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Policing Canada and Smarter Crime Control in the 21st Century

What shifts policy, to cost effective public safety?

Irvin Waller, Ph.D., University of Ottawa; Member CCA Expert Panel on the Future of Canadian Policing Models

POLICING CANADA IN THE 21ST CENTURY (Council of Canadian Academies, 2014)

Highlights:

- "It is not at all clear that crime rates are declining" (p 142).
- Canadian policing expenditures increased by 50% from 2000 to 2011 after discounting for inflation (p 52).
- "Police costs in Canada have been on the rise for a decade with no strong evidence of improving performance" (p 144).
- "The future policing models will be shaped by the reality of police working" as only one player in controlling violent crime (p 141).
- A growing body of evidence identifies "initiatives with a prevention focus that do not involve police" as being cost effective, especially in the area of reducing interpersonal crime (p 147).
- "Wider reaching governance structures and a stronger system of performance measurement" are needed through Public Safety and Security Boards (p. 146).

SMARTER CRIME CONTROL: A GUIDE TO SAFER FUTURES FOR CITIZENS, COMMUNITIES AND POLITICIANS (Waller, Irvin, 2014)

- Inter-personal crime is concentrated in a small number of census tracts, characterized by a concentration of people and families with risk factors that are scientifically established as correlating with interpersonal violence.
- Prestigious agencies such as the United States Department of Justice (US DOJ) and the World Health Organization show strong scientific information for what prevents violence by tackling risk factors.
- The US DOJ crimesolutions.gov identifies 78 "effective" solutions, more than half of which tackle the social roots of crime.
- Some targeted proactive police programs are effective.
- Pre-crime prevention programs that tackle risk factors are more effective and cost effective than police programs on their own.
- Cities and programs that combine smart policing and prevention have reduced interpersonal violence by 50% or more.
- Applying this knowledge will achieve large reductions in harm to victims of violent crime and savings in taxes.
- Specific actions are identified for legislators to implement cost effective violence prevention.

STUDY AIMS

- To raise awareness of the evidence on (i) what is effective and cost effective in reducing violent victimization and (ii) the importance of "partnerships" to achieve those reductions.
- To identify and describe actions, particularly in Canada and the US, that have shifted to using violence prevention knowledge, and to identify where reduction in crime and taxes have been successful.
- To examine what factors contributed to the successful shift, including the role of moral and financial crises, political awareness and vision, the media, police leadership, task forces, disparity in violence and incarceration, and victim advocacy.

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES FOR CANADA (within 5 years)

- Reductions of 50% in rates of crime victimization and costs of harm to victims (from \$83 billion to \$40 billion).
- Reductions of expenditures (taxes) on policing and prisons in billions, particularly at the municipal level (from \$21 billion to \$17 billion).
- Investment for Social Return of at least \$1 for \$7, including helping parents with kids difficult for them to manage; mentoring at-risk kids to help them succeed; teaching life skills and "4th R" in schools to reduce adolescent abuse of alcohol and sexual assault.
- Shift to proactive policing, such as hot spots and problem-oriented policing.

METHODS

- The study will identify intentional or other situations between 2010 and 2020 that have seen increased use of violence prevention through legislative change, new responsibility centres, political awareness, funding shifts at the state/provincial/city level and so on.
- Intentional strategies include:
 - Canada - the National Municipal Network for Crime Prevention; Building Partnerships to Reduce Crime; Ontario Crime Prevention Framework for Action; the Economics of Policing Initiatives.
 - USA - 21st Century Policing Task Force; State of the Nation Address by Obama; Pew Trusts Justice and Public Safety Reinvestment; ACLU Campaign to cut Mass Incarceration by 50% by 2020 (Soros); Everytown for Gun Safety (Blomberg).

DISCUSSION

- In Canada, some municipalities and police leaders are innovating important shifts that focus on evidence, violence prevention and smarter use of police resources and local jails. Some provinces are innovating effective prevention, including relating to gangs and to sexual assault.
- In the US, some police leaders have shifted police arrests towards misdemeanors. Some cities are innovating shifts towards effective prevention. Some political leaders want to reduce mass incarceration and racial disparities in criminal justice. Justice reinvestment is justified in terms of tax savings.

SUMMARY

Policing is just one player in reducing violence and is not the most cost effective. The accumulated evidence shows pre-crime prevention to be cost effective and effective in preventing violent crime. Innovations in Canada and initiatives in the US suggest that evidence may play a greater role in reducing interpersonal violent crime and taxes. The challenge is how to get these innovations and initiatives implemented to provide greater public safety at a lesser cost.

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