Challenges Associated with Interpreting and Using Police Clearance Rates

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Introduction

Police-reported crime statistics include frequency of criminal incidents, the severity of incidents, and the solve rate of incidents (Statistics Canada, 2011). These statistics are collected nationally on a monthly basis from over 1,200 different police departments in Canada, and are used to determine the overall crime and clearance rates annually reported to the public in a Statistics Canada document describing trends on a national, provincial, and, at times, municipal basis (Statistics Canada, 2011; Wallace, 2009).

Police-reported crime statistics are collected for Statistics Canada by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS) through the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Surveys (Wallace, 2009). One survey collects aggregate data, while the other collects incident-based data; specifically, incident and offender characteristics (Statistics Canada, 2003). Importantly, when a single criminal event involves multiple offences (e.g. an intoxicated person who committed an assault in public is found to be holding a small amount of marijuana), the aggregate UCR collects data on only the most serious incident (the assault)[1]; therefore, the national statistics on crime represents only a portion of the total amount of crime. While the UCR Incident-Based Survey records additional incidents (although detailed information pertaining to the additional offences is not reported), there is a maximum of four violations allowed recorded per incident, meaning that undercounting of criminal incidents occurs (Wallace, Turner, Matarrazo, & Babyak, 2009). Furthermore, data reported to CCJS does not reflect all activities of police, as many calls for service are based on violations of provincial (e.g. *Mental Health Act*) or municipal (e.g. bylaw issues) legislation.

UCR-based data is further limited in that it does not reflect the dark figure of crime, i.e. the amount of crime not detected, reported to, or recorded by police, nor does it reflect unfounded (crimes that were reported but which did not actually occur) or unsubstantiated (crimes that were reported but police determine there is no evidence to support that an offence occurred) crimes. These offences are not reflected in UCR data, and, therefore, are not factored into crime and clearance rates (Statistics Canada, 2011; Wallace et al., 2009). Instead, UCR data only consists of crimes that have been reported and substantiated by police. Despite these restrictions and limitations, these official statistics are commonly used by policy makers, academics/researchers, and the general public to draw inferences about the effectiveness of various police forces at deterring, investigating, and solving crime, and inform the public about the quantity and nature of crime (Hollins, 2007).

Crime rates are calculated by dividing the number of criminal incidents in a given time period (often the past year) by a given population number (often 100,000 for national statistics or 1,000 for provincial). Thus, the crime rate theoretically allows for meaningful comparisons to be drawn between jurisdictions as the size of the population is controlled. However, using crime rates for this purpose should be done with caution, given the limitations on the types of data included.

Similarly, clearance rates are calculated by dividing the number of solved crimes by the total number of crimes. Theoretically, clearance rates measure the effectiveness of a police force at

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[1] There are some exceptions to this rule, such as when a Criminal Code traffic offence and non-traffic offence simultaneously occur (e.g. an impaired driver with a weapon). In these instances, the most serious traffic offence and most serious non-traffic offence are both reported.

investigating and successfully solving crimes. According to Statistics Canada, crimes are "solved" when police have sufficient evidence to charge an individual with the offence. These solved offences can then be cleared through a charge or cleared "otherwise", meaning that police had sufficient grounds to lay charges, but proceeded in some other way, such as by diverting the chargeable suspect. These two forms of solving crime are factored into the clearance rate, which, prior to 2009, was calculated by dividing the total number of calls successfully cleared by the total number of known incidents.

The remaining offences not cleared may be left as founded uncleared in that there is evidence that a crime occurred, but not enough evidence to identify a chargeable suspect. Alternatively, the offence may be unfounded or unsubstantiated but, as previously noted, these latter two offence types will not be factored into the crime or clearance rates, as there is insufficient evidence that a crime actually occurred. Calls for service can also be scored as involving assistance, information, or prevention; similar to unfounded or unsubstantiated calls, these do not involve reportable offences and so are not factored into crime or clearance rates. With these non-reportable exceptions to police calls for service, founded uncleared crimes represent the overall number of reportable crimes unsolved by police.

Recently, changes have occurred to both crime and clearance rate calculations to factor in the severity of crimes cleared by police. This is a very important change because, previously, crime rates would be dominated by high volume, but relatively minor crimes. For example, a decrease in the number of thefts under $5,000 could have the effect of decreasing the overall crime rate when more serious crimes, such as assaults, were increasing (Wallace et al., 2009). Thus, in 2009, the Crime Severity Index was introduced so that offences were weighted based on their seriousness.

Similarly, since 2009, clearance rates have also been calculated using a weighting formula that assigns more weight to more serious offences (Wallace et al., 2009). As a result of this weighting system, a national weighted clearance rate of 38% does not mean that police solved 38 out of every 100 recorded crimes. Clearance rate statistics today are therefore not straightforward reflections of how many incidents were cleared relative to how many occurred, making it more difficult to use these statistics for comparative purposes. However, as will be argued below, even prior to the introduction of the weighted clearance rate, using clearance rate data for comparative purposes was problematic for other reasons.

Uses of Crime and Clearance Rate Data

Crime and clearance rate statistics are frequently used at the police department level by the department's crime analysts to determine hot spots for crime and recent crime trends. This data is provided to senior leaders for a wide range of decision making practices associated to department policies and practices. These statistics are also used by academics/researchers and special interest groups studying particular crime trends, and by politicians when making decisions about the resourcing needs of local police. This information may also be used by members of the public when deciding where to live or open a business. Importantly, as previously mentioned, these statistics have been used as performance indicators for individual police departments, as well as to compare jurisdictions on efficiencies in policing and solving crime (Hollins, 2007). However, for reasons to be explored in this report, the use of crime and clearance rate data should be used with extreme

caution as these statistics are often a misrepresentation of the actual nature and quantity of crime in a jurisdiction. Using the results of a study on file processing in British Columbia, this report will demonstrate that due to inconsistencies in file processing, using crime and clearance rate statistics to compare police departments is fraught with challenges. To begin, this report provides a brief overview of the process of file creation and assignment of UCR and clearance codes typically followed by police departments

Calls for Service and File Scoring Processes

Calls for service are typically received by dispatch (although some calls may be taken by front counter personnel or directly by a police officer) who generate a Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) call and assign an initial CAD call type to describe the general nature of the call. The call is then entered into the CAD system where it is placed in a call queue[2] and responded to by a general duty member[3] based on its assigned priority level, with priority one calls (e.g. threats to the person) receiving immediate response by police, while priority four calls are those where police attendance is not required.

Once a member has responded to the call, a general occurrence (GO) file is typically created and the call is assigned an initial UCR incident category.[4] UCR codes are assigned based on whether the incident involves *Criminal Code of Canada* offences (e.g. codes in the 1000 series are assigned for crimes against the person, while the 2000 series is used for offences against property), non-*Criminal Code* provincial legislation violations (e.g. a 7000 series code), or a UCR Statistic and Survey Code, which includes non-*Criminal Code* violations (e.g. a municipal bylaw; this code category is often referred to as an 8000 series code).

By reviewing the CAD call type and basic description of the incident provided by dispatch, a member is informed of the general nature of the offence they will be attending. However, upon arriving at the scene, the member may determine that the nature of the call is different than what was described to or interpreted by dispatch, and through their selection of the appropriate UCR category, the incident category of the call should be changed. For instance, a member may have been dispatched to an "assault" in progress, but upon arriving at the scene, they may determine that a mutual fight broke out between two people on the street. Given this, the call should receive the UCR code relating to "causing a disturbance". At this point, some files may be concluded in the CAD, meaning that a GO file is not generated and the call will not be reflected in the agency's Record Management System (RMS) and the CCJS will not receive any statistics relating to it. These calls tend to involve issues that are non-criminal or unfounded/unsubstantiated, such as a false alarm or a false 911 call from a cell phone.[5]

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[2] Some calls may be concluded by dispatch or front desk personnel, such as a report of an alarm that is cancelled and not responded to by police.

[3] While independent police agencies refer to their police staff as "officers", Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) are referred to as members. For the purposes of the current report, all sworn police officers will be referred to as "members".

[4] Some minor calls do not result in GO files being created as they can be concluded in the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system.

[5] While the types of calls concluded in the CAD appear to vary by police agency, it is important to note that quality control personnel should review all files concluded in the CAD and create General Occurrence files

Assignment of the appropriate incident code is important at these early stages as any call that receives a *Criminal Code* UCR score will be pulled by Statistics Canada during the monthly reporting of statistics. Therefore, if a member fails to change what was originally coded as a provincial/municipal act, but was a *Criminal Code* offence, the crime rate will be underestimated. Likewise, if a *Criminal Code* offence is determined to be a provincial/municipal act, the crime rate will be overestimated. Accuracy is important at this early stage; if the member assigns the wrong UCR code (e.g. a Break and Enter – Business instead of a Break and Enter – Residential) while the overall property crime rate will be calculated accurately, the specific types of property crime will not be.[6] Inaccuracy may also happen by assigning the wrong UCR code series, such as when a violent offence (e.g. robbery) is coded using the property offence series (e.g. theft), meaning that both violent and property crime rate statistics will be inaccurate.

Once the member has attended the scene and conducted their investigation, they are expected to complete the GO file by entering in relevant descriptive data, including entity data (e.g. characteristics of the complainant, subject of complaint, witness), other carded entities (e.g. license plate of a reported stolen vehicle), and a synopsis or a summary description of what occurred. The synopsis typically includes the "what, where, when, why, who, and how" of the offence. Essentially, a synopsis should provide sufficient description that anyone reading the file can conclude whether an incident occurred, who may have been responsible, and what the response to that person was (e.g. recommended charges or if not, why not). Alternatively, if the member arrives at the scene and there is no evidence that a crime occurred or the complainant reports that they made a mistake, the file will be updated to reflect that the offence was unsubstantiated or unfounded and no further investigation will be conducted. Moreover, statistics on these calls will not be reported to Statistics Canada as no offence occurred.

Jurisdictions operate different policies regarding the "concluding" of files. Once the general duty investigator has completed their file, in some departments, they may change the CCJS clearance status directly, whereas other departments leave this score to be changed at higher levels. Generally, the default CCJS status field code in the system is B, which indicates that a crime has been founded, but not cleared. Once the member has completed their investigation, they may change this field to indicate that charges have been recommended or that the suspect was chargeable, but that the member proceeded in another manner, such as diversion (see Table 1 for the various clearance status codes). In these two situations, the incident is founded-cleared (by code C or by D through R) as the crime has essentially been solved. In other situations, such as when there is evidence that an offence occurred, but witnesses/victims are not cooperating and there is insufficient evidence for

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wherever necessary so that all relevant data is sent to CCJS. However, this is an issue in need of further study given the apparent different policies and practices employed by municipal and RCMP police agencies, as well as between RCMP detachments themselves. This is critical because it is possible to substantially influence the crime rate by clearing calls in the CAD that should be reported to Statistics Canada.

[6] As noted below, if a UCR code was later determined to be assigned inaccurately and updated to reflect the correct incident category, an update will be sent to Statistics Canada and the statistics will reflect a more accurate picture. However, there are often significant delays in reviewing these files. As a result, accurate statistics may not be available from Statistics Canada for months. Furthermore, while an update may improve the accuracy of a previous months statistics, the new statistics being reported may contain new inaccurate data that has not yet been subjected to quality control reviews. Therefore, accuracy is extremely important in the early stages of scoring a file to provide Statistics Canada with the most accurate data possible.

charges, the member may leave the field code as "B" to indicate that, for the time being, the incident was founded, but uncleared. Any of these clearance categories will be factored into the clearance rate. However, if it was determined that no crime occurred or there was a lack of evidence to support that a crime occurred, the incident should be coded as unfounded or unsubstantiated. In these cases, the incident will not be factored into the crime or clearance rate.

Table 1: Common CCJS Status Codes used by RCMP

Code	Translation
1[7]	Information (use with ZZZ-code)
2	Prevention (use with ZZZ-code)
3	Assistance (use with ZZZ-code)
4	Unsubstantiated (use with ZZZ-code)
A	Unfounded
B	Founded not Cleared
C	Charged
D	Suicide of Accused
E	Death of Accused (not suicide)
F	Death of Complainant or Witness
G	Reason beyond Police Control
H	Diplomatic Immunity
I	Accused Less than 12 Years Old
J	Accused Committed to Mental Institution
K	Accused Out of Country
L	Complainant Won't Lay Charges
M	Accused Involved in Other Incident
N	Accused Already in Jail
O	Departmental Discretion
R	Alternative Measure

Again, the default setting in PRIME is to code the CCJS status field as "B" to indicate that a crime was founded, but not yet cleared. This is important as the box indicating whether a crime is reportable to Statistics Canada is tied directly to the primary UCR code recorded. Thus, if a member enters a UCR code that is reportable to Statistics Canada, but does not enter update the CCJS status field from B, the file will be sent to Statistics Canada reflecting that an offence has occurred, but has not been solved, thereby contributing to a higher crime rate, but a lower clearance rate.

Once the front-line member has completed their work on the file it is forwarded to their supervisor/watch commander/watch clerk for review. One of the main purposes of this stage is for supervisors to review the nature and quality of the investigation and to determine whether the

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[7] Codes 1 through 4 are RCMP specific codes

member did everything they could to solve the incident. Additionally, this review stage can ensure that the file was appropriately documented (i.e. all entity information has been provided, all detail pages have been completed, and there is an adequate synopsis written) and scored (i.e. the correct UCR has been assigned and, in some departments, that the correct clearance status has been entered). Should the supervisor feel that the file has been insufficiently investigated, inaccurately scored, and/or insufficiently documented, they send the file back to the member for further investigation or work. Once the supervisor feels that the file has been adequately investigated, documented, and scored, it is sent into a quality control queue for a final review.

In some larger jurisdictions, quality control can involve a variety of record and reader personnel who are responsible for mundane/routine (records) and serious/complex (reader) files. In smaller jurisdictions, there may only be a records person, while, in others, a senior leader may do this work. The overall purpose of quality control is to review whether the elements of the offence have been met (i.e. that an alleged offence has been properly documented) and whether appropriate UCR and clearance scores have been assigned.

Given these responsibilities, and the fact that quality control personnel tend to be civilians who are not involved in any on the ground police work, it is essential that the file be adequately described and documented to allow for quality control to correctly ascertain the nature of the file (UCR code) and its current status (clearance code). If a file has not been sufficiently described or documented, quality control may return the file to the supervisor or member for further work. Quality control may also question the nature and quality of investigation; however, this is likely less common when quality control personnel are staffed by civilians with no investigative experience, and is also less likely to occur than files being sent back for accuracy purposes given that one of the main reasons supervisors review files is for investigational quality. At this stage of file work, quality control may reassign the UCR and/or clearance code based on their review of the file, and once their review is complete, the file is essentially concluded, with the exception of uncleared files that may have their clearance status changed in the future.

It is important to qualify that while there are many quality control steps to ensure the accuracy of UCR and clearance codes, there is an immediate issue that leads to concerns regarding accuracy of these statistics. Given the number of steps involved in processing a file and the potential for a file to be returned for further investigation/elaboration, a file may be open for a substantial period of time before quality control completes its final reading and scoring of a file. In the meantime, CCJS will pull data on these open files each month. Thus, incorrect scoring at an early stage will result in inaccurate crime and clearance rate statistics. Further, inaccurate clearance rate statistics will more likely occur in departments where members are not permitted to change clearance codes as it may take weeks or months before a cleared file is actually scored as cleared. Thus, variations in department policies and practices may have important influences on the accuracy of crime and clearance rate statistics. Given this, it is important to be cautious when using crime and clearance rate statistics to compare the efficiencies of police departments. However, based on the authors' experience in researching police issues, a number of other potential issues were identified that may lead to problems in using such statistics. Thus, the current study involved an investigation into file scoring with a view of describing the various issues inherent to using crime and clearance rate statistics.

Current Study

The Centre for Public Safety and Criminal Justice Research (CPSCJR) in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of the Fraser Valley designed a qualitative interview study on file scoring involving police departments in British Columbia. As this project originated through discussions with the RCMP, the majority of interviews were conducted with RCMP members. However, interviews were also sought with four municipal forces in order to reflect potentially differing practices in the recording of crime and clearance rates. Unfortunately, given the project timelines, only two of these agencies were able to participate in the current study; therefore, future research should ensure greater representation of independent forces to better identify any relevant differences in regards to file scoring. In addition, although this project sought to connect with representatives from each RCMP district (Island, Lower Mainland, North, and Southeast), no interviews occurred with Island RCMP and a limited number occurred in the Southeast region. Again, future research should secure additional participation from these jurisdictions to determine whether there are important variations in call and clearance rate processing.

Overall, representatives from eight RCMP and two municipal departments participated in the interviews. All interviews addressed similar potential file scoring issues, although the specific questions varied slightly due to the respondent's nature of responsibility with file scoring. Overall, 36 interviews were conducted with general duty members (n = 9), supervisors (n = 7), records/readers/quality control (n = 13), and senior leaders (n = 7).[8] As policing in British Columbia has undergone civilianization of some positions, interviews were conducted with both sworn members and civilian employees. All general duty, supervisor, and senior leader interviews involved sworn members, while the quality control interviews involved a mix of sworn members and civilian employees.

The semi-structured interviews took between 45 minutes and several hours to complete, depending on the nature of the person's involvement in file scoring. Researchers with the CPSCJR conducted the interviews. To obtain copies of the interviews used in this study, please contact the first author. All interviews and research processes were approved by the University of the Fraser Valley Research Ethics Board prior to study implementation.

Overview of Policing in British Columbia and Crime and Clearance Statistics

RCMP provide the bulk of policing in British Columbia as they are the provincial police force; therefore, they are responsible for the municipal policing of over 100 jurisdictions ranging from populations of less than 5,000 to over 100,000 (Police Services, 2011a). However, 11 jurisdictions (Abbotsford, Central Saanich, Delta, Nelson, New Westminster, Oak Bay, Port Moody, Saanich, Vancouver, Victoria, and West Vancouver) are governed by independent municipal police forces, and one additional municipality is policed by First Nations policing (Police Services, 2011a; Police Resources in Canada, 2009).

Typically, British Columbia has recorded a higher crime rate than the rest of Canada. In 2009, the overall crime rate in British Columbia was 90.1 offences per 1,000 people compared to a national

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[8] Some interviews were conducted with dispatch/front counter personnel; however, there were not a sufficient number of these interviews for the data to be included in this report.

crime rate of 64.1 offences per 1,000 people (Police Services, 2011b). Although generally higher than the national average, the crime rate in British Columbia has been declining for the past several years (Police Services, 2011b). The bulk of the crimes composing the crime rate in 2009 were property offences (61%); given the decline of nearly 8% in property crimes between 2008 and 2009, this accounts for the decline in the non-weighted crime rate. The remaining crimes were violent offences (19%), and "other" offences (20%) (Police Services, 2011b). The violent crime rate was 16.7 per 1,000 in 2009, which represented a decrease of 1.2% from the previous year (Police Services, 2011b). Thus, the Crime Severity Index, which represents a weighted crime rate, has also declined in British Columbia; however, the general CSI is still 27% higher in British Columbia (CSI of 110) than the rest of Canada (87). More specifically, the violent CSI was 17% higher in British Columbia (110) than nationally (94), and the non-violent CSI was 31% higher (111 versus 85 nationally) (Police Services, 2011b).

As previously noted, offences are "cleared" when police have identified a suspect and have enough evidence to support charges. In British Columbia, in 2009, 27.5% of all *Criminal Code* offences were cleared, with a little over one-quarter either cleared by charge (14.6%) or cleared otherwise (12.9%) (Police Services, 2011b). Similar to the crime rate in British Columbia, the overall clearance rate is lower than the national average, where nearly half (41%) of all *Criminal Code* offences were reported cleared in 2009. In British Columbia, the highest clearance rates by category occurred for drug offences (68%), followed by violent offences (52%) and other offences (46%), whereas only 13% of property offences were cleared (Police Services, 2011b). Property offences were also the least likely to be cleared by charge (7%), whereas more violent offences (34%), drug offences (27%), and other offences (20%) were cleared by charge (Police Services, 2011b). Overall, across British Columbia, in 2008, the weighted clearance rate ranged from a low of 10.8 in Oak Bay to a high of 47.4 in Merritt (Beattie, 2009). It is important to note that this data is based on the UCR 2 Survey scoring rules so only the most serious violation of a criminal incident was reported (Police Services, 2011b). Regardless, using this same data source to compare to the rest of Canada, British Columbia experienced a higher crime rate, a higher crime severity index, and a lower clearance rate.

Relevant crime and clearance statistics for departments participating in the current study are reproduced in Table 2. The Crime Severity Index reflects the overall severity of crime in each jurisdiction. The Weighted Clearance Rates reflect the proportion of crimes solved (through charge or otherwise) relative to the proportion of crimes occurring, considering the severity of solved crimes. The Crime Rate data represents the total number of *Criminal Code of Canada* offences, excluding drugs and traffic offences that were reported in the calendar year divided by a representative population number of 1,000 to account for population size. However, in terms of police capacity to investigate, case load is a better indicator than crime rate or population size as it refers to the number of *Criminal Code of Canada* offences recorded per authorized police strength; thus, this data is also included in the table.

Table 2: Breakdown of Policing in British Columbia in 2009

Police Force	Type of Force	Approximate Population [1]	RCMP Jurisdiction[2]	Crime Severity Index [1]	Crime Rate	Case Load	Weighted Clearance Rate[1]
Delta	Municipal	100,000+	Independent	75.6	66	40	24.2
Victoria	Municipal	100,000+	Independent	168.2	132	55	18.0
Burnaby	RCMP	100,000+	Lower Mainland	119.4	82	66	16.8
White Rock	RCMP	15,000-49,999	Lower Mainland	74.4	62	51	19.6
Surrey	RCMP	100,000+	Lower Mainland	144.7	99	76	20.8
Kelowna	RCMP	100,000+	Southeast	143.9	123	96	28.0
Logan Lake[9]	RCMP	< 5,000	Southeast	No data available	64	60	No data available
Quesnel	RCMP	5,000-14,999	North	246.3	246	114	32.4
Williams Lake	RCMP	5,000-14,999	North	348.1	252	117	28.4
Prince George	RCMP	50,000-99,999	North	158.7	162	94	35.1
1 Statistics Obtained from Beattie, 2009							
2 Statistics Obtained from Police Services, 2011a							

Main Findings

Prior to developing the interviews, the CPSCJR held several lengthy meetings with representatives from the RCMP to clarify the processing of calls for service and identify potential issues within those processes relating to file scoring (i.e. assigning UCR and clearance codes). The main issues identified were: a) Classification Issues (differences in assigning UCR codes to incidents); b) Denominator Issues (alternative methods of dealing with offences that may result in incidents not being recorded in crime and/or clearance statistics, and concluding files in the CAD); c) Resourcing

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[9] Note: the 2009 Police Resources in Canada document does not reflect RCMP jurisdictions with a population under 5,000 so some statistics are not available for this jurisdiction.

and Capacity Issues (the capacity to conduct investigations and deployment of resources); d) Use of Different Systems (some incidents may be recorded in systems other than PRIME); e) Business Processes (differing file review and/or auditing processes); f) Training (at each level of personnel involved in UCR/clearance code scoring); g) Client Expectations (what is treated as a crime and whether police or alternative agencies respond may vary depending on jurisdiction); h) Use of Clearance Designations (may differ depending on departmental policies); and i) Bulk Filing (incorporating high volume offences into a single file). From the interview data, it was determined that some of these anticipated issues would not influence the crime/clearance rate; therefore, these issues are not discussed in this report.[10] The remaining issues are explained in more detail below with a focus on their potential influence over file scoring and subsequent crime and clearance rate calculations.

Classification and Scoring Issues

One anticipated issue with file scoring involved the potentially different interpretation of scoring rules used to assign UCR codes to calls for service and clearance codes. With regards to assigning UCR codes, an incident could receive one of several different UCR codes (e.g. lost property versus a theft) depending on the type and amount of description provided in the file or the department's interpretation of how certain files should be scored, according to the guidelines provided to them by Statistics Canada. With regards to clearance codes, although there are clear descriptions regarding clearance categories, it was anticipated that departments might differ on their use of these codes in different situations. From the various interviews conducted, it was apparent that the classification issue was characterized by two related overarching problems; mistakes in scoring and inadequate file documentation/description.

MISTAKES IN SCORING

Mistakes in file scoring can occur with respect to both UCR and clearance codes. While these mistakes may occur at any level of personnel, the researchers anticipated that they would more commonly occur at the general duty level, where the initial codes would be assigned.

Mistakes in UCR Scoring

Assigning UCR codes was reported to be a somewhat subjective process, as the "appropriate" UCR code will depend on the quality of information in the file, as well as the interpretation of that information by the person reviewing the file. Respondents were asked to report the sources behind inaccurate UCR scoring, how often they found mistakes in scoring UCR codes, how often UCR file scoring was changed, and the manner in which the UCR scoring was changed.

UCR scoring mistakes were made for a variety of reasons. One initial reason is that front-line/general duty members do not actually have access to the full list of UCR codes when working on their mobile data terminal (MDT) in their vehicle. While they do have access to the full list of codes on the office terminals, members commonly work on their files while on the road. In a way

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[10] Additional details on these issues and why they were determined to not influence crime/clearance rate statistics can be obtained from the first author.

then, members are forced into making mistakes, as they do not always have the right code available to them. However, for most incidents, there are a sufficient number of codes available on the MDT that the member can code the incident fairly accurately.

A related problem is that the UCR drop-down/pick list on the MDT is organized alphabetically and members who are scanning the list for the appropriate code may pick an inaccurate category based on what description comes up first. In fact, this can happen even if the member searches the list for the appropriate code. For instance, when responding to a break and enter of a house, members may search the list for "break and enter". Given that they are often trying to complete their files quickly, they may pick the first break and enter that appears on the list. However, the first break and enter category applies to businesses, rather than homes. If a member does not check the full description of the offence, they may assign the wrong UCR code. Although they are at least still in the ballpark with recording the incident as a property offence, an unanticipated outcome of this practice is the potential perception that a crime wave related to break and enters in businesses is occurring. Depending on the length of time required to rectify this inaccurate score (i.e. through quality control reviews), these statistics may be used to inform detachment-level practices and could lead to inappropriate strategies being developed, such as those targeting break and enters of businesses. Similarly, impaired driving of a boat appears prior to impaired driving of a vehicle in the pick list, so members may pick the wrong code if they are not familiar with the actual UCR code or if they do not fully read the category; until these statistics are rectified at a later stage of review, police may be uninformed that there is actually an ongoing problem with impaired driving in their jurisdiction and may miss an opportunity to develop and implement a much needed crime-specific targeted strategy.

Another related issue is when members cannot or do not take the time to consider what the best code might be, but pick a generic "catch-all" category, such as unspecified assistance, assist general public, or suspicious person/vehicle/occurrence to describe the file. Although the incident may actually involve an offence, until quality control reviews the file, the event will not be coded as an offence and CCJS data will reflect a lower crime rate as these generic categories are not reportable offences to Statistics Canada. This can have a detrimental effect on resourcing as a jurisdiction may appear less in need of additional officers when the crime rate is low, as well as on those using the data for policy, practice, or research purposes, including crime analysts, senior leaders, academics/researchers, and the general public.

Another reason for incorrect UCR scoring at this level is that the pick list contains a mix of RCMP and municipal codes that cannot be used by the other type of agency. During the interviews, general duty members and quality control personnel both complained that, at times, the most appropriate code presented to them in the UCR pick list was a code they could not use based on the type of agency they worked for. Although general duty in the RCMP are prohibited from selecting municipal-only options, they would sometimes do so as the code was more appropriate to their call than the RCMP codes, and vice versa. While quality control knows better than to pick a code they cannot legitimately use, they reported that they were sometimes forced to use a range of less appropriate codes to adequately describe the file when using a single code from the other type of agency would have provided a much more concise and accurate description.

Unfortunately, another explanation for the tendency for files to be scored inaccurately at this stage is the attitude of general duty and supervisors towards the importance of file scoring. At both the general duty and supervisor levels, accuracy of file scoring was not reported to be a priority, though these positions similarly perceived that accuracy would and should be extremely important to those working in quality control. Quality control similarly reported that general duty and supervisors did not appear to prioritize accuracy; specifically, general duty members were picking whichever codes were quick and easy (e.g. using assist general public instead of robbery) and that, as a result, nearly every file subsequently needed corrections, which also indicated that supervisors were not identifying and fixing incorrectly scored files. This kind of erroneous scoring, as well as insufficient synopsis information, produces quality control backlogs, generally around six to eight weeks in larger departments, and results in inaccurate statistics being sent to CCJS and used by crime analysts within the department.

Part of this attitude stems from the fact that these positions were aware that quality control will fix the file. Further, members/supervisors are often busy responding to calls for service and see protecting public safety as their priority, not data entry or report writing. Quality control echoed this concern, acknowledging that members do not have the time or the training to ensure that their files were 100% correctly scored; however, they also suggested that taking a few minutes at the end of each call whenever possible to at least attempt to score the UCR accurately and to write up a file sufficiently would help ensure Statistics Canada data is relatively accurate, and would also help speed up the overall file review process. However, for scoring accuracy to be given greater priority by the members, it is essential that supervisors and other senior leaders first begin vocally prioritizing accuracy of scoring. Thus, supervisors' attitudes towards file accuracy were a contributing factor to general duty's lack of concern for file scoring accuracy.

A final reason why mistakes may occur in file scoring at this stage is that general duty members may intentionally try to downscore the seriousness of a file by recording a non-*Criminal Code* UCR code (i.e. an 8000 series code, such as unspecified assistance) when the incident actually involved a *Criminal Code* offence (e.g. such as assault). This may be done in an attempt to reduce the amount of work needed on a file or to get rid of an error message that prevents a file from being submitted. For instance, an assault file is a *Criminal Code* offence that requires additional documentation, such as completion of a victim's page. By scoring this offence as an unspecified assistance, breach of the peace, or other non-offence, the data will not be pulled by Statistics Canada and less information needs to be included in the file for it to be viewed as complete. Downscoring can help members close files more quickly when they are busy and do not have time to investigate further. In addition, downscoring could occur when a member is otherwise unable to clear a file; by changing the scoring to a non-reportable offence, they avoid having a negative effect on their clearance rate when they lack sufficient evidence for the crime to be cleared through charges or otherwise.

Some supervisors attributed the potential for downscoring to the effects of PRIME policy. In fact, the complexity of PRIME is an important reason why mistakes occur in file scoring. Quality control and supervisors were asked whether they believed it was more or less difficult to score files than in the past and, overall, respondents tended to suggest that it was more difficult today because the PRIME system used in British Columbia is much more complex than PIRS, with many more scoring options, rules, and detail pages, and subsequently more room for hidden errors. This complexity

may push general duty members to downscore files to avoid the additional paperwork required by PRIME policy for *Criminal Code* offences like domestic assault and impaired driving. Similarly, some senior leaders also suggested that members might be motivated to reduce the severity of their files (e.g. coding a trespass at night as a suspicious person/vehicle occurrence, or coding a gang fight with weapons as a disturbance call) in order to avoid having to complete the multiple layers of details required by certain criminal offences on PRIME. Of note, a few quality control interviewees believed it was easier to score on PRIME, as there were more fields and specific UCR codes available now. Thus, while the system is much more complex in British Columbia than in other provinces, it may also lead to more informative statistics as more details appear to be collected than in PIRS. Yet, the complexity of the system could also lead to intentional downscoring of *Criminal Code* offences by general duty members.

Overall, interviews with general duty members suggested that they do not downscore intentionally and that if this practice does occur, it could be attributed to a lack of understanding of UCR scoring, rather than an attempt to reduce work. In fact, downscoring would likely be caught at the supervisor or quality control level and the member would need to complete the additional work anyways. That said, it is possible that if an offence was downscored, by the time quality control reviewed the file and sent it back for further investigation, the expiry date in regards to laying a charge for the incident may have passed and no further work could be conducted on the file. Thus, although it is likely to be caught at or before quality control, general duty members may still employ downscoring, and future research should more objectively review the nature of file coding at this level to determine whether it appears to occur more often by certain members or within certain departments. This issue is an important one to address because downscoring may actually make a jurisdiction appear as though additional resources are not needed as substantial downscoring could reduce the crime rate in a jurisdiction.

Not surprisingly, given the identified issues with UCR scoring mistakes, quality control generally reported that they changed members' UCR scoring on a daily basis; however, there was a wide range of overall proportions of files needing changes. Two respondents estimated changing approximately 10% of files, one reported approximately one-third, three reported changing half, while five reported changing between 75% and 90%. Supervisors reported changing UCR codes less frequently, with estimates ranging from 5% of files to around one-third to one-half of files. Other than the intensity of a file review based on position, one reason for this differentiation may be the nature of the call, as it was anticipated that some calls would be more difficult to score than others.

Mistakes in Clearance Scoring
Based on previous research (Hollins, 2007), it was expected that mistakes in file scoring specific to clearance codes might result from an inconsistent use of the "cleared otherwise" designation. Cleared otherwise should be used when, rather than laying charges against a chargeable suspect, another process is followed, such as diversion. Cleared otherwise can also be used to clear files when, for example, there is evidence that a person committed 15 robberies, but, as they were already sentenced for five of them, charges may not be pursued for the remaining 10; however, the remaining files may be cleared as they have essentially been "solved". Another example of cleared

otherwise is when there is evidence to support a charge but charges cannot be laid, for instance, due to death of the suspect or lack of support from the victim/complainant. In effect, cleared otherwise should only be used when there is an identifiable and chargeable suspect, but the police process the suspect through means other than a charge. However, cleared otherwise may be used inappropriately, such as to deal with offences that cannot otherwise be cleared due to lack of sufficient evidence. Such use may occur at the general duty/supervisor level, and may be perpetuated by quality control through inconsistent policies regarding what files can be cleared "otherwise". Alternatively, the use of cleared otherwise may occur much more frequently in some departments than others, given department policy on the type of files or situations it may apply to. For example, in previous research, Hollins (2007) found that cleared otherwise designations of certain offences varied widely, with a range of approximately 5% to 24% of disturbing the peace offences cleared this way in various RCMP detachments.

In fact, there appeared to be no clear-cut policy on when or how to use cleared otherwise designations. Thus, several years following Hollins' (2007) finding of inconsistent knowledge and use of cleared otherwise designations, this issue persists. Departments generally have policies regarding when cleared otherwise should be used, but these vary by department. In some locations, cleared otherwise are used for a wide range of minor non-violent offences, such as false alarms, stolen cell phones, breaches, causing a disturbance, youth mischief, some theft offences, traffic files, and liquor act offences. In some departments, it was reported that minor assaults, domestic assaults, uttering threats, and harassment could also be cleared otherwise, while another department used cleared otherwise for borderline impaired drivers. Still others reported using this designation for violent/weapons offences where witnesses may be hostile and non-cooperative with the investigation making successful charges less likely. In effect, "cleared otherwise" appears to be used by these departments in any file where it was unlikely that charges would or could be pursued and to deal with heavy, but relatively non-serious file loads, as these calls can be quickly cleared without further use of limited investigational resources. In contrast, two other departments used this designation only for files being diverted to alternative measures, and, therefore, did not use this clearance code very frequently. Interestingly, in one interview, a supervisor reported using the cleared otherwise designation for files that could not be substantiated, such as an impaired driver who was gone on arrival, or for files that did not meet all the elements necessary to be coded as a certain offence (e.g. UCR code is assault but the elements necessary for an assault are not present); these files should actually be scored as unsubstantiated and so scoring them as cleared otherwise actually contributes towards inaccurate crime and clearance rate statistics.

At a basic level, some departments only use cleared otherwise for diverted offences, whereas others use it for any offence that is relatively minor and, therefore, not worthy of pursuing charges or where pursuing the investigation is unlikely to be successful given uncooperative witnesses. Cleared otherwise is, therefore, being used inconsistently across departments and will contribute to inaccurate clearance rate statistics as it can inflate the clearance rate statistics in departments using it liberally. This issue needs further investigation and clearer policies must be developed detailing specifically when and for what types of offences it is appropriate to use cleared otherwise designations. Furthermore, future research should review this issue more objectively by investigating, through data analysis, the files of agencies with particularly high clearance rates. It is possible that such departments use this code to increase their clearance rates, and this is important

to control, if being used inappropriately, or at least to understand, among those who intend to compare police departments through the use of crime/clearance rate statistics.

Another issue with clearance rate file scoring is that, in some departments, general duty members are not permitted to change the CCJS status field. Thus, mistakes in clearance scoring may occur at this early stage as offences are left coded as "B" (founded – uncleared) until a supervisor or quality control reviewer updates the file. Given this, in these departments, erroneous clearance rate statistics will be reported to CCJS and will remain changed for a long period of time because general duty members cannot update the code.

Of note, an issue identified in Hollins (2007) and echoed in at least one interview in the current study involved the intentional misuse of "suspect chargeable" designations by investigators/quality control. This issue originated several years ago when Criminal Record Check requests began to become more routine, for instance, for employment or volunteer experience. Should an individual have been identified as a "suspect chargeable" or "subject of complaint" in a police file, this will show up on the results of a Criminal Record Check and may negatively affect the individual's ability to secure a placement. According to Hollins (2007), the general view that this policy was unfair for those involved in minor incidents, which he noted constituted the majority of criminal incidents, meant that investigators were less likely to "card" an individual using suspect terminology and may instead "card" them as an "other" individual related to the file. This has a direct effect on clearance rates, as a file can only be cleared when there is an identifiable suspect. While this theme was not directly questioned in the current study, it was raised in at least one interview and suggested that there may still be issues related to this policy at both the investigator and quality control levels. Future research should investigate this potential issue further.

The rate at which clearance codes were changed by quality control varied depending on whether the department permitted their members to "clear" their own files, with 100% of files being changed in departments that did not permit this. With respect to the mistaken use of cleared otherwise, quality control estimated that the CCJS status field was completed incorrectly (primarily due to lack of understanding by members regarding what criteria must be met for this designation) in approximately one-quarter of cleared otherwise files. Corrections to this would generally be made by quality control; still, given the tendency of queue lengths to be six to eight weeks long, approximately one-quarter of CCJS statistics on cleared otherwise offences will be inaccurate. Similar to UCR scoring, it was anticipated that certain files may be more likely to result in mistaken clearance coding simply based on the complexity of the offence.

Difficult Files to Score
It was expected that file scoring would be more difficult and, therefore, more likely to result in mistakes for some calls more than others. Respondents were asked what files they found the hardest to score. Overall, similarities were reported at each level of personnel, with continuing offences, serious offences that involve lengthy investigations, multiple offence files that must be linked (e.g. an impaired driver who has weapons and an outstanding warrant), and offences involving secondary survey codes being among the most difficult to score at many levels.

A consistent UCR scoring mistake that was identified at all levels of interviews was the overuse of generic code categories, specifically unspecified assistance, assist general public, and suspicious person/vehicle/occurrence. General duty reported using these codes frequently to deal with files where they were unsure of the appropriate UCR code. In effect, files that were not *Criminal Code* offences (e.g. municipal issues) were difficult to score and so were typically clustered into these generic categories, as they are "easy catch all" codes. This is important because these codes have been misused in the past to lower the crime rate by disguising offences as non-offences.

A 2003 policy restricted the use of these generic codes for some jurisdictions by introducing quotas, for instance, stipulating that no more than 5% of calls for service could be coded as unspecified assistance. Interestingly, Hollins (2007) noted that this policy actually had the effect of artificially *increasing* the crime rate, as thousands of these files were coded as Disturbing the Peace files, which is a reportable offence to Statistics Canada. Moreover, the clearance rate subsequently dropped dramatically for this category of offences as the majority of these files tended to go uncleared; however, this varied by detachment, with some detachments relying on cleared otherwise to effectively close the file. Hollins (2007) noted that a similar issue occurred with Common Assault, as this and Causing a Disturbance were used as a "dumping ground" for the otherwise restricted generic categories.

Given that these quotas still exist in many locations, quality control often continue to face the problem of needing to change the UCR score from a generic code to another category. This is problematic because rather than reducing the amount of inaccurate statistics, quotas can actually increase inaccurate statistics as calls that should be reflected as generic calls are being transformed into other calls to meet the rules. Of note, not all departments operated under a quota; however, for those who are intending to use crime/clearance rate statistics, it is important to be aware which departments have to meet this criteria in their statistics so they can be cautious about the interpretation of that data.

In terms of misusing these categories, respondents consistently suggested that this was unintentional; general duty members were unsure of what the proper code might be and so used a generic code in place of another UCR code. In some interviews, it was suggested that this misuse may be intentional, but not for the purposes of hiding crime; instead, general duty may use these codes to avoid having to complete the additional file details required when an incident will be sent to Statistics Canada. Of note, several respondents explained this practice as an effect of the complexity of PRIME, where the amount of time to complete a file is now five to six times greater than under the previous system of PIRS.

In addition, some general duty members identified "verbal domestic" files as difficult to assign a UCR score to, as members were unsure whether to code them as breaches of peace or causing a disturbance. Again, quality control also noted that these types of files were difficult to score and suggested that one must be familiar with the policy related to each type of incident to know which code applies. Specifically, breach of peace refers to an incident occurring indoors whereas causing a disturbance refers to similar incidents that occur outdoors. Knowing the distinction between these categories is quite important, as breach of peace is not a criminal offence, whereas causing a disturbance is. Thus, struggling with the correct interpretation of these files in the early stages can

cause crime rate inaccuracies as the file may not be properly scored until it reaches quality control, which may not occur until six to eight weeks after the file was created.

Such files were also noted to be problematic for clearance scoring as they often are "he said-she said" files, making it difficult for members to determine whether an offence actually occurred and who the perpetrator was. Thus, they may be scored as unfounded/unsubstantiated if the member cannot find supporting evidence of an offence, or the file may be left as uncleared if an offence occurred, but the member is unable to collect sufficient evidence to identify a chargeable suspect. This problem was also noted by some quality control personnel; specifically, some files that were difficult to score for clearance purposes were any of the 1000 series codes (offences against the person, such as assaults, threats, and harassment files) where it could be difficult to find supporting evidence that an offence occurred, and where the amount of information required to fully substantiate the offence and to document/score it is greater than usual. Of note, Hollins (2007) reported that, in the past, difficulty in interpreting whether an offence occurred actually led to a bias towards over reporting certain crimes, such as Common Assault and Disturbing the Peace, to Statistics Canada, even when it was unclear if an offence had occurred. Given that there was a lack of evidence even to support an offence, these offences were less likely to be reported as cleared. Thus, lack of clarity on when an offence occurred can also contribute towards increased crime and decreased clearance rates.

An issue mentioned consistently at the quality control level were that newer offences, such as harassment using electronic devices or identity fraud/theft, were more difficult to score because of the complexity of rules surrounding them and the difficulty in proving that an offence occurred. Fraud was a consistently mentioned problematic file type given the complexity of rules surrounding it. These types of files should be investigated in future research to determine whether a reporting bias exists towards over reporting even when substantive evidence is lacking.

Several respondents, both at the supervisor level and in quality control, reported that any file would be difficult to score if it was missing the required documentation/description. In fact, this is the second major issue identified in relation to classification and scoring issues. Prior to discussing this second issue, a review of the ways in which file scoring mistakes are currently fixed is necessary.

Returning Files to Members/Supervisors
Although supervisors are supposed to change UCR/clearance scores when they have been scored incorrectly, most of the changes to file scoring appear to occur at the quality control level as supervisors appear to be only superficially reading the files, or reading them primarily for investigation rather than accuracy purposes. As such, when files were returned to general duty for further work, the work required tended to differ depending on whether the file was returned by a supervisor (more investigation needed) or quality control (more detail/elaboration needed).

Quality control repeatedly stated that they determine how to score the UCR and clearance code for a file by reading the provided descriptive text, but when information is missing or the text is non-descriptive, they cannot make the necessary decisions and may have to return the file to the member for more description. This becomes a major problem when supervisors believe their

members do not have the time to add details to files and refuse to send the file back. In addition, when queue lengths are long and the file is returned weeks after originally written, the member may be unable to provide further details. This can result in potential inaccuracy in UCR scoring, as quality control must then pick what they think is that the most appropriate UCR code.

Although quality control is supposed to return files that they need clarification or additional details for, they may not do so as they know from experience that the supervisor will not pass the file onto general duty for follow up or that too much time has already passed to change the clearance outcome. Therefore, the file may be left as founded – uncleared, contributing to lower clearance rate statistics, it may be left inaccurately scored as quality control does not anticipate getting more information, or the UCR may be inappropriately changed to reflect a lesser or non-offence.

Downscoring/Underscoring and Upscoring/Overscoring of UCR Codes
For the purposes of this report, underscoring refers to the inaccurate downgrading of a UCR category (e.g. to hide crime) whereas downscoring refers to the appropriate downgrading, such as when the offence was reported to be more serious than it appeared following investigation. Similarly, some files may be upscored or overscored. Again, this may be done for valid reasons, as files may be upscored to reflect a more serious offence than was originally reported to the call taker; however, a call may be inappropriately overscored by recording a more serious UCR code than the offence warrants.

An example of underscoring would be inappropriately changing an Assault to an Assist General Public offence, changing an Impaired Driving to a 24 Hour Suspension, or changing a Domestic Assault to a Breach of Peace. This practice is illegitimate when the member is using codes from the 8000 series (e.g. Breach of Peace, Unspecified Assistance) to deal with what should be a *Criminal Code* call for service as this data is not collected as part of the federal crime statistics by CCJS and could artificially reduce the overall crime rate or specifically hide certain types of calls. For instance, a department could be under public/government pressure to reduce Impaired Driving calls and could appear to be resolving this issue by scoring a proportion of their criminal Impaired Driving calls as 24 Hour Suspensions. In at least one department, this practice was acknowledged to have occurred by scoring Causing a Disturbance files as Bylaw-Noise Complaint intentionally to reduce the amount of recorded crime in the community. However, once it was made clear that reporting these statistics accurately would justify the hiring of more officers, the practice ended.

In contrast, one example of overscoring would involve changing a non-reportable offence to a reportable one. Another example would involve substantiating offences that really should have been coded as unsubstantiated due to lack of evidence. These practices may intentionally occur as a way to inflate crime rates and demonstrate the need for more resources. Another example of overscoring was reported by Hollins (2007), who noted that, in the past, overscoring was more likely to occur by coding already reportable offences (e.g. Common Assault) as more serious offences (e.g. Assault Causing Bodily Harm). Importantly, as today's crime and clearance rate statistics are both weighted based on severity, overscoring offences in this manner might have the negative effect of making crime appear more severe than it actually is, but also a positive effect in improving clearance rates, as solving more serious crimes contributes more towards clearance rates than solving less serious crimes.

As was suggested in the general duty interviews, rather than being done intentionally to inflate crime statistics, this practice may reflect uncertainty in interpreting Statistics Canada guidelines for reporting offences. Hollins (2007) noted that for "soft offences", such as those related to Disturbing the Peace, there tended to be wide variation in determining whether a crime had or had not actually occurred, and that the trend in recent years was to score this as an offence even if the evidence only suggested that an offence *may* have occurred, rather than treating this as an unsubstantiated file. This practice would have a detrimental effect on clearance rates through increasing the crime rate used to calculate clearance rates. Furthermore, reporting these offences contributes towards a reduced clearance rate as they are also the crimes less likely to be solved, as it is unclear whether an offence even occurred in the first place (Hollins, 2007). In addition to Disturbing the Peace, Hollins (2007) documented over reporting trends with respect to Common Assault and Other Theft Under $5,000 and noted that many of these files should have legitimately been "unsubstantiated" and therefore not reported to Statistics Canada.

It was anticipated by the researchers that both underscoring/downscoring and overscoring/upscoring may occur at the quality control level. While quality control did not perceive that the inappropriate practice of underscoring or overscoring occurred, downscoring and upscoring for valid reasons did occur. For instance, downscoring an offence from a crime to a non-crime or from a reported crime to an unsubstantiated file could result from the investigation. Another example of a legitimate downscore would be when a general duty member scores a file as an assault when the reading of the file suggests the incident was more mutual. In this situation, quality control will change the scoring to causing a disturbance (if the incident occurred in public) or breach of peace (if the incident occurred indoors); however, based on the interviews, it was reported that these kinds of changes rarely occurred.

Interestingly, quality control reported that when they changed the scoring on files, they tended to upscore rather than downscore as general duty members commonly used very generic codes for their files, such as unspecified assistance and assist general public. These codes needed to be changed for at least two reasons. First, many jurisdictions were working under a quota limit for the proportion of their calls that can be scored using these categories; thus, they needed to find more appropriate codes to describe them. Second, as previously mentioned, general duty tended to pick something convenient to describe their call that may not be an accurate description; therefore, quality control often needed to upscore these generic codes.

Further, rather than downscoring, quality control suggested that they make "sideways" changes to UCR scoring, implying that when general duty pick a criminal code for their file, quality control only needs to make the code more specific than completely different (e.g. changing from an Assault Causing Bodily Harm to an Assault with a Weapon as opposed to changing an Assault Causing Bodily Harm to a Causing a Disturbance). One example of files where this commonly occurs is on fraud calls where the legislation is quite complex and there is a wide range of fraud UCR codes available (e.g. fraud-other, fraud-credit card). Another example is when an unspecified assistance file is changed to a z-code file indicating that the incident was not substantiated; this change is actually lateral in nature as neither statistic would go to CCJS. Thus, the interview data suggested that intentionally underscoring or overscoring files to make the crime rate appear lower/higher is

not likely to occur. Still, more objective analysis of files is required to determine the extent to which this statement is true.

INADEQUATE DOCUMENTATION/DESCRIPTION

As noted in Hollins' (2007) report, a major contributing factor to mistakes in scoring is inadequate file documentation or description. Although members may score the UCR and clearance codes based on their experiences at the incident, these experiences must be replicated in writing in sufficient detail to allow supervisors or quality control to review the file and conclude that the scoring is accurate. Therefore, when a file reads "member attended to report of shoplifter at xyz, they issued a ban, member confirmed identification and left" there is insufficient detail to score the offence substantiated or to score clearance because, at a minimum, this synopsis has not demonstrated the elements of the offence and whether an offence actually occurred. The file should clearly and sufficiently describe whether there was evidence that the shoplifting did occur and could be attributed to the subject of complaint. If so, the crime will be founded and will factor into the crime and clearance rate; if not, the incident could be unfounded or unsubstantiated and will not factor into the crime and clearance rate. Therefore, a more detailed description that includes the "five Ws and the H" and the member's response will allow supervisors/quality control to review whether appropriate steps were taken and that the proper offence and clearance codes were assigned. Essentially, members need to take five to ten minutes at the end of each call to write a detailed summary of what transpired at the scene; even if the steps taken seem routine, they need to be documented in the file to assist those reviewing the files to accurately conclude them.

Consistent with what Hollins (2007) identified in his previous report, inadequate file description was noted to be a particular issue by quality control when the files involved more common and fairly minor UCR codes, including the generic codes of unspecified assistance, assist general public, and suspicious person/vehicle/occurrence. These types of files were perceived as difficult to score by quality control personnel due to the vagueness and lack of information commonly provided in the file given that less investigative effort is typically made towards such files. As another example, differentiating between causing a disturbance and breach of peace (and choosing when to use a z-code on such a file) is a common grey area for quality control given the lack of sufficient description provided in the file. These files were also provided as an example of the types of files that quality control tended not to send back for more investigation because more information typically is not available, especially if the file has been in the queue for a number of weeks and if general duty/supervisors do not see the value of spending limited resources on revisiting this type of call. When members leave the details vague and quality control does not see the value in returning it for further work, the file is open to subjective interpretation by quality control personnel that can result in inaccurate crime rate statistics. Vagueness in files may also result in lowered clearance rate statistics as they lack sufficient information to be cleared.

In addition to inadequate file synopses, files lacking supporting documentation were also identified as a major problem hindering the efficient processing of file scoring and file review. In addition to describing the five Ws and the H in the description, members also need to complete additional documentation, such as completing details pages when there are weapons involved and ensuring

any carded information (e.g. entity information regarding a stolen vehicle) is completed. The many steps required of members to fully document a file is a demonstration of the complexity of PRIME and why supervisors alleged that it took five to six times longer for their members to complete; furthermore, this was identified as directly contributing to inadequate documentation in files.

While inadequate description/documentation affects the scoring of UCR codes, it can have a particularly detrimental effect on the scoring of clearance codes in those jurisdictions where the general duty member is not permitted to change this status. In these jurisdictions, files may reach quality control with an "R" status, indicating that the member has generated a report or more likely a "B" status, indicating that the offence has been founded, but not cleared. After reviewing the text file and associated offence details, quality control will then change the CCJS status (the clearance status) field to one of the clearance options discussed earlier in this report; however, inadequate documentation means the file needs to be returned to the member before the CCJS status field can be updated.

The apparent reason for this policy is that general duty members are not trained on the range of clearance codes available to them and the polices/rules regarding when to use each one. As a result, allowing them to pick the clearance category will generate additional errors that quality control need to fix. As an example, when a file is scored as a z-code to indicate the call was unsubstantiated, the clearance code must be a 4 rather than a B, which members/supervisors are generally not aware of; therefore, they create errors when they assign z-codes and do not change the clearance status accordingly. Another example of scoring rules is call-specific. In a recent UCR refresher course experienced by some quality control respondents, readers/records staff were instructed that files involving uttering threats, where only the complainant was spoken to and not the alleged offender, should no longer be coded as "founded uncleared" as they were in the past. Instead, these files should be scored as "unsubstantiated" since there was insufficient evidence to support that an offence occurred. Of note, not all departments attended this refresher course suggesting that some departments may still be following the previous practice of "founded uncleared". As a result, their crime rate for this offence will be higher while their clearance rates will be lower for this particular crime than departments who attended the course or who were otherwise made aware of this change in policy.

While supervisors could potentially be trained on clearance scoring, quality control suggested the quality of clearance scoring varies by supervisor depending on their prioritization of accuracy of files. Furthermore, they noted that scoring accuracy for supervisors is "a matter of willingness, not of capability", but that the workload of supervisors often makes them unwilling to spend the time on file reviews. Supervisors themselves often felt that ensuring files were scored accurately was the responsibility of quality control; therefore, their review of the files tended to focus on whether an adequate investigation had been conducted by the member. With regard to file description/documentation, general duty must produce sufficient file description/documentation that quality control can clearly discern upon reading whether, for instance, the member recommended charges/diversion or failed to find sufficient evidence to support an offence (unfounded/unsubstantiated), and supervisors must review this description/documentation to ensure that the details are clearly provided.

There were several reasons why inadequate description/documentation was provided in files. One of the more common explanations was that members experienced heavy call loads and tried to clear files quickly or left writing them up until the end of that shift or on another shift when recall of details would be less complete. Along these lines, members, especially the less experienced ones, may make assumptions that are not accounted for in their written description of the file. Lack of experience may also relate to insufficient description/documentation as these members would be less familiar with what information PRIME required for each offence or what information quality control needed to see in a file to score it properly; in addition to lack of experience, this problem relates to a general lack of training to be discussed later in this report. Another reason for inadequate description/documentation can be attributed to a lack of supervisor enforcement as supervisors may pass the file to quality control without asking the member to add additional documentation that would help the file to be scored accurately. This may also be attributed to a lack of training; however, in some cases, it could also be the result of a negative attitude towards the importance of accuracy in scoring (see the training section for further discussion on this issue). This issue was also documented by Hollins (2007) who noted that many supervisors lacked the experience and training required to ensure files were properly documented within the rules and guidelines provided by Statistics Canada. Furthermore, he specifically recognized that there was a lack of mentoring by supervisors of general duty members and little feedback provided to help develop file documentation skills.

Supervisors and quality control personnel were asked to estimate the proportion of files appropriately described/documented such that the UCR and clearance codes could be properly determined. Estimates ranged from a high of "80% to 90%" of files to a low of 25%. Overall, it appeared that approximately one-quarter of files lacked adequate description/documentation and were returned to the supervisor/member for further work. However, this rate depended on the nature of the call and the experience of the member, as more serious files were more likely to be returned and more experienced members learned what quality control required in a file and were more likely to take the time to adequately write up their files immediately upon leaving the scene. Importantly, although files were regularly returned to general duty/supervisors for additional work, some respondents indicated that they would leave a file as "founded – uncleared" as they anticipated not being able to get additional clarification on the file because of the time lapse since the original offence occurred and the attitudes of general duty/supervisors towards revisiting their previous files. This is important because it suggests that inadequate description/documentation in the first instance directly contributes to lowered clearance rates as offences are founded but not cleared when they could be recorded as cleared with slightly more investigation/description of what transpired once the member arrived.

Not surprisingly, lack of adequate description/documentation appeared to be the main issue noted by quality control as contributing to inaccurate crime/clearance rate statistics because until a file is adequately documented, quality control cannot sign off on that file and may need to send a file back to the supervisor/member for further investigation/write up. This is an issue both at the general duty and supervisor levels because one of the purposes of the supervisor review is to ensure that files are appropriately documented prior to sending them to quality control queues. Thus, the fact that a large proportion of files arrive in quality control inappropriately documented and that a substantial proportion must be returned back to the supervisor/member implies that a meaningful

number of supervisors are not completely doing their job. Instead, supervisors may be focusing only on the investigative side (did the member do all that they can do investigate this incident) of the file, rather than the accuracy side (was the file scored/cleared correctly based on what is reported) or may only be superficially reviewing the files, if they are reading them at all, before forwarding them onto quality control. In fact, some supervisors admitted that they did not perceive reviewing files for accuracy as their responsibility; instead, this was what quality control personnel were for. Furthermore, some supervisors reported that they essentially "could care less" about file scoring.

Such attitudes have an important negative effect on crime/clearance rate statistics as it greatly increases the length of time to complete file scoring accurately given the number of mistakes made when a file is created. Meanwhile, these inaccurate statistics go to Statistics Canada and are calculated into crime and clearance rates, crime analysts at the jurisdiction level use these inaccurate statistics to understand crime trends, and senior leaders use the inaccurate data to guide the development of their department's policies and practices. Given these important effects, inadequate documentation is a major issue that must be responded to by police agencies. One way to respond to this issue is to enhance the training of members and supervisors; in fact, as discussed in the next section of this report, inadequate training was another major factor contributing to inaccurate crime and clearance rate statistics.

Training

The second major problem identified in this report as contributing towards inaccurate crime and clearance rate statistics involved the tendency for police personnel to be inadequately trained in the purpose, methods, and importance of accurate file scoring. In 2003, when Statistics Canada introduced the Incident-Based UCR Survey, they also provided training materials for two-days of training on definitions, scoring rules, and other survey characteristics (Statistics Canada, 2003). Yet, although UCR training materials are given to police departments, there is no national standard in place with the result that the training provided for general duty, supervisors, and quality control differs by jurisdiction. Although, in 2007, a recommendation was made to implement a single level of training for all investigators, one for all supervisors, and a more advanced level for quality control/records personnel, this proposal was not supported due to a lack of resources to develop and deliver the program. This is an important issue because the lack of training in certain positions was identified as a major contributor towards inaccuracy of UCR and clearance code assignments. Specifically, while quality control personnel generally felt well trained, the training of general duty members and supervisors was reported to be insufficient, while senior leaders had generally "fallen between the cracks" with regards to training.

GENERAL DUTY FILE SCORING TRAINING

Overall, general duty members reported that they did not receive any formal training in file scoring, or that they did not recall receiving any training while in Depot or at the Justice Institute (JI). Of note, RCMP members who are trained at Depot receive no training on PRIME; instead, they are trained on the system used in the rest of Canada, PROS. One general duty member reported

receiving two additional days of training on PRIME following their graduation from Depot and suggested that members should be trained on both the office and vehicle versions of PRIME as these systems look completely different depending on what type of computer the member uses. However, it is important to note that this same member did not recall receiving any training on file scoring specifically, just training on the PRIME system itself. Very few general duty members actually recalled receiving UCR training at Depot; one member reported that they were taught what UCR stood for and what the purpose of these codes was, but that they were taught this only in the PROS system and that the process followed on PRIME is different. Likewise, one municipal officer recalled receiving some training at the JI on assigning UCR codes, but felt that the training was not particularly relevant at the time.

Generally, the training of British Columbia general duty members on file scoring appears to occur informally at the department when new police officers are going through their regular on-the-job training with their field coach. Essentially, they learn the file scoring process as calls are coming in and being dealt with by the new officer and their field coach. Generally, there is no additional training on file scoring; however, one member reported that PRIME would occasionally send an email about upcoming training. Thus, the training of general duty members regarding what file scoring is, what it is used for, and the importance of accuracy varies widely and the quality of this training will essentially completely depend upon their training officer's own level of understanding and attitude towards the importance of file scoring accuracy.

Moreover, general duty did not recall a lot of on-the-job training time being spent on file scoring; instead, the bulk of their training was focused on the investigative side of call response. This resulted in many general duty members reporting that they did not know what UCR scores were or what file scoring related to. In fact, quotes such as not knowing what UCR codes were, "just picking the box that looks right" or closest and assuming that this would be fixed "down the road" by quality control if they picked wrong, and "just winging it" were expressed. Despite this, general duty did not perceive a need for additional training in this area. In fact, one general duty member reported that they did not need any additional training other than what they had received through taking calls with their field coach, and that the reason for not needing any additional training was that the file scoring "magically gets fixed on the other end", i.e. at the watch clerk/quality control level. Furthermore, this member felt comfortable with the process because if they were consistently making mistakes, quality control/supervisors would let them know. In fact, the same member reported that files were actually fairly regularly sent back, often for missing adequate information.

The inadequate training of general duty members on file scoring was reflected by their lack of understanding of what UCR codes meant. In virtually all general duty interviews, when asked about their role in assigning UCR codes, members did not know what the interviewer was asking about. Part of this issue is likely just due to terminology because when they were told what UCR codes represented (i.e. the code that is next to the description you pick when assigning the call category), many understood that these were the numbers attached to the written description in their pick list.

In reality, general duty police did basically understand how to use UCR codes (although not necessarily why they were using them), they were simply unfamiliar with UCR terminology. General duty officers reported having a drop down list of call types on their computers that they could pick the most appropriate category for the call they were dealing with. As previously noted,

they reported that this list was "dumbed down" for them so that it was relatively easy to pick what seemed the best category at that time; they just needed to start typing in a letter or short title (e.g. A) and then look for the relevant category (Assault). Interestingly, some members felt that even the reduced list available on their MDT offered too many options and should be reduced further. In fact, having a shorter pick list was not generally viewed as a problem; there was fairly consistent agreement across interviews that general duty members do not need the full list of UCR codes for two reasons. First, general duty was not trained on understanding the often complex and very specific variations in UCR categories. Second, this was the job of quality control; specifically, to review files and determine whether a more specific UCR code is appropriate based on their understanding of the offence as it occurred and their understanding of UCR code definitions and policy regarding UCR code assignment. Assigning this responsibility to quality control is meant to free general duty up to do what they were hired to do – respond to calls for service. Thus, general duty do not receive as in depth training on UCR codes as quality control, which could explain their lack of familiarity with the terminology.

However, a significant limitation of this lack of training is that, although members used the pick list or "drop down list" to assign call type, they were generally unaware not only that the numbers besides these categories were UCR codes, but also of what UCR codes were eventually used for (i.e. reporting to Statistics Canada). Because general duty police were generally unaware that these codes were sent to Statistics Canada on a regular basis and factored into crime rates, their lack of understanding meant that they were not aware of the importance of picking the right UCR category at this initial call response step, which, as previously noted, can generate inaccurate crime rate statistics. While these mistakes are often fixed by quality control, they contribute towards lengthening queues and inaccurate data.

Furthermore, as previously noted, the other major issue related to incorrect UCR category use by general duty was the tendency of general duty members to only partially describe the nature of the incident in their file, and the failure of supervisors to ensure that these files were sent back to general duty for more details before moving them into the quality control queue. Both of these issues can be attributed to the lack of adequate training received at both the general duty and supervisor levels. In effect, the lack of training regarding the purpose of UCR/clearance rate scoring and the need for accuracy in these statistics results in general duty/supervisors not prioritizing scoring accuracy. Related to this, when general duty members are busy, they will fail to adequately describe/document their files because they do not realize, at least until they become more experienced, what type of information quality control requires in a file to score it accurately.

In addition to a lack of awareness regarding UCR codes, there was a lack of understanding among general duty of what clearance codes meant. This was likely due to the policy in many departments that only quality control can update the clearance category after reviewing the file. Still, it is important for general duty to understand the nature of these categories because they are responsible for providing the relevant file information to allow quality control to accurately and efficiently determine the appropriate clearance category. Not understanding how clearance codes are assigned and what information they are assigned based on can contribute to inadequate file description/documentation.

Overall, general duty did not report scoring accuracy as very important to them, although several perceived that scoring accuracy could have important implications for crime statistics that represent what police actually do, and that accuracy in file scoring can effect budgets, resources, time management, and crime analysis. Moreover, one member reported that it was "100% important" to them as a call could easily fall through the cracks if it was coded incorrectly (e.g. a domestic coded as a disturbance) resulting in less follow up by police and potentially negative outcomes. However, the majority of general duty interviewees reported that accuracy was not important to them. In addition, most reported that their supervisors also tended not to care about accuracy. However, this perception changed when it came to quality control, as scoring accuracy was seen as very important to this level of personnel. Thus, although general duty members themselves do not tend to value accuracy in file scoring, they were confident that quality control did.

While general duty members did not recall much, if any, training on file scoring, few perceived needing any additional training in this area because they felt comfortable with their ability to pick the box that seemed most appropriate to the call they were dealing with, and that if they were incorrect, quality control would fix it. Another member reported observing from time to time that their UCR codes would be changed by quality control, but being unclear as to why. Generally, this did not bother them because they perceived that quality control was responsible for applying policy and fixing the files. Furthermore, one general duty member blatantly reported that they "could care less" about file scoring as they have other things to deal with. Interestingly, while this latter member saw these codes as relevant for management and Statistics Canada purposes, they did not perceive them as important for general duty directly. This suggests that general duty members need to be more informed about how file scoring is used and how it can ultimately affect resourcing.

A few general duty members reported that they could benefit from some additional training on file scoring so that they could have more clarity on how to pick appropriate codes. They acknowledged that this training was important because they were the ones who created the file and set the tone for accuracy and how much cleaning up would be necessary at later points in the process. One member suggested that a list of the most common types of files and instructions on how to score them properly would be helpful, as would a cheat sheet on how to code certain files, such as assaults and other major files that required additional details. Another member suggested that training could consist of learning the most common mistakes made by general duty so that they can avoid making these in their own files. Interestingly, many supervisors generally did not feel that general duty members needed additional training because they had "better things to worry about than coding". However, some supervisors recommended that general duty receive more training; one said, "they're the key to PRIME" as they are "inputting the info" but that they "don't know what they're doing half the time and they're not getting good feedback". Senior leaders also generally felt that general duty should be exposed to more training, especially when it came to scoring secondary offences.

Interestingly, when asked who was most in need of file scoring training in their detachment, some general duty members suggested that it would be supervisors because they are the ones communicating directly with quality control about what information was needed in a file. Once

supervisors received training, they would be able to communicate better the needs of quality control to their general duty members. In fact, as will be discussed in the next section, the overall training of supervisors appears to be inadequate.

SUPERVISORS/WATCH COMMANDERS UCR/CLEARANCE CODE TRAINING

Training of supervisors appeared to vary depending on the jurisdiction, with Lower Mainland supervisors essentially reporting no official training other than what they experienced while in general duty, while supervisors in the North and Southeast reported that they received official training through PRIME/Informatics sessions or through other members. Training consisted of scenario-based applications; i.e. supervisors were required to score investigation files as part of their training. Generally speaking, the supervisors who were exposed to training appeared to have taken the one or two day PRIME training course, which included references to UCR scoring and CCJS clearance codes. However, the utility of this training was debated. Although some supervisors felt this training was adequate, one suggested that this training appeared more geared towards quality control responsibilities and that a separate course specifically for supervisor responsibilities would be more helpful to them. However, this same supervisor did not feel they needed any additional training, but felt that this type of training should really only occur for quality control as file scoring responsibilities pass to quality control in larger detachments and that training supervisors would be a waste of time as they would not regularly be applying the skills learned in PRIME training. However, some supervisors did feel that additional updates provided in a classroom setting using scenarios would be beneficial as scoring codes and methods were constantly being revised. Those who were in favour of more training consistently mentioned that it would be best for a trainer to deliver the training at the department rather than sending supervisors elsewhere to complete a course because the practice of scoring files varied so much by jurisdiction.

In terms of what training would be beneficial, supervisors noted some specific problem areas. For instance, definitions were noted as being vague, and several supervisors felt that additional training on the primary versus secondary and survey code scoring would be useful, as would a discussion regarding what information was necessary for a file to be scored properly by quality control. Using difficult files as examples would be useful to provide some clarity on why files are scored certain ways. In terms of the clearance codes, distinguishing between unsubstantiated and unfounded files could be difficult at times, and one supervisor noted a problem with leaving files as founded but uncleared, which has a negative effect on the department's clearance rates. In addition, a description about how files get cleared would be useful. Overall, supervisors who had previously been exposed to some training felt that regular updates to their training would be beneficial.

Interestingly, while supervisors themselves generally felt adequately trained, senior leaders tended to think they were undertrained and in need of regular refresher training. Specifically, some senior leaders reported that the issue was that supervisors who were themselves untrained were now training new supervisors on using PRIME and reviewing file scoring; thus, more structured and more regular training needed to be introduced at this level so that supervisors were not "just rubber stamping files".

In contrast to these districts, supervisors in the remaining interviews did not recall having any official training on file scoring. While a few supervisors initially met with quality control or took their own initiative to learn more about the nature and importance of UCR and/or clearance code scoring, others simply continued to practice what they had learned as a general duty member which, as noted above, was essentially insufficient. Again, this led to inconsistency in encouraging accuracy from their members. Some supervisors would routinely report returning files to their members for more adequate description or UCR code assignment; more regularly, these files would simply be forwarded to quality control. Moreover, when files were returned to supervisors from quality control for lack of information, some supervisors would return these files to their members with instructions to complete the request, while others would tend not to deal with the file, believing that it was "a waste of time" to send officers back to accumulate missing information. This speaks to the importance of the supervisor's role in ensuring files are completed as accurately and completely as possible in the first instance so as to avoid having them returned. However, accuracy is clearly not a priority when supervisors report that they "could care less about that clearance rate stuff, and I tell my GD [general duty] guys the same thing".

It was reported that the main purpose of the file reviews by supervisors was to ensure that the proper investigative process had been followed, and that reviewing the files for scoring accuracy was not a priority. Similar to general duty, there was a view that quality control was responsible for scoring accuracy and fixing errors. While this may be quality control's responsibility, supervisors can help quality control reduce their queue lengths and can help ensure more accurate statistics are provided to CCJS by reviewing the initial details provided in the file by their team and ensuring that there was sufficient detail regarding the elements of the offence, such that quality control can determine whether the scoring codes are accurate and can assign the proper clearance code. In effect, some quality control interviewees suggested that time could be saved if supervisors simply encouraged their members to write detailed and complete descriptions of the offence, as the lack of information in files forwarded to quality control otherwise necessitated returning the file to the supervisor/general duty for additional follow up.

While there were generally no differences between municipal and RCMP supervisory perceptions, there was a difference based on detachment size. Supervisors in small detachments where quality control positions did not exist were, unsurprisingly, more aware of file scoring processes and issues because this responsibility tended to fall to them. Supervisors in these detachments generally reported demanding more accuracy of their general duty members and would review these files not only for investigative purposes, but also for file scoring accuracy purposes. Although larger detachments likely dealt with more files, they would likely correspondingly also have more supervisors to deal with those files. Thus, detachment size and presence of quality control should not be an argument for why some supervisors failed to consider scoring accuracy when reviewing their team's files.

QUALITY CONTROL TRAINING ON UCR/CLEARANCE CODES

Quality control personnel (e.g. records, readers) typically received the official PRIME training course and overall, this training was reported as adequate. However, some consistent themes arose

regarding potential improvements to training, including the frequency and methods of updates, how to score new offences, and new PRIME scoring policies. In effect, while the initial official training was perceived as adequate, quality control staff desired more regular training to deal with the new information and practices that routinely occurred in their jobs. One manner in which they currently receive updates to file scoring practices and policies is through bulletins provided by Statistics Canada; however, there were some comments that this practice of disseminating policy changes could be improved as bulletins could be ignored or misinterpreted, and questions could not be easily asked regarding the meaning/purpose of these policies. Instead, regular updates, such as a half or full day course once a year, would be more helpful than email communications as they would enable quality control staff to ask questions and engage in discussions. Similarly, some quality control staff reported having attended working groups or subcommittees in the past where these new policies would be discussed and difficult files could be debated amongst colleagues. These working groups no longer meet, likely due to financial and time constraints; however, they were reported as extremely useful by those who attended them and reinstating them should be considered to ensure consistency in scoring interpretations and practices.

Again, most quality control personnel received the one or two day PRIME course training as part of their on the job training. However, the bulk of training appears to occur on the job by fellow quality control staff. After, and sometimes before, receiving the official PRIME course, new quality control staff typically received in-depth one-on-one training in the office from experienced quality control staff. While quality control staff reported being well trained in this manner, this one-on-one method is time consuming and expensive to conduct as it removes an experienced staff member from their job for several weeks as they spend time explaining and reviewing files with a new staff member.

Furthermore, it was noted that it can take up to two years to become proficient at quality control work, but by the time staff reach this level, they may transfer into another position. Thus, staff turnover in quality control was also noted to be a major issue contributing towards delays in file processing, as training occurs over a lengthy period of time and files need to be regularly reviewed by more experienced staff during this time. Staff absences and turnover is also an issue because there is not a simple call out list of casual employees who can fill in for quality control given the intensity of training. It was reported that, at one point, there were discussions about having a general pool of trained temporary QAR staff available that could be shared by RCMP and municipal agencies; however, this plan was not implemented.

During the interviews, it was noted that a new training centre available for both municipal and RCMP would be opening in the Fall of 2011. The centre consists of non-operational computers loaded with dummy files for practice coding. Over 10 people will be able to work on one file simultaneously, and the trainer can review the various fields and processes with them. This centre will be used for training of new records and reader staff, and will help existing staff as experienced quality control personnel can continue to work on their own files instead of needing to focus their attention on one-to-one training of new hires. Following this training, new hires return to their detachment for regular in-house training and mentoring by experienced quality control staff; however, the amount of in-house supervision will be significantly reduced through this class training. The introduction of the training centre will therefore substantially benefit departments where many new quality control casual staff are typically hired annually.

In terms of what additional training may be needed by QAR, one records manager noted that the error reports their detachment typically dealt with involved the secondary and survey codes that readers must add for particular offences. For instance, scoring an assault with a weapon is easy enough; however, all the additional details that must be added, such as the victim information and the weapon type, are usually where the problems occur and errors are generated. In addition, regular updates and reviews on new offences and more complicated files (e.g. frauds, identity thefts, electronic threats, continuing offences) would be useful. It is also important that training on new offences occur in a timely fashion; otherwise, quality control personnel at a particular detachment may determine their own policy regarding interpretation of the offence and may proceed with this through several hundred files before it is detected that they are applying different policy than elsewhere. Not only might this cause an erroneous peak in the crime rate, but it also contributes towards queue lengths because all these files will need to be reviewed and fixed according to the general protocol. Again, having a regular regional working group/subcommittee could reduce the likelihood of this occurring as quality control staff could discuss these practices with other quality control staff and determine what is appropriate policy and practice. In terms of clearance codes, some quality control staff reported that additional training on using the clearance codes, such as when to score files as founded not cleared versus founded cleared versus unfounded/unsubstantiated would be helpful as they found this process to be quite subjective.

SENIOR LEADERS' TRAINING ON UCR/CLEARANCE CODES

Interestingly, senior leaders often felt that they could benefit from additional training. Some mentioned having "fallen through the cracks" given the transition from PIRS to PRIME and felt that attending a few days of classroom training could help bring them up to speed on what supervisors should be doing in file reviews. This was especially important for some smaller jurisdictions where senior leaders may be tasked with reviewing some files; of note, all senior leaders in the northern RCMP jurisdictions reported receiving official training only a few years ago, which they generally reported as being adequate for their needs. Thus, training of senior leaders may vary geographically or by department size.

Resources
The final major theme identified in this study as a contributing factor to inaccurate crime and clearance rate statistics concerned resources. Resourcing issues included the capacity to investigate files (i.e. manpower issues), as well as turnover and its relation to training in the area of quality control.

CAPACITY TO INVESTIGATE

For general duty, the main issue relating to inaccurate file scoring appeared to be the shortage of resources; specifically, being understaffed on the street. When there is a shortage of members on the road and/or general duty members are carrying a heavy file load, the ability to investigate each file adequately is reduced and the likelihood that charges will occur also decreases. Consistently, general duty suggested that more members on the road would provide them more time to

investigate files. This problem was generally supported by quality control personnel, who noted that the level of investigation is affected by the number of members available to take calls.

Being short on members or carrying a heavy file load could negatively affect the clearance rate because crimes are less likely to be solved when investigations are lacking. Minor crimes, such as theft from a vehicle, tend to have poor clearance rates because members do not use their limited investigation time on these types of calls.[11] In addition, it could also affect the crime rate. For instance, it is possible that police have a large amount of intelligence files that could be used to develop drug cases, but they lack the resources to investigate all these files to their fullest extent. Thus, the number of criminal incidents occurring in a jurisdiction is reduced given the inability of police to investigate all reported crime. Unfortunately, there is no way to determine the extent of this latter problem short of actually providing more resources to determine how many new criminal events tend to result from investigating more intelligence files. Alternatively, as suggested earlier in this report, carrying a heavy file load may also result in underscoring offences to reduce the amount of paperwork required by a typical *Criminal Code* file. It may also affect the crime rate in terms of accuracy in UCR scoring. Although, it can take very little time to change the scoring code, members often pick generic codes or the wrong sub-category of a UCR when they are rushing to complete files either in between calls or at the end of their shift. Thus, resourcing can affect both the accuracy of UCR and clearance scoring.

Supervisors also spoke of resourcing shortages as a reason for not sending files back to members for further investigation/elaboration even though some were aware that this would negatively affect crime/clearance rate statistics. Interestingly, it was suggested that having more civilians available to help complete the required paperwork would reduce the administrative pressures on general duty, freeing them up to deal with more file work. That said, it is important to qualify this statement based on the findings earlier in this report. Having more civilians to work on files will not result in improved administrative file work if members do not adequately describe or document their files in the first instance that it is clear to those working administratively on the files what exactly happened. In effect, improvements must be made at this initial level to have the available resources at later levels functioning to their best ability.

Again, supervisors also noted that PRIME contributed to a substantial increase in the time required to write files. Several supervisors suggested that the complexity of PRIME produced a culture where members try to write off their files in ways that avoid requiring further investigation or by picking generic rather than specific codes. Thus, supervisors suggested that PRIME has negatively affected the ability to investigate and score files accurately.

From the perspective of some senior leaders, having more members on the road will not necessarily mean improved clearance rates. Instead, what affects clearance rates is how the member carries out their duties, and their motivation to properly investigate and complete the file. In contrast, another senior leader echoed the concerns of general duty, saying that manpower shortages "absolutely will have an effect" as heavy file loads contribute towards a culture of writing

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[11] It is important to note that respondents were actually asked directly whether they ever prioritize calls based on the likelihood of clearing and virtually all respondents replied that this did not happen; however, answers such as these in response to less direct questions about call prioritization suggest that it may happen more often than police are aware.

off files because members do not have the time or ability to take the extra step needed to solve them. Thus, for some senior leaders, the more staff available to handle incoming calls, the more work can be done, and the better the investigation and accuracy in scoring. Of note, some specifically mentioned that PRIME has created many difficulties and delays in completing paperwork, with one saying it was "the worst thing that ever happened", and others critiquing the way in which it was implemented. In effect, PRIME has led supervisors to come off the road and into administrative functions, while it has caused general duty members to "cut corners" to avoid additional paperwork. Thus, PRIME itself was noted as a direct contributor to inaccurate scoring. Of note, if general duty members were encouraged to better document/describe their files in the first instance, perhaps the amount of administrative file review work by supervisors could be reduced and files could be sent directly to quality control for review rather than requiring the additional step of supervisor review.

STAFF TURNOVER AND TRAINING

While quality control generally did not perceive resourcing issues as having a major effect on file scoring, two resourcing issues were identified with regards to the efficiency of file processing at the quality control level. A major contributing factor to the lengthy queues identified in some jurisdictions is the difficulty in reviewing files and assigning UCR codes, and the subsequent length of time required for training new staff. In some departments, this resulted in quality control working overtime hours, not only at their primary location of employment, but also at nearby departments who require additional help to deal with their queue. Many records/readers acknowledged having a backlog of files to review, and sometimes these queues could be fairly substantial for a department, ranging from a few hundred to one thousand files waiting for review. The farther behind quality control were on reviewing files, the less thorough they will likely be in reading those files, which directly contributes towards inaccuracy in UCR and clearance scoring.

There are several reasons why such a backlog may exist. First, the lack of adequate description/documentation found in up to one-quarter of files reviewed by quality control means that these files must be returned for further investigation/description and then must re-enter the queue at a later date. Lack of description/documentation also means that quality control cannot quickly review and conclude a file. A second major issue concerns the previously discussed length of time required for training new staff and the high turnover found in quality control positions. Briefly, training a new quality control staff member can take up to two years and during the early stages of training, experienced quality control personnel are pulled off files to conduct one-to-one training and mentoring with new employees. Thus, it appears that, in many departments, quality control personnel are constantly training new staff and are unable to deal effectively with their own queues. Aside from staff turnover, when people are absent due to illness/training or other short-term needs, there are not other quality control people available to work temporarily on file processing. Having a trained pool of auxiliary temporary staff would help to fill short-term gaps, and could even be used for longer-term absences, such as maternity leaves; however, such a pool of trained part-time staff does not exist. Thus, understaffing and lack of a pool of trained staff were two of the key resourcing issues identified by quality control.

A second issue identified concerned the nature of staff in this position. In some jurisdictions, retired members filled reader positions, while civilians filled records positions. In other jurisdictions, all quality control positions tended to be civilianized.[12] While civilians felt entirely comfortable assigning UCR and clearance codes, retired members tended to recommend that civilianizing reader positions was not ideal because they did not have the field experience to "read between the lines". In effect, they felt that civilian staff did not approach UCR and clearance code assignments with the same informed perspective as ex-members.

Moreover, these respondents suggested that civilian readers may not have the same authority to challenge files perceived as inadequately investigated; in effect, not having previous investigation experience means that supervisors/general duty may not take their requests for additional investigation as seriously as if that request came from an ex-member. Essentially, the arguments regarding the nature of staffing were that the previous investigation experience of ex-members was especially helpful in assigning clearance codes as they could more accurately determine whether all appropriate investigational steps were taken and whether files had been appropriately cleared. Moreover, having this previous experience gave credibility to the reader when requesting additional work on a file. If a negative or less supportive attitude towards civilian readers does exist at the general duty/supervisor level, it suggests that clearance rates may be lower in departments where reader positions are civilianized. It should be noted that this concern was specifically levied towards readers, rather than records because when both positions are in place, records deal with more mundane/routine files, whereas readers handle the more complex and serious cases. Having civilian readers may also contribute to the length of time it takes to train quality control staff well.

While these allegations are important to address, the researchers did not test these observations in the current study. Future research could explore the nature of quality control job performance based on the nature of the position by comparing how accurately and quickly UCR and clearance codes are assigned by civilian versus ex-member quality control staff and how frequently files returned to general duty/supervisors return with the requested additional description/documentation. If differences are found, it is essential that attitudes towards readers be adjusted by general duty/supervisors because they could have a negative effect on clearance rates should members not take requests from civilians as seriously. However, it is also important to reiterate that one of the main purposes of supervisors is to review the files for investigational quality prior to forwarding them to quality control; thus, if supervisors are doing their job adequately, records/readers can focus primarily on scoring accuracy, rather than reviewing investigational steps that reduces one of the two concerns levied by ex-members regarding civilianizing of positions.

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[12] According to the Police Resources in Canada – 2009 document: "Civilian personnel, such as clerks, dispatch officers..., has increased over the past 10 years at a rate more than twice that of police officers. In 2009, there were nearly 27,000 civilian personnel accounting for 29% of all policing personnel or 1 civilian per 2.5 police officers. Clerical support personnel represented the highest proportion (39%) of these employees, followed by management professionals (28%), and communications and dispatch personnel (14%)." (Beattie, 2009: 6)

INTEGRATED TEAMS

As a final note regarding resourcing, users of crime rate/clearance rate statistics should be informed of whether integrated units, where multiple departments combine resources, exist in the jurisdiction of interest, and which police departments opt into or out of these arrangements. For instance, in British Columbia, there are several integrated teams staffed by personnel from both municipal and RCMP police departments who work together to solve specific types of crimes, including the Integrated Homicide Investigation Team (IHIT) and the Integrated Municipal Provincial Auto Crime Team (IMPACT). It is possible that having shared units focused on a single type of criminal incident increases the clearance rate as resources are concentrated in this one area. Importantly, as the personnel working on these units become specialized in dealing with this particular criminal incident, clearance rates may increase as the quality of investigations is improved. On the other hand, with regards to crime rate statistics, units like IMPACT can also initially increase the crime rate through their focus on detecting particular forms of crime through programs like the Bait Car, and likely decrease rates later by deterring would-be offenders.

Given this, users of crime rate/clearance rate data should be informed as to how many of these units exist and how long they have been in operation. Moreover, additional data could be relevant in interpreting the potential effects of having or not having these units. For instance, file life reflects how long it takes to process a particular type of offence and can indicate how many resources are dedicated to particular crimes in one jurisdiction versus another. Caseload should also be noted to indicate how busy particular units are and how many resources are required to effectively investigate all reported offences. The experience of members working in these units is also of relevance, as theoretically more experience would equate to faster file processing and quality of investigation. Thus, all these factors should be taken into consideration by users of crime/clearance rate data when attempting to interpret these statistics.

Recommendations

After identifying these major themes, the research team summarized the recommendations suggested by respondents and created some additional recommendations that should be considered to reduce the likelihood that crime/clearance rate statistics will be inaccurate. A major problem contributing to inaccurate crime and clearance rate statistics were mistakes in scoring made at the general duty level and that were not fixed at the supervisor level. The main recommendation to deal with these errors is to introduce more knowledge at these levels because these mistakes all come back to a lack of training. Additional recommendations were made regarding resourcing issues. However, before discussing these recommendations, it is critical to point out that an earlier RCMP investigation into clearance rate issues by Hollins (2007) identified some similar issues. Thus, despite there being at least some level of awareness of some of these issues, no changes appear to have been made in the previous four years to improve clearance rate accuracy and consistencies.

More Training for General Duty Members on the Purpose and Effects of File Scoring

While the researchers are not recommending that general duty be exposed to a great deal of training in relation to file scoring, it is clear that their lack of understanding of the purpose of file scoring and how this effects them in terms of resourcing, policies, and practices contributes towards a lack of priority regarding scoring accuracy that directly contributes to delays in obtaining accurate statistics. Thus, providing more information about the importance of accurate file scoring in the first instance will ideally help to encourage general duty to attempt to score their files more specifically, rather than relying on generic codes or downscoring files to avoid additional paperwork.

It is not recommended that general duty spend a great deal of time being trained on file scoring as their job is mainly to respond to calls for service and they do not need to be well-versed on file scoring policies and practices. However, by introducing them to the concepts and basic processes of file scoring early in their detachment-specific training, general duty can be encouraged to develop more positive attitudes towards file scoring accuracy and ideally can learn the importance of taking a few minutes at the end of each file, whenever possible, to adequately write up their file. This should be achievable through an initial meeting with quality control early in their on-the-job training. Having new recruits spend at least half a day with quality control will help them learn the nature, purpose, and importance of file documentation and description, and recruits can be trained on what quality control need in a synopsis to conclude a file. Quality control can point out common mistakes made at the general duty level, and provide guidelines and examples on how to score and document files. Currently, general duty learn file scoring from their field coaches; however, the training is inconsistent and generally lacks depth and, more often, they may be taught to leave the specific scoring for quality control to deal with. The attitude that "quality control will fix it" needs to be changed at this level because members are primarily the ones creating and documenting the files and, therefore, setting the foundation both for file accuracy and the speed at which quality control can process a file.

Of note, a concern expressed by several general duty members was the lack of training received on PRIME, given that they are trained at Depot on the system used by the rest of Canada. Thus, it is important that British Columbia recruits spend a few additional days of training learning PRIME and learning more about the complexity of this system when completing files so that they know what to expect when they begin at their detachment.

Do Not Add more UCR Codes to the MDT Pick List

Although a few members were interested in having a greater variety of UCR codes available to them in their MDT drop-down/pick list, the results of this study advise against this for several key reasons. First, general duty already receive minimal training on UCR and clearance codes at Depot and providing more codes would require greater training that could be used more efficiently in teaching what clearance codes are used for, how they are linked to UCR codes, and the importance of completely filling out the call for service description to assist quality control in their job. Second, given that general duty in many jurisdictions report being quite busy responding to calls for service,

they will likely ignore the longer list of options and continue to pick as they currently do. In many cases, this means relying on generic codes that do not accurately reflect the offence. Third, although members tend to work on their files while in their vehicles, general duty actually do have access to the longer list of UCR codes on their office computers. As such, if they wanted to spend more time picking the specific UCR code, they have the ability to do so. Given this, the researchers would not necessarily recommend adding any additional codes to those currently available on the MDT; in fact, we would recommend auditing the list of codes currently available to ensure those listed are ones that are most commonly used by quality control and that cover the wide variety of crimes police may be dealing with.

More Training for Supervisors on the Purpose and Effects of File Scoring to Improve Job Performance and Attitudes

While some supervisors take the reviewing of files for scoring accuracy very seriously, more appear to focus on reviewing files for investigational quality and leave the scoring accuracy review to quality control or simply skim the files and forward them for quality control to review. However, it would be extremely helpful for supervisors to be aware of the purpose of scoring accuracy and the importance of this being achieved as early in a file's life as possible so that they can encourage their members to pay attention to UCR scoring. Similarly, by being made more aware of the needs of quality control to be able to conclude a file (i.e. adequate documentation and description), supervisors can help reduce quality control queues by ensuring their members are appropriately writing their files in the first instance.

Similar to general duty, one way that this can be achieved is by having new supervisors spend part of their early training with quality control personnel who can convey what is required in a file to do their job effectively. Thus, one recommendation is that new supervisors spend at least one day with quality control learning about the common mistakes made by general duty and at the supervisory level in file documentation/description and review, as well as learning about what quality control needs to see in a file to quickly and efficiently review, score, and conclude files. It is also recommended that supervisors get exposed to regular refresher training; this can be achieved through meeting for half to a full day with quality control on a yearly basis to address common problems and to discuss changes to PRIME/UCR policy and practice that affect the nature of file scoring. Currently, supervisors appear to be conducting their file reviews based on the knowledge they picked up while in general duty, which has already been acknowledged as lacking in depth and quality. Even if current supervisors train new supervisors, those currently in the position have not received quality training on file scoring/PRIME policies and could benefit from meeting with quality control, if not attending a PRIME course that also addresses file scoring.

Thus, in addition to this basic one-day training, it may also be useful for new supervisors to attend a one-day PRIME course where they can be exposed to some of the basic rules and guidelines regarding UCR and clearance scoring, and where they can practice reviewing files; they may also benefit from regular (yearly) attendance at refresher courses built specifically for their level of responsibility. Supervisors do not need to attend the more complex/detailed courses attended by records/readers given their lesser role in file scoring; however, having a regular refresher course would help keep the focus on prioritizing file scoring accuracy and ensure they are up to date with

the basic practices expected at the quality control level. At the very least, departments should ensure their supervisors meet with quality control to confirm that they are informed of detachment-specific ways of scoring and processing files.

Quality control can also contribute to the training of both general duty and supervisors by communicating more regularly when trends in scoring errors are identified. Rather than sending back files individually, when a consistent problem is found, this information should be conveyed to members and supervisors through attendance at briefings, with an explanation as to why it is an issue and how it can be fixed. Thus, quality control can directly mentor general duty and supervisors on file scoring and reduce errors through communication and education. Of note, one respondent suggested that keeping statistics on the rate of errors being made by particular general duty members/supervisors would be one way of encouraging compliance as these statistics could be used when making promotional decisions. As research generally suggests that compliance is best achieved through education and working with others, rather than punitively, this is not a recommendation currently supported by the researchers. However, should education and greater training fail to encourage greater compliance of members/supervisors in documenting and reviewing their files, this idea could be re-visited.

Overall, exposing supervisors to more training should help in the development of more supportive attitudes towards file scoring that are subsequently conveyed to their patrol members. Supervisors need to prioritize the importance of file description to help quality control do their job more efficiently and effectively. This means returning files whenever necessary to their general duty members, whether it is due to the supervisor's prerogative or on a request by quality control. That said, the more supervisors can do to emphasize the importance of sufficient file description for their members, the more accurate and timely those files and statistics will be. Similarly, exposing senior leaders to some training on PRIME and file scoring would also be of benefit because those in more powerful positions often shape organizational attitudes. As senior leaders use crime/clearance rate statistics in developing their agency's policies and practices, they should emphasize the importance of accurate statistics to those primarily involved in creating them.

Quality Control Should Attend More Frequent Refresher Training Courses

Quality control suggested that scoring quality could be improved through their attendance at more refresher courses and having more interaction with other people in similar positions, as well as with informatics. Therefore, we recommend that Informatics hold more training sessions for quality control. Current training opportunities are limited, and quality control reported often having to pick someone to send for training rather than sending all who need it, which increases the potential for miscommunication of new policies/practices. The introduction of the new training centre should help with the training of new staff, and should be used by both RCMP and municipal jurisdictions; however, offering more regular (yearly) refresher training for current quality control personnel will improve consistency in interpretation and application of policies and rules. At these training courses, recent updates to legislation and policies/practices can be discussed and hands on examples can be used to practice applying these updates.

Create an Auxiliary Pool of Trained Quality Control Staff

Apart from inadequate file description/documentation, the other major issue noted by quality control in regards to file scoring processes and efficiencies related to the lack of adequately trained quality control staff available to fill in for short and long-term agency needs. Given that turnover and staff absences result in lengthening file queues and delays in correcting file statistics, it is recommended that resources be devoted towards hiring and training a group of quality control personnel who can fill in for short and long-term absences. It would be useful to hire new employees from across the province and send them for two weeks of training at the new training centre. These employees can then be assigned to particular geographical areas (e.g. one group to the North, one to the Southeast) to act as on-call staff. This recommendation is perhaps more feasible for RCMP than for the independent municipal agencies, but perhaps the same pool of employees could be used to fulfil the basic needs of both types of police agencies as specific policies and practices at the agency level can be part of some minor additional training once the employee is on-site.

Re-Establish Working Groups for Quality Control Personnel

Some quality control personnel recalled previously attending working groups with other records/readers where current problems and issues with file scoring or updates/changes to PRIME policies and practices were discussed as a group. These working groups no longer appear to be in operation or are functioning only to a limited extent. Therefore, a recommendation is that resources be dedicated towards re-establishing regional working groups where quality control representatives from all jurisdictions would be expected to attend on a monthly basis. Whenever possible, these working groups should also have an Informatics staff member in attendance so that decisions made at this level can be communicated to other regional groups. Importantly, these decisions must also be shared with general duty and supervisors whenever appropriate through discussion at briefings. Overall, re-establishing these groups should add consistency to the way that files are scored across jurisdictions and will improve the likelihood that all levels of those involved in file processing operate in a similar way. While working groups may not be able to mandate particular ways of scoring files, they should at least ensure documentation of what process is used when scoring a file so that those using the data are aware of the different practices that may exist across jurisdictions.

Produce a Concise Instructional Manual with Case Scenarios

Having an instructional manual for UCR and clearance scoring with case scenarios were perceived by both quality control and supervisors as being useful in reducing scoring errors. The UCR manual currently in use was perceived as too bulky and not helpful. Rather than a manual that simply lists criminal codes, providing case studies/scenarios would be more helpful, especially for the more complicated offences. As an example, one scenario could demonstrate how to correctly code an incident involving several charges against several different people, all of whom were attending one event, such as a brawl at a house party that included assaults, weapons, and drugs, with a stolen car in the driveway. Other useful scenarios would involve more recent complex offences, such as

computer crimes. For instance, distinguishing between identity theft and identity fraud would be a useful case study, as would determining what elements comprise a harassment offence using today's electronics (e.g. harassment through social networking, texting).

It is important that this manual provides clear rules, definitions, and guidelines to follow when file scoring. This manual would be helpful in training of quality control, and could also be used by quality control when explaining to supervisors and general duty the policies and practices that quality control is expected to follow when scoring a file. Thus, a condensed version of the manual could be provided to general duty members, while more detailed manuals with more policy discussion could be provided to supervisors and quality control. Such a manual would increase standardization in scoring and provide guidance on when and where exceptions are to be made.

Investigate and Develop Clear Policies on Use of Cleared Otherwise

As noted in Hollins (2007) and this study, departments use cleared otherwise designations inconsistently for a wide range of different offences. It is possible that one source of this variance may relate to familiarity with Crown Counsel and what they expect to lay charges against a suspect. As police in British Columbia do not actually lay charges, but recommend them to Crown Counsel, use of cleared otherwise may be higher than in other provinces (or may vary between British Columbian jurisdictions) given police expectations of whether Crown will actually proceed with the charges that police recommend.

Understanding variations in use of cleared otherwise is extremely important as cleared otherwise designations will increase the clearance rate. It is recommended that an independent file review be conducted on a random sample of cleared otherwise files to determine whether this designation was appropriately used and to document the range of offences and situations it is commonly applied to. This information should be made available to those who intend to use crime/clearance rate statistics as it has a direct effect on whether one department has higher clearance rates than another for similar types of offences.

Of note, quality control personnel reported that Statistics Canada already engaged in routine auditing of the files submitted through CCJS. Thus, the foundation for routine auditing of these sorts of situations is already in place and should occur more regularly with respect to the issues identified in the current study.

Users of Crime and Clearance Rate Data Must be Aware of Jurisdiction-Specific Policies and Practices

In several places in this report, the researchers advised that those intending on using crime and clearance rate statistics must be aware of the department-level practices that may affect the way these statistics are calculated or the timeliness/accuracy of those statistics. Examples include the rate of use of cleared otherwise designations and types of offences used for, presence of integrated units, member ability to change the CCJS status, and average queue length for quality control. Ideally, this information could be held by Statistics Canada so that those who are unfamiliar with the practices of departments for whom they are using data can obtain basic descriptions of the

types of practices that might affect the data they are working with or limit their ability to conduct comparative analyses with other jurisdictions.

Summary

After interviewing police employees from eight RCMP and two municipal detachments in British Columbia, several major problems with file processing and scoring were identified that contributed towards inaccurate crime and clearance rate statistics and make it very difficult to compare departments or jurisdictions. In effect, given the variation of business processes and policies used in file scoring and the lack of priority given to file scoring accuracy at some levels, crime and clearance rate statistics should *not* be used to measure and compare the efficiencies of various police departments, at least without considering and referencing the problems identified in this report.

For respondents, the major problems with file processing and scoring differed somewhat by level of personnel. The main issue identified by general duty was a shortage of manpower that led to an inability to always conduct an adequate investigation, particularly on more mundane files. Supervisors tended to believe that file scoring accuracy was more of a quality control concern, rather than a concern they should be focused on, and generally felt that general duty members should primarily be investigating files, rather than completing the administrative/data work on files. For quality control, above all other concerns, the main issue appeared to be with the lack of adequate file description/documentation because this contributed to lengthy quality control queues and inaccurate statistics going forward. Senior leaders recognized that lack of training was an issue at most levels, but, whereas general duty and supervisors tended not to understand the need for accurate scoring, senior leaders generally recognized the serious negative effects of inaccurate data on resourcing, policies, and practices.

Overall, the results of this study support that there was clearly a lack of understanding at the patrol level regarding the purpose and utility of clearance rates, and a lack of prioritization placed on clearance rates at both the patrol and immediate supervisory level. This related to a lack of relevant training on UCR data and clearance codes at the patrol and supervisory level. While records personnel have received more in depth training and, therefore, displayed a much greater understanding of the importance of file scoring accuracy, mistakes at the earlier levels and consistent staff shortages contributed towards lengthy queues. While the researchers recognize that general duty members are primarily responsible for responding to calls and that issuing appropriate UCR and clearance codes is the responsibility of quality control personnel, it is likely that the immediate problems faced by quality control, and subsequently Statistics Canada, can be limited by providing a small amount of training to general duty members on the nature and purpose of UCR and clearance codes, and emphasizing to both general duty and their supervisors the importance of completely documenting each general occurrence file so as to reduce the likelihood that quality control personnel will need to "read between the lines" and/or return the file. Greater accuracy earlier on in the process will help reduce queue lengths and ensure that the data interpreted by Statistics Canada is more timely and accurate.

Given these problematic themes, the researchers' interpretation of the results was that training was above all a contributing factor towards the problematic trends found in this study. Lack of training contributed towards negative attitudes towards file scoring and a tendency to rely on others to fix mistakes. Providing the necessary resources to upgrade training and offer it more frequently to each level of personnel is a key recommendation of this study. Broadly speaking, the problems with crime and clearance rate statistics mainly related to a lack of adequate and relevant training.

Future research

There were several limitations to the current study that restrict a full understanding of the issues involved in file scoring and crime/clearance rate statistics. As previously noted, while this study sought the participation of both municipal and RCMP detachments, a limited number of municipalities were represented. Furthermore, this study occurred only in British Columbia, and the results may not be as generalizable to the rest of Canada given the different police records management system used in this province (i.e. PRIME). It is important that future research further explore the different processes used and resulting issues within municipal versus RCMP departments across Canada. Furthermore, future research should obtain input from policy makers to reflect on the larger picture of clearance rate statistics processes, policies, and interpretations as the current study was focused on those working specifically at the department level.

Future research can also build on this study through more objective sources than interviewing personnel involved in file processing. As noted elsewhere in this report, there are multiple sources of file data that can be used to more objectively answer some of the questions raised in this study, such as whether there is a tendency to downscore files, to overuse cleared otherwise, to clear calls in the CAD, or to use UCR scoring to manipulate crime and clearance rates.

Furthermore, future research may seek to more objectively study file scoring processes by implementing experimental studies. For instance, research might test how scoring rules are interpreted by different jurisdictions by providing examples of complex files and comparing practices in scoring and clearing those files.[13] For instance, with regards to continuing offences, whether quality control scores breaking into 22 cars in an underground lot as 22 offences or as one offence can be compared. Scoring and clearing complex files, such as those involving fraud or electronic harassment, can be studied. Likewise, the manner in which general duty officers score certain difficult files, such as verbal domestic assaults or noisy parties, can be evaluated. Whether supervisors recognize and change scoring when necessary can also be evaluated through provision of file examples. Providing examples of files scored as cleared otherwise in some jurisdictions can also help to objectively determine agencies that tend to use this category to clear cases; similarly, providing examples of files that tend to be cleared in the CAD or of files that may tend to be scored using the 8000 series codes when they should be coded using UCR categories or vice versa can also shed light on erroneous practices that influence crime and clearance rate statistics.

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[13] Hollins' (2007) report provides a large number of file synopses examples that were difficult to interpret and can be used to test variations in scoring accuracies.

Conclusion

Although not all the identified issues in this report can or will be dealt with through changes to policy and practice, a major goal of this report was to describe the trends and issues in file processing and scoring so that others who are interested in using the data can be more informed about the limitations of this information. While the current study occurred in British Columbia, no doubt other police agencies across Canada experience similar issues with UCR and clearance code assignments; therefore, this report has important implications for anyone intending to use crime and clearance rate statistics.

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