

Sellin T & Wolfgang M E. *The measurement of delinquency.*
New York: Wiley, 1964. 423 p.
[University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA]

The *Uniform Crime Reports* are annual reports of the FBI, collating police reports of offenses known to the police from more than 16,000 police jurisdictions. Our research has been meant to provide a more elaborate and precise measurement of crime than the simple numerical reports of homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. We provided detailed descriptions of the relative seriousness of each crime. The psychophysical scaling of crime was a new methodological technology for measuring the seriousness of crime by asking respondents to give a number, from above zero to infinity, of how serious they thought various crimes were. [The *SSCI*® indicates that this book has been cited in more than 410 publications.]

A Psychosocial Scaling of the Seriousness of Crime

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In 1958, the Ford Foundation supported many delinquency prevention programs. The foundation was interested in knowing whether the crime rate was affected by their programs.

To promote more precise measurements of the crime rate, the Ford Foundation offered the Criminology Center at the University of Pennsylvania a grant to improve on the FBI Uniform Crime Reporting System that reports "crimes

known to the police" from 16,000 police jurisdictions across the country.

The *Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)* have been publishing reports on the extent and volume of crime nationally since 1930. These are crude descriptions of crime—murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft—with no indication of the degree of seriousness of injury or property loss or damage.

The research that we devised was based on a sample of 1,000 subjects who were asked to assign a number to the level of seriousness, involving varying degrees of injury from death, hospitalization, treatment and discharge by a physician, minor injury, and degrees of dollar loss.

Our subjective ratings produced the psychophysical scaling of the seriousness of crime for 141 offenses, in 1964, and 204 offenses, in 1985.¹ The latter scaling was based on 60,000 interviews from a representative sample of households and interviews by census enumerators.²

The scaling of crimes from the most serious to the least serious was a suggestion made by Cesare Beccaria in 1764.³ Our research has accomplished this task. The perception of crime and degrees of seriousness are entirely culturally subjective.

Our scale has been used by sentencing commissions to determine degrees of penal sanctions. Many scholars here and abroad, using the original 1964 publication, have replicated our findings of the scale of seriousness, and the FBI is considering the use of the scale in publishing crime statistics.

1. **Wolfgang M E & Figlio R M.** Weighing social responsibility: how perceptions differ for individual and corporate crimes. *Wharton Annu.* 9:32-7, 1985.
2. **Wolfgang M E, Figlio R M, Tracy P E & Singer S I.** *The national survey of crime severity.* Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1985. 167 p. (Cited 10 times.)
3. **Beccaria C.** *On crimes and punishment.* (Ingraham E, trans.) Philadelphia: Nicklin, 1819.

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