



Organized Crime Research Brief no. 11

Creating an OC Harm Index

BUILDING A SAFE AND RESILIENT CANADA

Insufficient quantifiable data exists to reliably measure the scope and harm of organized crime in Canada. Detailed self-reported victimization data and data on illicit markets are required. Proxy estimates or indicators may be useful.

The primary goal of this study was to assess the feasibility and utility of developing and applying rigorous methodological and analytical models that could reliably measure the harm of organized crime in Canada. Within the context of exploring the development of an Organized Crime Harm Index (OCHI), this study aimed to: determine if harm assessment research could produce accurate and reliable findings; analyze the utility of harm assessment research and indices in contributing to the larger goal of organized crime control; and assess the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of implementing an OCHI for Canada.

This report found that, in general, there are insufficient existing sources of quantifiable data in Canada that could be used to reliably measure the scope and harm of the organized criminal activities, including economic-related crimes and illegal drug trafficking. This problem is epitomized by the shortcomings of police-recorded data, which are critical for harm assessment research into organized crime. The only national source of police-recorded data is the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) survey, which under-estimates the true scope of criminal activities. The UCR is not representative of the population of criminal occurrences and does not isolate incidents committed as part of organized criminal conspiracies.

In addition to better police-reported data, other sources where better data is required to more accurately measure the harm of organized crime include collecting more precise, self-reported victimization data collected on a more regular basis, and better usage, prevalence and consumption data

for a wide array of criminal markets, such as illicit drugs, prostitution, and organized fraud.

With respect to the utility of harm assessment research and indices in contributing to the larger goal of organized crime control, a variety of research findings suggest that harm assessment research, and harm indices specifically, can contribute to criminal justice policy-making.

It was demonstrated that a national, comprehensive OCHI would be very costly, due, in part, to the necessity of measuring a wide range of criminal activities and the complexity of any research that attempts to measure the scope and effects of organized crime. The cost-effectiveness of implementing an OCHI would be undermined by the lack of a reliable centralized national repository of relevant, quantifiable police-recorded data on the incidence of organized crime offending and the significant challenges that may be encountered in convincing law enforcement agencies to share what information does exist.

Developing a detailed, accurate OCHI would require more in-depth scoping and feasibility research into the development and implementation of an OCHI, as well as extensive, and costly, regular data collection. Future exploratory research could examine: the full range of the organized criminal activities that would comprise the index; different options for how the data measuring the scope and harm of each criminal activity could be collected, and how the methodological limitations identified in this report could be overcome; the range of indirect harms to be included in a measurement of harm; more precise estimates of the costs of conducting such harm assessment research; different conceptual OCHI models could be developed; and how a composite OCHI would be used to inform (and benefit) policies and programs for combating organized crime.

Johnston, Peter, Stephen Schneider, John Neily, Wendy Parkers, and Denis Lachaine. (2010) *Developing and Applying an Organized Crime Harm Index: A Scoping and Feasibility Study*. Ottawa, ON: Public Safety Canada.

For more information on organized crime research at Public Safety Canada, please contact the Organized Crime Research Unit at ocr-rco@ps-sp.gc.ca.

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