

INTRODUCTION TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH METHODS

An Applied Approach

Third Edition



Gennaro F. Vito, Ph.D. Julie C. Kunselman, Ph.D.
Richard Tewksbury, Ph.D.

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By

GENNARO F. VITO, PH.D.

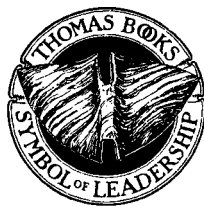
*Professor
Department of Justice Administration
University of Louisville*

JULIE C. KUNSELMAN, PH.D.

*Leader of Research and Development
Studer Education*

RICHARD TEWKSBURY, PH.D.

*Professor
Department of Justice Administration
University of Louisville*



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PREFACE

Introduction to Criminal Justice Research Methods: An Applied Approach is a text designed to assist criminal justice students and practitioners to conduct research on problems and issues facing the criminal justice system. It is based upon our collective experience as researchers and instructors in criminal justice research and policy analysis. It is our hope that our definitions and examples will help students and practitioners to both comprehend research articles and reports and to conduct their own research.

Each of the authors brought specific areas of expertise to this effort. We are familiar with the research process and have worked together on several published studies. The text is designed for persons with little or no research background and provides real world examples and clear definitions of terms and concepts. The text focuses upon policy and program analysis in the hope that accurate information will improve and reform criminal justice operations.

G.F.V.

J.C.K.

R.T.

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INTRODUCTION TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH METHODS

Chapter 1

THE PURPOSE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This text is designed as an introduction to research methods in criminal justice. Research is really about the generation of information that is both accurate and objective for the purpose of guiding decision making. Without research, we have no knowledge about crime: What it is, where it happens, how it happens, and why it happens. Information either guides the development or determines the validity of theory (Criminology) and the effectiveness of crime policies and programs (Criminal Justice). Information provides guidance on how to combat crime and the selection of the best possible approach. Research is also the way to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach considered. Without information, we have no guidance.

For example, one of the innovations in police management is known as Intelligence Led Policing. The intelligence led policing paradigm confirms that the police can use crime data and information to combat crime. Generated by crime analysis, intelligence can help the police deal with crimes that they can impact – especially street-level violence and order maintenance crimes. The targeting of serious offenders that Ratcliffe advocates has been done in several cities (Greensboro, NC; Cincinnati, OH) under violence reduction programs operating under the model pioneered by Professor David Kennedy in the Boston Gun Project. ILP demonstrates that the use of research information can lead to more effective policing.¹

In corrections, research on the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs has fed the development of evidence-based practices. Latessa has stated that correctional programs have become more evidence based and that correctional research can be used to implement change and improve the performance of rehabilitation programs while holding both offenders and correctional administrators and operatives accountable for performance.²

THE PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The detailed information that is generated by research is a management tool that has become a significant part of criminal justice operations. For example, problem solving has become a key component of police operations at all levels of the organization – from the community and the street cop to the chief executive. Research informs the problem solving function. Police managers must be able to assess agency performance (both individually and collectively), analyze and solve community problems and judge the competency of programs designed to address them. It can guide decision making in the following manner:

Research can provide useful and exciting insights into community problems and how police agencies operate. It can reveal potentially useful programs and strategies for dealing with problems. It can show which programs are successful and which are not. It can suggest new strategies to deal with old issues. It can provide information needed to improve existing programs. And it can inform the public and elected officials. In short, research is a tool for police managers who want to make rational, informed decisions.³

Police research is designed to provide information to answer specific questions and to inform police management decisions.⁴ In policing, research can guide management decisions to allocate resources in the department and to the community. How should the department deal with calls for service, routine patrol, crime investigation and prevention, and engage in problem solving? Efficient allocation of resources requires information.⁵

The Goals of Research

Research can be classified by purpose, according to the aims of the project. Thus the research may involve exploration, description, explanation, and evaluation. The goal of **exploratory research** is to examine the forces at work in some new area of crime where little about the subject is known. This type of research can generate information that could lead to more detailed analysis of the subject in the future. For example, identity theft is a new form of crime. It involves someone wrongfully obtaining and using another's personal data (your name, Social Security number, credit card number, bank account number, telephone calling card number, or other identifying information) to commit fraud or deception for economic gain.⁶ Exploratory research on identity theft reveals that its costs are substantial. Estimates from 2003 indicate that thieves who used personal information to establish new credit and bank accounts cost victims and financial institutions over \$33 billion.⁷ The victims of these crimes are not only faced with financial losses. They must also contend with the loss of identity and restoration of their good financial name in terms of their credit rating. Exploratory research on identity theft has led to further analysis. For example, research findings from one large municipal police department in Florida found that the number of reported incidents of identity theft increased at a higher rate than other more typical theft crimes. It was also determined that the average identity theft offender was African American, female, unemployed, working alone, and unknown to the victims. White males were most likely to be the victims of this crime.⁸

Descriptive research is designed to answer three basic questions:⁹

1. How big is the problem?
2. Whom does the problem effect?
3. What causes the problem?

Descriptive research is aimed at detailing situations and events that are somewhat new and unique. It attempts to uncover facts and describe reality. For example, consider the research findings on the drug, methamphetamine – a powerful central nervous system stimulant that produces a short, intense “rush” when used due to release of high levels of dopamine from the brain. It can be smoked (in its granulated, crystal form known as “ice”), snorted, orally ingested, or injected.¹⁰ Chronic abuse of methamphetamine abuse can lead to psychotic be-