



INTRODUCTION TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH METHODS

An Applied Approach

FOURTH EDITION

GENNARO F. VITO | GEORGE E. HIGGINS

INTRODUCTION TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH METHODS

Fourth Edition

INTRODUCTION TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH METHODS

An Applied Approach

By

GENNARO F. VITO, PH.D.

Professor

Department of Criminal Justice

University of Louisville

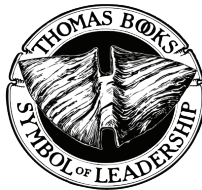
and

GEORGE E. HIGGINS, PH.D.

Professor

Department of Criminal Justice

University of Louisville



CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.

Published and Distributed Throughout the World by

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.
2600 South First Street
Springfield, Illinois 62704

This book is protected by copyright. No part of
it may be reproduced in any manner without written permission
from the publisher. All rights reserved.

© 2026 by CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.

ISBN 978-0-398-09503-1 (paper)
ISBN 978-0-398-09504-8 (ebook)

First Edition, 1988
Second Edition, 2009
Third Edition, 2014
Fourth Edition, 2026

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2026014544 (print)
2026014545 (ebook)

*With THOMAS BOOKS careful attention is given to all details of manufacturing
and design. It is the Publisher's desire to present books that are satisfactory as to their
physical qualities and artistic possibilities and appropriate for their particular use.
THOMAS BOOKS will be true to those laws of quality that assure a good name
and good will.*

Printed in the United States of America
LD-C-1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Vito, Gennaro F. author | Higgins, George E. author
Title: Introduction to criminal justice research methods : an
applied approach / Gennaro F Vito, George E Higgins.
Description: 4. | Springfield : Charles C Thomas, Publisher,
Ltd, 2026. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2026014544 (print) | LCCN 2026014545 (ebook)
| ISBN 9780398095031 paperback | ISBN 9780398095048 ebook
Subjects: LCSH: Criminal justice, Administration of-- Research-- Meth
odology | Criminology--Research--Methodology | Criminal justice,
Administration of--Statistical methods | Social sciences--Research
| Criminal justice, Administration of--Evaluation
Classification: LCC HV7419.5 .V58 2026 (print) | LCC HV7419.5 (ebook)
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2026014544>
LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2026014545>

PREFACE

I*ntroduction to Criminal Justice Research Methods: An Applied Approach* is a text designed to assist criminal justice students and practitioners in researching problems and issues facing the criminal justice system. It is based upon our collective experience as researchers and instructors in criminal justice research and policy analysis. We hope that our definitions and examples will help students and practitioners to both comprehend research articles and reports and to conduct their own research.

Both authors brought specific areas of expertise to this effort. We are familiar with the research process and have worked together on several published studies. The text is designed for persons with little or no research background and provides real-world examples and clear definitions of terms and concepts. The text focuses on policy and program analysis, with the hope that accurate information will improve and reform criminal justice operations.

G.F.V.
G.E.H

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Preface</i>	v
<i>Chapter</i>	
1. THE PURPOSE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH	3
Chapter Overview.....	3
The Purpose of Research	5
The Goals of Research.....	5
Basic Characteristics of the Scientific Method.....	8
Theory	8
Inductive and Deductive Reasoning.....	8
Problem Statements.....	9
Units of Analysis.....	10
Hypothesis Testing.....	11
Independent and Dependent Variables	11
Issues and Traditions in Criminal Justice Research	13
The Classical School	13
The Positivist School	14
The Social Process School.....	16
Criminology as an Applied Social Science	17
Example: The Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment....	18
Example: Hot Spot Policing.....	19
Example: Racial Profiling in Policing	21
Example: Racial Disparities in Capital Sentencing.....	23
Conclusion	25
Key Terms	25
Review Questions.....	26
References.....	27

2. LIBRARY RESEARCH AND LITERATURE REVIEWS.....	32
Chapter Overview.....	32
What Is Library Research?	33
Doing Library Research	33
Sources of Research Literature	33
How to Find Previous Research.....	40
Literature Reviews.....	43
Writing the Literature Review	46
Conclusion	49
Key Terms	49
Review Questions.....	49
3. ETHICAL ISSUES IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH.....	50
Chapter Overview.....	50
Ethics in Research.....	52
The Belmont Report	53
Addressing General Ethical Principles in Research	54
Anonymity.....	54
Confidentiality	55
Potential Harm to Subjects	56
Deceiving Subjects.....	57
Evaluating Ethical Principles in Research.....	60
Institutional Review Board	60
Informed Consent.....	61
How-to Steps in Creating an Informed Consent Form	62
Researcher Responsibility and Legal Issues.....	65
Previously Collected Data, Including Protected Data.....	66
Conclusion	69
Key Terms	70
Review Questions.....	70
References.....	72
4. MEASURING CRIME: THE VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF CRIME DATA SOURCES	74
Chapter Overview.....	74
Key Measurement Concepts	74
The Uniform Crime Reports (UCR).....	76
Index Crimes	76
Selected UCR Findings.....	77
Limitations of the Uniform Crime Reports	77
UCR Supplemental Homicide Report.....	81

Conclusions Concerning UCR	82
The National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)	83
The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)	85
Features of the NCVS	86
Selected NCVS Findings	88
Advantages of NCVS	89
Limitations of NCVS.....	89
Conclusions Concerning the NCVS	90
Self-Report Studies.....	90
Monitoring the Future: National Results on Adolescent Drug Use.....	91
Sexual Victimization in State and Federal Prisons Reported by Inmates, 2011–12.....	92
Advantages of Self-Report Studies.....	94
Limitations of Self-Report Studies	94
Triangulation.....	95
Conclusion	96
Key Terms.....	96
Review Questions.....	97
References.....	98
5. ELEMENTS OF RESEARCH DESIGN	101
Chapter Overview.....	101
Types of Research Design	101
The Classical Experiment.....	101
The Minnesota Comprehensive Reentry Plan (MCORP).....	105
Experiments on the Impact of Mandatory Arrest in Domestic Violence Cases	106
Problems in the Use of a Classical Experiment	108
The Quasi-Experimental Design.....	109
Other Types of Research Designs	110
Threats to Internal Validity.....	113
Threats to External Validity	116
Conclusion	119
Key Terms	119
Review Questions.....	120
References.....	120
6. PRINCIPLES OF SAMPLING	123
Chapter Overview	123

Overview of Sampling	123
Types of Samples.....	127
Probability Samples.....	127
Non-Probability Sampling	130
Sampling in Criminal Justice: Some Examples	132
Police Manager Perspectives.....	133
Criminal Victimization in the United States.....	133
Wardens' Perceptions of Inmate Fear of Sexual Assault.....	134
Guns and Crime	135
Conclusion	135
Key Terms	136
Review Questions.....	136
References.....	137
7. SCALING.....	139
Chapter Overview.....	139
Concepts in Scaling.....	140
Types of Scales.....	144
Likert Scales	145
Thurstone Scale	146
Guttman Scale.....	148
Potential Uses of Measurement Scales.....	149
Severity of Crime Scale.....	149
Positive Adjustment Scale	151
Creating a Measurement Scale	152
Example: Race, Homicide Severity, and Applications of the Death Penalty: A Consideration of the Barnett Scale.....	154
Example: Use of Risk Scales in Correctional Treatment.....	155
Conclusion	156
Key Terms	156
Review Questions.....	157
References.....	157
8. SURVEY RESEARCH	159
Chapter Overview.....	159
Introduction to Survey Research.....	159
Principle Types of Surveys.....	161
Self-Administered Questionnaires.....	161
Mail and Email Questionnaires	162
Internet Questionnaires	164
Conducting Survey Research.....	166
Questionnaire Construction	167

Pilot Study	169
Guidelines for Questions	169
Evaluating a Questionnaire	171
Conclusion	173
Key Terms	174
Review Questions.....	174
References.....	175
9. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: OBSERVATIONAL STUDIES.....	177
Chapter Overview.....	177
Basics of Qualitative Research.....	178
Participant Observation.....	181
Roles and Approaches to Data Collection	184
Complete Participant.....	185
Potential Participant.....	188
Participant as Observer	188
Observer as Participant.....	191
Complete Observer	192
How-To Steps for Determining Role	193
Selecting a Setting and Gaining Entree Into the Setting.....	196
Locating the Setting.....	196
Gaining Entry.....	197
Recording and Analyzing Data	198
Collecting the Data: What to Look For.....	198
Field Notes: Two Steps to Launch the Analysis	202
Raw Field Notes.....	203
Developed Field Notes.....	204
Analyzing the Data.....	205
Conclusion	207
Key Terms	207
Review Questions.....	208
References.....	208
10. QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS.....	209
Chapter Overview.....	209
Types of Interviews.....	211
Structured Interviews	211
A Structured Interview Guide: Prison Officers' Job	
Perceptions.....	212
Semi-Structured Interviews.....	213

A Semi-Structured Interview Guide: Prison Officers' Job	
Perceptions.....	214
Unstructured Interviews.....	214
Unstructured Interview Guide: Prison Officers' Job	
Perceptions.....	215
Elite Interviewing.....	216
Determining the Proper Form of Interviewing	216
Conducting Interviews.....	219
Transcribing.....	222
Data Analysis.....	222
Developing a Coding Scheme.....	223
Initial Coding of Transcripts.....	223
Collecting Similarly Coded Passages from Transcripts	225
Secondary Coding.....	225
Ordering the Concepts	225
Outlining Concepts	225
Writing the Final Report.....	226
Computerized Interview Coding and Analysis	226
Focus Group Interviews.....	227
Conducting a Focus Group Study.....	229
Conceptualization Phase.....	229
Interview Phase.....	230
Analysis and Reporting.....	232
Conclusion	233
Key Terms	234
Review Questions.....	234
References.....	235
11. EVALUATION RESEARCH IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE	236
Chapter Overview.....	236
The Purpose of Evaluation Research.....	237
Process Evaluation.....	238
Impact Evaluation.....	239
Logic Models.....	242
Performance Indicators	244
Recidivism	244
Justice	246
Measuring Police Performance	249
Red Light Cameras.....	252
Utilization-Focused Evaluation.....	252

Strategic Action Evaluations.....	254
Types of Evaluation Designs	255
Before and After Program Comparison.....	256
Time Trend Comparison Before and After Program Implementation	256
The Classical Experiment.....	256
Quasi-Experimental Designs	257
What Works in Crime Prevention.....	257
Problems and Issues in Evaluation Research.....	259
Conclusion	262
Key Terms	262
Review Questions.....	262
References.....	262
<i>Index</i>	267
<i>About the Authors</i>	271

INTRODUCTION TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH METHODS

Chapter 1

THE PURPOSE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This text is an introduction to research methods in criminal justice. Research is really about the generation of information that is both accurate and objective to guide decision-making. Without research, we have no knowledge about crime: What it is, where it happens, how it happens, and why it happens. Information either guides the development or determines the validity of theory (Criminology) and the effectiveness of crime policies and programs (Criminal Justice). Information guides how to combat crime and select the best possible approach. Research is also a way to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach considered. Without information, we have no guidance.

For example, one of the innovations in police management is known as Intelligence-Led Policing. The intelligence-led policing paradigm confirms that the police can use crime data and information to combat crime. Generated by crime analysis, intelligence can help the police deal with crimes that they can impact, especially street-level violence and order maintenance crimes. The targeting of serious offenders that Ratcliffe advocates has been done in several cities (Greensboro, NC; Cincinnati, OH) under violence reduction programs operating under the model pioneered by Professor David Kennedy in the Boston Gun Project. ILP demonstrates that the use of research information can lead to more effective policing.¹

In corrections, research has played a crucial role in shaping evidence-based practices. Latessa stressed that correctional programs are increasingly grounded in research findings.² This shift towards evidence-based approaches has not only improved the performance of rehabilitation programs but also held offenders and correctional staff accountable for their actions. It underscores the transformative power of research in the criminal justice system.

Evidence based practice (EBP) enhances decision-making by thinking critically about the best available evidence. In policing, this process is accomplished by (Barends, Rousseau, & Briner, 2014, p. 2):³

- **Asking:** Translating a crime problem into an answerable question.
- **Acquiring:** Systematically searching for valid evidence on the crime problem.
- **Appraising:** Critically assessing the quality and validity of the research evidence about the crime problem.
- **Aggregating:** Weighing the evidence to address the crime problem.
- **Applying:** Incorporating the evidence into the decision-making process.
- **Assessing:** Evaluating the effectiveness of the crime problem response utilized.

Evidence-based practice aims to improve the effectiveness of crime prevention policies and programs.

Researchers must consult multiple sources of information to obtain data for evidence-based practice. Specifically, the sources are (Barends, Rousseau, & Briner, 2014, p. 4):⁴

- **The Scientific Literature:** Findings from empirical studies published in criminological and criminal justice journals, reports, and books.
- **The Organization:** Crime data of all types is regularly collected by your department.
- **Practitioners:** Information based upon their professional experience and judgment of practitioners.
- **Stakeholders:** Members of the internal and external elements of the department – employees and citizens.

It is essential to use the best available evidence to ensure the quality of decision-making.

THE PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The detailed information generated by research is a management tool that has become a significant part of criminal justice operations. For example, problem-solving has become a key component of police operations at all levels of the organization — from the community and the street cop to the chief executive. Research informs the problem-solving function. Police managers must be able to assess agency performance (both individually and collectively), analyze and solve community problems, and judge the competency of programs designed to address them.⁵ It can guide decision-making in the following manner:

Research can provide useful and exciting insights into community problems and how police agencies operate. It can reveal potentially useful programs and strategies for dealing with problems. It can show which programs are successful and which are not. It can suggest new strategies to deal with old issues. It can provide information needed to improve existing programs. And it can inform the public and elected officials. In short, research is a tool for police managers who want to make rational, informed decisions.⁶

Police research is designed to provide information to answer specific questions and to inform police management decisions.⁷ In policing, research can guide management decisions to allocate resources to the department and the community. How should the department handle calls for service, routine patrol, crime investigation, and prevention, and engage in problem-solving? Efficient allocation of resources requires information.⁸

The Goals of Research

Research can be classified by purpose according to the project's aims. Thus, the research may involve exploration, description, explanation, and evaluation. The goal of **exploratory research** is to examine the forces at work in some new area of crime where little about the subject is known. This type of research can generate information that could lead to a more detailed analysis of the subject in the future. For example, identity theft is a new form of crime. It involves someone wrongfully obtaining and using another's data (your name, Social Security number, credit card number, bank account number,

telephone calling card number, or other identifying information) to commit fraud or deception for economic gain.⁹ Exploratory research on identity theft reveals that its costs are substantial. Estimates from 2023 indicate that consumers lost more than \$10 billion to fraud – an increase of 14 percent over reported losses in 2022.¹⁰ The victims of these crimes are not only faced with financial losses. They must also contend with losing identity and restoring their good financial name in terms of their credit rating. Exploratory research on identity theft has led to further analysis. In 2021, about 23.9 million U.S. residents aged 16 or older (9% of the population) were victims of identity theft.¹¹ About 1 in 5 persons had experienced identity theft in their lifetime.¹²

Descriptive research answers three basic questions:¹³

1. How big is the problem?
2. Whom does the problem affect?
3. What causes the problem?

Descriptive research aims to detail situations and events that are somewhat new and unique. It attempts to uncover facts and describe reality. For example, consider the research findings on the drug fentanyl. Fentanyl is a potent synthetic opioid drug used for pain relief and as an anesthetic. It is approximately 100 times more powerful than morphine and 50 times more potent than heroin.¹⁴ Fentanyl use produces effects such as relaxation, euphoria, pain relief, sedation, confusion, drowsiness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, urinary retention, pupillary constriction, and respiratory depression. Fentanyl overdose may result in stupor, changes in pupillary size, cold and clammy skin, cyanosis, coma, and respiratory failure leading to death.¹⁵ From 2011 to 2012, the use of synthetic opioids (like fentanyl) led to approximately 2600 overdose deaths each year. By 2021, the number of these overdose deaths climbed dramatically to over 68,000.¹⁶

Explanatory research involves the determination of how or why an event has occurred. Typically, it consists of the search for the causes of crime by examining the relationship between variables. This type of research can be applied from a problem-solving perspective. For example, street-level prostitution creates an environment where other crimes can flourish – the sale of illegal drugs, the generation of profits for organized crime groups, and bringing strangers in contact with

offenders who are primed to commit robbery. Only when the sources of a problem are determined can a response to it be developed. For example, police crackdowns on street-level prostitution can thus involve¹⁷

1. Enforcing laws prohibiting soliciting, patronizing, and loitering for prostitution.
2. Enhancing fines/penalties for prostitution-related offenses committed within a specified high-activity zone.
3. Banning prostitutes or clients from geographic areas.
4. Encouraging community members to protest prostitutes and clients publicly.
5. Identifying and targeting the worst offenders.

In this fashion, explanatory research can examine a problem and generate approaches to it. Valid information can guide criminal justice operations.

Evaluation research is concerned with the application of research knowledge. It is a specialized form of research that aims to determine the effectiveness of a policy or program. This subject is covered in detail in Chapter Eleven. For example, the Lifer's Program at a state prison in Rahway, New Jersey (the famous "Scared Straight" documentary) was one of several programs designed around organized prison visits by at-risk juveniles. The aim was to deter them from further involvement in delinquency. Petrosino and his colleagues conducted a detailed review of studies (experimental designs conducted over 25 years in eight different jurisdictions and involving nearly 1,000 participants) to determine the effectiveness of these programs. They found that, rather than aiding their juvenile subjects, the programs were likely to be more harmful than doing nothing.¹⁸ Evaluation research examines the track record of criminal justice interventions so that good programs proliferate and poor ones do not.

Research methodology involves using the proper plans and tools to produce accurate information. We will provide an overview of the essential tools available to conduct and comprehend research reports. Students must be able to conduct research and comprehend the worth of research reports. The criminal justice professional must be able to understand and implement policy based on valid information. Students must be able to read and comprehend research reports and make reasoned judgments about the conclusions.

Introduction to Criminal Justice Research Methods: An Applied Approach - Fourth Edition is a text designed to assist criminal justice students studying criminal justice, criminology, and public policy, and leaders and practitioners to: better understand research practices and how research is conducted; analyze how research findings may impact their work, including external policies and systems; conduct their own research on problems and issues facing the criminal justice system; use their research findings to have conversations with employees and the public; and engage in identifying, implementing, and progress monitoring evidence-based research solutions based on their findings to continuously improve leadership and practitioner practices, organizational processes, policies, systems, and services. The content of this newest edition is broadened and continues to be designed for individuals with little or no research background in an attempt to better understand and improve criminal justice practices, policies, and operations. To that end, this edition includes: clear definitions of terms and concepts; real-world examples and analysis of policies and programs; real-world examples and implementation of evidence-based research findings; and "how-to" steps for conducting research and discussing findings. It will help students, practitioners, and leaders comprehend research articles and reports, conduct their own research, utilize their research findings to have conversations about improving their practices, processes, and policies, and identify and implement evidence-based research solutions.

