Using Criminal History Records to Enhance Statistical Infrastructure at BJS

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Outline

Using Criminal History Records to Enhance Statistical Infrastructure at BJS

• Introduction
• Federal and State Criminal History Records (aka “Rap Sheets”)
• BJS Experience with these Records
• Operational Uses of the Records
• Research and Statistical Uses
• How BJS Acquired Records
  – Technological solution – determining what was technically feasible.
  – Legal authorization and hurdles – obtaining access.
  – Memorandum of Understanding – gaining agreement and cooperation.
  – Procurement of contractual services – acquiring needed support.
• Technical Attributes of Routinized Acquisition and Analysis Processes
• Remaining Challenges to “Full” Integration
• Costs of the Project
• Future Research Plans
• Conclusions
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Administrative and Operational Uses of Criminal History Records

• Criminal Justice Uses
  – Police name checks
  – Charging decisions
  – Pre-trial release decisions – held in custody or released on recognizance
  – Sentencing
  – Correctional classification – housing assignments in jails/prisons
  – Public registries (sex offender)
  – Firearm purchases, licenses, permits, etc.

• Non-Criminal Justice Uses
  – Pre-employment screening
  – Professional/Occupational licenses
  – Permits
Research and Statistical Uses of Criminal History Records

• Studies of recidivism – pre-post event comparisons of arrests, convictions, incarcerations.
• Program evaluation.
• State-level studies:
  – Legislative impact studies/models;
  – Forecasting prison/jail populations; and
  – Other areas.
BJS Experience With Rap Sheets

• Dates to the late 1960s.
• Tied to federal assistance and support for:
  – Development of prototype system for interstate sharing of criminal records – precursor to Triple I.
  – Policy development (i.e. technology, data quality, privacy and confidentiality etc.)
  – Continued automation of state and local records.
  – Brady Act, improving record accuracy and completeness (Brady Act - NCHIP).
  – Data used in firearm checks (NICS Act – NARIP).
How BJS Obtained Access to the Rap Sheets

• Conceptual design of a technological process to acquire records from all the states.
• Pursued/received legal authorization to use FBI system to access records.
• Sought the willing participation of “record providers.”
• Executed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
• Procured contractual services/assistance.
Criminal History Data Acquisition Sequence

1. BJS provides Nlets with State Identification Numbers
2. Nlets launches record queries in Triple I
3. Triple I queries states holding indexed records
4. States return records to Nlets.
5. Nlets, parses responses; sends records to NORC.
6. NORC recodes, consolidates records into a standardized file.
The Acquisition Process

• BJS provides Nlets with State and/or FBI identification numbers (from another BJS administrative record collection).

• Nlets:
  – sends record queries into Triple I;
  – collects state responses, collates them, and creates a uniform “parsed” record; and
  – Forwards de-identified records to NORC.

• NORC:
  – Recodes data in the individual records;
  – Structures unstructured data;
  – Creates a database of single consolidated records;
  – Returns the database to BJS.

• BJS utilizes the database for its analyses.
Selected Attributes of Routinized Acquisition and Analysis Processes

• “Trickling” record requests into the live operational system.
• Parsing “raw” record responses.
• Reducing raw data in the records- recoding varied state codes and decoding unstructured data.
• Evaluating data quality.
• Returning benefits to record providers.
Remaining Challenges

• Balancing regulatory restrictions around retention of criminal history record information with need to archive data for additional/future research access.

• Addressing continued data quality improvement needs – a two-part framework:
  – Fitness for operational uses
  – Fitness for statistical uses
Costs* of Rap Sheet Infrastructure

• Developmental costs – about $3.0 million.
  – $1.1 million for initial record acquisition, collation, parsing.
  – $1.9 million for initially standing up the data standardization software, coding crosswalks, creation of recode libraries.

• Maintenance costs – about $360,000 annually
  – Acquisition, collation, etc. – about $60,000
  – Maintenance of standardization software, recode library and crosswalks – about $300,000 per cohort study.

*excluding OJP & BJS staff salaries and overhead.
Future Research Plans

• Technical – Methodological reports.
• Federal probationers.
• Adult criminal histories of juvenile offenders.
• New prisoner release cohort.
• Evaluation of federally-funded prisoner reentry programs.
• Risk levels of persons admitted to prison.
• Criminal careers of first-time arrestees.
Conclusions

• Use of criminal history records promises to dramatically enhance BJS’s statistical infrastructure.

• Data derived from these records holds great potential to be significantly influential in a variety of policy domains.

• Ongoing statistical analyses involving these records will also improve operational usage of these records:
  – improve how the quality and completeness of the records is evaluated; and
  – help federal assistance programs better target the use of funds to make systematic and measurable improvements.
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