The Rise and Fall of Crime in Abbotsford British Columbia

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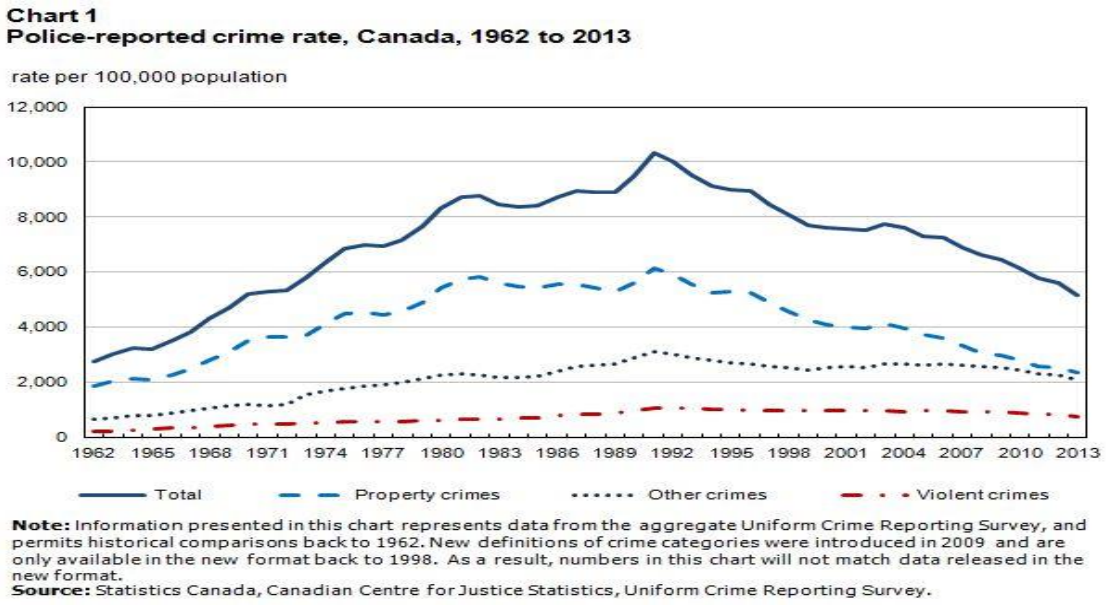
Introduction

How is one to make sense of the substantial decline in crime over the decades? The mysterious contemporary decline of crime regionally, nationally, and globally has become a perplexing enigma to some of the most brilliant minds in the discipline of criminology and criminal justice. Indeed, police-reported crime statistics have demonstrated a staggering decline in reported crime in Canada since the early 1990's (see Figure 1). Incredibly, the Canadian crime rate is now at its lowest level since the 1960's, rates of violent and property crime have consistently decreased for more than two decades, and the homicide rate has receded to a 50 year low (Boyce, Carter, and Perreault, 2014; "Police-Reported", 2014). Therefore, it can be reasonably argued that Canada is safer today than it has been in a generation.

Interestingly, this phenomenon is not unique to Canada. In 2010, the violent crime rate in the United States reached a 40 year low (Wilson, 2011). Specifically, since 1991, violent crime has fallen in America by 51%, while property crime has decreased by 43% (Roeder, Eisen, and Bowling, 2015). Furthermore, the American homicide rate has been declining for more than two decades; particularly, in major U.S. metropolises, such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York (Dyer, 2014). Remarkably, global crime and homicide rates are also at historic lows with certain crimes, such as bank robberies and car thefts, having been virtually eliminated in some jurisdictions ("The Curious Case", 2013). Crime in the United Kingdom has consistently declined for 20 years, including a 50% drop in Britain between 1995 and 2010. Meanwhile, crimes rates have also fallen throughout Africa, Asia, Australia, Latin America, and Europe (Cobain, 2014; Knepper, 2012; Tseloni, Mailley, Farrell, and Tilley, 2010). While there has been some degree of variation in the extent, timing, and nature of crimes involved, the progression of crime in most advanced countries has been identical; a meteoric rise in the 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's followed by a sustained period of decline since the 1990's (Farrell, 2013; Tonry, 2014). Still, crime continues to be purported as an epidemic by many politicians, journalists, and academics. Additionally, the fear of crime continues to influence criminal justice policy throughout the Western world (Hipp, 2013; Knepper, 2012). At the same time, the majority of the Western populace remains utterly oblivious to the decline of crime in terms of its existence and enormity (Tonry, 2014).

FIGURE 1: POLICE REPORTED CRIME RATE IN CANADA FROM 1962 TO 2013[1]



Over the past decade, Abbotsford, British Columbia had become synonymous with crime. For example, in 2006, Abbotsford had the highest rate of property crime per capita in Canada ("Abbotsford is Canada's", 2006). Furthermore, the homicide rate in Abbotsford reached an alarming level from 2008 to 2009 as the Fraser Valley community had more homicides per capita than any other Canadian jurisdiction; a sobering statistic that earned Abbotsford the ignominious moniker of being the "murder capital of Canada" (Hopes, 2012a). More troubling, of the 11 homicides that occurred in Abbotsford in 2009, eight were attributed to gang violence; a pervasive criminal archetype Abbotsford has had difficulty shedding ever since (Oliver and Chan, 2014). Consequently, since 2008, the Abbotsford Police Department (APD) has adopted the lofty mission statement of transforming Abbotsford from Canada's "murder capital" to British Columbia's safest city (Vigneron, 2013; Olsen, 2014).

Thus, Abbotsford represents a fascinating case study. If any jurisdiction can serve as a microcosm for investigating the prodigious decline of crime, it is the quaint Lower Mainland community that has become profoundly associated with criminal behaviour. Therefore, Abbotsford will serve as the primary case study for this report as the evolution of crime in the region will be examined in detail in an effort to both corroborate the ubiquitous decline of criminality and to contextualize Abbotsford within the global crime drop. However, before this process can be undertaken, several theories of the great crime decline, as well as the ways in which crime rates are developed, interpreted, and applied warrant closer examination.

[1] Boyle et al., 2014.

Literature Review

THEORIES OF THE GREAT CRIME DECLINE

It should be noted that some researchers have suggested that the outlier in the crime rate narrative is not the present decline of crime to a level absent for almost a half century, but the veritable aberration warranting an explanation is the unrelenting proliferation of crime from the 1970's to the 1990's (Levitt, 2004). Nonetheless, when seeking causal variables for declining crime rates, the hypothesized factors should be universally applicable and robust, while avoiding the finite specificity of singular locales. In other words, the applicability of each theory to different contexts is critical (Farrell, 2013; Knepper, 2015). In effect, theories that explain the crime drop, yet only account for uniquely domestic characteristics, are best avoided. However, similar to the search for a general theory of crime, establishing a theory for the crime decline that is wholly generalizable is impractical, if not impossible, as each explanation has significant shortcomings.

Past research on crime rates has indicated that the proportion of crime in a region maintains a certain degree of equilibrium so that ebbs and flows in the crime rate are ephemeral with the ratio of crime inevitably regressing to the mean (Narayan, Nielsen, and Smyth, 2010). Furthermore, this degree of homeostatic criminality has been inseparably linked to socio-economic factors (Baciu and Parpucea, 2011). From this perspective, regardless of the jurisdiction examined, the crime rate historically remains relatively stable until economic and social structural profiles deteriorate to such an extent that financial desperation begets crime (Narayan et al., 2010). Thus, it is reasoned that economic stagnation in the form of increased unemployment and lower wages increases rates of crime, whereas economic prosperity serves to lower crime rates (Barker, 2010; Levitt, 2004). However, despite the contemporary economic recession, the precipitous fall of crime has continued unabated throughout the Western world (Wilson, 2011). Furthermore, economic-oriented theories fail to explain the decline in violent criminality that often takes the form of the proverbial "crime of passion".

Evolutionary psychologist, Steven Pinker, argued in his book, The Better Angels of Our Nature, that violent criminal behaviour has persistently declined since the Middle Ages. Indeed, medieval accounts of human torture and cruelty seem almost fictive in relation to contemporary violent crime (Mahoney, 2013; Tonry, 2014). Pinker stated that as time progressed, humans developed psychological restraints that served as protective factors when contemplating violent criminal acts. Furthermore, these psychological restraints are said to have been strengthened with each subsequent generation due to socialization processes that promote empathy, self-control, morality, and reason as normative schemas, as well as increased institutionalized equality for various social groups (Mahoney, 2013). However, Pinker's theory fails to account for the increase and eventual peak in violent criminality from the 1960's to the 1990's. A more audacious bio-social theory that attempted to explain this gap in declining violent crime was the "lead-poisoning hypothesis". It has been demonstrated that there is a near perfect correlation between levels of environmental lead exposure and crime rates over the last half century; therefore, it has been suggested that lead contamination resulted in the cognitive impairment for a generation of youth, eventually manifesting in an increased proclivity for violent aggression (Heidt and Wheeldon, 2014). However, as Heidt and Wheeldon (2014) stated, correlation does not equal causation. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine lead poisoning having universally identical changes to the biological/genetic

composition of all affected individuals. Furthermore, while accounting for the decline in violent crime, each of these theories fails to explain why property crime, which has little to do with aggression, has also been declining.

Other theoretical explanations for the crime drop are equally contentious. For example, it has been suggested that the decriminalization of abortion on the grounds of unconstitutionality in the United States in 1973 and in Canada in 1988 has contributed to declining crime rates. In other words, fewer children are now born into poverty, maladaptive familial environments, or with development deficits; all of which can contribute to criminal lifestyles (Barker, 2010; Blumstein and Wallman, 2006; Levitt, 2004). However, many children raised in negative social environments, including those with a developmental disorder, do not partake in crime. Likewise, many offenders have stable family relationships and are otherwise healthy.

Rapid urbanization and gentrification, typically stimulated and augmented by increased immigration, has also been proposed as an explanation for the crime decline (Barker, 2010). Wadsworth (2010) suggested that the crime decline was correlated with widespread immigration as municipalities with a high proportion of foreign-born immigrants typically had lower crime rates. Past research also indicated that foreign-born immigrants historically commit fewer crimes than their domestic counterparts (Barker, 2010). However, this line of reasoning can lead to the perpetuation of racial stereotypes pertaining to the existence of cultural protective factors that prevent criminal behaviour, as well as developing cultural barriers among certain groups from reporting victimization for certain types of offences, such as domestic violence and sexual assault (Tonry, 2014). On the other hand, and contrary to conventional wisdom, communities with a higher proportion of immigrants may have increased collective efficacy with residents who are more apt to exert community control over individuals engaging in crime and delinquency (Wadsworth, 2010).

Mass incarceration has also been attributed to the precipitous decline of crime (Levitt, 2004). Notably, there was a 400% increase in the United States prison population between the 1970's and 2000's (Barker, 2010). Therefore, it stands to reason that crime rates have dropped due to an ever increasing number of offenders incarcerated in correctional facilities who are unable to commit further criminal acts in their communities (Blumstein and Wallman, 2006). Until recently, however, mass incarceration and a "tough on crime" agenda were lacking in Canada. Yet, the Canadian crime rate has declined similarly to that of the United States and in many European nations (Farrell, 2013). Furthermore, Roeder et al. (2015) suggested that mass incarceration has had a negligible effect on declining crime rates as the majority of Americans in prison are incarcerated for non-violent, drug-related offences. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that the prison environment can be "criminogenic" by fostering criminal contacts that accelerate recidivism and that draconian prison sentences are an inadequate deterrent for criminal behaviour. Similar to the mass incarceration hypothesis, other theories for the crime drop are also uniquely American, including a changing market for crack cocaine and an accompanied reduction in drug enforcement, new laws for concealed weapons and stringent regulations for the purchase and sale of firearms, and the recurrent use of capital punishment (Levitt, 2004). As such, the persuasiveness of these theories contributing to the great crime decline is suspect (Farrell, 2013).

Declining crime rates are also associated with one of the most pertinent contemporary demographic shifts throughout the Western world, namely an aging population coupled with

declining birth rates. As such, it has been argued that many chronic offenders may have "aged out" of crime either in body or spirit (Barker, 2010; Levitt, 2004; Roeder et al., 2015). However, as Mishra and Lalumière (2009) attested, the aging hypothesis fails to account for the sustained decline in youth crime. There has also been a decline in "risky behaviour" amongst contemporary North American youth, such as rates of unsafe sex, teenage pregnancy, adolescent interpersonal violence, substance use, and teen suicide, in conjunction with increased rates of high school graduation. All of this suggests increased self-discipline and social well-being (Knepper, 2012; Mishra and Lalumière, 2009). Furthermore, Western youth now spend the majority of their leisure time online, which may serve to insulate youth from engaging in street crime or delinquency (Knepper, 2015). Still, it could be argued that an increase in diversion programs, such as restorative justice, and a general reluctance to charge youth with criminal offences obscures the rates of youth crime given that young adults and teenagers have historically been more likely to be involved in criminal activity than their adult counterparts (Barker, 2010).

Alternatively, Hall (2012) questioned whether crime rates were, in actuality, decreasing. The "dark figure of crime", or the amount of crime that remains either unreported or undetected, may be increasing. Indeed, crime is not a static entity, but dynamic and malleable such that criminals react to innovative methods of crime prevention and crime reduction with equally inventive felonious techniques (Farrell, 2013). Cybercrime, for example, may have replaced traditional robberies and burglaries with fraud and identity theft, which are more difficult to accurately detect and measure. In fact, the crime drop roughly coincides with the emergence of the internet; therefore, it is possible that cybercrime has resulted in a paradigm shift in the way in which crime is committed (Knepper, 2015). Likewise, organized crime has become increasingly indiscernible as it now constitutes a global enterprise characterized by the transnational black-market for contraband, drugs, weapons, money, and even people. Furthermore, white collar crime and state crime are typically not recorded in conventional crime statistics (Hall, 2012). However, Knepper (2015) suggested that advancements have been made in the ability to measure and analyze surreptitious forms of crime. Moreover, without rigorous empirical validation, the widespread proliferation of cybercrime and transnational organized crime, such as human trafficking, remains conjectural.

Farrell (2013) argued that the only theory for the crime drop with universal generalizability was the "security hypothesis". In effect, technological advances combined with heightened security mechanisms now serve as an impediment to commit crime. For example, surveillance cameras, as well as vehicle and home security mechanisms, are permanent safeguards against the commission of property crime (Barker, 2010). However, akin to theories that only account for the decline of aggressive behaviour, the "security hypothesis" fails to adequately explain why rates of cross-jurisdictional violent crime, such as homicides, robberies, and sexual assaults, have also been in a perpetual state of decline as technological innovation has intensified (Tonry, 2014).

The ability of the police to contribute to declining crime rates has been fiercely disputed in the discipline of criminology. Criminologists and theorists, such as Travis Hirschi and Steven Levitt, have historically asserted that law enforcement personnel are incapable of reducing crime (Roeder, et al., 2015). Furthermore, previous research has demonstrated that increasing the number of deployable police officers has a minimal positive effect on crime reduction and deterrence. Instead, it may be that specific police practices are more important in reducing crime (Kleck and Barnes,

2014). Accordingly, contemporary criminological research has suggested that police can play a significant role in crime reduction through innovative police practices (Cohen, Plecas, McCormick, and Peters, 2014). In fact, Franklin Zimring in his book, The Great American Crime Decline, acknowledged criminal justice efficiency, including innovative policing, as one of the main factors for the contemporary crime drop (Barker, 2010). For example, the advent of community policing, where the police synergistically work in tandem with local residents to respond to their concerns about crime problems, as well as the police themselves, has been proposed as a possible explanation for declining crime. However, community policing would axiomatically increase crime rates as more crimes would theoretically be brought to police attention (Sozer and Merlo, 2013). A more robust example of law enforcement strategies resulting in crime reduction is information or intelligence-led policing (Cohen et al., 2014). For instance, the "Compstat model" uses the meticulous data analysis of crime statistics as a means for identifying criminogenic areas and crime patterns. In turn, police resources can be concentrated to those areas and be tailored to respond to specific crime problems with "hot spot" policing or a targeted focus on prolific offenders (Barker, 2010; McElvain, Kposowa, and Gray, 2012). However, as Roeder et al. (2015) suggested, the ability of police organizations to contribute to declining crime rates is dependent on their size and location, the availability of resources emanating from the degree of political collaboration, and, perhaps most importantly, police leadership.

METHODOLOGICAL FLAWS OF CRIME STATISTICS AND CRIME RATES

Police-reported crime statistics suffer from a number of limitations. First, in order for a crime to become a crime statistic, it must transcend a convoluted process reliant on police discretion, including the manner in which clearance rates are operationally defined, and the observation and perception of the criminal event by a victim or bystander (Boivin, 2014). Consequently, some have argued that crime statistics are more a measure of police priorities and behaviour, and less a reflection of the true quality and quantity of crime in a jurisdiction. Second, the coding of a criminal event is difficult when several crimes occur in succession or simultaneously, such as what occurs in a crime spree (Palys and Atchison, 2014). Third, in the contemporary context of information-led policing and the use of Compstat in strategic police deployment, law enforcement organizations are under inordinate pressure to lower crime rates through whatever recourse necessary. As such, some governmental and law enforcement agencies, such as the Home Office in Britain and the New York Police Department (NYPD), have been pilloried for malfeasance in the form of falsifying crime data, downgrading the severity of offences, and even failing to report certain crimes at all (Eterno and Silverman, 2010; Roeder et al., 2015). Thus, an increasing reliance on crime statistics as a performance measure for the efficiency and effectiveness of law enforcement has the potential to create an erroneous depiction of the rate of crime, as crime statistics can become ends in themselves as opposed to means to an end; a performance measure as opposed to an analytic, crime reduction tool (Dabney, 2010). It should, however, be noted that many law enforcement agencies are now auditing police reported crime statistics for quality assurance and legitimacy ("Compstat", 2013). Perhaps most importantly, a Criminal Code offence constitutes a recorded and charged criminal incident by the police; however, documented offences for the purposes of determining crime rates do not necessarily represent criminal convictions (Knepper, 2015). Thus,

crime statistics and crime rates illustrate alleged or reported crime, and not necessarily the totality of actual crime.

One of the inherent challenges of examining crime rates is that they often lack methodological veracity. In other words, crime rates are subject to a myriad of structural and systemic issues. For example, the "dark figure of crime" does not appear in crime rates; this is clearly problematic because some crimes are habitually underreported (Frank, Brantingham, and Farrell, 2012). This can occur for a myriad of reasons, including adverse public confidence in the criminal justice system and the regional law enforcement agency, issues of access to justice, exorbitant financial expenditures necessitated by court proceedings, the time investment involved in the judicial process, avoidance of the inevitable revictimization and trauma that can occur during cross-examination, and a perception that the crime in question lacks the moral acerbity to warrant police interdiction (Palys and Atchison, 2014). For example, a homicide is much more likely to manifest as a crime statistic than stolen Halloween decorations. Consequently, underreported and undocumented crimes can factitiously alter the rate of crime purported to the public.

The importance of crime statistics should not be underestimated. Indeed, crime statistics shape criminological theory, influence governmental legislation and policy, determine law enforcement strategies and priorities, inform public opinion regarding the nature of crime, and help to illustrate the degree of human probity, rectitude, and morality in various jurisdictions over a period of time ("Uniform Crime", 2011). However, crime statistics and crime itself are social constructions. Behaviour that is deemed illicit is subjectively determined and malleable, depending on the context in which it is examined (Palys and Atchison, 2014; Tonry, 2014). Accordingly, it is perhaps illogical to compare the rates of crime in different jurisdictions as if they operate within an ossified, monolithic framework. In other words, various jurisdictions are unique in terms of population density, demographics, population stability, economic conditions, climate, social structures, culture/religion, family systems, effectiveness and strength of law enforcement, public confidence in the criminal justice system, and rates of reporting victimization ("Uniform Crime", 2011). Nevertheless, when crime rates are reported, people are often quick to rank various jurisdictions as if they can be compared without the aforementioned factors taken into consideration. This is a fallacious and myopic approach that distorts the understanding of crime. A more appropriate method of examining the prevalence of crime is to consider a longitudinal analysis of a single jurisdiction, such as a city, province, or country.

During the appraisal of crime rates, there is often a dissonance between the volume and seriousness of recorded offences (Boivin, 2014). In other words, two jurisdictions may have identical rates of crime; however, one may be characterized by pervasive violent crime, such as murder, rape, and robbery, whereas the other may be typified by comparatively less serious crimes, such as theft and vandalism. Furthermore, public fear of crime is strongly influenced by the rate of violent crime in contrast to the overall crime rate, which is disproportionately influenced by relatively minor crimes (Hipp, 2013). Notably, and further to the point, homicide rates are frequently unrepresentative of widespread crime patterns (Hipp and Roussell, 2013). Therefore, any examination of crime rates ought to include an analysis of the proportion of violent crime, rather than the assurance that the overall crime rate is indicative of the breadth of violent criminal aggression.

Statistics Canada has recently attempted to rectify the issue of crime severity through the production of the Crime Severity Index (CSI); an instrument used to determine the proportion of serious crime in Canada. However, the CSI has come under criticism for using a convoluted formula reliant on incarceration rates and mean sentence lengths, therefore operating under the false premise that sentencing penalties are invariably analogous to the perceived severity of criminal infractions. Moreover, contemporary research has revealed that the CSI generates homologous results to conventional crime rates (Boivin, 2014). One suggestion to remedy the issue of unreported crime misrepresenting the overall crime rate has been to examine victimization surveys, which are often in stark contrast to the rates of reported crime. However, victimization surveys are subject to many of the same structural issues as crime rates. For example, the Canadian Victimization Survey (CVS) allows for a maximum of three reported incidents of criminal victimization per respondent. This is an artificial cap designed to prevent statistical outliers, but also one that speciously restricts rates of repeat victimization that past research has established as a common occurrence (Nazaretian and Merolla, 2013). Therefore, it is incontrovertible that weighted crime rates and uncapped victimization surveys are superior measures of crime; however, there is seemingly a lack of consensus has to how to establish a formula that can accurately capture the incongruity of severe to relatively inconsequential crime and genuine rates of victimization (Boivin, 2014).

Another formative issue, as it pertains to crime rates, is that crime statistics are predominately concerned with incidence, the rate of crime per population, its prevalence, and the proportion of victims within the population examined; however, concentration is completely indiscernible when crime rates are analyzed (Rogerson, 2008). In other words, while it is beneficial to identify the aggregate ratio of crime in a population and the number of victims per capita, the clustering of criminal activity (or lack thereof) in confined areas must also be determined. For example, crime prevention strategies would be necessarily disparate if one victim was victimized ten times as opposed to ten victims exploited once (Rogerson, 2008). Thus, just as crime rates can be misleading due to a variance in severity, so too can crime rates equivocate predicated on the distinct problems of concentrated and proportional crime (Boivin, 2014; Rogerson, 2008). Therefore, one of the inherent challenges when investigating crime rates is to discern if crime is heavily concentrated and whether certain areas within a jurisdiction are especially criminogenic.

Difficulty in interpreting the volume, severity, and concentration of crime within a jurisdiction leads to an inauspicious start towards generating accurate crime statistics. However, producing reliable and valid crime rates are further complicated due to the abstruse and ambiguous nature of population counts, which is a necessary denominator of the crime rate equation (Boivin, 2013). Indeed, traditional crime rates are determined by dividing the count of total criminal infractions by the number of residents living in the region; however, the population of a city may not accurately convey the true magnitude of offenders and victims in the area. In other words, some jurisdictions may possess a large ambient population or the number of individuals present in a community without necessarily residing in it (Boivin, 2013). For example, major cities, such as Vancouver, British Columbia, may have numerous offenders and victims within the city limits at any given time who are tourists, transients, commuters, workers, and otherwise non-inhabitants of the region. Moreover, contemporary research has demonstrated that a relatively small number of prolific offenders instigate the majority of criminal activity (Cohen, et al., 2014). Likewise, research has

asserted that crime is not randomly distributed; instead, due to vulnerability, specific targets are often repeatedly victimized (Frank et al., 2012). Therefore, due to displacement stemming from criminal justice interventions targeting prolific offenders, as well as socio-economic conditions resulting in the relocation of victims, it is reasonable to surmise that crime rates may be relatively unfounded as a result of the impracticability of determining the number of offenders and victims who actually reside in the region under investigation.

It is readily apparent that due to the aforementioned systemic issues in the production, elucidation, and operationalization of crime, there is a need for a more accurate understanding of the prevalence of crime in Canada, as well as refined measures for determining true rates of crime and victimization (Nazaretian and Merolla, 2013; Boivin, 2013). Nevertheless, even though they are not infallible, crime rates remain the best measure for determining the prevalence of crime. Furthermore, crime rates are essential analytic barometers of the changing themes and patterns of crime within specific communities for the purpose of conducting longitudinal analyses (Palys and Atchison, 2014). Thus, in light of the drawbacks of crime statistics, an analysis of the evolution of crime necessarily entails the use of imperfect crime data, i.e. police-reported crime statistics and crime rates.

Study Methodology

A quantitative case study research method was employed in this project as pre-existing records containing secondary data were used as a data collection instrument. Namely, publicly available police-reported crime statistics were collected from the Juristat (2014) journal article published by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics and Statistics Canada available online at http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2014001/article/14040-eng.htm, as well as the British Columbia Crime Trends (2014) document published by the Ministry of Justice British Columbia Police Services Division available online at http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/policeservices/statistics. The former contained police-reported crime statistics for the time period of 2003-2013, whereas the latter contained police-reported crime statistics for the time period of 2004-2013. The crime statistics were downloaded and entered into frequency distributions in Microsoft Excel. Crime rates were determined by dividing the number of total Criminal Code offences by the population and then multiplying by 1,000 to arrive at the crime rate per 1,000 population. Likewise, property and violent crime rates were determined by dividing the total number of property offences and violent offences respectively by the population and then multiplying by 1,000 to arrive at the property and violent crime rate per 1,000 population. When provided, crime rates were entered into frequency distributions directly without performing any calculations.

In addition, publicly available police-reported crime statistics supplied by the APD in Compstat and Monthly Operational Reports archived from January 2009 to December 2014, (containing crime data from 2008 to 2014) were also collected. The statistics are available online at the APD website, http://www.abbypd.ca/Crime-Statistics. The data was downloaded and entered into frequency distributions in Microsoft Excel. Crime rates were determined by dividing the number of total Criminal Code offences by the population of Abbotsford and multiplying by 1,000 to arrive at the crime rate per 1,000 population. The final Compstat Report and Monthly Operational Report for

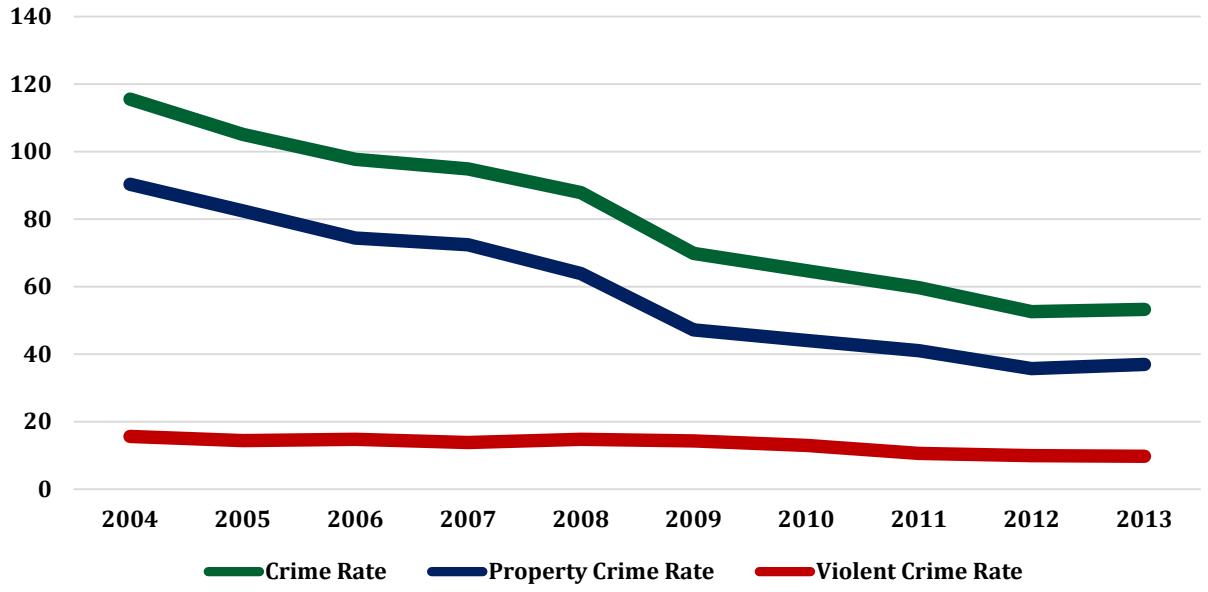
each year between 2009 to 2014 included year end totals for total Criminal Code offences, violent offences, and property offences for the period of 2008-2014 that were used to determine rates of overall crime, violent crime, and property crime. The population used in the crime rate equation was identical to that provided in the final Compstat report for each year.

Definitions for offences constituting violent and property crimes were identical to the definitions used by the publishing agencies. Crime rates, violent crime rates, and property crime rates were all rounded to the nearest tenth. It should be noted that there are disparities between the Statistics Canada/BC Ministry of Justice and APD data for the crime rates and crime statistics for the City of Abbotsford. This is partly the result of discrepancies in population count; however, Statistics Canada and the APD "score" criminal offences differently, with the former only considering the most serious offence when multiple criminal infractions occur simultaneously ("Protecting with Pride", 2012). Thus, the crime rates generated from the APD data will be invariably larger. Each crime rate was visually depicted in a longitudinal line graph, with the respective crime rate represented on the y-axis and each year on the x-axis. In addition to crime rates, several specific offences were also selected and their prevalence was also illustrated in longitudinal line graphs identical in structure to those depicting crime rates. The offences selected are those that self-reported victimization surveys indicate are the most likely to be reported to police, including homicides, robberies, vehicle thefts, and break and enters (Perreault and Brennan, 2013). Due to a smaller number of total incidents, the homicide rate for Abbotsford is presented as per 100,000 population. Using an inductive approach, several potential explanations are posited to interpret the crime trends that have taken place in Abbotsford over the past decade.

Research Findings

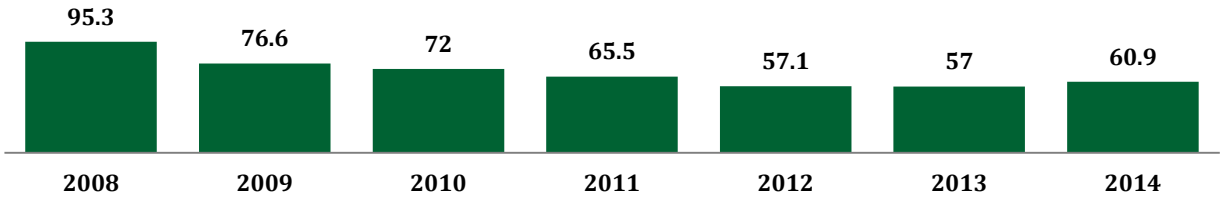
An analysis of the crime statistics provided by the BC Ministry of Justice revealed that the overall crime rate in Abbotsford declined by 54.5% from 2004 to 2012 (see Figure 2). Specifically, there were a total of 14,810 total Criminal Code offences in the City of Abbotsford in 2004, which had a population of 128,221. In 2012, there were 7,271 total Criminal Code offences with a population of 138,195. More specifically, the crime rate dropped from 116 crimes per 1,000 population in 2004 to 53 crimes per 1,000 population by 2013. As there was a smaller decline in violent crime from 16 per 1,000 in 2004 to 10 per 1,000 by 2013, the overall drop in the crime rate was driven by the steep drop in property crime in this time period.

FIGURE 2: ABBOTSFORD CRIME RATE PER 1,000 POPULATION 2004 TO 2013



While the crime rate in Abbotsford declined annually, the most significant drop occurred after 2008. Indeed, an examination of the APD Compstat data from 2008 to 2013 revealed that there was a 40.2% drop in the overall crime rate within that half-decade time period (see Figure 3). The magnitude of the crime drop in Abbotsford was staggering as no other major municipality in British Columbia or Canada experienced as significant of a decrease in the overall crime rate over the last decade ("Police-reported Crime Rate", 2014). Moreover, the enormity of the crime drop in Abbotsford is often underestimated as the neighbouring City of Mission, British Columbia, which has not experienced nearly the same degree of crime decline, is typically combined with Abbotsford when formulating Canadian crime rates (Boyce et al., 2014; Olsen, 2014).

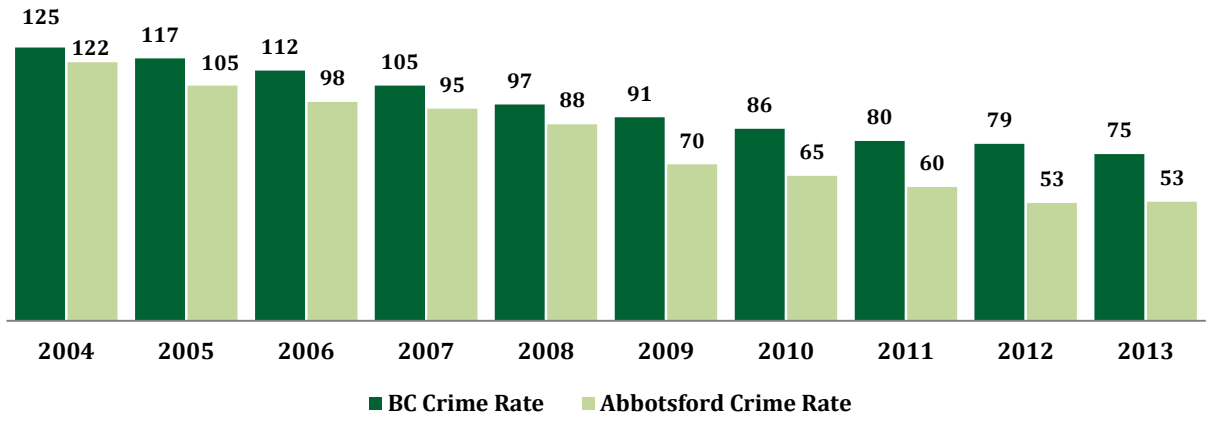
FIGURE 3: APD COMPSTAT CRIME RATE DATA PER 1,000 POPULATION 2008 TO 2013



Notably, the BC Ministry of Justice data indicated that the crime rate increased by 1.1% from 2012 to 2013, whereas the APD Compstat data revealed that the crime rate decreased by 0.2% during the same timeframe. This discrepancy demonstrates the importance of accurate population counts in determining crime rates, as the latter indicates that the population of Abbotsford was 139,005 in 2013, whereas the former has a listed population of 139,426 for 2013. Significantly, the APD data indicated that crime increased by 6.8% between 2013 and 2014. Although, it should be noted that

this figure assumes that the population of Abbotsford remained identical to that of 2013; thus, it is a generous estimate of the 2014 crime rate. Nevertheless, after a period of remarkable decline, it appears that the crime drop in Abbotsford plateaued.

FIGURE 4: BRITISH COLUMBIA AND ABBOTSFORD CRIME RATE COMPARISON PER 1,000 POPULATION 2004 TO 2013



In comparison to the crime drop in British Columbia as a whole, it can be observed that crime has declined profoundly in Abbotsford in relation to the rest of the province since 2008 (see Figure 4). Specifically, crime in British Columbia declined by 38.9% from 2004 to 2013, whereas Abbotsford surpassed this figure in the half-decade from 2008 to 2013 alone. It can also be observed that even when Abbotsford led Canada in property crime per capita in 2006 and homicides per capita in 2008/09, the overall crime rate was in a state of noticeable decline.

"MURDER CAPITAL OF CANADA"

Since 2008, the violent crime rate in Abbotsford decreased by 38.2% (see Figure 5). Thus, the crime decline in Abbotsford consisted not only of a drop in less serious non-violent crime, but also a significant decrease in violent criminality, including homicides, robberies, and assaults. For example, after 136 and 134 robberies in Abbotsford in 2008 and 2009, where violent crime as a whole atypically increased for a two year duration, there were 80 and 87 robberies in 2013 and 2014 respectively (see Figure 6). Therefore, the anomaly of 2008 and 2009 warrants closer investigation.

FIGURE 5: ABBOTSFORD VIOLENT CRIME RATE PER 1,000 POPULATION 2008 TO 2013

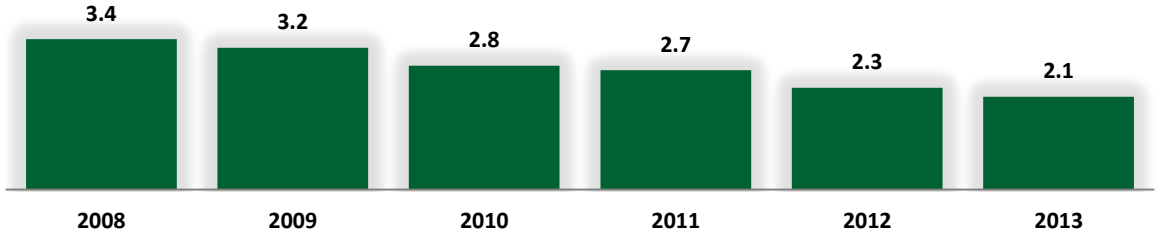
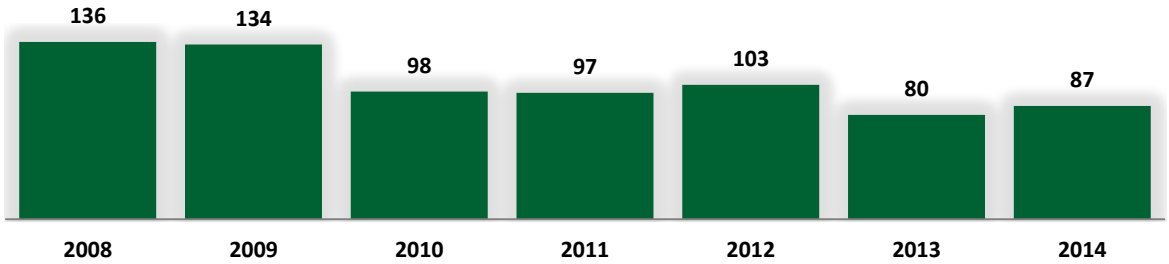


FIGURE 6: ABBOTSFORD ROBBERIES 2008 TO 2014



As mentioned, homicide rates are often erratic and deviate from overall crime patterns, and Abbotsford was no exception (Hipp and Roussell, 2013). For example, after 15 homicides in the City of Abbotsford in 2008 and 2009, Abbotsford was murder free in 2011 (see Figure 7). Moreover, prior to 2008 and after 2009, the homicide rate in Abbotsford remained fairly consistent on an annual basis. The increase in murders in Abbotsford during 2008-09 can largely be explained by the increase of violent gang activity in British Columbia in the 2000's. Indeed, there were 68 gang-related murders in British Columbia within that two year span and the vast majority of homicides in Abbotsford in 2008 and 2009 were related to organized crime ("BC's Anti-Gang Police", 2013). As such, it is not surprising that Abbotsford's homicide rate correlated with an identical increase in homicides throughout the rest of British Columbia in 2008 and 2009 (see Figure 8).

FIGURE 7: ABBOTSFORD HOMICIDE RATE PER 100,000 POPULATION 2004 TO 2013

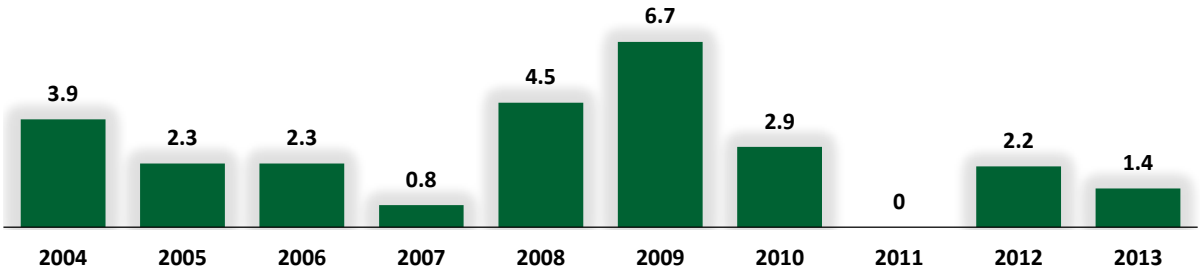
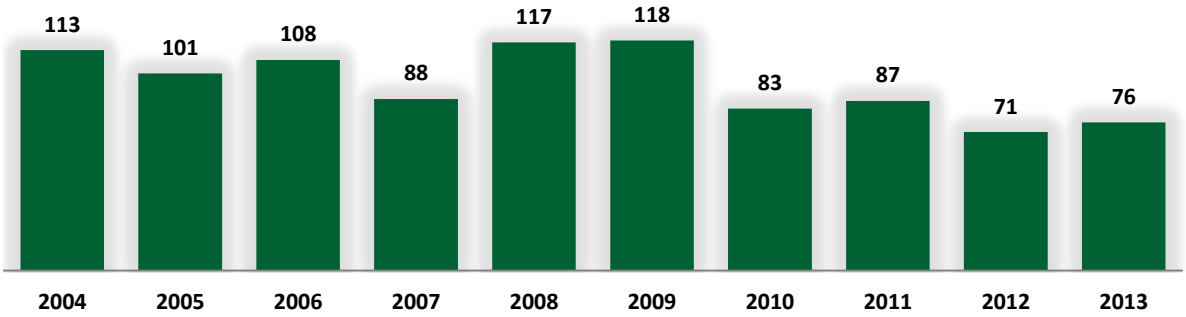


FIGURE 8: BRITISH COLUMBIA HOMICIDES 2004 TO 2013



The rise in violent gang activity in Abbotsford and British Columbia throughout the 2000's is inextricably linked to the drug trade, particularly marijuana as Abbotsford's temperate climate and proximity to the United States border makes it a near perfect region for the production and trafficking of cannabis (Slinger, 2011). Several prominent organized crime groups, such as the United Nations gang, Red Scorpions, Independent Soldiers, and Hells Angels engaged in a violent "turf war" for control of the British Columbia drug trade, peaking in the escalation of homicides in 2008-09. In response, in 2010, the APD formulated a Gang Suppression Unit and in conjunction with the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit (CFSEU), which was formed in 2004, aggressively targeted organized crime in the Fraser Valley and Lower Mainland, while also implementing strategies to assist in gang prevention and desistance ("BC's Anti-Gang Police", 2013; Hopes, 2012b). As a result, many of the criminal gangs that contributed to the increased rates of homicide in Abbotsford disbanded, as members have increasingly been incarcerated or displaced, while several prominent leaders of organized crime groups have been murdered or imprisoned (Oliver and Chan, 2014). As such, while violent crime consistently decreased in Abbotsford and British Columbia, law enforcement can be credited, in part, for contributing to these declining rates of homicide after the anomalous increase from 2008 to 2009.

On the other hand, since 2010, gang activity in Abbotsford and the Lower Mainland has become increasingly chaotic and disorganized, with smaller criminal organizations competing for control of British Columbia's drug trade. In turn, this has led to an increase in brazen shootings that have yet to be reflected in an increase in homicides (Bolan, 2015). Notably, advances in health care and technology have significantly decreased the likelihood of firearms-related deaths. For example, there was a 47% increase in the number of hospitalizations attributed to gunshot wounds in the United States between 2001 and 2011; however, the American homicide rate declined by 8% during the same timeframe (Dyer, 2014). Accordingly, gang-related homicides are now increasingly becoming attempted murders or aggravated assaults. Furthermore, gang violence in Abbotsford has become disproportionately associated with disillusioned Indo-Canadian youth, perhaps marking a return to the ethnic-based gang activity in British Columbia during the 1990's. Moreover, many middle-class youth who would not ordinarily be considered "at-risk" increasingly view gangs and criminal activity as a viable means to acquire affluence, respect, and a sense of acceptance from their peers ("Abbotsford Youth Crime", 2009; "BC's Anti-Gang", 2013; Bolan, 2015; Slinger, 2011). If these smaller criminal organizations gain prominence, it is possible that Abbotsford will experience

a return to the gang violence and the associated increase in homicides that once led to Abbotsford's reputation as the "murder capital of Canada".

"PROPERTY CRIME CAPITAL OF CANADA"

Property crime in Abbotsford declined by 49.6% from 2008 to 2012. This decline was followed by a 1.8% increase from 2012 to 2013 (see Figure 9). Indeed, declines in property crime seemingly account for the majority of the crime drop in Abbotsford, British Columbia, and Canada over the last decade. For example, there was a 46.2% decrease in break and enters in British Columbia from 2004 to 2013, as well as a substantial 69.3% decrease in vehicle thefts during the same time period (see Figure 10). Furthermore, the "bait-car" program, whereby police-controlled vehicles equipped with surveillance cameras are deliberately left idle for the purpose of being stolen by car thieves, has been credited for significant declines in automobile thefts since the early 2000's ("Vancouver Police", 2009). Thus, much like the purposeful response to gang activity, local law enforcement deserve credit for contributing to declining rates of property crime.

FIGURE 9: ABBOTSFORD PROPERTY CRIME RATE PER 1,000 POPULATION 2008 TO 2013

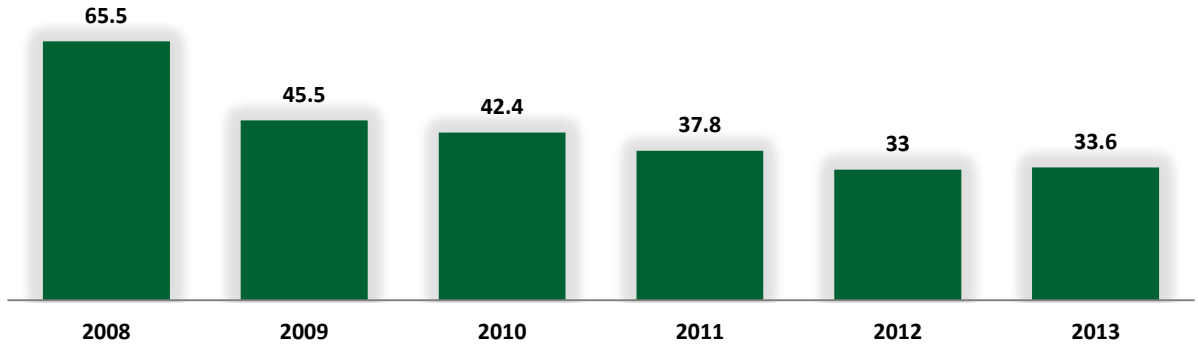
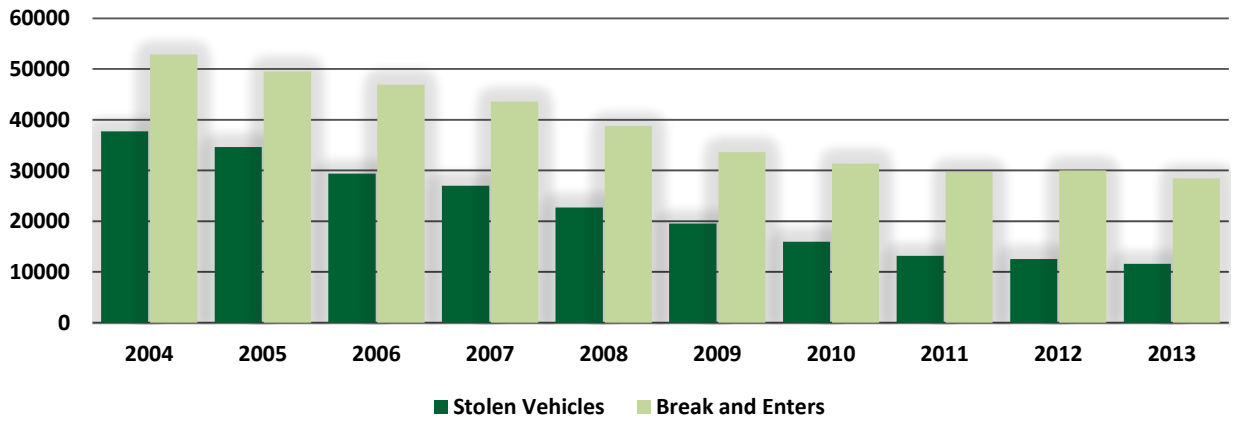
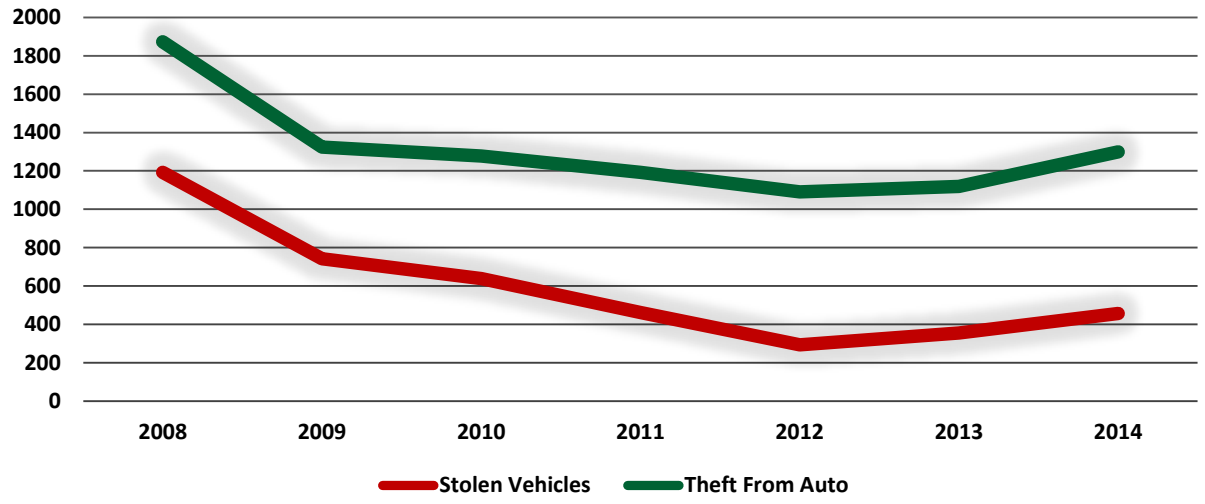


FIGURE 10: BRITISH COLUMBIA PROPERTY CRIMES 2004 TO 2013



On the other hand, rates of vehicle thefts in British Columbia have seemingly stabilized since 2011. In addition, the number of vehicle thefts in Abbotsford increased in both 2013 and 2014 after a 75.4% decrease from 2008 to 2012. Likewise, the number of thefts from automobiles has increased by 19.2% from 2012 to 2014 (see Figure 11). Therefore, criminals may now be adapting to police efforts to curtail motor vehicle-related property crime. Furthermore, research has indicated that property crimes, including break and enters, stolen vehicles, and thefts from automobiles, are associated with drug addiction, as criminals parlay stolen property as currency for illicit substances, such as heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine (Gottfredson, Kearley, and Bushway, 2008). Thus, the rise in property crime in Abbotsford since 2013 may potentially indicate the need to address rates of substance abuse and addiction in the region.

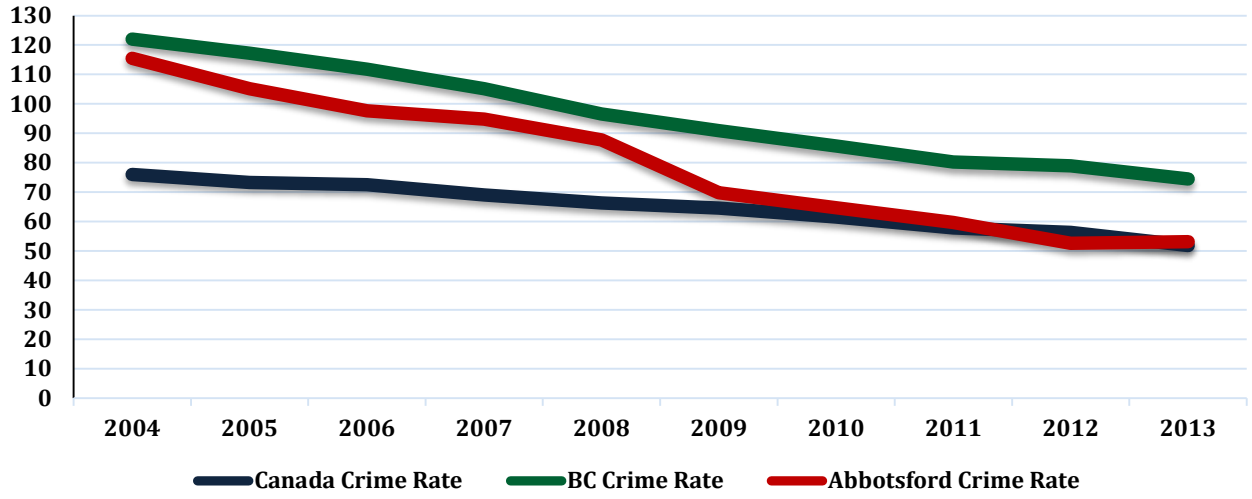
FIGURE 11: ABBOTSFORD STOLEN VEHICLES AND THEFTS FROM AUTO 2008 TO 2014



THE RISE AND FALL OF CRIME IN ABBOTSFORD

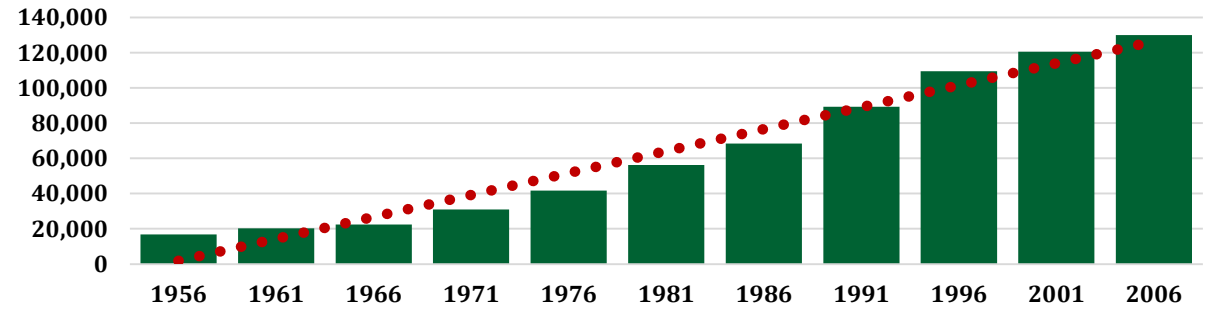
Although situated within the context of a systemic crime drop, the decline of crime in Abbotsford is particularly noteworthy. Indeed, the crime rate in Abbotsford was 52% higher than the national average in 2004; however, by 2012, the crime rate in Abbotsford had dipped 6.6% below the Canadian overall crime rate (see Figure 12). Furthermore, while the crime rate in British Columbia remains 43.5% higher than the national average, Abbotsford, by virtue of a sharp crime decline since 2009, had a crime rate 53.2% lower than the provincial average in 2013. Accordingly, Abbotsford's embarrassing labels as the "property crime capital" and "murder capital" of Canada have become obsolete as Abbotsford is now one of British Columbia's and Canada's safest cities, at least as it pertains to overall rates of crime. The decline of crime in Abbotsford and its affect on the public was also reflected in two recent public safety surveys conducted in 2010 and 2012 that demonstrated overwhelming public confidence in the Abbotsford Police, as well as high levels of personal safety within the community (Armstrong, Plecas, Cohen, and McCormick, 2010; Hopes, 2013).

FIGURE 12: CANADA, BRITISH COLUMBIA, AND ABBOTSFORD CRIME RATE COMPARISON PER 1,000 POPULATION 2004 TO 2013



Despite the extraordinary crime decline in Abbotsford, the factors that led to Abbotsford becoming a haven for property crime and gang activity in the 2000's warrants consideration. Perhaps the most significant factor was drugs. As mentioned previously, marijuana is the core currency of the drug trade in the Fraser Valley, as is stolen goods from the commission of property crime to facilitate the procurement of drugs (Gottfredson et al., 2008; Slinger, 2011). Thus, while police in Abbotsford should be commended for aggressively combating violent gangs in the area and for using intelligence-led policing techniques to target prolific offenders who disproportionately commit the majority of property crime, long-term social policy solutions are required to ensure that the market for illegal narcotics does not facilitate a return to increased rates of crime in the area (Cohen et al., 2014; Knepper, 2012). Moreover, resources for law enforcement are increasingly becoming limited as crime control costs continue to rise while, at the same time, government agencies endure a budgetary crisis as a result of rising health care costs and an aging Canadian population (Di Matteo, 2014). Therefore, it is imperative that police organizations in Canada maximize their efficiency in order to maintain present levels of crime reduction and prevention.

FIGURE 13: ABBOTSFORD POPULATION CHANGE 1956 TO 2006



Another reason for high rates of property crime and gang violence in Abbotsford in previous years may stem from demographic shifts in the region. For example, the population of Abbotsford

increased by approximately 125% between 1950 and 2005 (see Figure 13). Indeed, since 1980, Abbotsford became one of the fastest growing communities in Canada. While population growth rates have since stabilized, the rapid increase in residents allowed Abbotsford to become a Census Metropolitan Area that allows Abbotsford to be compared to other major Canadian jurisdictions in crime rate publications, including other major British Columbia cities, such as Surrey and Vancouver. Furthermore, Abbotsford's population growth was fuelled by increased immigration as the community became one of the most ethnically diverse in Canada. Perhaps most significantly, Abbotsford remains one of the youngest regions in Canada as approximately 85% of the residents are under the age of 65, with a median age of an Abbotsford resident being approximately 37 years old ("City of Abbotsford", 2009). Thus, a relatively high proportion of youth may have contributed to Abbotsford's crime problems in the 2000's as young adults are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour, partake in drug use, and join gangs (Barker, 2010; Mishra and Lalumière, 2009).

Study Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, crime rates were determined using police-reported crime statistics that, as mentioned previously, do not account for the entirety of crime within a jurisdiction and contain a number of inherent structural and methodological flaws. Second, the assurance of the construct validity of the data is reliant on the process used by police organizations in Abbotsford, British Columbia, and Canada to define and interpret the occurrence of criminal activity in a jurisdiction. However, as crime data is increasingly linked to police deployment through the use of the "Compstat model" and information-led policing, it is reasonable to assume that the crime statistics used in this study are a cogent resource for analyzing crime. Third, an analysis of the prevalence of crime in Abbotsford would ideally make use of self-reported victimization surveys. Alas, comprehensive victimization surveys specific to the City of Abbotsford do not exist. Moreover, the General Social Survey (GSS), which records self-reported rates of criminal victimization in Canada, is released every five years ("The General Social Survey", 2013). However, the last available survey was produced in 2009, as the survey for 2014 has yet to be published as of the writing of this report. On the other hand, the GSS only surveys approximately 25,000 Canadians, each of whom must elect to participate and have access to a telephone ("The General Social Survey", 2013). Importantly, the 2009 GSS revealed that rates of self-reported criminal victimization remained stable and essentially unchanged from the previous GSS conducted in 2004 (Perreault and Brennan, 2013). Thus, the limited victimization data that exists corroborates that Canadian crime rates, at the very least, did not increase in the 2000's.

Lastly, a comprehensive research study examining the evolution of crime in Abbotsford would benefit from a multi-method research approach that would include not only the quantitative data used in the present investigation, but also qualitative interviews with key stakeholders, such as the police and individuals who criminally offend in the region. Indeed, this would create a more realistic understanding of the crime problems in Abbotsford. Unfortunately, this larger scale, mixed-methods approach was not feasible for the purposes of the present research project.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is no panacea for the phenomenal crime decline in Abbotsford and throughout the Western world since the 1990's. Various theoretical explanations proposed for declining crime rates each have a degree of cogency; however, each also has significant failings. Therefore, much like the futile search for a general theory for why people commit crime, a silver bullet for the crime decline is seemingly inconceivable. Instead, it appears that several explanations serve to mutually reinforce one another (Barker, 2010). Furthermore, while the Abbotsford Police can be credited for helping to reduce the local crime rate through the use of intelligence-led policing and a targeted emphasis on gang activity, the fact remains that Abbotsford has been situated within a broader crime decline that spans more than two decades. Indeed, as noted earlier, even when Abbotsford was labeled as Canada's "murder capital" and "property crime capital", crime in the region was in a state of perpetual decline. Nevertheless, the magnitude of Abbotsford's crime decline is significant and warrants recognition, as it is more profound than virtually any other major municipality in British Columbia and Canada, specifically, a 54.5% decline between 2004 and 2012 and a 40.2% decline between 2008 and 2013 ("Police-reported Crime Rate", 2014). Alas, the crime rate in Abbotsford appears to have now plateaued. Consequently, the great crime decline may have come to an end. As such, it will be interesting to see if crime rates locally, nationally, and internationally continue to subside, remain stable, or increase in the coming years.

It is paramount that governmental agencies continue to produce accurate accounts of the prevalence of crime in their respective jurisdictions. As mentioned previously, crime rates, crime statistics, and self-reported victimization surveys contain numerous inherent methodological flaws that can distort reported levels of crime. Therefore, it is imperative that the organizations responsible for collecting and analyzing crime statistics search for innovative and robust methods of measuring levels of crime that ameliorate these concerns. Moreover, police-reported crime statistics require oversight to ensure that they are precise. Likewise, self-reported victimization surveys would seemingly benefit from being administered with increased regularity and to a broader sample of individuals.

Disconcertingly, it appears as if the field of criminology remains relatively uncertain in how to answer the original research question posed in this study; namely, where has all the crime gone? Despite an unexpected, profound, and extensive decline in crime, there remains a relatively sparse degree of research exploring the crime drop since the 1990's (Barker, 2010; Tonry, 2014). Furthermore, criminologists and theorists in other academic disciplines appear to attribute the crime drop to singular factors that are unique to their scholarly field or research interests without accounting for the sheer complexity of the crime decline; a phenomenon that will continue to occur in the absence of rigorous scholarly investigation and empirical analysis. Meanwhile, many prominent theorists appear to be ignoring what is perhaps the most significant occurrence in the discipline of criminology in decades (Tonry, 2014). Therefore, it is perhaps time for criminological discourse to evolve from the dogma of traditional theories of crime to explore the widespread decline of crime since the 1990's and the proliferation of crime in the 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's. Indeed, the crime drop has created trends and patterns that are incompatible with traditional theoretical explanations of crime (Barker, 2010). The rise and fall of crime in Abbotsford and

beyond is one of the most pertinent questions in contemporary criminology and criminal justice and one that should continue to be investigated in future research.

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