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A Better Estimation of Police Costs by Offence Types

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Determining costs-of-service trends is a critical concern for law enforcement agencies. It continues to be a constant challenge in Canadian society to balance the rising cost of police services while law enforcement agencies struggle with budget cuts. Although crime has decreased, police expenditures have increased, leading to several different costing reports over recent years.

Possible reasons for the rise in police costs include expanded duties due to recent court decisions (e.g., *R. v. Stinchcombe*, 1991 requires greater transcription work by police), training costs and advancements in technology.

Current police costing studies are at a macro level, disallowing a more granular analysis. Also, the majority of costing estimates for policing that focus on costs of crime tend to focus on aggravated offences and exclude minor criminal violations such as traffic violations or motor vehicle accidents (Ratcliffe, 2014). Improving the quality of per-incident cost estimate is not only important in understating the costs of individual crimes, but also essential in policing performance management, aiming to better manage service delivery costs and to generate improved public safety outcomes.

STUDY AIMS

The purpose of this study is to begin to develop a more accurate and effective estimate of police costs by offence type and costs of crime by:

- Determining the average costs per criminal incident by offence type.
- Assessing the percentage of cost spent on crime compared to non-crime activities (proactive activities) and reactive policing (i.e., calls for service).

METHODS

Two police services contributed to the current pilot project (Waterloo Regional Police Service [WRPS] and Ontario Provincial Police [OPP]). The basic tangible costs for crime versus non-crime activity and per offence type have been calculated using direct costs of salary and hours of policing. In addition, a mean cost for both police services is calculated and reported.

The WRPS data is comprised of calls for service between 2012 and 2013. Crimes were mapped by the WRPS to Unified Crime Codes (UCR). The OPP data include investigative costs (crime) and administrative, traffic, and operational costs (non-crime costs). For the OPP data, offences were aggregated prior to the current analyses using OPP service codes. Therefore, frequency of offence type could not be calculated for the OPP, but costs of crime compared to non-crime proportions could be calculated and have been compared.

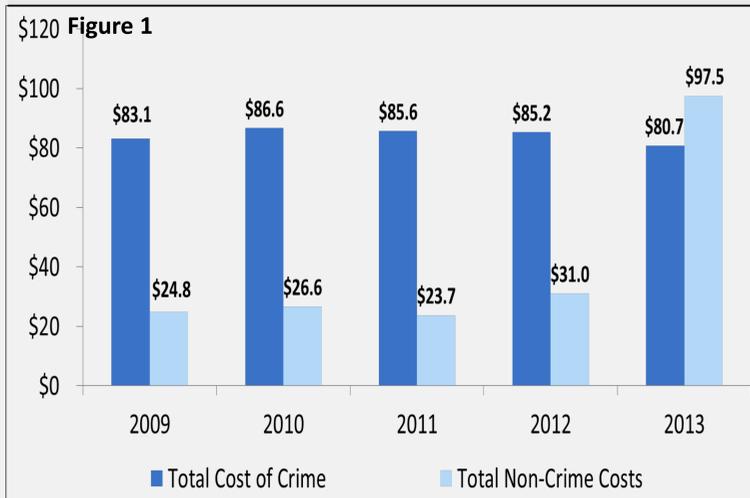
RESULTS

Analysis of WRPS data reveal the proportion for cost of crime is 52.49% and 54.5% of total cost for reactionary and preventative policing in 2012 and 2013 respectively. Primary costs for calls for service in Waterloo are attributable to preventative police activities.

Table 1 shows the results of cost per offence for WRPS calls for service in 2013. The highest range for an offence is in Other Criminal Code (OCC) violations which differs from 2012, which has Crimes Against Person as the highest cost for an offence. In 2013, Drug Violations has the highest *average* cost, which differs from OCC violations as the highest in 2012. Property crime shows the lowest mean cost per offence in 2013, similar to 2012.

OPP data shows little variation in crime expenditures (see Figure 1) until 2013. OPP crime related costs are higher than non-criminal activity expenditures, showing an average cost of crime per year of 75.95% for 2009 to 2012. Factoring in patrol costs in 2013 reduced the average cost of crime related costs to 45%.

UCR Crime Category	Average in CAD \$	Range in CAD\$
Crimes Against Person	461.75	63.01 – 2696.46
Crimes Against Property	174.72	57.90 – 554.16
Other Criminal Code Violations	449.78	28.43 – 9651.93
Drugs and Substances Violations	637.08	81.09 – 4797.87
Traffic Violations	275.89	44.02 – 1008.20
Other Provincial Statute Violations	177.81	176.31 – 228.20
Other Federal Statute Violations	506.68	37.76 – 508.43



DISCUSSION

A more micro-level analysis by cost of offence type offers a more informative estimate of policing expenditures. Cost of crime is not as large of a proportion as first thought based on previous research. Meanwhile proactive/preventative policing is a large expenditure in police costs. This can be seen most directly in the OPP analysis that shows how large patrol time (a preventative policing activity) shifts the proportion of crime compared to non-crime costs significantly.

Although the difference in costs can be significant, such as when patrol time is added, it cannot be calculated if this difference is *statistically* significant. To create a better estimate that can be more statistically informative, additional variables need to be used. For example, if the number of officers per incident were included, it could be used to determine if the differences in costs per offence type or activity (reactive/preventative/investigative) is statistically significant.

SUMMARY

More granular estimates for policing costs expenditures would be beneficial to create more informative assessments. Furthermore, comparing non-crime activities to different crime activities, such as reactive to preventative to investigative policing, could provide more informative results.

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