# Introduction

by

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This book marks the 25th anniversary of the British Crime Survey (BCS), which first went into the field in 1982. It has its origins in a conference held at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor, in October 2006. This event, funded by Rutgers University and the British Home Office, brought together many of those who have contributed to the survey in various ways over its life, as well as others with expertise in crime surveys in Britain and elsewhere.

The conference was co-organised by the editors of this book, by Ron Clarke, and by the current BCS team. We and the team thought that the survey's 25th birthday should not go unmarked. We all felt that the BCS has proved to be a significant phenomenon, both in terms of public administration and of criminological knowledge, and that some sort of stocktaking would be sensible at this juncture. We decided to combine forces, and organise an event that would bring together academic and government researchers, past and present, to reflect on the past and to consider the future.

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Whilst it is obviously pleasant to look back with satisfaction on past achievements, the more important purpose of the event was to think about the future of crime surveys. The BCS – and its various cousins in other countries – have been subject only to small changes over the last quarter of a century. The genre is still largely unchanged. Whether it can and should continue well into the 21st century are important questions to ask. The answers partly turn on practical issues – whether, for example, a high enough proportion of the public will continue to take part in social surveys of this sort to guarantee reliable findings. In part, however, the survival of large national crime surveys depends on the changing informational needs of government. The 14 substantive chapters in this book all address these issues in various ways.

Chapter 2 traces the development of the BCS, noting its origins in the policy and research community of the day. The authors describe the most important contributions to research and practice that can be traced to the BCS. This includes methodological innovations in how basic counts of victimization can be combined with special-purpose groups of questions. Some thoughts about alternative futures for the BCS are expressed, themes picked up in the last chapter and applied to crime surveys generally.

Identifying the significance of multiple victimization is one of the major contributions of the BCS. Chapter 3 tells many tales, first tracing the discovery of repeat victimization to almost 30 years ago. Graham Farrell and Ken Pease then once again highlight the imbalance between the number of crime victims and the number of victimization incidents. The authors conclude that the BCS decision rule to cap incidents at five in a series seriously underestimates the incidence of both household and personal victimization. Further, truncating the distribution in this way systematically undercounts crimes targeting those most often victimized.

Recognition that victims and offenders are often the same people is an idea that predates victim surveys, traced in chapter 4 by Janet Lauritsen and John Laub to Marvin Wolfgang's study of a birth cohort. Most research in this area is based on either specialized samples, small numbers of individuals, or specific offenses. The BCS has been an important source of information from a general population sample, including selected self-report offending questions in a large victim survey. Nevertheless, Lauritsen and Laub argue that the existence of the overlap is now so well documented that further research with large-scale general surveys is not likely to produce much new information. The chapter concludes by describing more-focused research strategies that are more promising for understanding the mechanisms of victimization and offending.

Only a limited number of self-reported offending items can be included in a general-purpose crime survey. In chapter 5, David Matz describes the development of a remarkable survey that focuses on self-reported offending among the population at large, aged 10 to 65, and then from a subsample of respondents in younger age groups where offending is more common. Those aged 10 to 25 were interviewed in the second wave of the survey to reveal information about sequences of offending and victimizations. Matz presents brief results from the 2003 and 2004 waves of the OCJS, and describes how the survey articulates with other efforts to collect victimization and offending data from different target populations.

The ability to link individual and household characteristics to types of areas and neighborhoods has been a key feature of the BCS since the 1984 sweep. In chapter 6, Tim Hope takes advantage of this to examine dimensions of victimization in community context, finding covariation between burglary and a composite measure of community deprivation. The social environment of high-crime communities is different from that of low-crime areas. One important element of this, Hope argues, is differential ability to adopt personal crime prevention, something he calls "reflexive securitization." Hope concludes by observing that the shift in sampling strategies introduced in 2000 has reduced the relative sample sizes of inner city areas, undermining the potential for subsequent research questions such as reflexive securitization.

Since its first wave in 1989, the International Crime Victims Survey has been conducted in dozens of countries, making it possible to compare crime rates, police reporting, and a variety of other basic indicators of crime and justice. Jan van Dijk begins chapter 7 with an overview of the ICVS. Because different countries and different regions often face varying crime problems, surveys in individual countries are partly tailored to meet more specific needs. Country-specific items supplement measures of traditional volume crimes. van Dijk discusses how indirect measures of crimes such as corruption or organized crime activity can complement survey measures of other crime types. This chapter also highlights key dimensions of crime that are not well measured by crime surveys and their focus on victims.

The NCVS is the only national crime survey that has provided annual data for an extended period. The U.S. survey has also been the model for other national crime surveys. Chapter 8, by Michael Rand, traces the evolution of the NCVS, highlighting its contribution to research. Conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. survey includes certain distinctive features: large samples, bounded interviews, and a six-month recall

period. Each of these adds to the cost of conducting the NCVS. Rand describes how pressures to economize have mostly reduced sample sizes. Considering the future of the NCVS, Rand believes the survey will become leaner and more flexible, resembling early sweeps of the BCS.

Crime surveys provide information about police as well as about crime. In chapter 9, Wesley Skogan examines how surveys meet the growing interest in measures of police performance, concluding "not very well." Memories of bad encounters are more long-lived and contagious than recall of positive experiences. Skogan also shows that citizen perceptions of police performance do not covary with measures of policing quality collected by direct observation. Given a range of problems with validity and reliability of survey-based measures, Skogan calls for a program of research aimed at learning more about patterns of error in perceptions of police. In the meantime, it appears that measuring change in attitudes is more reasonable than measuring variation across neighborhoods or jurisdictions.

Since its earliest sweeps in the 1980s, the BCS has incorporated many batteries of questions about police performance. Now, following heightened government interest in performance measures, the BCS sample has been redesigned to obtain at least 700 completed interviews in each of 42 police force areas nationwide. Jonathan Allen describes these efforts in chapter 10, explaining how they link up with different performance assessment initiatives.

Different sweeps of the BCS have included a variety of measures of public attitudes toward various elements of crime and justice. Chapter 11, by Mike Hough and Julian Roberts, discusses different attempts to gauge attitudes toward crime and punishment, culminating in a comprehensive bundle of questions in the 1996 BCS. Like Skogan's analysis of attitudes toward police, Hough and Roberts' findings show sharp discrepancies between public beliefs and other measures of such things as change in crime rates or criminal sentences. Disparities between opinion and purported fact are not limited to the BCS, as similar gaps in public knowledge have emerged from surveys in other countries. The authors conclude with a range of proposals for better understanding what survey data on public opinion do and do not measure.

Fear of crime has been of interest since the first sweep of the BCS. In chapter 12, Jason Ditton and Stephen Farrall briefly summarize what has been learned about fear over the past 25 years, concluding that despite a lengthy body of research a great deal of conceptual ambiguity still limits

what we can claim to know. This is especially interesting, since few attitudes in criminology have received as much attention in efforts to improve measurement. The authors conclude that fear is best viewed as a multidimensional construct that should be measured by multiple items together with experiments in scaling.

Mike Sutton, in chapter 13, argues that crime surveys yield little information about a growing variety of crimes and related problems. Frauds targeting individuals or businesses, together with an expanding range of computer-facilitated offenses, are the most well known of these. Sutton considers these problems broadly. Traditional crime types operate in realms of traditional physical and social behavior that form the basis of crime surveys. Individual behavior and economic transactions are increasingly framed by the Internet, and traditional conceptions of crime have not yet caught up. The chapter describes examples of basic research that would begin to address these shortcomings. Sutton offers suggestions on how to take advantage of changes in communications technology to measure victimization by fraud and other offenses.

The BCS and selected spin-offs have begun to accumulate knowledge about fraud, as described by Jacqueline Hoare in chapter 14. Questions in the BCS asked about individual experiences of fraud, though this assumes individuals are aware they have been victimized. Two surveys that sampled businesses included questions about fraud victimization. The Offending Crime and Justice Surveys contain items about fraud offenses committed by respondents. Hoare also describes a range of administrative and private sources of data on fraud, concluding with an analysis of what is needed to understand better this complex family of offenses.

David Cantor and James Lynch begin chapter 15 by describing how changes in the social environment of surveys have reduced response rates, presented new challenges in sampling, and generally made it more difficult to conduct large-scale crime surveys. At the same time, changes in telecommunications and other technologies offer opportunities for improving measurement and reaching target populations otherwise difficult to contact. Cantor and Lynch also discuss the changing role of crime surveys as part of a system of statistical indicators of crime. Just as many clusters of indicators monitor health and economic conditions, evolving crime problems should be measured through a statistical system.

The final chapter centers on the future of crime surveys, pulling together topics raised mostly in other chapters. In much the same spirit that surveys of victims were proposed as measures of unreported and

unrecorded crime over 40 years ago, chapters in this volume describe new directions for crime surveys.

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