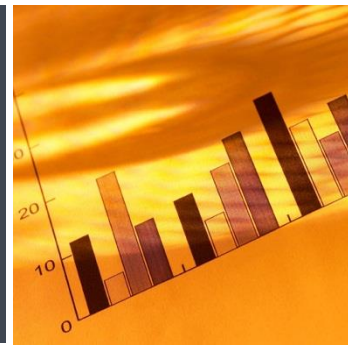


RESEARCH SUMMARY

A Literature Review on the Amalgamation of Police Services in Canada



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BUILDING A SAFE AND RESILIENT CANADA

**There is a trend towards amalgamating police services.
Medium-sized police services appear to be particularly effective.**

BACKGROUND

Canadian policing is in a period of transition, due in large part to a global trend toward the adoption of private-sector managerial and organizational values and strategies, which are expected to provide greater fiscal accountability, cost-efficiency, and value for money. These initiatives have resulted in an array of service models ranging from community policing to tiered public policing, and amalgamating small police services into larger regional police services.

Aboriginal police services in Canada have a distinctive mandate and structure, and play a complex role in policing Aboriginal communities. Of special interest is the challenge for provinces and territories of providing 24/7 coverage and ensuring adequate response times for remote and isolated Aboriginal communities which, on average, have approximately 3,000 residents and are policed by police detachments of about nine officers.

To date, there is little evidence-based research on the amalgamation of police services in Canada. This is despite the fact that over the last 40 years numerous small and medium-sized police services in Canada (especially in Ontario and Quebec) have been amalgamated into larger regional police services. The trend toward consolidation of smaller police services in Canada is similar to what is occurring in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Within this context, the main objectives of this report were to: 1) identify how the amalgamation of police services has occurred nationally and internationally; 2) assess the implications of amalgamation of police services in terms of performance measures; and 3) examine the specific implications for the policing of First Nation and Inuit communities.

METHOD

A review of the documents, articles, and other reports on police amalgamation, during the last 30 years, was conducted to identify key issues, and empirical analysis of police amalgamations in English common-law countries. The literature review included: government technical reports, policing inquiries and evaluations; peer-reviewed scholarly articles; grey literature; and books dealing with the issue of police amalgamation. Approximately 36 sources were reviewed.

FINDINGS

Since the 1970s, regionalized policing has become a priority for provincial governments seeking to improve policing standards and costs for small communities. In Quebec, for example, the provincial government amended the *Quebec Police Act* (2000) wherein municipalities with populations less than 50,000 had to contract for policing with the Sûreté du Québec. The rest of municipal police services that were unable to meet the new provincial policing standards were disbanded and consolidated into larger ones. Since 2001, the number of municipal police services in Quebec has shrunk from about 109 to 30 as of November 15, 2012. This represents a 72% reduction in municipal police services in Quebec over a 10-year period.

In Ontario, from 1962 to 1996, 153 police services were amalgamated by the provincial government into 11 regional police services providing policing to over 60 per cent of Ontario's population. The regionalization trend was accelerated in the 1990s when the provincial government enacted Bill 105 (*Police Services Amendment Act, 1997*). The Ontario Provincial Police



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(OPP) was dramatically affected as they saw their service contracts to municipalities increase massively. The OPP had 16 police service contracts in 1988, but by 2014, that number had risen to 145 with full cost recovery.

The three main reasons for the amalgamations were: 1) fiscal realities and an attempt to create efficiencies and economies of scale; 2) an increase in more exacting provincial policing standards (usually through amendments of provincial policing legislation), which small and medium-sized police services were often unable to meet; and 3) as a by-product of general municipal amalgamation by provincial government policy and legislation.

Despite claims and popular assumptions surrounding police regionalization, the studies reviewed demonstrated that large regional police services are not particularly more effective or efficient than medium-sized non-regional services. The primary reason is that policing seems to be a very local issue. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that medium sized police services (those policing about 50,000 inhabitants) are more successful in dealing with crime and operational costs than much larger regional services due to diseconomies of scale. One reason why larger services may be less effective or efficient is that the percentage of officers assigned to patrol decreases as police service size increases. Larger services are more likely to assign personnel to other specialized services such as criminal investigation, traffic control, juvenile services, administration, training, detention, communications, supervisory roles, or crime labs.

The impact of police regionalization may contradict community-policing principles, which logically requires decentralization within police organizations and between the various levels of policing. Community policing requires rank and file police officers to exercise discretion so they can adapt to specific situations and the needs expressed by local citizens.

Some of the other arguments in favor of regionalization, such as the need for specialized services and increased cooperation between jurisdictions are not supported by the evidence. Other studies, and indeed, provincial practice indicates that small police services are able to obtain specialized services from larger provincial or adjacent police services, as required. In the “real world,” there is already considerable cooperation between services. In

addition, medium-sized police services (those up to 100 officers) tend to have closer contact with the people they police that, in turn, may result in operational effectiveness and intelligence gathering. This observation supports the community policing strategy.

On the other hand, research on police service life-cycles has also shown that small police services, usually deploying fewer than ten officers, are more apt to fail due to their inability to maintain or meet ever-increasing policing standards. Thus, the amalgamation of micro-sized police services into larger medium-sized regional entities may be a valid strategy for the future direction of policing in Canada.

NEXT STEPS

Public Safety Canada has contracted a consulting firm to conduct a comparative analysis of selected amalgamated and non-amalgamated police services in Canada; and assess the implications of amalgamation to policing services provided to Aboriginal communities under the First Nations Policing Program.

SOURCE

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