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### ***Using UCR to Compare Your Department***

Can a police department use its UCR stats to compare itself (productivity, efficiency, etc.) to other departments? No! When can UCR be used for comparative purposes? To compare itself from year to year.

First, lets see what the FBI says:

There are many [variables affecting crime](#) and the reporting thereof including the demographic differences between jurisdictions, the level of training received by agency personnel in UCR, report writing variations, and technology.

“The FBI discourages data users from ranking agencies and using the data as a measurement of law enforcement effectiveness.”

“The data user is, therefore, cautioned against comparing statistical data of individual reporting units from cities, counties, metropolitan areas, states, or colleges or universities solely on the basis on their population coverage or student enrollment. Until data users examine all the variables that affect crime in a town, city, county, state, region, or college or university, they can make no meaningful comparisons.”

“Ranking agencies based solely on UCR data has serious implications. For example, if a user wants to measure the effectiveness of a law enforcement agency, these measurements are not available. As a substitute, a user might list UCR clearance rates, rank them by agency, and attempt to infer the effectiveness of individual law enforcement agencies. This inference is flawed because all the other measures of police effectiveness were ignored.”

“The UCR clearance rate was simply not designed to provide a complete assessment of law enforcement effectiveness. In order to obtain a valid picture of an agency’s effectiveness, data users must consider an agency’s emphases and resources; and its crime, clearance, and arrest rates; along with other appropriate factors.” (FBI website)



**FBI Links:**

[UCR Statistics: Their Proper Use](#)

[Variables Affecting Crime](#)

Take for example the fact that some police departments take reports from citizens over the phone or internet, making it very easy for citizens to report crime. Others require officers to respond in person to reports of crime in order for a report to be taken. The problem with this is often people don't have the time or want to wait around so they end up not reporting the crime all together.

Furthermore, some agencies have report writing manuals and computerized reporting while others don't. Do these factors affect crime stats? They certainly do.

**Survey**

In June 2011 PRI Management Group submitted a survey to over 1000 U.S. police departments pertaining to UCR/NIBRS crime stats. 82 agencies responded. While this was not a formal survey representing a statistically valid sampling of all law enforcement agencies, the results are nonetheless interesting.

The purpose of the survey was to determine how police departments use crime stats and if the statistics could be affected by today's law enforcement technology tools as well as by other variables affecting police reporting.

**Survey Results**

Nearly 50% of agencies surveyed indicated they take reports over the phone while 39% indicated an officer must always respond to reports of crime.

20% of agencies surveyed have an internet website allowing citizens to fill out reports online. Of these agencies 5% reported an increase in their overall crime rate of 5 to 10 percent.

67% of agencies surveyed indicated they keep a second set of in-house statistics based on actual numbers of crime (not based on UCR rules).



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8.5% of agencies surveyed indicated that the person who handles UCR/NIBRS reporting for the agency has not received training in this area.

55% of agencies surveyed indicated that no sworn personnel have ever received training in UCR/NIBRS.

43% of agencies surveyed indicated they do not have a report writing manual.

Despite these factors, 57% of agencies indicated they use their UCR/NIBRS crime stats to compare their crime rates with other jurisdictions.

When *can* you use UCR for comparison purposes? When your agency needs to compare its own crime rate year to year. What is today's definition of customer service in law enforcement? Providing a simple and easy way for citizens to report crime, right from their desks. If your agency is going to purchase an online crime reporting platform it will be very important to evaluate its UCR functionality to ensure those crimes which are reportable to the program are properly counted.