

## **Fact Sheet**

### **Crime in the Halifax Regional Municipality in 2005**

The Department of Justice has prepared this fact sheet on crime in the Halifax Regional Municipality to help inform the work of the Minister's Task Force on Safer Streets and Communities. The Minister's Task Force was developed, in part, as a response to recent statistics which indicated violent victimization and youth violent crime were increasing in Nova Scotia and as a result, were identified as areas of concern. This fact sheet includes 2005 statistics on overall crime and specific categories of crime by both adults and youth.

#### ***A note about the data:***

Each year, police-reported crime statistics are collected by Statistics Canada to measure the magnitude and the nature of criminal activity brought to the attention of the police. Every five years, these crime statistics are complemented by victimization data from the General Social Survey (GSS), also conducted by Statistics Canada. While the police survey measures crimes known to the police, victimization surveys provide estimates of criminal victimization, including those not reported to police.

Many factors can influence police-reported crime statistics including reporting by the public to the police. The failure to report crimes to the police can lead to an under-counting of crime in official police statistics. According to the GSS, only 33% of criminal incidents in Canada came to the attention of the police in 2004. Other factors include reporting to Statistics Canada by police organizations as well as police practices, such as the failure to officially record the use of informal warnings and cautions when dealing with young offenders.

The data in these fact sheets are subject to the above-noted limitations of police-recorded data. Furthermore, the data presented here deal only with the most serious offence recorded during an incident. That is to say, if an offender assaults a person and is then found to have drugs on their person for the purposes of trafficking, only the most serious offence, the assault, is recorded in the statistics presented in these fact sheets. As a result, the information presented here, while it is the best we have, likely underestimates the amount of criminal activity taking place in Nova Scotia.

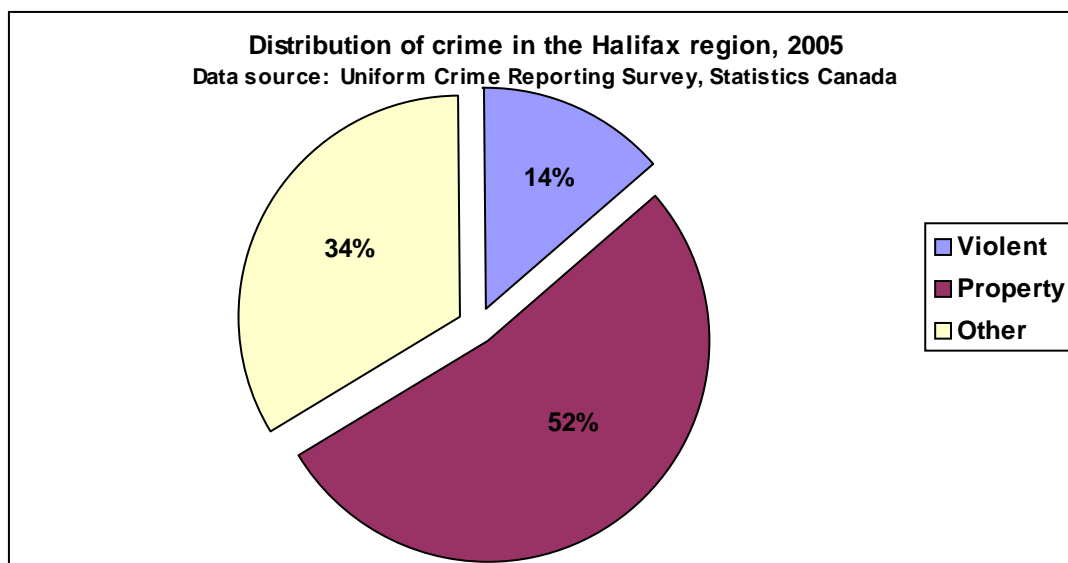
#### ***Population:***

As of 2005, there were approximately 380,000 people residing in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), which represents approximately 41% of Nova Scotia's population. As a result, it is not surprising that HRM has a higher crime rate than other areas in Nova Scotia. However, as indicated below, crime rates are slightly higher than you would expect given the number of people who live there.

Prior to recent hiring in Nova Scotia, there were 173 police officers for every 100,000 Nova Scotians in 2005. This is slightly lower than the national average of 185 police officers per 100,000 population. In the Halifax Regional Municipality, there were 190 police officers per 100,000 population, slightly higher than the national average.

*Overall crime (adult and youth):*

- In 2005, there were approximately 36,000 incidents of crime reported to the police in the HRM. This represents 46% of the total volume of reported crime in Nova Scotia.
- The HRM region has the highest rate of crime in all of Nova Scotia (9,389 incidents per 100,000 population) and it is also 13% higher than the provincial average (8,345 incidents per 100,000 population). Between 2004 and 2005, overall crime in the Halifax area went down 7%.
- Fifty-two percent (52%) of all crime reported to the police in the Halifax region was for property crime, followed by other *Criminal Code* offences (34%) (for example mischief, bail violations, etc.) and violent crime (14%). It should be noted that the majority of violent crime (61%) reported to the police in the Halifax region is for the least serious form of physical assault, also known as common assault in which no weapon or injury was present.



*Violent crime (adult and youth):*

- Forty-seven percent (47%) of violent crime incidents in Nova Scotia occurred in the HRM, the equivalent of approximately 5,000 incidents. The rate of violent crime in HRM (1,306 incidents per 100,000 population) is 15% higher than the provincial average (1,138 incidents per 100,000 population).
- There were 10 homicides and 21 attempted murders reported in the HRM in 2005. This represents almost half of all murders and attempted murders in Nova Scotia.
- Three hundred and eighty-eight (388) sexual assaults were reported to police in the HRM in 2005. The vast majority (97%) were for the least serious form of sexual assault (e.g. unwanted sexual touching). This is likely an underestimate of the actual number of sexual assaults occurring in the HRM as sexual assaults in general are the least likely crime to be reported to the police according to the 2004 General Social Survey.
- Approximately 3,800 incidents of physical assault were reported to the police. The vast majority (79%) were for the least serious form of physical assault also known as common assault (such as a fight or threat of a fight in which no weapon was used and no physical harm was caused). On the other hand, 20% of physical assault charges were for assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm.
- A total of 591 incidents of robbery were reported to the HRM police in 2005, representing fully 84% of robberies which occurred in Nova Scotia. The majority of robberies which occurred in the HRM involved a weapon (53%), either a firearm (15%) or other weapon (e.g. knife) (38%).
- In 91 of the HRM robberies, a firearm was present. This represents 89% of all firearm robberies in Nova Scotia. The use of firearms during the commission of a robbery is largely an HRM issue.
- Fifty-seven percent (57%) of offensive weapons charges were laid in the HRM. Offensive weapons charges can be laid for such crimes as using a firearm during the commission of an offence, using an imitation firearm during the commission of an offence, possession of a weapon for dangerous purposes, unauthorized possession of a firearm, etc.

- According to the 2004 General Social Survey, Halifax had the highest rate of violent victimization in the country. The violent victimization rate in Halifax was 229 incidents per 1,000 population. In comparison, the rate of violent victimization in Toronto was 107 incidents per 1,000 population, the rate in Montreal was 64 incidents per 1,000 population and the national average was 106 incidents per 1,000 population.

*Property crime (adult and youth):*

- Fully 55% of all property crime reported in Nova Scotia occurred in the HRM. In 2005, approximately 18,600 incidents of property crime were reported to the HRM police. Slightly half of these incidents were for theft under \$5,000 (10,075 incidents), followed by break and enter (19% or 3,496 incidents).
- The rate of property crime in HRM (4,887 incidents per 100,000 population) is 35% higher than the provincial average (3,626 incidents per 100,000 population).
- Over 1,600 incidents of motor vehicle theft occurred in the HRM. This represents 62% of all motor vehicle thefts in Nova Scotia.
- According to the 2004 General Social Survey, the household victimization rate in HRM was 293 incidents per 1,000 households. This is higher than the provincial average (232 incidents per 1,000 households) but also amongst the lowest in the country amongst similar sized areas. Household victimization includes the following four crimes: motor vehicle theft/theft of parts, break and enter, theft of household property and vandalism.

*Drugs and other Criminal Code offences (adult and youth):*

- A total of 891 charges were laid for drug offences in 2005, representing 44% of all drug charges laid in Nova Scotia. The vast majority of these were cannabis related (75%), followed by cocaine (13%) and other drugs (12%).
- With regard to the 671 cannabis related charges, the majority were for possession (66%), followed by trafficking (26%) and production (8%).
- Ninety-five percent (95%) of all prostitution offences reported to the police occurred in the HRM. This is the equivalent of 105 charges laid.

- Drug and prostitution offences are often referred to as “victimless crimes” and are particularly sensitive to police enforcement practices. Caution should be exercised when examining these statistics as they may be more a reflection of police enforcement practices (for example a crack down on prostitution) than the actual incidence of these types of crimes.

### *Measuring youth crime*

Youths aged 12 to 17 who come into contact with the law can be formally charged or dealt with by other means. While this has always been true, the *Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA)*, which came into force on April 1, 2003 replacing the *Young Offenders Act*, recognizes that appropriate and effective responses to youth crime need not always involve the courts. The Act provides police services with a number of alternatives to charging a youth, including informal police warnings, formal police cautions, referrals to community programs, and referrals to extrajudicial sanctions (EJS) programs (formerly known as alternative measures programs). The Act requires that police officers consider extrajudicial measures prior to charging a youth.

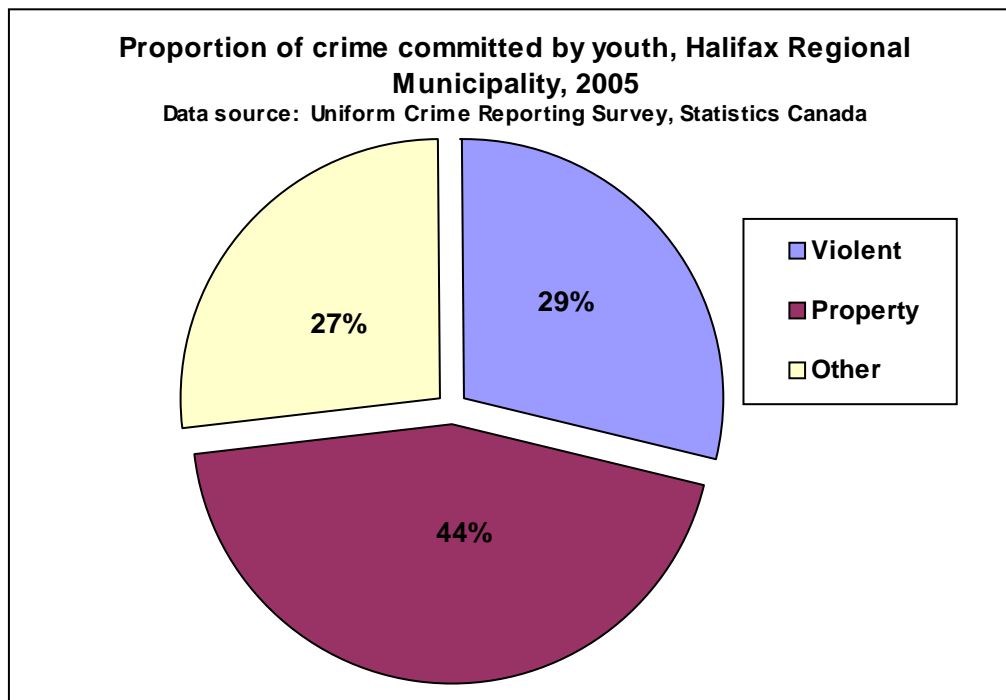
Since the implementation of the *YCJA*, police-reported data confirm that the number of youths formally charged have dropped while the number of youths dealt with by means other than a charge has increased. To provide an accurate picture of youth criminal activity in the HRM, the following data includes incidents where formal charges were laid as well as incidents which were diverted from the formal criminal justice system.

### *Youth Population:*

As of 2005, there were 29, 000 young people residing in the Halifax Region of Nova Scotia, representing approximately 39% of Nova Scotia’s youth population. The results below indicate that violent and property crime rates are higher than one would expect given the number of young people who live there.

### *Overall youth crime:*

- In 2005, there were approximately 2,300 incidents of youth crime reported to the police in the HRM. This represents 35% of the total volume of reported youth crime in Nova Scotia. The overall rate of youth crime in HRM (81 incidents per 1,000 youth).is lower than the provincial average (91 incidents per 1,000 youth).
- Forty-four percent (44%) of all youth crime reported to the police in the Halifax region was for property crime, followed by violent crime (29%) and other *Criminal Code* offences (27%) (for example mischief, bail violations, etc.). It should be noted that 56% of youth violent crime involved the least serious form of physical assault in which no weapon or injury was present.



*Youth violent crime:*

- Over the past six years, youth violent crime has increased in the HRM. The rate of youth violent crime in the Halifax Region (23 incidents per 1,000 youth) is slightly higher than the provincial average (21 incidents per 1,000 youth).
- Forty-four percent (44%) of youth violent crime incidents in Nova Scotia occurred in the HRM, the equivalent of approximately 670 incidents.
- There was 1 homicide and 1 attempted murder committed by youth in the HRM in 2005. In Nova Scotia overall, 2 homicides and 3 attempted murders were committed by youth in 2005.
- Thirty-two (32) sexual assaults involving youth were reported to police in the HRM in 2005. All 32 were for the least serious form of sexual assault (unwanted sexual touching). This is likely an underestimate of the actual number of sexual assaults occurring in the HRM as sexual assaults in general are the least likely crime to be reported to the police according to the 2004 General Social Survey.

- Approximately 500 incidents of physical assault involving youth were reported to the HRM police. The vast majority (74%) were for the least serious form of physical assault known as common assault (such as a fight or threat of a fight in which no weapons are used and no physical harm is caused), 24% of physical assault charges were for assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm and 2% or 8 incidents involved the most serious form of assault which is aggravated assault and involves an assault which wounds, maims, disfigures or endangers the life of someone.
- A total of 105 incidents of robbery involving youth were reported to the HRM police in 2005, representing 87% of youth robberies in Nova Scotia. The high number of robberies in HRM are partially attributable to swarmings. As there is no official “swarming” criminal code offence, the police record swarmings as robberies.
- Forty-five percent (45%) of HRM robberies involving youth involved a weapon, either a firearm (6%) or other weapon (e.g. knife) (39%).
- In 6 of the robberies involving youth in the HRM, a firearm was present. This represents 75% of all firearm robberies involving youth in Nova Scotia. In 2005, there were a total of 8 robberies committed by youth involving a firearm in Nova Scotia. The use of firearms during the commission of a robbery is largely an adult issue (over 18 years of age).
- Forty-four percent (44%) of offensive weapons charges involving youth were laid in the HRM. This amounts to approximately 35 charges. Offensive weapons charges can be laid for such crimes as using a firearm during the commission of an offence, using an imitation firearm during the commission of an offence, possession of a weapon for dangerous purposes, unauthorized possession of a firearm, etc.
- A recent Statistics Canada study notes that youth are most likely to physically and sexually assault other youth.
- Victimization rates are also particularly high among youth. In 2004, the rate for Canadians aged 15 to 24 years was 1.5 to 19 times greater than the rate recorded for other age groups. The risk of violent victimization steadily declined as age increased. For example, those aged 25 to 34 years had a rate of 157 incidents per 1,000, compared to a rate of 115 incidents per 1,000 for the next oldest age group (those aged 35 to 44 years). Rates of violent victimization were lowest among the oldest segment of the population, those aged 65 and older.

*Youth property crime:*

- The overall volume of youth criminal activity involving property has remained relatively stable in the HRM region. The rate of youth property crime in the Halifax Region (36 incidents per 1,000 youth) is slightly higher than the provincial average (32 incidents per 1,000 youth).
- Forty-three percent (43%) of all youth property crime reported in Nova Scotia occurred in the HRM. In 2005, approximately 1,040 incidents of property crime involving youth were reported to the HRM police. Almost a third of these incidents were for theft under \$5,000 (326 incidents), followed by break and enter (15% or 161 incidents).
- Eighty-two (82) incidents of motor vehicle theft involving youth occurred in the HRM in 2005. This represents 51% of all motor vehicle thefts committed by youth in Nova Scotia.
- Youth (12 to 17 years of age) were responsible for only 5% of all motor vehicle thefts which occurred in the HRM in 2005.

*Youth drug crime and other Criminal Code offences:*

- A total of 114 charges were laid against youth for drug offences in 2005, representing 37% of all youth drug charges laid in Nova Scotia. The vast majority of these were cannabis related (91%), followed by cocaine (8%) and other drugs (1%).
- With regard to the 104 cannabis related charges, the majority were for possession (74%), followed by trafficking (25%). Only 1 youth was charged with producing cannabis in the HRM in 2005.
- Drug offences are often referred to as “victimless crimes” and are particularly sensitive to police enforcement practices. Caution should be exercised when examining these statistics as they may be more a reflection of police enforcement practices than the actual incidence of these types of crimes.
- The rate of youth accused of other *Criminal Code* offences in the Halifax region (22 incidents per 1,000 youth) is lower than the provincial average (38 incidents per 1,000 youth).



*The cost of crime:*

- The federal Department of Justice estimates that, in 2003, crime in Canada cost an estimated \$70 billion, of which \$47 billion was incurred by victims. Costs to victims include the value of their damaged or stolen property, pain and suffering, loss of income and productivity, and health services. Criminal justice system expenditures such as police, courts, and correctional services comprised \$13 billion of the estimated total cost of crime. The remaining \$10 billion was spent on defensive measures such as security devices and protective services. Property crimes cost Canadians \$40 billion, violent crimes cost \$18 billion and other crimes cost \$12 billion.
- Here in Nova Scotia, the provincial Department of Justice estimates that about \$235 million is spent on the administration of justice (including policing, courts, legal aid, corrections and public prosecution) each year, and the cost is climbing.
- A 2004 study by GPI Atlantic, a non-profit research group, attempted to capture the broader costs associated with crime. It estimated that crime costs Nova Scotians an estimated \$550 million a year (based on late 1990s data) when one includes private spending on security services (alarms, guards, surveillance and insurance) and economic losses to victims in addition to public spending on police, courts and corrections. That translates into \$600 per person. And it climbs to \$1.2 billion a year or \$1,250 per person when losses due to unreported crimes, insurance fraud and shoplifting are added.
- GPI's estimated cost of crime is based on 1990s data, and it is probable that current costs are higher still in light of higher crime rates, which leads to higher taxes for public justice expenditures, higher insurance premiums, higher rates of personal spending on security and more victim losses.

*A note on gangs:*

In Canada as well as in Nova Scotia, there has been growing concern about crimes committed by gangs. Data on gangs, however, is notoriously difficult to collect. While the General Social Survey (GSS) does not measure gang-related violence per se, it is able to assess the number of accused involved in a violent incident.

Results from the GSS show that, at the national level, the majority of violent incidents (76%) were committed by one accused and about one in five violent incidents involved more than one accused (22%). Of the three types of violent offences measured in the GSS (assault, sexual assault and robbery), robberies were most likely to involve more than one accused (39%). There has been no significant change in the proportion of violent incidents committed by two or more accused between 1999 and 2004 (73% versus 76%). Data are currently unavailable for Nova Scotia.

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