

How Government Distorts Statistics

Justice Policy Journal, Spring 2016, "Bad Data: How government agencies distort statistics on sex-crime recidivism", Alissa R. Ackerman and Marshall Burns,
http://www.cjcj.org/uploads/cjcj/documents/jpj_bad_data.pdf

Ackerman and Burns looked at 287 studies of sexual recidivism rates and selected seven that exhibited "the most egregious misinformation and that have been the most influential in shaping governmental policy."

Page 18: "Each report analyzed for this study found recidivism rates for individuals convicted of sex crimes to be quite low, but reported the statistics in ways that conveyed the opposite impression...It appears that data analysts at the BJS (*Bureau of Justice Statistics*) and California *Department of Justice* 'knew' in advance that individuals convicted of sex crimes had high rates of recidivism and therefore found it necessary to adjust their reports to fit that 'knowledge'."

Ackerman and Burns look at the various studies done by the BJS and other governmental agencies, showing how the statistics were distorted to try to show that the sexual recidivism rates for released inmates with a sex offense were alarmingly high when in fact they were quite low, falling well below 10% in the represented studies. One way the government studies distorted the data was by including technical violations as new sex offenses.

An example of the above-mentioned distortions: In 2010, the state of California found an average rate of 64.6% recidivism rate for people imprisoned for sex crimes after the first three years of release from prison. The new sex crime re-offense rate was actually 3.2% with a new non-sex offense rate of 5.7% and parole violation rate of 55.6%. These three percentages total out to 64.5% which was used in the California report, when, in fact, the new sex crime re-offense rate was only 3.2%. (See page 14 in the report.)

"The misinformation issued by U.S. lawmakers goes beyond what is found in government reports. Sometimes they just make things up out of nowhere," causing devastating results for the hundreds of thousands of people on the Sex Offense Registry who are not sexually re-offending. (See pages 19-20 in the report.)

Unfortunately, there are many people in our country who believe every government report and everything that comes out of the mouths of political leaders within the political party of their choice. Coupled with this is the fact that science and research are not valued by many of our citizens, making it difficult for validated facts to prevail.