

# **TR-05-98E**

## **Violent Incidents**

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**TECHNICAL REPORT**  
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NOTE: Further information  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Canadian Police Research Centre would like to thank Dr. Loree and the Community, Contract and Aboriginal Policing Services for permission to publish this report of a pilot project.

The report was prepared as a result of a study conducted within the RCMP. Dr. Loree has included a footnote explaining the provincial designations of the Divisions. The term “members” used throughout the report refers to peace officers.

This report is also available in French.

## **SOMMAIRE**

Le Centre canadien de recherches policières tient à remercier M. Loree ainsi que les Services de police communautaires, contractuels et autochtones de nous avoir donné la permission de publier ce rapport sur le projet-pilote.

Le rapport a été rédigé par la suite d'une étude menée auprès de la GRC. M. Loree a ajouté une note précisant les désignations provinciales des divisions. Le terme «membre» utilisé dans le rapport renvoie aux agents de la paix.

Le document est aussi disponible en français.

# VIOLENT INCIDENTS

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## VIOLENT INCIDENTS

### Executive Summary, Conclusions and Recommendation

- Concern with officer safety was a major reason for implementing a pilot project to collect data about violent incidents involving members and their families. After extensive consultation, a survey was designed and implemented for 1995 with the support of management and DSRR's. Surveys were distributed to all operational units and returned by mail or Fax.
- 671 reports were received from across the country with the "lower mainland" of BC being the only seriously under-represented contract area.
- One or more of 3 screening/trigger factors were necessary and sufficient for an incident to be reported. These were:
  - 1 *A weapon was involved in the incident, although not necessarily used.*
  - 2 *A member was physically assaulted in the course of their duties.*
  - 3 *Threats were made to members, or their families, by persons who were believed to have had the intent or carrying them out.*
- Assault was the most common trigger, 38% of the total, followed by weapon, 31%. Regional/divisional patterns are observed; assault is the most common trigger in the Atlantic region, followed by "F" division<sup>1</sup>. Weapon is most frequently cited in "D" followed by "K" and the North (almost all from "G").
- One third of the reported incidents occur between 10pm and 2am and over 40% on Saturday and Sunday.
- The likelihood of an injury being reported is highest on the weekend, not surprising given the workload.
- Incidents which typically occur in a home are over 1/3 of the total - 23% being domestic/family violence. The size of the unit/detachment is related to the type of incident, probably reflecting different workloads in communities of different size, location, etc. For example, the smaller the unit, the greater the proportion of reports are for domestic/family violence incidents. The larger the unit, the greater the proportion are for effecting arrest or executing a warrant.
- Alcohol is cited as the main contributing factor in half of the reports and, in combination with other factors such as drugs, in 75%. Psychiatric problems/mental

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<sup>1</sup> The Divisions - "B" (Newfoundland), "D" (Manitoba), "E" (British Columbia), "F" (Saskatchewan), "G" (Northwest Territories), "H" Nova Scotia), "J" (New Brunswick), "K" (Alberta), "L" (Prince Edward Island), "M" (Yukon), "A," "O," & "C" (Federal Divisions - National Capital, Ontario, Quebec).

illness, alone or in combination, is a factor in about 16%.

- In 10% of the reports, no one was actually working in the unit at the time of the incident. In 1/4 of the reports, only one member was on duty.
- Overall, in 51% of the reports, the unit/detachment was described as being at strength at the time of the incident. There were regional/divisional differences with the highest percentage being in "F" (61%) and "E" (59%) and lowest in the North (38%) and "K" (42%).
- In 40% of all the incidents, one member made the initial response. In 1/4 of all incidents, only one member was involved. Of the latter group, which is 12% of the total, 57% said they were working alone and handled the incident themselves while 37% said they were alone in the community at the time.
- In 47% of the cases, members said they asked for RCMP back-up and 13% said they didn't have time. 12% said they didn't because no-one was available.
- When RCMP back-up was provided, it was in less than 20 minutes in 85% of the time.
- About 3/4 of the members report direct communication with one or more of their detachment, their back-up, or the OCC.
- Apart from off-duty members, support was provided by a large number of people in the community, e.g., Auxiliary Constables, by-law officers, guards and matrons, band constables and ordinary citizens.
- Most, 92%, of the incidents involved only adults and 6% only youth. Although the numbers are small, a greater percentage of the latter than the former are incidents of suicide/attempted suicide and for disturbance in a public place. The latter reports were more likely than adult incidents to be characterized by psychiatric or mental illness problems.
- Almost 60% of the incidents involved only one person and 17% two people.
- About 10% of the incidents involved only females while 2/3 involved only males. The necessity of using some level of force to resolve the incident was similar, 72% and 76% respectively. Pepper spray is reported as the greatest level of force used in 29% of the male only incidents compared with 18% of the female only incidents.
- Overall, about 3/4 of the incidents required the use of some level of force to resolve. 44% said physical force was the greatest used (although this will vary greatly), 27% pepper spray, 3% firearm, and 26% none.

- The use of some level of force to resolve an incident was greatest in the largest units (>18) and least in those with 4-8 members, about 90% and 60% respectively.
- There are divisional differences in the percent of incidents resolved with and without the use of force, for example 41% of the incidents in "D" were resolved with no force reported compared to 17% in "F" and 20% in "E" division.
- There are regional/divisional differences in the levels of force used, for example, pepper spray is the most frequent reported level in the Atlantic region and the least used in "D" while physical force is most frequent in "E" and the least again in "D."
- A weapon(s) was reported in 282 (43%) of the incidents. 125 reports cited "other firearm" (rifle or shotgun) while the second most common was a knife (81 incidents).
- There were 50 incidents when a weapon was reported being used against a member, 10 involving a firearm.
- Serious threats were reported in about 229 incidents, and considered capable of being followed through in 155 incidents, about 22% of the total. About 1/4 of the latter were to either family members or to a member and their family.
- Members in "D," "G," and "F" report a higher percentage of incidents with threats and threats considered believable.
- Overall, just under 30% of the incidents resulted in some level of physical injury. The smallest percentage of incidents with physical injury is in the North and the greatest in "F" division. Injuries are more likely to be reported in the larger units.
- Of the injuries reported, almost 2/3 were self-treated, 30% required medical treatment and 4% hospitalization.
- About 1/4 of all the incidents in which injuries occurred while effecting arrest/executing warrant and about 18% while dealing with a domestic/family violence incident.
- Measuring danger by the likelihood of injury, 36% of situations of effecting arrest/executing warrant resulted in some form of injury, the same percentage as automobile/traffic incidents. 22% of all domestic/family violence incidents and 27% of other house/party incidents resulted in injury.

## Conclusion

With exceptions in some areas, members across the country responded very positively to this pilot project. The data certainly do not include all such violent incidents but, with allowance for these exceptions, they seem to be representative, and hence reflect, the

range of such events over the year.

On the basis of the information from this pilot project, the frequency of violence directed toward members and their families, or the involvement of members in situations defined as violent is sufficiently serious as to merit immediate attention. We are confident that the data from the pilot project is sufficient for immediate application in many areas and hope that they will be interpreted and used by divisions, directorates and other interested parties in a timely and appropriate manner.

The data collected to date clearly indicate the potential of this type of survey to provide important information to decision-makers about critical sectors such as training, officer safety, staffing levels, shift scheduling, and communications. In this case, the numbers really speak for themselves.

However, it is also clear that it is essential that the RCMP monitor such incidents, and their causes and consequences, over time. To this end, the following recommendation is made.

***Recommendation: That a facility be created to collect data about violent incidents involving members and their families routinely and systematically. This should be done by creating a compulsory EDP screen (e.g., IPIRS) that will provide members with the option of completing a violent incident survey form at the time of opening a file.***

The present instrument has proven itself as a solid base which can be refined and used for this purpose. The data, collected in this way, will provide the basis for ongoing analysis both at HQ and in the divisions or regions.

# VIOLENT INCIDENTS

## Report of a Pilot Project - 1995

### Introduction

The involvement of members of the RCMP in a wide range of violent situations as well as incidents that are potentially violent, has long been a major concern, especially to anyone interested in the issue of officer safety. Concern about this topic has been growing in recent years and has instigated a number of reports on related topics. For example Officer Safety Study - One vs Two Officer Patrols, 1997, Satellite Office Study, 1993, both from the Community, Contract and Aboriginal Services Directorate, and Violent Occurrences - 1994, from "G" division all address the issue of violent incidents directly or indirectly.

The latter report was one of the main reasons that the present study was undertaken, documenting as it does many anecdotes of violence directed toward members as well as incidents with violent potential in which members were involved. The "G" division report illustrates that members' worries about violence may be particularly acute in the smaller isolated detachments in the frontier areas of Canada. However, it is also clear that these concerns are by no mean restricted to the remote areas. Indeed, it has been suggested that different patterns and causal relationships are to be found in different parts of the country.

Recognizing that collecting Force-wide data is essential if the RCMP is to understand and deal effectively with the incidence and consequences of violence directed toward members, actual or potential, the Director CCAPS encouraged the development of a pilot project to do just that. The "G" division report, largely anecdotal, pointed to the seriousness of the situation and the need to collect data systematically. Early in the process, we sought the advice and support of the RCMP Officer Safety Committee and this has been extremely valuable throughout the study.



## Methodology

After review within the Directorate, and many informal discussions with knowledgeable and interested parties, a draft data collection instrument was developed. We were faced with the challenge of designing a survey mechanism that would provide essential data yet, at the same time, would be short, simple, and easy to complete. This meant that we had to make some trade-offs between information and details that would have been useful and an instrument that we felt members would complete willingly.

A final questionnaire emerged after extensive consultation with divisional COs, their senior management and DSRRs, and the Officer Safety Committee. The latter group, with its broad representation, was particularly helpful in developing operational definitions of some of the key terms including "violent incident" ~~and~~. The questionnaire was subsequently translated and sent to every operational unit and detachment in the country. The instructions were very simple - if any incident in which a member was involved fell into one of three "trigger" categories, a report was requested. Completed reports could be returned either by fax or mail. Data were compiled and analysed using SPSS.

The project was designed as a pilot study that would collect data for one year, 1995. An interim report was presented to the COs/DSRRs conference in June, 1995. For the final report, questionnaires for incidents in 1995 but received up to January 20, 1996, were included in the data base.

Response Rate

By mid-January, 1996, 671 useable "Violent Incident Reports" had been received from across the country. It was necessary to cut off data entry at that time in order to begin analysis of the information. About a dozen additional questionnaires from 1995 have been received since that date but have not been included in the data base.

Figure 1 illustrates the number of reports that were received from each division during the year.

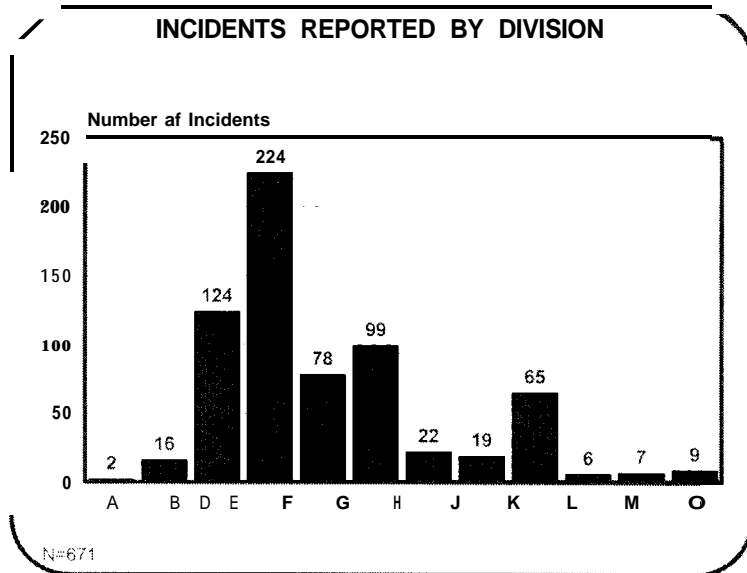


Figure 1

In Figure 2, using four major regions of Canada we show a comparison between the percentage of incident reports received, and the percentage of total RCMP members in each region. All members have been included in the regional data, with the assumption that the percentage of HQ and administration personnel are about the same in each region.

As can be seen, there is under-reporting proportionally in the Atlantic region and a slight over-reporting in the three prairie divisions. In other

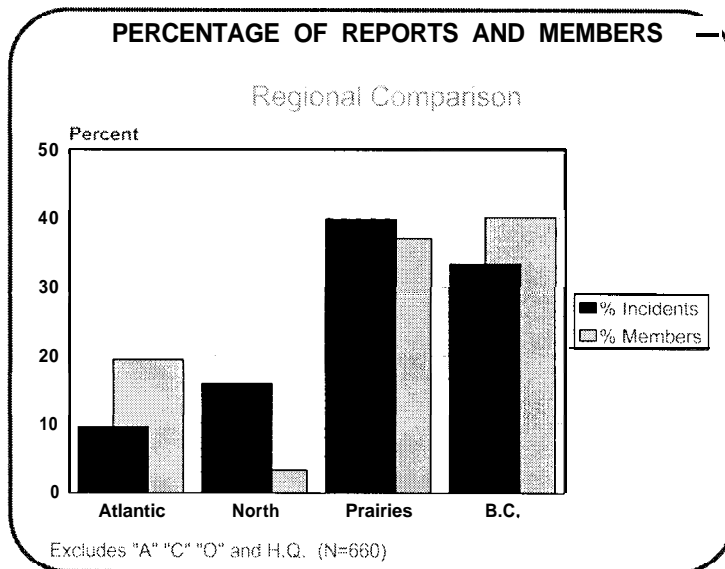


Figure 2

words, for example, approximately 19% of the members of the RCMP are located in the four Atlantic provinces and about 9% of the reports were from this region. In the North, the reports are almost entirely from "G" division and show considerable over-reporting proportional to the number of members working in the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

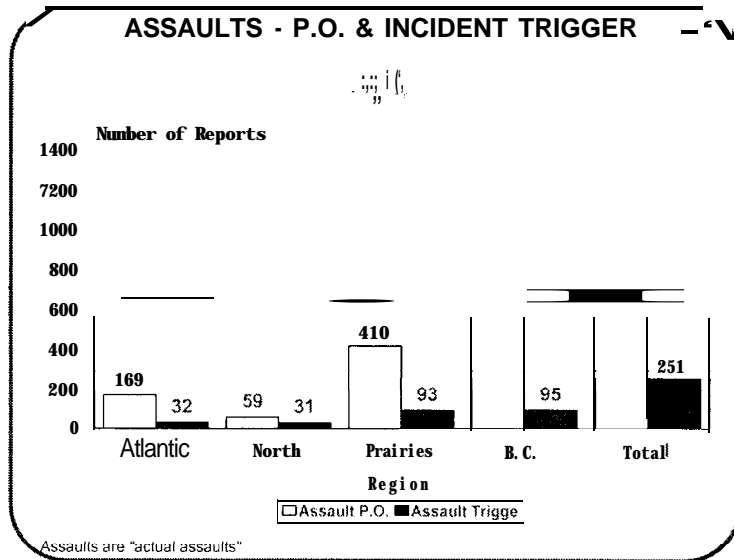
The slight under-reporting that appears in British Columbia, or "E" division, is misleading. Although about 30% of the members in "E" division work in the Lower Mainland, only 12 reports (about 5% of the total from the division) were received which were identifiable as being from the so-called "big six" detachments. To be more precise the number from each of these was: North Vancouver (6), Langley (0) Coquitlam (3), Burnaby (1), Surrey (1), and Richmond (1).

In spite of the efforts of the DSRRs in this area, members in this part of the country obviously decided against participating in the study. One can only speculate on the reasons but it is extremely disappointing when both DSRRs and management support a pilot project, one of the major purpose for which is officer safety, and a significant block of members opt out. While we can only speculate on the reasons behind this intransigence, and have been offered a number of rationalizations, we can think of none that have any validity. Outside the "Lower Mainland," members in "E" division certainly participated fully in the study.

The differences that we see between the four regions may reflect any number of things, including such things as differing communications or emphasis by the DSRR's in different divisions and levels of management support. However, the response rates may also be influenced by, or the product of, such factors as different type of work in various divisions, differing perceptions of what should or should not be reported (this is always an issue in self-reporting studies), cultural differences in the regions, and variations in police culture in the regions and divisions. It is certainly arguable that the nature of the work in "G" division - a large number of small settlements/detachments, isolation, etc. - is substantially different from that in "L."

In an effort to assess reporting rates in this study, we compared reports in which assault was a trigger with OSR actual incidents of "Assault Police Officer." With the exception of

the North, where the ratio of assaults to actual reports of assault police officer is 0.5, the ratio is about 0.2 in the other regions (**Figure 3**). In other words, there are about 5 times as many charges of assault PO as reports in which assault is used as a trigger for a violent incident report in the same year. At the time of the preliminary report after 4 1/2 months, the ratio was about 3 to 1 in all but the North. This could be due to systematic under-reporting and the gradual decline in the number of reports received over the year.



**Figure 3**

## Screening Factors

After reviewing the "G" division report on violence, and considerable discussion with the Officer Safety Committee and other knowledgeable members, three screening or trigger factors were identified and used in the pilot project. These were considered to be inclusive of the majority of incidents that members would define as "violent" and in which members are potentially at risk. One or more had to be present in order for an incident to be reported as a violent incident in this study, and as they appeared on the report form, these are:

1. *A weapon (gun, knife, club, etc.) was involved in the incident, although not necessarily used.*
2. *A member was physically assaulted in the course of their duties.*
3. *Threats were made to members, or their families, by persons who were believed to have had the intent of carrying them out. These could have been made prior to, during, or after the incident.*

In the first, it is often more the presence and potential of the weapon than its actual use that is the major concern. In the second, we decided that an actual physical assault, however small or however serious, was necessary for the incident to be included in the study. An assault on a member, it was argued, is a possibility in virtually every incident and therefore it was necessary to be specific. The third question, again involving potential, was carefully worded in order to try to capture the serious threats that members and their families encounter. The inclusion of members' families in this context is in specific response to concerns raised by members in "G" division, many of whom characteristically work in small isolated settlements.

As can be seen in **Figure 4**, one of the three main screening factors was cited in just over **83%** of all the incidents reported. Many combinations were possible, but the most commonly reported was that of "Assault and Threat." There are two things to be remembered when interpreting these data. First, the unit of analysis is the incident itself even though in a majority of cases more than one member was involved. Second, these

are all self-reported incidents. Short of having an observer follow each member, there is no other way of capturing such information. As a consequence, however, the reports reflect members' perceptions of what happened in any given incident. With the number of reports, individual variations and perceptions will tend to be averaged out in the divisional, regional and national levels of aggregation.

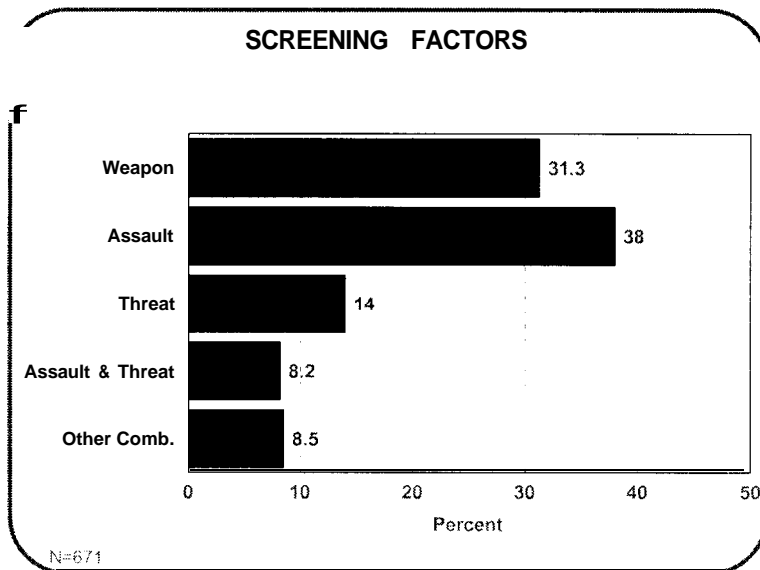


Figure 4

There are interesting regional and divisional variations in the frequency of the screening factors cited in the reports.

As a trigger to reporting a violent incident, a weapon was most common in the North, followed by the Prairies (Figure 5). Assault was most commonly cited in the Atlantic region, followed by British Columbia. Reports of a threat or some combination of factors as a trigger were quite similar in all regions of the country.

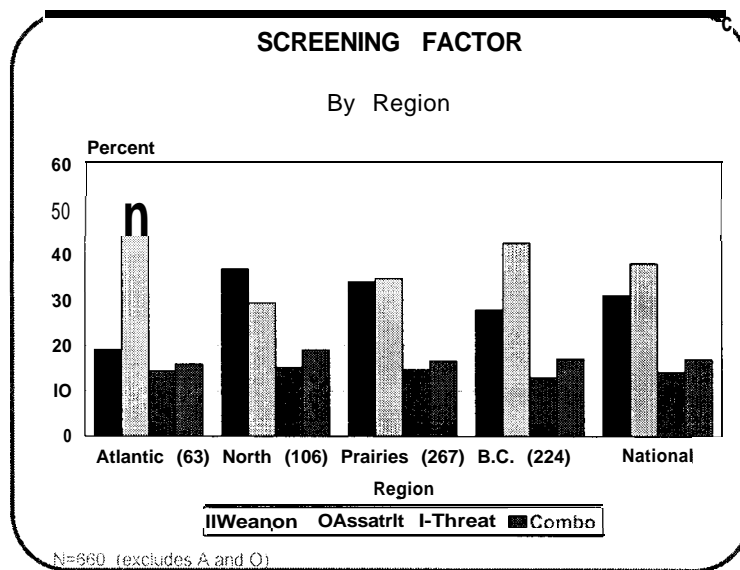


Figure 5

When the three Prairie divisions are separated (Figure 6) other differences are apparent. For example, "weapon" as a trigger factor is highest in "D" followed closely by the North,

(mainly "G") and "K" and lowest in "IF" and the Atlantic region. Assault is again most common in the Atlantic region, followed by "F" and "E." Threat is highest in "D."

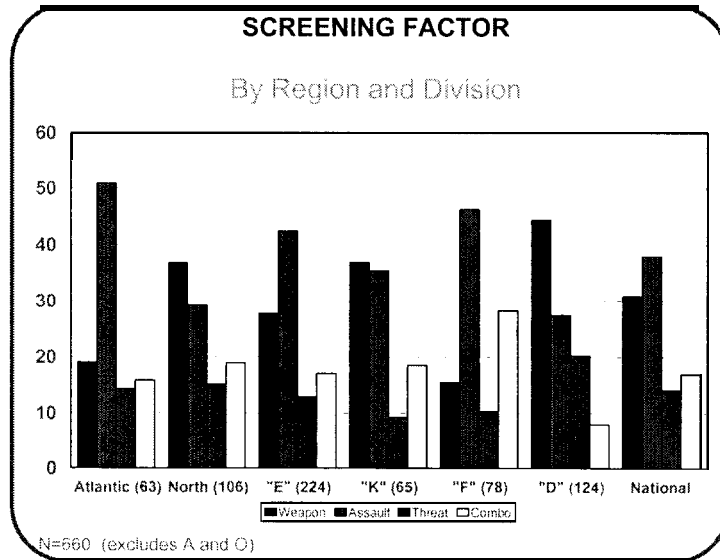


Figure 6

In Figure 7, we illustrate the relationship between the trigger factor cited by members, that which defined a violent incident for this study, and the circumstances within which the incident occurred. The numbers indicate the approximate rank-order for each type of incident. For example, the most common trigger for domestic/family violence incidents is a weapon, the second most common is assault, and so on.

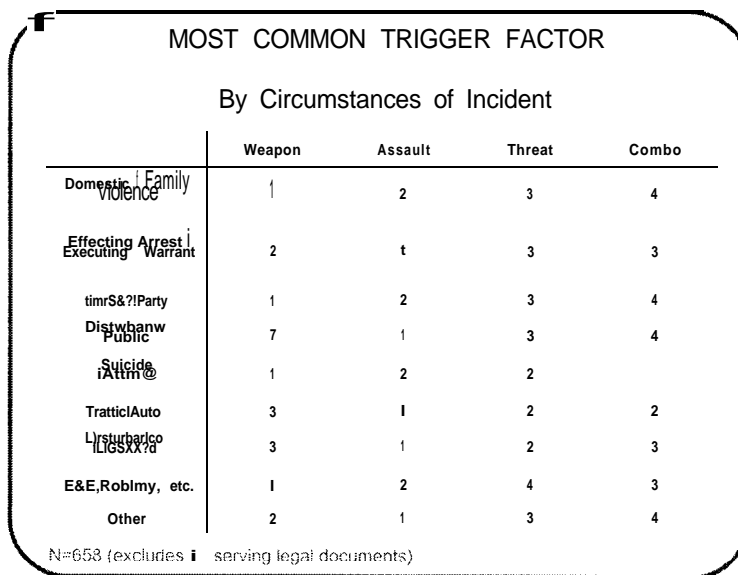


Figure 7

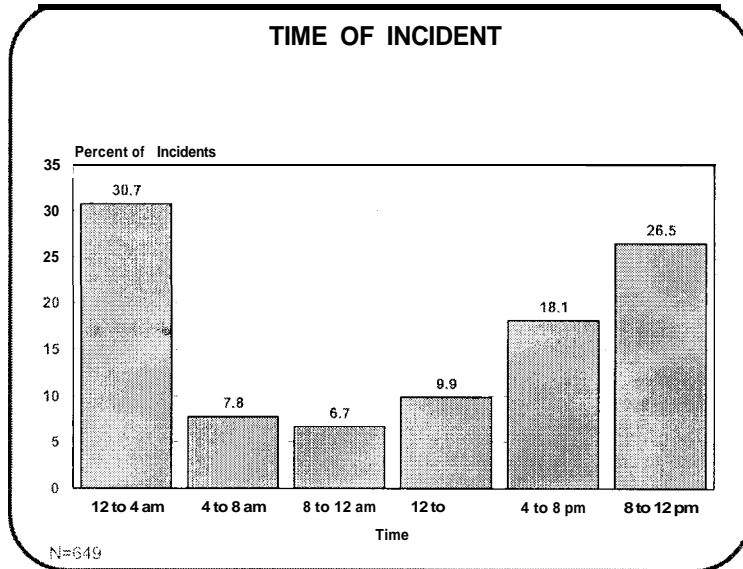
Looking at this another way, members are most likely to encounter a weapon at a domestic event - 29% of all weapon-triggered reports. Similarly, members are most likely to report

an assault while effecting arrest or executing a warrant - 26% of all assault-triggered incidents. The combination of assault and threat is also highest for this category of event, being 32% of all such combinations. A threat to members or their family, as a sole trigger, is most likely to occur as a consequence of a domestic incident - 24% of the total threats.



Time of Incidents

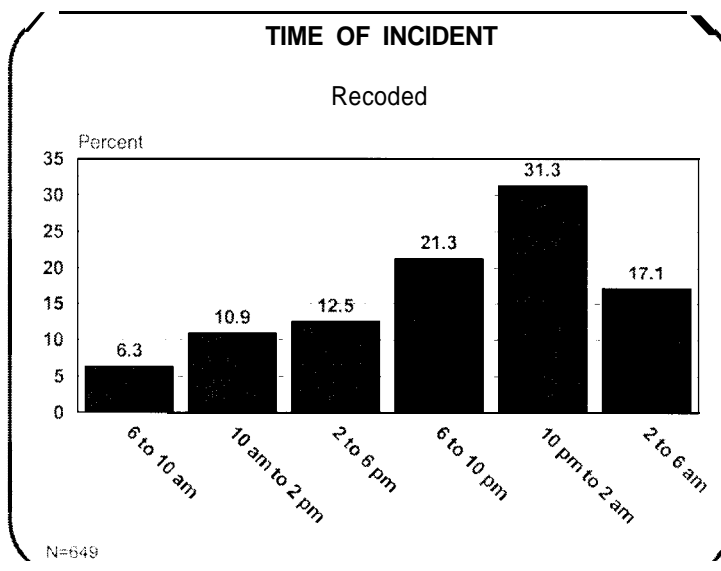
Time of Day: There are any number of possible ways of defining time and, given the almost infinite variation in shift schedules in detachments across the country, we have not tried to link the data to any specific one. **Figure 8** illustrates the distribution of incidents during a 24 hour period using a relatively traditional approach. This shows that about 55% of the incidents occurred in the 8 hours between 8pm and 4am.



**Figure 8**

However, looking at the data in a different manner (**Figure 9**), may provide a somewhat more realistic picture as time relates to the demands of police work. It is apparent that almost 1/3 of the reported violent incidents occur between the hours of 10pm and 2am.

Not surprisingly, of the various circumstances identified in the study, most occur most frequently between the hours of 10pm and 2am. The only exceptions, and even these are somewhat marginal, are traffic/automobile incidents which are slightly more common between 6 and 10 pm, and suicide or attempted suicide which are more evenly



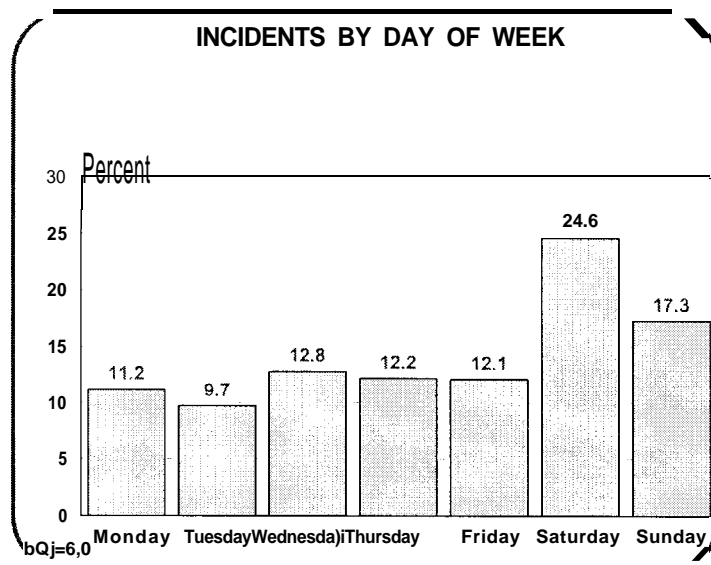
**Figure 9**

distributed over the day although, as is the case in all categories, 6 to 10am is the least frequent time.

Similarly, when the contributing factors as they relate to the time of the incident are considered, most are closely linked to the 10pm to 2am time period. The exception is that of the category of psychiatric or mental illness problem which is generally spread out over the entire day, albeit somewhat less likely in the early morning (2am to 10am). There is no significant correlation between the screening factor reported and the time of day.

The size of the detachment/unit seems to have little relationship to the time such incidents occur. The 10pm to 2am time period is busiest for all unit sizes although the smallest (1-3) and largest (>18) have the second largest percent of reported incidents between 2 to 6am. For the others, (4-8 and 9-18 in size), the time between 6 and 10pm is the second busiest time of the day.

Day of the Week: Just as the calls for service to which police officers respond are not uniformly distributed over the week, neither therefore would we expect violent incidents to be randomly distributed. As can be seen (**Figure 10**) one quarter of the violent incidents reported occur on Saturday and over 40% on Saturday and Sunday. The remaining 60% are distributed fairly evenly between Monday to Friday.



**Figure 10**

All of the three main screening factors - weapon, assault and threat - are most frequent on Saturday with Sunday being a close second for threats. Friday and Sunday have almost the same percentage of assaults reported. In comparison, the trigger of "weapon" is

spread somewhat more evenly over the week.

When we look at the circumstances of the incident, several patterns are noted. Not surprisingly, disturbances in a public place are most commonly reported on Saturday (36%) followed by Sunday (13%) and Monday (13%) with the rest evenly spread out over the other days (n=72). Disturbances at licenced premises (n=35) occur most frequently on Friday (31%), followed by Saturday (20%).

Incidents involving effecting an arrest or executing a warrant were spread fairly evenly over the week, with between 15% to 18% reported daily from Wednesday to Sunday and fewer than 10% on Monday and Tuesday (n=132). Traffic and automobile related incidents are most common on the weekend , over 50% being reported on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Domestic incidents are even more concentrated with about 50% (n=148) occurring on Saturday and Sunday.

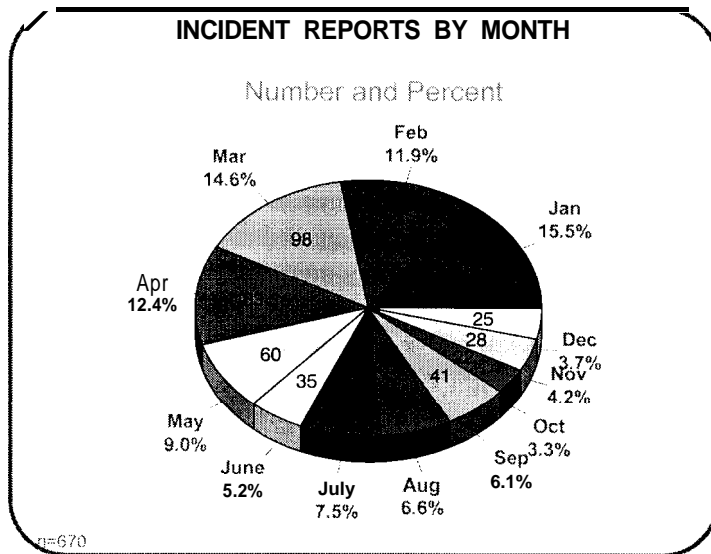
When we consider the contributing factors reported by members as they are related to the day of the week, alcohol predominates. Almost half (49%) of the incidents where alcohol is cited as the sole contributing factor occur on Saturday and Sunday and, when Friday is included, this rises to almost two thirds (n=326). The alcohol and drug combination similarly is predominately a weekend event with 47% on Saturday and Sunday (N=128), with the rest spread evenly over the rest of the week.

Incidents where psychiatric or mental problems are cited as the main contributing factor peak on Wednesday (28%) with Monday second with 23% (n=47). Friday is the lowest for this category with only 4% reported.

Not surprisingly, given the workload, injuries are most likely to occur on Saturday and Sunday (26% and 16% respectively, n=195). While the involvement of a weapon in the incident is highest on Saturday (22%) there is no significant correlation between the involvement of a weapon and the day of the week.

Incidents by Month: As in any study which involves self-reporting, there is a tendency for the response rate to decline over time. As can be seen in **Figure 11**, there was a gradual slowdown in the number of reports after the first four months. (It is instructive that the

results are quite similar in most respects to the data from January to mid-May that was used in the interim report.) With the exception of the North, again primarily "G" division, the decline in reports was consistent across the rest of the country. Reports from the North were below the national percentage in the first five months but rose considerably in July and August and remained higher than the national figure for the rest of the year.



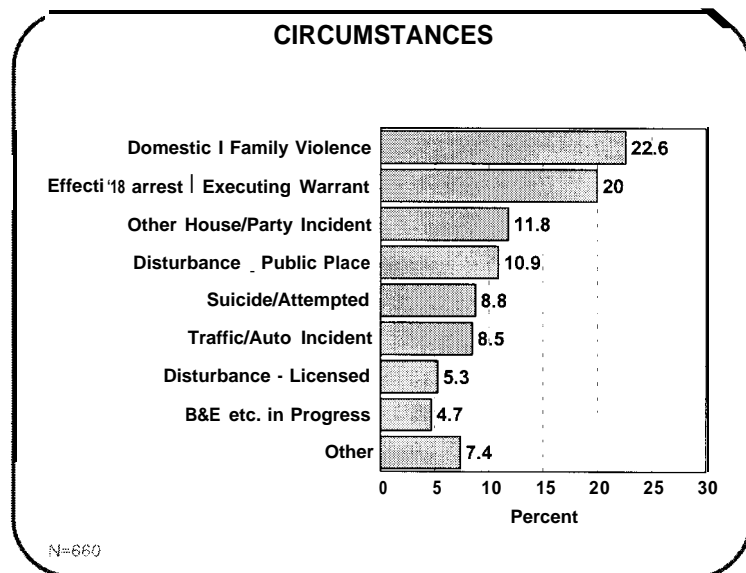
**Figure 11**

Neither the screening factor cited in defining the incident as violent, the involvement of a weapon, nor the circumstances reported are significantly related to the month of the year. Given the small number of incidents in some categories, however, more data will be required to determine if there are indeed other seasonal patterns as reported anecdotally.

## Circumstances

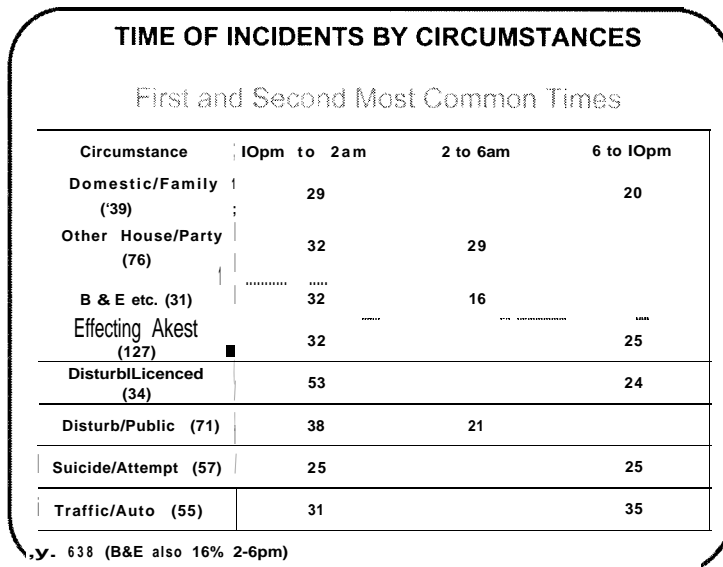
Using a list that was provided on the survey form, members were asked to select the one which most closely described the circumstances of the incident about which they were reporting. We recognize that there may be overlap between some of the categories listed, and especially that a given incident can evolve over its lifetime. However, given the constraints of a pilot study, and the fact that we are interested in how members define situations, this list proved to be very useful and is probably reflective of the reality of the gamut of these types of situations in most communities.

**Figure 12** portrays a picture of the percentage of incidents reported in each circumstance category. Incidents of domestic or family violence constitute almost 1/4 of the total reported during the year. Combined with other house or party incidents, incidents which occur almost exclusively in a dwelling or family home are over 1/3 of the total violent incidents.



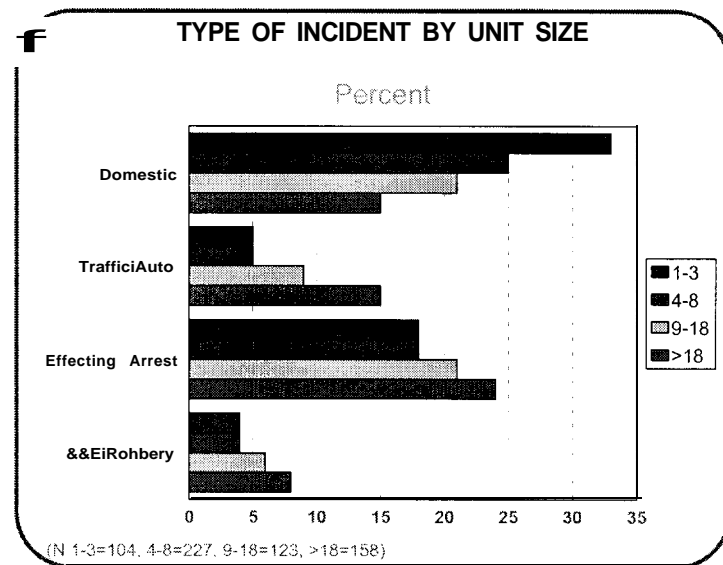
**Figure 12**

It is not at all surprising that for most types of incidents, the greatest percentage occurs between the hours of 10pm and 2am. In **Figure 13**, the percentage of the incidents in this time period, and the percentage in the second most common interval, is presented. Only in the case of traffic/automobile incidents was the most common time different. In the case of suicide/attempted suicide, there was an even split between 10-2am and 6-10pm.



**Figure 13**

There are several areas in which the pattern of incidents varies by size of the unit or detachment, (**Figure 14**). In the case of Traffic/Automobile incidents, this may reflect, in part, the size and location of the community served - and the relative availability and use of automobiles. Although the absolute numbers are not large, the patterns, especially for incidents of domestic and family violence is interesting. Overall, these reflect a different type of workload in communities of different sizes and location.

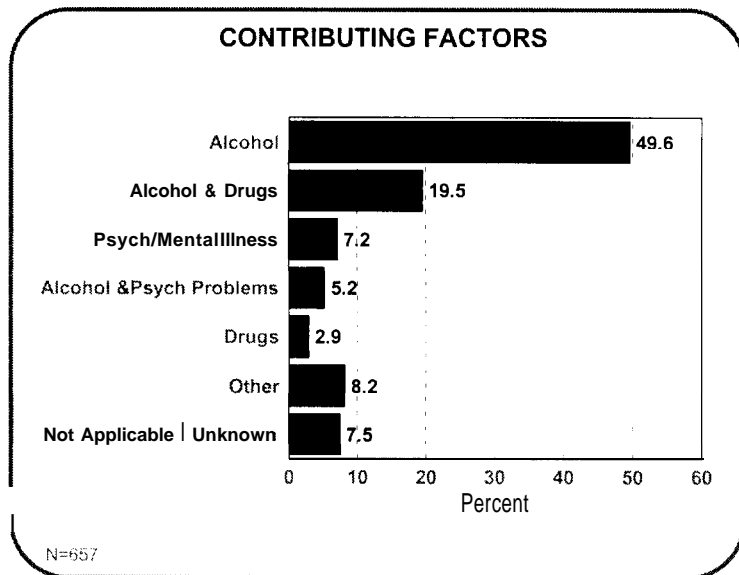


**Figure 14**

## Contributing Factors

It is important to have some understanding of the range of factors which may affect any given situation, perhaps increasing the likelihood of violence or the potential uncertainty for the member or members involved. Members were therefore asked to indicate which, if any, of a list of factors they believed contributed to the violent incident, **(Figure 15)** More than one choice was possible.

Alcohol, by itself, is identified as the major contributing factor in half of all the incidents reported. In combination with other determinants, alcohol is an integral part of 75% of the violent incidents.



**Figure 15**

Psychiatric or mental illness problems are identified as the main factor in 7% of the incidents and, in combination, is a factor in about 16% of all cases. Given the present trend toward de-institutionalization of mental patients, this will likely be a growing problem for members. Although drug use alone is the major contributing factor in only 3% of the incidents, drugs and alcohol in combination is the second largest contributing factor mentioned by members, after alcohol alone.

Alcohol is identified as the major contributing factor in about 60% of the incidents of domestic/family violence, house/party incidents, traffic/automobile incidents, and disturbances in public or licenced premises. These reports, combined with those defined by the combination of alcohol and drugs, constitute about 70% of the traffic incidents, 80% of the domestics and disturbance in public places, 90% of the other house or party incidents, and almost all of the disturbances in licenced premises.

While over 20% of the B&Es and robberies are alcohol related, 30% are noted by members as having no specific contributing factor. Not surprisingly, psychiatric or mental illness is cited in about 20% of the suicides or attempted suicides with an additional 22% of the incidents involving alcohol and psychiatric problems. Alcohol is still the most commonly cited single contributing factor in suicide situations (31%).



## The Unit

Unit Strength: Members were asked to report (1) the authorized establishment of their detachment or unit as well as (2) its actual strength at the time of the incident and (3) the number of members of the detachment or watch who were actually on duty at the time of the incident. In just under 10% of the incidents, **Figure 16**, there was no one actually on duty at the time. In just under 25% of the reports, only one member was reported as being on duty.

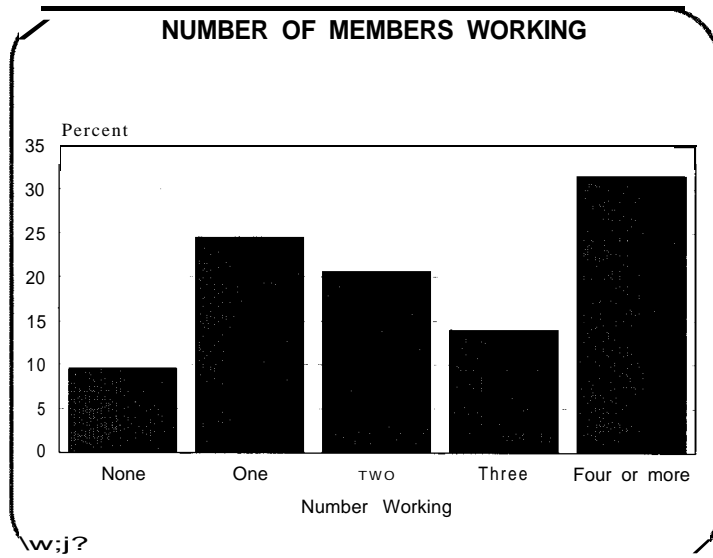


Figure 16

As one would suspect, the correlation between the number of members working and the size of the detachment or unit is quite significant. Almost all of those reporting no one working were from units with less than 9 members, reflecting the reality of life in small detachments.

Overall, 51% of the reports indicated that the unit or detachment was at strength at the time of the incident. That is, the actual strength was reported as being the same as the establishment strength. **Figure 17** presents a comparison by region of the percent of reports from units which were at strength at the time of the incidents.

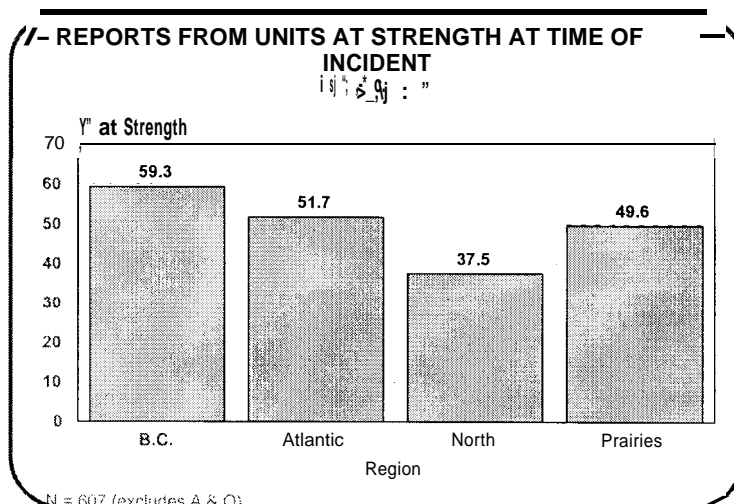
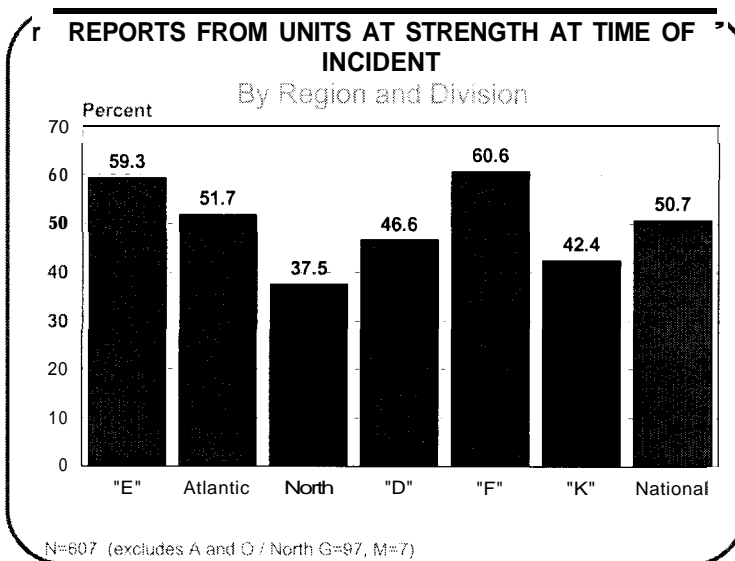


Figure 17

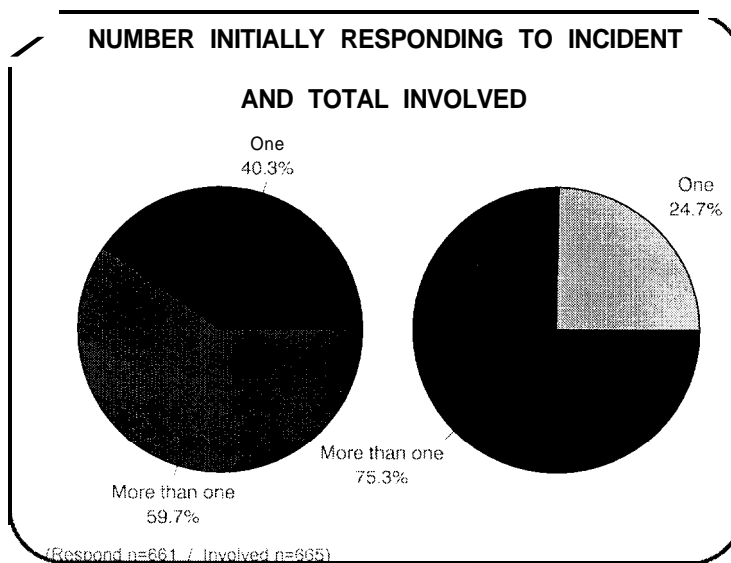
**Figure 18** shows the same data but permits a comparison between divisions where the numbers warrant. Both of these charts exclude "A" and "O" (2 and 8 incidents respectively).

There are many reasons for a unit being under strength at any given point in time; absences due to transfer, sick leave, training, vacation, suspension, and even practice in a division. We do not have data about how long the situation of understaffing had existed although there were written comments from quite a few detachments in different parts of the country that indicated that this was not at all uncommon for considerable periods of time.



**Figure 18**

**Members Responding to Incidents:** The number of members who respond to any given incident is a function of many possible factors. For example, the size of the detachment or unit, the location of the incident, the time of day, other concurrent activity, perception of the seriousness of the event and so on all impact on both the

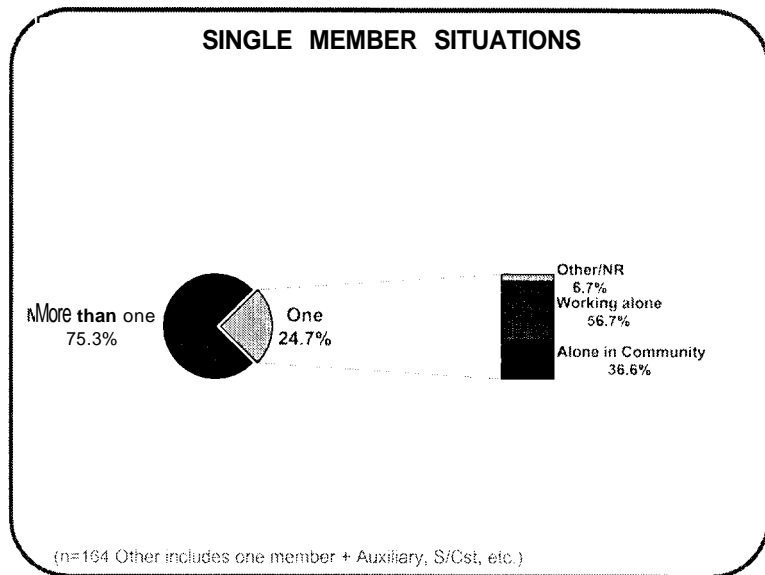


**Figure 19**

availability of members to respond as well as the actual number responding. In this study, we have asked members to differentiate between the number who made the initial response to the call or incident, and the number of members who were eventually involved in resolving the situation and the results are summarized in **Figure 19**.

This shows that while one member made the initial response in 40% of the incidents, in 75% of the cases reported by members more than one member was finally involved. Nevertheless, one quarter of the violent incidents that were reported during the year were handled by only one member for one reason or another. Whether one member was involved in an incident, or more than one, is not related to the level of force necessary to resolve it, nor to the likelihood of a member being injured.

We wished to learn a little more about the circumstances in which violent incidents were dealt with by only one member. As can be seen in **Figure 20**, in over half of the incidents that involved only one member, the individual was “working alone and handled the incident alone” while in almost 40% of the cases, the member reported being “alone in the community at the time of the incident.” As noted, the category of “Other” includes incidents where a single member was assisted by, for example, an Auxiliary Constable or a Band Constable.



**Figure 20**

Of the total number of incidents reported in the study, approximately 9% involved members being alone in the community at the time of the incident and an additional 13% were situations in which a member was working alone and handled the incident by him or herself.

Back-up: The availability of back-up is often regarded as a critical factor in officer safety. Overall, **(Figure 21)**, in just under half of the incidents reported, the member or members who initially responded to the incident requested RCMP back-up. In about 30% of the cases a request for back-up was considered unnecessary although a significant minority (13%) said that they didn't have time to make such a request.

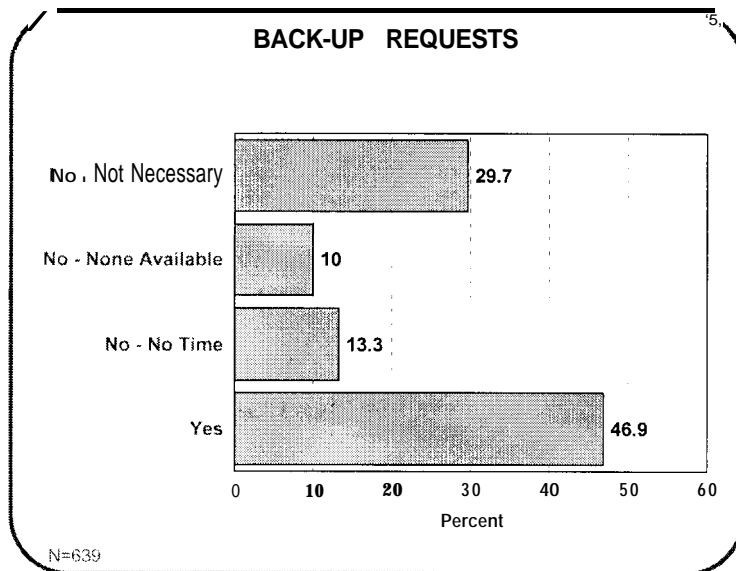


Figure 21

The responses of the members who were working alone and who handled the incident alone to the question about requesting RCMP back-up are interesting. 28% said that they didn't have time, and 35% said that back-up wasn't considered necessary. However, 12% said that there was no back-up available and 1/4 indicated that they had asked for back-up but it either was not available or did not arrive in time.

However, as can be seen in **Figure 22**, in half of the incidents where RCMP back-up was requested this took less than 5 minutes. In most cases, this meant that more than one member made the initial response to the call or the incident. In some incidents it is evident that

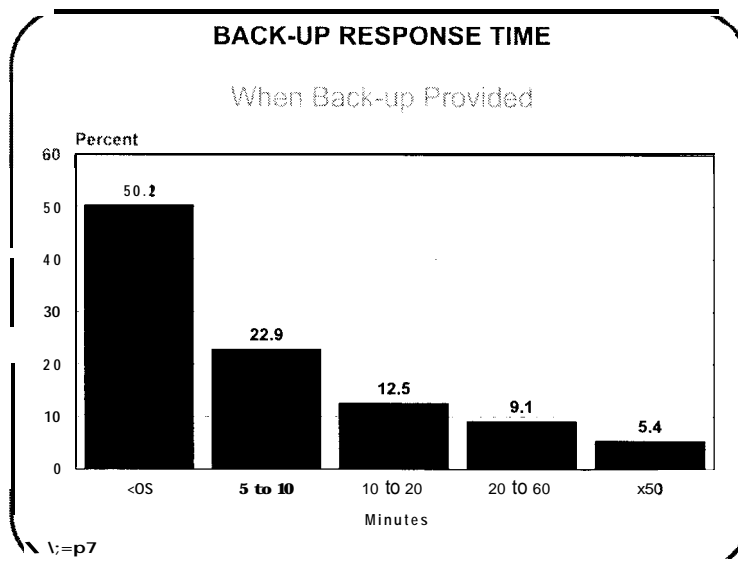


Figure 22

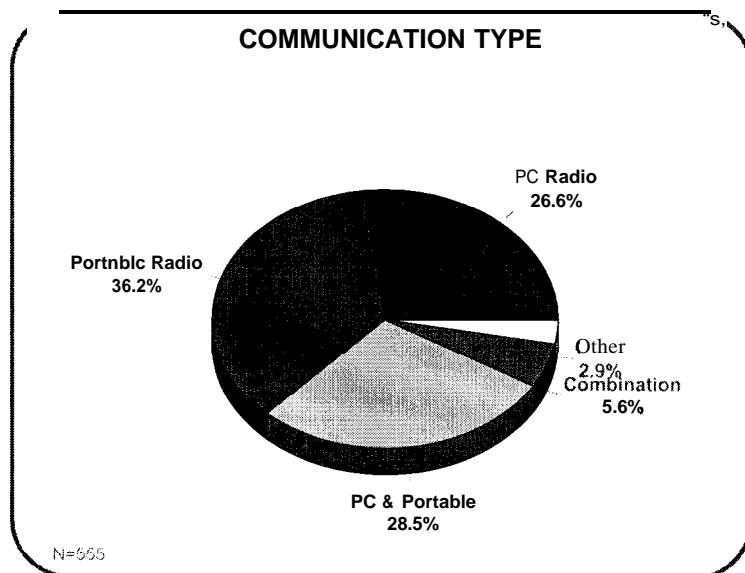
back-up is requested, and provided, in anticipation of the event itself. In an additional 14 incidents not included in this chart, members report that communication could not be established, the request was cancelled, or no one came.

There is no accepted standard time for back-up time in police work, for example 10 minutes, 20 minutes or 30 minutes, whether the incident is defined as violent or not. However, in the incidents reported in this study RCMP back-up was provided - *when requested* - within 20 minutes 86% of the time. In just 15% of the incidents did back-up required more than 20 minutes. Although the actual number in the latter category is very small, only 43 in total, 14 of these were in "D" division, 7 in each of "E," "F" and "G", 6 in "K" and 1 in "H" and "J." The 7 incidents in "G" were all over 60 minutes, whereas reports in this category made up fewer than half of all the other cases.

Of the 16 incidents where back-up took more than 60 minutes, 14 (88%) involved a weapon compared to 2/3 or less in all the other time categories. In contrast, in over half of the former (56%) no force was necessary to resolve the incident compared to 40% or less in the other categories.

Communications: Members were asked whether or not they had direct communication, during the incident, with their detachment ( 65% said yes), with their back-up (71% said yes), and with the O.C.C. (75% said yes). All possible combinations of these three communication types were mentioned.

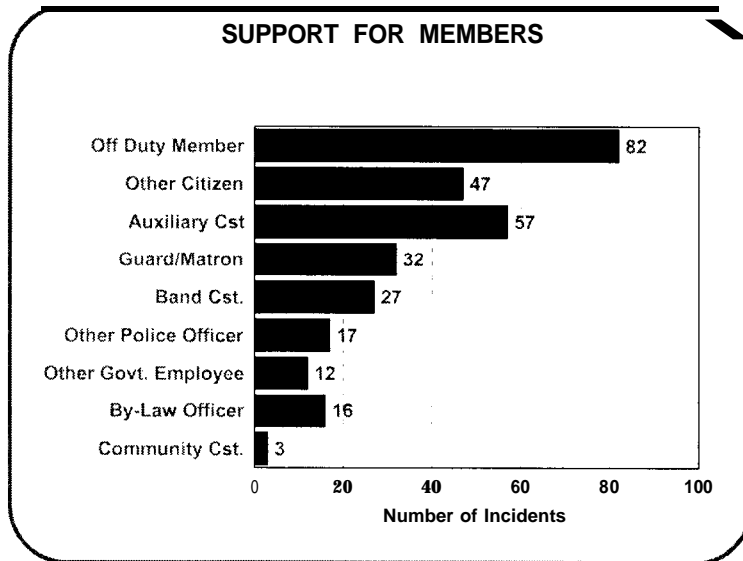
If there was direct communication with one or more of the three areas mentioned, respondents were asked to identify the type of communication used (see **Figure 23**). The category "Other" includes such things as



**Figure 23**

“voice” and “telephone.”

Support for Members in the Community: In the incidents reported over the year, hundreds of individuals provided support in one form or another for members engaged in a violent incident. **Figure 24** shows the number incidents in which such support was offered and by whom. In many cases, assistance from more than one category was reported, for example a citizen and an Auxiliary Constable or By-Law Officer. When a member requested assistance, it was almost always forthcoming.



**Figure 24**

## The People Involved

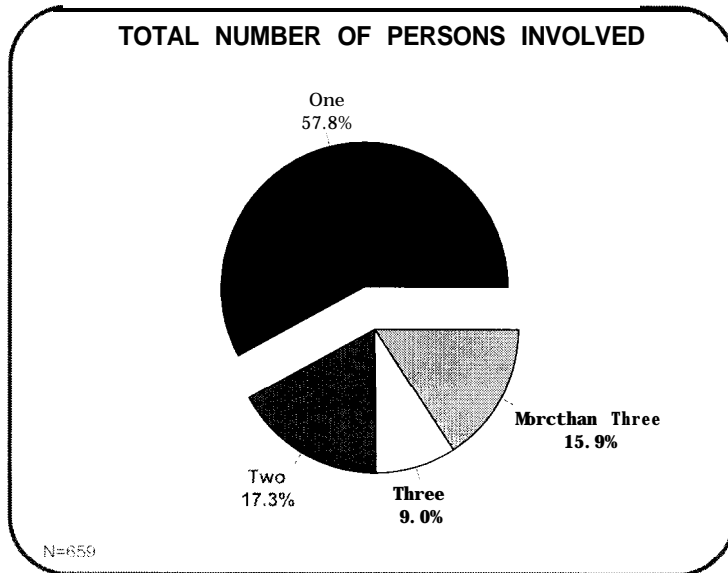
The survey asked members to identify whether or not the main offender(s) or person(s) involved in each incident reported were adults and/or youth. We also asked members to tell us the number of males and females that were involved. Overall, 92% of the incidents (n=654) involved only adults, 6% youth only, and 2% both adults and youth. Although the number of youth-only incidents are small, the pattern of reported circumstances of the incidents is not significantly different from that for adults only with three exceptions: 1) a somewhat higher percentage are incidents of suicide/attempted suicide (13% youth and 9% adult); 2) they are less likely to be for effecting arrest/executing a warrant (16% and 21% respectively) and 3) are more about twice as likely to be for disturbance in a public place (21% and 11% respectively).

When we look at the use of force to resolve an incident, 39% of the reports involving youth only did not require force, compared to 25% of the adults only incidents. However, in situations that did require some force, 51% of the youth-only incident reports mentioned that physical force was used compared to 43% for adults. On the other hand, pepper spray was reported used in 29% of the adult only incidents compared with only 8% of the youth only situations.

When the contributing factors of adult and youth only incidents are compared, alcohol and alcohol with drugs are both higher in the former (51% and 20% compared with 40% and 13% respectively). On the other hand, only 6% of adult incidents compared with 21 % of youth incidents were characterized by psychiatric or mental illness problems.

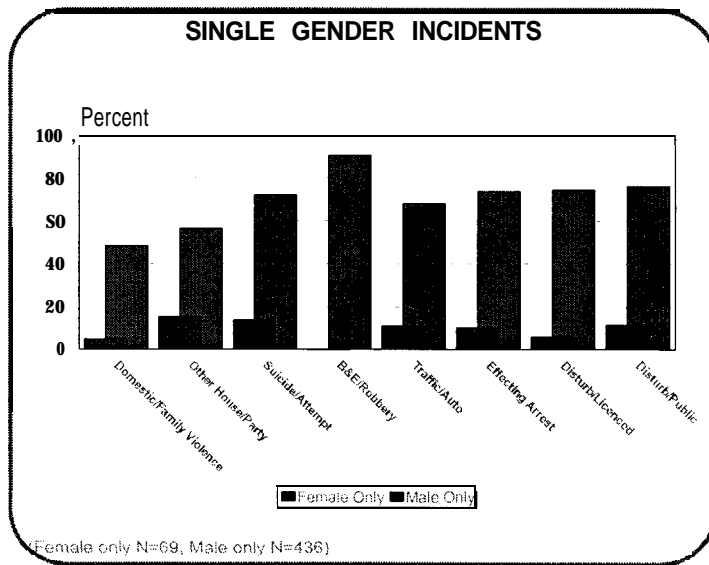
The likelihood of a member being injured is higher when only adults are involved than when the situations involve only youth: 30% and 21% of these situations respectively reporting injuries.

Although the total number of people involved ranged from one to several hundred, almost 60% of all the incidents reported in the study involved only one person (see **Figure 25**). The overwhelming majority, (602) involved one or more males and 235 involved one or more females. About 10% of the incidents (69) involved only females and 65% (436) only males.



**Figure 25**

**Figure 26** compares the percentage of different types of incidents that involved either only females or only males and reflects a somewhat different pattern based upon gender. For example, of the 56 traffic/automobile incidents 68% involved only male(s) and 11% only female(s). The percentage for males is highest in B&E/Robbery followed by the two disturbance categories. For females only, the house/party category is the highest followed by suicide/attempted suicide and disturbance in a public place.



**Figure 26**



The necessity for member(s) to use some level of force to resolve male-only incidents compared to those which involved only females is almost the same, 76% and 72% of the incidents respectively reporting this. However, when the use of force is necessary, there is a somewhat greater tendency to use physical force than spray when the incident involves only females than when only males are involved: 18% of the former reporting that pepper spray was the greatest level of force used compared to 29% of the latter. The likelihood of being injured in either type of incident is about the same, about 30%.

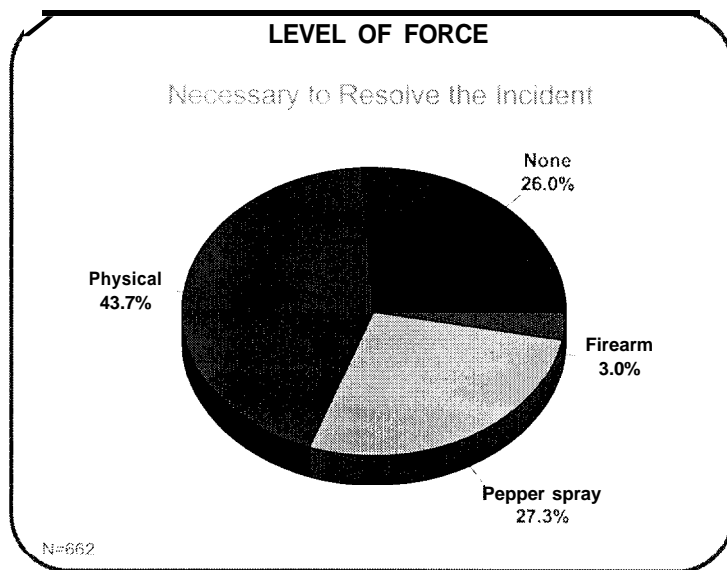
## The Use of Force

Almost by definition, violent incidents frequently demand the application of some measure of force on the part of the police in order to bring about a resolution. Members were asked to indicate the greatest degree of force that was necessary to resolve the incident. The level of force - physical, spray or firearm - used to settle any incident is related to such things as the number and state of the individuals involved, the location and circumstances of the incident, the skill and experience of members, and so on. The question did not attach any necessary priority to the use of physical force or the use of pepper spray, leaving it up to the individual to decide which was the greatest.

As can be seen in **Figure 27**, almost 3/4 of the reported incidents required the use of some level of force by the member(s) involved. While 44% of the reports cited physical force, this category obviously includes a very wide range of behaviour.

According to written comments, in some cases members resort to physical force before it is felt

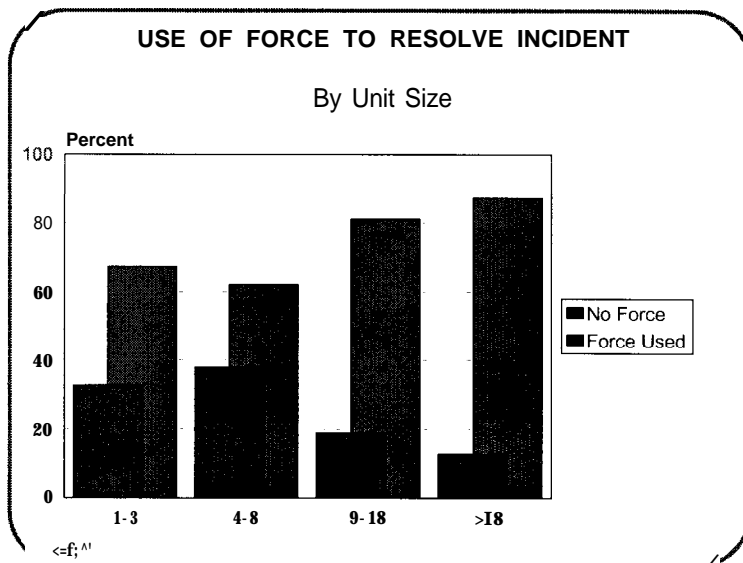
necessary to resort to spray while in others, the decision is made or the incident calls for spray to be used initially. In a number of cases, members reported that pepper spray either had little effect on the individual or actually inflamed the situation. The idea of what constitutes the use of physical force is also highly idiosyncratic and likely linked to both individual perceptions as well as the situation itself.



**Figure 27**

As we can see in **Figure 28**, the likelihood of force in one form or another being used to resolve an incident is related to the size of the detachment or unit.

These two figures illustrate that some level of force was used by members in **73%** of the violent incidents reported over the course of the study. Of the total, physical force was used in 44% of the incidents, pepper spray/baton (virtually all mentioned spray) in 26%, and firearms in less than 3%. In the larger divisions, reported use of physical force ranges from 48% of the incidents in "E" division and 49% in "G" to **44%** in "F" division, 41% in "K", and a low of 37% in "D". Overall, 17% of the violent incident reports came from units of 1-3 members, 37% from 4-8, 21% from 9-18, and 25% from units with more than 18 members.



**Figure 28**

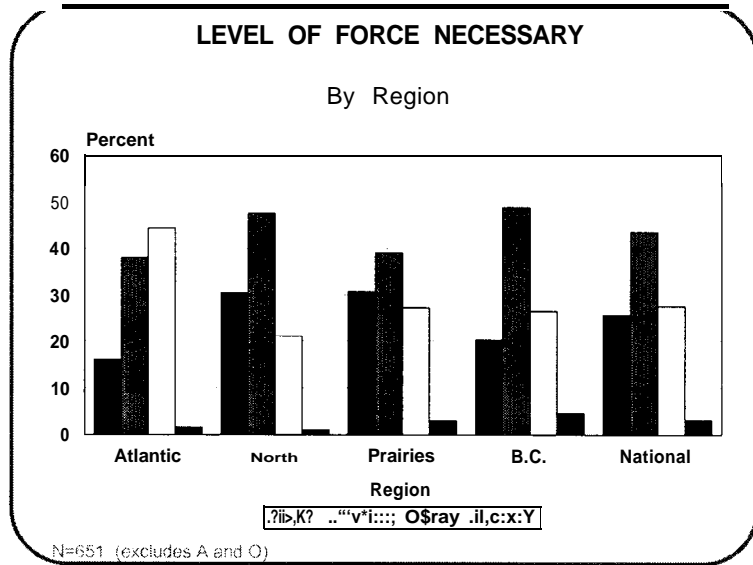
While some level of force is reported in about 2/3 of the incidents in units under 8 in size, this increases to between 80% and 90% as the size of the unit increases. Overall, no force is reported as being necessary in 27% of the incidents. A comparison by division, where numbers warrant, is presented in **Figure 29**.

**Figure 29**

Division	Number	Percent with No Force
D	124	41%
E	219	20%
F	<b>77</b>	<b>17%</b>
G	98	<b>32%</b>
K	<b>63</b>	<b>27%</b>

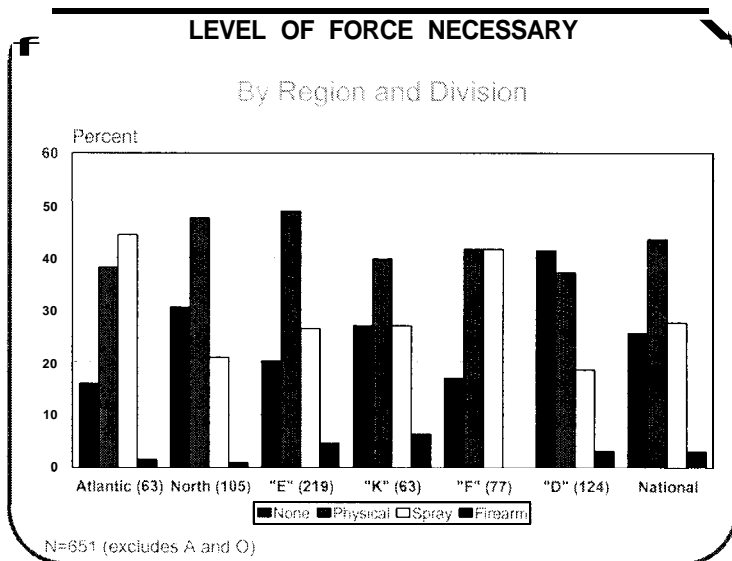
However, even the small numbers in some of the other divisions may be indicative of differential reporting practices, members' perceptions, or both. For example, 15 of the 16 incidents in "B" reported the use of force, 1 of 19 in "J," and 7 of 22 in "H."

**Figure 30** shows a comparison of the level of force used by region in comparison with the national data and **Figure 31** presents the same comparison for regions and the larger divisions.



**Figure 30**

There may be a number of possible reasons for such significant differences between regions and between divisions. These could include different types of communities and demands for service, different patterns of crime, differences in reporting patterns linked to community and police cultural variations, and so on.



**Figure 31**

## Weapons and Threats

Weapons: A weapon or weapons, of one sort or another, was reported as part of about 43% (282) of the total incidents during the study. Members were asked whether or not a weapon was present during the incident, whether or not it was used, and whether or not a weapon was used against a member. **Figure 32** summarizes the data obtained from these questions about the number and types of weapons that were involved over the year. A number of incidents involved more than one type of weapon, a knife and a club for example, or a firearm and a knife.

	Present - Not Used	Used	Total	Used Against Member
Handgun	11	3	14	2
Other Firearm	84	41	125	8
Knife	44	37	81	6
Club	11	21	32	12
Other	28	30	58	22

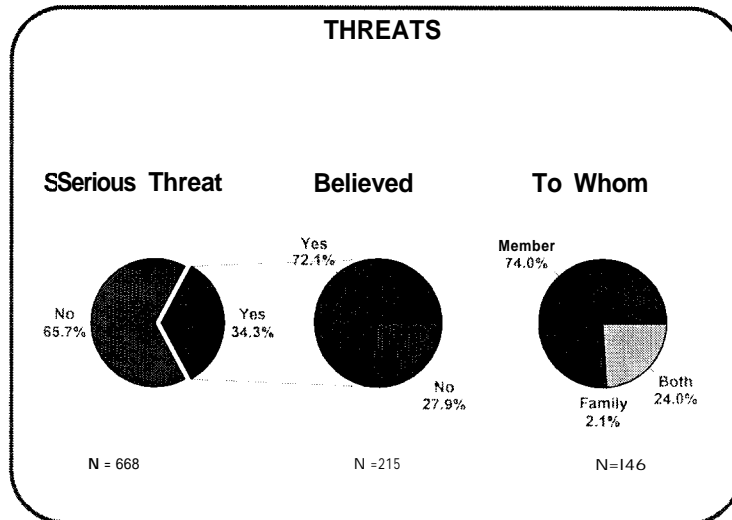
**Figure 32**

As can be seen, a weapon of one type or another was used against a member in 50 incidents. These ranged from an actual attack and injury to threatening gestures. The category "other" includes everything from an automobile to scissors, fists, boots and so on. Parenthetically, it should be noted that some well publicized incidents in different parts of the country during 1995 which involved weapons and weapons used against members, especially firearms, regrettably were not reported by the members involved.

Threats: Serious threats were reported in 229 incidents, about 1/3 of the total (see **Figure 33**). Of these, members reported that they believed that these threats might be followed through in 155 incidents, or about 22% of the total. 146 members responded to a question asking about to whom the threats were made and, of these, over 25% indicated that members' families were the subject in one way or another.

There is a correlation between the size of the detachment or unit and reports of serious future threats to either members or families. The likelihood of a serious threat was highest

where the authorized size is 1-3 (46%) 35% in units of 4-8, 31% in units of 9-18, and 29% in units over 18. This supports the contention made in the earlier report from "G" division that threats to members and members' families in small settlements are of serious concern. Generally speaking, divisions with a high number of isolated posts such as "D," "G," and "F" tend to report a higher percentage of incidents with not only threats but threats that members believe might be followed through. For example, in "D" division about one third of the reports cited a future threat during the incident and of these, 83% felt considered them believable. In "G" division, 39% of the reports cited a future threat and 65% of these were considered believable.



**Figure 33**

The four most common circumstances in which threats to members or their families occur are, in order, (1) disturbance in a public place (42% n=72), (2) traffic/auto and B&E/robbery (39% n=56 and 31 respectively), (3) domestic/family incidents (37% n=149) and (4) effecting arrest (35% n=132).

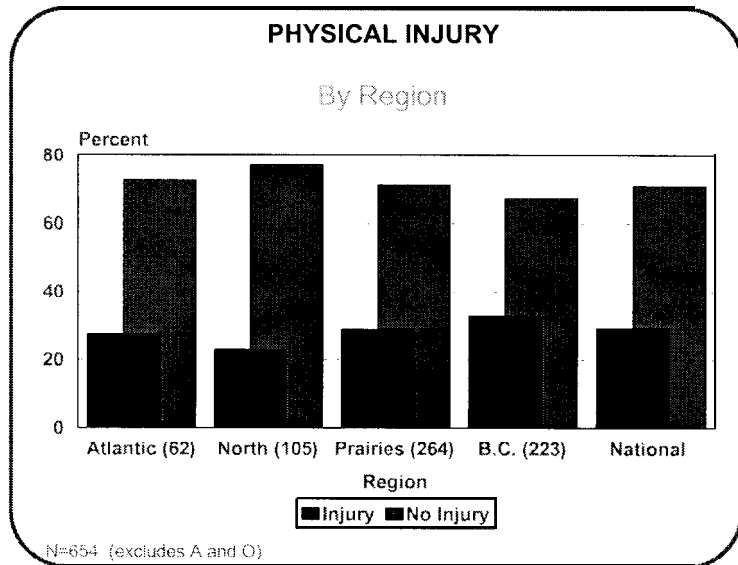
The rank order for the circumstances in which these threats are seriously believable is (1) B&E/robbery (83% n=12), (2) Other (73% n=15), (3) domestic/family violence (71% n=52) and (4) suicide or attempted suicide (69% n=16). Traffic/automobile incidents and effecting arrest follow closely, each with 67%. (Many of the "other" situations are threats to family members made outside of regular duties - over the phone or in a social setting for example - and are taken very seriously.) These data indicate, for example, that while there may be more threats made in situations of disturbance in a public place, these are not considered nearly as serious or believable as threats made during a B&E/robbery incident.

## Injuries

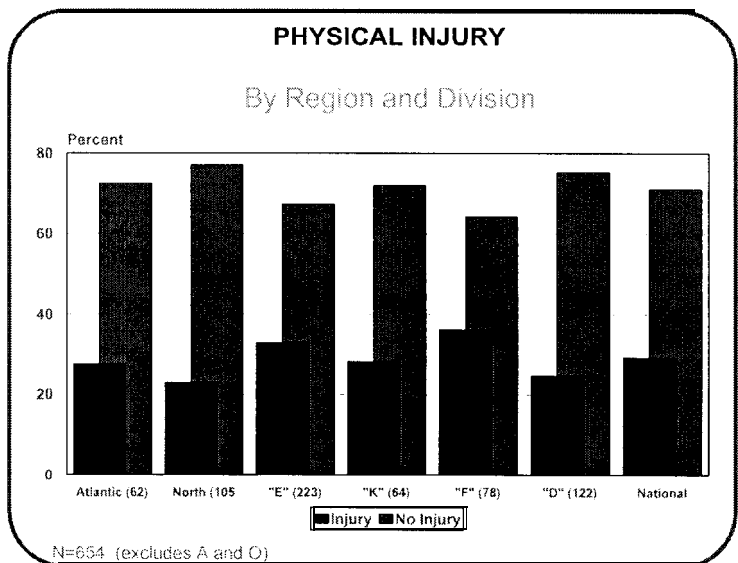
Incidents that involve weapons or in which members are assaulted are those in which injury is most likely to occur. We therefore asked whether a member(s) suffered physical injury during the incident and, if so, what was the most serious level of treatment required - self-treated, medical treatment, or hospitalization. The latter provides a simple measure of the severity of the injury.

**Figure 3** permits a comparison of regional and national percentages of incidents involving physical injury. **Figure 35** shows the same information, but by region and division where numbers warrant.

The smallest percentage of reported incidents with injury is in the North, again primarily "G" division, while the highest percentage is in "F" division. Although the numbers in the other divisions are small, the percentage of incidents with injuries is just under the national figure in "B" and "H" divisions, considerably under in "M" and "L" divisions, and over in "J." Nationally, 29% of the incidents reported during the year involve some form of injury. Overall, whether or not the unit was at



**Figure 34**

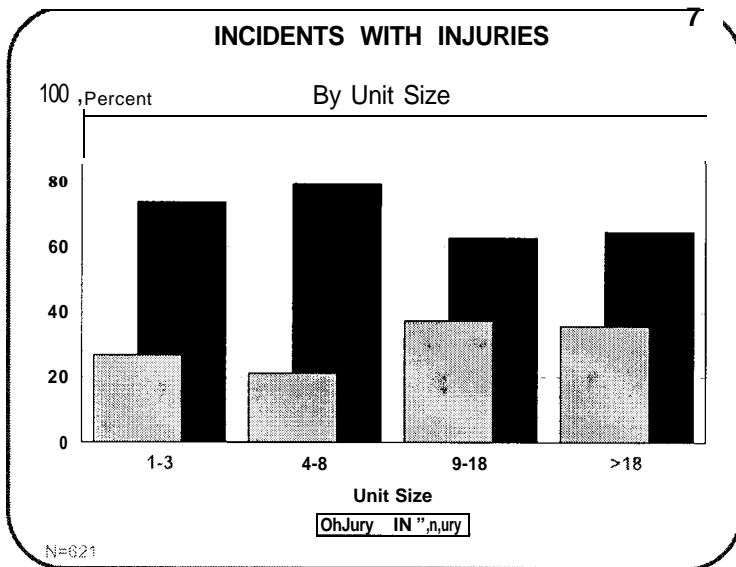


**Figure 35**



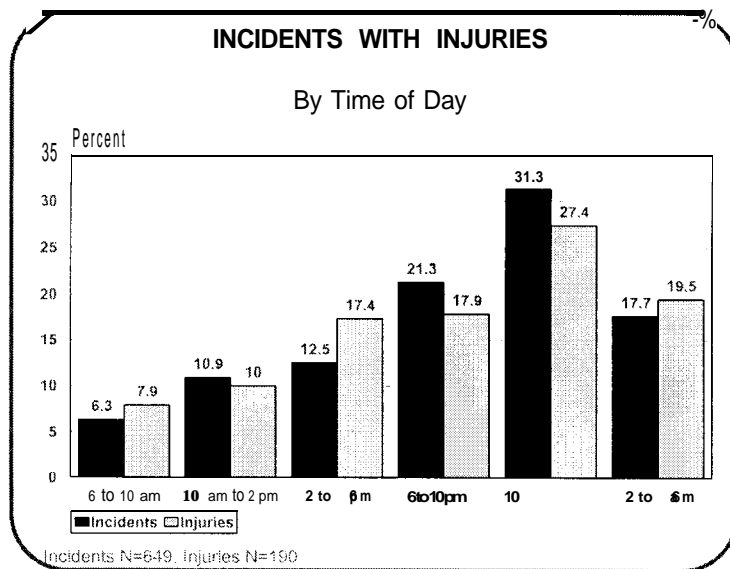
strength or under strength made virtually no difference in the likelihood of injury.

As can be seen in **Figure 36**, the percentage of incidents with injuries varies by the size of the unit. Injuries are least likely to be reported by members in units between 4 and 8 members and most likely in the larger units.



**Figure 36**

Not surprisingly, there is a strong correlation between the time that an incident occurs and the likelihood of an injury being reported. **Figure 37** compares the percentage of incidents that occur in a given time period with the percentage of injuries in the same time.



**Figure 37**

Relative to the number of incidents, injuries are somewhat

more likely to be reported between 6 and 10 in the morning, between 2 and 6 in the afternoon, and between 2 and 6 in the morning and less likely during the other time slots. These differences could reflect the influence of such things as the type of call most common at these hours, the state of mental preparedness, the approach taken, and so on.

Of all the incidents which involved injuries, alcohol was a contributing factor in almost half (48%). The combination of alcohol and drugs is a contributing factor in an additional 25% (n=190). However, if we look at these data in another way a different perspective emerges. In only 28% (n=324) of the incidents in which alcohol alone was cited as a contributing factor was injury reported to a member. On the other hand, the likelihood of an injury was much higher when alcohol and drugs were involved (37% n=127), slightly higher when psychiatric/mental illness was mentioned (30% n=47), and the greatest when drugs were mentioned as the key contributing factor (44%) although there were only 18 incidents in this category.

Similarly, as can be seen in Figure 38, one quarter of all the injuries reported occur when the incident involves a member effecting an arrest or executing a warrant. Incidents of domestic or family violence are second with 18%.

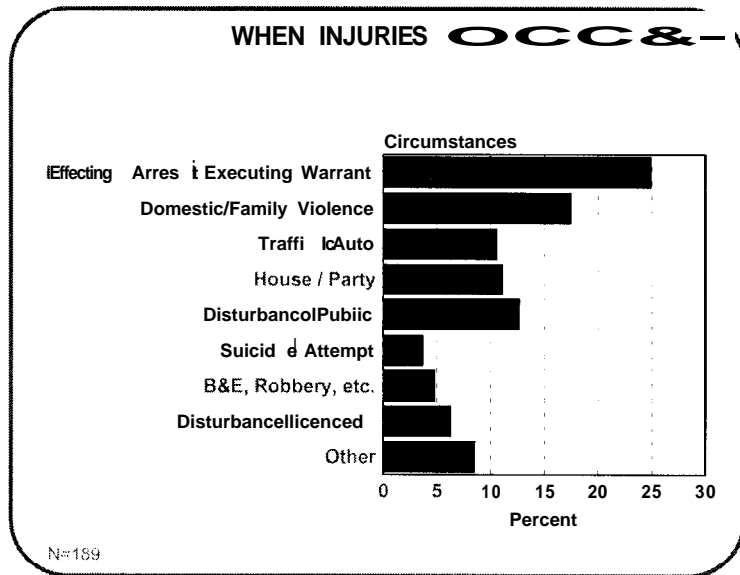


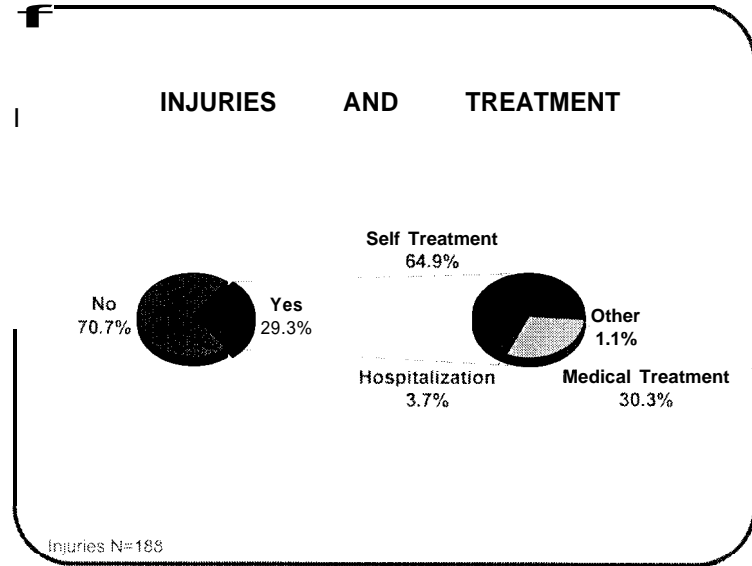
Figure 38

Again, when we look at these data in a different way, that is the likelihood of injury occurring in a given type of situation, effecting arrest/executing a warrant is still very dangerous, with 36% of the incidents of this nature resulting in some form of injury (n=132). However, traffic/automobile incidents also had an injury rate of 36% (n=55). One third of disturbances in a public place resulted in some form of injury (n=72), as did 22% of domestic/family incidents (n=147), and 27% of other house/party incidents (n=77).

There is no correlation between an injury received during a reported incident and whether or not the unit was at strength. When only one member handled the incidents, members who were alone in the community were slightly less likely to receive an injury (20% n=80) than those who decided to, or had to, handle the incident alone (28% n=89). Perhaps the former were more careful.

The relative seriousness of injuries received is pictured in **Figure 39** Of the 671 incidents reported, relatively few resulted in physical injury requiring more than self treatment (66 or just over 10% of the total).

About 1% of the total required hospitalization.



**Figure 39**

## Conclusion

With exceptions in some areas, members across the country responded very positively to this pilot project. The data certainly do not include all such violent incidents but, with allowance for these exceptions, they seem to be representative, and hence reflect, the range of such events over the year.

On the basis of the information from this pilot project, the frequency of violence directed toward members and their families, or the involvement of members in situations defined as violent is sufficiently serious as to merit immediate attention. We are confident that the data from the pilot project is sufficient for immediate application in many areas and hope that they will be interpreted and used by divisions, directorates and other interested parties in a timely and appropriate manner.

The data collected to date clearly indicate the potential of this type of survey to provide important information to decision-makers about critical sectors such as training, officer safety, staffing levels, shift scheduling, and communications. In this case, the numbers really speak for themselves.

However, it is also clear that it is essential that the RCMP monitor such incidents, and their causes and consequences, over time. To this end, the following recommendation is made.

**Recommendation:** *That a facility be created to collect data about violent incidents involving members and their families routinely and systematically. This should be done by creating a compulsory EDP screen (e.g., IPIRS) that will provide members with the option of completing a violent incident survey form at the time of opening a file.*

The present instrument has proven itself as a solid base which can be refined and used for this purpose. The data, collected in this way, will provide the basis for ongoing analysis both at HQ and in the divisions or regions.