Scoping Organized Crime
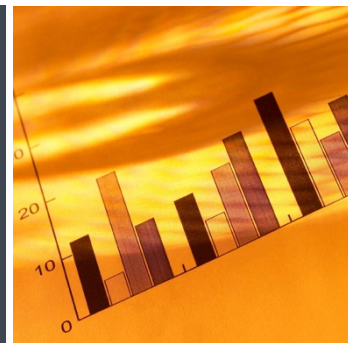
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BUILDING A **SAFE** AND **RESILIENT CANADA**

In Montreal, between 2005 and 2009, about 1.97%
of all criminal incidents can be attributed to organized crime activity

BACKGROUND

The prevalence of criminal organizations, their involvement in illegal activities and the violence stemming from illicit markets generates serious concerns for law enforcement agencies. Organized crime has routinely been the subject of legislative initiatives and policy. With the introduction of Bill C-22 and Bill C-95 leading to subsequent amendments to the *Criminal Code,* legislation in Canada has intensified providing police "enhanced" powers to combat organized criminals.

Definitional problems in the area of organized crime lead to measurement problems that have trickled down the criminal justice system. There are various definitions offered by scholars and variations in legal definitions provided by different statutes. As a result, police services differ in their methodology for investigating criminal incidents associated with criminal organizations. These discrepancies, in return, lead to uncertainties about the frequency of incidents related to organized crime and greater uncertainties about the allocation of police resources in dealing with such incidents. Organized crime is an important issue for policing and policing practices. Currently, no prior studies have provided a set of findings addressing: 1) the estimated proportion of criminal incidents that are associated with organized crime activity in one policing jurisdiction; 2) the proportion of resources allocated by the police in dealing with issues related to organized crime; and 3) the overall spending of police services in responding to, and combating activities related to criminal organizations. In other words, there exists little research on estimating the financial and non-financial costs of preventing, investigating and responding to organized crime activity, or comparisons of the organized crime problem to other crime problems.

METHOD

A mixed-method approach was taken to respond to three objectives of this project: 1) provide an estimate of the proportion of criminal incidents that are associated with organized criminal activities (overall and for each offence type) in Montreal; 2) situate all offenders who were potentially involved in organized crime-related activities within the larger criminal scene in Quebec; and 3) gauge the resources, whether it be human (police strength) or financial (investigation costs) allocated by law enforcement agencies in responding to and combatting activities associated with organized crime.

Data was obtained from the Module d'information policière (MIP), provided by the Sûreté du Québec (SQ), Quebec's provincial police force and analyzed for co-offending patterns. The MIP provides data on all crime incidents in which one or more individuals were accused, or arrested, but not necessarily convicted in the Province of Quebec. Further, in-depth interviews were conducted with police personnel in Quebec and British Columbia to supplement the quantitative analyses derived from the MIP.

The estimates of criminal incidents associated with organized criminal activities are based on three different, yet complementary, models: 1) the wide net model (2 co-offenders); 2) the standard definition model (3+ co-offenders); and 3) the post hoc flag model (modified 3+ co-offenders). Each of these models is subjected to three different thresholds based on the seriousness of offences: a) none (all offences); b) broad (offences classified as serious plus "unclassified" offences); and c) strict (offences classified as serious).

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FINDINGS

Only 4.4 percent of all criminal incidents in Montreal between 2005 and 2009 involved two or more co-offenders (11,417 of 256,722 incidents). Using the broadest of models and thresholds (wide net model, broad threshold), it was found that pairs co-offended more than once together in 2,608 incidents out of all of the 11,417 co-offences. This represents 23 percent of all co-offending incidents in the data. These repeat pairs form the basis of what can potentially be considered "organized crime."

The standard definition model provides a range of between 1.6 percent (strict) to 6.9 percent (no threshold) of co-offending incidents that fit the definition of organized crime. If the wide net model threshold is used, the range is much wider: from 3.9 percent (strict) to 22.8 percent (no threshold) of co-offending incidents that fit the definition of organized crime. For post hoc flag model, the range of proportions go from 0.26 (strict) percent to 2.93 percent (no threshold), with broad threshold producing an estimate of 1.97 percent. The post hoc flag model is the most elaborate of models, which probably provides the better of estimates for proportions of incidents that are related to organized crime.

Generally, from 2005 to 2009, incidents involving two or more offenders, notwithstanding continuity, were most likely to be violent crimes, or property crimes in Montreal. This is in comparison to solo offences that primarily fall into the "all others" category, which is a combination of various non-serious incidents. For instance, 45 percent of solo offences comprised of "other types of offences," followed by violent crimes (25%). This contrasts with 34 percent of property and another 34 percent of violent offences of co-offences, and 57 percent of property crimes and 22 percent of violent crimes of incidents that could potentially be related to organized crime.

Twenty three percent of Montreal OC offenders were part of the core segment of the Quebec provincial co-offending network (compared to only 5% for non-OC offenders). In addition, 26 percent of the organized crime cases were part of the periphery of the provincial network (compared to 13% for non-OC offenders). Thus, roughly half of these Montreal OC offenders are connected to the wider Quebec provincial OC network in one way or another.

Finally, a combination of estimates from units with mandates to only combat OC and those that deal primarily with OC incidents suggests that there are approximately 250 law enforcement officials at Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM) who are directly involved in combating OC. This represents an average 0.06% of all police staff in Montreal for the years under study. Of these, 100 core officers are involved in long-term investigations that target upper-level OC members, whereas the remaining 150 officers are more likely to be involved in cases that target lower- to medium-level members, reflecting their limited resources to conduct long-term investigations. Using a very hypothetical calculation method with severe limitations, it could be speculated that the salary cost of the 250 officers directly involved in combatting OC is around $25.9 million, or 4.9% of the average SPVM annual budget.

SOURCE

Bouchard, M., Morselli, C., Hashimi, S., and Ouellet, M. (2015). *Proportion of Criminal Incidents Associated with Organized Crime*. Ottawa, Ontario: Public Safety Canada. 55 pages.

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