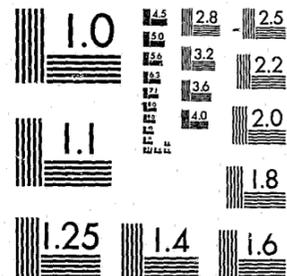


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National Institute of Justice
United States Department of Justice
Washington, D. C. 20531

Date Filmed

4/03/81

Report by
a Panel
of the
National
Academy
of Public
Administration

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CRIMINAL JUSTICE ADMINISTRATIVE STATISTICS

75337

Conducted under Grant # 78-SS-AX-0043
from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration

CRIMINAL JUSTICE ADMINISTRATIVE STATISTICS

Report of a Panel of the
National Academy of Public Administration

1225 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

December, 1980

This report was supported by grant number 78-SS-AX-0043 from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration U. S. Department of Justice. The statements and conclusions presented here are a consensus of the views of the members of the Academy Panel and do not necessarily represent views of the U. S. Government in general or LEAA in particular.

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FOREWORD

This report presents the findings of the third study by the National Academy of Public Administration in the field of criminal justice. The two preceding studies were Criminal Justice Planning in the Governing Process A Review of Nine States published in February 1979 and Administrative Information About Criminal Justice Agencies by David T. Stanley published in September 1977. The Stanley study provided the conceptual basis for the initiation of this inquiry.

The report which follows is an examination of the role and uses of nationwide criminal justice administrative data, or data that are collected for the nation as a whole about organization, financing, personnel and other administrative aspects of criminal justice. We are now at a point in our nation's social history when rising crime rates are occurring simultaneously with a pending cutback of federal assistance to state and local governments for criminal justice programs. The need for data to guide decision-makers concerned with planning, budgeting and administering criminal justice programs is likely to become even more pressing in a period of fiscal stringency. This report addresses some of the key questions in determining how administrative data can be utilized most effectively in the years ahead.

The report represents the views of the distinguished panel which guided its preparation. On behalf of the Academy Board, I would like to express our great appreciation for the active participation of the panel members, the support provided by the project staff, and the cooperation of the Bureau of Justice Statistics which sponsored the study.

George H. Esser
President

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study, undertaken by a Panel of the National Academy of Public Administration, has focused on the role and uses of nation-wide comparative criminal justice administrative statistics. Its broad purpose has been to find ways to optimize the production and use of such data in the interest of the most effective administration of the criminal justice system. ^{In light of fiscal stringency} For purposes of this study administrative statistics are defined as data on the organization, finances, administration, personnel and other resources of criminal justice agencies.

The principal uses of these national data are found at the national level where they provide a basis for monitoring trends in the criminal justice system as a whole. They are useful and necessary as a basis for policy analysis and planning. In addition, they provide an essential part of the total information needed by public and private researchers seeking to gain an understanding of how the criminal justice system works in the framework of intergovernmental relations.

At the state and local levels the needs for national administrative data tend to be limited to those concerned with planning and budgeting, though operational agencies are making increasing use of such data. At state and sub-state levels the national data are used most often as a basis for comparing the position of one jurisdiction with like jurisdictions or the nation as a whole.

Field interviews indicated that many of those in state and local criminal justice agencies, even though they may make limited or no use of nationwide comparative administrative statistics, recognize the need for collecting the data. Others, however, are not even aware of the need, and there is a good deal of skepticism concerning the value of the data in relation to the demands on those who must maintain the records from which most of the data are drawn.

The substantial manpower demands and administrative burdens involved in collecting, verifying, analyzing and disseminating data represent a major obstacle to efforts to increase and upgrade criminal justice administrative statistics. Such difficulties have blocked a number of past attempts to carry out measures similar to those advocated by the Panel.

Moreover, as this study progressed, it became increasingly clear that there was virtually no prospect for continuing past levels of federal funding of criminal justice statistical programs, either administrative or operational. The premises underlying the study were radically altered as budgets were drastically cut. The statistical programs under the Panel's review have been evolving over many years in response to needs from various quarters for an information resource to facilitate informed decision-making and resource allocation.

Now the institutional base for maintaining nationwide criminal justice statistics is threatened and some of the accomplishments of the last decade seems unlikely to survive. The reporting of these national data is highly dependent on a statistical capability at the levels where criminal justice responsibilities are centered, namely state and local governments. Capacity building is necessarily a slow and gradual process. It cannot take place when the resources applied to it are subject to abrupt and unpredictable cutoffs. Only two years ago the Office of Federal Statistical Policy and Standards criticized the insufficiency of the funding levels being allocated for criminal justice statistics programs, but even those levels will no longer be attainable. Nevertheless, the Bureau of Justice Statistics plans to continue building on what is retained of past accomplishments to establish a statistical network.

In an environment of fiscal stringency administrators have no choice but to try doing more with less and to allocate resources with maximum efficiency. This study sought to identify the most promising opportunities for adjusting to the new environment. One possible side effect of fiscal stringency may be a tendency on the part of policy-makers to become more self reliant in the utilization of quantitative information. Key decision-makers may come to recognize the necessity to take more responsibility for building their own information capabilities. The decline in resources for criminal justice at all levels of government means that decision-makers will require administrative data which is more useful in allocating scarce resources.

1. User Needs

The wide range and variety of uses of criminal justice administrative data complicates the task of summarizing user assessments of the data. As noted above, the preponderance of usage tends to be for the tracking of national trends and for comparisons of jurisdictions with national norms rather than for strictly operational purposes. Most operational users are not dependent on the national data in current form or at a set frequency. This fact provides an opportunity to those responsible for deciding on statistical priorities for experimenting with new collection procedures before initiating major changes. For example, information from sample surveys may prove to be more economical and more accurate than some current series. Studies could be conducted on the rate of obsolescence of data and the need for updating.

User recommendations for improvements in administrative statistics vary in the particulars, but there is substantial agreement on the need to upgrade the quality of existing series. Many users recognize the need for greater attention to setting national standards and upgrading the quality of record-keeping systems of local agencies which underlie administrative statistics.

Users feel that the federal government, and more particularly the Bureau of Justice Statistics, (BJS) should assume a leadership role, providing the guidance and expertise required to insure the availability of quality data. It should undertake a program of methodological research exploring how such data can be produced in the most efficient way. Most users also think that BJS should provide assistance in the use of data by publicizing examples of data use in order to expand the user community.

While according a leadership role to the BJS, users believe that it is critical for BJS to maintain close links to users and to encourage user input in the setting of statistics priorities. Users want to be represented in the development phases of new series and they want institutionalized mechanisms for user feedback.

Many users are skeptical that a "feeder-up" model of data collection assures data of high quality and they believe that such a model imposes more burden on participants than the benefits warrant. Most want to avoid duplication of effort and feel that efforts should continue to develop automated information systems which produce statistics as a by-product.

11. Adequacy of Existing Data

In assessing the adequacy of existing data series the Panel was guided by five criteria, (1) the comprehensiveness of coverage without unnecessary duplication, (2) the quality of statistical design and the reliability and validity of data, (3) timeliness, (4) costs and (5) the use of data in relation to intended purposes. The Panel focused its attention on a group of 30 statistical publications which are the most important vehicles for administrative data. These series have evolved over a period of many years and are produced by a great variety of governmental and non-profit sources. Changes in the future must build upon the statistical past documented by these series.

A. Gaps

Despite the somewhat voluminous output of data already disseminated, there are some notable and serious gaps in administrative statistics on criminal justice. In some instances the gaps are found in a particular component, while in other instances the gaps range across the spectrum of criminal justice reporting. In the latter category are two general types of information needs--the need for additional analysis of existing data and the need for linkages of administrative data to measures of population or clientele, services rendered or other indications of performance. Specific gaps or deficiencies in one or more of the several components of the criminal justice system are the following:

1. Courts. The inclusion of civil justice data under a category ostensibly covering criminal justice gives a falsely inflated impression of criminal justice expenditures, personnel and facilities. While past efforts to distinguish between the two have been resisted by the courts, further study is needed to find ways to make the task administratively manageable.

2. Prosecution. Statistical data similar to the 1978 publication, State and Local Prosecution and Civil Attorney Systems, which was based on 1976 data, need to be reissued periodically. Data on staffing and pay should indicate the share of attorneys' time devoted to defense of and advice to government agencies, in contrast to prosecution's primary criminal enforcement mission.

3. Defense. Defense, as a critical component of the criminal justice system, should be more fully and regularly reported.

4. Corrections. Salary and fringe data on correctional personnel should be reported on a more current basis and periodically.

5. State Planning and Statistical Agencies. The Criminal Justice Councils (formerly State Planning Agencies) and the Statistical Analysis Centers represent an important aspect of the intergovernmental system for administering criminal justice. The professional associations for these agencies, the National Criminal Justice Association and the Criminal Justice Statistics Association, can perform a useful service by providing periodic reports based on surveys of the organization, staffing and resources of these agencies. The national Association of Criminal Justice Planners is best equipped to collect data on local planning units.

6. Unionization data. Data on the scope and characteristics of unionization and collective bargaining for law enforcement and corrections personnel should be reported annually in publications on each of those components.

7. Pension data. Pension obligations and costs are not generally included in personnel cost data. Pension and other fringe data should be incorporated in personnel and financial statistics for all components.

8. Workload data. Data on workload for all components of the criminal justice system are far less fully and adequately reported than organizational data. Such workload data relates personnel resources to services rendered either by caseload or client population served. These types of data are needed especially at local government and agency levels. Within each component there needs to be a concerted effort to devise commonly acceptable workload standards based on common codes for units of analysis.

9. Non-profit agencies. A one time survey of non-profit agencies providing essential criminal justice services should be conducted focussing on administrative data and statistics.

B. Periodicity and Timeliness

The most essential and informative administrative data on each of the major components of the criminal justice system need to be reported on a timely and periodic basis. Perhaps the most common criticism leveled against existing publications by questionnaire respondents and field interviewees dealt with timing delays. Potential users of data are often discouraged when they cannot find very recent data to support decision-making. These users often have little comprehension of the extended time required in all the various stages of collecting, verifying, analyzing, printing and disseminating data.

Several principles should govern the scheduling of data series. For each component, the priority needs for data elements, ~~including those noted in the preceding discussions,~~ should be determined in consultation with representatives of the user communities. A periodic publication schedule of one key report should be set for each component. The content and format of reports should be compatible and comparable among the several components to the greatest extent feasible to facilitate system-wide analysis. The publication of reports can be staggered over longer time periods, provided that summary narratives are issued annually and data tapes or other machine-readable data are made available on an as-needed basis.

C. Duplication

Considering the fragmented and diffuse nature of criminal justice systems and the fact that concern for nationwide comparative statistical reporting has come into being mainly during the ten-year life span of LEAA, the extent of unnecessary duplication of administrative data is relatively slight. Partly because of their "pocketbook" interest, salary and fringe data tend to be thoroughly and frequently reported. The most extreme case of apparent excess encountered in this study was the quarterly publication of the Survey of Judicial Salaries. In the case of police salary reporting, the six reports in this area are intended for different types and sizes of governments, and the duplication tends to be more apparent than real. Also, some of the duplicated reports are based on the same source research which lessens the cost impact of such duplication.

D. Presentation of Analysis

While many of the available publications of administrative data contain some introductory analysis, the presentation and format of reports is not always designed to foster reader recognition of the analysis that has been performed or to open the way for broader uses of the data. Yet one of the fundamental objectives in distributing these statistical data is to encourage interpretive studies and the use of data for trend analysis. Analysis linking trends in one area to developments in the criminal justice system as a whole would help to evoke reader interest. Analysis of data tailored to big cities or other specified groupings at state and local levels would help to create interest at these points. Presentation is important to assure that the analytical material in the reports is not lost to potential readers.

Special efforts should be made to produce a series of readable user-oriented releases highlighting the main interpretive findings of reports as they appear. Inclusion of such releases with the reports as they are distributed would help to stimulate user interest in the content of the reports. Separate bulletins should also be issued for non-specialists. The reports and the releases based on them should provide adequate information on the methodology underlying the publication, definitions used, and the availability of data in other forms.

III. Continuing Need for Administrative Data

The collection and dissemination of nationwide criminal justice administrative statistics remains an essential function to guide decision-making by those responsible for planning and executing criminal justice programs throughout the country. Even in the absence of a national formula grant program, which has been the prime reason for collecting the Expenditure and Employment series, the continuing significance of crime and criminal justice as issues of public policy dictate a continuation and an upgrading of administrative statistics programs. While responses to this project's user survey confirmed that state and local government use of and interest in nationwide administrative statistics is concentrated in certain quarters, the responses also reveal that these statistics are consulted and used to guide decision-making. Moreover, the survey responses point to a widespread recognition that strengthening and improving administrative statistics programs will become even more essential in a future environment of tighter budgetary constraints. With diminished resources it will be increasingly necessary to allocate those resources effectively and to monitor their impact comparatively among jurisdictions.

IV. Towards Wider Use of Data Resources

Compared to the resources allocated to criminal justice administrative data collection, the resources provided to stimulate wider use of data are far more modest. Although budget restraints are limiting, the recent establishment of BJS offers an opportunity for greater emphasis on promoting wider and more effective use of available data. One of the most widely felt needs throughout the data user community is that for a central reference or reference librarian service on statistical data.

Such a service should provide users with detailed information on content of publications and information on alternative forms in which data are available. As the use of machine-readable data has increased, the need for cataloging such data files has grown. One of the most useful initiatives that could be undertaken by the federal government would be an inventory or catalog of all criminal justice data resources comparable to catalogs maintained and disseminated by other federal statistical agencies, as for example the National Center for Education Statistics. The inventory of machine-readable data being prepared by the National Criminal Justice Data Archive could form the basis for this inventory.

A major reason that administrative data are not used more extensively in the criminal justice system is the difficulty of linking such data with other types of statistical information to provide measures of output or performance. Those who would like to conduct workload analyses would be greatly helped by a greater uniformity in terminology in criminal justice variables and in the use of standard identification codes for agencies and governmental units. The codes used by the Census Bureau for agencies and governmental units are helpful in providing common basis for linking performance or workload data to administrative data. Use of such common codes should be encouraged in all criminal justice administrative data programs.

Significant attention should be devoted to encouraging more extensive analysis of existing data. Many statistical publications would benefit from the inclusion of more interpretation or analysis of the data they contain. Attention must be devoted to insuring that data are available to users in forms appropriate to their analytic needs and that statistical services are available to facilitate data analysis.

Upgrading the capabilities of users is an important route to more widespread and effective data usage in the criminal justice community. Training programs, technical assistance and information dissemination programs should be designed to keep qualified analysts up-to-date and to improve the awareness of decision-makers of the useful role statistics and quantitative information can play in their efforts to efficiently administer the agencies and programs of the criminal justice system.

INTRODUCTION

1. Study Objectives

This study was undertaken for several related purposes, all revolving around the role and use of criminal justice administrative statistics. The working definition of such statistics adopted for this research effort is data that provide information on the organization, finances, administration, personnel, and other resources of criminal justice agencies. In this study, administrative data are considered distinct from "operational data" such as records of prison populations or numbers of arrests. Growing volumes of administrative data are collected and disseminated at different levels of government and in many different forms to serve users whose needs and interests vary. Moreover, the quality, timeliness and utility of these data are highly variable.

The study was initiated under a grant from the National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service (NCJISS) of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA). While the study was under way, the functions of NCJISS were transferred to the new Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) of the Department of Justice.[1] Although BJS is the sponsor of the study, the report has been drafted for a wider audience including the community of non-profit, public interest and professional organizations in the field of criminal justice.

The study has focused on nationwide, comparative data or statistical information published by agencies and organizations at the national level and made available to users at all levels. Such data are essential at the national level in monitoring the administration of the criminal justice system and determining how best to allocate federal grants and assistance to state and local levels of government. On the other hand, state and local levels of government need such nationwide data as the basis for assessing the position of their respective jurisdictions in comparison with counterparts or national averages. Criminal justice administrative statistical series have tended to develop, as have statistics on most other functions of governments, as multiple purpose materials seeking to respond to a variety of different needs on the part of different users.

1. For consistency, references throughout the report to the Bureau of Justice Statistics or BJS include the National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service. In referring to activities conducted before the formation of BJS the text will use the acronym NCJISS.

The overall objective of this study is to provide the analysis on which future determinations can be made concerning the most effective policies and procedures to assure a reliable, accessible and readily usable data base for criminal justice administrative decision-making.

The first major task in pursuit of this goal was determining the scope and nature of data needs and the extent to which they are met by existing data. In September, 1977, the Academy released a study by David Stanley entitled "Administrative Information About Criminal Justice Agencies." This study was conducted over a brief period which precluded any survey of users. The present study, however, has relied extensively on a mail questionnaire and field visits to selected states and cities. Interviews were also conducted in Washington with key governmental and interest group personnel interested in the issues under review. A major thrust of this aspect of the research was to determine how the array of administrative data should be collected and disseminated in ways most responsive to the needs of the entire community of users.

The second task was to prepare a current inventory of criminal justice administrative statistics. This task began with a review and updating of the study by David Stanley. A total of 30 publications or data series were identified, 26 of which were covered in the Stanley report, as the basis for this data availability review. The 30 items were analyzed from the perspective of the overall criminal justice system and also from the functional viewpoint of the five components or parts of the system--law enforcement, prosecution, defense, courts, and corrections including probation and parole.

The third task was an analysis of ways to increase access to available data resources through alternative forms of organization, storage and dissemination. The on-going efforts of the Bureau of Justice Statistics and other producers to increase the utility of data and to upgrade user statistical capabilities were reviewed. Particular attention was given in this phase of the study to the need, earlier identified in the Stanley study, for ways to link information on administrative processes to performance measures. A means of linking data on resources applied with results achieved is essential to effective programming and budgeting at all levels of government and in all parts of the criminal justice system.

As this study was underway it became clear that there would be a substantial decrease from past levels of federal funding of criminal justice statistical programs, either operational or administrative. In periods of fiscal stringency it becomes essential to optimize the returns on limited funding. The findings and recommendations of the Panel, though based on concepts of sound practice for statistical endeavors in all circumstances, take special note of the areas of maximum benefit and greatest need in allocation of limited resources.

The recommendations point out opportunities for economies in the dissemination of existing series. Areas of duplication or overlap are noted. But emphasis is also given to areas where additional efforts are needed either to fill gaps in data currently available or to make more effective use of existing data.

A special sub-task of the study was an examination of the Expenditure and Employment series collected for the Bureau of Justice Statistics by the Bureau of Census. These annual reports are the most widely distributed of all criminal justice administrative statistics. They provide the principal information on which the allocation of federal criminal justice funding of state and local governments has been based.

Another effort performed in connection with this study was an assessment of a BJS program designed to facilitate wider dissemination and use of criminal justice data by means of linkage to a computer system, the Michigan Terminal System. The results of this study are reported in Appendix F.

11. Methodology

To guide this study, the Academy appointed an eight member Panel of distinguished practitioners and scholars experienced in the field of criminal justice administration and statistics. The Panel was supported by a small professional staff. The Panel met on seven occasions over a twenty-two month period to advise project staff on the planning and conduct of studies and to review draft versions of resulting reports. The findings and recommendations presented in the report are a consensus of Panel views. The list of Panel members and staff appears on page 3.

In addition to analysis of past studies and relevant literature, this study relied heavily on input from users at all levels of government and the non-profit sector. Two principal means were employed to obtain this user information. First, in-depth interviewing was a major information gathering technique. Site visits were made in the six states of California, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Virginia and in the cities of Baltimore, Denver and New York. A substantial number of interviews were also conducted with individuals whose concerns are focused at the national level. These included officials of LEAA and representatives of the major criminal justice professional associations and public interest groups. A list of these interviewees appears at Appendix H.

The interviews sought information from officials in all branches of government, especially those individuals in criminal justice agencies having responsibility for making and administering criminal justice policy. Questions were focused on four main areas:

1. the extent to which national data series are used and how they are used
2. how local agencies keep records and manage information and how such local information systems can best be used to "spin-off" data for national series
3. what state and local officials perceive as the most useful role for the federal government and particularly the Bureau of Justice Statistics
4. how limited federal funds can best be used to provide maximum benefits to the wide variety of users and potential users

The second major device for gathering information was a national sample survey of potential users based on a mail questionnaire to general government and criminal justice 979 officials throughout the country with responsibility for some part of the criminal justice system. The 524 responses, representing a 53.5 percent return rate, were analyzed by each of the 11 major groups. Responses to open-ended questions provided greater depth on the considered views of a number of individual respondents. Additionally, extensive phone interviews were held with a number of individuals who expressed particular interest in this subject. Details on the methodology for the study including the questionnaire appear at Appendix B.

Data obtained from the survey questionnaire is available in detail upon request to the Academy, as are copies of the full report of the Academy Panel.

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