



Organized Crime Research Brief no. 9

Literature Review on OC

BUILDING A SAFE AND RESILIENT CANADA

Organized crime largely exists due to illicit markets. The application of violence by organized crime is cyclical. There is no consensus on how to measure the harm of organized crime.

This report examined academic research being conducted world-wide on addressing organized crime, as of 2009. The objectives of this study were to identify gaps in the research, to develop a practical knowledge base of valid and measurable indicators to better determine the harm that organized crime presents, as well as to identify best practices with regards to the success of organized crime interventions.

An exhaustive literature review on the issue of organized crime was conducted and over 300 articles were identified for examination. A detailed analysis was completed on 50 of the articles that met the criteria for being most typical, most innovative, or for providing an important contribution to the field.

The report noted that illegal markets are typically made up of small, transient, decentralized groups, as opposed to static groups with centralized figure heads. Illegal markets easily adapt to outside pressures, and actively find ways to resist external control measures. As a result, law enforcement intervention has generally had a limited impact on changing or shaping illicit markets.

With respect to the issue of illicit drugs, several findings are noted: most traffickers operate independently; there was no evidence of a monopoly of the drug trade by one specific group; most criminal operations were small in size; and, violence was not routinely used but was cyclical in nature. Police intervention was determined to be most effective during peak situations of violence.

Research findings also suggest that law enforcement

anti-money laundering regimes are unlikely to have an impact upon money laundering as a whole. The research has demonstrated that most tactical efforts have been geared towards low-level participants in the areas of drugs and fraud, and that a shift in focus towards the regulation of legitimate market actors and businesses might be a better source of information in terms of criminal intelligence.

While police intervention is a valuable enforcement tool needed to control violence, the research reviewed cautioned that an over-reliance on law enforcement can have a detrimental impact on alternative preventative approaches. Alternative paradigms are currently being explored within the criminological literature as options to “traditional” methods of law enforcement. Since organized crime takes place within both licit and illicit markets, opportunity reduction and harm minimization are presented as key components in eroding the foundations upon which organized crime rests.

The report identified a dearth of research in other areas, more specifically, there was no consensus on how to measure the social harm of organized crime. Also, the vast majority of the research has found that the ability of governments to exert strategic interventions in the realm of telecommunications and cyberspace remains limited. Environmental crime is another area of organized crime that has not received significant attention from researchers, despite being a global issue.

The authors of this report suggest that further, credible research is required to address gaps in our knowledge base with regards to organized crime, in the areas of cybercrime, environmental crime, and the social harms associated with organized crime. The report also endorses the development of a cohesive framework to explore alternative prevention based strategies to traditional law



enforcement measures. The authors suggested that co-operation and a transfer of knowledge between academics, law enforcement, and other criminal justice practitioners is an important part of establishing effective strategic policies and best practices, and in effectively combating organized crime.

Sheptycki, James and Margaret Beare, Pierre-Yves Bourduas, Carlo Morselli, Lisa Taylor, and Norman E. Taylor. (2009) *The Global Literature on Organized Crime: An Interpretive Report on the Development and Meta-Analysis of an Annotated Bibliographic Database for Canadian Policy Makers*. Ottawa: Law Enforcement and Policing Branch, Public Safety Canada.

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

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