

Calling the Police: Theoretical Insights and Practical Implications

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BMC [Crime Science](#) is calling for submissions to our Collection on *Calling the Police: Theoretical Insights and Practical Implications*.

Police-recorded crime statistics are significantly influenced by low reporting rates and inconsistent recording practices, creating a 'dark figure of crime.' Understanding whether how, and why individuals contact the police after experiencing or witnessing a crime is crucial for accurately quantifying crime, minimizing harm, and designing effective crime prevention strategies.

This special issue will comprise a set of articles advancing theoretical explanations of crime reporting behavior and studying the practical implications of under-reporting for the criminal justice system.

About the collection

Police-recorded crime statistics are substantially affected by low crime reporting rates and inconsistent crime recording practices. The volume of crime data that is missing from police records is often referred to as the 'dark figure of crime' (Biderman & Reiss, 1967; Skogan, 1977).

Understanding whether, how, and why people contact the police when they experience or witness a crime is not only crucial for better quantifying the volume and distribution of crime in society (Pina-Sánchez et al., 2022,

2023), but also for minimizing the harms associated with individual experiences with crime and designing evidence-oriented approaches for crime prevention. Citizens' decision to call the police shapes our understanding of the volume, distribution, and nature of crime, indirectly affecting data-driven criminal justice interventions for crime prevention (Skogan, 1984). Crime reporting and victims' help-seeking behavior have been subjects of research for decades (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1988; Greenberg & Ruback, 1992; Hindelang & Gottfredson, 1976), yet there is still limited evidence about what drives victims' and witnesses' reporting, the spatial and temporal variation in crime reporting, and the effects of under-reporting on crime prevention and criminal policy. This special issue will comprise a set of articles advancing theoretical explanations of crime reporting behavior and studying the practical implications of under-reporting for the criminal justice system.

Criminological research, as well as psychological, sociological, and economic scientific inquiry, have amassed evidence on the individual, social, and situational factors that influence victims' decisions to contact the police and support police investigations (Xie & Baumer, 2019). The effects of sex, age, race, education level, marital status, income, and social class on crime reporting behavior have been extensively studied in Global North countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands (Baumer & Lauritsen, 2010; Goudriaan et al., 2006; Tarling & Morris, 2010). Research gaps are apparent in the Global South (Mbewu et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2007), and there is limited research on crime reporting by Indigenous and First Nations communities. Beyond individual factors, researchers have explored social support factors and investigated whether victims with stronger ties to family and community are more or less likely to seek criminal justice interventions in cases of victimization (Black, 1976; Ruback et al., 1984). For instance, Baumer (2002) found that lower- and upper-class communities in the United States, as opposed to middle-class neighborhoods, often lack informal social bonds to cope with victimization without resorting to criminal justice responses. Additionally, open access survey data available in Global North countries have facilitated research into incident-level factors influencing victims' and witnesses' responses to crime, including crime type, offense seriousness, characteristics of the offender(s), victim-suspect relationship, and the time and place of occurrence (Asiama & Zhong, 2022; Hart & Rennison, 2003). While recent

research has shed light on geographic (Buil-Gil et al., 2021) and temporal (Xie et al., 2023) variations in crime reporting, criminological inquiry necessitates evidence on the impact of large-scale social events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the George Floyd protests, on attitudes toward contacting the police.

Qualitative inquiry into the reasons for contacting or not contacting the police is limited. Survey data indicate that many victims choose not to call the police due to a perceived ineffectiveness of police forces (e.g., believing the police would be unable to take action), a limited impact of victimization on their lives, or the time required to engage with the police, file a report, and support an investigation (Office for National Statistics, 2019; Torrente et al., 2016). Limited research exists on the effect of confidence in policing on crime reporting across communities and ethnic groups, especially among marginalized populations. Furthermore, little empirical research has investigated the effect of online police reporting portals or automated robot call centers on crime reporting attitudes and behaviors.

All these factors form the basis for integrated theoretical perspectives on crime reporting. For some, crime reporting is seen as a rational decision-making process in which those who experience or witness a crime weigh the anticipated benefits (e.g., self-protection, property recovery, justice retribution) against the costs (e.g., time and resources required, fear of retaliation) before deciding whether to report it to the police (Asiama & Zhong, 2022; Skogan, 1984). Others argue that explanations of crime reporting based solely on rational choice models oversimplify the issue and fail to acknowledge that victims may not always assess the full extent of benefits and costs associated with reporting or have sufficient information about the criminal justice system (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1988). Crime reporting decisions may be influenced by emotional and motivational states tied to the sense of loss and fear experienced during the crime (Greenberg & Ruback, 1992) and may be influenced by prior experiences with the criminal justice system (Goudriaan et al., 2006). Recently, multilevel explanatory models have been proposed to encompass the diverse factors influencing crime reporting and help-seeking decisions (Xie and Baumer, 2019).

Advancing the understanding of factors influencing crime reporting and developing theoretical perspectives to explain victims' help-seeking and interactions with the police are essential for estimating the volume, distribution, and nature of the 'dark figure of crime.' This understanding could potentially lead to estimates of crime with improved reliability and accuracy. Methodological studies focusing on the measurement properties of police records and using information about crime reporting behavior to mitigate measurement errors in police data have increased in recent years (Pina-Sánchez et al., 2023; Riascos Villegas et al., 2023). Less evidence is available on how police forces manage and utilize call-for-service data (Klinger and Bridges, 1997). Additionally, research is needed on specific measures that the criminal justice system and public administrations can implement to enhance crime reporting, particularly impact evaluations of policing programs on calls for police services.

This Collection will feature articles that advance theoretical explanations of crime reporting and help-seeking behavior, while also examining the implications of under-reporting for practices and interventions within the criminal justice system. We welcome a variety of contributions, encompassing conceptual, theoretical, and empirical articles. These articles can draw from both primary and secondary data, utilizing quantitative and qualitative methodologies. We are particularly eager to receive submissions that focus on marginalized groups and communities, as well as case studies from Global South countries.

The following topics are suggestions for consideration within this special issue, although they are by no means exhaustive:

- Individual, Social, and Situational Predictors of Calls for Services: Explore the factors that influence individuals' decision to contact the police.
- Theoretical Perspectives on Crime Reporting Behavior: Present, discuss and test different theoretical frameworks that explain why people choose to report or not report crimes.
- Spatial and Temporal Variation in Crime Reporting: Investigate how crime reporting patterns vary across different geographic locations and over time.

- **Willingness to Cooperate with Police Investigations:** Examine the willingness of individuals to actively participate and cooperate with police investigations.
- **Witness and Third-Party Reporting:** Analyze the dynamics of crime reporting when individuals are reporting crimes they have witnessed or when third parties are involved.
- **Effects of Under-Reporting on Criminal Justice Systems and Practices:** Study the impact of under-reporting on the functioning of criminal justice systems and the subsequent implications for policies and practices.
- **Policing Approaches to Enhance Crime Reporting:** Evaluate strategies employed by law enforcement agencies to encourage and improve crime reporting from the community.
- **Methodological Considerations in Crime Reporting Studies:** Provide insights into methodological aspects of research related to crime reporting, discussing challenges, and proposing best practices.

By welcoming diverse perspectives and methodologies, we aim to create a special issue that fosters a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of crime reporting behavior. Our intention is to contribute to the advancement of scholarship in this field while addressing practical implications for criminal justice systems. We encourage authors to submit their work for this special issue, with a special emphasis on shedding light on often overlooked topics, marginalized populations, and regions less explored in the existing literature.

Submission Guidelines

This collection welcome a variety of contributions, encompassing conceptual, theoretical, and empirical articles.

Before submitting your manuscript, please ensure you have read our [submission guidelines](#). Articles for this Collection should be submitted via our [submission system](#). During the submission process, under the section additional information, you will be asked whether you are submitting to a Collection, please select "Calling the Police: Theoretical Insights and Practical Implications" from the dropdown menu.

Articles will undergo the journal's [peer-review process](#) and are subject to all of the journal's [policies](#). Articles will be added to the Collection as they are published.

The Editors have no competing interests with the submissions which they handle through the peer review process. The peer review of any submissions for which the Editors have competing interests is handled by another Editorial Board Member who has no competing interests.

Meet the Guest Editors

David Buil-Gil: PhD, The University of Manchester, United Kingdom



David Buil-Gil is a Senior Lecturer in Quantitative Criminology at The University of Manchester, and Academic Lead for Digital Technologies and Crime at the Manchester Centre for Digital Trust and Society. His research areas cover crime measurement, victimisation surveys, geographic criminology, quantitative research methods, and open science. He is the Managing Moderator of *CrimRxiv* – the Global Open Access Hub for Criminology, and co-Chair of the European Network for Open Criminology.

Dr. Buil-Gil's research has been published in the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, *The British Journal of Criminology*, *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, *Crime & Delinquency*, *Crime Science*, *European Journal of Criminology* and various other international journals. His research has been awarded by the Early Career Researcher Award 2021 of the Office for National Statistics, the Quantification and Cyber Risk Award 2022 of the Research Institute for Sociotechnical Cyber Security, the University of Manchester's President's Doctoral Scholar Award 2020, and the Archimedes University Research Contest 2015 of the Spanish Ministry of Education. In 2023, David Buil-Gil and Prof. Laura Huey co-edited 'The Crime Data Handbook', which will be published by Bristol University Press in 2024.

Laura Huey: PhD, University of Western Ontario, Canada



Laura Huey is Professor of Sociology at the University of Western Ontario, the Editor of *Police Practice and Research* and a member of the College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists of the Royal Society of Canada. She currently sits on the Council of Canadian Academies' Expert Panel on Cybercrime, the Royal Society of Canada's Covid 19 Taskforce, and is a Senior Research Fellow at the U.S. National Police Foundation. She is also the founder and former Director of the Canadian Society of Evidence Based Policing (CAN-SEBP) and has engaged in consultative work for the Canadian federal government, provincial police organizations and other groups.

Dr. Huey's work in the field of crime and security is primarily focused on policing (frontline and criminal investigation), victimization, terrorism and cyber-security. Her research has appeared in the *British Journal of Sociology*, *The British Journal of Criminology*, *Sociological Review*, *Society & Mental Health*, *Theoretical Criminology*, *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* and various other international journals. She is also an International Advisory Editor for *Theoretical Criminology* and on the editorial advisory boards of *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, the *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice* and *Surveillance & Society*.