

Aboriginal Peoples' Safety*

Strategic Overview

The legacy left by residential schools and colonization has caused Canada's Aboriginal population to suffer from many intergenerational problems now reflected in their high rates of both victimization and offending. This poses a daunting challenge to all municipalities across Canada.

The explanations of Aboriginal violence are multi-factorial. Aboriginal people are both perpetrators and victims of violence for the same reasons that non-Aboriginal people are including, poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, homelessness, high residential mobility, reliance on food banks and shelters, and a lack of a strong institutional social network (La Prairie and Stenning, 2003; La Prairie, 1994, 1992; Jaccoud and Brassard 2003).

But the problems are more acute. Aboriginal people are more disadvantaged and disproportionately concentrated in high-crime areas (such as inner cores of central metropolitan areas) than non-Aboriginal People (Fitzgerald, Wisener and Savoie, 2004; Fitzgerald and Carrington, 2008; La Prairie, 2002). They do not have attachments in urban areas and they often feel discriminated against (La Prairie, 1994; Urban Aboriginal Task Force, 2007).

So it is not surprising that more police, lawyers and prisoners will make little difference to violence (Waller, 2006).

Action for Municipal Stakeholders

Municipalities will reduce urban violence affecting Aboriginal Peoples if they:

1. Invest in activities such as those outlined in other action briefs, particularly on Safe Streets and Women's Safety.
2. Support and work together with Aboriginal leaders in order to address the crime situation specific to each municipality, particularly when developing a strategic plan and public engagement.
3. Sustain funding to culturally relevant social development programs and promising practices that help Canada's Aboriginal youth attain healthy productive futures, including those tackling risk factors, such as Alcohol Abuse Intervention and Aboriginal Perspective 4th R
4. Encourage more Aboriginal Peoples to take up staff positions, particularly in the community safety responsibility centre and in programs servicing Aboriginal people.
5. Encourage programs on reserves to prepare Aboriginal Peoples for life in urban areas.

* Prepared by Lisa Monchalin, Institute for the Prevention of Crime

Justification

The Challenge

Aboriginal overrepresentation in victimization and offending remains a significant issue. Aboriginal people are more likely than non-Aboriginal people to be victimized by virtually all types of violent crime in Canada, are three times more likely than non-Aboriginal people to experience some form of violent victimization, and are twice as likely to be repeat victims of crime (Brzozowski, Taylor-Butts & Johnson, 2006). These violent victimization rates are the highest for young Aboriginal females, with the rate of violence being three and a half times higher when compared to non-Aboriginal females (Brzozowski, Taylor-Butts & Johnson, 2006).

The rates of overrepresentation are also alarming when considering incarceration data. Despite comprising only 4% of Canada's total population, Aboriginal adults in 2005 accounted for 24% of adult admissions to provincial/territorial custody, 19% of admissions to remand, and 18% of admissions to federal custody (Landry and Sinha 2008: 6). Aboriginal youth, who comprise only 6% of Canada's total youth population, represented 31% of admissions to sentenced custody, 23% of admissions to remand and 22% of admissions to probation (Milligan, 2008: 7).

Levels of violence are also higher in areas highly populated with urban Aboriginal peoples. For example, Winnipeg, the CMA with the most urban Aboriginal people in Canada, is also home to the highest levels of violence in comparison to the other nine CMAs¹, which, along with Winnipeg, are considered to be among the top ten largest in Canada.²

The Aboriginal population is also becoming increasingly urban. Many Aboriginal peoples are moving off reserves to urban areas.³ In 2006, 54% of Aboriginal people lived in an urban centre, which is an increase from 50% in 1996 (Statistics Canada, 2006 Census).

There is a vast amount of research proposing explanations for overrepresentation. This research highlights factors such as:

- Aboriginal people are younger on average compared to non-Aboriginal people.
 - The median age of Aboriginal people is 27, compared to the non-Aboriginal population, whose median age is 40 (Statistics Canada, 2006 Census).
- Aboriginal people have much lower levels of educational attainment compared to non-Aboriginal people.
 - Only 4% of the Aboriginal population have a university degree, compared to 16% of the non-Aboriginal population (Brzozowski, Taylor-Butts & Johnson, 2006).⁴
- Aboriginal people are more likely to live in crowded housing conditions.
 - Aboriginal people are almost four times as likely as non-Aboriginal people to live in a crowded dwelling and are three times as likely to live in a dwelling in need of major repairs (Statistics Canada, 2006 Census).
- Aboriginal people are more likely to be unemployed.
 - The unemployment rate for Aboriginal people is almost double the rate for non-Aboriginal people (Pérusse, 2008).⁵

- Aboriginal people are more likely to have poorer health.
 - The life expectancy of Aboriginal people is 6 to 8 years shorter in comparison to non-Aboriginal people (Tjepkema, 2002).⁶
- Aboriginal people are more likely to be heavy consumers of alcohol.
 - 22.6% of Aboriginal people report being heavy drinkers compared to 16.1% of non-Aboriginal people (Tjepkema, 2002).⁷

Much research has revealed the correlation between Aboriginal peoples' victimization and offending and poor individual, social and economic factors. These include, but are not limited to: low levels of education, substance abuse problems, unemployment, low income, single parent families, younger average age, living in crowded conditions and having high residential mobility rates (Brzozowski, Taylor-Butts and Johnson, 2006; La Prairie, 1992, 1994, 2002; Latimer and Foss, 2004; Jaccoud and Brassard, 2003).

One way this correlation between risk factors and crime among Aboriginals has been identified is through comparing the occurrence of a crime with the existence of the aforementioned risk factors. For example, during the years 1997 to 2004, 89% of accused Aboriginal homicide offenders were found to have consumed an intoxicant at the time of the homicide, therefore suggesting that the use of an intoxicant may be a risk factor related to committing a homicide offence (Brzozowski, Taylor-Butts and Johnson, 2006: 9).

Overall, much of the research has revealed that those exposed to factors such as childhood disadvantage, deprivation, child abuse, or parental drinking and/or violence will often find their adult lives disproportionately characterized by many of the same ills, leading to later victimization and involvement in the criminal justice system (La Prairie, 1994; Linden, 2001).

Many urban Aboriginal people are marginalized to a greater extent than non-Aboriginal people, with the marginalization process beginning in early childhood (La Prairie, 1994, 2002; Jaccoud and Brassard, 2003). This process has its roots in broader social contexts associated with the consequences of racism, colonization on traditional values and culture, as well as with the breakdown of family life resulting from the experiences suffered by many Aboriginal peoples at residential schools (see Brant Castellano, Archibald, and DeGagné, 2008; Dion Stout and Kipling, 2003; Backhouse, 1999). Residential schools stripped away many Aboriginal peoples' language, culture and identity (Rice and Snyder 2008: 54). Numerous Aboriginal children who went to these schools were also physically assaulted, molested and raped (Kelly, 2008: 24). The intergenerational consequences of both colonization and residential schools now weigh heavily on today's Aboriginal generations (Rice and Snyder 2008: 49; Monture-Angus, 1998: 363).

Racism, residential schools and colonization have left a legacy of adversity among Canada's Aboriginal population, causing them to suffer the intergenerational consequences (Rice and Snyder, 2008; Dion Stout and Kipling, 2003; Monture-Angus, 1998). From childhood, the lives of many urban Aboriginal peoples are conditioned by their circumstances, which include high levels of poverty, non-integration into the conventional job market, involvement in socially unacceptable activities, alcohol and drug abuse, homelessness, reliance on food banks and shelters, and a lack of strong institutional social networks (Jaccoud and Brassard, 2003: 143).

Difficulties of Using Criminal Justice

Currently Canada's principal approach to addressing offending and victimization by and against Aboriginal peoples are through the standard approach to criminal justice, that is, the police, courts and corrections services. Given the large numbers of victimized and incarcerated Aboriginal peoples it is overwhelmingly apparent that continuing to use this standard approach will not solve the intergenerational problems that lead to crime committed by and against Aboriginal peoples.

Not only is it ineffective to continue to arrest, charge and incarcerate Canada's Aboriginal peoples, but incredibly expensive as well (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 1999: Volume 1: Chapter 10). This is not to say that such measures should be eliminated, but a more balanced approach which gives equal importance to prevention and treatment must be implemented alongside these standard measures.

Current Involvement of Municipalities

Municipalities are already involved in some prevention services that directly or indirectly tackle some Aboriginal peoples' risk factors (although, many programs do not have sustained funding and/or lack central leadership). Some of these initiatives include:

- Culturally sensitive after-school sports and recreation programs
- Early childhood and parental support programs
- Neighbourhood Revitalization strategies
- Enhanced after-school academic programs
- Safety programs for women
- Aboriginal Friendship Centres

Box 1

Alcohol Abuse Intervention for Aboriginal Peoples in Nova Scotia

A relatively recent prevention program has shown some promise in reducing drinking behaviours (a risk factor highly correlative to victimization and offending) amongst Aboriginal youth in Nova Scotia. Researchers Mushquash, Comeau and Stewart (2007) developed and pilot-tested an early intervention initiative for alcohol misuse among Aboriginal youth from two Mi'kmaq communities (4 different schools) in Nova Scotia. Through a culturally-adapted intervention entitled "Nemi'simk, Seeing Oneself," the research revealed that youths who participated in the intervention had fewer alcohol-related problems and were more likely to abstain from alcohol abuse in the future.

This culturally-adapted intervention incorporated traditional Mi'kmaq knowledge and teachings, making the program as appropriate and meaningful as possible for the intended segment of the population. It targeted at-risk personality types and associated risky drinking motives among Mi'kmaq youth through a partnership with their communities and schools.

Results were encouraging, revealing that students who participated in the intervention:

- drank less overall
- engaged in fewer binge drinking episodes (i.e. 5 drinks or more on one occasion)
- had fewer alcohol related problems
- were more likely to abstain from alcohol use
- reduced their use of marijuana (an unexpected yet beneficial outcome which the study had not been originally designed to achieve)

Some municipalities have also created partnerships and/or committees of people that collaborate to address issues that may have some impact on the problem of overrepresentation. Edmonton, for example, has an *Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee* whose purpose is to promote the awareness and development of Aboriginal people in their city; they work with individuals, groups, agencies, and levels of government who are also addressing concerns regarding Aboriginal people living in urban areas. In addition, the committee advocates on behalf of urban Aboriginal people, and collaborates with the Mayor and City Councillors through meetings, reports, and other projects. They are also involved with other agencies like the *Safe Edmonton Advisory Committee*, which seeks to prevent violence, support vulnerable groups, and design and support safe neighbourhoods.

Box 2

Aboriginal Perspective Fourth R Program

The *Fourth R (Relationship)* program represents a promising example of risk-focused prevention originating in London, Ontario. The program focuses on tackling risk factors for future delinquency related to domestic violence and bullying, and is presently being implemented into select school systems throughout Canada (Wolfe et al., 2005). It is based on a 21-lesson skill-based curriculum provided by trained classroom teachers in grades 7 through 10. The lessons encourage healthy relationships, target abuse and violence (such as bullying, dating, peer and group violence), high-risk sexual behaviours, and substance abuse (Crooks, et al., 2008: 111; Wolfe et al., 2005: 4).

This program is still undergoing evaluation, but preliminary results from a randomized controlled trial comprising over 1500 students in London, Ontario, are promising, demonstrating significant reductions in boys' aggressive behaviours toward their peers (Wolfe et al., 2005: 9-10; Crooks, et al., 2008).

This program was originally developed for delivery in a universal setting; however, it has now expanded to include an *Aboriginal Perspective Fourth R* version. This version keeps the skills-based curriculum of the original program, but situates the program in a cultural identity framework. This framework takes into consideration that Aboriginal people's specific vulnerabilities and risk behaviours are very much a result of their historical circumstances.

Elders and other members from the Aboriginal community are also involved in the program, and are brought into the classroom to assist with the lessons and execution of the program.

Nova Scotia has a successful Tripartite Forum, which enlists the collaborative efforts of federal, provincial and Aboriginal representatives. It has met regularly for the past seventeen years and has altered the landscape for Aboriginal justice throughout the province.

The *International Centre for the Prevention of Crime*, based out of Montreal, has an Aboriginal virtual network and bulletin. Including such countries as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, this agency brings together many individuals who work in the area of Aboriginal crime and its prevention from across the world, its purpose being to share knowledge, facilitate research, and to advance partnerships with Aboriginal communities across the globe.

Solutions

Promising initiatives do exist which seek to reduce high levels of urban Aboriginal peoples' victimization and offending. However not enough

is being done. There is a great deal of research that reveals the importance of municipalities joining with Aboriginal leaders and organizations to tackle crime problems together (Capobianco, 2006: 19; Linden, 2001: 43-44). Culturally relevant programs and initiatives that tackle the multiple risk factors associated to urban Aboriginal people must be implemented and sustained with continued funding.

Different programs/initiatives include:

- Providing public health nurses to at-risk mothers, or single parent families
- Enriched pre-schooling for at-risk children

- Providing culturally relevant violence reduction education programs in schools
- Providing youth with job training
- Implementing programs on reserves to prepare Aboriginal Peoples for life in urban areas

Many people and organizations working in the area of crime prevention have struggled with the challenge of how best to translate knowledge into tangible action. Guidelines on how to implement crime prevention into public policy have been created in response to this quandary. Many international organizations, such as The World Health Organization (2002, 2004) and the United Nations (2002), who both attempt to represent the views of disparate populations from many nations globally, have arrived at a consensus concerning how to best implement these prevention measures. This includes criteria such as:

Leadership and Coordination: In order to effectively implement such initiatives municipalities need to coordinate with and support Aboriginal leaders, community groups, organizations and/or already existing Aboriginal initiatives/programs. Aboriginal Peoples need staff positions in a community safety responsibility centre and in programs servicing Aboriginal people.

The Development and Implementation of an Action Plan Based on Knowledge: Each municipality, with guidance from an Aboriginal Leader (such as an Elder), would need to set targets based on the needs, cultures and risk factors unique to the targeted population.

Monitoring and Evaluating the Action Plan: Ongoing evaluation, as well as impact evaluation, is needed to determine whether changes in the initiatives need to be made, and to assess whether the strategy is producing its desired effects.

References

Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission (1999) Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba.

November 1999. <http://www.ajic.mb.ca/volume.html>

Backhouse, Constance (1999) *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1990-1950*. University of Toronto Press: Toronto: ON.

Brant Castellano, Marlene, Archibald, Linda and Mike DeGagné (2008) *From Truth to Reconciliation*

Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Ottawa: ON

- Brzozowski, Jodi-Anne, Taylor-Butts, Andrea and Sara Johnson (2006). "Victimization and Offending Among the Aboriginal Population in Canada." *Juristat* Vol. 26 (3). Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.
- Capobianco, Laura (2006) *Community Safety Partnerships by and with Indigenous Peoples*. International Centre for the Prevention of Crime. Montreal: QC
- Crooks, Claire V; Wolfe, David A; Hughes, Ray; Jaffe Peter G and Debbie Chiodo (2008). "Development, Evaluation and National Implementation of a School-Based Program to Reduce Violence and Related Risk Behaviour: Lessons from the Fourth R". *IPC Review*, 2: 109-135
- Dion Stout , Madeleine and Gregory Kipling (2003) *Aboriginal People, Resilience and the Residential School Legacy*. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Ottawa: ON.
- Fitzgerald, Robin T. & Peter J. Carrington. (2008). "The Neighbourhood Context of Urban Aboriginal Crime" *The Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*. October: 2008: 523-557.
- Fitzgerald, Robin, Wisener Michael and Josée Savoie (2004). *Neighbourhood Characteristics and the Distribution of Crime in Winnipeg*. Research Paper. Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.
- Jaccoud, Mylène & Renée Brassard (2003). "The Marginalization of Aboriginal Women in Montréal." In *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*. David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters (eds.). Policy Research Initiative. 131-145.
- Kelly, Fred (2008) "Confession of a Born Again Pagan." In Brant Castellano, Marlene, Archibald, Linda and Mike DeGagné (eds.) *From Truth to Reconciliation Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Ottawa: ON: 11-40
- Landry, Laura & Maire Sinha (2008). "Adult Correctional Services in Canada, 2005/2006". *Juristat*. Vol 28 (6). Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics
- La Prairie, Carol. (1994). *Seen but Not Heard: Native People in the Inner City*. Ottawa: Department of Justice.

- La Prairie, Carol. (1992). "Dimensions of Aboriginal Over-Representation in Correctional Institutions and Implications for Crime Prevention". Aboriginal Peoples Collection. Solicitor General Canada.
- La Prairie, Carol. (2002). "Aboriginal over-Representation in the Criminal Justice System: A Tale of Nine Cities." *Canadian Journal of Criminology*. 44 (2): 181-208.
- La Prairie, Carol & Philip Stenning (2003) "Exile on Main Street: Some Thoughts on Aboriginal Over-Representation in the Criminal Justice System." In *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*. David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters (eds.). Policy Research Initiative. 179-193.
- Latimer, Jeff & Laura Casey Foss (2004). *A One-Day Snapshot of Aboriginal Youth in Custody Across Canada: Phase II*. Ottawa: Research and Statistics Division, Department of Justice Canada.
- Linden, Rick (2001) *Crime Prevention in Aboriginal Communities*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba.
- Milligan, Shelly (2008) "Youth Custody and Community Services in Canada, 2005/2006" *Juristat*. Vol 28 (8) Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.
- Monture-Angus, Patricia A. (1998) "Lessons in Decolonization: Aboriginal Overrepresentation in Canadian Criminal Justice." In David Long and Olive Patricia Dickson (eds.) *Visions of the Heart: Canadian Aboriginal Issues: Second Edition*. Thomson Nelson: Scarborough: ON. 361-386.
- Mushquash, Christopher J., Comeau, Nancy. M & Sherry H. Stewart (2007). "An Alcohol Abuse Early Intervention Approach with Mi'kmaq Adolescents." *First Nations Child & Family Review*. 3 (1): 17-26.
- Pérusse, Dominique (2008). *Aboriginal People Living Off-reserve and the Labour Market: Estimates from the Labour Force Survey, 2007*. Research Paper. The Aboriginal Labour Force Analysis Series. Statistics Canada.

- Rice, Brian & Anna Snyder (2008) "Reconciliation in the Context of a Settler Society: Healing the Legacy of Colonialism in Canada." In Brant Castellano, Marlene, Archibald, Linda and Mike DeGagné (eds.) *From Truth to Reconciliation Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Ottawa: ON: 43-61
- Tjepkema, Micheal. (2002). "The Health of the Off-Reserve Aboriginal Population" *Supplement to Health Reports*. Catalogue 82-003. Volume 13. Statistics Canada.
- United Nations, Economic and Social Council. (2002). *Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime in Action to Promote Effective Crime Prevention*. New York: United Nations, Economic and Social Council, Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention.
- Urban Aboriginal Task Force (2007) *Urban Aboriginal Task Force Final Report*. Commissioned by The Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, The Ontario Métis Aboriginal Association, and The Ontario Native Women's Association. December 2007.
- Waller, Irvin (2006). *Less Law, More Order: The Truth About Reducing Crime*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Wolfe, D.A., Crooks, C.V., Chiodo, D., Hughes, R., Jaffe, P. (2005). *Impact of a comprehensive school-based prevention program: changes in adolescents' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to violence, sexual behaviour, and substance use*. London ON: CAMH Centre for Prevention Science.
- World Health Organization. (2004). *Preventing Violence: A Guide to implementing the recommendations for the World Report on Violence and Health*. Geneva: Violence and Injuries Prevention.
- World Health Organization. (2002). *World Report on Violence and Health*. Geneva: Violence and Injuries Prevention.

Endnotes

¹ This includes Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Ottawa-Gatineau, Calgary, Edmonton, Quebec City, Hamilton and London.

² Statistics Canada, 2007 UCR Data

³ this includes large cities, or census metropolitan areas, and smaller urban centres

⁴ Data derived from Statistics Canada 2001 Census

⁵ Data derived from Statistics Canada 2007 Labour Force Survey

⁶ Data derived from the 2000/01 Canadian Community Health Survey; this refers to registered Aboriginal people

⁷ Data derived from the 2000/01 Canadian Community Health Survey; this refers to Aboriginal people living off-reserve