

NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL CANADA



ECONOMIC ANALYSIS COMMITTEE

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SAFETY AND SAVINGS: CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

For information on crime prevention through social development, call the National Crime Prevention Council at (613) 941-0505.

Investing in Crime Prevention

The evidence is conclusive that the most effective way to prevent crime is to ensure healthier children, stronger families, better schools and more cohesive communities. Crime prevention through social development is a sound investment. The dividends include less violence, safer communities and significant cost savings in the criminal justice system and in almost every other area of public and private spending.

The Threat of Crime

Canadians continue to feel threatened by crime in their communities. They feel threatened by the amount of crime around them and by the violent nature of so much of this crime.

- Despite small reductions in recent years,¹ the crime rate in 1994 was 8% higher than a decade ago.² The rate of violent crime increased by an average of 4% every year from 1978 to 1993³ and is now 400% higher than in the 1960s.⁴ In 1993, approximately 24% of all adult Canadians had been the victims of at least one criminal act within the preceding 12 months.⁵

- Canadians are 50% more likely than Europeans and 500% more likely than Japanese to be victims of burglary, assault, sexual offences and robbery.⁶

- Successive polls have reflected our fears and anxiety about crime: 50% of Canadians feel less safe than they did five years ago; 48% of Canadians believe violent crime is increasing; after unemployment, crime was viewed by Canadians in one poll as the most important issue of the day; 48% of women and 18% of men feel that there are areas close to their homes where they would be afraid to walk at night.⁷

As disturbing as these findings are, they grossly understate the real impact of crime on Canadians. Crime victimization studies indicate that only 10% of sexual assaults, 32% of other assaults and 50% of property crimes are ever reported to the police.⁸

Women are more likely to be sexually assaulted by someone known to them than by a stranger, 31% of all women have experienced a sexual assault by someone known to them (such as dates or boyfriends, marital partners, family, neighbours and acquaintances) while 19% have been victimized by a stranger.

The Cost of Controlling Crime

In this period of fiscal restraint, governments are spending tremendous sums of money on the criminal justice system.

- Spending on police services, the courts, legal aid and corrections reached \$9.7 billion in 1993/94, an increase of 13% in constant dollars since 1988/89.⁹
- Over the past seven years, the average annual increase in spending on police services has been 7.1%. Total spending on police has now reached almost \$6 billion.¹⁰ Total spending on corrections in 1994/95 was \$1.9 billion, an increase of 10% over five years.¹¹
- In 1994/95, the average number of inmates in correctional institutions was 33,882, an increase since 1990/91 of 24% in the federal system and 11% in the provincial systems.¹²
- The estimated cost of detaining a young offender is at least \$100,000 per year.¹³ Estimates of the annual cost of incarcerating an adult range from about \$40,000 a year to almost \$80,000.¹⁴ Inmates in federal correctional institutions are incarcerated for an average of 44 months, representing an expenditure of more than \$160,000 per person.

The Full Cost of Crime

The \$9.7 billion in direct expenditures on the criminal justice system represents only the most visible part of the total cost of crime to Canadians and Canadian society. Researchers have struggled with the challenge of developing a reliable and more comprehensive estimate of the full cost of crime.

- Statistics Canada and government ministers have estimated the indirect but readily identifiable costs of crime (property loss, security services, insurance frauds, crime-related hospitalization and volunteers) at \$6.7 billion annually.¹⁵ This estimate does not include the cost of the human pain and suffering resulting from crime, or the social costs to communities. Including them would raise the estimate many times over.

- In 1993, the Quebec Task Force on Crime Prevention, after examining only the readily measurable costs of crime (“the tip of a largely submerged iceberg”), suggested that the full cost of crime in that province could range from \$6.8 billion to \$34 billion annually. Their approach would suggest total Canadian costs of up to \$136 billion annually,¹⁶ an amount that is three to four times the annual deficit of the Government of Canada.
- A formula developed by a panel of experts reporting to *Business Week* in the United States, if applied to Canada, would suggest total costs of perhaps \$46 billion annually. This estimate is based upon costs in the criminal justice system (i.e., \$9.7 billion) representing 21.2% of the total cost of crime.¹⁷
- Attempting to address the less readily identifiable costs, the Canadian Public Health Association has estimated the cost of violence-related hospitalization at between \$38 million and \$71 million annually.¹⁸
- Researchers with the Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children have examined a broader - though still not complete - range of costs resulting from criminal violence against women. They calculated that this crime carries an annual price tag of \$4.2 billion with social services and education costs being \$2.4 billion, criminal justice costs being \$872 million, labour and employment losses being \$577 million and health and medical costs being \$408 million. The authors suggest that governments bear 87.5% of these costs, or \$3.7 billion annually.¹⁹
- Another study examining only the health-related costs of violence against women calculates a total of more than \$1.5 billion, including \$255 million in medical consultations through the long term and \$506 million in short- and long-term psychiatric care.²⁰

These groups are trying to do something that is very difficult to do with absolute certainty. How can we place a dollar value on the inter-generational costs associated with children who grow up in an abusive environment and become abusers themselves?²¹ How can anyone place a price tag on the lost potential of a young person killed on the street, or on the emotional trauma experienced by the victim and by the family and friends of a woman who has been raped or is being stalked?

Nevertheless, it is clear from the valuable research that these groups have undertaken that the costs and expenditures associated with crime are significant.

A conservative estimate would place those costs in the range of \$46 billion annually. Furthermore, even this estimate does not include the cost of white-collar crime, such as income tax evasion or stock market manipulation

Preventing Crime through Social Development

There are very real limits to what the criminal justice system can achieve in terms of preventing crime, deterring criminals or making our homes and communities safer.²² There are limits as well to how much we should be spending on these approaches. Indeed, the most concrete outcome of our current approach is an incarceration rate among the highest in the world.²³

A more effective strategy for preventing crime includes social development programs that strengthen individuals, families and communities.

Social development programs can address those factors that are associated with youth delinquency and adult criminal activity; for example, violence in the home, unsupportive family life and parental behaviours, poverty, poor housing, failure in school and illiteracy, drug and alcohol abuse, and unemployment.²⁴

High quality early childhood child care and education have been shown to reduce the delinquency rate among disadvantaged children. It is also associated with a higher success rate in completing high school and obtaining employment.

- Family support, parent training and early intervention programs are estimated to reduce child abuse by as much as 50% and thereby reduce also the life-long consequences and costs of living with abuse. Similar programs can prevent the highly aggressive behaviour among young children that is often associated with failure in school and, later, with delinquency and criminality.²⁵

- A four-year longitudinal study conducted in Sweden found that children entering day care at an early age performed significantly better in a variety of important learning and social ways than did children entering day care at a later age. Quality child care can lessen the likelihood of some children becoming involved in drugs, vandalism and other antisocial behaviours.²⁶

- Crime went down by 60% in two Lansing, Michigan, neighbourhoods after police, local schools and social service agencies opened a neighbourhood centre and launched an extensive youth development program.

In Fort Myers, Florida, a "Success through Academic and Recreational Support" program (STARS) was responsible for reducing the juvenile crime rate by more than 30%.

Only 6% of participants in a day care assistance and home visiting program in Syracuse, New York, were ever processed in juvenile court, compared with 22% of youth randomly assigned to a control group.²⁷

- A home visiting and parenting skills program for low-income families in Houston, Texas, helped parents to be more affectionate, more responsive and less punitive. Five to eight years

later, program children exhibited less fighting, and less anti-social and aggressive behaviour than did those in a control group. Participants were less disruptive, less impulsive and less restless, all behaviours with links to subsequent criminality.²⁸

- Children in the Yale Child Welfare Project, 10 years after the program, showed less delinquency-related behaviour, were less dependent upon welfare, were better educated and were less likely to require remedial education than those in a control group.²⁹

None of these examples is based on a reliance on traditional criminal justice system responses.

These case studies of effective programs all rely upon a social development, rather than the traditional criminal justice, model. Importantly, public opinion in Canada coincides with current research. Both say social development programs - child care, income security, youth community centres - are the most effective means of preventing crime.³⁰

The Cost-Benefit of Preventing Crime through Social Development

Social development programs make sense not only in terms of making our communities safer, but also in terms of reducing government expenditures in both the short and the long term.

- In Ottawa, the PALS (Participate and Learn Skills) community project offered young people a range of activities. An evaluation concluded that the savings in reduced vandalism, police time and fire costs greatly exceeded the program's cost even in the short term.³¹

- Long-term evaluations in the United States conclude that a \$1 investment in quality preschool child care saves \$7 that would have been spent down the road on welfare, policing, social services and prisons.³²

- Almost 30 years of follow-up with participants in the Perry Preschool Program in Michigan indicates clearly how home visits and family support create major cost savings by reducing criminal behaviour. The program also yielded a host of other benefits for participants: they were more likely than those in a control group to be literate, employed and attending college or vocational school; less likely to have become parents while still teenagers; and less likely to be dependent upon social assistance.

There is an estimated net benefit of \$27,000 per participant to society, taxpayers and potential crime victims.³³

- By preventing recidivism through short-term crisis intervention and family support, the Los Angeles County Delinquency Prevention Program produces savings of somewhere between six and 30 times the \$300 spent annually on behalf of each of the program's 10,000 participants.³⁴

- The Jobs Corps program in the United States provides more than 62,000 youth each year with basic education, vocational skills and a range of supportive services. The program is expensive, costing from \$15,000 to \$21,000 per participant. However, evaluations of the program find that it "significantly increased earnings and educational attainment while reducing welfare dependency and the incidence of serious crime among graduates." The payback to society is estimated at 145% of the program costs.³⁵

Safety and Savings

The cost of crime - at least \$46 billion annually - is a horrendous drain on the limited financial resources of Canada. Our \$9.7 billion in direct government expenditures on the criminal justice system is a huge expenditure.

We must balance our spending between the control of crime and the prevention of crime. In this era of limited financial resources, we have to ensure that we are spending more effectively, and that our limited dollars are invested wisely. We need to examine what we are doing with our resources and use those resources to address crime in an effective manner and, in so doing, ensure that our communities are safer.

By way of example:

- it would cost our society less to support one person through four years of a university education than we spend now on incarcerating one person for one year; and
- data from the Canadian Tax Foundation indicate that crime is consuming more of our financial resources than the government of Canada commits to old age pensions (\$15.8 billion), the Child Tax Benefit (\$5 billion), the Canada Assistance Plan (\$7.4 billion), and child care (\$5.5 billion) combined, and twice as much as is spent to support unemployed people through the Unemployment Insurance program (\$18.1 billion).³⁶

Wise investments are those that are effective in preventing crime, that represent “not a financial drain but a vital instrument of economic development,”³⁷ and that return more than they cost.

Enabling children to live in a healthy manner, within strong families and cohesive communities, is that wise investment.

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2. CCJS, “Canadian Crime Statistics, 1994,” *Juristat*, Vol. 15(12).
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9. CCJS, *Juristat*, Vol.15 (10).
10. CCJS, *Juristat*, Vol.15(8), March 1995.
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16. Quebec, Task Force on Crime Prevention, "Partners in Crime Prevention: For a Safer Quebec," *Report of the Task Force on Crime Prevention*, 1993:73-76. The Quebec calculations included policing services, CSIS, private security services, legal services including legal aid, adult and youth correctional services and other youth services, assistance for victims, training and special projects. The Task Force deducted the revenues accruing through fines from their total.
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