Brief to the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science & Technology

Urban safety

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PREFACE

The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (CRCVC) is a national, non-profit, non-government advocacy group for victims and survivors of serious crime. We provide direct assistance and support to victims across the country, as well as advocating for public safety and improved services and rights for crime victims.

We are pleased to appear before the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science & Technology with respect to urban safety in Canada. We have made several recommendations which we believe will positively impact victims of crime and social justice in Canada.

INTRODUCTION

The CRCVC's clientele includes families and individuals impacted by serious crime. We serve approximately 1,200 new clients each year who contact the office through our toll free line or through email. Despite the decline of crime in Canada (both the severity and the volume of police-reported crime dropped in 2009, continuing the general decrease seen over the past decade[1]), we remain very concerned by acts of violence committed in communities across Canada and by their lasting impacts on victims. The General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization 2009, conducted every five

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[1] Mia Dauvergne and John Turner, Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2009, Summer 2010 Vol. 30, no. 2.

years in Canada, recently revealed that violent victimization remains stable in Canada and that the reporting of violent crime is declining[2]:

- In 2009, close to 1.6 million Canadians, or 6% of the population aged 15 years and over, in the ten provinces reported having been the victim of a sexual assault, a robbery or a physical assault in the preceding 12 months, a proportion similar to that in 2004.

- Research has shown that for various reasons victims may choose not to report their victimizations to the police. For example, according to the 2009 GSS 69% of violent victimizations, 62% of household victimizations and 71% of personal property thefts were not reported to police.

- The GSS also revealed Regina reported the highest rates of violent victimization, at close to double the rates in other CMAs. Regina also reported one of the highest rates of household victimization. In contrast, Toronto, Canada's largest census metropolitan area, recorded the lowest rate of violent victimization and was among the lowest for household victimization.

At the CRCVC, we are also particularly concerned by the over-representation of Aboriginal people as victims, particularly Aboriginal women and children in urban settings due to their increasing population in these areas. This is evidenced by more than 600 missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada. According to the 2009

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[2] Statistics Canada, *Criminal victimization in Canada, 2009*, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2010002/article/11340-eng.htm#a3

Statistics Canada study, "Violent victimization of Aboriginal people in the Canadian Provinces", sexual assaults accounted for more than one-third of violent incidents involving an Aboriginal victim. In fact, sexual assaults were reported at a rate of 70 incidents per 1,000 people versus 23 per 1,000 non-Aboriginal people.[3]

It is fairly well documented by research that "societies in which there are high levels of income inequality and diminished social cohesion have higher levels of crime and violence and higher mortality rates."[4]

IMPACTS OF VIOLENCE

Many of our clients become socially isolated as a result of being victimized. Their friends and family members do not understand the trauma they endured and expect them to get over it quickly and get on with their lives. Many survivors do not access support services in their communities for varying reasons, let alone psychological counselling to assist them in moving forward positively. In many cases, these important services are not known to the victim; not easily accessible to them or they cannot afford the high costs associated with ongoing counselling sessions, for example. The social responses we provide to victims and survivors in the immediate aftermath of the crime

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[3] Samuel Perreault, "Violent victimization of Aboriginal people in the Canadian provinces, 2009 (http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2011001/article/11415-eng.pdf)

[4] Stephen Stansfield, "Social Support and Social Cohesion," in *Social Determinants of Health*, ed. Michael Marmot and Richard Wilkinson, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999.

can impact their future healing and it is critical that those who are victimized feel supported and heard.

Many victims of crime cannot return to work following their victimization due to physical consequences of violence or negative mental health impacts of crime such as anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. The economic consequences of victimization are serious and often leave survivors in a much lower socio-economic position than they were prior to the crime being committed.

Survivors often feel re-victimized by the police investigation, media coverage of the crime and/or the trial/sentencing of the offender. They feel that balance is lacking in the Canadian criminal justice system and they have no real rights to participate or be heard. Victims observe the legal system's obsession with the rights of the accused while the victim and those persons harmed by the crime are merely bystanders. This leads to further feelings of alienation and exclusion for some victims.

SOCIAL INCLUSION & COHESION

To achieve social inclusion and cohesion, Canada must address the safety and security concerns of its citizens. Those impacted by violence and crime are a vulnerable group at risk of exclusion. In our experience working directly with victims of crime and violence, we see that victims are often excluded from full participation in society as a result of what has happened to them. Some racialized groups, such as young black males in Toronto or persons of Aboriginal descent, do not always feel safe to report crime or when they see police responding to an incident. Other groups, such as women

who are abused by their intimate partners, may rely on police for protection orders and see the police as vital to their security. Canadians feel different levels of fear and vulnerability under the same conditions. Our sense of security is also very unique, as is the way different groups in society respond to security and justice institutions.[5]

> "The terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 had a dramatic effect on Canadians' sense of peace, safety and security. Conditions we may have previously taken for granted suddenly were seen to warrant attention. These conditions include the freedom to move about as we wish and to participate and to be in public spaces without concern for our physical safety. Physical and emotional security and confidence have become more evident as elements of social cohesion. Canadians of Arabic or Muslim origin, as well as Canadians thought to be Arabic or Muslim, felt vulnerable to the effects of the public's fear. As a result, they need to see bridges that connect them with other Canadians, and evidence of acceptance and inclusion. There is a need to identify the bridges and connections that best address racialization and the divisions exacerbated by anxiety and fear. For visible minorities, indeed for all Canadians, connections, bridges and participation have more significance since September 11, 2001."[6]

COSTS OF CRIME

Seeing the impact of violent crimes on a daily basis, we strongly support initiatives to reduce violent victimization across Canada. According to research undertaken by the Department of Justice, the cost of crime in Canada in 2008 is estimated to be $99.6 billion, a majority of which, $68.2 billion or 68%, was borne by the

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[5] Inclusion for All: A Canadian Roadmap to Social Cohesion Insights from Structured Conversations
http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/rs/rep-rap/2001/tr01-rt01/p5.html
[6] Inclusion for All: A Canadian Roadmap to Social Cohesion Insights from Structured Conversations
http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/rs/rep-rap/2001/tr01-rt01/p5.html

victims. Victim costs include tangible losses such as damaged or stolen property, loss of income and productivity, and healthcare services, as well as intangible costs such as pain and suffering and loss of life.[7]

The costs of incarcerating offenders in Canada is also astounding. The Correctional Services Canada (CSC) website states that there are currently 13,000 offenders incarcerated within institutions and 8,800 serving sentences in the community. "The cost to incarcerate an offender within a federal institution was $113,974 in 2011 according to CSC's latest annual report. It now costs $2.3-billion for the country's 53 penitentiaries, which works out to $312 per prisoner, per day."[8] This is an enormous cost to society, thus we must ensure we are incarcerating only the most violent and dangerous individuals until such time that they are rehabilitated and can return to the community as pro-social members.   As most offenders will eventually return to society, it is critical for them to gain employment and contribute meaningfully to the economy so that they do not re-offend.

SMALL AND LARGE URBAN AREAS: RECENT TRENDS

A large share of Canada's population resides in either a small or large urban area and it is consistently increasing. Between 1986 and 2006 the urban population increased 4% from 76% of the population living within the urban realm to 80%. The

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[7]Ting Zhang, *Costs of Crime in Canada, 2008*: http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/rs/rep-rap/2011/rr10_5/rr10_5.pdf

[8] Eric Thibault, QMI AGENCY, accessed online at: http://www.torontosun.com/2012/02/28/it-costs-113000-a-year-to-lodge-a-federal-prisoner-report , February 28, 2012.

largest growth has been witnessed within large urban areas where the population has

grown by 8% and currently has 68% of Canada's population residing in these areas.[9]

It is commonly believed that more violent crimes happen in Census Metropolitan

Areas (CMAs) yet statistically, this belief is unfounded. According to Statistics Canada

the volume and severity of crime fell or remained stable in virtually all census

metropolitan areas (CMAs) in 2010, including Canada's ten largest cities.[10] However, it

is important to note that safety in CMAs is an issue when violent crime is present.

When citizens within the urban core are exposed to violent crimes the presence of

weapons is much greater than in comparison to rural or small urban areas. The weapon

used in these violent acts is most commonly a knife and when a firearm is present, it is

most frequently a hand gun.[11]

YOUTH GANG INVOLVMENT IN URBAN CENTRES

At the present time, research in Canada is limited regarding youth and gang

culture however studies have been performed in Toronto, Montreal and the United

States. The Montreal Police Service has defined the term "youth gang" as, "an organized

group of adolescents and/or young adults who rely on group intimidation and violence,

and commit criminal acts in order to gain power and recognition and/or control certain

areas of unlawful activity." Youth gangs have no barriers and vary across many

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[9] Statistics Canada, *A Comparison of large urban, small urban and rural crime rates, 2005*
(http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/85-002-x2007003-eng.pdf)

[10] Statistics Canada, *Police-reported crime statistics, 2010* http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2011001/article/11523-eng.htm#a3

[11] Statistics Canada, *A Comparison of large urban, small urban and rural crime rates, 2005*
(http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/85-002-x2007003-eng.pdf)

ethnicities and, geographic, demographic and socio-economic communities. Gang activity is not limited to one specific group or context.[12]

A number of youth that partake in youth gangs within the urban core are faced with economic difficulty and often experience a high level of inequality and social disadvantages. Youth that have been exposed to these factors face a higher probability of gang involvement. Long-term studies that have taken place in large Canadian and American cities (Montreal, Seattle, Washington and Rochester) have suggested that the most relevant risk factors in youth gang involvement include: negative influences in the youth's life (parents, siblings, friends), limited attachment to the community in which they reside; associating with anti-social peers; poor parent supervision; alcohol and drug abuse by self and family members; poor educational/employment potential and a need for recognition and belonging have all been attributed to youth gang violence within Canadian CMAs.[13]

PARTNER ASSAULT

Domestic violence/partner assault is a national issue and largely remains hidden in Canada. It can affect all people regardless of where they reside and it is reported consistently across all provinces and territories. Domestic violence does not discriminate between education, wealth, colour or religion and is present across small

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[12] Public Safety, *Youth Gang Involvement: What are the risk factors?, 2007* (http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/bldngevd/_fl/2007-YG-2_e.pdf)
[13] Wortley, Scot and Julian Tanner. "Social Groups or Criminal Organizations? The Extent and Nature of Youth Gang Activity in Toronto" in *From enforcement and prevention to civic engagement: research on community safety* / edited by Bruce Kidd and Jim Phillips. Toronto: Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto, 2004: 59-80; Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN), 2003.

and large urban areas. It is important to note that partner violence is not due to anger

and rage but is rooted in the desire for power and control over another individual.

Typically, the violence is perpetrated by males onto females and it is estimated that half

of Canadian women (51%) have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual

violence since the age of sixteen.[14] However, victims of domestic violence are not

limited by their sex or gender as males are common victims of partner and spousal

violence even though it is reported less frequently.

According to the 2009 General Social Survey an estimated 6% (653,000) of the

women surveyed reported that in the 5 years prior to the survey they had experienced

recurring sexual or physical abuse by their partner. Alarmingly, partner violence is most

dominant within the younger population between the ages of 15-24; in relationships of

less than 3 years; people who are separated; and people in common-law unions. In

addition, women are 3 times more likely than men to fear for their lives and twice as

likely to experience 10 or more violent episodes.[15]

The statistics surrounding partner assault are astounding and affects the safety

of people in all communities across Canada. We are concerned for children who grow

up in abusive homes and witness physical violence against their mothers or experience

it themselves. Individuals residing within CMAs, small urban areas and rural

communities are all at risk of becoming victims of this very intimate form of violence.

Education and prevention campaigns must be initiated immediately in both large and

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[14] Statistics Canada, *"The Violence Against Women Survey,"* The Daily, November 18, 1993.

[15] Statistics Canada, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2005*
(http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/85-224-x2005000-eng.pdf)

small urban areas (and rural Canada) to help victims recognize the cycle of violence and provide information to them about existing support programs available to them.

CRIME PREVENTION

We believe the federal government should invest far more significantly in prevention initiatives, rather than so highly in reactive solutions, especially for children and at-risk populations. Many of the families and survivors of violent crime we work with do not desire tougher, longer sentencing. While some do, many others would like to see the use of preventative measures before victims are created and see rehabilitation programs mandated during the offender's sentence.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO INCREASE SOCIAL COHESION & INCLUSION

At the CRCVC, we feel there are many measures that can be implemented to increase social cohesion and inclusion thereby increasing safety within the CMAs including:

1) **Implement and integrate the importance of social inclusion and acceptance into educational curriculum (all ages)**

   a) National anti-bullying/anti-violence/anti-substance abuse curriculum and campaigns;

   b) Encouragement and implementation of unisex sporting activities and clubs:

      i) Limit male/female stereotypes and biases;

ii) Discredit gender roles and expectations;

iii) Educating young children, new immigrants and adults how to recognize the current gender barriers within Canadian society and how they can be deconstructed.

c) Loosen criteria/increase acceptance for troubled students to alternative educational programs (technical institutions, reach ahead program & head start):

i) Ensure literacy and success for ALL students.

2) Community Centre Involvement

a) Install and offer outreach programs within community centres to raise awareness and educate individuals about victimization and personal safety measures.

b) Facilitate neighbourhood awareness and communication among members.

c) Promote and publicize the importance of reporting criminal activity as well as available community and government resources.

d) Implement programs to help community members locate and access public funding for financial aid if they have been victims of crime. Increase access to and funding for services that support and empower crime victims in their healing, including funding for specialized healing centres.

e) Offer job training/skills development programs for young people and after-school programs.

f) Offer public health nurses to work in at-risk communities.

g) Educate members about family violence, protecting children and concrete steps victims can take when they are ready to end the cycle of violence.

h) Provide enriched and subsidized childcare for all community members.

3) Implement rehabilitation incentives for offenders as well as increase community supports after release to reduce recidivism and victimization rates

a) Offer small incentives for offenders that earn a GED while incarcerated in order to increase employment options upon release as well as boost self-esteem and self-sufficiency.

b) Offer mandatory alcohol and substance programs while incarcerated, as well as after release.

    i) Enforce drug and substance testing during reintegration.

c) Facilitate and increase offender/ex-offender access to mental health/counselling programs to ensure success in the community.