

Fact Sheet

Crime in the South West region in 2005 (The South West region includes Lunenburg, Queens, Shelburne and Yarmouth County)

The Department of Justice has prepared this fact sheet on crime in the South West region 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.

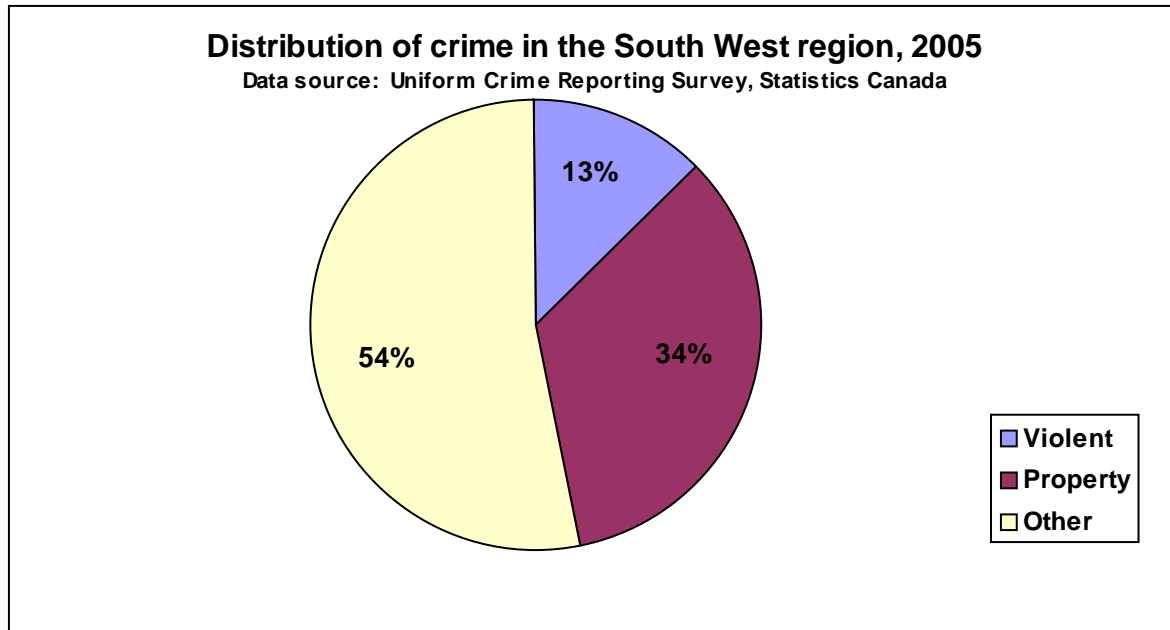
Population:

As of 2005, there were approximately 107,000 people residing in the South West Region of Nova Scotia, representing approximately 11% of Nova Scotia's population. The results below indicate that crime rates are slightly lower than one 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.

Overall crime (adult and youth):

- In 2005, there were approximately 7,700 incidents of crime reported to the police in the South West region. This represents 10% of the total volume of reported crime in Nova Scotia.
- The South West region had the second lowest rate of crime in all of Nova Scotia. In 2005, there were 7,179 incidents per 100,000 population, which is 14% lower than the provincial average of 8,345 incidents per 100,000 population.
- More than half (54%) of all crime reported to the police in the South West region was for other *Criminal Code* offences (for example mischief, bail violations, etc.), followed by property crime (34%) and violent crime (13%). It should be noted that the majority of violent crime (75%) reported to the police in the South West 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):

- Nine percent (9%) of violent crime incidents in Nova Scotia occurred in the South West region, the equivalent of approximately 1,000 incidents. The rate of violent crime in the South West region (919 incidents per 100,000 population) is 19% lower than the provincial average (1,138 incidents per 100,000 population).
- There was 1 homicide and 2 attempted murders reported in the South West region in 2005. This represents 5% of all homicides and attempted murders in Nova Scotia.
- Sixty-seven (67) sexual assaults were reported to police in the South West region in 2005. All sexual assault reported to the police (67) 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 South West region as sexual assaults in general are the least likely crime to be reported to the police (General Social Survey, 2004).
- Approximately 860 incidents of physical assault were reported to the police. The vast majority (86%) 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). Thirteen percent (13%) of physical assault charges were for assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm.

- A total of 16 incidents of robbery were reported to the South West police in 2005, representing 2% of robberies which occurred in Nova Scotia. Two (2) of these robberies involved a firearm, while 6 involved other weapons such as a knife.
- Seven percent (7%) of offensive weapons charges were laid in the South West region, the equivalent of 46 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.

Property crime (adult and youth):

- Eight percent (8%) of all property crime reported in Nova Scotia occurred in the South West region amounting to approximately 2,600 incidents of property crime being reported to the South West police. Over half of these incidents were for theft under \$5,000 (1,439 incidents), followed by break and enter (27% or 700 incidents).
- The rate of property crime in the South West region (2,417 incidents per 100,000 population) is 33% lower than the provincial average (3,626 incidents per 100,000 population) and the second lowest in the province.
- Approximately 100 incidents of motor vehicle theft occurred in the South West region in 2005. This represents 4% of all motor vehicle thefts in Nova Scotia.

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

- A total of 280 charges were laid for drug offences in 2005, representing 14% of all drug charges laid in Nova Scotia. The vast majority of these were cannabis related (88%), followed by other drugs (7%) and cocaine (6%).
- With regard to the 245 cannabis related charges, the majority were for possession (69%), followed by production (18%) and trafficking (13%).
- 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 (for example a crack down on grow-ops) than the actual incidence of these types of crimes.

- There were 71 incidents of arson reported in the South West region in 2005, this represents 12% of all reported arsons in Nova Scotia.
- Almost 600 charges were laid for disturbing the peace in the South West region, this represents 16% of all disturbing the peace charges laid in Nova Scotia.

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.

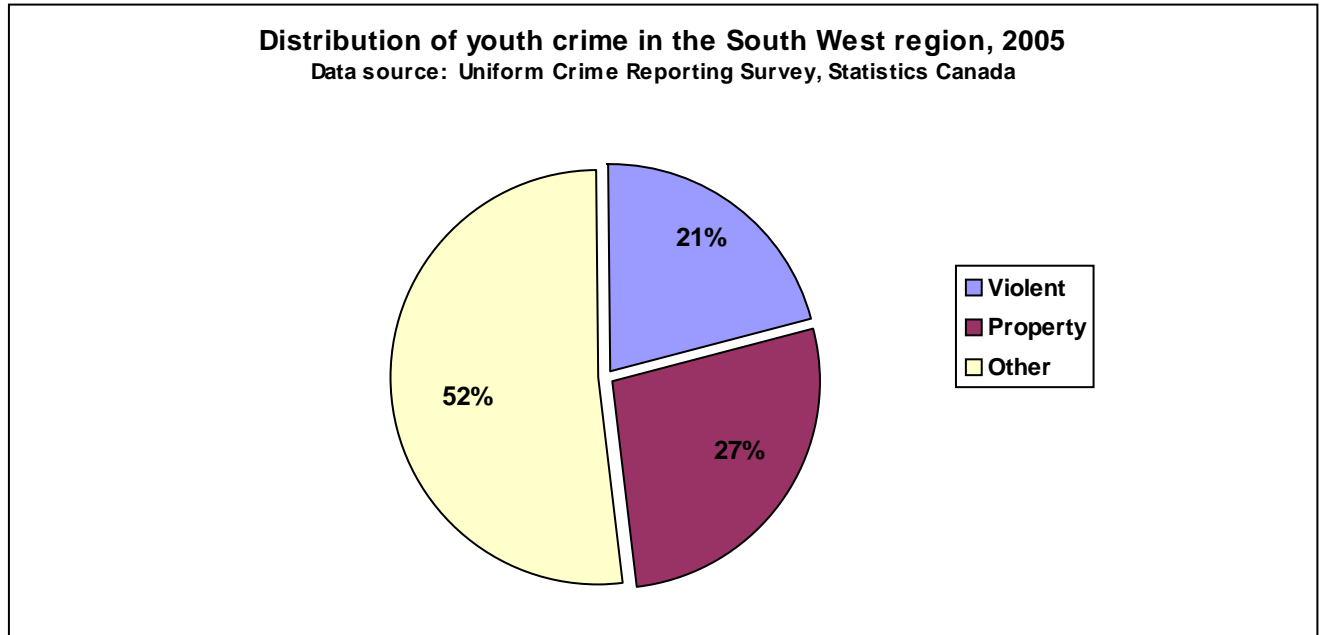
Youth Population:

As of 2005, there were approximately 8,400 young people residing in the South West region of Nova Scotia, representing approximately 11% of Nova Scotia's youth population. The results below indicate that violent crime rates and rates of other *Criminal Code* offences are higher than one would expect given the number of young people who live there.

Overall Youth Crime:

- In 2005, there were approximately 900 incidents of youth crime reported to the police in the South West region. This represents 14% of the total volume of reported youth crime in Nova Scotia. The overall rate of youth crime in the South West region (111 incidents per 1,000 youth) is higher than the provincial average (91 incidents per 1,000 youth)

- Over half (52%) of all youth crime reported to the police in the South West region was for other *Criminal Code* offences (for example mischief, bail violations, etc.), followed by property crime (27%) and violent crime (21%). It should be noted that the majority (77%) of youth violent crime involved the least serious form of physical assault in which no weapon or injury was present.



Youth violent crime:

- The overall volume of violent youth criminal activity has been increasing in the South West region. The rate of youth violent crime in the South West region (24 incidents per 1,000 youth) is slightly higher than the provincial average (21 incidents per 1,000 youth).
- Thirteen percent (13%) of youth violent crime incidents in Nova Scotia occurred in the South West region, the equivalent of approximately 200 incidents.
- There were no homicides and 2 attempted murders committed by youth in the South West region in 2005. In Nova Scotia overall, 2 homicides and 3 attempted murders were committed by youth in 2005.

- Six (6) sexual assaults involving youth were reported to police in the South West region in 2005. All 6 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 South West region as sexual assaults in general are the least likely crime to be reported to the police (General Social Survey, 2004).
- Approximately 180 incidents of physical assault involving youth were reported to the South West police. The vast majority (84%) 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) and 13% of physical assault charges were for assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm.
- A total of 3 incidents of robbery involving youth were reported to the South West police in 2005, representing 2% of youth robberies which occurred in Nova Scotia. No robberies involved a firearm.
- Ten percent (10%) of offensive weapons charges involving youth were laid in the South West region. This amounts to approximately 8 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 been decreasing in the South West region. The rate of youth property crime in the South West region (29 incidents per 1,000 youth) is lower than the provincial average (32 incidents per 1,000 youth).

- Ten percent (10%) of all youth property crime reported in Nova Scotia occurred in the South West region. In 2005, approximately 250 incidents of property crime involving youth were reported to the South West police. Over half of these incidents were for theft under \$5,000 (138 incidents), followed by break and enter (27% or 66 incidents).
- Thirteen (13) incidents of motor vehicle theft involving youth occurred in the South West region in 2005. This represents 8% of all motor vehicle thefts committed by youth in Nova Scotia.
- Youth (12 to 17 years of age) were responsible for 12% of all motor vehicle thefts which occurred in the South West region in 2005.

Youth drug crime and other Criminal Code offences:

- A total of 52 charges were laid against youth for drug offences in 2005, representing 17% of all youth drug charges laid in Nova Scotia. The vast majority of these were cannabis related (92%), followed by other drugs (8%).
- With regard to the 48 cannabis related charges, the vast majority were for possession (90%).
- 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 (for example a crack down on marijuana grow-ops) than the actual incidence of these types of crimes.
- The rate of youth accused of other *Criminal Code* offences in the South West region (58 incidents per 1,000 youth) is higher 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.

Please direct inquiries to:
 Nova Scotia Department of Justice
 Policy, Planning and Research
 5151 Terminal Road, 3rd Floor
 Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 2L6

Phone: (902) 424-5341

