



The amalgamation of small police services into larger medium-sized regional entities may have efficiency advantages, but there are limited or no cost savings in amalgamating medium to larger police services

BACKGROUND

The issue of the amalgamation, consolidation, regionalization, or merger of police services has been the subject of various local, provincial/state and federal governmental and non-governmental commissions in Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States for over 50 years.

Debates concerning this issue have been on-going and expressed in terms of whether merging police agencies, particularly those serving smaller communities, will lead to more effective and efficient service delivery, and cost-savings.

While police consolidation has occurred in Canada in the context of the creation of regional governing bodies for large municipalities and contiguous suburban and rural areas, there have been few police consolidations involving First Nation police services.

First Nations band councils have shown an interest in police amalgamation as the demands for policing services are difficult to meet due to high debt levels, deficits, and limited increases in funding under the tripartite policing agreements.

In response to the economic and social challenges of policing First Nation communities, the question of what benefits and/or costs might accrue from the amalgamation of police services in adjacent communities is important for administrators considering how to optimize service delivery and value for money.

This report's objectives are to: 1) study the amalgamation of police services by analyzing the national and international policing literature and by conducting a comparative analysis of selected police

services in Canada that have undergone amalgamation with those that have not; and 2) identify the benefits, costs, and challenges of amalgamating policing services in First Nations and Inuit communities.

METHOD

In reviewing the literature on the consolidation of police services and assessing the potential impact of amalgamation on the First Nations Policing Program (FNPP), both quantitative and qualitative analytic approaches were used. The quantitative analysis consisted of collecting data for five police services that had undergone amalgamation and four that had not.

The qualitative information consisted of interviews with major stakeholders involved in police amalgamation either as a senior police executive, a member of a police board or commission, a provincial government official, or a senior local elected official.

This project is a retrospective study in that it looks at consolidations of services that have already occurred.

FINDINGS

For proponents of police amalgamation the main argument in favour of consolidating resources has been the potential for cost savings. However, the majority of studies focused on economies of scale suggest that there are limited or no cost efficiencies associated with the amalgamation of medium to larger-sized municipal police departments.

There is evidence to suggest that medium sized police services (those policing about 22,000 to 50,000 inhabitants) are more successful in dealing with crime and operational costs than much larger regional police services due to the diseconomies of scale.



If economies of scale do exist, they can be obscured by bureaucracies capturing and spending cost savings. This was evident in interviews with those familiar with policing amalgamation in Canada and has been labelled as “bureau monopoly power” by police researchers. It is the process whereby public employees are capable of quickly responding to capture any savings after a consolidation occurs.

To understand the impact of police amalgamation on Canadian police services, expenditure and crime data for nine Canadian police services were reviewed. The data show that there were no differences between police services that had undergone amalgamation and those that had not.

An interesting new finding (not found in the policing research literature) concerns the issue legislated amalgamations may have negative and long-lasting impact on police personnel emotions, morale, and team cohesion. Potentially, this may negatively affect employee morale for a period of time after amalgamation. Within this context, the human element must be taken into account when amalgamating police services and the appropriate process must be implemented to deal with employee concerns prior to future amalgamations.

In the mid-1990s, many Ontario police services were amalgamated as part of a general municipal restructuring. Interviews were conducted with former senior officials at the police and political level who were directly involved with the amalgamation process.

The interviews revealed that while the argument was put forward that police amalgamation was required to save monies, this was not the case. Additional costs such as new equipment or upward adjustment of salaries and wages for all the police officers and civilian personnel offset any cost savings.

However, some benefits were noted including: the opportunity to streamline information technology and communications systems, and the opportunity to share services in the interest of efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings on police amalgamation of police services in Canada identified the implications of amalgamation on the FNPP. These included the legal framework for policing, the collective bargaining process, non-union police officers, attrition rates, and the recruitment and retention of First Nations police officers. The report focuses on other options such as:

- 1) Shared service agreements;
- 2) Full amalgamation;
- 3) Municipal agreements; and
- 4) Provision of First Nations policing services to adjacent communities.

The above-mentioned four options could be viable policy directions for the FNPP to explore.

SOURCE

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