



Research Summary



MEASURING CRIME IN CANADA

Question: How are statistics regarding the criminal justice system in Canada gathered and reported?

Background: Data on the criminal justice system is gathered by the police, courts, and correctional agencies across Canada. The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS) of Statistics Canada is the focal point of the federal-provincial-territorial collection of information on the nature and extent of crime and the administration of criminal justice in Canada. However, there is additional data on federal offenders, those serving sentences of two years or longer, that is not readily available to Statistics Canada. Each year, Public Safety Canada collaborates with CCJS, Correctional Service of Canada, the Parole Board of Canada, and the Office of the Correctional Investigator to collate and publish up-to-date statistics on corrections and conditional release in Canada. The goal of this publication is to provide a useful source of statistical information and assist the public in gaining a better understanding of these various components of the criminal justice system.

Answer: Police reported crime is an important source of information. The statistics are based upon members of the public coming forward to report the occurrence of a crime. In 2009, the overall crime rate was 7,224 per 100,000 population, which is 13.8% lower than the

overall crime rate of 8,376 in 2000. Since the year 2000, the rate of property crime has dropped 21.4% from 5,189 to 4,081 and the rate of violent crime has decreased 12% from 1,494 to 1,314.

Court information is different from police reported crime in that it is a workload measure counting the number of cases processed. Adult courts in Canada have shown small increases in the number of adult cases that have been processed. Since 2006-07, the number of cases processed increased from 379,301 to 391,685 in 2008-09. Similar to the drop in property crime rates, there was a decrease of 2.5% in the number of property cases from 2006-07 to 2008-09. However, unlike the decline observed in the violent crime rate, there was a small increase of 1.8% in cases of crimes against a person (from 92,329 in 2006-07 to 94,004 in 2008-09).

Prison statistics reflect the number of persons entering a custodial facility. This includes those convicted of a crime and sentenced to prison as well as those persons awaiting trial. Police reported crime includes cases that do not result in a charge being laid or lead to a conviction. Court statistics count cases that include all decisions of the court such as findings of guilt and not guilty as well as when charges are stayed or withdrawn. Prison statistics concerning provincial institutions indicate there has been an increase in average daily counts of

26.8% from 18,646 in 2000-01 to 23,635 in 2008-09. This increase has mostly been driven by the increase in the number of individuals remanded into custody waiting court processing. The number of individuals incarcerated while on remand has increased 82.4% from 7,392 individuals in 2000-01 to 13,486 in 2008-09. Prison statistics concerning the number of offenders incarcerated in federal prisons has increased 5.8% from 12,794 in 2000-01 to 13,531 in 2009-10.

In 2009-10, there were 7,101 offenders serving federal sentences in the community under supervision. This represents a 6.3% decline compared to 2000-01 when there were 7,581 federal offenders being supervised in the community. This decline coincides with the 8.9% decline in the number of offenders being considered for conditional release (day parole or full parole) by the Parole Board of Canada. Not only is the number of offenders appearing before the Parole Board of Canada declining, so too are the rates of granting day parole (from 71.9% to 66.3%) and full parole (from 42.4% to 40.8%).

For offenders serving provincial custodial sentences (i.e., custodial sentences of two years less one day or shorter), 49.7% fewer offenders are being granted conditional releases. There were 1,761 offenders being

supervised on provincial parole in 2000-01 and there were 886 offenders being supervised on provincial parole in 2008-09.

Policy Implications:

1. Criminal justice statistics are derived from a number of different sources and no one source gives a complete picture of crime in Canada. Readers should be aware of the limitations of any one source of crime statistics.
2. Although police reported crime has shown a decline, the demands on corrections have increased as more individuals are incarcerated and fewer are being released on parole or prior to trial. Criminal justice agencies must constantly examine their policies to manage correctional pressures while ensuring public safety.
3. The vast majority of incarcerated offenders eventually are released into the community. There needs to be greater focus on the efforts of correctional agencies to examine how offender releases can be enhanced for the long-term safety of all Canadians.

Source: Public Safety Canada. (2010). *Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview: Annual Report 2010*. Ottawa, ON: Public Safety Canada.

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