



Pergamon

Journal of Criminal Justice 28 (2000) 283–295

**JOURNAL  
OF CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE**

## A test-retest reliability assessment of the international self-report delinquency instrument

Sheldon Zhang<sup>a,\*</sup>, Theodore Benson<sup>b</sup>, Xiaogang Deng<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Department of Sociology, California State University—San Marcos, 333 South Oaks Twin Valley Road, San Marcos, CA 92096, USA*

<sup>b</sup>*Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, Chapman University, Palm Desert, CA 92211, USA*

<sup>c</sup>*Department of Sociology, University of Massachusetts—Boston, Boston, MA 02520, USA*

### Abstract

This article reports the findings from a self-administered test-retest study of the International Self-Report Delinquency (ISRD) instrument, which was developed by criminologists from fifteen Western countries a decade ago and has been widely used since. Despite its popularity, a recent Dutch study challenged its over-time reliability. This study found that the instrument, when self-administered among college students in Boston and San Diego ( $N = 147$ ), produced consistent results. The consistency between Time One and Time Two in response to the prevalence question (i.e., “Have you ever . . . ?”) in all recorded offenses ranged from a high of 100 percent to a low of 85 percent. The observed variations (i.e., a *yes* answer at Time One and *no* at Time Two, or vice-versa) in most cases were found to be insignificant. Alcohol and drug questions had the highest reliability over time. Limitations and implications of the findings and suggestions for future research were discussed. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved

### Introduction

Cross-national studies on crime and delinquency are steadily increasing, and for many good reasons. By comparing the extent, nature, and development of crime and criminality in industrialized countries, policymakers can acquire more insight into how differences in criminal involvement are related to different social and cultural contexts, and learn about policies that are successful in one country but ineffective in another. The Council of Europe is such an example, where researchers and policymakers from more than twenty-five countries meet to compare research results and to evaluate different policy measures (Junger-Tas, 1994).

Cross-national studies are difficult to conduct due to a lack of uniform definitions of criminal acts, common instruments, or common methodologies (Junger-Tas, Klein, & Zhang, 1991). Countries differ not only in ways they organize police forces and courts and the way

they define legal categories, but also in ways police and judicial statistics are collected and presented (Vetere & Newman, 1977). Many efforts to create uniformity, including those sponsored by the United Nations, have run into major problems (Pease & Hukkila, 1990). Despite these obstacles, there have been many studies comparing official statistics (Lynch, 1995).

In contrast, cross-national studies based on self-report data have been rare, in spite of the many strengths of this data-gathering method. In the past decade or so, researchers from many western countries have made significant efforts to overcome definitional, methodological, as well as logistical difficulties to engage in cross-national studies on crime and delinquency. The development of the International Self-Report Delinquency (ISRD) instrument and its subsequent adoption by researchers in many Western countries, represent a major methodological advance in the application of the self-report method.

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: 760-750-4162; fax: 760-750-3551.

E-mail address: xzhang@csusm.edu (S. Zhang).

This present study evaluated this widely adopted self-report instrument and examined some of the basic issues about the methodology itself, which is most often taken for granted in day-to-day research activities. This article seeks to contribute to the discussion of how self-report data on crime and delinquency is gathered and analyzed, and whether the method can be employed reliably to uncover delinquency involvement among youths in cross-national studies.

### Background

During a 1988 NATO workshop in the Netherlands, the idea of developing a large-scale International Self-Report Delinquency (ISRD) instrument was proposed in response to the need to gather and compare self-report data on crime and social reactions in different countries (Klein, 1989; Klein & Zhang, 1991). At the NATO workshop, researchers from fifteen industrialized nations worked intensively to resolve many technical and policy-relevant issues of developing a suitable cross-national instrument that would avoid the many problems of using data of widely different content and quality from official(1) to examine the feasibility of conducting cross-national self-report delinquency research using a standardized questionnaire, (2) to explore cross-national variability in patterns and correlates of self-reported delinquent behavior, (3) to measure the relative rank-ordering of prevalence of different types of youthful misbehavior in industrialized countries, and (4) to contribute to methodological development of the self-report method.

The ISRD instrument was born out of compromises among the participants of the workshop, especially between U.S. participants and the European ones (Junger-Tas, 1994). Certain acts are considered illegal in the U.S. because of different social contexts, but not so in Europe (such as alcohol use and purchase) or are not prosecuted (such as marijuana) (Junger-Tas et al., 1994). After several workshops and pilot studies, the ISRD project expanded to include more researchers who conducted surveys using the instrument in 1990, 1991, and 1992 in the Netherlands, Germany, Finland, Italy, Switzerland, North Ireland, England and Wales, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Belgium, New Zealand, and the United States. In their cross-national comparison of ISRD studies, Junger-Tas, Klein, and Zhang (1991) found that “the core ISRD worked well, even in different countries with very different populations: schools (Italy), institutionalized youths (California), fairly delinquent members of a youth club (Nebraska), and random samples of 14–21-year olds (Netherlands and Germany)” (p. 86).

The results from these studies were published in *Delinquent Behavior Among Young People in the Western World* (Junger-Tas et al., 1994). This was the first major attempt to collect comparable data on youth crime in Western countries based on the “most carefully devised instrument yet available, the form developed for and used in the National Youth Survey in the United States” (Klein, 1994, p. 383).<sup>1</sup> The findings revealed three general patterns: (1) there was a great deal of similarity in rates of delinquent behavior in the countries that participated in the ISRD survey, and in the nature of the offenses that were most frequently committed; (2) self-report measures were fairly robust; and (3) social bonding variables (e.g., attachment to parents and school) appeared to be consistent correlates of self-reported delinquency (Junger-Tas et al., 1994, p. 378–379).

### Structure of the ISRD instrument

The instrument contains a set of core questions, essentially covering five domains: (1) prevalence and frequency of delinquent behavior, (2) circumstances of the act, (3) social reactions to delinquency, (4) social background variables, and (5) theoretical variables. Such a design allows instrument adopters the flexibility of adding other measures important to their regional issues (Junger-Tas et al., 1994, p. 8).

There are a total of forty-four delinquency measures grouped in five categories. The first group contains questions on problem behaviors (i.e., status offenses and minor infractions); the second group pertains to vandalism; the third contains various kinds of theft behaviors; the fourth asks questions about violent and aggressive behavior; and the fifth group contains questions on alcohol and drug use. A set of filtering questions is put forth before the details of specific delinquent acts are probed, as shown in Table 1.

Following the filtering questions, more specific questions are prompted to gather information on the frequency of the acts, the most recent act, and its circumstances, as shown in Table 2.

### Validity and reliability of self-report measures

Official statistics are often thought to reflect police activities and therefore tend to underestimate the “true” level of crime. Even when serious crimes are involved (such as armed robbery, burglary, and auto theft) chances of ever being detected are still slim, about 2 out of every 10 violations (see discussions in Empey & Stafford, 1991, p. 101; Erickson & Empey, 1963, p. 462; Williams & Gold, 1972, p. 219). Since the early 1970s, the self-report method has increasingly been used both in the United States and abroad

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات