

## What is a "Crime Rate"?

It makes sense that in places with bigger populations, the number of crimes would be greater, just as we would expect there to be more births and deaths simply because there are more people.

**Crime rates** are calculations based on the crime information collected by police that allow us to compare the crime levels of small towns to those of big cities. Crime rates provide a snapshot of the types and prevalence of crime in Canada. They are usually calculated per 100,000.

### References cited:

1. Public Safety Canada. *Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview: Annual Report 2009*.

2. Statistics Canada. *Criminal victimization in Canada, 2009*.

3. Smith, P., Goggin, C., & Gendreau, P. (2002). *The effects of prison sentences and intermediate sanctions on recidivism: General effects and individual differences*. Ottawa: Solicitor General Canada

**Myth:** Crime is on the rise—we need to get tougher on crime and build more prisons to keep our communities safe.

**Reality Check:** Crime in Canada has been *declining* since the 1990s. Crime rates show that our communities are safer today than they have been for many years.

## Spotlight on Canada's Crime Rates

In Canada, our official **crime rates** are generated by Statistics Canada using statistics collected by police services. Police-based crime data, gathered in the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, records criminal activity detected by or reported to the police. The following are current crime data, calculated using police statistics:

- The crime rate in Canada peaked in 1991, and has since then been in decline. 2008 marked the *lowest recorded crime rate in the last 25 years*.<sup>1</sup>
- The property crime rate, which includes offences like theft, has declined by 50% since 1991, and in 2008, was also at its lowest point in the last 25 years.
- The violent crime rate, which includes offences like assault, was highest in 1992, and had decreased by 14% by 2008. 2008 had the lowest violent crime rate since 1989.



There are often comparisons made between today's crime and victimization rates and those of the 1960s. There are problems with making these general comparisons.

Since the 1960s, there have been many changes to the way crime information is collected, and the way police report crimes. There have also been many changes to the *Criminal Code* in Canada; therefore, we must be very careful when comparing today's crime rates to crime rates of the past. For example, some types of crimes did not even exist in the 1960s, such as crimes involving the internet.



## Who are we?

*“Effective, just, and humane responses to crime and its causes”*

The John Howard Society of Ontario supports our 19 Affiliates through research, policy and program development. We strive to offer the most effective service possible to our clients and their families and contribute to the health, well-being and safety of communities.

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## What are “Victimization Rates”?

Twice every ten years, since 1988, the General Social Survey (GSS) asks Canadians about their experiences as victims of crime. This includes asking about how they were victimized and if they reported the crime to the police.

Some people claim that unreported victimization is rising, and that Canadians are fearful of crime, but the results of the most recent GSS do not appear to show this<sup>2</sup>. The 2009 GSS shows that:

- The amount of Canadians who reported being victimized did not change much since 2004.
- A large majority (**93%**) of Canadians felt somewhat or very satisfied with their personal safety from crime, similar to the GSS findings from 2004.

## If Crime Rates Are Dropping, Why Build More Prisons?

- The research simply does not support the argument that building more prisons is needed.
- More prisons and longer prison sentences will not make our communities safer. A research study found that longer prison sentences can actually produce increases in re-offending. The study’s authors conclude that prison should not be used with the expectation of reducing criminal behaviour<sup>3</sup>.
- The U.S. has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, and yet crime rates have not dropped despite the country’s heavy use of imprisonment. What they have instead are massive costs — funds that are taken away from other important areas of government spending, like education and healthcare.
- Programs and services offered in the community work much better than prison to prevent crime, and cost significantly less to deliver.

## JHSO Says:

We support approaches to criminal justice that are supported by sound research and statistics. Smart responses to crime and its causes, those which are effective, just and humane, will keep us safer than “tough on crime” approaches.