

## 2.4: Self-Report Statistics

**Self-report statistics** are stats that are reported by individuals. Self-report statistics get gathered when people are asked to report the number of times they may have committed a particular crime during a set period in the past, regardless of getting caught or not. For example, in-class students take a criminal activity checklist and report behaviors they have engaged in at some point in their lives. People should be honest since the data has no identifying information collected, and report even if no one ever found out what we find during class time it that all the students, for over eight years of teaching, have committed a crime. However, the amount of students that have to get caught is minimal, especially those that received formal sanctioning from the CJ system (funneling of crime).

Monitoring the Future is an ongoing study of the behaviors, attitudes, and values of American secondary school students, college students, and young adults. Each year, a total of approximately 50,000 8th, 10th, and 12th-grade students get surveyed (12th graders since 1975, and eighth and 10th graders since 1991). Besides, annual follow-up questionnaires are mailed to a sample of each graduating class for some years after their initial participation. The Monitoring the Future Study has been funded under a series of investigator-initiated competing research grants from the **National Institute on Drug Abuse**, a part of the **National Institutes of Health**. MTF is conducted at the **Survey Research Center** in the **Institute for Social Research** at the **University of Michigan**.

### Monitoring the Future Drug Use Amongst Teens

How do we get estimates on drug use amongst teens if most of them do not get caught? We rely on reports like the one above from the MTF. Monitoring the Future (MTF) is a long-term study of substance use among U.S. adolescents, college students, and adult high school graduates through age 60. The survey is conducted annually, which allows us to examine long term trends. MTF findings identify emerging substance use problems, track substance use trends, and inform national policy and intervention strategies. Respondents are confidential, which means we cannot link their answers to them. Therefore, people may be more likely, to tell the truth. <sup>[1]</sup>

### In the Report: One Form of Drug Use Showed a Sharp Increase in Use in 2018

The most important findings to emerge from the 2018 survey is the dramatic increase in vaping by adolescents. Vaping is a relatively new phenomenon, so we are still developing measures related to this behavior, which included asking separately for the first time in 2017 about the vaping of three specific substances—nicotine, marijuana, and just flavoring. As the section on vaping in this monograph shows, there was a significant and substantial increase in 2018 in the vaping of all three of these substances, including some of the most substantial absolute increases MTF has ever tracked for any substance. Given that nicotine is involved in most vaping, and given that nicotine is a highly addictive substance, this presents a severe threat. <sup>[2]</sup>

Self-report statistics are great because they can help discover problems we were unaware of, such as vaping. Further, it helps us identify victimless crimes, or crimes to where there is no victim such as drug use, gambling, and underage drinking. Lastly, we uncover offenses that are not as serious such as shoplifting, which is less likely to be known to police. <sup>[3]</sup>

However, self-report data also has its limitations. Respondents may exaggerate or underreport their criminal behavior, for various reasons. For example, in the class activity, we do many students did not know what they did was illegal behavior until the statute was read, so they would never have thought they committed a crime. Lastly, if we do not capture a large sample, we may limit who gets the survey. If we are surveying kids in school about substance abuse, but not reaching out to all kids even if they get suspended, we may miss important data. <sup>[4]</sup>

### Which Data Should We Use?

In each type of data (official, self-report, and victimization) there are pros and cons. Additionally, each source is more likely to produce a better picture of what is occurring depending on the area of study. If a person wanted to get the best statistics on reported homicides in the US, which source would be best? How about domestic violence? What if we were interested in finding out drug abuse rates amongst teens in high school?

1. Johnston, L.D., Miech, R.A., O'Malley, P.M., Bachman, J.D., Schulenberg, J.E., & Patrick, M.E. (2018). *MTF. 2018 Overview Key Findings on Adolescent Drug Use*↗

2. ohnston, L.D., Miech, R.A., O'Malley, P.M., Bachman, J.D., Schulenberg, J.E., & Patrick, M.E. (2018). *MTF. 2018 Overview Key Findings on Adolescent Drug Use*↗
3. Hindelang, Hirschi, & Weis, (1981). *Measuring delinquency*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Pubs. ↗
4. Lab, S., Holcomb, J., & King, W. (2013). *Criminal justice: The Essentials*. Oxford University Press: Oxford. ↗

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