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Office of Justice Programs  
*Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention*



**OJJDP**

**National  
Juvenile Justice  
Statistics  
Assessment**

*An Agenda for Action*

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# *OJJDP*

## **National Juvenile Justice Statistics Assessment**

*An Agenda for Action*

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# Foreword

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Accurate statistical information, both national and local, is essential to monitor the extent and nature of juvenile crime and victimization in this country.

Data about the American juvenile justice system, the juveniles going through it, and the results of our efforts to reduce delinquency and crime are crucial in helping us develop effective programs.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) completed a comprehensive assessment—the first ever—of the quality and usefulness of existing national statistics on juveniles, both as victims and as offenders. The overwhelming conclusion was that accurate and adequate information about juveniles for policymaking and research purposes is sorely lacking.

Based on this conclusion, OJJDP and BJS prepared a report containing recommendations to help improve statistics on juveniles and juvenile justice. This report originally was used by both Offices as a planning tool. However, due to requests for information about statistics, we have decided to publish the assessment report and make it available to the public.

We recognize that the assessment is a first step, one that is expected to lead to further cooperation and collaboration among Federal agencies to improve the quality and utility of statistics on juveniles and juvenile justice. This *Agenda for Action* will continue to serve as a planning tool. Conscientiously pursued, it will culminate in comprehensive statistical information that is useful for policy and research at the Federal, State, and local levels.

Terrence S. Donahue  
Acting Administrator  
Office of Juvenile Justice and  
Delinquency Prevention

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# Preface

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The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) cooperated to assess juvenile justice data needs and the quality and utility of existing statistics on juvenile justice.

This report describes the work and recommendations of the assessment. It explains the need for and logic of the evaluation and presents major recommendations for improving juvenile justice statistics.



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# Acknowledgments

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The *National Juvenile Justice Statistics Assessment* is the product of the cooperation of dozens of people, some mentioned in the first chapter. Other individuals who assisted in the assessment include:

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) former Administrator Verne Speirs continued the support given by Alfred Regnery, former Administrator of OJJDP, who began the assessment process.

Steven Schlesinger, former Director of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), provided support in the form of staff participation.

Pamela Swain, Director of the Research and Program Development, OJJDP, supported the idea of an assessment from its infancy and guided the project throughout.

Margaret Levine, Steven Bradford, and Eileen Garry attended to the logistical and administrative needs of the project and organized its workshop component. Peter Smith offered valuable editorial assistance in the format and presentation of this document.

The work group consisted of: James Lynch, technical adviser in the design of the assessment, moderator of the workshop, and principal author of this report; Sue Lindgren of BJS, who devoted many hours to compiling notes and comments from the workshop and drafting and editing the final report; and Barbara Allen-Hagen, OJJDP, whose idea it was to undertake this effort, and whose determination and hard work saw it through.

## *Dedication*

*This report is dedicated to the memory of our friend and colleague, Steven Bradford, who worked tirelessly and with courage on this and other endeavors to help improve juvenile justice for youth.*

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# Chapter 1

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## Need for and logic of the assessment

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) is charged with helping States and localities provide services to delinquent and troubled youth and is authorized by 42 U.S.C. Sec. 5652 to serve as:

- **An information bank** by systematically collecting and synthesizing the data and knowledge obtained from studies and research by public and private agencies, institutions, and individuals concerning all aspects of juvenile delinquency, including its prevention and treatment.
- **A clearinghouse and information center** for the preparation, publication, and dissemination of all information regarding juvenile delinquency, including State and local juvenile delinquency programs statistics, and other pertinent data and information.

OJJDP is a major user of juvenile justice statistics in its other functions such as—

Monitoring the magnitude of problems involving juveniles.

Identifying responses to these problems.

Promoting exemplary programs for providing services and evaluating programs.

These tasks require a great deal of data on juveniles, their families, and groups that serve them. Too often, when the data are not readily available, costly, special-purpose studies are necessary.

This assessment is a first step toward a more systematic approach to serving juvenile justice needs. It evaluates how well present data systems serve these needs, and recommends steps to provide more and better data.

## Contributions of earlier assessments

This assessment builds on the assessments of statistics on juveniles conducted by OJJDP in 1978 and 1980, but it has a different focus. The earlier assessments were designed primarily to identify problems with the statistics. This one emphasizes solutions to problems.

The earlier assessments were problem-specific. They evaluated how well statistical systems provided data on a given population of juveniles (such as status offenders) or a given type of system response (such as detention).

This assessment examines the full range of populations of interest and system responses.

This broad scope is essential to moving beyond problem-specific remedies to a comprehensive system of juvenile justice statistics. Problem-specific cures are of little help when policy priorities change. Judging data systems on how well they serve the full range of data needs may suggest solutions that serve the greatest number of recurring needs.

Unlike its predecessors, this assessment takes advantage of interagency cooperation. It does not assume that OJJDP alone is responsible for solutions. For example, if a survey of families is indicated, OJJDP would find out if the data could be obtained by

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supplementing another agency's ongoing survey before suggesting that an additional survey be done.

## **A two-phase approach**

The assessment has two phases:

- **Phase I** features immediate, inexpensive steps that will provide information necessary for developing a more radical, long-term strategy for improving statistics on juveniles.
- **Phase II** uses **Phase I** information to choose and implement more radical and integrated changes or additions to present data that would require greater expense and longer lead time.

This phased approach was adopted, in part, because of the pressing need to improve the state of juvenile justice statistics. OJJDP faces crucial decisions about the funding of data collection systems. Phasing provides the specific information on feasibility, costs, and benefits necessary for making informed allocation decisions. Long-term commitments of substantial resources must be based on reliable costs and benefits information. Phase I provides such information.

## **Purposes and objectives**

The assessment aims to provide information to guide Federal policy and funding decisions concerning efforts to collect national data about children and youth as victims and offenders.

This involves efforts to—

- Identify needs for juvenile justice data on various youth populations and establish priorities.
- Assess the current and potential value of present national data collection efforts for Federal policy and programming needs.
- Identify economical ways to make present data collection efforts more useful. This includes coordination with other data collection efforts to modify their instruments and methodology, or to prepare special tabulations and analyses of their data.
- Consider new data collection approaches in priority areas for which no data are available or other sources or strategies are inadequate.

## **Organization of the assessment**

Phase I involved four sequential tasks:

**Task 1.** The work group—

Specified juvenile justice data needs.

Identified existing data sets that can serve those needs.

Selected consultants to assist the work group in later Phase I tasks.

Child Trends, Inc., assembled a compendium of sources that provide data on juveniles including the sets identified by the work group.

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**Task 2.** Consultants examined how well existing data and statistical systems serve data needs specified by the work group.

Each consultant wrote a paper that evaluated a set of data systems designed to serve one or more of the specified needs. The papers noted strengths and weaknesses of the data sets and recommended ways they could be improved.

**Task 3.** The consultants' papers were evaluated by experts and interested individuals in a workshop. The consultants presented their papers, and workshop participants suggested modifications and elaborations.

**Task 4.** This report is the final task of Phase I. It presents a plan for short-term improvements in juvenile statistics based on the consultants' papers and comments by workshop participants.

Phase II of the assessment will be much like Phase I. It will begin with a staff work group, proceed to the use of technical experts, and conclude with the reactions of a broad-based group of data producers and users.

### **Defining data needs**

Given the systematic emphasis of this assessment, it was essential to be exhaustive in defining juvenile justice data needs. Yet, more narrowly defining the scope of the evaluation yielded recommendations much like those associated with earlier special-purpose data collection efforts.

To avoid this, juvenile justice data needs were defined according to—

- Population of interest.
- Particular use of the data.
- Phenomena of interest.
- Type of statistic required.

Data needs were identified hierarchically, driven by the definition of the populations of interest—juveniles as victims and offenders—specified by OJJDP's statutory mandate.

### **Identifying data uses**

Data on these populations need to serve multiple purposes, including:

- General descriptions for juvenile justice professionals, the public, and Congress.
- Management information.
- Program and policy development and evaluation.
- Research.

This list reveals the increasing rigor needed in collecting data. For example, general information is the basis on which an agency should be able to report to the public, the legislature, and budgetary bodies about the nature and extent of the problem it is charged to address.

**Table 1**  
**Juveniles as victims and offenders**

<b>Definition of population:</b>	
<b>I.</b>	<b>Victims of</b>
A.	Nonaccidental death <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Homicide</li> <li>2. Suicide</li> </ol>
B.	Kidnapping/abduction <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Missing children—foul play</li> <li>2. Parental kidnapping</li> </ol>
C.	Child abuse and neglect—intrafamilial <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Physical abuse</li> <li>2. Sexual abuse</li> <li>3. Abandonment/neglect</li> </ol>
D.	Child abuse/neglect—extrafamilial <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Child sexual exploitation               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Child pornography/pedophilia</li> <li>b. Juvenile prostitution</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Institutional abuse and neglect               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. By staff, teachers, foster parents</li> <li>b. By other youth</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
E.	Personal crimes and other offenses by peers and others <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Actual victimization</li> <li>2. Fear of victimization</li> </ol>
<b>II.</b>	<b>Troublesome and endangered youth—sometimes victims and sometimes offenders</b>
A.	Runaway and homeless youth
B.	Juvenile substance abusers
C.	School dropouts/pushouts and truants
D.	Incorrigible youth—other status offenders
<b>III.</b>	<b>Offenders</b>
A.	Their offenses <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Crimes committed</li> <li>2. Context of the crimes               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Victims-offender relationship</li> <li>b. Individual versus group involvement</li> <li>c. Locus of crime</li> <li>d. Seriousness of crime</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Arrests</li> <li>4. Court and system processing</li> </ol>
B.	Their prior history <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As victims</li> <li>2. As offenders</li> </ol>
C.	In custody <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In juvenile facilities</li> <li>2. In adult facilities</li> </ol>

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This would include being able to routinely provide current and reliable data on the—

Number and characteristics of offenses by juveniles.

Number and characteristics of juvenile offenders.

Juvenile justice system response.

It is also important to observe changes in levels of crime and system responses over time and across populations. This requires that data collected on attributes of offenders and offenses define critical populations, such as sex, age, race, and type of offense.

The data used to inform the public and the legislature may also serve such management needs as:

- **Allocating resources among programs.** Decisions must be made about the needs of specific juvenile populations (such as missing children) and system responses to these groups. Allocation decisions require data on the prevalence and incidence of such populations and their change over time.
- **Assessing the impact of legislative and administrative policies.** Data not specific enough for program evaluation can be used to assess the extent to which general legislative and administrative policies are being applied. For example, data on the number of juveniles in secure juvenile facilities will show the extent to which the policy of deinstitutionalization of status offenders is being applied. These data, however, cannot be used to assess the overall impact of this policy in reducing recidivism.

Program development and evaluation require data on the results of specific programs and a great deal of contextual information that indicates when and if the results are attributable to the program.

Data systems that serve general descriptive and management needs are not well-suited for program development and evaluation. Yet, good systems can help program development and evaluation by improving decisions about site selection and program needs. For example, in targeting programs to address emerging juvenile gang problems, data on gang-related crime could identify jurisdictions or types of jurisdictions where the problems are the greatest.

Similarly, in allocating scarce evaluation resources, data on the level of juvenile problems, system responses, and other jurisdiction or program characteristics can be used to select the best sites for intensive evaluation. This approach should help in selecting sites that are most conducive to successful implementation or completion of the evaluation. It will also permit better informed and more appropriate generalization of implementation or evaluation results.

Statistical systems can serve basic research needs to a limited extent, and their research usefulness can only be evaluated case by case. Nonetheless, a series serving general information, management, program development, and evaluation needs, should be as flexible as possible to respond to the ever-shifting and extensive demands of basic research. For example, provision should be made for periodic supplementation or modification of the data content of statistical series. This will permit the production of level and change estimates, while affording new data needed for building basic theory.

## Detailing phenomena of interest

The phenomena of interest include:

- The **behaviors** that make the juveniles part of the population of interest, such as delinquency, noncriminal misbehavior (status offenses), and victimization by intimates and others.
- Information about the **juveniles** involved in these behaviors, both victims and offenders.
- The **system responses** to these behaviors and juveniles including such decisions as police contacts/arrests, detention, diversion and intake decisions, adjudication, and disposition.

## Defining data of interest

Three types of data were deemed necessary for each phenomenon of interest:

- **Level estimates**—data needed to answer questions about prevalence and incidence, for example, the juvenile homicide rate.
- **Estimates of change in level**—data that measure year-to-year change in prevalence and incidence or change over longer or shorter periods.
- **Analytical information**—attempts to answer questions about why a phenomenon occurs or changes over time, or about the effects of certain actions or policies. Studies of the etiology of delinquency are examples of analytical uses of data.

The range of juvenile justice data needs for each phenomenon of interest is displayed in table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Information needs by population of interest**

Information need	Status offenders	Delinquent offenders	Victims of crime	Victims of abuse
Incidence/prevalence of the phenomenon/behavior				
Level estimates	X	X	X	X
Change estimates	X	X	X	X
Analytical uses (cause and correlates)	X	X	X	X
System response to phenomenon or behavior (e.g., arrest, petition, adjudication, etc.)				
Level estimates	X	X	X	X
Change estimates	X	X	X	X
Analytical uses (policy, program analysis)	X	X	X	X

## Identifying relevant data sets

Because Phase I of the assessment emphasized building on existing data sets, a major focus was to identify and document data sets that include relevant data on children and juveniles. In later stages of the assessment, these data sets were matched with the needs defined in the previous section to reveal gaps in existing data.

The selection of data sets to be assessed was guided by several considerations:

- The sets should contain some data on juvenile victims or offenders, or events that involve them.
- All sets of data collected continuously or annually were included. However, because consultants noted that many one-time collections include a great deal of data useful for exploring causes and correlates of offending behavior, such data sets compiled under Federal auspices were also included.
- Emphasis was given to nationally representative data.

The task of identifying and documenting relevant data sets was given to Child Trends, Inc., because of its earlier work with the Interagency Conference on Child and Family Statistics. All data sets considered in the assessment are listed in table 3.

**Table 3**  
**Data sets and systems included in the assessment**

Sources	Sponsors
<b>National surveys</b>	
National Crime Survey (NCS)	Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS)
National Survey of Drug Abuse (NSDA)	National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA)
National Youth Survey (NYS)	National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)
National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Experience of Youth (NLS)	Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), U.S. Department of Labor
Monitoring the Future (MF)	NIDA
High School and Beyond—National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS)	U.S. Department of Education
Safe Schools Study	National Institute of Education
Physical Violence in American Families	NIMH
Information Collection and Research Evaluation: Runaway and Homeless Youth	Administration on Children, Youth and Families



<b>Sources</b>	<b>Sponsors</b>
National Survey of Children	Child Trends, Inc., for National Child Foundation
Decennial Census—Persons in Institutions and Group Quarters	U.S. Bureau of the Census
National Statistical Survey on Runaway Youth	Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
<b>Administrative record systems</b>	
Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)	Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
Vital Statistics on Mortality	National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS)
National Juvenile Court Data Archive	OJJDP
Client-Oriented Data Acquisition Process	NIDA
1980 National Study of the Incidence and severity of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-I)	National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN)
1986 National Study of the Incidence and Prevalence of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-II)	NCCAN
<b>Surveys of organizations and facilities</b>	
National Study of Children's Residential Institutions and Alternative Programs	OJJDP
Local Jails: Census, Survey, and Survey of Inmates	BJS
State/Federal Correctional Facilities: Census, Survey, and Survey of Inmates	BJS
Children in Custody: National Census of Juvenile Detention and Correctional Facilities (CIC)	OJJDP and BJS

### **Outlining evaluation criteria**

The consultants evaluated how well the data sets satisfied the data needs listed in table 2. For each assigned system, a consultant—

Judged whether it provides data related to a specified need.

Assessed the data's quality and accuracy.

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Evaluated the data's accuracy in terms of error and bias. Error included sampling and measurement error. When possible, the magnitude and direction of errors were estimated.

For example, the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) estimates the number of juveniles arrested for delinquency in a given year. This estimate is based on a subset of police agencies that is self-selected rather than sampled systematically. For that reason, it is impossible to estimate its sampling error. Because some agencies do not report, prevalence and incidence estimates will be in error.

Self-selection may introduce bias if large urban areas are more likely to report and if blacks are overrepresented there. As a result, the arrest rates for blacks may be artificially high, thereby introducing bias into an analysis that uses race as a variable.

### **The utility of data sets was also evaluated.**

The consultants appraised the utility of the data sets using the following criteria:

**Timeliness**—How soon do these data become available after the end of the reference year? For example, complete 1984 UCR data were published in September 1985.

**Periodicity**—How often is the data collected and made available?

**Classification**—How useful are the major classifications of victims, offenders, or incidents used in the data?

**Documentation**—Will accompanying documentation permit intelligent use of the data?

This short list of utility issues is illustrative rather than exhaustive.

### **Consultant papers**

Based on these criteria, the consultants were asked to evaluate the relevant data sets and state their findings in papers divided into three sections:

- Range of data needs and a brief description of existing data systems that serve them.
- Evaluation of how well these systems serve the data needs.
- Specific steps that could be taken in the near term to improve the accuracy and usefulness of existing data systems.

The cost and time needed to apply the recommendations were intended to be reasonably modest. Yet, in some cases it was impossible to judge the exact cost or difficulty to make suggested improvements. Phase I emphasized supplementing, modifying, or making increased use of existing data sets rather than implementing new ones.

The five consultants were selected for their experience with the populations or the data sets within the scope of the assessment. The consultants and their assignments were:

- Anne L. Schneider, Ph.D., Oklahoma State University—Troublesome Youth: Status offenders and drug abusers.
- John H. Laub, Ph.D., Northeastern University—Children/youth as victims of personal crimes and other offenses by peers and others.

- 
- Paul E. Tracy, Ph.D., Northeastern University—Juvenile offenders: Systems response.
  - Robert J. Bursik, Jr., Ph.D., University of Oklahoma—Youth/juvenile offenders: Prior history as offenders.
  - Gerald T. Hotaling, Ph.D., University of New Hampshire—Victims of nonaccidental death: Child abuse and neglect.

## **The workshop**

The breadth of the assessment, both in data needs and data sets, meant that no single consultant would be sufficiently familiar with all the relevant data sets to be able to evaluate them definitively. Moreover, the assessment's fast pace did not allow consultants to develop greater familiarity with specific data sets. For these reasons, it was necessary to draw upon a group of experts with the requisite knowledge. The consultants' papers were meant to be catalysts for discussion among these experts in a workshop format rather than the final evaluation of the fit between data needs and available data.

OJJDP and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) selected 42 people to participate in the workshop—Assessment of National Juvenile Justice Data Collection Efforts Workshop—held May 13 and 14, 1986, in Washington, D.C. They were chosen to represent a broad spectrum of data users and included policymakers from State and Federal agencies, representatives of child advocacy groups, and researchers. Some consideration was given to ensuring representation of users with interest in the client populations identified. Workshop participants are listed in Appendix 1.

The workshop was organized around presentations by the five consultants, essentially summaries of their papers, and comments by workshop participants designated as discussants. These comments were designed to evaluate and elaborate on the consultants' work.

Participants not named as discussants were asked to respond to the papers and comments. In this way, the workshop ensured that the assessment considered the broadest range of user perspectives and availed itself of a cross section of expertise relevant to statistics on juveniles.

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# Chapter 2

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## **Juvenile justice statistics: An agenda for action**

This chapter contains the suggestions and deliberations of the workshop participants, the consultants, and the workgroup organized into a set of recommendations for improving juvenile justice statistics in the near term.

These recommendations and considerations are not a strictly consensual view of the principals who took part. In some cases, there was clear agreement about goals and methods; in others, there was no apparent agreement.

The workgroup organized the papers and discussions into a coherent set of recommendations. This chapter attempts to accurately present the matters on which participants agreed. Where there was no consensus, the proposed recommendations are a melding of opinions.

The recommendations offered here are not a complete plan for serving all the data needs of the juvenile justice community. Rather, they present an agenda to follow to ensure that the greatest number of data needs are served by new and existing statistical systems.

The fact that these recommendations do not mention the special studies funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and others does not imply that new statistical systems would replace them. Only special studies can provide detailed information needed for program evaluation and development.

OJJDP has funded special studies for a number of years, but there has been no systematic program to build ongoing statistical systems. These recommendations are a first step in that process.

An effective strategy for improving juvenile statistics requires—

- Defining data needs.
- Presenting options for serving these needs.
- Ranking the importance of the options.
- Pursuing the most desirable options.

The assessment performed the first two functions. The recommendations that follow constitute the range of goals to be considered in setting priorities. Ranking of these recommendations has yet to be done. The aim of this report is to stimulate and guide the discussion of priorities within OJJDP and among other Federal agencies.

This chapter presents recommendations for improving juvenile justice statistics as well as specific steps to implement the recommendation or to determine the feasibility and desirability of pursuing it. These steps can be undertaken in the near term at reasonable cost.

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Chapter 3 explores some of the issues that must be considered in the long term when final decisions are made about implementing the recommendations that prove to be both desirable and feasible in general terms.

### **Near-term strategy**

The first group of near-term recommendations is presented by population and data need that would be met if the recommendation were followed. The discussions of improvements in specific data sets suggest the options considered most desirable and outline steps needed to carry out the recommendation.

The recommendations should be viewed as goals worth pursuing. Their feasibility cannot be fully assessed until some of the steps have been taken. For example, it may be desirable to provide nationally representative data on waiver of juveniles to adult court, but this may prove to be unfeasible. This will not be determined until the costs and benefits of a specific data-collection program have been clearly established.

The specific and immediate steps needed to reach each recommended goal are presented in sequence, but many can be pursued simultaneously. These steps may be taken as separate initiatives or in combination within a single contract or cooperative agreement.

It is important to note that the recommendations are not ranked in order of priority. Rather, the first set of recommendations addresses the juvenile offender, followed by the juvenile victim, and, finally, system response—from police to corrections.

### **Improving data on juvenile offense behavior**

Not enough data are now available on juvenile offending behavior to estimate its incidence or prevalence or to analyze its nature, causes, and correlates. This is true for delinquent and status-offense behavior (noncriminal misbehavior).

Present statistical series provide somewhat useful but flawed data on offenses and offenders. Estimates of the incidence and prevalence of offending behavior are often based on a selected aspect of offenses and offenders and data sources unsuited to providing current, nationally representative data. Much of the contextual data needed for research is not routinely available.

To correct these shortcomings, workshop participants and workgroup members recommend these actions:

#### **Recommendation 1**

***Develop an ongoing, nationally representative survey of juveniles to assess delinquent and status-offense behaviors and their causes and correlates.***

Official reports of status-offense and delinquent behavior are insufficient to provide data needed for policy formulation and development in the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and elsewhere. At present, no nationally representative police data are available on these behaviors, and none are likely to be in the near future.

Evidence of the extent and nature of juvenile misbehavior, should not be based on

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police data. Police data at all levels exclude both behavior that does not come to the attention of the police and offenses that are referred directly to the courts.<sup>1</sup> It cannot be assumed that incidents not reported to the police are similar in all important respects to those reported.

Understanding the difference between incidents reported and not reported to authorities is crucial for the development and targeting of prevention and treatment programs. Therefore, a self-report survey of juveniles is needed to obtain data on delinquent and status-offense behavior not reported to the police.

An entirely new survey to collect these data will be costly and require extensive planning. Therefore, interim steps must be taken before committing to a new survey.

In the immediate future, it may be possible to supplement an ongoing survey to obtain both data on offense behavior and information needed to guide long-term decisions on a new data collection effort. This method has a number of advantages:

- The marginal cost of asking additional questions once an interviewer has contacted a respondent is much less than the cost of the original interview.
- The lead time needed for sample and survey design is reduced because many design features are fixed.
- Office of Management and Budget (OMB) restrictions on respondent burdens is also a consideration. Presumably, a supplement will require fewer burden minutes than a full interview because much demographic and other identifying data will have already been collected in the core survey.

The tradeoff, of course, is that the supplement's sponsor will have less control over the research design, and the resulting data may be less appropriate than that generated by a survey dedicated to collecting data on juvenile offense behavior.

### **Step 1.1** *Conduct secondary analyses of self-report survey data to identify the strengths and weaknesses of various survey methodologies.*

Neither the consultant papers nor the workshop discussions produced a clear choice of which survey to "piggyback." The assessment did, however, identify issues that must be addressed in selecting the best survey to supplement.

Two types of surveys were considered:

- **Household-based surveys** were preferred largely because they were not as clearly affected by the absence or loss of survey respondents due to truancy and dropping out of school, but there was a difference of opinion over how severe this problem is.
- **School-based surveys** will underrepresent truants and not represent drop-outs because they will not be in school to be interviewed. The magnitude of this underrepresentation was disputed at the workshop.

This issue should be resolved first through secondary analysis of existing data and then, if needed, by small field tests.

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Other issues and design features that would affect the choice of survey vehicle included:

**Lower age limit of respondents in the survey**—Surveys that interview younger children should be preferred as supplement vehicles.

**Ability of the sample design to serve the greatest number of data needs**—Surveys that provide data needed for annual estimates of juvenile offense behavior, age-specific estimates of offense behavior, and criminal-history data would be most desirable. Consequently, to collect longitudinal data, a rotating panel design of housing units that are retained in the sample for several years may be most appropriate.

**Implications of the survey design for cost and data quality**—Though panel or longitudinal designs may produce higher quality data, the costs may be prohibitive. Estimates of the level of offending behavior should be examined across designs, if possible, to see if design features such as longitudinal or cross-sectional designs make much difference in level and change estimates.

**Sample size**—Large samples are better than small ones because standard error is smaller, allowing more precise and reliable estimates of the topics being studied.

**Ability to collect contextual data on causes and correlates of delinquent and status-offense behavior**—Surveys that interview parents and siblings are more desirable than ones that do not. In addition, surveys that provide data on the victimization experience of offenders or the offending behavior of victims are preferred.

Many of these issues can be resolved by analysis of data from current surveys or completed studies. The National Youth Survey (NYS), for example, used a household design, but the Safe Schools Study and the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS) used a school-based design. Comparative analyses of these data should be done to resolve the question of the effect of nonattendance on the merits of school-based designs. These and other modest methodological studies should be undertaken to help design a supplement and choose a survey vehicle.

### **Step 1.2** *Explore the desirability, feasibility, and costs of alternative methods of conducting a continuous, nationally representative survey of juveniles.*

Data resulting from step 1.1 will be used to evaluate possible survey vehicles based on their ability to serve the data needs identified in this assessment.

Supplement design specifications for a supplement should be developed, including the required interviewing time, sample size, and features such as additional callbacks to contact hard-to-reach respondents. Several candidate surveys should be selected and cost estimates obtained for fielding a supplement with these specifications.

The candidate surveys should include:

- National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Experience of Youth (NLS), sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), U.S. Department of Labor.

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- National Survey of Drug Abuse (NSDA), sponsored by the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA).
  - NELS, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education.
  - Monitoring the Future (MF), sponsored by NIDA.

The cost and utility tradeoffs of each supplement design and survey vehicle should be presented to OJJDP for consideration.

**Step 1.3** *Review results of the feasibility study and prepare recommendations for accomplishing a continuous, nationally representative survey of juveniles.*

Based on the cost estimates and general desirability of the survey as a supplement vehicle, OJJDP staff, with the advice of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and experts in survey methodology and juvenile issues, should select the best supplement design and recommend it to the Administrator of OJJDP.

If the Administrator endorses this recommendation, an agreement should be reached with the agency or organization sponsoring the survey to which the supplement will be added. OJJDP staff, with the help of technical consultants (see recommendation 13), should negotiate design of the supplement with the agency or organization.

**Recommendation 2**

***Develop nationally representative data on criminal histories of juveniles that provide information on the causes and correlates of their behaviors.***

Criminal-history data are important for many analyses of juvenile offenses and offenders. Prior criminal involvement is one of the strongest predictors of future offending behavior. Complete data are of great value in developing intervention strategies and for deciding when they should be used in the course of offender careers.

Good nationally representative criminal-history data are needed from both official and self-report sources. Each source has strengths and weaknesses. Official reports provide good information on the sequence of offense behavior cited therein, but self-reports do not. Self-reports, however, reveal many offenses that never become known to the police. This is important for less serious offenses that may play a key role in the beginning and development of criminal careers.

A major criticism of today's criminal-history research is that such studies have been conducted in only a few jurisdictions. The results may not be applicable to the juvenile population as a whole.

Self-report data on criminal histories could be obtained from the survey described in recommendation 1 if a longitudinal design is used. This design could also be used to collect data on the victimization history of offenders.



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The following steps should be taken:

**Step 2.1** *Analyze self-report data to identify the strengths and weaknesses of various methodologies for collecting these data.*

Two data sets could produce survey-based, criminal-history data:

NYS, sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and OJJDP.

NLS, sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

These data sets should be analyzed to see if this type of survey can provide useful and reasonably accurate criminal-history data.

**Step 2.2** *Explore the feasibility of using official records to supplement self-report studies as a way of providing nationally representative data on criminal histories of juvenile offenders.*

In its sample, NYS collected police data on the offense history of juveniles. This experience should be reviewed to see if merging data sources is feasible and to identify sound procedures for doing so.

**Step 2.3** *Review the results of work done in steps 2.1 and 2.2, and make further recommendations for analysis or data collection as warranted.*

**Step 2.4** *Evaluate the potential of the National Juvenile Court Data Archive for providing both criminal and abuse and neglect histories.*

Workshop participants suggested that the National Juvenile Court Data Archive (NJCDA) may provide more representative data on criminal histories of juveniles than the single-jurisdiction studies reviewed as part of the assessment.

Moreover, NJCDA may be able to link abuse and neglect data with delinquency data to make it easier to explore the association between victimization and delinquency.

OJJDP should assess NJCDA's ability to provide this information by asking three questions:

- (1) In how many jurisdictions can NJCDA case-level data be linked to individual juveniles? This would include linking cases in which the same juvenile was the offender in some cases and the victim of abuse or neglect in others.

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(2) Can these data be linked across years to compile a continuous record of court-reported offenses?

(3) Would NJCDA data include information on most of a person's prior contacts with the police or only court contacts?

Partial answers to questions (1) and (2) are easily obtainable from NJCDA. Indeed, NJCDA has linked individual delinquent records in several jurisdictions, and is exploring the feasibility of linking abuse and neglect records in some of the same courts. It remains to be seen how many jurisdictions participating in NJCDA can perform the linkage done in NJCDA's original delinquent careers study involving two jurisdictions.

Answering question (3) will require some empirical comparison of police and NJCDA records for a number of jurisdictions. If the answer is yes, constructing criminal histories from NJCDA data should be seriously considered.

If the answer to all these questions is no, the completeness of the criminal-history data is in doubt and the decision to support this effort may be based on the cost of creating this criminal-history file.<sup>2</sup> NJCDA may provide a cost estimate for this work, and the decision made on that basis.

**Step 2.5** *Review results of the National Juvenile Court Data Archive's evaluation and make appropriate recommendations.*

**Step 2.6** *Coordinate training and technical and financial assistance resources to support the design or modification of State/local data-collection systems for developing prospective cohort data files on criminal histories and related data.*

It is important to develop high-quality, and locally and nationally representative data systems. Ultimately, local systems can be improved and coordinated to provide nationally representative data on the criminal history of juveniles.

The Federal Government should build high-quality, nationally representative systems for collecting criminal-history data. This effort can rely in varying degrees on the quality of local data systems, but should not depend on them. At the same time, existing State and local data should be used for program development.

In the process, the Federal Government should encourage improvement of subnational data systems to provide—

Better data for program development in the short run.

High-quality, nationally representative data based totally on submissions by States and localities in the long run.

For example, Federal short-term efforts to obtain nationally representative data on juvenile courts should include the long-term goal of developing a locally based administrative series that would include all juvenile courts.

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## **Improving data on juvenile victims**

The assessment concluded that the National Crime Survey (NCS) routinely provides useful data on a large component of the juvenile victim population.

NCS data can be used to analyze the correlates and consequences of victimization as well as to estimate the level and changes in the level of juvenile victimization.

Yet, NCS does not include juveniles under age 12, and some legitimate questions have been asked about the completeness of NCS data on sensitive crimes such as rape and intrafamilial violence.

To improve available data on juvenile victims, workshop participants and workgroup members recommend the following:

### **Recommendation 3**

*Explore the potential of the National Crime Survey and other vehicles for providing additional data on the incidence, causes, and correlates of juvenile victimization.*

NCS can be used to serve needs of the field for data about juveniles. Recent changes will make NCS a better source of data on juvenile victims, although it cannot provide comprehensive and accurate data on some victim subpopulations.

Steps should be taken to improve the ability of NCS to collect data on these populations or to use other data collection methods.

**Step 3.1** *Conduct secondary analyses of National Crime Survey data, with special attention to the data made available by recent changes in the survey.*

Near-term changes in NCS will reduce some major sources of error in the data on juvenile victims. The addition of more extensive information on police response to juvenile victims offers data not previously available. Most important, perhaps, is that routine supplements to NCS may substantially expand the range of data on outcomes of victimizations, services to victims, and potential causes and correlates of victimization.

Direct NCS interviewing of 12- and 13-year-olds should produce more accurate data for this age group. In addition to the analyses of NCS data that the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) has routinely supported in the past, special analyses should investigate the effect of interviewing 12- and 13-year-olds directly rather than by proxy on juvenile victimization trends. If necessary, adjusted trends should be produced.

Also, the effect of the change in interviewing procedure on the survey's ability to collect data on the causes and correlates of victimization should be assessed. Other analyses should exploit the new data available from NCS with special attention to the expanded data on police response and victim-offender interaction.

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**Step 3.2** *Explore the possibility of funding a routine supplement to the National Crime Survey that would explore issues relevant to juvenile victims.*

OJJDP should use supplements to provide data needed on—

Victim services.

Outcomes of victimization.

Causes and correlates of victimization.

Therefore, these steps should be taken:

- Identify the most desirable supplement topics and prepare specifications for the supplements (purpose, sample size, desired respondent, time in household). The choice of supplement topics could be made by OJJDP or in collaboration with other agencies or nongovernment sources.
- Negotiate the cost and timing of proposed supplements with the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and the U.S. Bureau of the Census. These arrangements could be made to reserve space on NCS for routine supplements dealing with juveniles or to cosponsor supplements with other justice agencies on topics of mutual interest with some oversampling of juveniles, if possible.
- Decide about fielding specific supplements.

**Step 3.3** *Support methodological work on the National Crime Survey and other initiatives that have particular importance for the study of juvenile victimization.*

Because juvenile victims are only one component of the NCS sample, decisions can be made about the survey design that will improve the survey generally but that may adversely affect statistics on juveniles.

OJJDP should be kept informed of proposed design changes so it can note changes that may be detrimental to statistics on juvenile victims. OJJDP may then choose support alterations to the design or methodological work that may be uniquely important for data on juvenile victims.

For example, BJS' initiative with the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEISS) to identify seriously injured victims will provide data on victims that NCS does not capture well. This initiative may also serve juvenile justice data needs. OJJDP should ensure that the interests of juvenile victims are considered in this process.

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**Step 3.4** *Work with other interested Federal agencies to improve the methodology for interviewing younger children and victims of highly sensitive crimes such as child abuse and intrafamilial violence.*

OJJDP should cooperate with other agencies that sponsor retrospective surveys of "sensitive" victimizations (such as intrafamilial violence, child abuse and neglect, and spouse abuse) to develop survey methods that elicit more accurate reporting of these behaviors.

These events are poorly reported, but no method has been agreed upon for estimating or correcting this error. OJJDP, BJS, the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN), and other agencies have a common interest in resolving this problem, but none can shoulder the full burden of necessary development work on its own.

These agencies could create a research group to identify methodological issues and prepare a plan for conducting the research. This plan could be presented as a proposal to the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Panel on Survey Methods, which could underwrite some of the cost.

The agencies could contribute a small amount of discretionary funds and their staff members' time. The research group could use NSF money and matching funds from participating agencies to contract for needed development work. If NSF funds are not forthcoming, the agencies may want to consider the possibility of providing full funding.

The first step in the process is to canvass relevant agencies about their interest. With enough interest, a coordinating body such as the Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics (COPAFS) could serve as the research group and write the research plan and proposal to NSF with appropriate support. If the proposal is successful, research awards could be made to private contractors or government agencies.

Research and development work on interviewing young children should identify and address the technical, logistical, and political problems inherent in such a task. It should—

- Establish the youngest age at which children reliably report victimization.
- Develop instruments and procedures for interviewing young children.
- Estimate the extent of logistical, legal, and ethical problems in such interviewing and propose remedies.
- Suggest ways to reduce the political problems that may ensue from interviewing younger children.

### **Improving data on services for juvenile victims**

There is no comprehensive and continuous source of data on services provided to juvenile victims. The National Crime Survey (NCS) provides limited data on victim

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services. The National Study of the Incidence and Prevalence of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-II) offers more extensive data on one group of juvenile victims—abused and neglected children.

Available data cannot yield usable estimates of the levels and types of services provided to juvenile victims. How useful these data are for analytical purposes is less clear, but their incompleteness suggests they will be of limited value. The following actions would improve the data on services to juvenile crime victims:

#### **Recommendation 4**

***Explore comprehensively the need for data on system response and services provided to juvenile victims. Study the feasibility of various methods of obtaining these data.***

Steps should be taken to assess the ability of NCS and the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) to provide the data desired about system responses to juvenile victims and the need and feasibility of creating alternative systems, including administrative series. This process should begin with a clear and exhaustive articulation of the data needed on services to juvenile victims.

##### ***Step 4.1 Study the ability of the redesigned National Crime Survey to provide data on victim services to juveniles.***

The first step would be to specify NCS' limits in providing data on victim services. Some of this can be done at once by estimating the juvenile victim populations, including juvenile victims of rape, assault with serious injury, assault with injury by parent, and series crimes perpetrated by parents presumed to be in need of services.

Supplements to NCS could explore more extensively the types of services provided to victims and the number of people acknowledging receipt of each type.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) should consider cooperating with the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) in funding supplements to NCS. This cooperation could take the form of the arrangement that now exists between BJS and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ).

This arrangement would give OJJDP greater control over the content of the supplement than it has over BJS- or NIJ-sponsored supplements. Procedures like those outlined in step 3.2 could determine the subject matter and design of supplements.

Among topics that could be featured in these supplements, OJJDP should explore the idea of using NCS to track victims through various types of victim services. For example, NCS could ask victims about services or help they received from the police, the courts, or other sources. They could also be asked to describe the type of services rendered, their duration, etc. Most likely, too few victims will have received services beyond police help to permit useful estimates or analysis.

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However, it is important to learn how useful NCS supplements are for these purposes. Compared to the cost of creating new systems, they offer an efficient means of collecting data. The sampling errors of different size supplements will need to be studied to estimate how long a supplement must run before it can support reliable estimates of types of services provided. If acceptable sampling errors can be obtained from administering supplements to samples of reasonable size, NCS may be able to fill this data gap. Validation of NCS data on victim services should also be considered.

If these explorations show that NCS cannot provide adequate data on services provided to juvenile crime victims, OJJDP should explore the feasibility of an administrative series to collect these data.

**Step 4.2** *Explore the feasibility of designing administrative statistical systems to collect data on services provided to juvenile victims.*

Administrative statistical series on victim services could be designed in many different ways. The Children in Custody (CIC) series offers one model; NIS-II offers another. The CIC approach would require the collection of data from a representative sample of agencies that serve victims. NIS-II samples counties and collects data from their networks of service agencies.

The choice between these designs hinges on how clearly the universe of victim-service agencies and the type of data needed can be identified:

- If the universe of service-providing agencies can be defined clearly and a good sampling frame can be constructed, the CIC model would be more appropriate.
- If the universe of service-providing agencies is amorphous and shifting, the NIS-II approach may be preferable because it permits a more flexible selection of agencies.
- If services tend to be provided in a single organization, the CIC design may be more desirable.
- If services involve referrals to many different agencies or a network of services, the NIS-II model may be more appropriate.

These and other design features should be considered in exploring alternative ways of improving data on victim services.

**Step 4.3** *Monitor implementation of the Uniform Crime Report system redesign to discover the extent to which victim data is being collected.*

In its implementation, the proposed UCR redesign as outlined in Abt Associates' *Blue Print* involves substantial change. The system proposed by Abt would provide

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potentially useful data on juvenile victims in contact with the police if adequate attention is paid to ensure the collection and analysis of victim data.

If its implementation or recommended changes is substantially altered, its ability to provide data on juvenile victims may be reduced. OJJDP should then consider alternative ways of obtaining these data, preferably by arranging for State UCR and statistical agencies to provide them without participation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

**Step 4.4** *In light of steps 4.1 through 4.3, prepare recommendations regarding the development of a comprehensive, nationally representative data series on system response and services provided to juvenile victims.*

#### **Improving data on system response: The police**

The data now available on police response to juvenile offenses are not adequate for estimating the incidence and type of action or for analysis. There are no data on the proportion of reported incidents by juvenile perpetrators with known victims.

The data on arrests of juveniles and other police actions are not reported by a substantial minority of agencies. Police response to lesser crimes, such as status offenses, are not reported by many of the agencies that take part in national statistical series. Because there is little quality control of the data reported, interjurisdictional comparisons are unwise.

Finally, the data available on police response are of limited value because they are based on jurisdictions, not on cases or persons. To address these shortcomings, workshop and workgroup participants recommend the following:

#### **Recommendation 5**

***Strongly support redesign of the Uniform Crime Report program to adequately address juvenile justice needs.***

There is great interest in the proposed Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) system, and a number of diverse interests, including the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), are looking to it to serve their data needs.

The proposed UCR system (*Blueprint for the Redesign of the Uniform Crime Reports*, Poggio et al. 1985) is a tremendous improvement over the present system. OJJDP and others interested in juvenile justice statistics should strongly support and monitor its implementation to ensure that data on juveniles receive adequate attention in the proposed system. Of necessity, modifications will occur in the course of implementation. In that process, OJJDP and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) should ensure that juvenile justice data needs are given due consideration, including these steps:



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**Step 5.1** *Convey to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Bureau of Justice Statistics concerns of the juvenile justice community that certain changes in the implementation of the redesigned Uniform Crime Reports will not adequately serve the needs of juvenile justice.*

- Clarify ambiguities about juveniles in the proposed system and in the fit between the system as proposed and its implementation.
- Make juvenile justice data needs clear to those implementing the proposed system so they can be addressed in the process. Some of these needs have been articulated in the assessment.

If implementation changes the proposed system too much, OJJDP should consider building alternatives to UCR to collect police data on delinquency and status offenses.

**Step 5.2** *Closely monitor implementation of the redesigned Uniform Crime Report to ensure that juvenile data needs are addressed.*

The system proposed by Abt Associates is generally very good, but some details were not thoroughly explained. Specifically, the Abt report calls for vigorous auditing of reports filed by participating police agencies, but it does not explain how this auditing will be conducted in the largely voluntary system.

Given the concern about the quality and uniformity of UCR data, the importance of quality control cannot be overstated. The proposed system is weak in this area. As implementation begins, several more ambiguities and departures from the proposed system have arisen that could seriously impair UCR's usefulness in answering juvenile justice data needs. OJJDP should obtain clarification on these issues or strongly urge the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to reconsider decisions.

One issue is that State UCR programs, as a group, have rejected the collection of case-level (as opposed to jurisdiction-level) data on status offenses in level II of the proposed system. This would severely limit the utility of UCR data for providing national estimates of the number and types of status offenses handled by the police.

Status offenses account for a substantial part of all police matters involving juveniles. Moreover, UCR now collects data on some status offenses (in its reports of persons arrested), so the State programs' decision can be considered a step backward.

A second issue is that hierarchical coding of offenses in the current UCR contributes to an undercount of some offenses and greatly reduces the flexibility and analytical utility of the data.

Some crimes, generally those viewed as more serious, are more important than others in the UCR system. Rape, for example, is considered more serious than kidnaping. As a result, a kidnaping and rape are coded as a rape, and the kidnaping is not recorded. This undercount of kidnaping does not permit assessment of the risk kidnaping poses.

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The proposed UCR system permits inclusion of secondary offenses, but there is good reason to believe the system will undercount them. BJS should examine this matter closely in pretesting the new UCR. The coding of primary and secondary offenses in the proposed system should be compared with attribute-based classification of these events from report narratives.<sup>3</sup>

Attribute classification requires that extensive data be collected on the characteristics, or attributes, of crimes. Events can be classified in many ways by combining the attributes of individual events rather than requiring events to be classified in the field.

In an attribute-based system, distinctions are not made between primary and secondary offenses, and there is less risk of excluding or undercounting lesser offenses.

If tests show substantial underreporting of secondary offenses in the proposed UCR crime classification procedures, a more attribute-based approach to crime classification should be considered.<sup>4</sup>

On a third issue, Abt recommended implementation of the incident-level or level-II system in a sample of jurisdictions. This approach would serve many purposes:

- Provide nationally representative estimates of the level and change in level of delinquency cases handled by the police.
- Simplify quality control of the data, because fewer jurisdictions would be involved.
- Simplify implementation of the level-II system.

It is not clear that the level-II system is still planned as a sample-based system. Abandoning the sample-based approach may substantially delay implementation of the level-II system and therefore the national estimates offered by the new UCR. OJJDP should obtain clarification of the status of the sample-based approach.

### **Step 5.3** *Explore alternative ways of obtaining data if the redesigned UCR does not meet juvenile justice data needs.*

If implementation of the proposed UCR system does not adequately address most juvenile justice data needs, OJJDP should seek other sources.

It may be possible to obtain the data directly from States and localities. Many State UCR programs collect more extensive data than necessary for participation in the national UCR program. These data could be routinely provided to State Statistical Analysis Centers (SAC's), which would then forward them to an appropriate repository for processing and analysis.

This option should be pursued only with full appreciation of its difficulty. The UCR program, although limited, has a long tradition and is held in high esteem by law enforcers. It would take much effort and good fortune to implement a remotely comparable system in the foreseeable future.

If UCR cannot provide data on juveniles, however, OJJDP should study the feasibility of alternative systems. This study would ask questions such as:

- What type of data on juveniles is available in police reporting systems at the State level?
- How many localities do not participate in a State reporting system? How would data be collected from them?
- Can an approach be pursued in which only a sample of jurisdictions in States without programs would be asked to report?
- Can staff at State SAC's who monitor compliance with the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act collect these data from localities in their States? What forms and other materials would be needed?
- How would the program deal with nonuniform reporting practices across State systems?
- Can this system serve basic data needs on juvenile offenders?
- Approximately how much would such a system cost?
- How long would it take to get the system operational?
- What incentives should be used to encourage the participation of local and State jurisdictions?
- Who would process and analyze the data?

If the feasibility study indicates that such a system is possible, OJJDP should take steps to implement it.

### **Improving data on system response: The prosecutors**

The assessment did not find any routinely collected, comprehensive, nationally representative data series on the prosecution or defense of juvenile offenders, although some types of decisions (such as waivers to adult criminal court) have been studied.

The prosecutor's role in juvenile proceedings may be relatively minor and not require extensive statistical systems. At a minimum, however, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) should investigate the need for a statistical series on juvenile prosecution and the capability of State and local statistical systems to provide these data.

Workshop and workgroup participants recommend these actions:

#### **Recommendation 6**

***Develop a comprehensive, nationally representative statistical series on the prosecution and defense of juvenile offenders.***

This series should include data on prosecutors' major decisions about the processing of juvenile offenders, including:

- Intake.
- Declination.

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- Filing petitions and changes in charges.
  - Waivers of juvenile court jurisdiction for trial in criminal court.
  - Whether the defendant was represented by counsel and, if so, the type of counsel.
  - Descriptive data on defendants.
  - Possible linkage of prosecutorial with other court data, such as National Juvenile Court Data Archive (NJCDA) statistics on decisions to file petitions, waivers, and prosecution outcomes.

**Step 6.1** *Study the feasibility of various approaches to collecting data on the prosecution and defense of juveniles.*

OJJDP should first study the most efficient way to collect this data, specifically, the following strategies:

- **Build on the NJCDA data system** administered by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ). Survey courts participating in the archive concerning the extent and type of data available.
- **Piggyback BJS efforts** to develop prosecution and court statistics about the adult system. Evaluate Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) systems including the Offender-Based Transaction System (OBTS), Prosecutor's Management Information System (PROMIS), other prosecutor management data bases, the project to collect sentencing data from a sample of jurisdictions, and the feasibility study being done for BJS' Adjudication Program (see *Bureau of Justice Statistics Annual Report, Fiscal 1986*, p. 62).<sup>5</sup>

This appraisal is an important first step in the decisionmaking process. It may provide the information needed to decide if prosecution data (and possibly other court data) could be collected efficiently through NJCDA, by supplements to BJS initiatives or if other strategies should be evaluated.

**Step 6.2** *Review the feasibility study and prepare a recommendation for creating a program to collect data on the prosecution and defense of juveniles.*

**Improving data on system response: The courts**

Data currently available on case processing in juvenile courts can serve some but not all needs for data on court response to juvenile offenders.

At this point, the National Juvenile Court Data Archive (NJCDA) data cannot be used to estimate the incidence and type of court response nationally because it does not collect data on a probability sample of courts or the population of juvenile courts. It can, however, be a tremendous resource for analyzing court decisionmaking and

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evaluating court programs and the effects of selected changes in the law.

NJCDA data could also provide valuable program development and evaluation material if more information on court programs were collected and linked to the other NJCDA holdings. (See step 2.4.)

If several quality control, documentation, and access problems were resolved, the Nation would have a useful system of gathering court statistics on juveniles. If these problems cannot be resolved, radically new data collection initiatives should be considered.

To improve the ability of existing systems to provide data on processing in juvenile courts, workshop and workgroup participants recommend these actions:

### **Recommendation 7**

***Build a nationally representative statistical series that provides information, from intake through disposition, on judicial handling of juvenile cases involving delinquency, noncriminal misbehavior, and abuse and neglect.***

To answer basic questions about how courts with juvenile jurisdiction handle various types of cases, a statistical system must be comprehensive in its universe coverage as well as its coverage of decisions handled by the court. The system must be sensitive to the organizational, structural, and statutory differences among courts that have jurisdiction over juveniles. Foremost in the design of any system gathering numbers and characteristics of cases and court decisionmaking is the fact that the administration of juvenile justice is a local/State matter. For such a system to provide useful, national data, a vast network of voluntary reporting agencies is required.

NJCDA holds some of the same promise and difficulty as Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) for collecting data on the juvenile justice system's response to juvenile misbehavior, but it has greater potential as a national statistical system than the current UCR because NJCDA includes both jurisdiction- and court-level data.

Data submitted to NJCDA for 1984 contained:

- Case-level data from jurisdictions that serve 44 percent of all U.S. juveniles.
- Jurisdiction-level (county-level) data for courts that serve about 96 percent of all U.S. juveniles, with data covering 61 percent of the juvenile population that can be used for reporting on juvenile court case processing.

Like UCR, NJCDA has a long tradition in juvenile justice, but it does not cover the universe of courts that have jurisdiction over juveniles. It has all the quality control problems that being voluntary implies, and the data it collects at the jurisdiction level are minimal.

In improving the capability of the existing statistical system, workshop and workgroup participants recommended concentrating future work with NJCDA on methodological research into error structure in its data, increased analysis of its data, and expanding its coverage of court jurisdictions.

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Workshop participants suggested several remedies for undercoverage and elaborations of the system to fill the current data gaps.

**Step 7.1** *Undertake research to determine the validity of the National Juvenile Court Archive's national estimation procedures.*

Two methods, of differing cost and complexity, were suggested for dealing with the undercoverage that seriously limits the production of reliable national estimates with NJCDA data.

The minimal approach would be to develop more complex ways to impute missing data using sophisticated statistical techniques. The courts that take part in NJCDA would be split into two groups. Imputation techniques would be developed using one group and tested on the other. Though this would indicate how good the techniques are, it would not indicate how representative participating (case-level) courts are of all courts.

One way to test this assumption would be to survey nonresponding jurisdictions to see if they differ substantially from participating jurisdictions. A sample of records could be collected from a subset of nonresponding jurisdictions and analyzed to see if there are systematic differences between reporting and nonreporting jurisdictions. This information could be used to develop more precise and defensible imputation techniques.

**Step 7.2** *The National Center for Juvenile Justice should make an intensive effort to expand its coverage of courts that do not provide automated, case-level data to the National Juvenile Court Data Archive.*

The actions proposed in step 7.1 will provide estimates of the accuracy of various imputation techniques, but these techniques are not permanent remedies.

The ultimate and most ambitious remedy for the undercoverage problem is aggressive recruitment of nonparticipating jurisdictions. This effort could target all nonparticipants or draw a sample of jurisdictions and recruit nonparticipating jurisdictions in the sample.

The inducements offered in this recruitment drive have not been specified, but because many nonparticipating jurisdictions do not have automated data systems, it may be necessary to help them obtain such systems to encourage participation.

Because this would be quite expensive, the less ambitious remedies for undercoverage should be pursued first. If the study of nonresponding jurisdictions yields satisfactory imputation techniques, recruitment can be pursued at a more natural pace and at lower cost to the Federal Government. If not, aggressive recruitment should be undertaken.

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**Step 7.3** *The National Juvenile Court Data Archive should develop procedures to assure acceptable levels of uniformity in the application of definitions within and across jurisdictions and over time.*

Aside from the problem of undercoverage, nonuniformities in the data submitted by individual jurisdictions are the greatest potential problem with the use of NJCDA data. This issue was not adequately addressed at the workshop.

Because NJCDA relies on the voluntary contributions of juvenile court jurisdictions, it is difficult to ensure uniformity in the use of definitions and procedures across jurisdictions or time periods. While NJCDA transforms the data from each jurisdiction into a uniform format for analysis, it is not clear whether local jurisdictions consistently apply similar definitions. As a result, informal probation in one jurisdiction, or at a certain time, may be classified as a dismissal at another place or time. This type of nonuniformity cannot be corrected by NJCDA's uniform record format.

NJCDA should provide more information on how it transforms data from individual jurisdictions into a national format. If its procedures do not ensure sufficient uniform use of definitions, NJCDA should be asked for a plan to improve the comparability of data submitted by jurisdictions.

**Step 7.4** *The National Juvenile Court Data Archive should facilitate direct access by researchers to State data by obtaining permission from the originating jurisdictions to transfer the individual State data files to the Criminal Justice Archive at the University of Michigan.*

Despite some limitations of NJCDA data for national estimation purposes, it can be very useful for subnational estimates and analyses. This potential would be more fully exploited if the data were more accessible to researchers and other interested parties.

The assessment identified several steps to increase accessibility:

- OJJDP should publicize the existence of case-level data from participating courts through brochures, publications, and training.
- These data sets should be documented in a way that is comprehensible to people outside NJCDA.
- NJCDA should seek blanket permission from data suppliers to use their data sets and to send them to the Criminal Justice Archive.

It may be necessary for the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) to arrange for different types of data files with varying levels of detailed information to be made available with varying degrees of access.

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**Step 7.5** *Support secondary analysis of National Juvenile Court Data Archive data to test its usefulness for exploring significant topics on juvenile careers, juvenile court processing, and the impact of legislation on the juvenile court.*

Improvement of NJCDA data depends largely on the use of these data. The more they are used, the greater our knowledge of their potential and limitations.

OJJDP should encourage and facilitate the use of NJCDA data for both substantive and methodological purposes. Visiting fellowships at NJCDA for researchers were suggested to encourage more extensive use of NJCDA data.

**Step 7.6** *Make greater use of the data submitted to the National Juvenile Court Data Archive on abuse, neglect, and dependency cases.*

NJCDA collects data on abuse and neglect cases but combines them with dependency data in its routine reports. Reporting the abuse data separately could tremendously increase the amount of data available on this population.

NJCDA should explore the feasibility of asking all jurisdictions to send the summary data in their periodic reports to NJCDA in a way that permits separating the abused and neglected cases from the dependency cases. More important, greater use should be made of automated case-level data on dependency and neglect cases.

**Step 7.7** *Establish an advisory board of survey methodologists, statisticians, and juvenile justice data users to review the National Juvenile Court Data Archive's plans and activities and to advise the project staff on methodological issues.*

The broad range of statistical, methodological, and analytical recommendations regarding NJCDA requires advice and careful oversight from experts in those fields and in juvenile justice. This should be provided by individuals outside NJCDA to bring a fresh perspective and to allow access to professionals in these specialized fields.

### **Improving data on system response: The correctional systems**

The quality and quantity of data on the handling of juvenile offenders in the correctional systems are mixed.



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With a few minor exceptions, data on the number of children in secure custody are quite good, but there is little data on the characteristics of these juveniles available for analysis. There is virtually no comprehensive data on the number and kinds of children in other types of nonsecure residential care such as foster care, or in noncustodial arrangements such as probation and parole.

The modest value of existing data for analyses to support program development would increase if there were more data available on the types of programs used in juvenile detention and correctional facilities.

To improve the quality and quantity of data on the correctional system's response to juvenile offenders, workshop and workgroup participants recommend the following actions:

### **Recommendation 8**

***Develop a comprehensive, nationally representative statistical series on the use of probation and aftercare for juvenile offenders and on the characteristics of juveniles under community supervision.***

At present, there are no nationally representative data for juveniles on parole or probation.

The National Juvenile Court Data Archive (NJCDA) includes some data on juveniles placed on probation, but they are not nationally representative, do not describe conditions of probation such as duration, or provide data on rates of completion. This is distressing given the fact that most juvenile court dispositions involve probation.

Similarly, there are virtually no data on juvenile parole or aftercare.

**Step 8.1** *Study the feasibility of collecting data about juvenile probation and parole.*

It may be possible to obtain more data on probation through a supplement to NJCDA's data collection or the Bureau of Justice Statistics' (BJS) adult probation and parole data collection. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) should explore the feasibility of these and other initiatives that would provide data on probation and parole.

**Step 8.2** *Review the feasibility study and prepare recommendations about implementation of such a data collection effort.*

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## **Recommendation 9**

***Develop a comprehensive, nationally representative statistical series on juveniles in detention and correctional custody.***

Consultants and workshop participants strongly endorsed continuation of the Children in Custody (CIC) series.

They suggested that work needs to be done to ensure that the survey covers a representative cross section of the facilities holding adjudicated and preadjudicated juveniles and recommended expanding CIC to include the collection of individual-level data on samples of residents in a sample of facilities. Other recommendations call for the collection of more data on services provided by facilities in the CIC sample.

***Step 9.1 Continue to collect Children in Custody data at least every 2 years and maintain the February reference period.***

OJJDP should ensure continuation of the CIC series. This data collection system is essential to serving the data needs of the juvenile justice community.

***Step 9.2 Assess the adequacy of procedures for listing the universe of facilities and for ensuring completeness of coverage in the Children in Custody census. Modify these procedures and, if necessary, expand the coverage.***

The juvenile justice system is diffuse. Many types of organizations provide custody for juveniles involved with the juvenile court. This complicates the process of constructing an exhaustive sampling frame of agencies and private organizations with custody over juveniles. It is difficult to determine the completeness of the coverage.

Current procedures for constructing the universe of programs should be documented. OJJDP should compare the procedures used for CIC with those used by the University of Chicago for a special study conducted in 1981. This will show the extent of undercoverage and provide a rough estimate of the size and direction of the error introduced by it.

If the comparison does not suggest substantial differences because of undercoverage, nothing more needs to be done. If it suggests that undercoverage is a problem, arrangements should be made with the Census Bureau to expand the CIC sampling frame.

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**Step 9.3** *Examine the feasibility of collecting individual-level data on the characteristics of juveniles entering, leaving, and residing in public and private juvenile detention and correctional facilities.*

Because CIC uses the facility as the unit of analysis, it explains little about the individuals who make up the population in custody or the specific services they receive.

OJJDP should consider funding an individual-level data collection on juveniles in facilities in the CIC sample.

In 1986 BJS and OJJDP began planning a feasibility study to collect data on juveniles detained in public and private custody facilities. The Census Bureau completed the study in the fall of 1987.

Using telephone interviews and site visits to selected facilities, the Census Bureau is determining the availability of the following information on juveniles:

- Demographic characteristics (age, race, sex, ethnicity).
- Socioeconomic characteristics (family background, number of siblings, living arrangements, family members involved in the criminal justice system, annual family income, etc.).
- Current offense, specific nature of the offense, characteristics of the victims of personal offenses, preadjudication events, nature and duration of the disposition, etc.
- Juvenile offense history and history of drug and alcohol use.
- Involvement in programs during current and prior incarcerations.
- Prior victimization including physical or sexual abuse.

The Census Bureau is also determining the manner in which these data may be obtained:

- If and to what extent juvenile records are computerized and the nature of the records if not automated.
- Ethical, legal, logistical, and other issues involved in interviewing juveniles on these topics.
- Feasibility and appropriateness of obtaining various types of information from juveniles as opposed to records.
- The facility's amenability to participation in the program.

**Step 9.4** *Review the feasibility study and make recommendations about implementing efforts to collect these data.*

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Once the feasibility study is completed, decisions will need to be made regarding whether the data will be gathered by interview or by collecting organizational records, the periodicity of the data collection, and the required sample sizes.

Prior to final decisions about these design issues, the results of the study should be carefully reviewed by the panel of experts described in recommendation 13.

**Step 9.5** *Consider collecting data on the characteristics of services and programs provided to juveniles by public and private juvenile detention and correctional facilities.*

The assessment supported the idea of expanding CIC data on services provided by facilities. The specific form for collecting these data was not discussed. Once OJJDP defines the specific types of data needed, other design features can be negotiated with the Census Bureau.

The Census Bureau suggested that if the volume of data is extensive, the survey could be administered in years that regular CIC data are not collected to reduce respondent burden. This would also reduce the currentness of the service data relative to the population data in CIC.

As an alternative, a supplement could be administered to a sample of the CIC universe. This would reduce respondent burden, but limit the number of cases available for analysis. When these design tradeoffs are agreed upon, the Census Bureau can provide cost estimates and OJJDP can decide whether to fund the initiative.

**Step 9.6** *Consider oversampling juvenile offenders in the Bureau of Justice Statistics quinquennial surveys of jail inmates and State prisoners.*

BJS surveys of jail and prison inmates provide some data on juveniles who enter adult jails and prisons. Because juveniles are such a small part of jail and prison populations, the number of cases is not sufficient for estimation and analysis.

OJJDP should consider funding an oversampling of juveniles in the BJS surveys. OJJDP should first specify the kind of estimates and analyses it requires. For example, the survey should yield reliable estimates of juveniles in adult institutions by race and gross offense (such as homicide, other personal violence, burglary, theft). These specifications can be given to the Census Bureau to develop design specifications and cost estimates.

### **Recommendation 10**

***Develop a comprehensive statistical series on the use of police lockups to detain juveniles and on the characteristics of juveniles so detained.***

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Several well-established systems provide data on children in custody, but none provide comprehensive data on juveniles in police lockups. Even though the stay in police lockups is usually quite brief, the flow of juveniles through the lockups can be very large.

**Step 10.1** *Explore the possibility of collecting data on juveniles in police lockups via the Bureau of Justice Statistics Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics Survey (LEMAS) now being planned.*

OJJDP should study the feasibility of beginning a new data-collection initiative to obtain these data. The study should explore at least two options:

**Expand or supplement the BJS Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics Survey (LEMAS)**—LEMAS respondents could be asked a few simple questions about the existence and use of police lockups for juveniles and the state of records documenting use of the lockups. This could be followed by a supplement to LEMAS (similar to CIC) for jurisdictions that have lockups to obtain data on their use.

**Collect data independently of LEMAS**—The Census Bureau could collect the data in the same way it now collects CIC data. LEMAS could be used to obtain the appropriate sampling frame of police departments.

A third approach would be to use the staff currently monitoring compliance with the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act at the State level. A survey could be designed by the Census Bureau or a private contractor.

This design could include data collection procedures and training material for State-level personnel. State personnel could conduct this survey as specified in the design and report results directly to OJJDP or to OJJDP through the State's Statistical Analysis Center (SAC). (With BJS support, SAC's were established in 47 States and were operational in 41 as of September 1987. The functions of the SAC's vary greatly, but, in general, they provide State agencies with statistical services similar to those provided by BJS on a national level. While they usually are not used by BJS in national data collection programs, they do provide a network whose utility for this purpose could be explored by OJJDP.)

Some advantages of this approach over a self-administered survey such as LEMAS are that:

- It does not rely on the responses of police organizations that may tend to minimize the number of juveniles reported in police custody.
- It may cost less in the long run because initial training costs can be amortized over later data collections and data collectors are already on the State payroll.

The disadvantages of this approach are that:

- Amateur or part-time data collectors may not be as good as more experienced, full-time personnel.

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- OJJDP may not have the needed number of staff members to supervise the data collection properly.
  - Supervision of field staff could be contracted out, but that would increase costs.

At a minimum, the feasibility study should evaluate these options. The study should be conducted in phases:

- Using the LEMAS data, the first phase should simply list in detail the advantages and disadvantages of each strategy.
- If a clear decision cannot be made based on the first phase, the viability of each technique should be investigated further. If a decision can be based on the first phase, further testing would be done only to confirm the feasibility of the most promising option.

### **Improving subnational data on juvenile justice**

The assessment's focus on developing nationally representative data systems is appropriate given policymakers' demand for national data and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's role as a Federal agency with responsibility for providing statistical information on juveniles and the juvenile justice system.

There is, however, a need to exploit more fully the potential of State and local data series without regard for national representation. High-quality data from State and local systems can be invaluable for program evaluation and development and for more theoretical studies of the causes and correlates of offending behavior.

Subnational data systems should be made available to interested parties systematically. Workshop and workgroup participants recommend the following actions:

#### **Recommendation 11**

***Improve the quality and utility of local data collection efforts that contribute to building a national statistical reporting program on juvenile justice system response.***

States and localities have primary responsibility for decisionmaking about juveniles who come into contact with the justice system and provide the bulk of services to juveniles. As a result, State and local information systems contain a wealth of information that can be used to estimate the magnitude of juvenile justice problems and to develop and evaluate programs designed to address these problems. This information can improve the juvenile justice system at every level—Federal, State, and local—if these systems are improved **with national as well as subnational needs in mind.**

Improvement steps should include the full identification and utilization of the range of data available at State and local levels. Simultaneously, these subnational data systems should be improved to service needs at all levels of government. These efforts should include providing technical and financial assistance to identify and fill gaps in State and local data.

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**Step 11.1** *Identify and fully analyze existing State and local data on juvenile offenders, victims, and status offenders.*

OJJDP should—

- Systematically identify all relevant data at the State and local levels.
- Publicize the existence of these data and make them available to interested parties.

Such an initiative should go a long way toward providing analytical and program development data at minimal cost. Several nongovernmental groups have performed similar tasks and have rapport with State data collection agencies. Use of their experience and goodwill should facilitate the task.

Simply identifying relevant data sets does not ensure they will be used to resolve issues in juvenile justice. Interested parties must be aware of the data and have ready access to the information they need. Encouraging use of these data by interested scholars is a particularly effective means of publicizing these data sets.

Research that leads to publication, either by OJJDP or in journals, will reach a broad cross section of academics and practitioners. Moreover, analysis of the data will ensure that documentation is sufficient for easy use, and will identify some data errors and limitations.

Presumably, this research will raise questions of enduring interest to OJJDP and thereby serve data needs while publicizing data availability. Simpler and more direct ways of publicizing the availability of the data should be pursued, and the funding of modest research efforts using these data should be seriously considered.

**Step 11.2** *Initiate a program of technical and financial assistance and training to improve the quality and usefulness of local data collection efforts that contribute to building a national statistical reporting program.*

Assessment recommendations about federally funded and administered programs such as the National Crime Survey (NCS) and the National Youth Survey (NYS) can be initiated independently of those that pertain to State and local data systems.

However, some other recommendations pertain to administrative surveys such as Children in Custody (CIC), or administrative series such as the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) or the National Juvenile Court Data Archive (NJCDA). Implementation of these recommendations depends on the quality of data reported at State and local levels. In some cases, successful implementation will require major changes in local procedures. In others, more modest alterations will suffice.

Consequently, development of a sound national system of juvenile justice statistics will depend on building good systems at State and local levels. OJJDP should start a

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program to promote and support improvements in State and local data systems that contribute to building a national system.

Because of the need for information on juvenile justice decisionmaking, it is critical that such a national program be capable of capturing basic decisions made by the various components of the juvenile justice system—from police intervention to final termination of dispositions. The system will have to be cognizant of local needs, decisionmaking practices and structures, and national data needs.

Under this program, aid should be given for the clear and direct purpose of building a national system. If, for example, OJJDP pursues a data collection strategy using a sample of counties similar to that used by the National Study of the Incidence and Prevalence of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-II), then aid allocation preference would be given to jurisdictions willing to adopt systemwide improvements. This would permit inclusion of these counties in the national sample.

Alternatively, specific counties could be targeted for aid if they happen to be included in a previously chosen, nationally representative sample of counties.

Whatever the criteria for dispensing aid, they should help build a high-quality national system of juvenile justice statistics in the long term.

### **Generally improving the quality of statistical systems**

Most actions recommended by workshop and workgroup participants serve a specific population or data need. Others address statistical systems more generally. Action on the recommendations that follow should increase the ability of statistical systems to serve the full range of juvenile justice data needs.

#### **Recommendation 12**

***Develop a juvenile justice dictionary of standard definitions for recommended use in juvenile justice data collections and presentations.***

Throughout the assessment, participants affirmed the need to use standard definitions in the collection of juvenile justice data.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) should take the first step toward uniform definitions by compiling a dictionary of juvenile justice data terminology similar to that developed by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) for the adult system. This effort can also borrow heavily from work done by the National Juvenile Court Data Archive (NJCDA) and the Children in Custody (CIC) system.<sup>6</sup>

Such a document can provide a standard for data collectors. Once this standard is available, OJJDP should consider stronger inducements to use standard definitions. For example, grantees could be required to use the definitions unless they could show that subscribing to them would adversely affect their work. Such inducements should only be considered after the standard definitions have been developed and shown to be useful.



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### **Recommendation 13**

***Establish a group of statistical consultants made up of survey methodologists, statisticians, data users, and practitioners to provide guidance in applying these recommendations.***

It is clear that there is no comprehensive set of statistics on juvenile victims and offenders and the system response to same. Attempting to build such a system requires the careful combination of statistical standards, knowledge of juvenile justice data needs, and expertise in building statistical systems. Consequently, advice will be required from several different groups.

Moreover, because building such a system will take years, it will be necessary to maintain continuity in the advising body. Establishing a technical advisory group would provide both a melding of perspectives and continuity.

### **Recommendation 14**

***Develop a publication strategy for a series of routine statistical reports of current national statistics on juvenile victims and offenders and on the system response to same.***

Statistical systems are useful only to the extent that they creatively assemble and disseminate the data they contain. Routine reports are a useful means of disseminating statistics.

Such reports also provide a standard against which the need for specific information can be measured. This helps make difficult decisions about the allocation of scarce resources.

For these reasons, in the near future, OJJDP should outline a series of routine statistical reports to be produced annually or at regular intervals.

The content of these reports should be determined by the demand for specific types of data and the quality of the relevant data available in the near term.

Where the demand for data is high and the quality of the data is reasonably good, OJJDP should outline the content of the desired report and specify its frequency.

These reports will partially serve data needs, but it is essential to meet those needs that can be served in the near term, and useful to build the demand for data that will be available in the longer term from improved statistical systems.

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# Chapter 3

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## Long-term issues

The recommendations presented in the previous chapter are goals for developing a comprehensive system of juvenile statistics. The steps specified will provide the information necessary to make judgments on the feasibility, costs, and benefits of achieving the recommended goals.

In the near term, decisions must be made regarding the desirability of the recommendations and the steps proposed. If a recommendation is deemed desirable, then the steps should be taken to provide the necessary information to develop implementation strategies.

It may be inefficient, however, to implement each recommendation independently. Some steps necessary to achieve one goal may also contribute to another. Implementation costs could be reduced if the recommendations were pursued jointly. This is the principal activity for the long term—developing an integrated information strategy for goals emerging from the consideration of near-term recommendations.

This chapter presents some of the issues that must be considered in developing an integrated implementation strategy.

## Defining data needs

Phase I of the assessment took the first step by systematically presenting the full range of juvenile justice data needs by:

- Client population.
- Incidence or prevalence of the behavior versus system response.
- National rather than subnational focus.
- Nature of the estimates—level, change, analytical uses.

This level of detail identified major data gaps in existing systems, but was not specific enough to guide the development of data sets or the choice among potential data-collection initiatives. Much greater specificity and a priority ranking of data needs are required.

## Defining essential data

It is often difficult to specify or anticipate data needs because they are subject to the demands of policymaking and the political process.

Building statistical systems, however, requires some stability in the demand for data. Variation in demand can be accommodated, but a reasonably stable core must be defined so that major collection systems can be put in place and maintained.

A major long-term issue is defining the core data needed for the juvenile justice field. Each population group and data need defined in the assessment must be described in more detail and assigned a priority. This is

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especially important for various analytical uses of the data, because these are the most amorphous of the listed data needs.

The relative importance of subnational versus nationally representative data is a major distinction among data needs that will affect the long-term planning of statistical systems. The Federal system so fragments data collection efforts that it requires significant effort to pull the various pieces together into useful, nationally representative estimates. If nationally representative estimates are not important, this effort need not be undertaken.

Some attention must also be given to the interrelationship of the various data uses defined in chapter I. Program development, for example, requires very different data from those needed to inform the public or mobilize public opinion. The former demands detailed data that permits inferences about causality. The latter can be satisfied with good estimates of the incidence of a certain problem.

In practice, these data uses can be complementary. For instance, level and change estimates can guide site selection for program development inquiries and define the limits to which program evaluations can be generalized. With some supplementation, good statistical systems can often be used directly in the evaluation process. A fuller discussion of the interrelationships and relative importance of these various data uses can help guide the tradeoffs that will be necessary in implementing a statistical system.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), in cooperation with other agencies and groups interested in juvenile justice, should attempt to define core data needs and rank them by importance.

OJJDP cannot and should not bear the entire informational load of defining the core data required of a juvenile justice statistical system. The juvenile justice system is extremely broad and amorphous and includes schools, health organizations, church groups, community organizations, and a wide array of other systems.

OJJDP is not and cannot be responsible for data on all parts of this far-reaching system and its clientele. Where other systems provide adequate data on specific populations, OJJDP need not become involved except to coordinate. Even in some instances where adequate data are not available, OJJDP may decide that a specific population is the responsibility of another agency and need not figure prominently in the planning of OJJDP's statistical system.

### **Defining reports for the long term**

One way to define core data needs and ensure their maintenance is to outline a set of routine reports that use these data. This forces some hard choices on what data are required and in what form. It also ensures that these data are used. Usage, in turn, creates demand and provides feedback for improvement.

The series of reports defined for the long term need not be constrained as severely as those called for in recommendation 14 by the limits of data that can be obtained from existing data sets or that will emerge from near-term improvements. These reports should reflect the data that would be available in the more ideal system envisioned in the long term.

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## Formulating a data strategy

When OJJDP sets its long-term goals for statistics, it will face a variety of decisions on how best to reach them. If, for example, subnational estimates are deemed more important than nationally representative estimates, sample-based, nationally representative estimates will be less desirable than building State systems and forgoing national estimates. Some of these strategic issues are noted below.

**Samples versus censuses.** One major decision is how much to rely on sample-based data collections rather than a census.

Properly drawn samples ensure statistical data that are representative of a given population within the limits of known sampling error. They are more efficient than censuses because they permit statements about populations without collecting data from all members of that population.

Censuses or complete enumerations have no sampling error, but they are less efficient. Moreover, gaining cooperation of the total population—agencies, jurisdictions, or people—is extremely difficult. Because censuses are much larger operations than surveys, their logistical and quality-control problems are much greater than those routinely encountered in surveys.

The workshop discussions illustrated radical versions of sample-based versus population-based systems that should be considered in the long term. At one extreme, it was suggested that national estimates for most populations could be obtained from a sample of counties. Sample counties would be selected, and extensive coordinated data collection would be undertaken to produce nationally representative estimates for most data needs and populations.

For example, a household survey measuring incidence of delinquent behavior would be conducted in the same counties in which police, court, and correctional record data are collected. Conceivably these data systems could be combined to provide estimates of incidence and prevalence of delinquency as well as descriptive and analytically useful data on system response.

At the other extreme, all of the agency's efforts would be devoted to building data-collection systems that would eventually cover the total population or all jurisdictions through the careful cultivation of local data systems.

The use of sample- and population-based systems need not be mutually exclusive, but the relative emphasis given each approach will have repercussions for the success of systems in serving data needs.

The choice between a sample-based and a population-based system hinges on whether—

The sample-based system can be implemented and provide reasonable estimates.

The population-based system can achieve the requisite level of participation.

The experience of Westat, Inc., with the National Study of the Incidence and Prevalence of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-II) indicates the ability of samples of counties to provide reasonably representative national estimates. A nonresponse study of the courts not participating in the National Juvenile Court Data Archives (NJCDA) and the assessment of the recruitment efforts of the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) should indicate the need for and the feasibility of expanding population-based systems.

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These near-term efforts will provide some of the information needed to decide between sample- and population-based systems for the long term.

**Centralized versus decentralized collection systems.** Whether the required data are collected on a sample or on a population, OJJDP must decide if the data will be collected by a single centrally administered organization or by multiple organizations.

The Survey of Jail Inmates is a good example of a centrally administered data collection. The Census Bureau collects data directly from the inmates of local jails.

The Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) is an example of a decentralized system where data are often provided by the State UCR program, which obtains the data from local police agencies. Decentralized systems have the advantage of spreading out the cost of data collection and the disadvantage of reducing control over the type and quality of data provided. Obviously, where decentralized systems can provide the required uniformity and quality of data, they are preferable because of the lower cost to the Federal Government. They also minimize the burden on the general public and on public agencies that may be asked to provide similar data to other governments.

The choice between the two systems hinges on the ability of decentralized systems to deliver data of demonstrated quality in a timely fashion.

**Old and new data-collection systems.** Any comprehensive statistical system must build on systems already in place. Existing systems have established the procedures and rapport needed to make a statistical system function effectively. High-quality data are provided routinely for a sample, a population, or a large subset of the population.

These points are often made about UCR. It has a long tradition that facilitates collection of data. With this tradition, however, comes inflexibility that may inhibit the improvement of this data system to serve the data needs of juvenile justice.

At some point, inflexibility outweighs the value of rapport, and old data systems must be abandoned in favor of less established systems that can avail themselves of technological innovations and are willing to provide the data required.

Several of the investigations and feasibility studies planned for the near term can help decide whether inflexibility outweighs the benefits of tradition.

At present, UCR is not a particularly useful source of data on juveniles and the system response to juveniles. The proposed revised UCR system will be a substantial improvement. Careful attention to its implementation will show whether UCR will provide the data needed on juvenile justice. If implementation severely reduces the type and quality of data that we can expect from the redesigned system, alternatives must be explored as outlined above.

Similarly, the near-term recommendations outline a number of remedies for the persistent problems that affect the quality of NJCDA data for particular purposes, such as the provision of national estimates. If these remedies are not effective, more serious consideration must be given to seeking an alternative to NJCDA.

**Cooperative and dedicated collection systems.** Various data needs can be served by statistical systems that are funded largely by organizations other than OJJDP. The National Crime Survey (NCS), for example, which is funded entirely by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), provides data on juvenile victims. UCR is supported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), BJS, and local police departments.

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The advantage of using data gathered by other organizations is that the data are available at no cost. The disadvantage is that OJJDP has very limited control over these derivative data systems with the result that the data only imperfectly serve juvenile justice data needs. Moreover, changes in these systems could be made that would seriously affect OJJDP's ability to produce routine reports.

OJJDP may want to consider contributing to the support of these systems or funding new systems dedicated to data on juveniles. Both approaches would ensure that juvenile justice data needs would be better served or less at risk of being ignored. Decisions must be made about which data would be collected in dedicated, cooperative, and derivative systems.

**Phasing in a new system.** If the decisions made about data needs and strategy result in changes and new initiatives, some attention must be given to plans for implementing these changes while maintaining the constant flow of data needed for reporting purposes.

### **Defining the long term**

The disadvantage of a phased approach to building a system of juvenile justice statistics is that the "long term" can be an invitation to inaction. While it is necessary to develop an integrated implementation strategy, and much of the near-term work will proceed at different speeds, it is necessary to set a point at which near-term work ends and long-term implementation begins.

The near-term phase of this assessment should end when all decisions have been made regarding the desirability of its recommendations, and all the steps specified under those recommendations have been taken. At this point all desirable recommendations should be associated with a feasible implementation strategy.

The long-term assessment can begin to integrate the specific implementation strategies emerging from the near term. Although it is difficult to set firm dates for these tasks to be completed, it is not unreasonable to expect that the steps specified in the previous chapter could be taken by late 1990. At this time OJJDP could issue a second report indicating the recommendations that have been rejected and implementation strategies for those that have been adopted. This document would serve as a basis for the second phase of the assessment.

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# Appendix 1

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# Appendix 2

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## Guide to Acronyms

BJS	Bureau of Justice Statistics
BLS	Bureau of Labor Statistics
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
CIC	Children in Custody: National Census of Juvenile Detention and Correctional Facilities
COPAFS	Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
LEMAS	Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics Survey
MF	Monitoring the Future
NCHS	National Center for Health Statistics
NCJJ	National Center for Juvenile Justice
NCCAN	National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect
NCS	National Crime Survey
NELS	National Educational Longitudinal Survey
NEISS	National Electronic Injury Surveillance System
NIDA	National Institute of Drug Abuse
NIJ	National Institute of Justice
NIMH	National Institute of Mental Health
NJCDA	National Juvenile Court Data Archive
NLS	National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Experience of Youth
NSF	National Science Foundation
NIS-II	National Study of the Incidence and Prevalence of Child Abuse and Neglect
NIS-I	National Study of the Incidence and Severity of Child Abuse and Neglect
NSDA	National Survey of Drug Abuse
NYS	National Youth Survey

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OBTS Offender-Based Transaction System  
OVC Office for Victims of Crime  
OJJDP Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention  
PROMIS Prosecutor's Management Information System  
SAC Statistical Analysis Center  
UCR Uniform Crime Report

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# Appendix 3

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## **Additional Products from the Assessment**

- John H. Laub, Ph.D., Northeastern University—Children/youth as victims of personal crimes and other offenses by peers and others
- Paul E. Tracy, Ph.D., Northeastern University—Juvenile offenders: Systems response
- Anne L. Schneider, Ph.D., Oklahoma State University—Troublesome Youth: Status offenders and drug abusers
- Robert J. Bursik, Jr., Ph.D., University of Oklahoma—Youth/juvenile offenders: Prior history as offenders
- Gerald T. Hotaling, Ph.D., University of New Hampshire—Victims of nonaccidental death: Child abuse and neglect
- Child Trends, Inc., National Statistics on (Children) Juveniles as Victims and Offenders: A Guide to Federal Data Programs

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# Footnotes

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1. Many status offenses are reported directly to juvenile courts. See *Delinquency in the United States, 1983, National Center for Juvenile Justice*, p. 17.
2. Because NJCDA data includes many jurisdictions, the possible filtering of offenses and offenders that occurs in official records could be included in the analytical model, using jurisdictional characteristics or simply dummy variables for jurisdiction. Even with court contacts only, NJCDA data may be useful in assessing the representativeness of criminal-history data from single jurisdictions.
3. In many ways, this is a conservative test of the effect of the approach proposed in the Abt report. The narratives in police reports omit many incident attributes that would be included if the patrol officer were asked to report them. In a complete attribute system, the reporting form would ask for a wider variety of incident attributes. Because narratives underreport attributes, the number of secondary offenses found by combining attributes will be understated.
4. The South Carolina pretest sites will also provide a test of the effects of attribute-based classification, although it will be somewhat biased because it is so small. Training and monitoring to ensure exhaustive classification of included offenses is easier in smaller systems. This may not hold for larger States with less control over the coding operation. South Carolina, for example, codes all of its offenses from offense reports in a central facility.
5. Preliminary indications are that OBTS and PROMIS include only those juvenile offenders who are prosecuted as criminals in adult court. Moreover, substantial modifications would be necessary to address the full range of relevant prosecution activities.
6. In this regard, *Guidelines for Coding Data Elements Commonly Found in Juvenile Court Information Systems*, NJCDA, would be extremely useful.