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ECONOMICS OF POLICING – BASELINE FOR POLICING RESEARCH IN CANADA

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OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

- To gather information on the current state of police research in Canada
- To examine the structures and programs for police research in several international jurisdictions
- To use these materials to facilitate the development of collaborative relationships between police services, governments, and academics
- To inform discussions on the creation of a national police research strategy

METHOD

- Review of the published and unpublished literature
- Scan of conference presentations and other forums featuring police research
- Review of materials on existing structures for funding and conducting research and disseminating findings
- Interviews: Canada (N=26); international (N=10)

THE CURRENT STATE OF POLICE RESEARCH

- “Policing research in Canada is disjointed, incoherent, fragmented and inconsistent. It tends to be narrow, abstract, and insular.” (academic)
- “Dismal as Hell. The state of policing research has slipped significantly.” (academic)
- “Research is being done, but by accident. Most police organizations don’t know why it’s important or how to use the information that is gathered.” (former police leader)

THE CURRENT STATE OF POLICE RESEARCH

- “Canada relies heavily on the U.S. and the U.K. to do our research for us.”
- “There is no funding and there never has been any funding” (provincial Assistant Deputy Minister of Justice)
- Federal government withdrawal of support for the research centres
- A need for the federal government to re-engage and to provide resources

ROLE OF PROVINCIAL, TERRITORIAL AND MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS

- View that governments not generally involved in research or facilitating collaborative research or disseminating research
- Current state is one of fragmentation and isolation of governments from one another
- No strategic provincial/territorial plan for police research; lack of MOUs with universities
- “I’ve seen limited to nil research from universities” (Assistant Deputy Minister of Justice)

POLICE SERVICES DIVISIONS, RESEARCH AND PUBLIC POLICY

- “There is a fundamental problem between quality research and public policy: by the time the government is aware that they need research, they don’t have an adequate timeline to do the research and if research is undertaken, by the time it is complete the issue isn’t topical anymore and research is not required.” (senior program manager, provincial police services division)

POLICE SERVICES DIVISIONS, RESEARCH AND PUBLIC POLICY

- “The view of the Police Services Division in [] was that the less they had to get involved in police research, the better. They didn’t want to get accused of being involved in research that went sideways and the Minister had to answer questions about it.” (former employee of Police Services Division in [])

POLICE SERVICES AND POLICE RESEARCH

- Canadian police services often have only a limited capacity to conduct in depth research studies and analyses.
- “You simply don’t have time to research best practices or emerging trends. Much of it (the research) is template-based.” (police planner)
- “There are no set research objectives, only a limited amount of research dollars, and research that is conducted is often not available outside of the Division. I can’t even take a guess at how much money is spent on research.” (strategic planner, RCMP)

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POLICE SERVICES AND ACADEMICS

- View among the academics that relations with police services were either non-existent or characterized by some degree of mutual suspicion and distrust.
 - Lack of understanding of the role of academics
 - Absence of strategic frameworks to facilitate collaborative partnerships
 - Perception that academics were often critical without providing recommendations for improving service deliver

THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN ACADEMICS AND THE POLICE

- Academic: “Why don’t police officers ever read research reports?”
- Police: “Why can’t academics write in plain English?”
- Academic: “Why are the police unwilling to examine their own organizational performance?”
- Police: “Why are researchers unwilling to produce information that a practical person exercising power can use to change a limited aspect of the organization instead of theoretical and explanatory structures of no use to the problem-solver?” (Bradley and Nixon, 2009:427)

THE ROLE OF PRIVATE CONSULTING FIRMS

- Respondents noted the increasing involvement of private sector “business” firms in conducting police research.
- Concerns with rigour of method, absence of sophisticated statistical analysis, and whether this involvement hindered the development of collaborative partnerships (“one and done”)
- “They don’t really know the nuances of policing and are asked by sponsors to review something in a time-line that is beyond stupid.” (police leader)

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create an adequate funding mechanism for police research
- Break down silos of organizations involved in police research
- Foster the development of collaborative partnerships involving the police, governments, and academics
- Create a portal for the timely dissemination of research findings
- Mixed views on the creation of a national police research centre