

Understanding Crime and Criminal Justice Data



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This book is designed to introduce students to the complicated and politically fraught world of crime data. This is no bland review of statistical trends or methodological flaws. Rather, this book aims to examine the social processes which shape and give meaning to our knowledge and perceptions of crime. The bamboozling world of political spin and tabloid sensationalism confronts and bewilders us as we navigate our way through a world increasingly populated by terrifying risks and appalling acts of violence and carnage. Whilst it remains the case the crime data is notoriously unreliable this book will attempt to explore what such data tells us about the nature and character of the crime problem and how it is responded to by politicians, criminal justice agencies, the media and the man on the street. Fundamental to this text will be an introduction to the different sources of crime and criminal justice data and the ways in which they are generated and used by vested interests such as government and the police. The old adage of 'Lies, damn lies and statistics' will be reconsidered and the pervading criminological wisdom that crime statistics can tell us nothing useful about actual rates of crime will be challenged in an attempt to reclaim the social scientific value of crime data for thinking about and understanding both trends in the crime rate and the underlying social processes that shape the way such trends are interpreted by society.

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