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TOWARD AN AGENDA FOR RESEARCH  
ON NATIONAL VICTIMIZATION SURVEY STATISTICS

Albert D. Biderman, Editor

April 15, 1978  
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Albert D. Biderman, Editor

A Summary Report of a Conference Held at  
Xerox International Center for Training and Management Development  
Leesburg, Virginia  
February 26-March 1, 1978

Organized by the Bureau of Social Science Research, Inc.  
at the request of National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service,  
Law Enforcement Assistance Administration

Bureau of Social Science Research, Inc.  
1990 M Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036

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CONFERENCE  
·TOWARD AN AGENDA FOR RESEARCH  
ON NATIONAL VICTIMIZATION SURVEY STATISTICS

Conducted by the Bureau of Social Science Research, Inc.  
at the request of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration  
Leesburg, Virginia  
February 26-March 1, 1978

Invited Participants

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Washington, D.C.

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Institute for Social Research  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

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REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE TOWARD AN AGENDA FOR RESEARCH  
ON NATIONAL VICTIMIZATION SURVEY STATISTICS

INTRODUCTION

The Conference was conducted by the Bureau of Social Science Research, Inc. at the request of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. It was held at the Xerox Training Center in Leesburg, Virginia from February 26 through March 1, 1978.

The list of participants in the Conference (including government resource persons and invited attendees) and the topics for its agenda were prepared by the Statistics Division of NCJISS. The Bureau of Social Science Research, Inc., under contractual agreement with NCJISS, undertook the logistics of the Conference. A. D. Biderman and Norma Chapman of BSSR served as Conference Coordinators. They proposed the general procedure for the conduct of its business that, with minor modification, was accepted by the participants. The substantive topics of the agenda were divided among four discussion sessions which occupied most of the first two days (and evenings) of the Conference. For each of these sessions, one of the non-governmental participants was designated chairperson and one the rapporteur. One of the government participants served each session as resource person. A draft summary of each session was prepared during the conference by these teams of persons. These summaries were distributed to participants during the Conference. The final half-day of the Conference was devoted to a wrap-up session. (Three participants--Reiss, Wolfgang and Groves--could not attend this wrap-up session.) This was an attempt to formulate in as concrete terms as possible the consensus of the participants regarding a research agenda for national criminal victimization survey statistics. For the wrap-up session, A.D. Biderman served as chair, Charles Kindermann of LEAA as rapporteur and Linda Murphy of the Bureau of the Census as resource person.

A summary of the wrap-up session was prepared by Biderman, with the assistance of detailed summaries received from Kindermann and Murphy.

Each Conference participant was asked to submit suggestions for revisions of the draft summaries during the month of March to the Conference Coordinator, Biderman. He thereupon prepared a draft final report. This draft was circulated to the participants for their approval and for the addition of any individual statements of views.

## CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

LEAA's current statement of goals for the NCS is satisfactory except that we should explicitly include the objective of gaining an understanding of the processes leading to victimization and the nature and duration of the conditions created by victimization. We would want to allow for a redesign of the survey that would collect more policy-relevant variables, including adding short-term questions on the impact of anti-crime policies.

Specific things to consider for inclusion are exposure-to-risk variables and measures of sociological space that will afford understanding of differential risk. These are to be asked of non-victims as well as victims.

On crimes to be covered, we should do research on screen questions which would elicit reports on a wider range of victimizations. Vandalism, intimidation, arson and fraud were suggested as crimes to be considered for inclusion. We should explore ways of eliciting victimization reports without asking about specific forms of crime, for example by asking about harms suffered. Research should determine what makes crime events memorable.

Small scale research could be done to determine the effect on rates of the definition of the population covered. For example, how many important crime events are missed by excluding institutionalized people, persons living in military barracks, and children under 12? In particular, methodological work should be done on the possibility of interviewing children between 6 and 11.

Reinstituting the commercial survey was given low priority by the participants, but they felt some attention might be given to examining the

efficacy of the survey method for measuring crimes against commercial establishments, as compared to alternative data collection strategies, and to including robbery occurring in business places in the household survey.

We should collect information on the characteristics of people's life styles, living arrangements, and habits which make them more or less vulnerable to crime. (Again, we must ask this of non-victims, too.)

Research should be done on the amount and types of data to be collected in the "series victimizations." Questions asked about "series" should determine whether the offender was the same person(s) involved in previously recorded offenses. Such a question might well be asked of all victims.

Following is a list of specific researchable topics to be considered:

1. Consider revisions to the screen questions; some things to consider are:
  - a. framing and grouping questions in terms of harms suffered, their causes, and circumstances, rather than using legal offense categories, where the latter do not appear to serve as cues to the most memorable aspects of events.
  - b. possible coverage of vandalism, intimidation, extortion, arson, and fraud.
2. Collect data from all respondents concerning their habits, life style, and situational characteristics related to risk and vulnerability (victimization proneness). Particular attention should be given variables that could be changed through policy programs or enlightened action by the public. More attention should be given to eliciting information on the sources of fear and concern; e.g., mass media, witnessing, word-of-mouth ("vicarious victimization").



3. Research on the possibility of respondents' reporting crimes that they themselves committed is merited, particularly as it may relate to issues of victim precipitation, provocation and risk.
4. Information should be collected on the number and types of people missed because of the definition of the population to be covered (i.e., institutionalized individuals, military bases, etc.).
5. Research on the possibility of getting reliable information by direct interviewing of persons under age 12.
6. Develop a subjective fear of crime scale (or series of scales) and study its relationship to victimization and objective levels of risk.
7. Refine data collection for series victimizations and crimes of lengthy duration (e.g., extortion), including questions of accuracy of number of victimizations, similarities and differences among victimizations in the series, continuing states of victimization, and whether same or different offenders were involved.
8. Consider asking for all incidents a question on whether the offender, if known, committed an earlier crime against that victim.
9. Follow-up questions are needed on the victim's subsequent dealings with the criminal justice system.
10. Consider collecting information about being a bystander or witness to a crime.

Chair: Albert J. Reiss, Jr.  
Rapporteur: William R. Klecka  
Resource Person: Marie Argana

## ANALYTIC PROBLEMS

### Formulation of Alternative Panel Designs for the NCS

The Conference clearly agrees that the development and maintenance of a longitudinal panel data file for the NCS is a high-priority item. This should be done in the larger context of active efforts toward improvement of our understanding of the problems inherent in long-term panel studies, and an improvement whenever possible in current panel procedures for the NCS.

A survey design which produces a stream of panel data could be utilized to address at least the following issues, each of which should be considered for detailed study by NCJISS staff:

- changes in life-styles and factors affecting proneness to crime; and the effects of these changes in subsequent victimization
- contact with and evaluations of components of the Criminal Justice System
- the longer-run consequences of victimization, including physical injury and its costs, and effects on perceptions and attitudes
- the insurance problems of victims of property and personal crimes
- cohort analysis and the estimation of secular trends in crime
- the issue of "multiple victimization"

In addition, a panel-analysis schema for the NCS would have several technical payoffs, including sampling efficiency and sampling error reduction.

However, the Conference has identified several key problems which must be investigated in detail before a long-term panel study can adequately

be maintained. These include:

- the problem of panel attrition. This is in part a substantive problem, for the heavily victimized are more likely to move. Thus, any study of the attrition problem must consider replacement, bounding, and the substitutability of in-movers for out-movers, and may involve a follow-up study of panel out-movers.
- time in sample. What is the most effective design of the sample in regard to the length of time respondents are to be "tracked"? At what intervals of time?
- general design effects of the survey which may be exacerbated by the panel design.
- data base management. How should the complex data base to be developed be organized, updated, verified, and documented, to maintain efficiently an accurate data base?
- the continuance of series victimizations across interviews as well as within one reference period.
- estimation problems from these panel-data files.

The Conference recommends that LEAA solicit a plan from the Census Bureau which outlines the organization, research options, and costs for investigating the above problems. In every case, both households and persons are to be considered as the appropriate units to track over time, and some attention is to be given to the issue of (social) household "split offs."

Analytic Problems\*

- a. How can data be organized and analyzed readily to produce estimates about crime of interest to the policy-making community? Could

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\* We have excluded diverse data collection issues (such as series incidents) which were discussed more fully later.

this be done independently of the length of the reference period, perhaps by producing useful "rolling estimates" of the current status of the population?

- b. Should victimizations continue to be the basic unit of analysis in the survey, or should the unit of interest be shifted to people and their recent problems?
- c. What is a "Multiple Victim"? Should the concept be operationalized as repetitive victimization by the same type of crime, certain mixes of crimes, any crimes? Should the average amount of time between victimizations be used?
- d. What is the appropriate mode of analysis for the over-time (but basically cross-sectional) data to be accumulated in the near future?
- e. What are the analytic problems presented by the fact that many cases in the NCS incident files are contributed by a small number of victims?

Chair: Wesley Skogan  
Rapporteur: Richard Sparks  
Resource Person: Richard Dodge

## DATA COLLECTION ISSUES--I

### Reference Period Research

Although the proposed reference period research by Census can be begun quite quickly and is relatively inexpensive, its timing may prevent maximum utility of its results. Since the project would investigate results of different reference periods on responses to the present instrument, the measured effect of reference period on response is strictly limited to the present instrument design. Changes in questions, interviewing procedures, etc., may produce different estimates of effects. For that reason this work would provide more information for future uses of the data if it were delayed until changes in questions have been made. It should also be noted that during the 18-month life of the project, other methodological investigations might be hampered. On the other hand, the project will provide the better empirical estimates of effects of reference period length, it could aid present research on the NCS data, and therefore might justify its relatively low cost.

Jointly with research on the length of reference period, we suggest that research on memory aids to respondent recall be pursued (e.g., providing the respondents with descriptions of the contexts of possible events, testing diary methods).

Respondents should be asked to report incidents up to the time of the interview in this research. Incidents reported that occur after the reference period but before the interview should be recorded and added to the control card.

### Bounded versus Unbounded Interviews

We note that the attempt to reduce response error by bounding interviews is not completely successful. Movers and new housing units interfere with the control on the proportion of bounded interviews.

We recommend that incidents occurring before the start of the reference period that were previously mentioned should be recorded by the interviewer and sufficient coding of these mentions introduced in order to permit measurement of the extent of these multiple mentions.

It was noted that a larger problem than misplacing events in time appears to be the failure to recall events at all. Much of the misplacement has low consequence for most uses to which the data are put. Given these observations, higher priorities should be set on recall problems.

It was noted that the interval between separate victimizations is an important variable in understanding the phenomenon of multiple victimizations.

Again some experimentation on the use of aided recall mechanisms would be useful (e.g. visual aids like calendars and fixing the start of the reference period at an important date such as December 25, July 4th or Labor Day).

### Panel vs. Other Designs

Various alternatives of the following sampling schemes should be evaluated:

- a. Fixed continuous longitudinal panels of respondents--a sampling of individuals that is followed over time regardless of their movements.

- b. Fixed continuous longitudinal panel of housing units--a sampling of housing units that is followed over time regardless of its occupants.
- c. One-time cross-sectional samples--samples of housing units whose occupants are interviewed only once.
- d. Rotating panels of individuals--linked samples of Type a, above, that are introduced into the survey and depart from the survey on a coordinated schedule (the present NCS design).

The issues regarding the design of the survey are 1) the number of times a person is interviewed, 2) the interval between interviews, 3) the staging of the introduction of a new cross-section into the survey, 4) the decision on following movers.

Points 1 and 2 above are topics of other sections. Points 3 and 4 are decisions that need to be made only with more complete information regarding costs and estimates of serial correlation for responses.

It is clear that the primary responsibility for this work as it involves the current NCS is the Census Bureau's. However, we strongly believe that the importance of this survey and the complexity of the undertaking requires the oversight of an outside panel of survey statisticians.

#### Random Digit Dialing--Telephone Interviews

We noted several problems with telephone surveys based on samples of random telephone numbers: 1) undercoverage of the household population, 2) problems of following panel members over time, 3) lower response and poorer quality data from some population segments (e.g. poor, lower educated, Blacks), 4) higher refusal rates, 5) determining household composition, 6) tendencies of telephone respondents to truncate answers to open-ended items, 7) the questionable propriety of calling unlisted telephone numbers, particularly as part of governmental survey.

The attractive qualities of the medium are 1) its much lower cost, 2) controls over the quality of data collection (e.g. closer supervision, CATI checking for consistencies), 3) abilities to measure more components of survey error cheaply (e.g. components of interviewer variance).

An experiment using RDD may be useful for measuring the relative precision per unit cost that telephone or mixed telephone-personal designs might yield. We also note that since much of the data collection is already occurring through telephone interviews, experiments on telephoning interviewing should be implemented.

#### Sample Design Issues

Two alternative secondary sampling units should be examined because they have substantive attraction as analysis units: police jurisdictional units and clusters that would be defined with a "neighborhood" rule. In order to use such units in analysis, sufficient number of cases would have to be selected from each one to justify the linking of NCS data with other characteristics of these areal units. It is clear that such a redesign would lower the precision of overall estimates of victimization. The effect of moving to such clustering needs to be assessed. Some of these effects can be measured by calculating components of variance in the present design.

The evaluation of disproportionate sampling designs needs more attention. Optimization needs to be explored at a lower level of aggregation than that of the current design.

Estimation of victimization through the use of multiplicity estimates should be explored. The examination of dual-frame designs (combinations of



areal units/records/phone sampling) is strongly encouraged as a way to reduce the cost of data collection with negligible change in precision.

The present design can yield data on several large SMSA's (20 perhaps) and some states. The precision of SMSA and estimates for those states should be examined to estimate the necessary length of aggregation over waves of interviews to permit a desired level of sampling error.

Chair: Michael Hindelang  
Rapporteur: Robert Groves  
Resource Person: Henry Woltman

## DATA COLLECTION ISSUES--II

### Questionnaire Revision

Linda Murphy reported a list of possible variation in the questionnaire and in data collection procedures. The one that seemed most interesting to the group was the possibility of varying the amount of information collected in incident reports; for example, reducing the number of incidents on which offender characteristics are obtained. It was noted that such variation could provide an evaluation of the effects of length of incident reports on the "productivity" of the interviewer. The general assumption is that the lengthy incident report procedure may lead a respondent who experiences it as burdensome to be reluctant to report additional offenses.

A discussion of supplements to the NCS followed, the major conclusion being that four levels of priorities should be recognized in designing a few supplements over the next five years.

The priorities are:

1. Research on the NCS itself
2. Critical and timely policy issues
3. Issues of general interest to the user community (analogous to the NORC General Social Survey items)
4. Specific projects that are initiated by single researchers

These priorities were not seen as necessarily mutually exclusive.

Two closely related points that received attention in this context were the use of multiple indicators (in supplements or other places) to investigate error structure and the possibility of including questions related to the activities of organized crime, e.g., extortion.

## Response Error Research

### Reverse Record Checks

The topic which received the most attention during the session was a new reverse record check study. T. Turner reported that the two purposes of such a study are to estimate: 1) the degree of reporting by type of offense and category of respondent and 2) bias and misrepresentation of facts. The overwhelming consensus of the group was that this is a very high priority study. Other important points from the discussion are:

1. Multiple sources of information, not just police records, should be used in validating survey responses.
2. Such validation studies should be done iteratively so that information gained and questions raised in one stage of the study can be used in other studies at other locations.
3. Estimates of other error components can be obtained from the validation studies. For example, they would provide a practical site for studies of interviewer variance.
4. Four factors were noted as important strata in the selection of offenses for the validation studies: a) the number of victims, b) urban-rural location, c) age of victim, d) type of incident.
5. The issues that should be addressed by validation studies are:
  - a. The influence of victim-offender relationships on reporting
  - b. Differential recall (telescoping, completeness, accuracy, whether recalled) by
    - 1) crime type
    - 2) victim attributes

- 3) time since event
- 4) other "work load" factors
- 5) attitudes
- c. Screener development and other question factors
- d. Interview methods
- e. Multiple victims or witness can be compared
- f. Further probing can be carried out after the record has been checked
- g. Information about commercial victimization may be obtained

Effects of Respondent Accommodation and Fatigue

These topics were noted but were thought to be of low priority.

Unfounding Issues

The most important point of the discussion seemed to be that this issue was a major threat to the credibility of the survey. Three suggestions were made:

1. There is a need for clarification of the conceptual boundaries of "crime."
2. Evidence that the police use in corroborating crimes might be useful in the survey.
3. Incidents might be evaluated in terms of their degree of acceptability as criminal events. Better descriptive information on incidents will be needed for such evaluations.

(A coefficient of the degree of acceptability might be calculated.)

Chair: Marvin E. Wolfgang  
Rapporteur: Colin Loftin  
Resource Person: Anthony Turner

SPECIAL SESSION

DISCUSSION OF STUDY OF NCS UTILITY AND BENEFITS

The conference heard a presentation by members of the Research Triangle Institute Staff, Phil McMullen and Jim Collins, on the RTI study being conducted for LEAA on utility and benefits of the NCS. A general discussion followed on approaches to the research problem.

## WRAP-UP SESSION SUMMARY

### Introduction

It should be stressed that although the quickly-prepared summaries of the previous sessions were distributed during the Wrap-Up Session, no attempt was made on the final morning to recapitulate all of the conclusions reached previously. Indeed, there was some effort to avoid over-redundancy with the more thorough treatment of particular topics of the previous days, particularly where some highly specific conclusion had been reached earlier. The Wrap-Up Discussion Summary should not be taken as a summary of all important conclusions of the entire Conference, but rather as a summary of a discussion which was wide-ranging and which could attend more readily to interrelations of various topics and to organizational issues.

### Objectives of Wrap-Up Session

The participants agreed to devote the final day's session to an attempt at specifying the elements of a research agenda for a five-year R&D program, to assigning as specific priorities as possible to these elements, and to making recommendations on how various resources might be organized for implementing the R&D program. Although consensus was achieved on many key matters, the strictures of time, along with the inability of three of the participants (Groves, Reiss, Wolfgang) to be on hand for the final session, precluded full achievement of these ambitions.

### Complexity of the R&D Planning Task

It also became clear in this discussion that the design and organization of this program was an intricate and demanding task in and of

itself that would necessitate substantial allocations of expert resources, both in the initial planning of the program and continuing throughout its course, as the results of earlier efforts clarified the appropriate directions for subsequent R&D.

The work of the final session, in other words, reinforced the consensus of previous discussions at the Conference on the need for a highly integrated, systematically planned program of directed R&D.

### Organization of the Directed R&D Program

#### Need for External Resources

The requirements for planning and coordination of the program argued for major strengthening of the government agency staff available for such activities. Confronting the needs for R&D planning and coordination, and proposal and product evaluation also made clear to the conferees that these tasks would demand a far greater quantity and range of expertise than could conceivably be provided for in-house. The program had great need for utilizing external expertise in the form of (a) a panel of technical experts for providing general advice and guidance to the program; (b) consultants to the program on particular specialized issues; (c) a technical staff for the detailed aspects of R&D planning, program coordination, dissemination and utilization. It was agreed that it would be advisable for the Justice Department to enter into contractual arrangements that could meet these requirements by drawing broadly on the most needed people and institutional capabilities of the non-Federal R&D community and that would afford a continuing mechanism for pursuing an integrated R&D program.

#### Priorities and Sequence

As has been emphasized above, the discussion during the wrap-up session proceeded from the agreement during the preceding sessions on the need

for a highly integrated, systematically planned program of directed R&D. Individual participants presented several schemes for categorizing the elements of such a program and for specifying their relations to each other in a systematic approach to the objectives of the program. "Priority" was used in the sense of how critical it was to the statistical program objectives that a particular issue be resolved, as well as the promise that a particular type of approach would contribute to resolving that issue. Equal stress was placed on another sense of the word "priority," that is, the proper sequential staging of various elements of the program, in that pursuing certain problems would be dependent for fruitful result on the conclusions reached with regard to certain other problems. For example, before one invested in research to calibrate how the survey data would be affected by memory decay functions, one would wish to have tested the effectiveness of alternative forms of screener in affording respondents appropriate conceptual cues. It would be important to resolve questions of the importance of broadening the scope of crimes covered in the survey prior to research on the effectiveness of different procedures for screening. But ultimate decisions with regard to the scope of crime coverage would have to await testing to determine with what clarity and accuracy respondents were able to report victimization by vandalism or by various forms of coercion and intimidation. Some of these mutual contingencies among elements are knotty and some decisions regarding sequence may only be made intelligently as the results of research unfold. These were among the considerations which argued for a high degree of central coordination and direction to the research program. Some R&D questions, however, possess little if any of this contingent character.



A variety of data-file management problems and studies of the differences between movers and stayers are examples. Work on such problems could be sequenced flexibly in terms of their intrinsic priorities and of the orderly management of the flow of work among the organizations participating in the program. (See further discussion of "Priorities," below.)

#### Interrelations of R&D and the Ongoing NCS

##### Importance of the Continuing Survey

The wrap-up session devoted considerable attention to the mutual relations of the ongoing NCS (past, current and prospective) and the research program. The conferees reiterated the need to view the R&D program as a continuing effort that will always parallel the work of the NCS. A commitment to a continuing program of methodological research is a necessity for such a large scale data effort and the survey itself should be so organized as to be constantly a source of knowledge useful for its own continuous improvement.

There was universal agreement that the data that are accumulating from the panel survey form a major resource for R&D directed at perfecting crime survey methods and the usefulness of their products. A major ongoing survey operation itself was also regarded as of critical importance to the R&D program. Methodological experiments can be conducted with subsamples or worked into its basic design. The ongoing NCS also can serve as a vehicle for supplementary inquiries directed at R&D objectives.

#### Interrelations of R&D and the Ongoing NCS

The wrap-up session devoted considerable attention to the mutual relations of the ongoing NCS (past, current and prospective) and the research program. There was universal agreement that the data that are

accumulating from the panel survey form a major resource for R&D directed at perfecting crime survey methods and the usefulness of their products. A major on-going survey operation itself was also regarded as of critical importance to the R&D program. Its utility resides both in experimentation that can be worked into its basic design, as well as through its serving as a vehicle for supplementary inquiries directed at R&D objectives.

#### NCS Series Continuity

The session confronted a set of issues relating to NCS continuity. These issues were raised by previous attention in the Conference to the R&D utility of longitudinal data from the ongoing survey, by the presentation of the research plan of the Census Bureau, and by the views of Census representatives and the participants regarding when it would be advisable to make changes in the survey, as knowledge develops regarding demonstrable ways of improving it. All three of these considerations argued strongly against making piecemeal changes to the current NCS of a kind that might destroy, or lessen, series continuity--particularly of victimization rates, but of other key variables as well.

#### Transition to a New System

##### Future "Ideal" Survey Series

If ways were to be found that would radically improve the methods (and most participants were convinced there would be), it was agreed that these might best be introduced as one systematically redesigned program at some point several years hence, upon the completion of an integrated R&D program. The date in current LEAA planning, 1982, was implicitly accepted as the point for initiating a transition from the current series ("A") to some hypothetical, optimum new victimization survey series ("Series B"). There was universal agreement that the R&D program should be aimed primarily at

this time horizon. It should contribute to the design of whatever might come closest to being an optimum national crime survey statistics system for the 1980's and future years. The bulk of the R&D effort should not be constrained by the prospective utilizability of its results within the current NCS system. An important aspect of this R&D, however, should be provision of bases for splicing Series A to Series B to preserve insofar as possible the time series value of data for years prior to any changeover.

#### R&D for Current Series

There remained to be considered what R&D allocation should be made to improving the current series. The conferees were mindful of the value of the great intrinsic value of a decade of continuous data from the current panel survey, whatever their imperfections, known or suspected. From the standpoint of the usefulness of these data as a statistical resource, it was felt important to improve their accuracy and usefulness by any means which would not disturb series continuity. It was also important to know as much as could be learned economically about the error structure of these data, so as to promote their proper interpretation, adjustment and use. Operational investigations were also recommended for steps that might reduce the costs of the survey. It was agreed that some allocation should be made to these ends. The Census Bureau which is so heavily involved in the current series was expected to play the major role in pursuing those R&D efforts directed at improving the value of the current series.

Some criticism was expressed regarding what was regarded as an overly conservative orientation of the Census Bureau toward existing NCS procedures. Some participants held that the Bureau should be more open to incorporating

improvements in the NCS than it appears to be; including (1) more experimental variation of procedures in partial samples, (2) incorporating improvements that would be unlikely to have major effects on victimization rates, (3) designing studies which would allow assignment of effects on rates from design changes to the specific change that has been made.

Regardless of whether one assumed that R&D program would lead to the eventual conclusion that a radically redesigned crime survey program is indicated, or merely to variations of the basic system model of the present NCS, however, there was agreement that concerted attention should be given in the program to statistical problems of time-series continuity. Attention should be directed to developing and to applying to the NCS statistical methods for "splicing" series data developed from surveys which are not identical in procedure. Such techniques might facilitate the adoption of improvements within the present series and would also afford bases for some continuity between it and some prospective new series.

#### Relative Allocations to Current and to Ideal Models

There was a discussion of the advisability of having the Conference agree on specific percentage allocations of resources of the entire program as between R&D primarily directed to improvement of the present series and that R&D which would be constrained only by the ideal objectives of some future system. Several participants felt that the reasonable division would be about 15% to the former and 85% to the latter. Other suggested ranges gave 10% as the minimum for current-series-directed work and 25% as the maximum. Although all participants agreed on the matter of general emphasis of the program, some saw reason to avoid such hard-and-fast decisions at the

present time. One of these considerations was that research using the ongoing survey and its products for illuminating the characteristics of an optimum system could be expected to yield results useful in the present series, and vice versa. The view was also expressed that until there was demonstration of the magnitudes of the improvements that might be possible from major changes in basic features of the current design, decisions to scrap it should be reserved.

#### Emphasis on External R&D Capabilities

There was agreement that the R&D effort directed to the ultimate, "ideal" system should be largely an external effort, planned and coordinated as discussed previously.

#### Role of the Census Bureau

##### Role in Directed External R&D Program

Although a considerable role for the Census Bureau was seen in this ideal-system-directed effort, it was felt that it should be one responsive to and supportive of this primarily external program. In addition to utilizations of the ongoing NCS that have been discussed, the importance of Census resources was recognized for whatever tests need to incorporate the institutional auspices of the Census Bureau in approaches to respondents, that is, where auspices might have important effects on completion rates or on responses to some questionnaire items. The Census Bureau would also have considerable involvement in determining the costs and feasibility of its implementing various design features that might be suggested for an eventual NCS system.

### Concentration on Current Series Improvement

With regard to R&D planning initiatives the Census Bureau might undertake, the conferees felt that these should concentrate on improvements of the current NCS. Current-series oriented work would also be that on which Census Bureau resources were concentrated.

### Relations to Non-Federal R&D Community

The desirability of making greater provision for involvement of external expertise in Census Bureau crime survey-related R&D was repeatedly mentioned. The problems presented by data access restrictions, by incomplete documentation and by the complexities of many of the design features of NCS make close collaboration with the Census often essential for fruitful research on the NCS by researchers from the private sector. Achieving Census Bureau research objectives for current series improvements also could be enhanced by far greater involvement of external experts than has been true in the case of past efforts. The Bureau was urged to consider greater use of Joint Statistical Agreements and other mechanisms to this end.

Regardless of what advantages use of Census Bureau collection resources might present for the various methodological experiments and tests in the program for a redesigned system, conferees felt strongly that use of these resources would only be merited if the microdata were readily accessible for "hands on" analyses by researchers involved in the program as grantees and contractors. Flexibility on the part of the Census Bureau for permitting outside researchers to introduce experiments into NCS data collection is also crucial to the success of the program. It was also felt extremely important that independent researchers interested in these methodological issues should

also be readily able to address questions to the data. The program, in other words, should be one which is fully documented and continually open to the scientific system of peer scrutiny, criticism, evaluation and replication of results. (See also discussion of "R&D Dissemination," below.)

### Dissemination

The past history of NCS R&D efforts was criticized for the failure of adequate dissemination of the results of methodological inquiries. Too much of the work has been reflected only in internal documents and unpublished documents. It was recommended that research findings of the Census Bureau, as well as independent researchers, be widely disseminated. (The Bureau of the Census representative indicated that the Census Bureau will look into ways of developing a working paper series that can be easily distributed.)

### General Methodological Developments

#### Problems not Peculiar to NCS

Many of the problems requiring solution for improvement of the NCS are not ones peculiar to the Crime Survey, but are more general problems of surveys, of statistical methodology, and of criminology. Experience with the NCS has served to identify and bring to the fore a number of these more general problems that pose new challenges to the scientific community. It is such considerations that have led to the repeated stress during the Conference on dissemination and on other steps that would bring about interaction between those working on victimization statistics methodology and those in the scientific community who are concerned with the same or closely related general problems.

The suggestion was also made that there be greater and more systematic effort toward bringing the importance of such problems to the attention of R&D programs with broader missions.

#### Census Methodological Programs

The question was raised, although not answered, of the extent and manner in which the NCS should contribute to an "overhead" burden of general methodological R&D and survey system design activities of the Census Bureau. The general survey methodology activities of the Statistical Methods program of the Census Bureau, for example, have been of major benefit to the design of the Crime Survey, and Crime Survey methodology and procedure have many points in common with those of Census surveys on health, employment, housing, etc.

#### Programs of Other Agencies

It was also suggested that LEAA administrators should confer with heads of pertinent general R&D programs, such as those of NSF, to assess the relevance of research under existing programs to NCS needs and insure that the interests of NCS in specific problems, such as response error, panel survey design, differential interview completion rates for various population components, and various data-file management and analysis problems, are taken into account in future program planning activities of such agencies.

#### Hybrid Future System

There were almost inevitable mutual incompatibilities seen in efforts to realize all the objectives set for the NCS, along with ideals of economy, precision and other scientific criteria. It was agreed that it would be unlikely that any single design could be devised for the eventual NCS that



could be optimum in terms of all these criteria. The premise was accepted that R&D planning should envision some hybrid system including (1) a cross-sectional survey for annual national estimates and, through stratification and oversampling, the production of critically important subnational data, (2) a longitudinal, panel survey designed with more explicit attention than in the present NCS for tracking the experience of persons and households through time. The design of the two surveys should be such as to exploit their special fitness for serving different uses, but also so as each might provide bases for illuminating and correcting weaknesses of the other.

#### Person- and Group-Orientation

The feeling was strongly voiced that victimization statistics should have a clear orientation to people and to such groupings of people as families, households, neighborhoods, or, should organizational surveys be reinstituted, business establishments, rather than disembodied crimes or victimizations. This orientation should infuse the conceptual basis, sampling plans, instruments, data file systems and analytic uses of victimization statistics. In victimization series, a crime event that harms five people cannot be treated as the equivalent of an event that victimizes one. Series that do not permit one to estimate how the effects of crime concentrate on the lives of particular people, particular types of neighborhoods, various types of households, particular classes of residences, etc., leave many vital questions unanswerable. The usefulness of prevalence rates, as well as incidence rates, was advocated, with attention to the design and investigation of the characteristics of prevalence rates as indicators.

### Priorities

Several schemes were presented by individual participants for classification and an integrated consideration of R&D program priorities in relation to issues confronting system redesign. Time did not permit employing any of these systems for arriving at a detailed specification of priorities and sequence of a research agenda. Discussion of these outlines did serve to differentiate those sets of problems that were particularly pertinent to either (a) a cross-sectional, periodic survey, (b) a continuing longitudinal survey, or (c) that required addressing, regardless of what specific form of survey design was being contemplated.

The outlines also lead to a general consensus on the components of an agenda and the broad order of sequence of four classes of work that should receive early emphasis:

#### 1. Conceptual Developments

The first order of priority was assigned to conceptual developments. The topics to be addressed here included:

a. the range of victimization to be covered--what legal categories of offenses with what forms of consequences to what classes of persons and groupings?

b. illuminating the characteristics of interview devices for gaining exhaustive and accurate reporting of victimization by investigating how crime is experienced, conceptualized and remembered by members of the public.

c. problems of the internal evidence of surveys, of the usefulness of various external validation sources, of how events are to be

treated that have problematic definitional features (e.g., victim provocation, uncertainty of respondent regarding evidence of crime, normative criteria applicable to events involving children).

d. development of concepts and statistical models relating to multiple and time-extended victimization.

e. risk and vulnerability, along with associated social-environmental and life-style variables.

f. evaluating utility of other policy-relevant variables meriting including in instruments or in sampling design.

## 2. Design and Testing of Interview Methods and Validation of Data

The second class of research in sequence would be that for developing and validity testing of victimization interviewing methods. Steps to overcome the response error and selective underreporting of which the NCS interviewing is now suspect probably form the single most important research need of the program. Research for instrument development requires extensive use of test populations of known victims, as well as testing with general population samples.

Reverse record checks, improving on the models used in the early development of the NCS, have an essential role to play in validating the products of particular questionnaire designs and interview procedures. Sole reliance should not be placed upon such studies, however. Special attention must be given to devising methods for the validation study of survey coverage of crimes not reported to the police. Sources other than police records must also be exploited for identifying victims for interview in validation studies:

Fundamental psychological research on memory and recall may also be a source of significant contribution to interview design objectives.

During the initial stage of testing new interviewing procedures, internal evidence from the distributions of the resulting data can be an economical and sufficient basis for assessing whether an innovation is worth subjecting to expensive external validation methods. The total number of incidents per "n" respondents, number of respondents reporting 0...n incidents, and the temporal distributions of reported incidents, and other criteria are usable with appropriate statistical and phenomenal models. The effectiveness of bounding and other means of controlling for memory loss and temporal displacement of victimization events in respondent reports deserves emphasis at this stage.

An important component of this research will be the exploration of alternatives to face-to-face interviews. Research on telephone interviewing deserves special priority, including the possibility that major modifications of interview format adapted to that medium may improve the quality of telephone interviews. The adaptability of automated telephone interview administration and data entry to victimization interviewing merits early development and testing. (The Conference gave extensive consideration to the merits of random digit dialing, but concluded that it should not be given priority in this program. Policy considerations, as well as sampling problems, figured heavily in this decision.) Specially-designed mail-back questionnaires also may prove useful for some classes of respondents, particularly in conjunction with telephone assistance available to provide additional instruction to persons needing it.

The design of visual aids for use with face-to-face interviewing or mail-back questionnaires deserves exploration.

Extensive interviewing of respondents on their perceptions of and reactions to the victimization interviewing will prove useful.

### 3. Reference Period Choices

Once key conceptual issues have been decided and basic interviewing tools are formulated, more specific inquiry can be directed to the choice of optimum reference periods.

Studies to ascertain the optimum reference period must take into joint consideration the differences in exhaustiveness and accuracy of reports using intervals of varying length, the ability to make statistical adjustments on the basis of applicable models of the data structures, the response burden and costs of using alternative screening procedures, the different needs for accuracy of correct incident dating for panel as contrasted with cross-sectional designs, and telescoping in unbounded interviews. Large enough samples and appropriate stratification schemes must be used in investigating these issues so as to permit consideration of differential rates of response error among population components (e.g., age-race-sex categories) and classes of victimization that figure in analysis.

### 4. Concurrent Projects

A number of projects that are less dependent upon results from the foregoing sequence can be initiated early in the program. Some separation is advisable between work directed toward an eventual cross-sectional design and that for a panel design, although the results of each will have implications for the other. For example, studies of the relative rates of victimization and vulnerability characteristics of movers versus stayers

and of the similarities of replacement households to lost households in NCS panel experience are important here. This research will contribute to solutions of panel design issues, including indicating the costs and feasibility of methods of tracking movers, but it will also serve to define the magnitude of the difference to be expected of cross-sectional procedures which are not affected (as much) by mobility. Time-in-panel effects and duration of "series of victimizations" have similar dual importance.

Although final sampling plans will be dependent upon results of research which will illuminate the victim prevalence and crime incidence rates that may be yielded by improved screening methods, as well as upon work toward further clarification of analytic uses of the data, some attention to sampling considerations early in the program will be advisable. This work must address the general feasibility of sampling schemes that could meet various objectives suggested by conceptual developments, including those for a prospective cross-sectional survey with oversampling provisions for various subnational estimates, and dual- or multi-frame approaches for panel designs that will have greatest potential for illuminating the micro-structure of victimization.

#### 5. Subsequent Design Studies and Organizational Planning

As the foregoing research program progresses, its results can be taken into account in evolving designs and organizational schemes for a restructured NCS. Progressively, there would be developed detailed sampling and data collection plans, data entry and management systems, analytic models and reporting formats, attention to problems of user needs and data access, with attention to cost-benefit considerations of design alternatives. Pretesting of the proposed packages would occupy the final period of the program.

## Proposed Conference Agenda

### CONFERENCE TOWARD AN AGENDA FOR RESEARCH ON NATIONAL VICTIMIZATION SURVEY STATISTICS

Conducted by the Bureau of Social Science Research, Inc.  
at the request of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration  
Leesburg, Virginia  
February 26-March 1, 1978

#### Sunday Evening, February 26

Registration; Evening Meal

#### Monday, February 27

8:15-11:30      SETTING THE AGENDA FOR THE CONFERENCE  
Chair: A. D. Biderman

Presentation: LEAA's Purpose in Requesting the Conference  
C. Kindermann (20 min.)

#### Break

Initial Views Concerning What Research Objectives Should Have  
Uppermost Priority: Brief Statements (limit: 5 minutes) by  
Each Participant (60 min.)

Discussion of the Logic of the Draft Agenda (60 min.)

Discussion of Proposed Procedure (15 min.)

11:30-1:00      Lunch Served

1:00-3:00      DISCUSSION OF CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Chair: A. Reiss  
Rapporteur: W. Klecka  
Resource Person: M. Argana

#### Crime Coverage

What crimes should be covered by NCS?

Should additional population groups be covered? (e.g.,  
military, institutional, under age 12)?

Should there be a commercial survey?

Other issues related to crime coverage?

## Measurement of Risk and Vulnerability to Victimization

How can risk and vulnerability to victimization best be measured?

How should NCS handle multiple victimization?  
Series victimization?

## Other Conceptual Issues

What other conceptual issues related to NCS need to be studied (or decided)?

3:00-3:30

### Break

3:30-5:30

### DISCUSSION OF ANALYSIS OF VICTIMIZATION DATA

Chair: W. Skogan

Rapporteur: R. Sparks

Resource Person: R. Dodge

Analytical Techniques

Longitudinal Studies

Analysis of Multiple and Series Victimization

Other Issues

5:30-7:30

### Dinner Served

Evening

UNSCHEDULED

## Tuesday, February 28

8:30-11:30

### DISCUSSION OF COLLECTION ISSUES - I

Chair: M. Hindelang

Rapporteur: R. Groves

Resource Person: H. Woltman

Sample Design

What issues related to sampling design need to be studied?

Possibilities:

Changes in stratification

Optimal reference period

Optimal length of time in sample



Random digit dialing

Panel versus other design

Bounded versus unbounded interviews

Other?

Movers versus non-movers

How should NCS handle in and out-migration

Break

Interviewing Methodology

What issues related to interviewing methodology need to be studied?

11:30-1:00

Lunch Served

1:30-4:00

DISCUSSION OF COLLECTION ISSUES - II

Chair: M. Wolfgang

Rapporteur: C. Loftin

Resource Person: T. Turner

Questionnaire Revision

Basic questionnaire vs. supplements. Which topics should be handled by each (e.g., police reporting, economic loss, injury, etc.)

Revised set of screen questions

Other issues?

Response Error Research

What issues need to be studied?

Possibilities:

Additional reverse record checks

Effects of respondent accommodation and fatigue, differential recall

Unfounding issues

Other?

4:00-4:30

Break

- 4:30-5:30      PRESENTATION: Studying Research Use  
Phil McMullen, Research Triangle Institute
- 5:30-7:30      Dinner Served
- 8:00-10:00     DRAFT WRITING PERIOD  
PM
- Preparation of draft summaries of the preceding discussions  
(Chairpersons, rapporteurs and resource persons of each session)
- Preparation of an outline of important gaps and cross-cutting  
issues in the prior discussion  
(Chair, rapporteur and resource person of Wednesday session)

Wednesday, March 1

WRAP-UP SESSION  
Chair: A. D. Biderman  
Rapporteur: C. Kinderman  
Resource Person: L. Murphy

- 8:15-10:00     Discussion of unaddressed and cross-cutting issues
- 10:00-10:45    Break and distribution and reading of discussion summaries
- 10:45-12:45    Concluding discussion of agenda for research:  
relative priorities, sequence and requirements

LUNCH SERVED UNTIL 1:00

NOTE: An evening session was added on Tuesday, February 28.



**END**