

Crime data integrity

Literature review of crime-recording by Ms Patricia Mayhew

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Introduction

This review looks at the literature on the integrity of data on police recorded crime (PRC). It assesses what literature is available, its quality, and its main findings. The focus is principally on literature relating to England and Wales, although some material from other countries is drawn upon. The term 'integrity' is taken to refer to how far PRC can be seen as reliable, trustworthy and credible as regards giving the correct picture of crimes known to the police across time and place. One reason for expanding the term integrity in this way is that there is not a great deal in academic literature which specifically addresses lack of integrity in the sense of straightforward, dishonest manipulation of PRC. Other sources ('whistleblowers' for instance) do address this however.

A vital element of the integrity of PRC is the recording process itself. Do the police record all that they should? Do they record (or not record) in ways that present the best picture for police interests at the time? Do they record wrongly because of confusing rules, poor training, or the types of IT system they are using, and so on? The literature which tries to answer these questions with 'evidence' – the empirical literature – certainly exists, but it is much less substantial than the literature which just discusses the questions – the discursive literature.

Changing climate

The literature relating to police forces in England and Wales covers a period of considerable change in the climate of crime-recording. The 1990s saw increasing computerisation of crime and intelligence recording systems. This changed the manner of crime-recording and had the potential to increase the amount of data that was 'captured'. There were also a number of important reports which alerted forces to poor crime-recording practices. For example, in 1995, *Tackling Crime Effectively*, led many forces to alter their crime-recording and investigation procedures by establishing centralised crime desks and Crime Management Units.¹ A comprehensive review by HMIC on crime-recording followed in 1996. This laid some of the foundations for a new set of Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR) for the recording of crime, introduced in 1998.² The Audit Commission then reported in 1999, identifying problems of crime-recording.³ So too did another 1999 report by HMIC which was uneasy about ethical recording and what it found on manipulation

¹ *Tackling Crime Effectively: Management Handbook*, Volume 2, ACPO, HMIC, Audit Commission, 1995.

² *A Review of Crime-recording Practice*, HMIC, 1996.

³ Annual Report on the Police and Fire Services, Audit Commission, 1999.

of clear-up rates.⁴ Enduring concerns, despite the new HOCR, led to research being commissioned from Morgan, Harris and Burrows (the MHB report). On the back of its results, HMIC conducted its own 2000 review, *On the Record*.⁵ These two reports, together with Simmons' review of PRC6 were the springboard for a wholesale revision of recording guidelines in the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) which was put into place in April 2002. This was meant to ensure greater crime-recording consistency between forces. The NCRS proposed a more victim-oriented approach such that any allegation of crime was to be recorded unless there was credible evidence to the contrary. This is usually called the prima facie approach.⁷ This was to replace the evidential approach where details had to be substantiated before a crime record was made. In the meantime, too, there were changes to detection statistics. Primary vs. secondary detections changed to sanction vs. non-sanction detections – albeit these (very recently) were made obsolete by a switch to measuring 'outcomes' for all recorded crimes. Finally, the early 1990s heralded the emergence of police performance measures and targets, throwing the issue of crime-recording into very sharp focus.

Given these changes, it would have been useful to have restricted the literature to that most recently available. The fact is, however, that recent empirical evidence on police recording practices - even since 2000 - is not plentiful outside the audits conducted, fairly briefly, by the Audit Commission, and by HMIC itself. Earlier, more research was done. Many studies are now old, dating back to the 1980s and even before then. Nonetheless, these studies still form the body of work regularly drawn upon to substantiate the "known limitations" of PRC.⁸ For this reason the early studies (restricted here to those published since 1980) need some attention - acknowledging (as many others do not) the many changes that have taken place recently.

⁴ Police Integrity: Securing and maintaining public confidence, HMIC, 1999.

⁵ *On The Record*, HMIC, 2000.

⁶ J. Simmons, *Review of Crime Statistics*, Home Office, 2000.

⁷ Specifically, the NCRS stated that an incident will be recorded as a crime for offences against an identified victim, if, on the balance of probability: (a) the circumstances as reported amount to a crime as defined by law (determined by the police based on their knowledge of the law and the HOCR); and (b) there is no credible evidence to the contrary. The NCRS requires police to record sufficient information to justify its classification. For details of these points, see: D. Povey and J. Prime, *Recorded Crime Statistics: England and Wales, April 1998 to March 1999*, Home Office Statistical Bulletin 18/99, 1999.

⁸ See, for example, *National Statistician's Review of Crime Statistics: England and Wales*, UK Statistics Authority, London, 2011 (page 5).

Sources of evidence

The focus here is on academic literature as far as possible. However, some pertinent material has been published by those who would not necessarily be thought of as academics. There is also 'grey literature' (e.g., reports by government, committees, official agencies, unpublished theses, etc). While not strictly academic, this can be very relevant. In any event, this review includes sources of evidence which it would be disingenuous to ignore as they are relevant and have featured in recent coverage of PRC in England and Wales. As we have said, most of the literature covered is from this country. However, some reference is made to literature from elsewhere as a way of providing some comment on the similarities of concerns about PRC.

The types of literature reviewed below fall roughly into five categories.

- **Empirical and more statistical studies.** Some of these track the process of recording incidents and their subsequent 'conversion' into recorded crimes. Some studies concentrate on how the drive for good 'clear-up' (detection) rates affects crime-recording. Some studies look at the variability between police forces in how they record crime; some just examine the recording process more generally. Later studies have looked at the influence of performance measurement on crime-recording.
- **Statistical comparisons of trends in crime according to victimisation survey data and PRC.** The interest here is whether trends from the two series differ in ways which suggest changes in police recording practices, thus compromising PRC as a reliable measure.
- **Interview studies.** These draw conclusions about crime-recording practices on the basis of what police officers say when researchers ask for their views.
- **Ethnographic and descriptive studies.** These are based on personal experience and observation of police practice.
- **The most influential, statistically-based, testimonies of those who have been involved in police work.** Particularly relevant here is the evidence given to the House of Commons enquiry into police crime-recording by Public Administration Select Committee (PASC hereon).⁹ This committee sat between November 2013 and February 2014.

It should be said that the integrity of PRC (and clear-up rates) has been challenged by very many of those with personal experience of recording practices. Some have been high-ranking officers. For instance, the former Metropolitan Police

⁹ House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee (PASC), *Caught red-handed: Why we can't count on Police Recorded Crime statistics*, Thirteenth Report of Session 2013–14, HC 760, April 2014.

Commissioner, Lord Stevens, reported to the Home Affairs Committee in January 2014 that “ever since I have been in the police service, there has been a fiddling of figures”. He believed this was still the case. The chief constable of Derbyshire also wrote in 2012 about “dirty numbers”.¹⁰

While much testimonial material was provided to PASC, no attempt is made here to cover it all. Also not covered is abundant testimonial material on recording malpractice outside the PASC context, often given by those labelled whistleblowers. That some of them may want to ‘stir up trouble’ cannot be discounted. But nor can it be discounted that they have genuine concerns. Some officers have aired these (usually anonymously) in what used to be *The Police Review*, on The Thin Blue Line blog, or in policeoracle.com (the online police magazine). Some officers leak to the media (always alert to possible public sector malpractice). Journalists sometimes pull the facts together themselves. (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism offers one route.)

Plan of the review

This review is organised as follows:

- First, it discusses the main challenges to the integrity of PRC as a reliable measure of crime.
- Next, attention is paid to the main empirical studies of crime-recording which have looked at recording variability, issues of discretion etc. A distinction is made between studies which just draw on interview material or are based on the author’s own experience, and those which use other methods (such as case tracking). Mention is made of few studies abroad.
- The next focus is on a comparison of trends in crime according to PRC and survey data from the British Crime Survey (now the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)). There is also mention of the practice in some other countries with national victimisation surveys.
- Next are studies which are related to the effect of performance management on crime-recording in England and Wales. Most of these rely on interview material. A little attention is paid to literature from other countries.
- There is then a discussion of CompStat in New York which has attracted criticism in relation to data manipulation. Two CompStat programmes in Australia are examined for evidence of similar concerns.

¹⁰ M. Creedon, *Chief attacks reliance on statistics*, Police Professional, 323: 12, September 2012.

- A brief look is then taken at the seven reviews of PRC conducted between 2000 and 2014. The point highlighted is their unanimous acceptance of the limitations of PRC in the absence of new evidence of their own. Their conclusions, though, have a bearing on current concerns.

The most recent Audit Commission report on force recording in 2006/07 is taken up next, along with some audit material from Australia.

A concluding section pulls some of the main points together.

The main challenges to police recorded crime

The limitation of PRC is a recurring theme in criminological textbooks,¹¹ media coverage and even government and official reports. (Much less time is spent discussing what uses PRC has). To a degree, one might say that the shortcomings of PRC have gained currency simply by repetition. Certainly the maxim that there are 'lies, damned lies and statistics' is probably nowhere more frequently referred to than in the context of PRC. All limitations of PRC are relevant to an extent on the question of how adequate it is in presenting a reliable picture of crime across time and place. However, some limitations are more relevant than others.

The first criticism usually made of PRC is that it is simply measuring a 'social construct' of crime, the count of which depends on what is defined as crime by legislation, what is discovered, what is reported, and what is eventually recorded. In this sense, then, PRC is seen as just a record of decisions made at various stages by legislators, the public, and the police themselves. Second, while many accept that PRC cannot give a 'full' picture of crime, it is nonetheless criticised for not covering well some offences of high public interest. For example, corporate crime, and offences which tend to get dealt with by agencies other than the police (e.g., tax and benefit fraud, or environmental crime). Third, and of particular importance, is that PRC is shaped very heavily by what others draw to the attention of the police. Many crimes are reported, but many are not. The problem is that if outside influences change reporting behaviour over time, this will affect the number of crimes that can be potentially recorded.

A fourth criticism of PRC is that it is generated by police forces -those whose capacities and qualities are judged by it. PRC is intricately tied up, then, with how the police respond to calls for service, and what they do to document what then happens. It is also tied up with policing priorities in the case of those crimes (often 'victimless' ones such as drug possession) which come to light only when the police identify them. The numbers counted, then, reflect much less the extent of transgression than the amount of police effort expended.

¹¹ From a UK perspective, see for instance: C. Coleman and J. Moynihan, *Understanding Crime Data*, Open University Press, 1996; T. Hope, *What do crime statistics tell us?*, in, C. Hale et al, *Criminology*, 3rd Edn, Oxford University Press, 2013; M. Maguire, *Criminal statistics and the construction of crime*, in, M. Maguire et al, *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, 5th Edn, Oxford University Press, 2012.

There are also ‘fact of the matter’ deficiencies. One of these is that PRC in England and Wales covers only ‘notifiable’ offences.¹² This leaves out of the count most ‘summary’ offences¹³ even though these can be of public interest – such as driving under the influence of alcohol. (Common assault was not a notifiable offence until it was made so in the new HOCR in 1998.) Moreover, what is in the notifiable offences count can change over time; this complicates the analysis of trends and it certainly causes confusion. Then, there is the fact that PRC counts only the most serious offence if several offences are committed at the same time by one offender against the same victim. Another criticism is that PRC often fails to distinguish between offences within a particular offences category (theft, for instance), which can vary widely in levels of seriousness.

A further focus of concern centres on the intricacies of the recording process. The decision to record a crime (and in what category) is circumscribed by rules which can be interpreted differently – and indeed can be difficult to understand. A degree of officer discretion in relation to crime-recording has always been the case and the decision to record may be influenced by a number of factors. Recording disparities lay behind the new HOCR in 1998, and even more so behind the introduction of the NCRS in 2002. Despite increasingly prescriptive rules, however, there will still be some room for manoeuvre as to which apparent wrongdoings are deemed to be reasonably and appropriately logged as a recorded crime. There can be particular issues here in relation to incidents reported by third parties or those offences discovered by the police themselves (e.g., during patrols or in admissions by arrested suspects). The issue of recording discretion has attracted a good deal of attention. The crux of the matter is that if police decisions on what to record (and how) are not comparable across time and place, the usefulness of PRC is badly compromised.

A final area of concern has emerged more recently. This is that PRC is now badly undercounting new forms of crime –commonly called cyber-crime or e-(electronic) crime –facilitated by developments in information and communications technology (ICT).¹⁴ There is no doubt that ICT, especially the internet, has substantially expanded new ways of committing crime – what a recent Home Office review calls

¹² Notifiable offences are most indictable offences (triable at the Crown Court) and ‘triable either way’ offences (triable at the Crown Court or at a magistrates court). Notifiable offences are those which police are required to submit details of to the Home Office under Section 44 of the Police Act 1996. The recording of these must comply with the HOCR.

¹³ Summary offences are those which, if they get to the stage of court proceedings, are triable only at a magistrate’s court. A few summary offences, however, are ‘notifiable’.

¹⁴ See, for example, House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, *E-crime*, Fifth Report of Session 2013–14, HC 70, July 2013.

cyber-enabled crime.¹⁵ Fraud, for instance, can now be perpetuated through mass marketing scams, ‘phishing’ e-mails¹⁶ etc. The internet, too, provides better inroads into the sexual grooming of children and sharing indecent images. ICT also offers opportunities for new types of crime –so-called cyber-dependent crime –not previously possible. An example is getting bank account details through malware.

For present purposes, a key question for PRC is how far ‘traditional’ crime (which might be considered relatively well measured – at least if known to the police) has been displaced into cyber-crime (which could be considerably less well-measured). The edge to this question is that, in a time of falling ‘traditional’ crime, PRC could be presenting a misleading picture of the nature of crime as it currently is, and the rate at which it is changing.¹⁷

There is a growing amount of data on and research into cyber-crime – of which there are many types of course. Nonetheless, as recently discussed by ONS,¹⁸ the true extent of cyber-crime is unknown, with lack of evidence in many areas. ONS identifies a number of serious challenges to measuring cyber-crime in the way that currently holds for ‘traditional’ crime. These include how attempts are counted (when cyber-space allows a countless number); who the victim is (e.g., is when bank customers are targeted); the jurisdiction in which the criminality falls; and how many incidents would fall within ‘notifiable’ offences. (We also know little about cyber-criminals themselves:¹⁹ for instance, whether ‘traditional’ property offenders acquire, or get access to the necessary skills, and/or whether ‘new’ criminals have been drawn in.)²⁰

Survey-based measures give some estimates of business and householder experience of cyber-crime The latest Commercial Victimization Survey, for instance, showed that 9 percent of premises in five business sectors had experienced online

¹⁵ M. McGuire and S. Dowling, *Cyber-crime: A review of the evidence*, Research Report 75, Home Office, 2013.

¹⁶ These are fraudulent emails that claim to come from a legitimate source. They aim to persuade recipients to voluntarily disclose sensitive information such as bank account and credit card details that can then be exploited to defraud them.

¹⁷ See, for example, M. FitzGerald, *The curious case of the fall in crime*, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, April 2014.

¹⁸ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/ns-reports--reviews-and-guidance/national-statistician-s-advisory-committees/crime-statistics-advisory-committee---minutes-and-papers.html> See paper CSAC (13)23 for the meeting on 3rd December 2013.

¹⁹ C. Hargreaves and D. Prince, *Understanding Cyber Criminals and Measuring Their Future Activity. Developing cybercrime research*. Lancaster University, 2013.

²⁰ See, for example, G. Kirwan and A. Power, *Cybercrime: the psychology of online offenders*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, and D. Wall, *Cybercrime: The transformation of technology in the information age*, Polity Press, 2007.

crime in the last year, although mainly computer viruses.²¹ The CSEW looked at various 'new' crimes. In the year to March 2014, 5.1 percent of plastic card owners were victim of card fraud – higher than in the previous year, but lower than in 2008/09 and 2009/10.^{22, 23} (This level of victimisation was higher than for offences such as theft from the person and other theft of personal property.) Two years earlier, 2 percent of CSEW respondents had money taken from their bank or building society that involved their personal details being used – similar to that in the 2007/08 survey. In the same period, 56 percent had received unsolicited communications (most seemingly via email) making false promises in order to extract money (mass marketing fraud). Only a very small proportion fell victim however – or at least were prepared to say so.²⁴ Most recent results from the International Crime Victimization Survey for 2004/05 showed that 2.4 percent of those in the UK had experienced internet shopping fraud – a comparatively high rate among the nearly 30 countries covered.²⁵

PRC at present records elements of cyber-crime when known. However, except where it breaches specific legislation such as the Computer Misuse Act 1990, it is hidden within existing offence categories. (Cyber-bullying, for instance, would fall into the harassment category.) Police forces are now being asked to flag offences with a cyber-element. Moreover, PRC has been expanded by data provided by Action Fraud (the national centre that records incidents of fraud and financially motivated cyber-crime directly from the public and organisations). These developments will improve understanding of the extent of cyber-crime within current PRC, but the problem remains of how much cyber-crime is not reported, or is not discovered by the police and other agencies themselves. A consistent finding of victimisation surveys is that reporting levels are very low – albeit often because what happened was considered too trivial. Other estimates of cyber-crime against businesses and public sector organisations may also underestimate its extent as they may be disinclined to reveal true losses because of reputational damage.

²¹ Home Office, Crimes against Businesses: Headline findings from the 2013 Commercial Victimization Survey, 2014

²² Plastic card fraud in the CSEW is defined as using plastic card payments (such as bank, debit, credit or store cards) to take money without the account holder's permission or prior knowledge from a bank or building society, or to charge money to a credit or debit card.

²³ Figures on UK card losses from Financial Fraud Action UK also showed higher losses in 2013 than the year before, but a substantial fall since 2008, when a number of security measures were introduced. See: Statistical Bulletin: Crime in England and Wales, year ending March 2014^{ONS, July 2014}.

²⁴ *Focus on Property Crime* 2011/12 release, (released 9th May 2013). Available from www.ons.gov.uk

²⁵ J. van Dijk, J. van Kesteren and P. Smit, *Criminal Victimization in International Perspective: Key findings from the 2004-2005 ICVS and EU ICS* Boom Legal Publishers, 2008.

In sum, then, it is difficult to know how PRC would change if it could take better account of the potentially large 'black hole' of cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent crime. Certainly, it is not now offering a very informative and reliable picture.

Police recording: discretion and variability of practice

The substantial literature which discusses the problems of exercising police discretion and variability of practice across forces in England and Wales draws on much of the same pool of empirical work. As we have said, many of the studies are dated and their findings may relate to more 'lax' recording regimes than now applies – although it is difficult to know for sure. Many of those who gave oral and/or written evidence to PASC referred to the litany of ways (familiar from the early studies reviewed below) in which crime figures are said to be manipulated, including: 'cuffing' (e.g., not recording a reported crime, or recording it as lost property); recording similar crimes with multiple victims as a single crime; 'no-criming'; and downgrading more serious offences to less serious ones (for instance, burglary to criminal damage). Some of these activities were said to have served the purpose of getting better detection rates.

Writing in 1996, Coleman and Moynihan note the influence of several factors on police recording decisions.²⁶

- One is the social and political context –encompassing things such as the payback from achieving high or low crime. For example, when crime attracted little political attention in the 1950s, there was little incentive for the police to record large numbers of crimes since it had no resource implications and would simply depress the detection rate if there was little chance of a 'result'. More recently, when 'law and order' rose on the political agenda, fuller recording aligned better with bids for more police resources. When the government then set targets to reduce crime and improve detections, recording decisions clearly become influential.
- A second factor is the organisational context – the nature of working practices in police forces, policing priorities, changes in fashions of policing, and the influence of key personnel. Also relevant here is the technology in place for dealing with recording incidents and crimes.
- Third is the situational context –how offences are reported, and by whom; offence seriousness; and how far the police adhere to what complainants want. Some have argued that police cultural prejudices and biases against certain types of complainant or complaint can come into play in deciding whether and what to record.²⁷

²⁶ Coleman and Moynihan (op cit).

²⁷ R. Reiner, *Law and Order: an honest citizen's guide to crime and control*, Cambridge: Polity, 2007.

The main empirical studies

Bottomley and Coleman, 1981

An early influential study (actually done in the 1970s) by Bottomley and Coleman drew on a large random sample of one-in-seven crime reports in a northern city, with supplementary information from interviews with officers and reviews of internal police bulletins.²⁸ It documented (as subsequent studies also did) how the police decision to record alleged offences was influenced by: organisational context; vaguely defined 'force practice'; what was felt to be 'proper' policing (this itself based on what the police felt the public expected); the effect on clear-up rates; or a general desire to 'ease' the job. Bottomley and Coleman could only speculate on the degree to which the police did not record alleged offences at all, although they felt that 'cuffing' had declined since the 1970s due increasing computerisation of crime-recording and a realisation that fewer crimes might mean fewer resources.

The Nottingham study, 1985

The next strong empirical study was by Farrington and Dowds, carried out in 1981 and published in 1985. They looked at Nottinghamshire's surprisingly high rate of recorded crime.²⁹ They tracked recording in Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Staffordshire, and undertook victimisation surveys in the three areas. The surveys showed a slightly higher rate of victimisation in Nottinghamshire, but only sufficient to explain between a quarter and a third of the difference in recorded crime levels. Rather, these reflected a number of procedural differences. First, telephone calls in Nottingham tended to be put directly onto a crime complaint form and given a crime number, rather than logged for initial investigation. (Or at least this was the case until the procedure was changed in 1983 to try and reduce the force's high crime rate.) Second, there was also more zealous prime facie recording in Nottinghamshire of minor thefts, and the counting of multiple and continuous offences as separate crimes. (Note that these procedures became part of the NCRS recommendations in 2002, so it could be argued that it was not so much Nottinghamshire that was adrift on current rules as the other two forces.) Third – and importantly – was Nottingham's practice of recording admissions made by offenders to offences which victims had not reported. Allied to this was a greater number of low-value property crimes recorded (some of which originated from admissions).

²⁸ A. Bottomley and C. Coleman, *Understanding Crime Rates*. Saxon House, 1981.

²⁹ D. Farrington and L. Dowds, *Disentangling criminal behaviour and police reaction*, in, D. Farrington and J. Gunn, *Reactions to Crime: the public, the police, courts and prisons*, John Wiley, 1985.

The Burrows and Tarling burglary study, 1986

Burrows and Tarling looked at differences between the Met and other forces in their recording of burglary allegations, this forming part of a broader investigation of disparities in burglary clear-up rates. Officers from a number of forces were asked to classify, according to their own force guidelines, incidents reported in another force. It was found that officers in the Met were instructed (unusually) not to record a burglary by assuming an 'intent to steal' if there had been nothing stolen or no entry to a property. Many alleged burglaries were classified instead as criminal damage or treated as 'no crimes'.

The Farrington and Burrows study, 1993

Changes in police practices in dealing with offenders was seen as one obvious influence on crime-recording. This has been highlighted recently in relation to neighbourhood policing which may have led to more low level crimes being dealt with informally –exerting downward pressure on police figures. A study in 1993 provided evidence of how police practice can mask what was happening on the ground. Farrington and Burrows investigated the substantial decrease (of more than one-third) in the number of recorded shoplifters between 1985 and 1989. The largest decrease was for juveniles.³⁰ They surveyed 16 retail chains, totalling nearly 8,000 retail outlets, accounting for a quarter of total retail sales in Great Britain in 1990. The number of shoplifters apprehended by the retailers remained tolerably constant between 1985 and 1989, as did the probability of reporting shoplifters to the police, and the number of store detectives in place. The conclusion drawn was that the true number of shoplifting offences probably remained fairly constant over the period, but an increasing proportion of shoplifters who came to police attention were dealt with informally, and hence did not appear in offence figures. That this might have been happening in relation to other types of offences by juveniles as well is suggested by the apparent drop in juvenile offending around that time.³¹

³⁰ D. Farrington and J. Burrows, *Did shoplifting really decrease?* British Journal of Criminology, 33 (1): 57-69, 1993.

³¹ G. Barclay, *The peak age of known offending by males*, Home Office Research Bulletin 28: 20-23, 1991.

The Morgan, Harris and Burrows study, 2000

Enduring concerns about police recording practices led to Home Office to commission research from Morgan, Harris and Burrows (MHB).³² They examined policy and practice in ten police forces followed up by a more detailed look at five forces. This included a tracking exercise which monitored what happened to telephone reports of crime. The findings were influential, revealing poor recording, inappropriate practices, and wide variation in recording practices between forces.

For one, MHB found substantial variation in how crime reports originated and how they were then dealt with (and whom by) – all influencing the recorded crime count. They were also differences in the systems used to record incidents and record crime; most forces had different systems which made tracking outcomes difficult. Forces differed too in what level of investigation they demanded before finalising a crime record. MHB found that some forces adhered to broadly prima facie principles for recording; others veered to the evidential approach. While forces varied in their attachment to one or other model, practical procedures also played a part in their adoption.

Across the five forces where calls were tracked, 47 percent of crime allegations overall were recorded as crimes (although the variation was between 33 percent and 55 percent). This is consistent with that found in the mid-1980s, suggesting that developments like computerisation and increased management control had not increased the proportion of allegations that are 'crimed'. Allegations relating to attempted crimes were less likely to be recorded than for 'completed' crimes. So too were allegations by witness rather than victims. Allegations about interpersonal incidents were consistently less likely to be recorded as crimes than property offences. The difference between 'definite' alleged crimes and 'possible' alleged crimes was significant: 71 percent of the former were recorded, but only 34 percent of the latter, suggesting that an evidential approach was being widely applied. It was clear that not all incidents reached the incident-recording system at all; there was often a crime record with no original incident recorded on the system.

MHB found that in the majority of allegations that were not recorded as a crime, it was difficult to judge whether this was appropriate, indicating that decision on whether a crime is a crime is not always easy to make. There was variation between forces in allegation-to-crime rates nonetheless.

³² J. Burrows, R. Tarling, A. Mackie, R. Lewis and G. Taylor, *Review of Police Forces' Crime-recording Practices*, Home Office Research Study No. 204, 2000.

Incidents to crimes – other work

Tim Hope

Professor Tim Hope provided written evidence to PASC with two areas of statistical information. The first, considered here, concerned a study Hope conducted in 2000 in a large police force area looking at the ratio of calls for service ('incidents') to recorded crimes.³³ Just over half of the incidents did not have crime equivalents. Of the incidents where an offence could have been committed, burglary and theft incidents exceeded crimes by 1.5:1; in contrast, anti-social and violent incidents exceeded crimes by a much higher ratio of 5:1 – although this is perhaps not surprising. More interestingly, Hope found that the disparity varied between different areas. Socially deprived communities not only reported more incidents in total but also had a relatively greater proportion recorded as crimes than better-off communities. Hope offers a number of reasons for this (not mutually exclusive): (a) that more serious incidents occur in socially deprived areas; (b) that the police are more likely to treat the calls they get from socially deprived areas as criminal incidents; (c) that those living in high crime areas only call the police for the more serious incidents when a crime has occurred or when they are personally victimised; (d) that police are more likely to deal with anti-social behaviour in low crime areas without recourse to criminal law; or (e) that there is a greater readiness among those in low crime areas to call the police to deal with a wider range of less serious problems, including wider community issues. Whatever the reasons, Hope concludes that PRC may provide an imperfect and misleading measure of the problems faced by different communities and their need for and use of police services.

A study in the US shows a similar pattern.³⁴ It compared calls for service and recorded crimes in different areas in San Antonio, Texas over the period 2001/05. As Hope found, disturbance calls were recorded at a lower rate in affluent areas, while more formal action was more often taken in higher-crime areas. For more serious forms of property crime such as car theft and burglary, the opposite occurred: officers were less likely to record crimes in poorer neighbourhoods. The authors speculate that this might reflect an 'unworthy victim' mentality, or the fact that the police will be servicing those in more affluent areas who want to make insurance claims.

³³ T. Hope, *What do crime statistics tell us?* in, C. Hale, K. Hayward, A. Wahidin & E. Wincup (Eds.), *Criminology*, 3rd Edn, Oxford University Press, 2013.

³⁴ S. Varano, J. Schafer, J. Cancino, and M. Swatt, *Constructing crime: neighbourhood characteristics and police recording behaviour*, *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 37: 553-563, 2009

Allan Brimicombe - PASC

Professor Allan Brimicombe (University of East London) also provided written evidence to PASC in relation to crime and incidents.³⁵ He produced some statistical information which he regarded as problematic. This was in relation to violent incidents and violent offences flagged as involving domestic violence. He contrasted Essex where there was a consistent trend in both incidents and offences over the period 2008/09 to 2011/12, to the Metropolitan Police District where the number of incidents rose as the number of offences fell. This suggested a 'drift' between the two with obvious impact on the recorded crime count.

The recording of sexual offences

The Kelly et al sexual offences attrition study, 2005

While the process of rejecting allegations as crimes was taken up to a degree in the MHB work, it has attracted by far the most attention in the literature in relation to the police being told about offences of rape and serious sexual assault. The context here is the high attrition rate for these offences – i.e., the very low proportion of rapes and serious sexual assaults reported to the police that result in a prosecution. This is not singular to England and Wales, although the particularly poor record here has prompted a number of studies looking at the attrition process – no-criming being one of the early fall-out points

Kelly and colleagues looked at the no-criming of reported rape allegations based on data from three Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) and an amalgam of three comparison areas.³⁶ They also reviewed six other UK studies. The no-criming rate ranged from 11% to 45%. Thus, despite the HOCA guidance on no-criming, all the studies showed that no-crimes were by no means limited to the categories allowed. (For example, many instances where a victim, having reported, declined to complete the initial process were recorded as no-crime). In Kelly's own study, no-criming rates varied from 17 percent to 31 percent across the four locations and, again, it was evident that the 'no crime' was being used for a far wider group of cases than the HOCA allow. Leaving aside, then, any issue of service provision for those reporting rape and serious sexual assault, variation in no-criming rates illustrates inconsistency in recording practice.

The issue of misrecording sexual offences featured in PASC. Note was taken of the IPCC's critical report on the recording of sexual offences in Southwark Police's Sapphire Unit in 2008/09. The number of serious sexual offences classified as 'no-crime' or a crime-related incident (one that was unconfirmed or reported by a third

³⁵ Public Administration Select Committee, CST0008.

³⁶ L. Kelly, J. Lovett and L. Regan, *A gap or a chasm? Attrition in reported rape cases* Home Office Research Study 293, 2005.

party) was consistently higher than the Met average. Performance targets seemed to be the issue. PASC also showed HMIC figures on recorded rapes in each force over the past five years. They revealed wide disparities around the national average of a 12 percent no-crime rate.

NPIA – the NCRS regime

A recent piece of work on crime-recording was carried out in 2011 by the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) at the request of ACPO.³⁷ Rather than being focussed on possible misrecording, it sought to identify unnecessary work as a result of tighter recording procedures. NPIA talked to 31 crime-recording managers and held focus groups with frontline officers in seven forces. Two overarching issues emerged. One was risk aversion (having to ‘get things right’), resulting in high levels of internal supervision and audit. The second was how the HOCR and the NCRS limited officers’ ability to use professional judgment.³⁸ Three key sources of perceived unnecessary work related to: (i) reclassification (when an initial crime classification is believed to be incorrect); (ii) no-criming; and (iii) pursuing ‘unwilling’ victims to get further information (partly due to the need to support reclassification and no-criming decisions). One element of the burdensome nature of work on these fronts was the need to service internal audit requirements, which in turn seemed driven by the perceived threat of external audit.

NPIA identified several areas where forces were not in accord. One was uncertainty about the level of detail required for crime classification. Another was misunderstanding as to whether the NCRS required all reported allegations to be recorded as crimes, which may contribute to some over-recording of crime. There were also concerns about the interpretation of ‘credible evidence to the contrary’ (needed to establish that an incident should not be recorded). Similarly, opinion differed in relation to what constituted ‘additional verifiable information’ to support a no-crime decision. More important, perhaps, was that forces varied as to when incidents were recorded as crimes. Some force recorded as early as possible, sometimes even before enquiries had been undertaken. This was seen as leading to erroneous recording and/or inaccurate classification, which then required additional time to sort out.

The NPIA research, then, is important in showing how tightened procedures are resulting in much greater scrutiny of the processes of converting crime allegations to recorded crimes, classifying correctly, and restricting no-criming. At the same time it indicates that these processes are underpinned by complicated rules which still allow

³⁷ A. Fildes and A. Myhill, *Understanding Crime-recording*, National Policing Improvement Agency, 2011.

³⁸ Written evidence from Inspector Michael White, Chair, Wiltshire Police Federation Joint Branch Board to the Public Administration Select Committee (CST0010) echoed some of these concerns.

for different interpretation between forces. It also hints at some adverse resource consequences of the current recording regime. According to the NPIA, these have been noted before. In 2006, for instance, the Audit Commission found that some forces were undertaking disproportionate data-checking that was not considered a good use of public resources.³⁹ Similarly, a review by HMIC recommended a more proportionate approach to the supervision and auditing of incidents and crimes following revision to the HOCR and the NCRS.⁴⁰

The ethnographic studies

Malcolm Young, *The Inside Job*, 1991

Going back in time and turning to ethnographic studies, Malcolm Young's book *The Inside Job* is frequently cited as providing damning evidence of recording malpractice. Although published in 1991, the material largely relates to the early 1980s, the 1970s and even earlier.⁴¹ Young joined the police as a cadet aged 16, rose to become a police superintendent and then gained a doctorate in anthropology. He draws on his experience as a constable, a member of a Drugs Squad, and in the research section of West Mercia Police. In each, he kept field notes on the sorts of behaviour he was interested in – essentially those indicating unethical recording. A large part of Young's book centres on how recording malpractice often served the purpose of improving detection rates ('CID tradecraft') in which managers were complicit. Young contends that there was deliberate decline in 'cuffing' in the 1970s as the police moved to present a picture of soaring crime, although other strategies remained to minimise any fall in detection rates. Based on his West Mercia experience in the 1980s, though, and contact with staff from other forces on training programmes etc, Young contends that 'cuffing' remained pervasive.

Roger Graef, *Talking blues*, 1990

Roger Graef (a documentary maker and author with a particular interest in policing and crime) published *Talking Blues* in 1990 based on conversations with around 500 (anonymously recorded) officers from 12 different forces.⁴² Graef's book ranges widely over how officers were dealing with the demands of their work in the late 1980s, but crime figures were covered by two Met PCs who spoke about the common practice of downgrading of burglary to vandalism. One sergeant in the home countries also reported on improving detections by prison visits. Another Met

³⁹ *Crime-recording 2005*, Audit Commission, 2006.

⁴⁰ *Cutting the Blue Tape*, HMIC, February 2011, unpublished.

⁴¹ M. Young, *An Inside Job*, Clarendon Press, 1991.

⁴² R. Graef, *Talking Blues: The police in their own words*, Collins Harvill, 1990.

PC warned that detection rate would fall as computerisation made it more difficult to manipulate the crime figures, and spoke about the competing demands on the police to have high crime figures to increase resources, but low ones to prove efficiency.

Resource manoeuvring

Gill – Merseyside

One of the factors identified in textbook discussions about crime-recording is that the police may manipulate what they do (or do not) put on the books to serve their current interests. In a somewhat dated study from 1987, Gill argued that Merseyside Police manoeuvred their detection rate downward in protest to a reduction in the local overtime budget.⁴³ This was achieved by reducing the time they spent on visiting prisons to gain admissions from inmates about additional crimes.

Political environment, Boivin & Cordeau, 2011, Canada

More recently, a study in Canada showed that police recording practices changed temporarily in Montreal as a way of increasing administrative workload and pressurising employers during two periods of police collective bargaining.⁴⁴ It looked at monthly PRC figures in Montreal between 1998 and 2009. In both periods of collective bargaining (from June to October 2000 and from July 2008 to April 2009), there were considerable increases in recorded assaults, minor thefts, robberies and vandalism, despite no apparent variation in calls for service.

System changes

Changes in the systems used to record crimes and incidents might well have an impact on the figures. Mainly, the literature here and abroad emphasises how technological changes are likely to have increased recording, allowing more rapid response to crime scenes, etc. Increasing computerisation is a common theme, although the way this changes things is not usually spelled out. Better amalgamation of incident and crime systems may also make it more likely that records are cross-checked better.

One documented example of the effect of system changes comes from New Zealand where the reliability of PRC about ten years ago seemed compromised by a change in the middle of 2005 from the existing Law Enforcement System (LES) computer environment to a new National Intelligence Application (NIA). This coincided with a 6 percent overall increase in the rate of PRC in 2005/06 compared to 2004/05, with PRC in previous years having been on a downward trend. In an evaluation for New

⁴³ P. Gill, *Clearing up crime: The 'big con'*, *Journal of Law and Society*, 14 (2): 254-265, 1987.

⁴⁴ R. Boivin and G. Cordeau, *Measuring the impact of police discretion on official crime statistics*, *Police Quarterly*, 14 (2): 186-203, 2011.

Zealand Police, Axist Consulting saw this as due to the NIA changeover.⁴⁵ Axist's conclusion was that: "Enhancements integral to the NIA application architecture (e.g. wizard entry) and processes by which the organisation has adjusted to the NIA environment (training, data entry processes, file auditing and supervision) appear to have influenced the statistics capture".

⁴⁵ *Understanding Recent Movements in Crime Statistics*, Axist Consulting New Zealand Ltd, 2006.

Comparisons of survey and police crime trends

Trends according to the Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW) and police statistics

Since its first sweep in 1982 (measuring crime the year before), the Crime Survey of England and Wales has provided an alternative measure of crime in England and Wales.⁴⁶ It gives an estimate, based on a large nationally representative sample of householders aged 16 or more, of the annual number of household and personal offences experienced by those interviewed whether or not these offences are reported to the police. One of the main contributions of the CSEW has been to provide a consistent measure of trends for a fairly wide range of offences over three decades which can act as a check on the trends that police figures display. The extent to which trends in the two series have matched each other has long attracted attention, particularly of course when they have shown conflicting patterns. The inconsistency of the trends between 2006/07 and 2011/12 reported in an ONS analysis⁴⁷ became one of the reasons why the National Statistics Authority de-designated PRC as national statistics.

As the coverage of the CSEW is more restricted than police statistics, the best comparisons on trends in crime according to the two series have been based on a 'comparable sub-set' of offences. These cover about three-quarters of CSEW crimes and just under half of PRC. All trend statistics in this section are based on this subset. Another filter that has been applied has been to restrict the CSEW count to only those crimes which have been reported to the police.⁴⁸ One reason for this is that if reporting goes up, the police have more crimes to record (and vice versa). The trend in CSEW reported crime can be thought of as an indicator of the expected trend in recorded crime. The other reason why there might be a divergence in trends is a change in police recording practices – the main issue here. This is best shown by a comparison of the number of reported crimes estimated by the CSEW with the equivalent number of recorded crimes. The difference between the two has shown a consistent 'recording shortfall' i.e., a ratio of less than 1 (or a proportion less than

⁴⁶ The CSEW was known as the British Crime Survey (BCS) until 2012, when responsibility for the survey transferred to ONS. For simplicity, the survey is referred to as the CSEW hereon. Details of the survey can be found at: <http://www.crimesurvey.co.uk>

⁴⁷ *Analysis of variation in crime trends: A study of trends in 'comparable crime' categories between the Crime Survey of England and Wales and the police recorded crime series between 1981 and 2011/12.* ONS, London, January 2014

⁴⁸ The number of reported crimes is derived by multiplying the proportion of CSEW offences in which the victim said the police came to know about the matter to the total CSEW count.

100 percent).⁴⁹ In fact, there are several reasons why the recording ratio may not be exact. One is that some variation in the ratio will arise due to sampling error associated with the survey figures. Also, some victims may say they reported when they did not, and some 'CSEW offences' may have been downgraded by the police to crime categories outside the comparable sub-set. Even so, the recording ratio stands as important statistical evidence as regards how police recording practices may be change in ways that lend credence to the claim that PRC lack trustworthiness or simply reliability.

Documenting the long-term trends in CSEW and police figures and in the recording ratio is somewhat tortuous. For one, CSEW figures are revised over time, mainly to take account of updated population estimates. This means that the changes in crime levels and in the recording ratio over different time periods differ across different publications. The most up-to-date CSEW figures are used below where possible. Second, the composition of the comparable sub-set changed with the 1998 HOCR. Third, the introduction of the NCRS in 2002 (and earlier anticipation of it in some forces) substantially changed police-recording practices. Finally, the CSEW moved in 2001 from a 'last year' calendar year count to a financial year count based on a rolling average based on two years of interview data. This essentially caused some mismatch in the financial year crime count from the CSEW and that of the police. Thus, the period 1999 to 2003/03 was volatile in measurement terms.

Results

The main feature of the period 1981 and 1991 (covering four sweeps of the CSEW) is that the number of CSEW offences (whether reported or not rose) by 50 percent, whereas the number of equivalent recorded offences rose by about twice that amount. This was consistent with a large rise in the number of reported offences, partly reflecting the underlying growth of crime and partly an increase in reporting levels (likely due to wider insurance coverage and changes in the ease with which victims could report). In terms of the recording ratio between 1981 and 1991, the average was 60 percent of reported crimes were recorded by the police.

Between 1991 and 1995 the picture changed. The CSEW count continued to rise (especially between 1991 and 1993), whereas the police count stabilised (1991-1993) and then fell (1993-1995). The less inflationary picture from police figures over the 1991-1995 period is consistent with a drop in reporting, due it seems to a fall in claims at a time when insurance premiums were rising.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, the recording ratio fell from 60 percent in 1991 to 50 percent in 1995.

⁴⁹ Not many other countries try to quantify the recording shortfall, but have been studies pertinent to it. A recent example is: M. Averdijk and H. Elffers, *The discrepancy between survey-based victim accounts and police reports revisited*, *International Review of Victimology*, 18 (2): 91-107, 2012.

⁵⁰ C. Mirrlees-Black, P. Mayhew and A. Percy, *The 1996 British Crime Survey*. Statistical Bulletin 19/9, Home Office, 1996.

Commentary at the time suggested (but could not prove) that recording might have fallen in the early 1990s because 'cut crime' performance indicators (introduced in 1992) could have swayed the police towards keeping marginal incidents out of the crime count.

Between 1995 and 1997 both the CSEW and police measures suggested a fall in crime overall. At offence level, however, there were divergences. The most notable was for wounding which police figures suggested rose by 18 percent, but the CSEW suggested fell by -14 percent. Some increase in reporting could have been at play, but an increase in the recording ratio for wounding also indicated more inclusive recording.⁵¹ Between 1995 and 1997, the recording ratio improved from 50 percent to 55 percent heralding the first signs of a move to more complete recording. This could well have been prompted by guidance from ACPO in 1995 and HMIC in 1996.

By the next CSEW, in 1999, the new HOCR were in place. One change was that some summary offences were added to the PRC count: notably, common assaults and vehicle interference and tampering. This expanded the comparable sub-set. Another change was that the number of victims were to be counted rather than the occasion of the offence. Assessing changes in crime between 1997 and 1999, therefore, is best restricted to the 'old' comparable sub-set, with police figures estimated to be what they would have been under the old counting rules.

On this basis, the police count fell by -5 percent between 1997 and 1999, whereas CSEW figures fell by double that (-10 percent).⁵² Increased reporting possibly explained the smaller fall in police figures for some offences. The pattern for other offences, however, suggested more recording of reported offences. Thus, the recording ratio improved again from 1997, standing at 57 percent in 1999.

When in 2001 the CSEW moved to a rolling two-year reference period, the increased sample size still allowed an embedded sample who reported on victimisation in 2000. On the basis of the new comparable sub-set, results showed a -13 percent fall in the CSEW crime count between 1999 and 2000 as against a smaller -3 percent fall in police figures. The divergence was largely associated with increases in reporting to the police (particularly for violent crime). However, the recording ratio moved up slightly to 58 percent in 2000. The recording ratio on the basis of the new comparable subset was a lower 54 percent in both 1999 and 2000 – the ratio pulled down mainly by the fact that relatively few common assaults are reported to the police, and a relatively small proportion of those reported are recorded.

⁵¹ This could have reflected recent initiatives to document better the scale of violent crime, and/or advice that less serious woundings should be recorded as such, even though some woundings could be charged as common assault.

⁵² The CSEW picture was more favourable across all offence types, with decreases larger, or rises smaller than according to police figures.

The next report showing CSEW results was that from the 2001/02 survey.⁵³ Both the CSEW and the police count fell slightly compared to 2000. The recording ratio for the 'new' comparable subset increased markedly from 54 percent in 2000 to 62 percent in 2001.⁵⁴ This was driven in particular by a steep increase in the recording ratio for common assault, but probably also reflected the bedding down of the new counting rules, and the anticipation in some forces of the NCRS.

The best way to discuss the period between 2002/03 (when the NCRS came into force) to the latest results for 2013/14 is to draw on the analysis by the Office of National Statistics (ONS), updated to the latest figures.⁵⁵ Between 2002/03 and 2006/07, both measures registered similar falls in crime (about -10 percent over the four years). In the next year, the police count fell a little more than the CSEW one. Then for the following five years (until 2012/13), the divergence was more marked. The police count fell by -32 percent, as against a slower CSEW fall of -19 percent. The latest figures for 2013/14 reverse this picture, with the police count falling by only -2 percent, as against a CSEW fall of -14 percent.

These patterns are reflected in changes in the recording ratio, as would be expected. This increased substantially after the introduction of the NCRS. The highest ratio (92 percent) was in 2003/04, but it remained around 90 percent for the next three years. After 2007/08, however, the ratio fell so that by 2011/12 and 2012/13 only 71 percent of reported crimes were recorded. In the last year (2013/14), the recording ratio has improved again – standing at 81 percent.

ONS conclude that there is no obvious methodological change to the CSEW that explains the shifts in the recording ratios, and the corresponding divergences in the trends. They speculate that the gradual erosion of the recording ratio after 2007/08 indicates decreasing compliance with the NCRS and they gained some confirmation of this from forces themselves. ONS cited a number of reasons for this. One was that staff turnover and perhaps insufficient on-going training meant that adherence to the NCRS principles may have declined. A second reason was that performance pressures associated with targets might have acted as a perverse incentive for some crimes to be downgraded to non-notifiable categories, to ASB, or to a crime-related incident (not captured in Home Office returns).

⁵³ This covered those interviewed between April 2001 and March 2002. So for the 2001/02 CSEW, the reference period includes the experiences of respondents between April 2000 and February 2002 (experiences in the interview month are discounted). Averaging over this moving recall period generates estimates that are most closely comparable with PRC figures for the year to the end of September 2001, six months behind the main recorded crime figures for 2001/02.

⁵⁴ The recording ratio was based on police figures to year end September 2001 as this is the period that most closely matches the range of recall periods covered by BCS interviews during 2001/02.

⁵⁵ *Analysis of variation in crime trends: A study of trends in 'comparable crime' categories between the Crime Survey of England and Wales and the police recorded crime series between 1981 and 2013/14.*

Thirdly, despite internal force audits, the cessation of the Audit Commission's audits after 2006/07 may have weakened the focus on complying with the NCRS. Fourthly, the move to neighbourhood policing may have led to more low level crimes being dealt with informally. Finally, pressure on police budgets and a policy shift to promote greater officer discretion may have heralded a return to a more evidential recording model. All this said, however, the improved change in the recording ratio in 2013/14 is seen as consistent with better NCRS compliance levels as a result, for instance, of the PASC inquiry and the ongoing HMIC inspection.

Summary

In sum, then, the main points with regard to police recording practices in England and Wales from the above analysis of CSEW and PRC trends are:

The average 60 percent of reported crimes that were recorded between 1981 and 1991 will have reflected current recording principles at the time, perhaps indicating a police tendency to downgrade the reports made to them by victims. The CSEW can give no indication of how the recording ratio differed across forces.

The fall in the recording ratio between 1991 and 1995 is open to the challenge that the police became more parsimonious about recording offences in order to service performance indicators introduced in 1992. The CSEW cannot directly prove this however.

The introduction of the 1998 HOCR and the NCRS in 2002 both increased the recording ratio. Externally imposed changes to police recording principles, then, are responded to by the police, albeit complicating the picture that police figures give as to trends in crime.

After 2002/03 until 2006/07, the recording ratio was high, and crime on both measures fell to a similar degree. After that, the recording ratio declined, and the police crime count fell much more than the CSEW one. This raised alarm. In the latest year (2013/14), however, the recording ratio improved by ten percentage points. These patterns indicate how compliance with national recording standards can deteriorate quite quickly, albeit also improve with outside pressure.

Survey and police crime trends – other countries

There have been some studies in countries outside England and Wales with regular national victimisation surveys which have looked at trends in crime according to survey results and police data. Usually a much less tight match between the two series is attempted than is the case in England and Wales where adjustments to police figures are made to correspond better to the CSEW, (survey offence definitions are matched to those of the police, and estimates are made of the number of victim-reported crimes).

Netherlands, Switzerland and France

Van Dijk and Tseloni recently have summarised results for the Netherlands, Switzerland and France.⁵⁶ In the Netherlands, Dutch PRC showed much steeper increases in crime between 1980 and the mid-1990s compared to the Dutch survey results. After that, property crime fell on both measures, although violence and vandalism continued to rise in police figures, but much less so according to the survey. Local analysts concluded that between 1980 and 2004 almost three-quarters of the rise in PCR seemed due to increased police recording of reported crimes, perhaps in part reflecting increased computerisation.

In Switzerland, for offence categories which can be compared (burglary, robbery and non-motor vehicle thefts), the survey and police series showed a similar pattern over time. The exception, however, was violent crime. Between 1994 and 2004 this rose much more steeply on police figures than survey ones. The explanation by Swiss analysts was that a previously 'liberal' policy on recording violence had been changed to a much stricter recording regime. In France, there was a similar picture with regards to serious violence (when the police count rose more than survey one). This seemed, though, simply to reflect legislative change whereby more types of violence were reclassified as aggravated and therefore drawn into the count.

New Zealand

Outside Europe, police and survey measures of crime trends can be compared for New Zealand (for a short-term period) and the USA. In New Zealand, the Crime and Safety Survey showed a small fall in crime between the two sweeps measuring crime in 2005 and 2008, including a fall in violence (albeit not very statistically robust). Overall, police figures changed very little. (A fall in some property crimes cancelled out an increase in violence.) Reporting levels according to the survey fell, perhaps explaining the downward trend in property crime. In contrast, the fall in the reporting of violence suggests more recording – a picture similar to other countries.

USA

The USA has had a victimisation survey since 1972 (the National Crime Victimization Survey, NCVS). Survey trends are reported separately to those from the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) which collects data from state and local forces for a selection of Index Offences. Some analysts, however, have looked at how trends from the two measures match each other.⁵⁷ They conclude that during most of the time since the NCVS started, there has been a reasonably consistent picture of crime trends

⁵⁶ J. van Dijk, J. and A. Tseloni, *Global overview: international trends in victimisation and recorded crime*, in J. van Dijk, A. Tseloni and G. Farrell, *The International Crime Drop: New directions for research*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

⁵⁷ J. P. Lynch and L. Addington (Eds.), *Revisiting the Divergence of the NCVS and the UCR*, 2007, New York: Cambridge University Press.

although sometimes the series have diverged – on occasion due to changes in both the NCVS and the UCR counts. They say this has resulted in “ill-informed debates” as to which source was more correct – pace the situation in England and Wales.

Trends in assaults have been the most divergent. Police-recorded assaults increased in the 1980s and stabilised in the 1990s. The NCVS showed assaults to be flat in the 1980s and declining in the 1990s. Rosenfeld found that changes in police recording of crime explain much of the divergence (although a redesign of the NCVS in 1992 helped reduce it).⁵⁸ The main issues seemed to be an increase in police productivity, due to widespread adoption of the 911 emergency system, increased computerisation of patrol, dispatch and crime records, greater sensitivity to violence against women, and less ‘unfounding’ of criminal allegations. The divergence has diminished over time, consistent with the idea that changes in police recording have stabilised.

⁵⁸ R. Rosenfeld, *Explaining the divergence between UCR and NCVS aggravated assault trends*, in Lynch and Addington (op cit).

Performance management

Now this literature review turns to a set of studies that relate to the effect of performance management (PM)⁵⁹ on crime-recording. In terms of the broader criminological literature on PM over the twenty years, what has caught most international attention is the Compstat initiative in New York. The focus first is more local: the changing context of PM in England and Wales, the types of literature on it, and what empirical evidence there is. At the end of the section there is an example of the effect of PM on crime-recording in South Africa.

There was a marked increase in PM in policing in England and Wales after the early 1990s. The same trend was evident elsewhere, but PM here seemed to be particularly vigorous. It was also distinctive in being government-mandated and officially monitored.⁶⁰ Over time, the specifics of the target environment changed,⁶¹ and may now be in demise. Performance indicators (PIs) became a statutory requirement for all police authorities in 1992, imposed by the Audit Commission. The Police and Magistrates' Court Act 1994 then allowed the Home Secretary to set key PIs on which league tables could be based. Alongside that, chief constables and police authorities were made responsible for producing annual local policing plans to include the setting of crime reduction and detection targets. Under New Labour, the Audit Commission established Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) in 1999. The stress here was on continuous improvement. There were also targets for crime reduction imposed on the Crime and Disorder Partnerships. In 2000, the Home Secretary asked police authorities to set five-year targets consistent with reaching the level of the top 25 percent of authorities – 'beacon' performers. The BVPI regime was superseded by Statutory PIs within the Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF) in 2006. This was managed by the Home Office Police Standards Unit, set up to improve the effectiveness of Basic Command Units; again the police were expected to show signs of continuous improvement. Assessments were carried out by the Home Office and HMIC. Of seven key performance areas, one was reducing crime, another investigating crime.

⁵⁹ Sometimes called New Public Management.

⁶⁰ C. Hood, *Public service management by numbers*, *Public Money and Management*, 27 (2): 95-102, 2007.

⁶¹ See, for example, P. Senior C. Crowther-Doverly and M. Long, *Understanding the Modernisation of Criminal Justice*, Open University Press, 2007; P. Collier, *In search of purpose and priorities: police performance indicators in England and Wales*, *Public Money & Management*, 26 (3): 165-172, 2006.

In light of criticism, some of it in the Flanagan review,⁶² government enthusiasm for targets waned. In 2008, the Home Office stopped statutory top-down numerical indicators (apart from a target to increase public confidence in the police). In June 2010, the Home Secretary cancelled the confidence target and the policing pledge.⁶³ A year later the last remaining targets were cancelled – except one (to cut crime). The PASC report, however, argued that strong remnants of performance culture still remain – with many forces setting their own targets, and after November 2012 many (though by no means all) police and crime commissioners (PCCs) doing so too. The PASC report was unequivocal in saying that targets were detrimental to the integrity of PRC.

A great deal has been written about changes in policing as a result of PM. The writing is largely discursive, often drawing on the effects of PM in the wider public sector. Some of the literature highlights positive effects of PM; most of it highlights negatives. Much of the discussion has been about the centralisation of the governance of policing; the influence on police culture; the implications for staff-manager relationships; preoccupation with targets as the expense of performance quality; and the subordination of local policing priorities to centrally-set ones with restricted priorities.

The aspect of PM most relevant here, however, is the effect on crime-recording of target setting for crime and detection, along with publication of league tables. Apart from the work of HMIC, there are not many hard empirical studies which document the effect (these are taken up below), although many discussions make sound points.⁶⁴ Often the material draws on personal testimony –reported for instance through the Police Federation.⁶⁵ Often it draws simply on the ‘common sense’ notion that those whose performance is being measured will naturally make their performance look better rather than worse.

⁶² *The Review of Policing* – Final Report, Home Office, 2008.

⁶³ The Policing Pledge was a Home Office initiative to restore public confidence in the police. It gave ten promises from the police about the services they would provide. The Policing Pledge came into force at the end of 2008. In June 2010, the Conservative Home Secretary cancelled it to reduce the public deficit, allowing forces to focus more on law enforcement and less on meeting targets.

⁶⁴ See, for example, S. Hallam, *Effective and efficient policing: some problems with the culture of performance*, in A. Marlow & B. Loveday (Eds.), *After MacPherson*, Russell House, 2000; B. Loveday, *Managing Crime: Police use of crime data as an indicator of effectiveness*, *Int'l Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 28:215-237, 2000; and J. Seddon, *Systems Thinking in the Public Sector*, Triarchy Press, 2008.

⁶⁵ Statistical ‘gaming’ was a major topic at the 2007 Annual Conference of the Police Federation.

PM clearly heightened the need, as Smith said in 2006 said, for “reliable and standardised local crime data for comparative purposes”.⁶⁶ But the impact of performance culture on crime-recording was soon picked up in official reports. For instance, the Audit Commission raised concerns in 1999.⁶⁷ HMIC also did so both in its 1999 thematic report on integrity⁶⁸ and in its 2000 report on crime-recording.⁶⁹ In its 1999 report, HMIC identified crime-recording as “perhaps the major area of malpractice connected with the performance culture”. HMIC force inspections and other general reviews since then have continued to ring warning bells. As noted above, too, one reason put forward by ONS for the divergence in trends between the CSEW and police figures after 2006/07 was that remaining targets might have acted as perverse incentives for some crimes to be downgraded or reclassified so as to be excluded from the target count.

Studies

There are a few studies that have provided evidence of the effect of target culture on crime-recording. Most of them draw on interview material.

FitzGerald et al (2002)

The first, by FitzGerald and colleagues, was a study of policing in London, reporting in 2002. An underlying theme was that government urgency to achieve policing reform led to a style of PM with perverse effects.⁷⁰ The study, designed as a sequel to a previous one in the early 1980s, looked primarily at what Londoners wanted from the police and at the sources of their satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Its methodology was wide-ranging, but included observational work, focus groups with police officers, and interviews with key informants including senior officers.

Many officers felt they were doing a less good job than they wanted to on account of (among other things) pressure to meet targets for a narrow range of crimes, and the demands of paperwork in relation to targets. They felt that the highly centralised management system – with its heavy focus on compliance with targets – had disempowered middle managers, reduced staff morale, and encouraged ‘accountancy dodges’. The quantitative PM regime was seen as having resulted in

⁶⁶ Smith A, *Crime Statistics: An Independent Review*, 2006. The Home Secretary’s 1999 Strategic Plan also stressed the importance of capturing ‘reliable data’ on which to measure performance against targets, which would otherwise ‘lack credibility.

⁶⁷ *Annual Report on the Police and Fire Services*, Audit Commission, 1999.

⁶⁸ *Police Integrity England Wales and Northern Ireland. Securing and maintaining public confidence*, HMIC, June 1999.

⁶⁹ *On The Record*, HMIC, 2000.

⁷⁰ M. FitzGerald, M. Hough, I. Joseph and T. Qureshi, *Policing for London*, Willan, 2012.

an increasingly narrow focus of resources on a small number of discrete targets which had to be met in the short-term. (The researchers said that they heard numerous references to local commanders being called in by senior staff to account for week-on-week fluctuations in their crime figures.) The cost was, according to officers, a disregard for the complexities of police work, and a withdrawal of resources from policing activities that they felt met local need and locally expressed priorities. Moreover, managers felt uneasy about being required to pursue crime-reduction targets that had been set in the absence of any firm knowledge about the means by which they could be achieved and –indeed, whether they are achievable at all given extraneous factors affecting crime levels.

One senior manager specifically mentioned data quality in relation to the IT system at the time. This, he said, had changed from being geared to operational demands to now simply servicing management information. This risked contaminating the quality of the crime data, since officers knew they were providing information that might be used to measure their own performance.

Long (2004)

Long in 2004 looked at the effect of BVPIs and the process of applying for ‘beacon’ status which involves having to demonstrate results that could be disseminated to others as best practice.⁷¹ Long interviewed 41 middle managers while they were on courses at Bramshill where he was a civilian police trainer. He showed how the prospect of censure was a real one for ‘failing’ performers (in the bottom quartile). This secured compliance by police forces because of fear of remedial intervention, but 82 percent of police middle-managers felt that the BVPI regime put pressure on police officers to manipulate crime figures to better their position. Moreover, Long showed that certain managers resisted the idea of striving to be the top quartile as they would then need to be able to demonstrate continuous improvement; the second quartile was quite good enough. Managers also spoke about how there was little incentive to share best practice in a competitive league table environment.

⁷¹ M. Long, *Naming, shaming and the politics of blaming: police middle management perceptions of the impact of Best Value*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of East London, 2004.

Chatterton (2008)

In 2008, Michael Chatterton was asked by the Police Federation to report on the resilience of CID.⁷² Interviews with operational detectives and other police staff revealed a number of examples of ‘gaming’ – referred to by officers as ‘good housekeeping’. The officers’ accounts suggested that the excessively rigid and bureaucratic approach to detection targets had perverse effects such as a diverting priority from serious crime to pursuing minor offences with a better chance of a clear-up, often ‘criminalising’ along the way members of the public who would not be thought of as criminals in the accepted sense. Discretion was also seen as unhelpfully undermined.

NPIA (2011)

Those interviewed in the 2011 NPIA study on unnecessary work in the NCRS regime, mentioned earlier, also identified crime reduction targets as leading to pressure to downgrade ‘target’ crimes to non-target ones and much time having to be spent on disputed classifications. Likewise, performance targets for sanction detections contributed in part to the time-consuming pursuit of uncooperative victims. Even when targets were removed, many officers still worked with a target mind-set believing that force comparisons would inevitably be made.

Parkinson (2012)

John Parkinson looked at the intended and unintended effects of PM regimes between 1982 and 2012 in the West Yorkshire Police (WYP).⁷³ He drew on various sources of evidence, including force crime figures and responses to three surveys conducted with police officers in 2012: an email survey (to which 679 officers responded);⁷⁴ a paper survey of 102 officers delivered through their line managers; and personal interviews with 20 officers. The main purpose of the surveys was to identify whether officers had felt pressure to deliver performance outcomes and, if so, whether that resulted in non-legitimate behaviour or practice. One of Parkinson’s conclusions is that while the removal of hard quantitative targets may have reduced the manipulation of crime data, non-legitimate practices still existed in WYP.

⁷² M. Chatterton, *Losing the Detectives: Views from the frontline*, Police Federation, 2008.

⁷³ J. Parkinson, *Managing Police Performance in England and Wales: Intended and unintended consequences*. Unpublished Master’s degree thesis, University of Cambridge, 2012.

⁷⁴ This represented a response rather of 13 percent, or 16 percent when those ‘unavailable’ were excluded. Response rates were lowest among junior officers. Parkinson accepts that the low response rates may have introduced some bias into the results.

Parkinson presents several strands of evidence, not all of which were particularly telling. However, some points to emerge were:

1. During the period of the Street Crime Initiative (SCI), in which extra resources were given to the ten force areas with highest robbery rates, there was a 33 percent drop in robbery rates in WYP between 2001/02 and 2003/04 as against a 10 percent increase in total recorded crime; there was also a near 40 percent increase in the rate of robbery detections compared to a flat trend for all offences. Parkinson sees this as evidence of data manipulation, although improvement in robbery rates in all SCI areas has generally been seen a genuine effect of the additional resources expended.⁷⁵
2. As part of increased investment in PM, the appointment of a Crime Registrar in 2002 to oversee recording standards coincided with a 20 percent increase in recorded crime in WYP.⁷⁶ (HMIC 2003).
3. The drop in burglary between 1993 and 2003 was accompanied by an increase in criminal damage (although the possible impact of the new HOCCR and the NCRS are not discussed). Some survey responses mentioned pressure to record burglaries as criminal damage.
4. Responses from the three sources of survey material showed that 92 percent of officers had at some time felt pressure to bend the rules i.e. misclassify crimes (69 percent felt this), boost detection rates or carry out discretionary activities such as stop and search other than when properly justified. Younger officers (under age 35) were most likely to have felt under pressure. Of those who felt they had been pressured to misclassify priority crimes, three-quarters felt it had worsened the quality of the investigation and two-thirds felt that it had worsened service delivery to victims.
5. For those who felt they had been pressured in one way or another to bend rules, 11 percent said it had applied across their time in service; 21 percent said it was in the last 12 months; while the rest (68 percent) said it had been earlier than that.
6. In answer to a question on whether “Managers and supervisors give mixed messages about [WYP] values / integrity regarding crime-recording”, two-thirds agreed that this was the case.

⁷⁵ See, for example, S. Machin and M. Olivier, *Crime and police resources: the street crime initiative*, LSE Research Online, 2005. Available at <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/19902/>

⁷⁶ *Inspection of West Yorkshire Police, 2002/2003*, HMIC, 2003.

James Patrick

One of the most influential UK whistleblowers recently has been PC James Patrick (referred to as PC Patrick from here). He joined the police in 2004 and worked as a PC with involvement in data analysis in the Metropolitan Police (Met) from 2009 until he resigned in April 2014.⁷⁷ Coming forward as a whistleblower, PC Patrick contacted the Chair of PASC (his local MP) in mid-2014 with his concerns about crime-recording in the Met. What he said was instrumental in prompting the PASC enquiry. Patrick gave oral evidence at the first sitting of PASC in November 2013, and submitted three pieces of written evidence. In his evidence, PC Patrick vociferously challenged the record of the Met as regards their honesty in crime-recording in a PM culture. Among other things he cited: downgrading of robberies and burglaries, no-criming of sexual offences or treating them as only 'crime-related incidents' (especially when reported by third parties or by victims with drug, alcohol or mental health problems): officers only recording some crime incidents as offences if there was a detection: officers taking inappropriate account of charging standards in making recording decisions: officers being unduly influenced by crime reduction targets set by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC); and the perverse effects on crime-recording of work-based individual performance assessments.

PC Patrick's evidence to PASC was clearly influential in the Committee's conclusions. This may have been, for one, because he backed his claims with analysis of Met crime data (some from his time as an analyst, some done later with data obtained through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests). The analysis mainly focused on statistical deviance from 'what would be expected' with respect to key crimes that were newsworthy (e.g., sexual offences) or subject to targets (e.g., robbery). PC Patrick's exposition of the deviance is not always easy to follow, although that is not to say it is wrong. (Indeed, the commissioner of the Met accepted at PASC that he would initiate an investigation into the level at which sexual offences were no-crimed or classified as a 'crime-related incident'.) PC Patrick's evidence also seemed to strike a chord with PASC because other witnesses relayed similar concerns about crime-recording in the Met (and beyond), and some of the information from witnesses who challenged Patrick about the Met's performance was refuted by Patrick seemingly to PASC's satisfaction.

In sum, PC Patrick's claims have been widely aired (and self-published). They carried weight with PASC. His personal experience and the accounts he got from others echo those from other sources. His statistical analysis was a little unclear, but might be telling.

⁷⁷ In 2012, PC Patrick started to blog and tweet about his concerns about policing – although these centred less on crime statistics than on nepotism in the police, and 'unhealthy' links between those in the police and government advising on police reforms with the private security industry. Many of his blog posts, emails and letters were self-published in 2013 in a book, *The Rest is Silence*, which was updated in 2014.

Rodger Patrick

Dr Rodger Patrick, an ex-detective inspector in the West Midlands, joined the police in 1975 and retired in 2005, acquiring academic qualifications along the way. In his PhD thesis (and a few published articles) he has written about how PM led to a variety of 'gaming' activities.⁷⁸ He gave oral and written evidence on this to PASC. Most of the 'gaming' activities Patrick identified have emerged in the literature before. He described them as: 'cuffing' (under-recording reported crimes); 'nodding' (collusion between officers and suspects to admit to offences in exchange for favours); 'skewing' (moving resources from activities not subject to PM to those which are); and 'stitching' (involving various malpractices to enhance strength of evidence). Patrick's conclusions about 'gaming' draw on his own experience and interviews with other officers (many retired) in his own force and outside.

Patrick also used statistical information obtained through FOI requests to document what he saw as suspicious variations in force statistics. These he felt reflected a move back to evidential recording.⁷⁹ Patrick also questions the adoption of 'false reporting' policies requiring victims to prove their report was genuine. (The initial impetus for this was concern about lost mobile phones being reported as robberies or theft for insurance purposes.) Patrick identified three forces as having a force-wide 'false reporting' policy for all acquisitive crime, and he presents figures for each in relation to total recorded crime before and after the policy was introduced. Recorded crime levels fell in all three forces, albeit from high base after the NCRS and falling crime in most other forces. Patrick also looked at criminal damage in Norfolk after it allegedly told officers to revert to an evidential standard. Again, the figures fell. He also shows national figures for criminal damage falling between 2008 and 2009, taking this as indicating that other forces were following Norfolk's example. Patrick also takes up falls in detection rates when four forces (after adverse inspections or leaks to the press) tightened up the use of TICs and prison visits.⁸⁰ He suggested this indicated top-level direction.

⁷⁸ R. Patrick, *Performance Management, Gaming and Police Practice*, unpublished thesis, University of Birmingham, 2011.

⁷⁹ R. Patrick, 'Reading tea leaves': an assessment of the reliability of police recorded crime statistics, *The Police Journal*, 84: 47-67, 2011.

⁸⁰ R. Patrick, 'A nod and a wink'. Do 'gaming practices' provide an insight into the organisational nature of police corruption? *The Police Journal*, 84: 199-221, 2011.

Tim Hope

In written evidence to PASC, Hope made another statistical contribution by looking at CSEW and PRC figures in relation to changes in the recording ratio between 1981, 1991 and 2003/04. He set his discussion in the context of PM. Hope looked first at burglaries with and without loss reported to the police. He argues that the much higher recording ratio for loss-burglaries at all three points in time reflects the fact that it is in the police's interest to service insurers and those making claims. He also shows that when reported loss-burglaries were highest (in 1991), the recording ratio went down, which he assumed reflected a workload adjustment. The recording ratio rose again in 2003/04 after the number of reported loss-burglaries fell. Thus, Hope argues, as workload pressure subsided, the police could afford to let the recording ratio rise, thus satisfying their recording obligation to insurers without prejudicing burglary targets. (No mention is made of the fact that the NCRS may have been a background factor.) In relation to reported no-loss burglaries, the recording rate was low and constant at each time point even though the number of reported no-loss burglaries was much higher in 1991.

Hope also looked at 'down-criming' in relation to robbery (covered by a target in the largest forces). Looking at the same three time points; he showed that the recording ratio for reported robberies increased between 1981 and 1991 (although even in 1991 it remained lower than 50 percent). Between 1991 and 2003/04, however, there was little change in the recording rate. That there might have been a systematic down-criming adjustment is suggested by a marked increase over the same period in the recording ratio for offences of theft from the person (a 'leakage' crime for robbery).

South Africa

From abroad, Bruce reports how after the South African government announced in 2004 that in the coming years it would try to reduce violent crime by 7 percent-10 percent a year, the level of violent crime dropped by 25 percent over the next five years.⁸¹ A closer look at the various types of violence categories identified peculiarities that could be best understood in terms of under-recording. This was linked to the introduction of a police performance chart whereby stations were ranked according to improvements as measured by reductions in crime and increases in the detection rate. Those in 'winning' stations in each province were apparently entitled to a performance bonus. An investigation by Stats SA into police statistics was said to be pending.

⁸¹ D. Bruce, *The ones in the pile were the ones going down: the reliability of violent crime statistics*, SA Crime Quarterly, No. 31 (March): 9-17, 2010.

China

An unusual study, that it took place in China, looked at police recording in the late 1980s and early 1990s as part of a programme of research on crime (during a liberal period).⁸² For a number of years, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) allowed samples to be taken of verified crime incidents reported to local stations to assess how many were recorded as crimes, and then, of the crimes passed up to the next level, how many remained in the official crime count. The proportion of crime incidents recorded as crimes in local stations was roughly 40 percent, of which about 70 percent passed the next level – giving an overall recording rate of about 30 percent. Crime and clearance rates were the only two indicators of police performance at the time and the authors of the study got evidence from the police that this was a major driver of low recording rates. Many ‘crimes’ were apparently downgraded to public order violations (not counted), even though they might well have been counted as crimes under international definitions. The MPS introduced changes (including wider performance indicators including the counting of public order violations) as a result of research; these seemingly increased the recording rate.

Overall, PM in its various guises in England and Wales over the 1990s and beyond certainly threw a new spotlight on PRC. From early on there were signs of perverse effects on crime and detection rates – some of the strongest coming from HMIC. The studies above provide mainly circumstantial evidence of the effects of PM on crime-recording, although it is not necessarily wrong on that account. With the exception of the three pieces of statistical work, the studies draw on the testimony of police officers, but often collected within a respectable research model. As said, PASC fell down heavily on targets in relation to the integrity of PRC and the demise of top-down government targets also testifies to a recognition of their perverse effects. A central question, though, is whether a target culture remains ingrained. PASC and some of the research above suggest it does.

⁸² O. Yu, and L. Zhang, (1999), *The under-recording of crime by police in China: a case study* International Journal of Police Strategy and Management, 22 (3): 252-263, 1999.

Compstat

The case of New York

In a widely quoted 2012 book, *The Crime Numbers Games*, John Eterno and Eli Silverman look at the use of crime statistics in relation to CompStat (short for compare statistics).⁸³ Eterno was a captain in the New York Police Department (NYPD) who retired in 2004 then turned academic. Silverman is Professor Emeritus at John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

CompStat was instituted in New York City under the leadership of Police Commissioner William Bratton and Mayor Rudy Giuliani. Starting in 1994, it embeds four principles: (a) accurate, timely intelligence available on a daily basis for all city areas; (b) rapid deployment; (c) effective tactics allowing for decentralised decision-making; and (d) relentless follow-up and assessment (through weekly meetings with local precinct commanders to hold them to account). Accountability was a key factor, although proponents see it also as a communications tool that keeps crime managers aware of innovations in other precincts, and a management development tool that enables leaders to identify best performers.

Falling crime in New York after the start of CompStat (much publicised by NYPD) held the media in grip. Police forces in the US and abroad flocked to the door of NYPD, excited by what seemed to be a highly successful new approach to policing. Subsequently many cities in the US and some forces abroad adopted CompStat-like programs.

Eterno and Silverman (E&S hereon) provide a trenchant criticism of CompStat, claiming that NYPD's crime data had been massaged down. Their main evidence came from a survey in 2008 of "high-ranking" retired police officers (recruited through the Captains Endowment Association). Of the 1,200 approached, 491 provided anonymous replies, (including 323 who had retired after 1995, the first full year of CompStat). Of the 491, a third said they knew of downgrading although they were not asked whether they had witnessed this or had merely heard about it. No one actually admitted to downgrading crime. E&S also interviewed several retired officers personally, and drew on reports by a number of prominent whistleblowers who spoke of the pressure to reduce crime year on year, prompted by some supervisors and precinct commanders, leading officers to downgrade offences, or lose some altogether.

⁸³ J. Eterno and E. Silverman, *The Crime Numbers Game: Management by manipulation*, CRC Press, 2012.

It is no surprise that CompStat attracted criminologists' attention and massaging of the figures was certainly considered. The main focus though has been on whether it was CompStat that produced the precipitous drop in crime in New York, including violent crime and homicide. Some feel that as directed patrols were a strong part of CompStat, and these seem effective in reducing crime in small areas with high crime rates, then it is plausible that CompStat was effective. However, others point out that CompStat was introduced alongside a number of other changes in the NYPD, including gun enforcement, a substantial increase in new better-educated police officers, and the introduction of 'broken windows' policies. Consequently, they think, it is difficult to attribute any reduction in crime to CompStat alone.^{84, 85}

More important perhaps (and overlooked by E&S) is the fact that crime in New York was in decline before the introduction of CompStat, as it was in other major US cities. For instance, homicide rates fell as fast in the three years before CompStat as in the three years afterwards, while other states had even greater falls between 1994 and 1996 than New York itself. The pattern for other crime was similar: there were falls before CompStat in New York and similar falls after it in many other cities.

E&S's book, however, extends beyond CompStat in New York to look at PM in other US contexts and in other countries. Especially when straying outside the US, it relies a lot on media reports, the testimonies of whistleblowers, and some rather obscure sources. Nonetheless, it includes material on PM in this country for instance which has been picked up above, or which tells the same story that E&S focus on, particularly the perverse incentives of PM, and the burdens of it on policing.

Compstat models in Australia

Compstat models were adopted by the police in several states in Australia in the late 1990s and shortly afterwards. Evaluations have been conducted in two states. One related to Queensland's Operational Performance Reviews (OPRs), introduced in 2001. Although led by a 'heavyweight' academic, the evaluation (which found a crime-reducing effect of OPRs albeit inconsistent across offence types and police districts) did not discuss any influence of changes in recording practices along the lines of E&S's complaints about the NYPD.⁸⁶ It is not possible to know what can be drawn from this.

⁸⁴ J. Eck and E. Maguire, *Have changes in policing reduced violent crime: an assessment of the evidence*, in A Blumstein and J. Wallman, *The Crime Drop in America*, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

⁸⁵ S. Levitt, *Understanding why crime fell in the 1990s: four factors that explain the decline and six that do not*, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 18 (1): 163–190, 2004.

⁸⁶ L. Mazerolle, S. Rombouts and J. McBroom, *The impact of Operational Performance Reviews on reported crime in Queensland*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Trends and Issues No. 313, 2006.

The second evaluation was of Operations Crime Reviews (OCRs) introduced in January 1998 in NSW (but suspended in the lead up to the 2000 Sydney Olympics). This evaluation, conducted by BOCSAR again found generally positive results, and explicitly examined possible recording shifts.⁸⁷ These were ruled out as other indicators (survey victimisation rates, insurance claims, emergency calls to the police, and all general calls for service) pointed to similar falls in offending activity. As said, BOCSAR is itself responsible for the dissemination of NSW's police statistics. Thus, it might be that NSW's police figures are already subject to careful scrutiny.

⁸⁷ M. Chilvers and D. Weatherburn, *The New South Wales "Compstat" Process: its impact on crime*, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology, 37 (1): 22-48, 2006.

Reviews of crime statistics in England and Wales

There have been several reviews of the production and presentation of crime statistics in England and Wales over the past 15 years. They made wide-ranging recommendations, often of the same nature. A good number have been acted upon or are being considered currently. The task here is not to detail the recommendations, but rather to assess whether the reviews add anything substantive about the quality of PRC. It can be said at the outset that they mainly comment on data quality, drawing simply on 'common knowledge' to conclude that police figures are problematic. Only the Simmons report adds any statistical information.

The Simmons report

The first review – the Simmons report – conducted in the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics Directorate reported in 2000.⁸⁸ It made 66 detailed recommendations and led to the victim-focused approach to crime-recording which became embedded in the NCRS. Some recommendations concerned ways of improving the technical quality and validity of police crime figures, with Simmons favouring the practice, already established in some forces, of employing professional, independent staff to audit crime records and ensure guidelines were being met.

Simmons present illustrative data for 1998/99 on 'no-criming' rates calculated as the proportion of crimes recorded which were subsequently 'no crimed'. The rates ranged from over 8 per 100 recorded crimes in the highest 'no-criming' force to less than 0.5 per 100 at the other extreme. Simmons, however, accepts HMIC's view that the figures reflect genuine differences in the way in which different forces record crimes, rather than malpractice. Nonetheless, Simmons cautions that no-criming rates are only one facet of force recording variability. Another key factor will be the proportion of calls for service that are (or are not) recorded as crime incidents in the first place. Here, different technologies and different crime-recording systems can be an issue. Thus, Simmons shows figures of varying ratios across forces of the number of recorded crimes to the number of crime incidents. Simmons sees this as a direct result of the confusion surround the recording of incidents and crimes identified in the MHB research. He recommended that all incidents reported to the police, from whatever route, should result in the creation of an incident record. Consistency in selecting the appropriate 'closing' classifications for incidents was one element of guidelines in the National Standard for Incident Recording (NSIR) which forces were required to comply with by 2006/07.

⁸⁸ J. Simmons, *Review of Crime Statistics*, Home Office, 2000.

The Statistics Commission report

The former Statistics Commission reported in 2006 on user perspectives of crime statistics.⁸⁹ The Commission did not offer any new empirical evidence, but cited previous research (e.g., the MHB report) and published overviews of knowledge about crime statistics. The Commission acknowledged improvements brought about by the NCRS, but remained concerned about dependency on the HOCR and variations in collection processes. Violent crime and anti-social behaviour were seen as the most problematic, since they pose the greatest problems of definition, recording, and the greatest volatility in public reporting.

The Smith Report

Another 2006 report was that by Professor Adrian Smith who was asked to led a cross-party working group to review and advise on crime statistics.⁹⁰ The review was prompted by divergent CSEW and PRC trends largely consequent on the new HOCR and the NCRS. Again, Smith does not offer any new empirical evidence about the quality of PRC; he simply says they have “long been recognised as having a number of weaknesses” including variability of recording practice which compromise force comparisons, uncontrollable variability of reporting levels, and regular claims that the police adjust their crime statistics to improve measured reported performance. He did, however, make a new point. This was that the integrity of police crime data is compromised by the means by which crime data are transferred from each police force to the Home Office –this at the time being done differently because of different data systems. Smith felt that this increased the risk of errors occurring. The development of a standard data warehouse (the National Management Information System Data Hub), which is fed by force crime-recording systems, was in part a reflection of this concern.

Smith noted that performance targets had meant that “crime statistics have been subject to a quite new degree of scrutiny and their release and handling have become politically much more sensitive.” He made numerous recommendations for improvement. One was for careful auditing of police data; another was that changes to statistical series should be better managed.

⁸⁹ *Crime Statistics: User Perspectives*, Statistics Commission, 2006.

⁹⁰ A. Smith, *Crime Statistics: An independent review*, 2006.

The Casey Review

A Cabinet Office report in 2008 by Louise Casey next took up the issue of crime statistics.⁹¹ Based on an extensive programme of public consultation, it documented how the public was losing trust and confidence in crime statistics. One concern was what was seen as political interference; another was that people did not feel they had enough local information about crime. Casey herself refers to “problems” with police figures, but says little more than that.

UK Statistics Authority – improving trust

The UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) reported in 2010 on ways in which public trust in criminal statistics could be improved.⁹² There is little mention of the quality of PRC as such, although some attention was paid to performance targets: “Although much of the evidence is anecdotal, a number of interviewees told us that crime-recording can be distorted by the existence of performance targets.” Of the just under 30 experts interviewed there seemed broad agreement that the Audit Commission work had improved PRC. Its cessation led the UKSA to recommend that arrangements to ensure compliance with the counting rules and validate and check the resulting data should be published and reviewed. UKSA also recommended the re-introduction of some form of cost-effective independent and risk-based audit.

The National Statistician’s report

The next report to appear, in 2011, was by the National Statistician, Jill Matheson, who was asked to review gaps in crime statistics, advise on which independent body should assume future responsibility for publication, and oversee implementation of the recommendations in the UKSA’s report (mentioned above) to improve public trust in criminal statistics.⁹³ The National Statistician’s report referred to “known limitations” of PRC (and the CSEW), but takes the matter no further than that. It does, however, accept that inconsistencies in recording will remain despite the NCRS given that there will always be an element of subjectivity in deciding appropriate crime classifications as well as different interpretations of the counting rules.

⁹¹ L. Casey, *Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime*, Cabinet Office, 2008.

⁹² *Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics: England and Wales*, UK Statistics Authority, 2010.

⁹³ *National Statistician’s Review of Crime Statistics: England and Wales*, UK Statistics Authority, June 2011.

UK Statistics Authority assessments

In 2011, UKSA looked at PCR in terms of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics to determine whether it was appropriate for PCR to be designated as national statistics. They were judged as appropriate, albeit one recommendation was that more information should be published about “the quality of the police recorded crime statistics, including the consistency with which crimes are recorded and classified”.⁹⁴ The basis for this recommendation appears to be largely the findings of HMIC’s own audits.

In 2014, PCR were prioritised for re-assessment partly because of the transfer of responsibility for the statistics from the Home Office to ONS, and “partly due to the high profile nature of concerns raised recently about some aspects of the police’s recording of crime data”.⁹⁵ These concerns centred on (i) the evidence given to PASC and the Home Affairs Select Committee; (ii) the January 2013 ONS report indicating that compliance with the NCRS might be falling; and (iii) recent evidence from HMIC itself.⁹⁶ UKSA also did not consider that ONS had sufficient information about the quality of PCR to be certain it met users’ needs, or be able to specify their limitations well enough. As a result, PCR were de-designated as national statistics.

In summary, these reviews accept the limitations of PCR as given. They make generally similar recommendations to improve oversight through rigorous and preferably independent auditing.

⁹⁴ *Assessment Report 102: Crime Statistics in England and Wales*, UK Statistics Authority, April 2011.

⁹⁵ *Assessment Report 268: Statistics on Crime in England and Wales*, UK Statistics Authority, January 2014.

⁹⁶ *The Crime Scene – A review of police crime and incident reports*, HMIC, London, January 2012.

Audits

The Audit Commission

To step back in time, the Audit Commission played a part in raising concerns about crime-recording practices at the end of the 1990s, for instance, in its 1999 report.⁹⁷ After the Home Office Policing Standards Unit came into being in 2001, it asked the Audit Commission to audit PRC to review compliance with the NCRS. The Commission did so for four years, with its 2006/07 report being the last before funding for the audits was withdrawn.⁹⁸

In its first audit, for 2003/04, the Commission found an absence of audit trials in some forces, and the recording of low-level offences problematic. When it last reported, it found good progress had been made in the quality of data. Thirty-eight police forces (88 percent) were rated as good or excellent, whereas the figure was only 28 percent in 2003/04. No area was rated as having poor quality data, which was said to indicate an 80 percent compliance rate with the NCRS. The rate of improvement was not uniform however. Of 16 forces rated as poor in 2003/04, 11 were now deemed excellent and four good. However, of 20 forces assessed as excellent in 2005/06, seven were only good a year later, and one had deteriorated to fair. Moreover, data quality varied across crime categories, with the recording of racial incidents and violent crime deemed least acceptable. In this last of its report, the Commission looked at compliance with NSIR within the antisocial behaviour incident category. It reported that progress in implementing NSIR has been patchy (only a quarter of forces were assessed as good or excellent). There was a lower level of compliance with NSIR than there was in the early stages of the NCRS.

In the light of the Audit Commission's warning that standards of data quality needed continuous inspection, it was perhaps not surprising that many of those commenting (ONS included) on the increase in the 'recording shortfall' after 2006/07 speculated that the cessation of the Audit Commission work could have led to lower compliance with the NCRS.

⁹⁷ *Annual Report on the Police and Fire Services*, Audit Commission, 1999.

⁹⁸ *Police Data Quality 2006/07*, Audit Commission, September 2007.

Experience abroad: Australia

Concerns about the quality of PRC are by no means restricted to the UK. Criminologists in all countries have looked at the crime-recording process and drawn attention to under-recording changes in procedures over time, disparities between areas, etc much in the way of the studies reported here. Australia, however, is worth a mention as there have been difficulties in getting the eight states into alignment, and the process of improvement has been overseen by a central agency similar to ONS, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

Each state in Australia compiles and publishes its own recorded crime figures, adhering to local recording protocols and even local offence classifications. At the same time, they provide information to the ABS for a selection of key offences (similar to the situation in the US). This does not always marry with locally-published figures, or indeed show a pattern that marries up with the national victimisation survey on state positions. Consistency in the ABS returns was problematic for many years, although ABS started to release state figures in 1993 meant to be on more standardised counting rules and similar offence definitions. Discrepancies in recording practices remained nonetheless, leading ABS (in liaison with state police commissioners) to introduce a National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS), much modelled on Home Office version. The NCRS was introduced progressively across the states with the recorded crime figures for 2010 marking the first year of full implementation. There was an ensuing break in the series, as here. Even now, though, ABS does not report state figures for assaults and sexual assaults because of continuing doubt about recording comparability. A point to draw out here, then, is how those who want to know 'how they are doing' compared with the rest of the country could struggle to find an easy answer. Any enduring and serious inconsistencies in recording practices between forces in England and Wales would pose the same problem.

Crime-recording in Victoria

Of all the states, Victoria was viewed with most suspicion as it had a comparatively low level of PRC, but a comparatively high ranking in the national victimisation survey. A number of reviews in the 1980s and 1990s were carried out, although they mainly concerned the inefficiencies of the administrative database, the Law Enforcement Assistance Program (LEAP). (There was some attention also paid to statistics on detections.) Many reviewers recommended that the state's crime figures should be managed and disseminated by an independent agency, as is the case in NSW through BOCSAR.

Another review of Victoria was done in 2001 by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC). It involved more in-depth auditing of the incidents and crimes records (both recorded in LEAP), inspection of quality control systems, scenario-

based testing, etc.⁹⁹ The review gave the police recording system based on LEAP a fairly clean bill of health, although it was critical of the complexities of the database. It found only a minor discrepancy between the number of crimes that might have taken place based on incident data and the number of crimes recorded, but concluded that it was not possible to say conclusively whether this was the full extent of the discrepancy. It was likely that because recording was largely based on an evidential model, some crime incidents may not have entered into LEAP at all.

The Victorian Ombudsman then published reports in both 2009 and 2011 relating to police statistics in Victoria. The first report resulted from a complaint made by the Leader of the Opposition that crime figures and/or police numbers may have been manipulated. The 2011 report dealt with a whistleblower who complained about the early release of (favourable, but unchecked) figures of violent crime by the chief commissioner during a caretaker period just before the state elections. (The chief commissioner resigned.) In both reports, the Ombudsman was critical of crime-recording in Victoria. The 2009 report, for instance, concluded that while investigators did not find “corroborated evidence that crime statistics were subject to falsification”, clearance rate practices were suspect, the administrative systems were poor and there was still evidence of some assaults and less serious crimes being under-recorded.¹⁰⁰ The changes in the NCRS to promote a prima facie approach to recording was also found to be poorly implemented and inadequately understood.

⁹⁹ C. Carcach and T. Makkai, *Review of Victoria Police Crime Statistics*, Australian Institute of Criminology Research and Public Policy Series, No. 45, 2002.

¹⁰⁰ Ombudsman Victoria, *Crime statistics and police numbers*, March 2009.

Conclusions

PRC in England and Wales has been subjected to an unusual degree of scrutiny recently and it has prompted a response. It is hard to know whether there has been the same fastidious attention in other countries. Nonetheless, criticisms in other westernised countries of the intrinsic shortcomings of PRC are much the same as here, and research has told much the same story about variability in police figures over time and place, and the difficulties inherent in the process of making sure that observations and allegations of offending are translated into correct and reliable crime records.

Elsewhere, too, there is much the same tendency for concerns about PRC to suddenly erupt. Very recently, for instance, crime figures in Paris,¹⁰¹ Chicago¹⁰² and New Zealand¹⁰³ have caught the local headlines.

The literature reviewed here has covered a period of over 30 years. It is the older literature which still stands as the basis for scepticism about the integrity of PCR, despite a changing climate. Some of the literature is more substantial than others. Some of the research is more observational than statistical. Some of the criticism of PRC (including much of that put before PASC) draws on 'common knowledge' or anecdote though it cannot be discounted on that account.

The HMIC report within which this review is placed will give the most up-to-date picture of current recording practice in police forces in England and Wales. It will show how responsive police forces have been to changing those elements of recording practice that they have been asked to change.

Since the early 1990s, the use of performance management in policing and its effect on crime-recording has been the main backdrop to debates about the reliability of PRC. The material reviewed here was fairly strong in showing that a target culture can undermine the trustworthiness of police figures, as well as result in a distortion of organisational practice from some aspects of policing that communities want. For the moment this is recognised.

But there was evidence here and in that submitted to PASC that a target mentality remains at ground level. Many PCCs reported to PASC that they were not setting targets, meaning that others were. In any event, the emergence of PCCs adds another dimension to ensuring the quality of PRC, not least because sound data will enhance trust. (One element of the breakdown in relationships between the Gwent

¹⁰¹ *Paris police wiped 16,000 crimes off the books*, The Telegraph, 2 March 2014.

¹⁰² *The Truth about Chicago's Crime Rates: Parts 1 and 2*, Chicago Magazine, June 2014.

¹⁰³ *Leak about police error political*, New Zealand Herald, 14 July 2014.

PCC and the chief constable concerned the accuracy of crime-recording in the force.)

All the seven reviews of PRC since 2000 were sparked by mistrust in PRC. Ironically, though, some of the changes introduced to improve the reliability or 'truth' of PRC (such as the inclusion of common assault as a notifiable offence, the NCRS, and the publication of CSEW and police figures together) may well have had the contrary effect of increasing public distrust. They have made the figures more difficult to interpret and have provided more opportunities to exploit discrepancies in the data.

This may improve perhaps, although if further pressure is put on forces to adhere to standards that lead to more inclusive recording there could be further public confusion about crime trends ahead. One consistent finding from many studies is that the count of violent crime in police figures has increased because of better recording. There is probably some headroom for the police count of violence in particular to rise further.

The scope for discretion in crime-recording, even though now curtailed, inevitably remains. This poses risks for ascertaining the true count of crime that the police know about and record as such, and for knowing whether forces are playing on a level field. The MHB report in 2000 sounded a note of caution about how easily change can be affected to provide this.

It saw force recording practices as clearly influenced by long-standing local traditions of 'how things are done'. An entirely consistent application of recording rules, then, might be difficult to achieve. Moreover, the NPIA study showed that there are still areas of confusion as to the precise ways in which the HOCR should be applied. Certainly, it identified some tension between using sensible discretion and strict adherence to formal rules.

Some 'big' questions remain concerning the reliability of PRC in documenting the nature and level of crime. One important one is how far PRC is capturing (and can capture) new forms of cyber-crime although improving measurement and recording here is critical to understanding the scale of the problem, how its nature is evolving, and whether the 'real' picture of trends in crime is being masked by displacement from 'traditional' crimes to those which are not well counted.

Another question is how the police will respond to potential increases in reported crime, when police budgets are constrained and officers are worried about workload. In the near future at least, an increased propensity on the part of victims to report may be cancelled out if offending goes down and there continues to be less crime to be recorded.

The degree of oversight of crime-recording is important too, and this has its own resource implications. The CSEW / PRC analysis reported earlier indicates how compliance with national recording standards can deteriorate quite quickly, albeit also improve with outside pressure. One written submission to PASC cited some police resistance to the new HOCR, the NCRS and the NSIR as being unnecessarily bureaucratic and increasing police workload.¹⁰⁴

If PRC is to be as reliable as possible, though, all efforts to ensure data quality may have to trump these considerations.

¹⁰⁴ Public Administration Select Committee, CST0003.