



POLICY ISSUES

Difficulties in Counting Crime

A notoriously difficult aspect of counting crime is what is termed *series victimizations*. Most crimes are discrete events—that is, there is a clear beginning and end of the incident. A man comes into the store, pulls a gun on the clerk, demands money, and leaves. A robbery has just taken place. It is easy to identify that this was a single robbery. However, other types of crime are not as easily counted. Imagine a child who goes to school. And every day in school he is ferociously bullied. The bullying begins when he is walking to school, it occurs in class, it occurs between classes, it occurs at lunch, it occurs on his way home. It never stops and happens day in and day out. Or imagine a woman who is violently abused every day and night by her intimate partner. She lives in a rural area and he has taken her car, her money, and her phone. She is a prisoner in her home with no way to leave. So every day, day in and day out, her tormentor abuses her.

If asked “How many times in the last 6 months have you been a victim?” how should these victims respond? Is 1 the

correct answer as it reflects that it has been one long, ongoing event? Would then using 1 to calculate crime rates accurately reflect crime? Or should they answer 180 given that in a 6-month period there are about 180 days? Is capping this number at 10 a better approach? Is this a more accurate count of the crime that occurred?

Series victimizations refer to those crimes that are difficult to quantify because they are ongoing. Each of the possible ways to answer is not precise and, as such, crime estimates will lack some precision.

Think About It

1. **How would you handle series victimizations if you were in charge?**
2. **What are the advantages and disadvantages to the approach you suggest?**