

COMMUNITY COUNTS FOR CRIME PREVENTION PROJECT:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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INTRODUCTION

Community Counts for Crime Prevention is a joint project of the Nova Scotia Departments of Justice and Finance and financially supported by the National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC). Nova Scotia's Crime Prevention Strategy is led by the Department of Justice. Nova Scotia Community Counts is a statistical information system for and about Nova Scotia's communities maintained by the Department of Finance. Together they provide the foundation for the community crime prevention profiles developed for this project.

The community crime prevention profiles are a tool to aid communities in understanding crime (or lack of crime) in their local area. They also provide information about the risk factors for crime. This tool can help communities paint a portrait of their local area and can be used to plan programs as well as provide benchmark statistics against which progress can be measured. This information will contribute to informing efforts to prevent crime in local communities. Many factors associated with crime are beyond the purview of this tool due to the complexity of the nature of crime and its root causes. It should not be used as the sole source of information for developing intervention or prevention programs.

OVERVIEW

The following material provides the policy context for the Community Counts for Crime Prevention Project; the relationship of risk (and protective factors) to crime; and, a brief description of several key aspects of the community crime prevention profiles developed for this project.

POLICY CONTEXT

NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION STRATEGY

The National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) of the Canadian Federal Government was created to reduce crime and victimization by targeting 'root causes' of crime in communities across the country. The focus of the strategy is to 'tackle crime in order to build stronger, healthier communities.'¹ One of the primary areas of focus of the strategy is crime prevention through social development.²

¹National Crime Prevention Strategy Web site. See references for Web site address.

² Accountability, Risk and Audit Framework for the Renewal of the National Crime Prevention Strategy, p 5.

NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION CENTRE

The federal agency assigned the responsibility of overseeing the strategy is the National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC). The mission of the NCPC is to:

“..provide national leadership on effective and cost-efficient ways to prevent and reduce crime by addressing known risk factors in high-risk populations and places.

The NCPC concentrates on two core activities: supporting targeted interventions and building and sharing practical knowledge.”³

The NCPC works in partnership with provincial governments to identify opportunities for providing funding which will assist them in carrying out their mission and increasing the safety of Canadians. The NCPC provided funding for the development of the community crime prevention profiles in Nova Scotia.

CRIME PREVENTION IN NOVA SCOTIA

Crime prevention in Nova Scotia is organized according to several distinct areas including: enforcement, programming and policy analysis. Each of these activities are intertwined and support the objective of reducing crime and victimization.

Enforcement activities include the work carried out to ensure that law-breaking is deterred and individuals who violate the law are held accountable. Typically prosecutors, police and probation officers are associated with an enforcement function.

Programming activities include work carried out to either prevent crime by providing at-risk individuals with the supports they need to prevent offending or work carried out with those who have offended to prevent such action in the future. Typically social workers, psychologists, community outreach, youth workers and recreational workers are associated with the programming function.

Policy analysis work is carried out to ensure that accurate information is available relating to types and level of crime in specific areas and in identifying risk factors which may be related to crime. Evaluation and research can help identify best practices, facilitate information sharing and assist in developing effective solutions for dealing with crime. Typically researchers, program evaluators and policy analysts are associated with the policy analysis function.

³The National Crime Prevention Centre: A Blueprint for Effective Crime Reduction. See references for Web site address.

The community crime profiles supports enforcement, programming and policy analysis work by providing relevant statistical information which can be used by stakeholders in identifying areas where the crime problem appears to be significant and what risk factors may be contributing to this problem.

By providing information relating to crime and risk factors, a ‘crime prevention through social development’ perspective is fostered. For this perspective, crime is situated in the broader context of other challenges which are facing a community such as high unemployment, low levels of education and low income levels. Community agencies are seen as partners in helping to better understand the nature of the crime problem in an area, how various risk factors may be contributing to the problem and identifying potential solutions which can be implemented and evaluated.

The need for statistical information to help diagnose the level of a crime problem and provide a yardstick by which progress can be assessed is critical to engaging communities and developing effective solutions. This is one of the principal reasons why the community crime prevention profiles have been developed.

RISK FACTORS

The Community Counts for Crime Prevention Project focuses on presenting data relating to risk factors associated with communities being ‘at-risk’ for higher rates of crime. Public Safety Canada defines risk factors as ‘...negative influences in the lives of individuals or a community. These may increase the presence of crime, victimization or fear of crime in a community and may also increase the likelihood that individuals engage in crime or become victims.’⁴ The Community Counts for Crime Prevention Project draws on studies conducted by Statistics Canada which examined characteristics of neighbourhoods linked to higher crime rates. The Statistics Canada studies used data for neighbourhoods in a number of Canadian cities including: Halifax, Montreal, Thunder Bay, Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon and Edmonton.⁵ Funding for these projects was provided by the National Crime Prevention Centre, the same agency which provided funding to the Community Counts for Crime Prevention Project.

In the Statistics Canada analysis, three different categories of risk factors were employed: demographic factors; socio-economic factors; and, dwelling and land use factors. Several

different analytical techniques were also used in determining the association between the

⁴This definition of risk factors is taken from the Public Safety Canada Web site at http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/risk-factors-eng.aspx#rap_factor.

⁵See the 2008 report by Josee Savoie of Statistics Canada titled *Analysis of the Spatial Distribution of Crime in Canada. Summary of Major Trends*. Table 1 on page 10 provides a convenient summary of the factors. This report provides a summary of the results of a number of studies done by Statistics Canada.

different variables including: visual depiction of the data using maps, correlation analysis and regression analysis. A listing of the categories and the indicators employed in the Statistics Canada studies is provided in Table 1. These risk factors are the source for those selected for the present project.⁶

| TABLE 1 - EXAMPLES OF RISK FACTORS |
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| <i>Demographic factors</i> - male/female ratio, proportion of people younger than 25, proportion of young men aged 15 to 24, proportion of single people, proportion of lone-parent families, proportion of people living alone, proportion of people having moved in the previous year, proportion of aboriginal people, proportion of visible minorities, proportion of immigrants. |
| <i>Socio-economic factors</i> - unemployment rate, proportion of the population aged 20 years and older without a high school diploma, proportion of the population aged 20 years and older with a university diploma, occupation, median household income, proportion of total income represented by government transfers, proportion of population in low-income households, proportion of households spending more than 30% on shelter. |
| <i>Dwelling and land-use factors</i> - bar density, proportion of dwellings in need of major repair, proportion of buildings built before 1981, proportion of owner-occupied dwellings, multiple family residential zoning, commercial zoning, single-family residential zoning. |

It should be noted that there are several key differences between the Community Counts for Crime Prevention Project and the work done by Statistics Canada. The Statistics Canada studies use a sophisticated multi-variate analysis to assess the relative impact of one factor while controlling for the effects of others. In contrast, the Community Counts for Crime Prevention Project provides descriptive data relating to the community in which the crime is occurring. The result is a descriptive profile which helps stakeholders get a sense of the extent to which specific risk factors are present in communities where higher levels of crime exist. Also, the Community Counts for Crime Prevention Project uses a subset of the factors employed in the Statistics Canada studies.

In addition to risk factors, there is sometimes reference to the concept of 'protective factors' in the research literature relating to criminal behaviour. Public Safety Canada's definition of protective factors are '...positive influences that can improve the lives of individuals or the safety of a community. These may decrease the likelihood that individuals engage in crime or become victims. Building on existing protective factors makes individuals and communities stronger and better able to counteract risk factors.'⁷ Many of the research studies which examine risk and

⁶It should be noted that the Statistics Canada studies deals only with risk factors related to crime rates. The study does not identify protective factors associated with reduced levels of crime.

⁷This definition of risk factors is taken from the Public Safety Canada Web site at http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/risk-factors-eng.aspx#rap_factor.

protective factors have related to young offenders and derive from psychological research on variables associated with offending and/or re-offending. In contrast, the Statistics Canada studies tend to derive from a sociological perspective and look at community-level characteristics associated with higher rates of crime. In the Statistics Canada studies and the Community Counts for Crime Prevention Project, only risk factors at the community level are examined, not protective factors.

The relationship between risk and protective factors can be somewhat complex. For those readers who are interested in a more in-depth discussion, they should refer to the 2001 report by the Office of the Surgeon General titled *Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General*. The reader should refer to Chapter 4 of this document (section on protective factors) for a review of several important issues associated with the use of these terms. Information provided by Public Safety Canada may also be helpful, particularly 'Family-Based Risk and Protective Factors and their Effects on Juvenile Delinquency: What Do We Know?'.

There are a number of considerations to be borne in mind when thinking about the use of risk factors in relation to crime rates.

- Rarely does any one factor 'cause' crime in some simplistic way, rather risk factors are cumulative such that the more of them there are, the higher the probability that a negative outcome will occur.
- Risk factors related to crime should be considered in groups or clusters and one indicator should be examined in the context of the others which comprise the set. For example, indicators such as education level, occupation and income are closely related and all should be examined as these factors are inter-related.
- The identification of risk factors assists those who are trying to develop a local solution to a crime problem by suggesting possible areas of intervention. For example, if higher rates of crime are found in communities with lower levels of education and high unemployment then programming may be provided to assist individuals in obtaining more education and training or assist individuals in starting a small business. Community economic development then becomes linked to community social development.

As noted in the crime prevention strategy, achieving the mission of a safer Nova Scotia is a shared responsibility between government and community.

What are community crime prevention profiles?

Community crime prevention profiles are a collection of statistical data available in the form of tables, charts or maps accompanied by descriptive information about patterns in the data. Each profile has information on crime rates (e.g., overall, violent and non-violent) as well as information relating to risk factors associated with crime.

How many community crime prevention profiles are there?

There are a number of different types of community crime prevention profiles available for review by users of Nova Scotia Community Counts. The data can be profiled at the provincial level, at the level of individual Justice Centres (JUC) of which there are 11, or at the level of the Justice Police District (JPD) of which there are 43.⁸

The crime data comes from the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) survey conducted by Statistics Canada. This survey collects crime data from police services all across Canada. There were 43 police services in Nova Scotia that reported to Statistics Canada in 2008.⁹ It should be noted that due to administrative changes in how policing services are delivered, geographic boundaries associated with the reporting of statistical information are periodically subject to revision. When boundaries are revised, data for one specific detachment/policing service area may be discontinued with the data then being reported through another police service.

To allow for comparisons over time where there has been a boundary change, crime data for specific Justice Police Districts on the Community Counts system may be combined for specific years. There are three specific instances where this occurred in the time period 2005 to 2008.

Cape Breton Regional Municipality and Membertou - In 2005 and 2006 Membertou and Cape Breton Regional Police (policing Glace Bay, Sydney and North Sydney communities of Cape Breton Regional Municipality) reported crime statistics separately. Beginning in 2007, Membertou and Cape Breton Regional Police crime statistics were combined for reporting purposes. To allow for historical comparison over time, the crime statistics were combined on Community Counts for the years 2005 and 2006.

Guysborough County and Canso - In 2005 crime statistics for Canso and Guysborough County were reported separately. Beginning in 2006, crime statistics for these areas were combined and reported under Guysborough County. To allow for historical comparison, the 2005 data for Guysborough County and Canso were combined on Community Counts.

Halifax and Halifax County - In 2005, 2006 and 2007 the Halifax Regional Police Service and

⁸Justice Centres refer to court locations throughout the province. In some Justice Centres such as Halifax there are multiple court locations for one Justice Centre while for others there is only one court location. Justice Police Districts refer to police services operating in specific areas. The number of Justice Centres (11) and number of Justice Police Districts (43) reflect the situation which existed in 2008. JPDs include data for a number of different police forces such as the RCMP, Halifax Regional Police, Cape Breton Regional Police and other police services across Nova Scotia.

⁹For further information relating to the UCR survey in terms of methodology and data accuracy go to <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/start-debut-eng.html>.

the Halifax County RCMP reported crime statistics separately. Beginning in 2008, crime statistics for these police services were combined for reporting purposes. To allow for historical comparison, the data for Halifax and Halifax County was combined for 2005, 2006 and 2007 for the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRPS/RCMP) on Community Counts.

The risk factors in the profiles are based on data from the Census administered by Statistics Canada every 5 years.

Why were the community crime prevention profiles created?

The profiles on the Nova Scotia Community Counts system are a tool which is intended to aid communities in understanding crime (or lack of crime) in their local area. This tool can help communities paint a portrait of their local area and can be used to plan programs as well as provide benchmark statistics against which progress can be measured. The system can also provide information which may be helpful to community groups in their applications to government for funding for crime prevention services and programs. The profiles should not be used as the sole source of information for developing intervention or prevention programs due to the local nature of crime and the complexity of factors associated with it.

The community crime prevention profiles may also be used by academic researchers interested in crime and/or civil servants who want to obtain relevant statistical information in an efficient manner for policy or program development.

What types of crime data are included in each profile?

There are several different types of data included in the community crime prevention profiles.

For crime data, there is the following for both youth and adults:

- Overall crime - includes violent and non-violent offences. The overall crime rate does not include traffic offences, drugs or other federal statutes.
- Violent offences - includes the following crimes against the person: homicide; other violations causing death; attempted murder; aggravated sexual assault (level 3); sexual assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm (level 2); sexual assault (level 1); sexual violations against children; aggravated assault (level 3); assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm (level 2); assault (level 1); assaulting a police officer; other assaults; using, discharging or pointing firearms; robbery; forcible confinement or kidnapping; extortion; criminal harassment; uttering threats; threatening or harassing phone calls; and other violent *Criminal Code* violations.
- Non-violent offences - include: breaking and entering; possession of stolen property; theft of a motor vehicle; theft over \$5,000 (non-motor vehicle); theft under \$5,000 (non-motor vehicle); fraud; mischief; arson; counterfeiting; weapons violations; child pornography;

prostitution; disturbing the peace; administration of justice violations; and other non-violent *Criminal Code* violations.¹⁰

The statistical information for crime data is reported both in terms of the number of incidents and also as a rate per 10,000 population.

Youth is defined as being in the age range of 12 to 17 years old at the time of the offence.¹¹ The statistical information for youth crime is reported both in terms of the number of youth charged and also as a rate of youth charged per 10,000 youth population.¹²

While it is important to know how many criminal incidents are occurring in a community, rates should be used when comparing communities as they standardize differences in population size. Rates should also be used when comparing community crime data with provincial and national crime data.

What other types of data are included in the profiles?

Risk factors corresponding to a subset of those used in the Statistics Canada studies are employed.¹³ The categories and indicators are listed below.

Socio-economic factors - includes data on families in a low-income situation; individuals in a low-income situation; households spending more than 30% of their income on rent or major payments; median household income; income coming from government transfers; unemployment rate; employment rate; labour market participation rate; and, individuals in a professional occupation.

Demographic factors - includes data on age, gender, family structure, marital status, household size and geographic mobility.

Dwelling and land-use factors - includes data on home ownership, condition of housing stock and age of dwelling.

For the risk factor information, the data is reported in a number of ways depending on the indicator used. For example, a dollar amount is reported for median household income. For households spending more than 30% of their income on rent or major payments, a percentage is

¹⁰For further information relating to types of criminal incidents in the different categories see the reference section of this document for the 2009 Juristat by Marnie Wallace on crime statistics.

¹¹Crime rates are based on the number of crimes reported to the police and an associated population. For the youth crime rate, the population referenced is the overall number of youth in the 12 to 17 age range. This contrasts with overall crime statistics where total population size is used.

¹²Statistics Canada will often publish youth crime rates 'per 100,000' while the Community Counts system uses a rate of 'per 10,000'. The 'rate per 10,000' is used as Nova Scotia has a smaller youth population than some of the larger provinces.

¹³ See the 2008 study by Josee Savoie listed in the references section.

reported as well as a number. Similar to the use of rates, the use of percentages should be used when comparing differences among communities.

What are the data limitations?

As with any project involving statistical information, there are a number of limitations to bear in mind when looking at the data associated with each profile.

First, the profiles that have been created do not contain all risk factors which are pertinent to understanding crime. There are many risk factors mentioned in the research literature which are beyond the purview of this tool, particularly risk factors at the family, school and individual level. For example, risk factors relating to family functioning such as conflict within the family or the extent to which parents in a family provide an appropriate level of discipline, etc. are not available. Consequently, the profiles which have been created are not exhaustive and other information should be examined to provide a more complete picture of risk factors associated with crime at the community level.

Second, the statistical information presented in the profiles only provides partial information which can be used to describe a community. For a more complete portrait of what is occurring in a community, context information needs to be included. One example might relate to youth crime. If crime rates for youth are high in a specific community this might be due to factors such as a lack of recreational activities. This level of information is not present in the community crime prevention profiles. Consequently, while the community crime prevention profiles may help users to get a sense of what is happening in a community, other context-related information is required to develop a comprehensive picture. Numbers only tell one part of the story. People involved in crime prevention in their own communities bring local knowledge to complement the statistical profile.

Third, many of the indicators used in constructing the community crime prevention profiles are based on data from Statistics Canada. As Statistics Canada is a national statistical agency collecting data from across the country, there is often a time lag associated with collecting the data and finalizing it in a report. For example, in 2009, the most current data available for crime statistics will be for calendar year 2008.

Fourth, it is important to note that the crime rate data only includes data for police-reported crime, that is, incidents which have been brought to the attention of the police. If criminal incidents are not reported to the police they are not counted. Differences between communities in the extent to which they report (or do not report) crime to the police may impact the official crime rate in that community.

Fifth, some of the indicators used in the profiles are based on Statistics Canada Census data which is subject to a rounding procedure to ensure confidentiality and protect against any

individual being identified. This may have a slight impact on the precision of the information presented at the community level.¹⁴

Finally, although statistical information can help to diagnose specific social problems fixing such problems can prove very challenging. The types of indicators employed in constructing these profiles may be of some assistance but this piece of work must be complemented by partnerships. Resources and community capacity are important factors which will affect the success of any strategy which is implemented. Although statistics on crime and risk factors are a helpful starting point, they only take us part of the way towards where we want to go.

Due to the limitations outlined above, it is important to note that when presenting risk factors, a higher crime rate or higher levels for specific risk factors such as poverty and unemployment does not mean that a community experiencing such problems is a 'bad community'. For example, just because a community has a higher crime rate doesn't mean that most of the individuals living there are criminals. In fact, research tells us that only a small proportion of offenders are responsible for a large volume of crime.¹⁵ The purpose of these profiles is not to stigmatize any specific community but rather to identify issues which can assist stakeholders in helping to determine what level of problem exists and what strategies can be employed to assist these communities in reducing crime.

CONCLUSION

This document has provided an overview on the background of the Community Counts for Crime Prevention Project and various issues relating to use of the Web site. The Community Counts Web site provides data, graphs and maps that will assist individuals in understanding the level and type of crime occurring in their community. Additional support activities including presentations and workshops are also being provided.

¹⁴For a more complete description relating to rounding procedures and confidentiality, the reader is encouraged to visit the Statistics Canada Web site to review material relating to data quality, sampling and weighting, confidentiality and random rounding. The URL for Statistics Canada is: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/start-debut-eng.html>.

¹⁵For readers who are interested in the topic of 'prolific offenders' see the articles by Garside (2004) and Townsley and Pease (2002) referenced at the end of this document.

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