Texas State University
School of Criminal Justice
Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam for Research Methods
October 7, 2013
12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

DIRECTIONS: Choose Option One or Option Two.
Save two electronic copies of your answer (one with just your ID number assigned to you, the other with your ID number and name). Email both copies to Cybele Hinson ch56@txstate.edu.
Print out and turn in a hard copy as well with both your ID number and name on it.

OPTION 1
Austin Texas is experiencing an increase of purse snatching in its downtown area. The problem appears to be localized within two similar but geographically separate shopping areas adjacent to the downtown area. In response to this crime pattern the police department wants to implement foot patrol strategy. This strategy will require officers to walk downtown beats and be generally visible in an effort to deter would be purse snatchers. The cost (in overtime salary) of this program is prohibitive so the City Manager wants to know if the program will be effective at reducing purse snatching. So, they have hired you as a consultant to conduct a study to determine whether this policing strategy will reduce purse snatchings.

A. Design a study to assess the effectiveness of the foot patrol strategy for reducing purse snatching. This design must include;
   1. The research question
   2. The specific research method you would use to collect the data
   3. The conceptual and operational definitions of your dependent variable
   4. The conceptual and operational definitions of your independent variable(s)
   5. A basic discussion of how you will analyze the data

B. Identify the potential threats to the internal and external validity (if any) of your study and how you might address them.

C. Do you anticipate any ethical problems with your study’s design? If so, how would you address these?

OPTION 2
Christopher Chapman recently conducted a study to determine if a police officer’s education, age, experience and ethnicity affected their use of force and their perception on the use of force by other officers who work within minority communities.

Chapman conducted an Internet survey of police officers in three cities within the State of New Jersey (Newark, Elizabeth and Orange). Combined, 17.3 percent of the residents in these communities are White, non-Hispanic.

The survey asked for demographic information (gender, age, years of experience as a police officer, ethnicity and duty assignment, i.e. patrol officer, detective, and other). Age and years of experience were captured in year ranges (EX: 18-21, 22-25, 26-30, etc.), rather than the actual number of years. The principle independent variable was educational level. Respondents were asked to indicate their
highest level of education obtained (high school, associate's degree, bachelor's degree or master's degree). The dependent variable, use of force was measured by "eight questions regarding the number of times over the past year the officer had used different levels of force" (425). Following this the respondents were asked to indicate what types of force they used (submission holds, pressure point controls, nightsticks, impact weapons, chemical agents and less-than-lethal bean bags. Here again, the respondent used a scale (0, 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7+), rather than the actual number of incidents. The survey collected two additional variables. Force level, represented whether an officer had a tendency to use stronger or weaker methods relative to other officers" (426). "Acceptance of use of force, was assessed by means of six questions regarding approval of use of force in general that might be regarded by members of the community as excessive" (426).

The survey instrument was distributed through the websites of the local branches of the New Jersey State Policeman’s Benevolent Association and the New Jersey Fraternal Order of Police. These organizations represent the labor interests of all officers within the target communities. To call the potential respondents’ attention to the survey these organizations sent their members an email with a link to the survey instrument. Respondents were allowed to self-select into the survey, chose not to answer specific questions, and end their participation at any time. Unfortunately, it was not possible to determine whether a respondent was a member of the target population or to prevent a respondent from responding multiple times. A total of 522 officers (31.2 percent of the target population) responded anonymously to the survey.

Chapman found,

"Among patrol officers only, education predicted less frequent force and lower levels of force use. Across all duties...younger officers used more force, but with age controlled, more experienced officers used more force. Those who reported greater use of force were less accepting of use of force in general" (421).

Questions
1. In general, what are the advantages and disadvantages of an Internet based survey instrument?
2. Within the context of this particular research, what are the advantages and disadvantages of an Internet based survey instrument?
3. Do the target communities in this study qualify as ‘minority communities’? Why or why not?
4. Given the nature of this particular subject matter (i.e. police use of force), is a self-report survey appropriate? Why or why not?
5. Would the findings from this study be generalizable to other policing populations? Why or why not?
6. To what extent would the level of measurement for the variables enhance or thwart the analysis of these data?

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