reality to account for variation therein. The questions of science are its most foundational component, not the methods with which those questions are answered. Theories clarify what appropriate questions can be formulated and how they should be approached. As such, methods always follow theories. However, this does not mean that methods are any less valuable and indispensable in the scientific process. On the contrary, methods of discovery, data collection, and analysis must be relied upon to test and/or apply propositions on a universe of observable phenomena and their interrelations. In other words, methodology is a necessary but insufficient condition for the accumulation of systematic knowledge the sciences pursue.

From this conception of the relation between theory, methods, and data, the present volume seeks to offer a useful contribution to present an overview of the value and use of a variety of methods and research techniques in criminology and criminal justice research today. There is no doubt that contemporary scholarship in criminology and criminal justice studies is sophisticated in all relevant respects that social science demands. Yet, the value of methodology in research on crime and criminal justice has sometimes been more and sometimes less recognized over the course of the development of these fields of study, with all due consequences.

While today’s methodological contributions in crime and criminal justice scholarship are at times not always fully acknowledged, it is to be noted that historically the so-called criminal sciences such as criminal anthropology and criminal justice administration were in fact virtually synonymous with methodology and empirical research. Traditional fields of criminological investigation, such as criminal

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**Methods of Criminology and Criminal Justice Research**  
**Sociology of Crime, Law and Deviance, Volume 24, 1–4**  
Copyright © 2019 by Emerald Publishing Limited  
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ISSN: 1521-6136/doi:[10.1108/S1521-613620190000024001](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1521-613620190000024001)

statistics in the nineteenth century (Deflem, 1997), were at the center of the evolution of social science. Although the criminological enterprise was distinctly developed to be serviceable to the administration of criminal justice as an instrumental form of knowledge, insights from these social research efforts actually informed the development of the social sciences, especially sociology. Classical scholars such as Auguste Comte, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Emile Durkheim all learned from the rigorous methods used in research on crime and other social-science phenomena, though they also sought to extend those inquiries in a manner that was consistent with the idea of sociology as an independent science.

As a result of developments related to the modernization of social science during the twentieth century, the turn in criminologically relevant work was distinctly theoretical rather than methodological. In fact, whereas methods were at the heart of research on crime and criminal justice in the nineteenth century, central theoretical developments in sociology during the modern era were intimately connected with criminological questions. For example, the masterful insights from crime causation perspectives such as differential association theory, the structural approach to deviant behavior in the context of anomie theory, and the constructionist approach of deviance studies and labeling theory were not only significant to criminology and criminal justice, but also to sociology and social science in general.

The variable positioning of scholarship on crime, deviance, and social control in between theory and methodology, then, is synonymous with the field's development and maturation over time. The scope of the present volume of *Sociology of Crime, Law, and Deviance* to focus on methodological questions, as such, complements the volume that was published in this series a little over a decade ago to bring out the unique contributions of theory (Deflem, 2006). What this volume hopes to show is that the special connection of criminological work with methodology, which was perhaps lost for a while when the focus was on conceptual questions, is now fully restored and can additionally benefit from not having given up on all useful theoretical considerations. As such, our volume should nicely complement other relevant methodological works, such as the anthologies (Copes, 2012; Piquero & Weisburd, 2010) and textbooks (Bachman, Schutt & Plass, 2017; Maxfield & Babbie, 2015) that our field now can rely on.

The chapters of this volume are not ordered per method applied in the authors' respective research enterprises, nor divided in terms of the dreaded distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods. Instead, precisely in order to show the value of a variety of methods in contemporary criminology and criminal justice research, the chapters are thematically grouped. Part I brings together three chapters that discuss general patterns and relatively broad trends of crime and criminal behavior in different ways. Barak Ariel and Matthew Bland first address the most fundamental question if crime has been rising or falling by comparing police-recorded crime numbers and victim survey results. Based on research on violent crime in England and Wales, they find that both methods have their limitations and that crime classifications need to be rethought and refined. Next, Kevin Walby and Alex Luscombe assess the value of freedom of information requests. They argue that such data can be very useful for the study of a variety of issues in socio-legal studies, criminology, and criminal justice. Marie Ouellet

and Sadaf Hashimi examine the use of network methods for modeling the nature of criminal groups and other social systems, rather than focusing on individual-level data. The authors argue that such methodological advances can also have theoretical benefits to examine crime and delinquency in terms of social relations and structure.

Part II focuses on certain special groups and issues of criminological relevance. Concentrating on violence against women, Walter S. DeKeseredy presents novel ways in which relevant survey data can be collected. He finds that such an approach can minimize underreporting and can have several theoretical and policy-related advantages. Focused on male sex workers, Navin Kumar reviews extant research from a methodological viewpoint. He finds that methodology should be carefully considered because research on male sex work is far from well-developed at present, but will need to advance in all relevant respects in view of the fact that the issue will not go away. Devoting attention to the puzzling case of elder financial exploitation, Julie Brancale and Thomas G. Blomberg suggest the advantage of a mixed-methods approach. Based on research in Florida, the authors argue that a variety of methods were used to begin to research the issue because the problem is still very much under-researched, though it will be of growing relevance in the future. Centering on the impact of school violence, in particular the shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, Jennifer O'Neill, Timothy McCuddy, and Finn-Aage Esbensen have examined a survey of middle and high school students in St. Louis County. The authors show that the Parkland incident greatly influenced students' perception of school safety, affecting the validity of such research.

In Part III, finally, methodological issues are explored on a variety of criminological problems that involve a crossing of boundaries, physical and otherwise. Nawal Ammar and Arshia U. Zaidi study effects of immigration by examining immigrant women in Canada who have been victims of intimate partner violence. They specifically explore the challenges posed in quantitative and qualitative community-based participatory research, which they argue can be relevant to both academics as well as advocacy groups. Sarah Turnbull focuses on another migration-related concern by studying her own attempt to incorporate visual data in research on immigration detention and deportation in Great Britain. Specifically centered on the method of photovoice, she discussed the uses and, especially, the limitations of participant-generated photographic images. Next, studying human trafficking, Valerie R. Anderson, Teresa C. Kulig, and Christopher J. Sullivan study the value and use of agency record data related to victimization, perpetration, and patterns. The authors show that such data have been used in a variety of settings of research on human trafficking and can be further developed and strengthened. Finally, co-authors Ryan Scrivens, Tiana Gaudette, Garth Davies, and Richard Frank study implications of the boundary-crossing aspects of the internet to examine methods for collecting data on extremism and terrorism-related behavior. The authors particularly study how web-crawling technology and sentiment analysis can be relied upon to analyze extremist content that is posted online.

In sum, the authors of this volume represent a usefully broad range of methodologies that are applied to a likewise varied collection of topics related to

crime, deviance, and criminal justice. Collectively and through their respective individual chapters, the contributors to this book make for a meaningful addition to the literature that should be of interest to scholars working on a multitude of issues of crime, deviance, and social control.

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