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**WORKING DOCUMENT**

**FIREARMS HOMICIDE, ROBBERY AND  
SUICIDE INCIDENTS INVESTIGATED  
BY THE WINNIPEG POLICE SERVICE (1995)**

**Proactive Information Services Inc.**

**February 1997**

**WD1997-1e**

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Department of Justice Canada. The views expressed herein are  
solely those of the author and do not necessarily  
represent the views of the Department of Justice Canada.*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### A. BACKGROUND

The purpose of this research study was to inform the law enforcement community and policy makers of the type of gun incidents and firearms encountered by police. The report is descriptive and builds largely on the research conducted by the Firearms Smuggling Work Group and their report entitled the *Illegal Movement of Firearms in Canada* (May, 1995). In addition, many of the data presented are similar to those resulting from site studies conducted in Toronto (Department of Justice Canada, 1994) and Edmonton (Edmonton Police Service, 1995).

This study involved a review of the Winnipeg Police Service's firearm incident files and property room files, concentrating on firearm homicide, firearm robbery, and firearm suicide. All files reviewed, with the exception of homicides, were for incidents which occurred in 1995. Data on firearm homicide were collected from incidents occurring between 1990 and 1995. To the extent possible, information was collected on the characteristics of individual firearm incidents, the type of firearms recovered, the legality of the firearm involved, and the attributes of both the suspect/accused and the victim.

Research of this nature has inherent limitations. Information contained in police incident files is primarily collected for investigative and administrative purposes. As a result, data pertaining to specific research issues and questions were not always available. For example, during the investigative process police typically checked whether the accused had a criminal record; if the search indicated that the accused had a criminal record this information was usually recorded in the incident file. However, if the query revealed that the accused did not have a criminal record, this finding was less likely to be recorded on file. Therefore, when the criminal record history of an accused was available from the police incident file it was likely to show that the accused did have a criminal record.

### B. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

#### 1. Overall

In 1995, the Winnipeg Police Service responded to 1,692 identified firearm related incidents. The study reviewed a random sample of 462 incident files and confirmed that 387 incidents were in fact firearm related. From the total number of reviewed incidents, 323 incidents were criminal (e.g., firearm homicide, robbery, assault, weapons offences) and 64 were non-criminal incidents such as suicides and attempted suicide. The following points describe other pertinent research findings:

Forty-five percent of all firearm related incidents were "cleared"; as a result, in 174 incidents an individual was apprehended and charged with an offence.

From the total number of reviewed firearm incidents (387), the police recovered/seized 442 firearms<sup>1</sup> (this includes 14 firearms recovered in gun homicide incidents between 1990 and 1994).

Fifty-three percent (236) of the firearms recovered/seized were non-restricted rifles and shotguns. Air guns and handguns were the second and third leading type of firearms recovered/seized, accounting for 14 percent (61) and 13 percent (58) of the total. Prohibited sawed-off rifles and shotguns accounted for seven percent (29) of the firearms recovered/seized.

Three-quarters (330) of all firearms were recovered/seized in criminal incidents. From the total number of firearms recovered/seized in criminal incidents, 51 percent (169) were rifles and shotguns, 12 percent (38) were handguns, and 16 percent (52) were air guns. Seven percent (23) of all firearms recovered/seized in criminal incidents were sawed-off rifles and shotguns.

Twenty-five percent (112) of all firearms were recovered/seized in non-criminal incidents. Rifles and shotguns made up 60 percent (67) of the firearms recovered in non-criminal incidents, 18 percent (20) were handguns and eight percent (9) were air guns.

The accused/victim relationship was known to police in 204 firearm incidents. Almost three-quarters of the accused were strangers; 16 percent were acquaintances; eight percent were spouses (ex-spouses); and the remaining three percent were other relatives.

Explicit information pertaining to the legality of the guns involved was available on the file for 47 (11 percent) of the 442 firearms recovered/seized by police. Accordingly, 12 were recorded as stolen, 16 were owned by the individual involved in the incident, and 19 were not owned by the individual in possession, however, the firearm was not reported stolen.

From the total number of handguns recovered/seized by police (58), 38 were traced on the Restricted Weapons Registration System (RWRS) of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Of the cases where there was enough information to determine the registration status, 69 percent (24) were registered and the remaining 31 percent (11) were not. The RCMP were unable to determine the registration status of three handguns due to a lack of information.

Files revealed that approximately 299 suspects were apprehended by police while investigating firearm incidents. The legal status of 117 (39 percent) apprehended suspects was available on file. From this total, 63 percent (74) of the apprehended suspects were either on probation (11), out on bail (8), on full parole (3), or were incarcerated and unlawfully at large (2); 29 were currently awaiting trial, and 21 were wanted or had an outstanding warrant for their arrest.

Criminal record history information was available for 137 (46 percent) apprehended

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<sup>1</sup> Under the *Criminal Code*, air guns that shoot projectiles under the velocity of 152 meters per second are not defined as firearms. However, due to their prevalence in crime and the number recovered by the Winnipeg Police Service, data on air guns was collected.

suspects. Forty (29 percent ) accused had no criminal record and 97 (71 percent ) accused did have a criminal record for a variety of offences including weapons, violent crimes and drugs.

Almost one-quarter (58) of all victims (259) involved in firearm related incidents either died or were injured.

From the total number of apprehended suspects (299), charges were laid against 261 accused. This resulted in a total of 661 charges laid (2.6 charges per accused). The most frequently laid charges were robbery (15 percent ) and use of a firearm to commit an offence (8 percent ).

## **2. Firearm Homicide**

In 1995, firearm homicides accounted for 13 percent (2) of all homicides (16) investigated by the Winnipeg Police Service. During the same period, the national proportion of firearm homicide was approximately 30 percent (Hung, 1996). Between 1990 and 1995 firearm homicides accounted for 11 percent (11) of the total number of homicides (96) in Winnipeg. From the total number of firearm homicide cases reviewed, 11 people were apprehended and charged, and 11 victims were killed and one was injured. Five attempted firearm homicide incidents were also investigated by police in 1995, but these cases are not included in the analysis below.

Seventy-two percent (8) of the incidents were cleared by police, two were followed by the offender committing suicide, one was not cleared, and one was still before the courts.

In total, 22 firearms were recovered/seized as a result of these 11 incidents. Almost two-thirds (14) of the firearms recovered/seized were non-restricted rifles and shotguns and six were handguns.

From the total number of firearms recovered/seized, four of the firearms were owned by the individuals involved, two were reported stolen by the original owners (thus were held illegally by the accused), and one was held by an individual who was not the owner, however, the firearm was not reported stolen. Information on the remaining 15 firearms was not available from police files.

All of the handguns recovered/seized were registered with the RWRS at the time of the homicide incident. However, one of the six handguns was held illegally by the accused because the handgun was reported stolen by the lawful owner.

In ten incidents, the accused/victim relationship was indicated on the file. Sixty-two percent (8) of the accused were acquaintances (this includes the two suspects who committed suicide); 31 percent (4) were strangers; and one was a male spouse.

Four of the homicide incidents reviewed (11) contained information on whether the



accused was the holder of a valid Firearms Acquisition Certificate (FAC). Accordingly, one-half of the accused were in possession of a valid FAC and the other half were not.

Information pertaining to prohibition orders was available in six incidents (each with one accused). From this total, one was prohibited from possessing firearms and the remaining were not.

From the total number of suspects (14), one-half had criminal records ranging from gun related offences to other violent crimes. Information pertaining to the suspect's current legal status was available for six apprehended suspects. Accordingly, one was on probation and the remaining were reported to have no status.

From the total number of apprehended and charged suspects (11), eight were charged with 1st degree murder, two were charged with 2nd degree murder, and one was charged with three offences: 2nd degree murder, attempted murder, and aggravated assault.

### **3. Firearm Robbery**

The Winnipeg Police Service investigated 313 firearm robbery incidents in 1995. This study sampled and reviewed 127 (41 percent ) firearm robbery incidents investigated by police. From this total, 98 suspects were apprehended and charged. None of the firearm robbery victims (145) were killed, however, 12 (eight percent) were injured during the incidents.

Thirty-eight percent (48) of the firearm robbery incidents were cleared by police in 1995.

From the total number of firearm robbery incidents investigated by the police (313), commercial establishments (e.g., banks, convenience stores, gas stations) were targeted in 76 percent (239) of the incidents. Twenty-four percent of the targets were individuals (e.g., taxi cab drivers and delivery personnel) and dwelling homes.

Thirty-three firearms were recovered/seized in 29 (23 percent ) of the 127 firearm robbery incidents reviewed. The majority of the recovered/seized firearms were prohibited sawed-off rifles and shotguns (27 percent ) and replica/imitation<sup>2</sup> firearms (27 percent ). Air guns (21 percent ) and starter pistols (15 percent ) were also frequently recovered in firearm robbery incidents.

In the vast majority of firearm robbery incidents reviewed, the suspect and victim were strangers.

In total, 111 suspects were apprehended by police. Information pertaining to the current legal status was available for 36 percent (40) of the suspects. Fifteen suspects were awaiting trial on other charges, seven had outstanding warrants, five were on probation, three were on full

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<sup>2</sup> Similar to air guns, replica/imitation and starter pistols were defined as firearms for the purpose of this study, even though they are not defined as firearms under the *Criminal Code*.

parole, and one suspect was incarcerated and unlawfully at large. Police files revealed that nine of the suspects did not fall into the above mentioned categories.

Criminal record history information was available for 41 percent (46) of the apprehended suspects. Accordingly, 83 percent (38) of the suspects had a criminal record. Four of the suspects had a criminal record involving drug offences, three involved firearm offences, three involved violent offences, and the remaining 28 involved other criminal offences. According to police files, eight of the suspects had no criminal record.

#### **4. Firearm Suicide**

In 1995, the Winnipeg Police Service investigated 11 firearm suicides and six attempted suicides. All suicide incidents and attempted suicide incidents were reviewed for this study. The police files revealed that the 11 suicide incidents involved ten adult males and one youth male.

From the 11 suicide incidents, 13 firearms were recovered by the police. Seventy-seven percent (10) of the firearms recovered were non-restricted rifles and shotguns. One handgun was recovered and two firearms were recorded as unknown.

Police files revealed that one victim had been under the influence of alcohol.

The review found that four suicide victims were treated for mental illness. As well, four had experienced stressful life events<sup>3</sup> prior to committing suicide.

#### **5. In-Person Interviews**

In-person interviews were conducted with 15 experienced members of the Winnipeg Police Service. These interviews provided an exploratory view of the characteristics of firearm related incidents investigated by police.

Several members indicated that there had been an increase in the quantity and use of handguns over the past three to five years. Others revealed that rifles and shotguns continue to be most prevalent. They also reported that firearms are now being used in “new types of crime” such as home invasions.

With respect to the source of guns used in crime, members most frequently cited residential break-ins. Theft from vehicles was also mentioned. Several members indicated that they believed the trafficking and smuggling of firearms from other provinces and across the United States-Canada border was another source. Members unanimously reported that when compared to five years ago, they perceive a greater risk today due to the presence of firearms in crime.

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<sup>3</sup> Stressful life events included family break-up or separation, or other stressful life experiences (e.g., bankruptcy or illness in the family).

It is important to note that members were selected from various units and that their views and observations may not be representative of all members of the service. The findings therefore represent the views and perceptions of the 15 interviewed members.

## **C. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS**

The findings presented in this report describe the characteristics of firearm related incidents in Winnipeg. The study reviewed a sample of all identified firearm incidents investigated by the Winnipeg Police Service in 1995. In addition, all firearm homicides which occurred between 1990 and 1995 were reviewed. The results therefore, represent firearm incidents in Winnipeg which should not be generalized to other parts of Manitoba or other provinces. The limited timeframe also prevents a description of long term trends in firearm incidents.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, the report does provide a first time review of firearm incidents from a large prairie city. The study found that in Winnipeg, non-restricted rifles and shotguns were the most prevalent type of firearm encountered by police. In criminal incidents, such as homicide, robbery and assault, non-restricted rifles and shotguns were recovered/seized more frequently than any other type of firearm.

Comparisons between national statistics and the findings presented in this report suggest some difference in Winnipeg's firearm incidents. For example, in 1995 the proportion of homicides committed in Winnipeg with firearms was 13 percent, however, nationally the proportion was 30 percent. The same is true for firearm robbery. It was reported that 17 percent of all 1995 robbery incidents in Winnipeg involved firearms (Winnipeg Police Service Statistics, 1995). Nationally, the proportion in 1995 was 22 percent (Hung, 1996).

From the total number of firearm incidents reviewed, criminal record information was available on file for 46 percent (137) of the apprehended suspects. Quite possibly, most of the remaining suspects (162) did not have a criminal record. Where criminal record information was available on file, almost three-quarters (97) of the suspects had a criminal record. More specifically, one-half (7) of the firearm homicide suspects and 83 percent (38) of the firearm robbery suspects had a criminal record.

As well, this report describes data elements which are not readily available from other sources. For example, in incidents where information regarding the legality of the firearm was known, the study found that 26 percent (12) of the firearms were recorded as stolen, 34 percent (16) were owned by the individual involved in the incident, and 40 percent (19) were not owned by the individual in possession, however, the firearm was not reported stolen.

Collecting information on guns involved in criminal and non-criminal incidents is challenging. Similar to the research project conducted in Toronto which examined firearms

recovered in crime, the file review process in Winnipeg was often hindered by missing or insufficient information. For example, in incidents where the firearm was not recovered/seized, detailed information on the firearm was not available. In cases where firearms were recovered/seized, information on whether the person involved was in legal possession of the firearm was often missing.

Finally, the research experience gained in this study will benefit future efforts to collect information on firearms from police incident files.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This report was the result of a joint research venture with the Winnipeg Police Service and the Department of Justice Canada. The report describes the number and types of firearms recovered/seized by the Winnipeg Police Service during 1995 (homicide incidents were reviewed for an extended period, covering six years, 1990-1995). The report focused on criminal and non-criminal incidents involving firearms, such as firearm robbery and suicide.

### **1.1 Objectives**

The study had five research objectives. The first objective was to determine the extent to which information on firearms was available from police incident reports and the property room database files maintained by the Winnipeg Police Service. The Department of Justice Canada was particularly interested in finding out whether police files typically contained information on the type of guns involved in firearm incidents, the origin of the firearms involved, and the legality of the firearms encountered by police.

The second objective of the report was to determine the number and type of firearm related incidents investigated by police and the number and type of guns recovered/seized as a result of these incidents. Special attention was given to firearm homicide, firearm robbery and gun suicide incidents. Originally, the report's analysis was to include a review of fatal firearm accidents investigated by the Winnipeg Police Service. However, the file review process revealed that the fatal accidents identified by the police incident reporting system did not involve firearms.

The third objective of the report was to describe the characteristics of the incidents, ascertaining the origin of firearms involved, the legality of the firearms, the number of suspects/accused involved, number of victims, and the types of charges resulting from the incidents.

The fourth objective of the study was to determine how many of the recovered/seized restricted handguns were registered with the Restricted Weapons Registration System (RWRS), maintained by the Firearms Registration and Administration Section (FRAS) of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Lastly, select members of the Winnipeg Police Service were interviewed to document police perceptions of the nature and extent to which firearms were involved in criminal and non-criminal incidents.

These objectives build largely on the exploratory research conducted with the Metropolitan Toronto Police (Department of Justice Canada, 1994) and the study completed by the national Firearms Smuggling Work Group (1995). The report is

intended to further inform law enforcement officials and policy makers by providing a first time glimpse of firearms misuse in a large prairie city. In general, the purpose of this report is to inform and support the development of firearms policy and programs.

## 1.2 Research Questions

The Department of Justice Canada identified several research questions. Insofar as possible, the study was to address the following:

- 1) To what extent do police incident files contain information on firearms, suspects, victims and the legality of the firearms involved in gun incidents investigated by the Winnipeg Police Service?
- 2) How many and what type of firearms do police recover/seize?
- 3) What are the sources of firearms recovered/seized by police?
- 4) How often do offenders in homicide and robbery legally or illegally possess firearms?
- 5) In cases of illegally held firearms how often was it because:  
the offender attained the firearms without a Firearms Acquisition Certificate (FAC);  
it was stolen;  
it was a prohibited weapon;  
it was a non-registered, restricted weapon; or  
the offender was under a firearm prohibition order?
- 6) What types of firearms are used in homicide and robbery?
- 7) What types of firearms are involved in suicides?
- 8) What is the perception by police of the nature and extent of gun crimes and smuggling/trafficking problem, and have there been recent changes in the trends?
- 9) What kinds of difficulties are faced in addressing the above questions? What are the limits in gaining such information from police files?

### **1.3 Outline of the Report**

The report contains eight sections which address the objectives and research questions mentioned above. Section two describes the methodology and sampling strategy used to select the incident reports and property room files reviewed for the study. This section also briefly describes the limitations of the approach used. The third section provides an overview of all firearm incidents investigated by the Winnipeg Police Service in 1995. Section four addresses firearm homicide incidents investigated by police between 1990 - 1995. The fifth section describes the sampled firearm robbery incidents. Suicide and attempted suicides are reviewed in section six and section seven contains the results of the in-person interviews with members of the Winnipeg Police Service.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 File Review Process

#### 2.1.1 Instrument Design

In the first phase of the project, a small sample of police incident files was reviewed in order to determine the amount and type of information available. This process also facilitated the examination of the format and ordering of the file information. Based on the stated research issues, an initial draft of the coding manual was constructed and tested on a small selection of files. The coding manual was designed in consultation with the Canadian Firearms Centre, and contained questions similar to those used in other studies of this type. In particular, the instrument displays marked similarities to the one used in the 1994 firearms study conducted in Toronto.

The instrument was made up of a number of sections.

Background Data: incident number, district number, incident type, clearance status, and several indicators to record the information that is available on file.

Suspect Data: number of suspects, relationship of suspect to victim, charges laid, indications of drug or alcohol involvement, gang activity, criminal history, legal status, mental illnesses, number killed, number committing suicide, and stressful life events.

Victim Data: number of victims, criminal history of the victims, legal status, victims history of mental illnesses, number injured/killed, and stressful life events.

Firearm Data: number of firearms involved, number recovered/seized, types of firearms, legal status of firearm, if and how many times a firearm was discharged, serial number, and indications of smuggling or trafficking.

#### 2.1.2 Sample Selection

This research project involved the sampling of police files for the most recent year available, 1995. Firearm related incidents were identified by the Winnipeg Police Service using their incident reporting database (GERX - a non-standard computer query run by the Winnipeg Police Service which builds on specified parameters). The database search selected main offence types identified as having involved firearms. As a result of the database search a list of firearm related incidents was generated by the Winnipeg Police Service. In consultation with the Canadian Firearms Centre and the Winnipeg Police Service, a sampling strategy was developed.



In determining the sample, the objective was to compile the most accurate and dependable information possible. Various factors were considered to optimize the sampling frame, such as the expected quality of firearm information from the various incident types, the variability within each offence, and the priority of each offence type. For example, while calls for service such as “safe calls” were classified as firearm related incidents, they were not sampled. Records of calls for service lacked the types of information required for this study. It was anticipated that some of the calls for service would be encountered during the review of the property room database files.

Information was also obtained on firearm related incidents from the Winnipeg Police Service’s database of recovered/seized property. The Winnipeg Police Service provided hard copies of two property databases; a list of items still in police stores, and a list of files that were purged from this database (firearm(s) returned to owner, destroyed, etc.). The current storage list contained 128 separate incidents, and the purged database contained 91 distinct incidents. Upon combining the two databases, deleting duplicates from the file review, and those involving only ammunition, a total of 146 files were reviewed.

Table 1 contains a breakdown of the types of incidents the GERX and property room database identified as firearms related incidents. A total of 1,779 incident files were identified as a result. However, 1,131 “calls for service” incident types, identified from within the GERX, were not included in the sampling frame because most of these incident types were “unfounded.” As stated above, when calls for service did result in a recovered/seized firearm, these guns were detected from the property room database files.

**Table 1**      **Data Source and Sampling Process**

Type of Incident	Data Source		Sampling Process			
	GERX	Property Database	Sampling Frame	Files Reviewed	Estimated Number of Firearm Incidents	Confirmed Firearm Incidents (Reviewed)
Homicide 1995	2	0	2	2	2	2
Homicide 1990 to 1994	9	0	9	9	9	9
Attempted Homicide 1995	2	3	5	5	5	5
Robbery	313	0	313	127	313	127
Other <i>Criminal Code</i>	135	77	212	212	180	180
Suicide	11	0	11	11	11	11
Attempted Suicide	6	1	7	7	7	7
Accidents	24	0	24	24	0	0
Other Non- <i>Criminal Code</i>	0	43	43	43	43	43
Calls for Service “Safe”	311	3	3	3	311	3
Calls for Service “Gun”	449	0	0	0	449	0
Calls for Service “Shots”	371	0	0	0	371	0

Property Files (not firearm related)	-	19	19	19	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1633</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>648</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>1701</b>	<b>387</b>

A 70 percent (462) sample of these incidents was selected and reviewed for the study. It was noted that, for 1995, there were only two homicides involving firearms. In order to obtain a robust number of homicide incident files, it was necessary to examine all gun homicides between 1990 and 1995 (a six year period of time). This resulted in a total of 11 firearm related homicide incidents for review.

There were 313 robberies involving firearms from 1995, and due to the low clearance rates and low firearm recovery/seizure rates, it was decided to stratify and randomly sample these files by specific target categories. Sampling was focused more heavily on the “Robbery - Other Premise” (e.g., gas stations, hotels and restaurants), and “Robbery - Other” (e.g., persons, homes, taxi-cabs, delivery personnel) categories due to the anticipated variability of these files (e.g., two bank robberies are more likely to be similar to each other than a personal robbery and a gas station robbery). This strategy resulted in an overall sampling rate of 41 percent (127). All other incident types were included in the review process.

### 2.1.3 Data Collection

The actual data collection process occurred over the span of approximately two weeks. Winnipeg Police Service employees pulled files from the Bureau of Police Records for those incidents no longer before the courts. Only two files were still before the courts, (both 1995 homicides) and for those files, members of the Winnipeg Police Service Homicide Unit assisted in completing the coding form.

The following **Operational Definitions** were used to ensure consistency throughout the data collection phase:

Suspect/Accused: Any person suspected of, arrested for, or charged with committing an offence.

Victim: Any person involved in a firearm related incident who was shot at, robbed with a firearm, had a firearm pointed at him/her, was threatened with a firearm, or injured/killed by a firearm. This included suicide victims.

Founded Incident: Any incident in which there was evidence of wrong-doing, regardless of whether a firearm was actually recovered/seized.

Cleared Incident: An incident in which police arrested and charged a suspect/accused.

Seized Firearm: A firearm which was actively taken into police custody during an investigation.

Recovered Firearm: A firearm which was turned in to police, not resulting from a direct police investigation.

#### 2.1.4 Coding and Analyses

The file review process was undertaken on-site by the statistical analyst and a research assistant. The entered data were verified in order to ensure accuracy, and analysis was undertaken using the statistical package Stat Pac Gold.

## 2.2 In-Person Interviews

### 2.2.1 Instrument Design

To supplement the data found in the incident files, information was gained from semi-structured in-person interviews with 15 experienced police officers. The semi-structured interview schedule was developed in consultation with staff at the Canadian Firearms Centre and Winnipeg Police Service. The objective of the interviews was to elicit member perceptions regarding the prevalence and changes which have occurred in the use of firearms in Winnipeg. Members of the Winnipeg Police Service were asked to describe their experiences when responding to firearm related incidents and to reveal their perceptions regarding the source of firearms in crime.

### 2.2.2 Sample Selection

The Research and Development Section of the Winnipeg Police Service selected experienced police officers for inclusion in the interview process. Selection was based upon their knowledge about the “street,” and their experience with the criminal use of firearms. Members were selected from five different areas: Homicide; Major Crimes (primarily robbery incidents); Drug Unit, Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs; and, Street Gangs.

### 2.2.3 Data Collection and Analyses

Fifteen in-person interviews were conducted over the course of three days in November and December, 1996, at the headquarters of the Winnipeg Police Service (Public Safety Building). Interviews ranged from 25 to 40 minutes in length. Questions

specific to the number and types of firearm-related incidents were analyzed and are presented in section seven of the report.

### **2.3 Limitations**

The information resulting from this study may not be generalized to other communities in Manitoba or Canada. Winnipeg is the largest urban community in Manitoba and, as such, has many features not found elsewhere in the province. This study was intended to be exploratory and descriptive in nature. It examined all identified firearm related incidents investigated by police in 1995 (11 firearm homicides which occurred between 1990 and 1995 were included). The findings represent firearm related incidents in Winnipeg which also portray a “point in time” and, as such, cannot be used to identify trends. This limitation is addressed somewhat with the inclusion of gun homicide incidents between 1990 and 1995, and in-person interviews with members of the Winnipeg Police Service.

Inherent to any research study which examines police files is the “funnelling effect.” That is to say, not all firearm related incidents come to the attention of the police. Therefore, the scope of this research is limited to firearm related incidents known or investigated by the Winnipeg Police Service. Firearm incidents not reported to or investigated by the police remain unknown. As well, the format of incident files were designed primarily to benefit police investigations and in-house administrative activities (e.g., internal statistics). Information is collected to support investigations rather than data analysis or social science research. Therefore, information of interest to the researcher was not always available (e.g., criminal record history of the accused).

Files are stored by their incident number which can be linked to a main offence code (via the GERX). When conducting a search by way of the main offence code, the incident file search was subject to the “most serious offence rule”. As a result, in certain circumstances the search may have omitted incidents in which a firearm was involved, because the offence code did not include a charge that was firearm related.

In other circumstances the offence code did not contain fields for firearms (e.g., sexual assaults, criminal harassment, and uttering threats). To determine whether a firearm was involved, the above mentioned incidents would have had to have been examined manually. This was not feasible given the time constraints and the burden it would have placed on police resources and personnel. This limitation was addressed by examining all property room database files identified as firearm related in which case several of the above mentioned incidents were found.

With respect to the in-person interviews, these interviews focused on police perceptions. In some cases their observations may not be supported by the quantitative

data presented in this report. However, their accounts still represent a significant contribution to this report.

Finally, despite these limitations, this report does provide new information on firearm related incidents (both criminal and non-criminal) and on the type of firearms recovered/seized by police.

### 3.0 FIREARMS IN WINNIPEG - OVERALL

In 1995, the Winnipeg Police Service responded to 1,692 incidents identified as being firearm related. For the purpose of this study 462 firearm incidents were reviewed and as a result 387 were confirmed to be firearm related. Table 2 shows the type and number of incidents reviewed in the study and the resulting number of firearms recovered/seized in each incident.

**Table 2**      **Number and Type of Incidents by Firearms Recovered/Seized**

Type of Incident	Number of Incidents	Number of Firearms Recovered/Seized
Homicide 1995	2	8
Homicide 1990 to 1994	9	14
Attempted Homicide 1995	5	3
Robbery	127	33
Other <i>Criminal Code</i>	180	272
Suicide	11	13
Attempted Suicide	7	36
Accidents	0	0
Other Non- <i>Criminal Code</i>	43	60
Calls for Service "Safe"	3	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>442</b>

### 3.1 Clearance/Founded

Overall, 45 percent (174) of the firearm related incidents were cleared. This was found to vary by incident type with the clearance rate being highest for homicide (72 percent ). In total, 301 of the incidents were founded. Gang involvement was mentioned in only 39 (10 percent ) incidents. Thirty-two of these incidents involved street gangs and seven involved biker gangs.

### 3.2 Firearms Recovered/Seized

Fifty-nine percent of the firearm related incidents resulted in the recovery/seizure of one or more firearms. A total of 442 firearms were recovered/seized in these incidents, 383 were seized and 59 were recovered.

They were most often recovered/seized at the home of the suspect/accused.

#### 3.2.1 Types of Firearms

Table 3 reveals that rifles/shotguns accounted for 53 percent of the firearms recovered/seized. This is similar to the findings of the Firearms Smuggling Work Group (1995) which found that approximately 50 percent of firearms recovered by ten different police agencies in 1993 were rifles/shotguns. In Winnipeg, air guns and handguns were the second and third leading type of firearm recovered/seized by police, accounting for 14 and 13 percent of the total number of firearms.

**Table 3**      **Types of Firearms Recovered/Seized by Police**

Type	Number	Percent
Rifles/Shotguns (non-restricted)	236	53%
Handguns	58	13%
Other Restricted	2	1%
Prohibited - Sawed-off	29	7%
Other Prohibited	13	3%
Air Guns	61	14%
Replicas/Imitations	18	4%
Starter Pistols	12	3%
Other/Unknown	13	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>100%</b>

\* This includes 14 firearms recovered in gun homicides between 1990 and 1994.

Approximately 75 percent (330) of firearms were recovered/seized in criminal incidents. Table 4 reveals that of those firearms recovered/seized in criminal incidents, 51 percent were rifles and shotguns, 16 percent were air guns, 11 percent were handguns and seven percent were sawed-off rifles and shotguns. In non-criminal incidents, rifle and shotguns made up 60 percent of the total number of firearms recovered/seized, 18

percent were handguns and 8 percent were air guns.

**Table 4**      **Types of Firearms Recovered/Seized in Criminal and Non-Criminal Incidents**

	Criminal			Non-Criminal		
	Number	Col %	Row %	Number	Col %	Row %
Rifles/Shotguns (non-restricted)	169	51%	72%	67	60%	28%
Handguns	38	11%	66%	20	18%	34%
Other Restricted	2	1%	100%	0	0%	0%
Prohibited - Sawed-off	23	7%	79%	6	5%	21%
Other Prohibited	13	4%	100%	0	0%	0%
Air Guns	52	16%	85%	9	8%	15%
Replicas/Imitations	18	6%	100%	0	0%	0%
Starter Pistols	9	3%	75%	3	3%	25%
Other/Unknown	6	2%	46%	7	6%	54%
<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>25%</b>

### 3.2.2 Firearms Discharged

Firearms were actually discharged in 20 percent of the incidents. In almost half (47 percent) of these incidents, the firearm was discharged only once. There were multiple discharges in thirteen incidents. In the remaining incidents, it was not known nor mentioned exactly how many times the firearm was discharged.

### 3.2.3 Firearm Origins

The police files contained information on the ownership of 47 firearms. Of these, 12 were stolen, 16 were owned by the person in possession, and 19 of the firearms were not owned by the person in possession, but not reported as stolen.

Information regarding where the firearms were acquired was present for 34 firearms. Firearms were most often acquired from a friend (12), or a family member (8). Sixteen of the firearms were acquired in the year of the incident (1995) and one was acquired as early as 1985.

Attempts to trace the origin of firearms were specifically indicated in 20 incidents (5 percent). The most frequently used search was the Winnipeg Police Automated Records Communication System (PARCS) or internal records search (14). The



Restricted Weapons Registration System (RWRS) maintained by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), was used in five searches. The United States, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms was utilized for one trace. In one case, the results of the search indicated that the firearm had been trafficked.

An additional effort was made to check the origins of recovered/seized handguns in cases where the incident files contained the serial numbers. As a result, 38 restricted firearms were traced on the RWRS. From the incident files where there was enough information to determine the registration status, 69 percent (24) of the handguns were registered and the remaining 31 percent (11) were not. The RCMP were unable to determine the registration status of three handguns due to a lack of information.

### **3.3 Suspects/Accused Involved**

Of the 533 suspects involved in firearm related incidents, 91 percent were male. The majority were adults (291), while a total of 176 were youths, the ages of all others were not mentioned. The influence of alcohol or other drugs was mentioned in relatively few incident files. One or more suspects were under the influence of alcohol in 20 incidents. Other drugs were implicated in ten incidents.

Suspects were apprehended in 200 incidents, resulting in 299 apprehended suspects. The majority of apprehended suspects were male (279). Again, most apprehended suspects were adults (203).

#### **3.3.1 Suspect/Accused Criminal History**

In most incidents reviewed, information concerning the criminal history of the suspect/accused was not present in the incident file. Information regarding the legal status of the suspect/accused was available for 117 of the 299 apprehended suspects. Forty-three (37 percent) of the 117 apprehended suspects did not fall under any of the categories mentioned below. However, 11 of the suspects were on probation, eight were out on bail, three were on full parole, and two were incarcerated and unlawfully at large. In addition, 29 of the suspects were currently facing other charges, and 21 were wanted or had an outstanding warrant.

Criminal record information was available for 137 apprehended suspects. Forty (29 percent) suspects had no criminal record. Approximately 97 (71 percent) of the apprehended suspects did have a criminal record at the time of the offence. Nine of these suspects' criminal records involved firearm related offences, 20 involved other violent offences, and 11 involved drug offences. The remaining 57 had either youth records (3) or criminal records involving other offences (54).

#### **3.3.2 FAC and Firearm Prohibition Information**

Little information was available regarding Firearms Acquisition Certificates (FAC). Of the 57 suspects for which information was available on file, 17 (30 percent) had a valid FAC and the remaining 40 (70 percent) did not. Information on whether the suspect/accused was prohibited from possessing firearms was available on file for 30 individuals. Almost one-half (14) of these suspects were prohibited from possessing firearms at the time of the offence. According to the incident files, the remaining 16 were not prohibited from possessing firearms.

### **3.4 Victims Involved**

A total of 259 victims were involved in 387 incidents. Victims were most likely to be adult (85 percent) and male (66 percent). It was mentioned that one victim was on probation, and one had an outstanding warrant at the time of the incidents. Five victims had a criminal record, none of which involved firearms, drugs, or other violent offences.

Five victims were mentioned as having been treated for a mental illness (all from suicide incidents). Eight were reported as having experienced stressful life events. The most common stressful life event of victims was a family break-up or separation (8).

#### **3.4.1 Victims Injured**

Almost one-quarter (58) of all victims (259) involved in firearm related incidents either died or were injured. Twenty-two victims died as a result of gun shot. Thirty-six victims were injured but not killed. In incidents where victims were injured, 13 involved shootings, and in two, the victim most seriously injured was “pistol whipped” by the gun. Seventeen incidents involved injuries, but not from the firearm. In nine incidents, an injured victim required hospitalization, and in three emergency treatment was given but no hospitalization was required. The rest did not require hospitalization.

### **3.5 Charges Laid**

Charges were laid in 174 incidents against a total of 261 accused suspects. These resulted in a total of 661 charges laid, or an average of 2.6 charges per suspect. Table 5 shows that the two most common charges laid were “robbery” and the “use of firearm to commit an offence.”

**Table 5**      **Ten Most Frequent Charges Laid (Total N = 661)**

<b>Charges Laid</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Robbery	100	15 %
Use of Firearm to Commit Offence	56	8%
Wear Disguise to Commit Offence	40	6%
Assault	37	6%
Possess of Weapon Dangerous to Public Peace	36	5%
Possess of Prohibited Weapon	32	5%
Unsafe Storage of Firearm	31	5%
Possess Goods Obtained by Crime	29	4%
Utter Threats	25	4%
Mischief	24	4%

## **4.0 FIREARM HOMICIDES**

In 1995, as a percentage of all homicides investigated by the Winnipeg Police Service (16), two (13 percent) were firearm related. Nationally, the proportion of homicides committed with firearms was 30 percent for the same year. In the six-year period 1990-1995 the Winnipeg Police Service investigated 11 firearm related homicides. This accounted for 11 percent of all homicides (96) investigated by the Winnipeg Police Service — nationally the proportion of firearm homicide was 32 percent between 1990 and 1995. In addition, there were five attempted homicides which were investigated in 1995.

### **4.1 Clearance**

Of the 11 homicides, eight (72 percent) were cleared by arrest and charge, two were followed by the offender committing suicide, and one was not cleared. One of the eight incidents is still before the courts. In comparison, the Toronto study revealed that “a murder charge was laid in 55 percent of the cases, and ten percent of offenders had committed suicide.” (Department of Justice Canada, 1994). In Winnipeg, it was reported that one of the incidents involved gang activity (street gang).

### **4.2 Firearms Recovered/Seized**

There was mention in ten homicides of at least one firearm being recovered/seized. In one incident it was reported that the firearm was not securely stored by the accused.

#### **4.2.1 Types of Firearms**

There were a total of 22 firearms seized. Ten were non-restricted rifles, four were non-restricted shotguns, six were restricted handguns, one was a prohibited sawed-off shotgun, and one was unknown. It was noted in the incident files that serial numbers had been erased from two of the seized firearms (one long rifle target pistol, and one sawed-off shotgun).

#### **4.2.2 Firearms Discharged**

A firearm was discharged in all 11 incidents; most often only once (6). Firearms were discharged twice in two incidents, four times in one incident, and five times in two incidents.

#### **4.2.3 Firearm Origins**

All of the handguns recovered/seized in homicide incidents were registered with

the RWRS. However, one of the six handguns was held illegally by the accused because the handgun was reported stolen by the lawful owner. Police incident files indicated that an attempt had been made to check the origin of three firearms (RWRS=1, PARCS=2).

### **4.3 Suspects/Accused Involved**

In ten of the incidents there was a single suspect, while in one incident there were four suspects (for a total of 14 suspects). In seven incidents one suspect was apprehended, and in one incident four were apprehended, representing 11 accused in total. It was reported that two suspects had been treated for mental illness. In addition, three apprehended suspects had experienced stressful life events prior to the incident, all of which were family break-ups.

#### **4.3.1 Suspect/Accused Criminal History**

In one incident a suspect was reported to be on probation at the time of the incident. From the total number of suspects, police files revealed that one-half (7) had criminal records. Three suspects had a criminal record involving firearm-related offences, three had a criminal record related to violent offences, and one had a criminal record related to other offences.

#### **4.3.2 FAC and Firearm Prohibition Information**

From the total number of gun homicide incidents where the accused was known to police (10 incidents), six files did not have any indication of whether the accused was in possession of a valid FAC. In two incidents the accused was the holder of a valid FAC and in the remaining two incidents they were not. In one incident the person in possession of the firearm was reported as being prohibited from possessing firearms. Five incident files contained information which revealed that the accused was not prohibited. The remaining files contained no information on whether the accused was prohibited or not.

### **4.4 Victims Involved**

In total there were 12 victims in the 11 incidents. Six victims were male and six were female. Two victims were youths. Three victims had criminal records which did not involve firearms nor violent offences.

The accused to victim relationship was known to police in ten homicide incidents. Eight of the accused were acquaintances (this includes the two suspects who committed suicide), four were strangers, and one was a male spouse. In total, 11 victims were killed and one was injured by gun shot, and required hospitalization.

#### **4.5 Charges Laid**

Suspects were apprehended and charged in eight of the incidents, amounting to a total of 11 accused. No one was charged in the remaining three incidents because one case has yet to be cleared, and in two incidents the suspects/accused committed suicide. From the total number of apprehended and charged suspects (11), eight were charged with 1st degree murder, two were charged with 2nd degree murder, and one was charged with three offences: 2nd degree murder, attempted murder, and aggravated assault.

#### **4.6 Attempted Homicides**

All five of the attempted homicides were cleared by arrest and charge, and all were founded. There was evidence of street gang involvement in one incident. Three firearms were recovered/seized from these incidents including a non-restricted shotgun, a restricted handgun, and a prohibited sawed-off shotgun.

There were a total of eight suspects from the incidents. Seven were male and one was female. One suspect was prohibited from possessing a firearm at the time of the offence and did not have a valid FAC. In two incidents the accused was reported to be under the influence of alcohol, and one was under the influence of other drugs. All eight suspects were charged with a total of 20 charges (eight charges of attempted murder). There were six victims in the five incidents, two of whom were injured (requiring hospitalization).

## 5.0 FIREARM ROBBERY

In 1995, the Winnipeg Police Service responded to 313 firearm robberies. This accounted for 17 percent of the total robbery incidents of 1995 (1,848). In comparison, almost one-quarter (22 percent) of the robberies in Canada in 1995 involved firearms. Table 6 reveals that the majority of firearm robbery incidents involve gas stations, hotels, and other commercial premises.

**Table 6** Total Number of Firearm Robberies Investigated by Police

Target	Number of Incidents	Percent
Bank	29	9.3%
Financial Institution	8	2.6%
Pharmacy	7	2.2%
Jewellery Store	5	1.6%
Convenience Store	60	19.2%
Other Commercial Premises	130	41.5%
Other*	74	23.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\* "Other" included robberies targeting persons, homes, taxi-cabs, and delivery personnel.

The following discussion is based on the results of the 127 sampled and reviewed incidents.

### 5.1 Clearance/Founded

In total, 38 percent (48) of the robberies were cleared by arrest and charge at the time of data collection. This proportion was lowest for robberies targeting other commercial premises (19 of 54). All of the sampled robbery incidents were founded (127). Gang activity (street gangs) was mentioned to be involved in seven of the incidents, and in two others, a copy of the incident report was forwarded to the Street Gang Unit, which suggests suspected gang involvement.

Overall, the mean value of goods stolen was \$1,732. This figure was found to vary greatly depending on the robbery target. The largest mean value of goods stolen (\$7,296) was found in pharmacy/jewellery store robberies.

### 5.2 Firearms Recovered/Seized

In over 90 percent of firearm-related robberies reviewed (127), the narrative of the incident file indicated that one firearm was involved. Two firearms were involved in seven incidents and four firearms were implicated in one incident. Twenty-five firearms were seized by police and eight were recovered (e.g., firearms found by police or turned in to police and later connected to a firearm robbery incident).

#### 5.2.1 Types of Firearms

Thirty-three firearms were recovered/seized in 29 robbery incidents. In total, nine of the firearms recovered/seized were prohibited sawed-off long guns, nine were replicas/imitations, five were starter pistols, seven were air guns, one was a handgun, one was a non-restricted rifle, and one was a piece of a handgun's handle. The majority of these (20) were recovered/seized at the home of the suspect/accused.

In 77 percent (98) of the incidents, no firearm was recovered/seized making it difficult to accurately describe the types of firearms used. In 14 incidents, the suspect/accused stated that they were in possession of a firearm, however, the victims did not actually see the firearm itself. From the incidents where a firearm was not seized by the police, victims' statements revealed that the majority were handguns (55).

#### 5.2.2 Firearms Discharged

The firearms that were involved in these incidents were rarely discharged. In six incidents there was evidence or mention of a firearm discharge.

#### 5.2.3 Firearm Origins

Three firearms were acquired from friends, and one from a stranger. Although there was mention that one handgun was recovered in one robbery incident, the police file did not contain enough information to determine the registration status of the gun on the RWRS.

### 5.3 Suspects/Accused Involved

Fifty-three of the incidents involved one suspect, 43 involved two suspects, 19 involved three suspects, and 12 incidents involved four or five suspects. Overall, there were 249 suspects; 237 were male, and 86 were youth. Suspects were apprehended in 56 of the 127 incidents (44 percent). Twenty-two incidents involved apprehending one suspect, 20 involved the arrest of two suspects, and 14 involved the arrest of three to five



suspects. In total 111 suspects were apprehended.

In three incidents, it was mentioned by either a victim or witness that a suspect/accused was under the influence of alcohol. In four incidents other drugs were implicated. It was indicated that two suspects/accused had experienced stressful life events prior to the incident.

### 5.3.1 Suspect/Accused Criminal History

In incidents where a suspect was apprehended (accounting for a total of 111 apprehended suspects), information on legal status was available for 36 percent (40) of the individuals apprehended. Five suspects were on probation, three were on full parole, and one was incarcerated and unlawfully at large. A further 15 were facing unrelated charges, and seven had outstanding warrants. Police files indicated that nine of the apprehended accused did not fall under the above mentioned categories.

Forty-one (46) percent of the apprehended suspect's criminal history was available from police incident files. From this total, 83 percent (38) of the accused had a criminal record. It was specifically stated that eight accused had no criminal record. Three of the accused had a criminal record involving firearm offences, and three others had a criminal record for violent offences. Four of the apprehended suspects had been involved in drug offences, and 28 of the suspects had been involved in other offences (e.g., drunk driving, possession of goods obtained by crime).

### 5.3.2 FAC and Firearm Prohibition Information

The majority of files reviewed did not contain information regarding FAC's, however, of the 111 suspects apprehended, it was stated that four of the persons in possession of the firearm were not the holders of a valid FAC. Police files contained firearm prohibition information on five apprehended suspects, four were prohibited from possessing firearms and one was not.

## 5.4 Victims Involved

Overall, there were 145 victims. In 107 firearm robbery incidents there was one victim involved, in 16 incidents there were two victims, and there were three victims in two incidents. Victims were most likely to be male (96) and adult (134).

The accused to victim relationship was noted in all 127 firearm robbery incident files. Ninety-eight of the accused to victim relationships were described as stranger.

From the total number of accused who were strangers to the victim, 67 percent (64) approached the victim as a customer. The remaining 32 accused were referred to as “other strangers.”

#### 5.4.1 Victims Injured

Twelve of the 145 reported victims were injured but no one was killed. From the total number of reported victims, two were actually shot and two were “pistol whipped.” Two victims required hospitalization and one received emergency treatment but was not hospitalized. The remaining nine victims were injured but did not receive any medical attention.

### 5.5 Charges Laid

In 48 of the 56 incidents involving the apprehension of a suspect, charges were laid. A total of 98 accused were charged with a total of 226 charges (an average of 2.3 charges per accused ). There were 91 charges of “Robbery,” 42 charges of “Use of a Firearm to Commit an Offence”, and 34 charges of “Wear a Disguise to Commit an Offence.” Other frequently laid charges were “Conspiracy to Commit an Indictable Offence” (12), “Possess a Weapon Dangerous to the Public Peace” (6) and “Possess a Prohibited Weapon” (3).

## **6.0 FIREARM SUICIDE**

In 1995, a total of 11 firearm suicides were investigated by the Winnipeg Police Service. As a proportion of all 1995 suicides (68) in Winnipeg, firearm suicides accounted for 16 percent (Winnipeg Police Service). National suicide data is currently available up to 1994 only; firearms accounted for 26 percent of the total number of suicides in 1994 (Hung, 1996).

As well, seven attempted firearm suicides were also reported in 1995. Firearm suicide incidents were most likely to occur in the victim's home.

### **6.1 Firearms Recovered/Seized**

In all 11 suicide incidents there was mention on file of at least one firearm being recovered/seized. All firearms were recovered/seized at the scene of the suicide incident. Police files did not report whether the firearm was securely stored or not.

#### **6.1.1 Types of Firearms**

In ten incidents the weapon was a non-restricted rifle (6) or shotgun (4). In one incident a restricted handgun (revolver) was used. The remaining two firearms were described in the police file.

#### **6.1.2 Firearms Discharged**

A firearm was discharged once in each of the 11 suicide incidents.

#### **6.1.3 Firearm Origins**

In two incidents the victim did not own the firearms used to commit suicide. Police files revealed that one firearm was acquired from the victim's father and in the other incident the origin of the firearm was unknown. The nine remaining incidents did not contain information on ownership status.

### **6.2 Suicide Victims**

All 11 victims were male and 10 were adults.

### 6.2.1 Victim's History

One victim was reported to have been under the influence of alcohol and four had been treated for mental illness. It was reported in the files that four had experienced stressful life events prior to their suicide (e.g., family break-up).

### 6.2.2 FAC and Firearm Prohibition Information

Of the 11 suicides, ten files did not have any indication of whether the person was in possession of a valid FAC. In the one case where information was available, the police file reported that the victim did not have a valid FAC. No files contained information on whether the victim was prohibited from owning firearms.

## 6.3 Attempted Suicides

A total of seven attempted suicides were investigated by the Winnipeg Police Service in 1995. Six of the victims were male, and all were adult. A firearm was discharged in only one incident injuring but not killing the victim. No charges were laid against any of these victims. One was reported to be under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident, and one was reportedly under the influence of other drugs.

One victim had been treated for depression, and four victims had experienced stressful life events prior to the incident (unemployment and family break-ups).

In total 36 firearms were recovered/seized. Most of these were non-restricted rifles and shotguns (30).

## **7.0 IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS**

The following section describes the perceptions of 15 experienced members from the Winnipeg Police Service. The purpose of conducting the in-person interviews was to document and identify the characteristics of firearm related incidents encountered by police. Members from the following units were selected and interviewed: Homicide; Major Crimes (primarily robbery incidents); Drug Unit, Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs; and, Street Gangs. Although participating members had 10 to 14 years of service experience, the focus of the interview was on firearm related incidents which occurred in the previous three to five years.

It is important to note that the results of the in-person interviews represent the views and perception of the 15 participating members. Opinions expressed by members may not always be reflected in the quantitative data presented above or reported in official crime statistics. However, their perceptions did provide valuable insights and information that is unique to their own experience.

### **7.1 Number of Firearm Related Incidents**

All police officers interviewed had been involved in firearm related incidents. The number of incidents encountered varied by the member's unit and between members themselves. For example, members of the Homicide unit investigated approximately five to ten incidents in one year. On the other hand, Major Crimes, Street Gangs and the Vice Division (Drug Unit and Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs) encountered a range of 20 to 75 firearm incidents per year.

### **7.2 Types of Firearm Related Incidents**

Members of the Homicide unit reported that gun homicide incidents typically involved handguns and shotguns and, occasionally, rifles. Although members stated that handguns were involved more often in the last three to five years, they also expressed that shotguns and rifles continued to be most prevalent. It was also expressed that the type of firearm used did not vary by groups (e.g., bikers, street gangs). There was a consensus that these people use "whatever [guns] they [criminals] can get their hands on."

Officers working in the Major Crimes unit primarily investigate robbery incidents and conduct a variety of related functions (e.g., surveillance and search warrants). Members also deal with armed and barricaded incidents which may involve hostages.

There was agreement that the firearms most frequently encountered were modified (sawed-off) shotguns and rifles. Handguns were also dealt with, but to a lesser degree. It

was suggested that the prevalence of shotguns and rifles reflect their ease of access. Members of Major Crimes indicated that the street gangs had a preference for sawed-off rifles and shotguns, while handguns were more often associated with suspects that were acting alone and not in conjunction with an organized gang. As well, members expressed the opinion that the types of firearms used in the last three to five years had not changed. On the other hand, some members thought that the use of handguns had increased and that there has been movement from imitation to “real” guns.

The Vice Division is involved with the investigation of motorcycle gangs and drug dealers. When compared to other Winnipeg Police Service members interviewed, the Vice Division indicated that they encounter a broader range of firearms and more sophisticated weapons which included sawed-off shotguns, high-powered rifles, and handguns. Members of the Vice Division stated that modified sawed-off rifles and shotguns were most prevalent while others perceived a trend toward semi-automatic weapons.

Members of the Street Gang Unit primarily investigate crime involving street gangs (e.g., stolen vehicles, break and enters, search warrants for weapons, drug dealer arrests, spot checks, and gun robbery incidents). With respect to the number of firearms encountered by members of this unit, one members indicated that in the month prior to the interview he had 15 search warrants of which approximately three-quarters “turned up guns.”

The Street Gang unit reported encountering a variety of firearms including high-powered rifles, altered shotguns and rifles, as well as handguns. There was agreement that the types of firearms used in criminal acts has changed over the past three to five years. It was perceived that the better organized gangs are slowly moving toward handguns. However, the consensus was that the firearms of choice among street gangs was sawed-off shotguns and rifles. One officer commented that, “First there were knives and bats, then shotguns, now a few handguns. Another officer commented, “Before replica or pellet guns were being brandished, now there are a lot more ‘real’ firearms out there.”

### **7.3 Criminal Acts in which Firearms are Used**

Two of the fifteen officers interviewed, thought that there had been no change in the type of criminal acts in which firearms are used in the past three to five years in Winnipeg.

Other members often expressed the opinion that firearms had become involved in “new types of crime.” Of these, home invasions and drive-by shootings were most often cited. Also mentioned by several of those interviewed were so-called “strong arm robberies” which included purse snatching and incidents where youths are robbed of their jackets. As explained by one officer, the use of a firearm in these instances allows a

criminal to work independently where previously he needed a partner for “muscle.” Another officer indicated that there had been a change in convenience store robberies. He stated that five years ago these robberies would have involved knives but now suggested that there is usually at least one loaded firearm.

#### **7.4 Source of Firearms Used in Crime**

There was a general consensus among members interviewed that the majority of illegal firearms used in crime are obtained from residential break-ins. The next biggest source cited by the officers interviewed was theft from vehicles and wholesalers. The third source indicated was other provinces and, finally, smuggling across the U.S.-Canada border. Several officers also noted that guns may be stolen from rural areas of Manitoba, where people may be less likely to take the proper storage precautions, and then brought into Winnipeg.

Of the firearms obtained from residential break-ins, a number of officers indicated that known gun collectors or hunters might be targeted. In other incidents, a theft of guns would be incidental to a break-in.

The officers from the Vice Division and several members from the Street Gangs unit suggested that there were other sources where firearms could be obtained. They identified an “interconnected sub-culture” across provincial and national boundaries to which gangs, particularly biker gangs, belonged and within which guns are shared and transported.

When asked “Is there an underground circulation of firearms in Winnipeg?” and “Are there illegal firearms dealers in Winnipeg?”, all the officers either perceived or were certain that there are both. Many thought that this kind of operation might not be highly organized, but that: “If the word is out at certain hotels that you want a gun, you can get a gun. . . .” and “There are people that you can go and see [to obtain a gun].”

Overall, members indicated that although there is a greater number of dealers today, the profile of the dealers has not changed significantly over the past three to five years. Some revealed, however, that there are now more young people involved. Several officers explained that the dealers may be transient, “depending on who’s in jail” but that generally the same types of people were involved.

#### **7.5 The Risk to Police Officers**

All officers interviewed believed that they are subject to greater risk than they were three to five years ago because of the presence of firearms in crime.

The officers also agreed that both the police department and themselves, personally, now take greater precautions. A number of officers also indicated that they have undergone additional training in the past several years to deal with high risk situations where firearms are suspected, including tactics for “high risk vehicle takedown” and “dynamic entry” into a building.

Many officers said they now wear their bullet-proof vests at all times on duty.

## **7.6 Curtailing the Use of Illegal Firearms**

The 15 Winnipeg Police Service officers interviewed had a number of suggestions relating to the curtailment of the illegal use of firearms. More than half expressed the need to enforce existing laws and to create stiffer penalties, not only for the use of a firearm in the commission of a criminal act, but also for the possession of an illegal firearm. Shared views included: “no bartering, no deals,” stiffer sentences, mandatory sentences, no parole, “parole at 1/6 should be thrown out!”, any altered firearm should be considered prohibited (i.e., not determined by measurements).

With regard to the ready availability of guns through break-ins, eight officers cited the need for better storage with lock-box safe-style cabinets. Two officers suggested a record-keeping system which would be the responsibility of the gun owner. This system would require gun owners to present to police officers on demand a record of the guns they own. Failing to do so would be a punishable offence and would void all insurance claims.

A couple of members advocated banning all handguns. One officer called for a full amnesty program while another suggested that all homes with firearms be required to have alarm systems. Finally, one officer commented that the root of the problem is not a police function: “[we] need positive family environments, role models, education - how do you ever get enough money for [all] the programs that are needed?”

## **7.7 The Use of Firearms**

The officers interviewed were in unanimous agreement that in Winnipeg, over the last three to five years, there has been an increase in both the numbers of firearms and their use in the commission of criminal acts. When asked to what they attributed this increase, a variety of reasons were put forward.

The proliferation of gang activity in Winnipeg was cited most often. It was felt that the criminal element is better organized now and young people are becoming increasingly involved. There was a perception that the increase in gang activity has resulted in an increase in break-and-enters and firearm thefts.



Attitudinal shifts were also reported as a reason for the increase in the use of firearms. There was a perception that street gang members had “wanton disregard” for others and placed no value even on their own lives. It was felt that there is a general lack of individual accountability and that youths, in particular at the bottom of the socio-economic scale, are growing up in an environment where violence and guns are commonplace. As well, a number of officers cited the breakdown of the family unit. Several others looked to the U.S.-based media as a negative influence.

Other members expressed the view that there is a more transient population in Winnipeg than there was five years ago.

## 8.0 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The use of police incident files and property room database file proved to be a rich source of information on firearm incidents and guns recovered/seized by the Winnipeg Police Service. For the most part, in cases where firearms were recovered/seized by police, incident files contained basic information on the firearms involved. However, information pertaining to the legality of the firearm was less evident.

For example, little information was available on whether the possessor of the firearm, at the time of the incident, was in lawful possession of the firearm (e.g., did possessor have a valid FAC?, was he/she prohibited from possessing firearms?, was the firearm stolen?, and in the case of restricted firearms, was the firearm registered with the RWRS?). Police files contained information related to legal ownership for 11 percent (47) of all firearms recovered/seized. On the other hand, there was enough information on file to determine the registration status of 35 handguns (60 percent of all handguns recovered/seized).

With respect to the legal status of the suspect/accused involved, police files contained information on 39 percent (117) of the 299 individuals apprehended. Criminal record history was available on file for 46 percent (137) of the apprehended suspects. The paucity of information, related to the legality of the firearms, legal status and criminal record of the suspect/accused, may be in part attributed to police documentation practices and procedures. For example, police may document findings on firearm related incidents (and other incidents) under investigation in their personal log books rather than the incident file. Information on the legality of a firearm may have been determined by the police, however, the action and the finding was not recorded in the incident file.

Regardless of the above mentioned limitations, this research project compiled new empirical data on the characteristics of firearm incidents and the types of firearms recovered by the Winnipeg Police Service. Accordingly, in 1995 the police in Winnipeg investigated approximately 1,692 firearm incidents. The file review process collected and analyzed data from 387 confirmed firearm incidents. Listed below are several report highlights.

From the total number of reviewed firearm incidents (387), the police recovered/seized 442 firearms (this includes 14 firearms recovered in gun homicide incidents between 1990 and 1994).

Fifty-three percent (236) of the firearms recovered/seized were non-restricted rifles and shotguns. In 1994, 46 percent of the firearm related incidents investigated by the Edmonton Police Service involved non-restricted rifles (Edmonton Police Service, 1995). Similar findings were reported by the national Smuggling Work Group report which stated that 49 percent of the firearms recovered by ten different police agencies across Canada in 1993 were non-restricted rifles and shotguns (Department of Justice Canada, 1995).

In this study, three-quarters (330) of all firearms were recovered/seized in criminal

incidents. From the total number of firearms recovered/seized in criminal incidents, 51 percent (169) were rifles and shotguns, 12 percent (38) were handguns, 16 percent (52) were air guns, and seven percent (23) were sawed-off rifles and shotguns.

Twenty-five percent (112) of all firearms were recovered/seized in non-criminal incidents. Rifles and shotguns made up 60 percent (67) of the firearms recovered in non-criminal incidents, 18 percent (20) were handguns and eight percent (9) were air guns.

From the total number of handguns recovered/seized by police (58), 38 were traced on the Restricted Weapons Registration System (RWRS) of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Of the cases where there was enough information to determine the registration status, 69 percent (24) were registered and the remaining 31 percent (11) were not. The RCMP were unable to determine the registration status of three handguns due to a lack of information.

From the total number of traced handguns, 23 were involved in criminal incidents. It was determined that 74 percent (17) of these handguns were registered and that 26 percent (6) were not. This finding makes the Winnipeg study distinct from the study completed in Toronto (Department of Justice Canada, 1994) and the work conducted by the national Smuggling Work Group. The study completed in Toronto revealed that 30 percent of the handguns were registered and 70 percent were not registered on the RWRS. The national Smuggling Work Group found that 48 percent of the traceable handguns were registered and the remaining 52 percent were not registered with the RWRS. This may suggest that there is less trafficking and smuggling of handguns in Winnipeg than in the other cities reviewed.

In 1995, 82 percent of the firearms recovered in attempted and completed suicides in Winnipeg were non-restricted long guns and 10 percent were handguns. These results are comparable to the findings reported in the national Firearm Smuggling Work Group report, which revealed that 80 percent of the firearms recovered in attempted and completed suicide were non-restricted rifles and shotguns.

Almost 25 percent (58) of all victims either died or were injured in firearm related incidents investigated by police.

In-person interviews with members of the Winnipeg Police Service provided valuable insights not attained from the file review. They suggested that the frequency with which shotguns and rifles were used in firearm incidents reflected their ease of access (or perhaps their availability). They indicated that residential break-ins, as well as theft from vehicles and wholesalers, is a major source of firearms trafficked and used in crime.

As previously noted, the file review process has a number of strengths and weaknesses. The outcome of the review process itself is dependent upon information recorded in the file. When planning a review exercise, consideration must be given to the objectives of the study and the ability to access the needed information. Furthermore, consistency in the documentation of information is critical. Prior to undertaking a study of this nature, there is a need to ensure that incidents have a "firearms" indicator as part of their data field. A "firearms" data field may

provide a clearer and more accurate figure as to the number of firearm related incidents investigated by police. The Winnipeg Police Service incident reporting information system is currently in the early stages of being upgraded and, as such, the inclusion of a firearm data field may assist future research endeavours.

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