

### Defining Inmate Misconduct

As we already highlighted in Chapter 1, it is possible to measure offending in several different ways, including with official arrest data, victimization surveys, and self-report offending data from surveys. There are different types of measurement error associated with each type of measurement tool, but generally, official data tend to indicate lower estimates compared to survey data. What if we wanted to measure offending behavior inside correctional facilities? This is an important question because one indicator of the safety of a prison or jail is often evaluated by levels of inmate offending behavior, generally termed *inmate misconduct*.

Like the victims in the general population, the detection of crime in a correctional facility is largely influenced by the willingness of victims or witnesses to report the events to authorities. Once reported, official records are also influenced by whether an incident makes it into the official record. To determine the convergence between official incident records of inmate misconduct and self-reported offending, Benjamin Steiner and John Wooldredge (2014) collected survey data from inmates as well as official records for the same inmates in correctional facilities in Ohio and Kentucky. They collected data for two groups of inmates: those who had previously served time before and those who had not. To be eligible to participate in the survey, however, respondents had to have been in confinement for six months or longer because the survey asked about misconduct that they engaged in during the past six months. Over 5,600 inmates completed the survey.

To operationalize whether inmates had committed an assault, they were asked whether they had “physically assaulted another inmate for reasons other than because he tried to hurt you first” or “stabbed another inmate for reasons other than because he tried to hurt you first” (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2014, p. 1083). Official measures of assault included these behaviors as well as attempted assaults. The authors stated, “Differences in the operational definitions of the types of offenses should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings” (p. 1084). Despite official records including attempted as well as completed assaults, results indicated that incidence of self-reported offending behavior was 80% higher than official rates of