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What One Might Expect: A Scoping Review of the Canadian Policing Research Literature

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**What One Might Expect:
A Scoping Review of the Canadian Policing Research Literature**

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Abstract:

Using the medium of a scoping review, the author provides an analysis of the Canadian policing research literature published over the past ten years (2006-2015). What this analysis reveals is both expected and unexpected. In line with public views expressed by a number of sources (academics, policy-makers and police), the overall volume of literature produced during this period was low (some 188 (n=188) papers were identified). However, in contrast to the belief expressed by some that the Canadian policing literature is overly theoretical and largely qualitative, the bulk of studies examined (n=123) were quantitative, and eighteen (n=18) were experimental or quasi-experimental in design. Of more critical import, however, is the issue of overall production and lack of coverage of key policing topics. Gaps in topic coverage are explored here, with some key recommendations offered for improving Canadian output.

Keywords:

Policing; research; Canadian policing literature; scoping review

Given the national cost of policing and the concerns expressed by various governments with those costs, one might expect commensurate investment in and attention to policing research. Yet that has not been the case (Doob 1993 cited in Robertson 2012).

Canadians are facing a period of economic austerity at a time when public service costs have been steadily rising. This is no less the case with respect to criminal justice expenditures: in relation to public policing, Canadians spent an estimated \$13.5 billion in 2012 alone, a figure rising to \$13.6 billion in 2013 (Hutchins 2014, 2015). In response to growing awareness of shrinking public budgets and escalating service demands on police, policy-makers, police leaders and academic researchers have been struggling with how to devise new models of community safety that increase the effectiveness and efficiency of public policing and the criminal justice system more generally (see PSC 2013; CCA 2014).

As I have stated elsewhere (author forthcoming), what either ‘effective’ or ‘efficient’ means in relation to Canadian public policing remains largely unknown because of chronic underfunding of policing research (CCA 2014; House Committee 2014; Griffiths 2014). Whereas shrinking public budgets have meant fewer dollars spent on research in general, policing research has been particularly hard hit. As the Council of Canadian Academies (2014: 151) noted in its report on the future of Canadian public policing, not only has policing research consistently received a very small share of the funding available through federal sources, but funding from provincial agencies has also been cut. Citing one of its witnesses, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security (2014) summed the situation as follows: “over the last three decades we’ve systematically dismantled our capacities to do police research in this country.”

One notable effect of this public policy crisis is that it has highlighted what some researchers had long been termed the “anemic” state of applied Canadian policing research

(Murphy 1999: 206). It also generated a renewed interest in policing research among stakeholder groups. One example of this interest was an ‘Economics of Policing summit’ convened by a federal agency, Public Safety Canada, with a special focus on policing research (Huggins and Murphy 2014). Shortly thereafter, a clutch of working papers began to appear, some proffering explanations for the reportedly abysmal state of applied policing research, others ignoring the causes and simply suggesting that internal and/or independent policing research be expanded (see Griffiths 2014; CCA 2014; Ahlgren 2014; AMO 2015). What none attempted to do was to provide a detailed empirical analysis of the actual state of that body of work, or, better yet, a detailed assessment of its contents. In essence, it was universally accepted that Canadians had a problem, but the actual size, scope and nature of that problem has remained largely undefined and ill- understood.

The purpose of the present paper is to begin laying the foundation for an improved understanding of the state of the Canadian policing research literature. Through the medium of a scoping review, a form of systematic literature review frequently used in health studies to evaluate the body of research on a given topic, I provide a base analysis of one hundred and eighty-eight (n=188) published studies on Canadian policing produced over a 10 year period (2006-2015). The purpose of this analysis is to provide an overview of the policing research literature, highlight gaps in knowledge of specific subject areas, and begin the process of identifying those topics for which there is or may be a moderate evidence base.

Method of inquiry

The research conducted for this study seeks to answer three basic, but important questions:

RQ1: What is the nature and scope of Canadian policing research as represented within peer reviewed journals over the past 10 years (2006-2015)?

RQ2: What Canadian policing topics are not well represented within the peer-reviewed literature?

RQ3: What Canadian policing topics are missing from the literature?

To address these questions, I opted to conduct a scoping review (SR) in advance of a later, separate narrative review (NR). A scoping review is an exploratory mode of knowledge synthesis that allows researchers to “explore the extent of the literature in a particular domain without describing findings in detail” (Armstrong, Hall, Doyle and Waters 2011: 147). The scoping review thus allows a researcher to provide an overview as to the key concepts, topics, theories and methodologies employed found within a body of literature, summarize the available evidence and highlight critical knowledge gaps (Colquhoun, Levac, O’Brien and Straus 2014). As with meta-analysis and narrative reviews, the scoping review requires the researcher to construct a set of *a priori* exploratory research questions and a systematic search strategy (Davis, Drey and Gould 2009). Where the scoping review differs from these other forms of systematic analysis, however, is that the SR is appropriate for use when confronted with a potentially challenging body of literature (Armstrong et al. 2011). In the instant case, the challenge arises in attempting to synthesize knowledge from a body of research that has generally been perceived to be underdeveloped and, with respect to what exists, varied in topics, methods and theoretical perspectives (Murphy 1999; Griffiths 2014).

Search strategy

The first decision made was to focus on finding peer-reviewed journal articles in academic data bases, thus excluding both grey literature and graduate theses and dissertations. The reason for this decision was simple: although the peer review process is not without problems, it remains, as Wilsdon (2016: 5) recently observed, “the least worst form of academic governance we have”. In relation to our present purposes, we can draw some confidence from the fact that peer reviewed

research has had the benefit of external validation and that it must, in theory, meet basic scientific and/or social-scientific research and publishing conventions, including the requirement to publish one's methodology. Further, peer reviewed work is available to researchers through journals and in scholarly conferences, and thus unfounded premises and faulty methodologies, among other hallmarks of bad science, can, in theory, provoke scholarly discussion and debate, revisions and counter-arguments. Accordingly, I began my search by looking for academic journal articles on 'Canadian policing' using an university library search engine.

A second decision was to focus on more recent research and thus the search period was set to the past ten years: 2006-2015. Keywords used included iterations and combinations of: Canada, Canadian, police, policing, research and study. Once this method appeared exhausted, I then conducted separate searches against the following databases in order to ensure no articles were missed: Psychinfo, Criminal Justice Abstracts, Pubmed, Web of Science, Scholars Portal, and Sociological Abstracts. I also had a student go through the list of papers included in the Canadian Policing College's bibliographies for any missing articles. As the number of studies from 2006 to 2010 was noticeably lower than in later years, I also sent an email to the Canadian Policing Research Network¹ asking for papers from these years.

Data selection

Given that the central concern of policy-makers is a lack of actionable research on Canadian policing topics (Huggins and Murphy 2014), the decision was made to focus on studies in which a piece of research had been conducted. Research here is defined as an empirically grounded, systematic study for the purpose of identifying, explaining, predicting and/or

¹ An informal information sharing network of approximately 80 policing researchers from across Canada.

determining the causes of a given phenomenon. Thus, each abstract returned from a search was read in light of the following inclusion criteria:

- the paper contains the results of a research study
- the focus of the research is some aspect of contemporary forms of Canadian public policing
- the research drew (at least in part) on Canadian data
- the paper contained a clear description of the methodology employed.

Abstracts were excluded based on the following criteria:

- the paper did not contain discussion of a study (ie. opinion pieces, commentaries, introductions)
- the study topic was not on some aspect of Canadian public policing (ie. private policing, international forms of policing)
- the study was a historical analysis
- the study was not published in English
- the paper contained no discussion of research methodology
- inability to access paper.²

If it was not clear after reading the abstract whether a paper met the inclusion criteria, it was downloaded and then read in full. Once each of the downloaded articles was read against the inclusion criteria, the result was a collection of 188 studies on topics related to contemporary Canadian public policing.

Coding and analysis

To answer the first research question, I employed a simple inductive coding scheme using the following categories: title, first author, year of publication, topic, approach (quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods), methods (data collection and/or analysis techniques), data source, sample size (if relevant), intervention and police participation. In relation to the last two categories, I sought to know whether the purpose of the research was to measure the effects of a specific intervention and whether one or more members of a police organization were involved in data collection, analysis and/or in the writing of the paper. Interventions and police participation in

² If a paper was not available through the university's subscribed databases, efforts were made to retrieve it from other sources, including contacting the author(s) directly.

research are hallmarks of the evidence based policing approach (Telep and Lum 2014; Sherman 2015), thus collecting data on these categories would shed some insights as to the extent to which this model of policing research is practiced in Canada.

Answering the second research question required not only the use of focused coding, but the creation of a novel approach to this coding. Ideally, what was required was a standardized list of public policing topics that could serve as a template. Attempts at locating such a list proved difficult, particularly as several policing journals had changed their submission process. Previously, upon joining a journal website as an author, or upon submitting a paper, one was asked to select keywords from a boilerplate list of topic options. Unfortunately, each of the policing journals I selected had done away with this step, asking instead for authors to supply their own keywords. I had more success turning to an alternate source: the published program guides of the American Society of Criminology (ASC) annual conferences.

Each year the ASC hosts one of the largest international events for criminologists, with policing well represented among its panels. Therefore it was assumed that papers presented at the ASC would represent dominant research interests within mainstream policing research and thus be fairly representative of the range of standard topics in the area. With that thought in mind, I downloaded each of the guides for period of 2009 to 2015 and used the titles for each of the policing sessions to construct a topic list. The initial result was 49 topic codes. I then added 4 further topic codes – aboriginal policing, police attitudes, traffic initiatives and police cautions – that were present in the Canadian research literature but not represented within the ASC panel themes. The list of topic codes was then compared to the list of topics found within the bibliographies of material held at the Canadian Police College (<http://www.cpc-ccp.gc.ca/en/cplibary/bibliographies>) and 1 additional code was added: crisis negotiation. Armed

with 54 topic codes, each of the 188 studies were coded using the new coding scheme. This allowed me to verify both what topics were present and missing based on the revised ASC list. Where studies covered multiple topics, they were coded with each topic code. As an example, studies evaluating the effects of training on police performance on interviewing tasks were coded as “training” and “interviews/interrogations”.

To achieve a measure of reliability in the coded data, all coding was independently verified by a research assistant, who had access to both the articles and the codes used. In any cases where there was a disagreement in coding – two articles – coding discrepancies were identified, rechecked and amended as needed³.

Final step - missing topics

After the second step of coding was complete, I identified several ‘missing topics’ – that is, topics that did not appear to have been covered within the Canadian policing research literature. To ensure they were, indeed, not within the relevant literature, I returned to the university research databases and executed specific searches for these topics, using generic keyword searches such as ‘Canadian’ ‘police’ and ‘terrorism’ and ‘Canadian police’ and ‘violence against police.’ As a final precaution, I also rechecked the topic bibliographies of the Canadian Police College for any relevant articles they may have listed, but had not turned up in any searches.

Findings

Extent and range of the literature

³ The dataset is publicly available on the Canadian Society of Evidence Based Policing website at www.can-sebp.net. The dataset includes all paper names, first author names, year of publication, topics, methods and so on.

One hundred and eighty-eight (n=188) studies meeting the inclusion criteria were collected for the period of 2006 to 2015. These studies encompassed 45 topics, with some covering multiple topics (see tables 2 and 3 below).

Although the main focus here is on the types of subject matter found within the Canadian policing research literature, I also want to offer some other noteworthy observations concerning this body of work. Of methodological approaches employed, one hundred and twenty-three (n=123) of the studies were quantitative, forty-eight (n=48) were qualitative and seventeen (n=17) utilized mixed methods. Specific methods used included: surveys, pre-test/post-test designs, interviews, focus groups, field observations, fitness testing, and document analysis.

Although experimental designs appear relatively infrequently within criminal justice research (Mazerolle, Lum and Braga 2014), I note that eighteen (n=18) of the studies drew on either an experimental or quasi-experimental design. One hundred and eighteen (n=118) of the studies utilized primary data collected by the author(s). Studies also drew on other sources, including: police data, census data, the Canadian General Social Survey and other public surveys, Uniform Crime Reporting rates, news articles, poster comments online and coroner records, among others.

I was also interested to see whether I could identify any meaningful trends over the past ten years in relation to the volume of articles per year. In particular, if there were any observable increases or decreases in production over time.

Table 1: Year and number of publications

Year	n
2006	8
2007	7
2008	19
2009	12
2010	13
2011	31
2012	17
2013	20
2014	21
2015	40
Total	188

Based on the results noted in Table 1 above, it would appear that the number of Canadian policing studies published in peer-reviewed journals has increased over the years (from a low of seven (n=7) in 2007 to a high of forty (n=40) in 2015). However, I would caution against using these results as cause for excitement. First, the overall volume is so low that any increases can hardly be interpreted as highly significant. Second, low figures for earlier years may reflect issues with lack of journal reporting and/or inclusion in the databases selected. These cautions aside, what we can see is that over the past couple of years, there have been minor fluctuations in the number of studies published, with 2015 representing the best year in the past ten for publication of Canadian policing data.

While numbers of papers are an interesting way to look at the volume of Canadian policing research, also of some import is the scope of what the literature contains in relation to area subject matter. To present these findings, I opted to categorize topics as ‘most frequently’ found, ‘medium frequency’ and ‘least frequently’. Cut off points were established at 5 and 10, so that the ‘least’ category includes topics for which there were 1 to 5 papers found, ‘medium’ includes 6-10 papers, and ‘most’ was reserved for topics found in 11 or more papers.

Most frequently represented topics

As can be seen in Table 2 below, only ten (n=10) of the 54 topics identified were represented in greater than ten studies⁴.

Table 2. Topics most frequently represented within the Canadian literature

Topic	No. of Studies
Criminal investigations	11
Decision-making	11
Interviews/interrogations	12
Officer health	15
Organizational studies	17
Police employee mental health	14
Policing of people with mental illness	13
Police-community relations	22
Public attitudes	12
Training	12

The topics most frequently represented within the Canadian research literature include: officer health (n=15), police⁵ mental health (n=14), police-community relations (n=22), organizational studies of policing (n=17), and police interactions with people with mental illness (PMI) (n=13). Of all topics, that policing of PMI would generate a greater number of studies within the peer-reviewed literature is not surprising given two factors: first, repeated claims within media and other sources that policing of PMI places a huge burden on policing resources (Ahlgren 2015) and; second, the relatively high rates of PMI killed in police lethal force cases, a topic that has generated significant media interest.

⁴ Note: the Ns provided refer to topics and, as one study may be coded for multiple topics, the overall N will not equal the study sample total of 188.

⁵ Whereas all of the studies of ‘officer health’ involved police recruits or in-service sworn personnel, one study in the mental health category examined stress responses on civilian staff (police emergency communicators), thus I opted for a broader category.

Police-community relations is another significant topic in news reporting and a major concern of police organizations. However, it is easy to suspect that the frequency with which this topic appears in the literature is less a function of its public importance than a reflection of the relative ease with which such research can be conducted (Skogan 2014). The same is true of public attitudes toward policing. Unlike some topics, which may require police consent or active participation in order to conduct the research, studies of this nature can be carried out with the public. The reality is that it can be significantly easier to conduct surveys of public views⁶ or hold focus groups with segments of the population than to gain institutional access. Further, such studies typically rely on methodologies that are familiar to social scientists, as Bayley (1993) has similarly observed. As it happens, in each of the studies identified as falling within the ‘police-community relations’ category, all study participants were members of the public and not police.

Higher numbers of studies on officer health and organizational studies reflect this same dynamic in reverse: police organizations are often more willing to participate in research in which they can see a clear institutional benefit, as is the case in studies on officer sleep patterns or the ergonomics of patrol cars. In relation to organizational studies, some of the studies – notably Duxbury, Higgins & Halinski (2015) – intersected with the topic of police health and wellbeing; however, more frequently the focus was on other central concerns of police organizations: such as staffing challenges or effecting organizational reviews, as well as institutional impediments to information collection, use and sharing.

The same holds true for police mental health issues: recognizing that officer mental wellbeing affects morale, as well as staffing and other resource issues, police agencies are often

⁶The ASC thematic panels distinguished police-community relations from public attitudes toward the police; however, every study collected on public attitudes (n=8) also fell into the category of police-community relations making distinctions meaningless.

more receptive to research on this topic. Furthering such receptivity is a growing recognition of the impacts of occupational stress and exposure to critical incidents on employee wellness. Indeed, recently released results from an ongoing study of PTSD in policing, found that 12% of municipal police members and almost 25% of RCMP officers in Saskatchewan had probable symptoms of PTSD (Horswill, Jones and Carleton 2015). In short, that this topic would generate a greater number of studies than others – such as police patrol work, the backbone of frontline policing – is not surprising given present organizational concerns over officer wellbeing.

That police training would also fall into this category is another non-surprise. The nature of police work requires training on new and changing laws, equipment, roles and shifts in community demographics – each of which may require the acquisition of new forms of knowledge and skills. As skills decay over time, much of what is learned has to be refreshed. Ensuring that officers are up to date in their training generates an estimated \$815 million in annual costs across Canadian policing services (Maslov 2015). This level of investment means that police agencies have a vested interest in evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of training techniques and procedures.

The topic of interviews/interrogations was the central focus of twelve (n=12) studies, which would seem to suggest that this is highly important topic of research across Canada. Closer examination reveals, however, that nine (n=9) of the studies came from authors associated with the same research lab. In other words, this figure appears more reflective of the productivity of this lab than with a wider interest in the topic.

Medium frequency topics

Table 3 below reveals the nine (n=9) topics researched within six or more published studies, but found in fewer than eleven articles.

Table 3. Medium frequency topics found within the Canadian literature

Topic	No. of studies
Discretion	8
Domestic violence	10
Media	7
Patrol work	6
Police performance	8
Policing strategies	9
Public health issues	7
Technology	10
Youth policing	9

Topics represented in ten or fewer studies encompassed key aspects of policing, such as patrol work and decision-making. Again, these low results may be a function of access issues. Domestic violence has been a fairly significant public policy issue since the 1980s, and the policing of domestic violence has been a common staple of researcher interest for as long, thus it is not surprising to see that it was among the better represented topics (n=10). Even so, if we averaged the number of studies produced over the ten year period, the average would be less than one per year.

That police and mass media are represented within seven (n=7) studies is also worth remarking upon given that media studies, particularly in the age of social media, are generally fairly easy to achieve because content can be readily accessible, and, depending on the nature of the study, may not even require research ethics clearance. Certainly, as social media use increases, and more police take to Twitter, Facebook and other sites, we have seen a rise in the number of studies of police use of social media elsewhere (Meijer and Torenvlied 2012). Further, such studies do not, in many instances, require police participation. That said, three (n=4) of the studies did draw on interview data collected from police officers.

There are other surprises within this category. For example, given not only the widespread use of technology within policing – from police radios and mobile data terminals to body worn

cameras – how to explain then the fact that such a relatively broad catchall category, ‘police technologies’, only generated ten (n=10) peer-reviewed studies over a 10 year period? Further, how to explain that only one of those studies looked at Conducted Electrical Weapons despite the attention their use has drawn? (Braidwood Commission 2009). Lack of a robust body of independent literature on CEW usage in Canada was similarly noted within a Council of Canadian Academies’ (2013) report on the health effects of CEW usage.

Given the present climate in Canada, in which federal, provincial and municipal governments have raised policing costs as a significant public policy issue (PSC 2015), it is disconcerting to see how little research has focused on police performance and policing strategies. In relation to the former, the performance category above included studies examining both organizational and individual performance factors, as there were insufficient numbers of one or the other to justify creating separate categories. In short, then, we know very little about either one and thus have no standards or benchmarks against which to reliably evaluate present or future performance. For policing strategies, which encompasses not only basic patrol and deployment strategies, but also intelligence-led policing and predictive analytics, the seven (n=9) studies identified represents the sum total of peer-evaluated work done in this area over the past 10 years. In relation to the increasingly important question of ‘what works’ in Canadian policing, we lack not only empirical research on policing strategies and models currently in use, we lack a solid evidence base from which to adopt and adapt new models and/or to innovate our own.

Least frequently represented topics

As can be seen in Table 4 below, twenty-six (n=26) topics were represented within the Canadian policing literature, however they were found within fewer than 5 studies. This list includes topics related to both staple issues in policing (use of force, police investigations, youth

policing), as well as topics linked to pressing public policy issues (cyber-policing, public health issues, racial profiling).

Table 4. Least frequently found topics within the Canadian literature

Topic	No. of studies
Aboriginal policing	5
Crisis negotiation	2
Cyberpolicing	1
Employment issues	5
Forensics	3
Gender	2
Lethal force	2
Police accountability	1
Police attitudes	4
Police cautions	2
Police crime reporting	2
Police culture	3
Police innovation	1
Police leadership	3
Police partnerships	2
Police stops	3
Police strength	3
Police use of data/research	1
Policing of organized crime/ criminal networks	7
Procedural justice	1
Public order policing	3
Racial profiling	4
Rural and remote policing	4
Specialized policing	1
Traffic and other road initiatives	2
Use of force	4

Of the topics in this category that generated, relatively speaking, the most research attention, we find aboriginal policing and use of force. That aboriginal policing in Canada should generate only five (n=5) studies is surprising, particularly as this topic actually encompasses two areas of policing: the policing of first nations people (in both rural and urban environments) and policing by first nations police services. It is also an area in which there is a desperate need for

greater knowledge and evaluation of existing policing practices, as has been recognized by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (2015), and through the establishment of a federal inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

While it is the case that an argument could be made that some of these topics – such as police leadership – might be treated as more general phenomenon, and thus as not requiring Canadian-specific data or research, this is not universally true. To illustrate, Canadian geography poses unique challenges to policing, not only in relation to staffing levels and deployment practices, but also to officer health and mental wellbeing (author cite), and yet I could only locate three (n=3) studies on rural and remote policing. Canada's history and cultural makeup is very different from the U.S., and thus we could reasonably expect to see key differences in police culture and/or in terms of the use of racial profiling. Further, visible minority representation differs across regions and within and across provinces, and thus one might not expect to see similar profiling patterns as is found in the U.S. Unfortunately, without published empirical analysis of police stop data, we have no way of testing this idea.

Policing of organized crime is another significant topic that has received little attention. There are an estimated 672 organized crime groups operating in Canada, floating a black market economy worth some \$77.83 billion (CISC 2014). Drug importation and sales make up a sizable portion of the illicit economy at an estimated \$44.5 billion; however, criminal gangs are also heavily active in cybercrimes and financial crimes (ibid.). While Canadian researchers have been actively studying organized crimes and criminal groups (see for example: Bouchard 2007; Decary-Hetu and Morselli 2011; Descormier and Morselli 2011), only seven (n=7) studies could be located that focused on the policing of organized crime and/or criminal networks in Canada. Of these,

although three drew on police data, and thus were included here, they were more generally focused on estimating the size of criminal networks than on techniques to police organized crime.

Papers on police strength do, however, support my assertion as to the relative merits of relying on peer reviewed research for engaging in structured literature reviews. Of the 3 papers located, one uses Canadian municipal police strength and population data in support of the minority threat hypothesis (Carmichael and Kent 2015); the other uses similar data in support of a counter-thesis (Ruddell and Thomas 2015). Thus, a researcher looking to better understand the extent to which there is empirical support for the minority threat hypothesis in Canada, can assess for herself the strength of claim and counter-claim. That said, given the low volume of research on the topic of Canadian police strength generally (n=3), she likely wouldn't get very far.

Nor would anyone be able to comfortably synthesize Canadian research on a host of other policing topics, including research on such important subjects as police innovation and police accountability. Searching out empirical work on the creation of Canadian crime data and its subsequent use by police organizations would also fail to yield rich returns. Combatting cybercrime, which has been identified by consecutive Canadian federal governments as a significant public policy issue, and thus as a strategic area for public investment, is a field in which we do find a burgeoning body of Canadian research. However, only one (n=1) study specifically on Canadian policing of cyberspace was located.

Missing topics

Based on the topic guide created, nine (n=9) topics were identified as missing from the Canadian policing research literature – that is, searches failed to turn up a single peer-reviewed study on that topic for the study period. Missing topics included:

- police anti-terrorism strategies
- diversity issues

- police education
- policing of human trafficking
- police misconduct
- police integrity
- police reforms
- police recruitment
- violence against police.

It is worth noting that several of the topics above center on key public policy issues. For example, since 9/11 public police agencies across North America have been investing heavily in anti-terrorism or countering violent extremism strategies. Aside from the RCMP's federal anti-terrorism program, several provincial police organizations and major municipal services spend thousands of dollars each year operating intelligence and community-based anti-terrorism programs. To date, none of these programs in Canada have ever been subjected to an evaluation and discussions with police leaders at a handful of these organizations reveals that these programs were often implemented without performance measures or identified deliverables or outcomes⁷.

Diversity, and the notion that police organizations represent the populations they serve, is widely viewed as a public ideal (Fridell, Lunney, Diamond and Kubu 2008). However, a recent report by CCA (2014) found that "the proportion of visible minorities employed by the police labour force is significantly below that of the labour force's national average" (ibid.: 48). In reviewing the Canadian policing literature, the CCA could not explain why, concluding that the reasons for the underrepresentation of visible minorities in policing "remain elusive", before suggesting that police organizations may face recruiting challenges (ibid.: 48). Perhaps not surprisingly then, the topics of diversity and recruiting in Canadian police organizations were not found within any studies located over the past ten years.

⁷ I was told in the fall of 2015 by a representative of a major funding agency that work has just begun on the first evaluation of a Canadian police CVE program.

Although concerns over police integrity and misconduct have featured in countless media stories over the years, raising the specter of police conduct and other issues necessitating reforms, I could also find no studies in any of these areas. And, although education has long been held up as a key component of police professionalization, and thus as an antidote to misconduct (Brereton 1961), this topic failed to generate any peer-reviewed work over the past few years. I could similarly make arguments as to the need for research in each of the remaining topics above.

To put these results into further context, I returned to the research literature and searched more generally for literature on each of the topics identified as missing for the years 2006-2015. For anti-terrorism policing research, I found studies from Australia, the U.S., the U.K. and Israel. A search of diversity issues in policing netted results from Australia, the U.K., Norway and the U.S. For the policing of organized crime, studies were easily located from research conducted in Sweden, the U.S. and the Netherlands. Police recruitment generated studies from the U.K., Australia, Norway and Sweden, whereas police misconduct appears to be a broader global concern leading to a relative wealth of research from Nigeria, the U.S., Norway, Romania, South Korea, Eritrea, Croatia, U.K., Australia and New Zealand, among others.

Conclusions

In the introductory section of this paper I articulated a rationale for engaging in the present study:

- a. to provide an overview of the state of the Canadian policing research literature,
- b. to identify gaps in knowledge of specific subject areas, and;
- c. to identify those topics for which there is a moderate to strong evidence base.

To that end, I collected and analyzed 188 studies published in peer-reviewed journals from 2006 to 2015, specifically looking at the range of the topics covered, as well as the extent of that coverage. Given what has been frequently stated concerning the state of Canadian policing

research, the results are about ‘what one might expect’. That said, this scoping review did provide further insights into where future research efforts might best be directed.

Among other key information revealed by this review is the fact that for the past ten years Canadian policing researchers across all disciplines have produced an average of about 1.9 peer-reviewed papers on public policing topics per year. This work is largely quantitative; however, much of it draws on primary data. In essence, then, we are not shy about data collection and there are likely some fairly large, reusable data sets still available. Given the relative dearth of work we produce on the whole, it might be useful for researchers who are finished with a project to consider taking steps to make current or future datasets available to others. In support of this idea, the dataset produced for this paper is available on www.can-sebp.net.

We now also have further confirmation that there are significant gaps in the Canadian literature on almost all policing topics. These gaps are not only in areas better covered by researchers in the U.S., U.K. or elsewhere, but also in relation to topics which are largely, if not in many respects uniquely Canadian, such as aboriginal policing and northern policing (rural/remote policing). Lack of evaluative research on home grown policing innovations, and, perhaps worse yet, lack of developmental studies leading to local innovation, reveals not only a moribund research culture in this area of criminal justice work, but also raises serious concerns about the potential stunting of progress in Canadian policing.

One of the primary reasons for researchers to engage in systematic literature reviews is to shed insights into the extent to which there is a moderate to strong evidence base in support of a policy, program, practice and/or other intervention. The present gaps in Canadian policing research make it near impossible to hold up any particular local policing strategy as an example of something that is well supported within our body of research. At best, we can point to the evidence

base in other countries on those techniques, technologies and so on that we share in common. What we generally cannot do is explain if, how, when, why and where they work at local, regional, provincial and national levels, and, most importantly, the extent to which they are effective or efficient in meeting Canadian community safety needs.

What can be done? One clear-cut solution would be for Canadian governments to increase public funding of policing research. As has been documented elsewhere, policing research has been underfunded for some two decades (Griffiths 2014; CCA 2014). Increasing funding levels would certainly serve as an incentive for more researchers to begin developing projects on policing topics. Certainly, we have seen the effects of increased funding pots on terrorism research, which has grown, relatively speaking, by leaps and bounds over the past few years from its previously stagnant state in the 80s and 90s. Funding research is, however, only part of what needs to be done in this area. What is also critical is the funding of capacity development initiatives that will help us to grow future generations of policing researchers (see also Griffiths 2014). One of the things Canada currently lacks are publicly funded research institutes equivalent to those found in the U.K., U.S. and elsewhere. Given the extent to which crime remains a significant policy concern, lack of investment in quality independent research facilities, for both conducting research and training future researchers, is, to say the least, highly disconcerting.

When discussions arise as to the practice of conducting research on criminal justice organizations, and, particularly, the police, researchers have a tendency to throw up their hands and claim that access issues can be too great an impediment. Unfortunately, such claims are not without merit (Bradley and Nixon 2009; Stanko 2009; Fleming 2010; Cockroft 2014). A study by Cynthia Lum and colleagues (2012) on ‘receptivity’ to research by police agencies in the U.S. found that police officers tended to be ‘lukewarm’ in their assessments of the utility of policing

research and thus in their willingness to use that research. In Canada, Griffiths (2014) found the same pattern, noting that “open-ended, more critical work is less appealing to police services” and that strong partnerships between police and researchers often exist only in those instances where “there is an ‘applied’ dimension to the studies.” And yet, exploratory and critical work can often be fundamental to the development of policing innovations. One key to solving this problem is, of course, dialogue to effect trust building between police and academic researchers (Bradley and Nixon 2009; Griffiths 2014). In Canada, this is beginning to happen. One small example can be found in the fact that, in March 2016, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police Research Foundation has convened a major conference on policing research, central themes of which include partnership building and evidence based policing. Elsewhere I have written on the need for evidence based policing in Canada (author cite), and thus I will not belabor the point here, except to add that to the extent that a fundamental component of this approach is mutual recognition – through the blending of police and academic expertise – it is an approach that lends itself well to fixing some of our present ‘relationship problems’.

In conclusion, I should note that the present study is not without limitations. Surely, some would argue that my reliance on peer-reviewed journals is too restrictive and exceptions should have been made for research within the canon of grey literature. I have provided my rationale for this in the preceding pages, so I will not reargue my case here. Other readers might take exception to another element of my inclusion criteria – a detailed methodology section – which had the effect of excluding several case studies. A third limitation relates to an exclusion factor: papers not published in English. It is likely that the inclusion of articles published in French would have resulted in a somewhat richer set of results. Therefore, aside from exhorting researchers to take up the challenge of increasing our scholarly output in the field of policing, I would also urge future

researchers with greater facility in French to consider further expanding our knowledge by adding French-language work to the dataset created for this project and publishing their results.

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