

August 2010

Bill Blair, President, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police

**Police Information and Statistics (POLIS) Committee
Annual Report 2009/10**

Executive Summary:

The POLIS Committee has extensive representation from the largest police agencies across Canada. It is strongly supported by, and enjoys an excellent working relationship with, Statistics Canada. As well, it has a formal linkage to Federal/Provincial/Territorial (FPT) Deputy Ministers responsible for justice through the Justice Information Council (JIC), and through representation on its operational arm, the Liaison Officers Committee.

The POLIS Committee contributes value through the opportunity to develop, improve and deliver accurate statistical and analytical information to the Canadian public, police and government to better understand our environment with respect to offending, victimization and policing, and to thereby facilitate strategic decision making, policy development and resource allocation.

Over the past year, the POLIS committee worked with Statistics Canada to:

- ensure that the new Crime Severity Index was fully understood by the police community;
- improve the collection of data on the involvement of organized crime/street gangs;
- establish standards for the proper “clearing” of offences to ensure comparable clearance rates among police services;
- discuss the comparability and utility of per capita costs among police services;
- formulate an official position from CACP on the collection of Aboriginal data from front-line police officers;
- expand the level of detail collected for police personnel to address future HR planning
- examine the consistency of police scoring for hate-motivated crimes, particularly for the category of “other similar factor”; and,
- ensure that the UCR Data Managers Data Quality Working Group continues to meet on a regular basis to discuss UCR data quality issues.

Committee Partners / Sponsors:

The POLIS Committee would not be viable without the continuous support (logistical, administrative and financial) of Statistics Canada’s Policing Services Program, led by Mr. John Turner, as well as the many police agencies who contribute the time and resources for their members to participate. POLIS is further strengthened by the active membership and participation of senior representatives from Justice Canada and Public Safety Canada.

Committee Vision / Mission / Mandate/ Objectives / Strategic Priorities

Vision: Quality data for quality policing

Mission: POLIS supports progressive change in policing, in partnership with the Policing Services Program of the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, a Division of Statistics Canada, and other partners, through the development and communication of meaningful public safety information.

Mandate/Objectives:

- Represent the police community in ensuring that emerging police issues, priorities and concerns are addressed by Statistics Canada surveys and products;
- Facilitate the development of partnerships among governments and criminal justice agencies to further the integration of justice information systems;
- Collaborate with Statistics Canada and police organizations in the development of standard police performance indicators;
- Promote improved police management and decision making by identifying, developing and communicating best practices in the collection, analysis and application of statistical information;
- Ensure that, in the development of new and ongoing surveys of crime and police resources, data can be provided by the police community in a standardized and cost-effective manner, minimizing respondent burden and costs;
- Promote innovation in information systems, collection techniques and other matters that improve the production and utility of police information;
- Review Statistics Canada reports before public release to ensure that appropriate context surrounding issues and trends is included to explain differences in local and regional comparisons, as well as to explain changes in trends.

Strategic Priorities 2007 – 2010 (to be updated at next meeting):

- Enhancing the comparability of crime statistics by:
 - mitigating and understanding levels of unreported and under-counted crime;
 - continuing to examine UCR data quality and comparability issues;
 - implementing a new Crime Severity Index;
 - addressing the differences between police-reported data and victimization data;
 - enhancing communications between Statistics Canada and police services in terms of concepts and standardization.
- Geo-coding
- High-tech Crime, including cyber crime and money laundering
- Sexual exploitation and the use of the Internet

Summary of Major Activities and Initiatives in 2009/10:

1. Implementation of a national Crime Severity Index

Background: In September 2004, POLIS examined the wide differences in the rates of relatively less-serious, high-volume offences for various police services. POLIS decided to explore with Statistics Canada the potential development of a national "Crime Index" that would reduce the impact of high-volume offences (which are prone to non-reporting) on overall crime rates, providing a more meaningful portrayal of crime to Canadians.

In March 2005, POLIS undertook to form a Working Group, consisting of representatives from the police community, federal/provincial justice ministries, the academic community and Statistics Canada, to develop the "Index". From 2005-2007, the Crime Index Working Group held a number of tele-conference meetings to guide the development of the Index and work out all conceptual and methodological issues.

The POLIS Chair and vice-Chair presented to the CACP Board of Directors in February 2008 to seek endorsement for the implementation of the new Index. By fall 2008, all development of the Index was complete and the focus turned to communications with the police community as well as federal and provincial justice ministries. Statistics Canada staff traveled across the country and presented on the new Crime Index to all Provincial Associations of Chiefs of Police.

In April 2009, Statistics Canada released a report introducing the new Index, based on 2007 crime statistics. In July 2009, with the release of 2008 crime data, the Index was first integrated into the annual crime statistics release along with the traditional "crime rate". The Index was well received by the police community, FPT officials and the media.

For the release of 2009 crime statistics in July 2010, the final component of the Crime Index work, a youth Crime Severity Index, was implemented. Due to relatively small numbers of youth accused, this new Index is only available at the national and provincial level, and not at the local police service or census metropolitan area levels.

In addition, a Crime Severity Index "rankings" table of over 200 police services policing communities over 10,000 population has now been formally prepared and integrated into the annual release to provide Chiefs in smaller communities with a sense of their crime ranking compared to other communities.

Policy implications: CACP tasked Statistics Canada to develop a better measurement to reflect the severity of police-reported crime. In response, the Crime Severity Index was created and has resulted in a better measurement of the severity of crime in our country, as well as an improvement to the comparability of crime statistics among Canadian police services. Thanks to joint initiatives such as this one between CACP and Statistics Canada, Canada is leading the way internationally in the measurement of police-reported crime statistics with the implementation of this new tool.

2. Organized crime data collection:

Background: Since the launch of the organized crime variable as a part of the 2.2 Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) survey in 2005, police agencies have consistently produced low numbers of offences linked to organized crime. POLIS believes that the data being submitted to Statistics Canada represents a vast under-count of organized crime's involvement in police-reported crime. For this reason, the data is being held back from publication, and therefore, has remained unusable for academics, federal and provincial/territorial governments, policy makers and other important stakeholders whose mandate it is to prevent and respond to the organized crime threat in Canada.

Street gang linkages to reported crime appear to be more reliable in contrast to the minimal data being supplied for offences associated with organized crime groups. However, recent discussions at POLIS have suggested that there is little difference anymore between organized crime and street gangs.

POLIS has asked that a detailed examination of the UCR2.2 organized crime data be undertaken in order to determine whether the under-counting is related to the nature and complexity of organized crime itself, or if it is the result of a lack of quality assurance processes and/or training. Some members have also raised the possibility that the UCR survey is simply not the appropriate data source to collect this kind of information.

As a result, a POLIS sub-committee was struck in 2009 to conduct a pilot project with the police services represented by POLIS as follows:

- identify the causes of the severe under-reporting of the organized crime variable;
- identify potential solutions or best practices designed to improve reporting;
- ascertain and address concerns police agencies may have in relation to collecting/reporting these data; and
- identify other potentially more relevant and reliable sources and indicators of the impact of organized crime in Canada.

The sub-committee will report back to POLIS at the October 2010 meeting, whereby a recommendation will be made to continue collecting through the UCR survey or to find an alternative source of data.

Policy implications:

Organized crime is a growing threat to the police community and the Canadian public. Accurate and timely data are required to quantify the threat that organized crime groups pose and determine if their activity is increasing. If it is determined that the UCR survey is not the appropriate vehicle for collection of this critical information, then a new source must be identified that is.

3. Clearance rates

Background: Even with the implementation of a “weighted” clearance rate, there is still wide variation in clearance rates throughout the country, particularly in British Columbia, where clearance rates continue to be much lower than in other regions. This variance was discussed thoroughly at the March 2010 POLIS meeting.

POLIS recommended that Statistics Canada work with the police and Crown in British Columbia (one of the provinces with Crown charge approval) to try and increase the reporting to UCR of clearances for incidents where an accused has been identified but is not recommended by Crown for formal charging.

Also, to address the issue of differences in local police scoring practices in terms of whether or not to clear a particular incident, **POLIS has come up with a list of standard criteria for clearing an incident and will ask the CACP Executive to distribute to all Chiefs as “best practices”**.

Policy implications: Clearance rates are often used as one of many indicators of police performance. It is, therefore, important that police services are using the same guiding principles and scoring criteria in the proper clearing of criminal incidents. The distribution of “scoring guidelines for clearing incidents” by CACP to all Chiefs would be one step in improving this measure. In addition, the investigation into scoring practices in British Columbia will, hopefully, bring clearance rates in that province more into line with the rest of Canada.

4. Comparability and utility of per capita costs at police service level

Background: Each year, Statistics Canada’s Police Administration survey collects high-level information on police service operating costs. Per capita costs are calculated and published at the police service level in the annual Police Resources in Canada report. However, as what expenditure items are contained in one police service’s operating budget can be very different from another’s, these data are really not very comparable among police services.

Despite footnotes and caveats in the annual report not to compare per capita costs at the police service level, both the media and local Police Boards continue to do so. Statistics Canada receives calls each year from Police Chiefs wanting to know why they continue to publish this information when it isn’t comparable.

In response, Statistics Canada is proposing to continue to collect expenditure data from police services and release it at the national level, but to discontinue publishing it in the annual report at the police service level. As such, **a Briefing Note is being prepared for discussion at the CACP Executive meeting to seek agreement to stop publishing per capita costs at the police service level in the Police Resources in Canada report.**

Policy implications: Per capita costs are often used by politicians and the media to determine the efficiency and budgets of local police services by comparing to other similar-sized police services. If the data being used are not comparable, then this is doing a disservice to the entire police community.

5. Aboriginal identity UCR2 data collection

Background: POLIS has been discussing the collection of Aboriginal Identity by front-line police officers since 2001. At that time, the committee had recommended the elimination of this variable from the UCR2 survey due to data quality concerns related to the difficulty of police obtaining this information from both victims and accused persons.

Although the committee still considers this information to be useful, there are a number of serious hurdles that continue to arise:

- the continued refusal of the RCMP (and many other police services) to collect this information, even in Saskatchewan. Several agencies do voluntarily gather Aboriginal data; however, these are generally not areas with large Aboriginal populations;
- the implications of requiring front-line police officers to ask this question, often under difficult circumstances, to all victims and accused persons; and,
- support for the collection of this information by police appears to be waning in Saskatchewan - Saskatoon Police no longer provides this information nor is supportive of any further work in this area, and some Aboriginal Groups in the province have also recently stated publicly that they are not supportive of police collecting this information.

Therefore, the POLIS committee recommends not moving forward with any further studies with police services at this time involving the collection of Aboriginal Identity by front-line police officers.

The Deputy Ministers recently acknowledged the difficulties of front-line police officers in gathering this data. They also highlighted how important gathering data prior to entry in the corrections system is, and will examine the possibility of gathering information from the courts.

Policy implications: While the collection of data on the involvement of Aboriginals in the criminal justice system remains an important issue to the police community, it is just not practical to expect front-line officers to collect this information. Quality data are already available from the corrections sector and, hopefully, will also be in the future from the courts area.

6. Expanded data on police personnel to assist in HR planning

Background: Statistics Canada, with funding from the Police Sector Council, will be undertaking an analysis in 2010-11 of the feasibility of expanding the personnel portion of the annual Police Administration survey to collect detailed information to assist the police community in future human resource planning. The POLIS committee has provided input into what information would be most useful as well as feasible to provide with minimum respondent burden.

The feasibility portion of the study will involve determining if the proposed new data elements are collected by police services, how the information is stored, if there is common HR software and how easy it is to retrieve. If the outcome shows that it is feasible to collect this additional information, then work will start in 2011-12 in terms of creating a new survey instrument and internal processing system. Data collection would then begin in 2012.

Policy implications: With the impending retirement of a significant number of senior police officers, the police community, like many sectors, is facing a possible shortage of replacement workers. As such, the Police Sector Council has determined that it requires more information in areas such as age, years of service, number of years to retirement, etc., in order to determine future Human Resources requirements for policing. If it is determined that it is feasible to collect these new data, then this survey will be able to address key human resource needs for policing services for years to come.

7. Hate crime definition of motivation by “other similar factor”

Background: In the *Criminal Code*, a number of specific hate crime motivations are listed, including “other similar factor”. Recently, there have been an increasing number of hate crimes classified by police as falling under this “other similar factor” category that are somewhat of a “grey” area. Among those incidents being classified in the category are those motivated by hatred of sexual child predators, homeless people, abortionists/anti-abortionists, red-heads, certain legal occupations such as police officers and certain illicit occupations such as prostitutes. The committee discussed that there is a need to have clear and concise guidelines for this category to ensure that the quality of hate crime data does not get watered-down.

After much discussion, there was a general consensus that the legislation was intended to protect groups based on identity characteristics. Therefore, the recommendation for now was to exclude the following types of crime from being classified as hate-motivated: vigilante-type crimes committed against persons believed to be child molesters, serial sexual predators, etc.

As well, the committee recommended that Statistics Canada organize a tele-conference call of various municipal and provincial hate crime units to discuss these sorts of issues among the experts. The first meeting of this group took place in July 2010.

Policy implications: It is critical that all police services are using the same criteria for determining whether an incident was motivated by hate, in order to ensure comparable numbers across the country.

8. Enhancing Communications between Statistics Canada and Police Services

Background: In terms of the understanding of UCR concepts and standardization among all police services, a number of initiatives have taken place or are underway. A national UCR Data Managers Data Quality Workshop was held in 2007 at Statistics Canada, initiated by POLIS. This represented a significant achievement in bringing together Statistics Canada staff and records managers from across the country to address major data quality issues and concerns.

Among the many Workshop recommendations were those to create an ongoing Data Managers Working Group to deal with emerging UCR data quality issues and information sharing; for Statistics Canada to work closely with police services to provide multi-level training; and, for Statistics Canada to continue their regional training workshops.

The first UCR Data Managers Working Group tele-conference call was held in December 2008, and calls are now being held approximately every two months. Statistics Canada is also investigating the possibility of using their secure Extranet site, available to all police services, to offer on-line training modules, create a UCR scoring web-forum, as well as provide enhanced information on data concepts, definitions and scoring rules.

Policy implications: The credibility of police-reported crime statistics ultimately boils down to data reported in a uniform, consistent and timely manner. Only the ongoing communication and data quality efforts between Statistics Canada and police services will ensure that Canada will continue to be at the forefront in terms of the quality of its incident-based crime data.

9. Statistics Canada Products for 2010-11

Each fall, Statistics Canada begins its planning process for products to be done in the next fiscal year and POLIS members are asked to put forward any suggestions they may have for topics. Policing-related topics that are scheduled for release in 2010-11 include:

- crime statistics annual report
- homicide in Canada annual report
- hate crime statistics annual report
- police personnel and expenditures annual report
- special-topic report on police officers killed

Meetings Held in 2009/10:

Sept. 21 & 22, 2009 in Calgary

March 30 & 31, 2010 in Ottawa

Meetings Planned for 2010/11:

Oct. 13 & 14, 2010 in Kitchener

Feb/March, 2011 in Ottawa

POLIS committee members as of July 2010:

Beaulne	Mario	Sup't	RCMP
Bourassa	Rick	Inspector	Regina Police
Clunis	Devon	Inspector	Winnipeg Police
Fugère	Paul		Sûreté du Québec
Jolliffe	Eric	Deputy Chief	York Regional Police
Lawrence	Austin		Public Safety Canada
MacDonald	Brad	Inspector	Edmonton Police
MacLean	Alyson		Justice Canada
Malone	Brian		Saint John Police
McNeil	Robin	Sup't	Halifax Regional Police
Erfle	Ralph	Sup't	Ottawa Police
Perreault	Josée		Montréal Police
Perry	Darlene		Victoria Police
Perry	Debi		Calgary Police
Petit	Eric	Sup't	Vancouver Police
Plunkett	Rodney	Major	Military Police Ontario Provincial Police
Rooke	Steve	Sup't Deputy	
Singleton	Ab	Chief Deputy	St. John's, RNC
Sloly	Peter	Chief	Toronto Police
Smith	Gary	Chief	Windsor Police Waterloo Regional Police
Torigian*	Matt	Chief	
Turner**	John		CCJS

* Chair

** Vice-chair