



BC CRIME TRENDS

ROBBERY

What is Robbery?

A robbery is a theft where the offender uses violence or the threat of violence against a victim with the intent to steal from him or her. It is an indictable offence punishable by a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

Robbery offence data are grouped into three categories: robbery with firearms, robbery with other offensive weapons (such as knives, baseball bats, etc.) and other robbery. "Other" robbery includes assault with the intent to steal (mugging) and stopping a mail conveyance with the intent to rob or search it.

Unlike other violent crimes in which an offence is counted for every victim, only one robbery offence is counted in official crime statistics regardless of the number of victims in an incident. (Notably, recent research findings indicate that more than 80% of robbery offences involve only one victim.)

In contrast to other violent offences, victims of robbery usually do not know their assailant.

On average, robberies account for approximately 10% of all reported violent crimes and less than 1% of total reported crimes. Despite its low occurrence, robbery is among those crimes most feared by the public.

Robbery in B.C.

1998 Snapshot

During 1998, 11% of all *Criminal Code* offences reported in B.C. were categorized as violent. These

crimes include homicide, attempted murder, sexual and non-sexual assault, robbery and abduction. Although robbery represented only 1% of total *Criminal Code* offences reported during 1998, it represented 11% of all reported violent crimes.

There were 5,700 robberies reported to the police in B.C. during 1998. This translates to a rate of 1.4 robberies per 1,000 persons.

Of the total number of reported robberies during 1998, 3,000 were "other" robberies, 1,800 were robberies committed with the use of weapons other than firearms, and 900 were robberies committed with the use of firearms.

In 1998, 29% of robberies were cleared (solved). This clearance rate is comparable to previous years.

Almost 29% of persons charged with robbery during 1998 were young offenders.

10-year Trends

After remaining relatively constant throughout the 1980s, the number of reported robberies increased steadily between 1990 and 1996. Beginning in 1997, however, the number and rate of

robberies decreased. The total number of robberies reported in 1998 was 4% less than reported in 1997 and 10% less than reported in 1996.

Similarly, the robbery rate peaked in 1996 at 1.6 robberies per 1,000 persons and has been declining since that time.

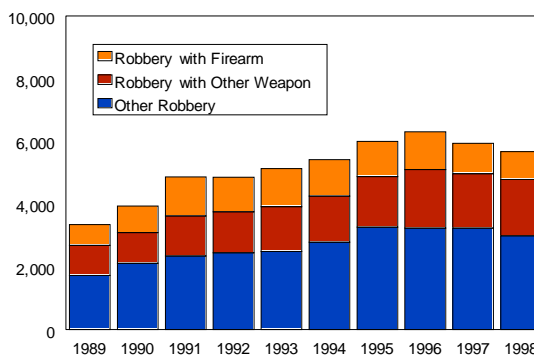
Preliminary crime data indicate that both the total number of robberies and the robbery rate have continued to decline during 1999.

Despite these recent declines, between 1989 and 1998, the overall number of reported robberies increased by more than 2,300 offences or 70%. In comparison, the total population of B.C. increased by 25% during the same time period.

Robbery in Canada

Canada's robbery rate was 0.9 per 1,000 persons in 1998, 3% less than during 1997. Between 1989 and 1998, the average robbery rate reported in Canada was 1.04 robberies per 1,000 persons.

Figure 1: Number of Robbery Offences in B.C., 1989-1998
By Type of Robbery



Nearly 29,000 robberies were reported in Canada during 1998, accounting for one in 10 violent crimes. Approximately 36% of persons charged with robbery during 1998 were young offenders.

How Does B.C. Compare with Canada?

Between 1989 and 1998, B.C.'s average robbery rate was 1.41 per 1,000 persons, which is 40% higher than Canada's average robbery rate of 1.04 per 1,000 persons.

The robbery rate for B.C. has been consistently higher than the national average since 1989, with a larger gap existing today than reported a decade ago. Unlike B.C.'s robbery rate, which continuously increased until 1996, the national rate generally showed a decline after peaking in 1991.

The proportion of firearm-related robberies for both B.C. and Canada peaked in 1991 and has continuously declined since that time.

During 1998, young offenders accounted for a smaller proportion of persons charged with robbery in B.C. (29%) as compared to Canada (36%).

Robbery Survey Results

Police Services Division conducted a survey of robbery incidents reported to provincial law enforcement agencies during 1996. One of the purposes of the survey was to determine the extent of home invasions occurring within the province. In total, 927 incidents, involving 1,600 accused and 1,150 victims, were examined.

The survey findings reveal that 33% of robberies occurred on a street, road or highway. An additional 9% occurred in other outdoor areas including parks, school grounds and parking lots; 8% occurred in homes; 8%

occurred in convenience stores; 7% occurred at banks; while 6% occurred in gas stations.

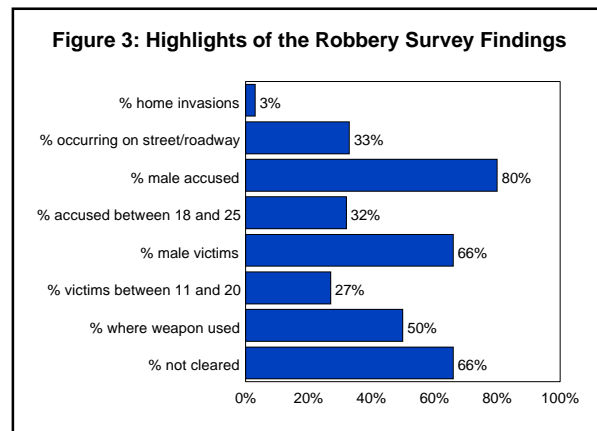
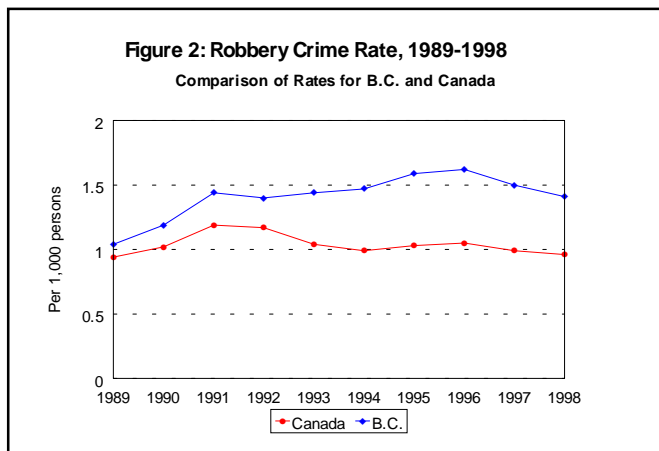
Half of the surveyed incidents involved an accused acting alone, while 28% of incidents involved two accused persons. In eight out of ten surveyed incidents the accused was male. Of those incidents where the accused was identified, 30% were young offenders, 32% were between 18 and 25 years and 15% were between 26 and 39 years.

In the surveyed incidents, two-thirds of the victims were male and one-third were female. Approximately 27% of victims were between 11 and 20 years of age, and 21% were between 21 and 30 years of age. An additional 23% of victims were between 31 and 45 years. A lone victim was involved in 81% of incidents while 13% of robberies involved two victims.

A weapon was used in approximately one-half of the surveyed incidents. Of these incidents, a firearm was used 27% of the time while a knife was used in another 41% of incidents.

When goods were stolen during the robbery, the value of the goods was estimated at less than \$500 in approximately 72% of the surveyed incidents.

Approximately one-third of the surveyed incidents were cleared by charge (solved) and the remaining two-thirds were not cleared (unsolved). An accused was not identified in most of the incidents that were unsolved.



Even though 8% of incidents occurred in a home, the police indicated in only 3% of the surveyed incidents that the robbery was a home invasion.

Home Invasion in B.C.

Defining Home Invasion

Official crime statistics do not count home invasions as a separate category of robbery offences largely because the *Criminal Code* does not have a specific section designated for home invasion offences.

Three general categories of home invasions have been identified in B.C. The common thread among these crimes is premeditated confrontation with victims, coupled with the intent to threaten or inflict violence, all of which occur within the homes of the victims.

Some home invasions can be characterized as residential robberies, relying on tactics similar to those used in extortion schemes. The perpetrators are often Asian gang members who target wealthy immigrant families and overseas students from the same cultural background.

Other home invasions are perpetrated by criminals against others within the criminal community. The targeted victims are generally involved in illegitimate activities. These home invasions may be carried out to gain access to illegal drugs or proceeds of crime from illegitimate activities, or as symbolic gestures to reinforce the power of a group within the criminal community.

Finally, some home invasions target the elderly. These crimes often involve the exercise of physical power and intimidation.

Magnitude of Home Invasion

In an attempt to measure the magnitude of home invasions in B.C., Police Services Division conducted an informal survey of major municipal police departments and RCMP detachments in the province during February 1999. Collectively, major police agencies (excluding Richmond and Vancouver) estimate that between 100 and 130 home invasions were perpetrated between January 1995 and February 1999.

The Vancouver Police Department has collected data on home invasions in their jurisdiction for some time and report that in the three-year period between 1995 and 1998, approximately 60 home invasions were perpetrated against elderly victims. In addition, the Vancouver Police Department has recorded another 93 home invasions (not against elderly victims) since 1997.

Richmond RCMP (not a participant in the survey) estimate that they annually investigate 10 to 12 incidents of home invasion in their jurisdiction. However, Richmond police investigators believe that home invasions perpetrated for economic gain are seriously underreported because victims fear retribution against either themselves or members of their families.

B.C.'s Response to Home Invasion

In partnership with the RCMP and municipal police agencies in the Lower Mainland, the Ministry of Attorney General has developed the brochure, *Protect yourself from Home Invasion*, to help improve the safety of homes and neighborhoods in the province. For a copy of the brochure, please visit

www.ag.gov.bc.ca/homeinvasions.html.

The B.C. government has also requested that the federal government amend the *Criminal Code* and the

Young Offenders Act to ensure tough sentences for home invaders. The federal justice minister has recently agreed to consider changes to the *Criminal Code* to send a stronger message to would be perpetrators of home invasions.

In Summary ...

The total number of robberies and the robbery rate began to decline in B.C. after 1996 and to decline in the rest of Canada after 1991. The downward trend in robbery offences is consistent with decreases in overall crime reported in Canada and around the world.

A survey of robbery offences in B.C. reveals that a "typical" robbery is not a home invasion but rather it occurs on a street, road or highway and is committed by a male adult acting alone. The victim is most likely to be a lone male adult. In about half of the incidents a weapon is used, but the weapon is more likely to be a knife than a firearm. Only one in three robberies are cleared by charge largely because victims are unable to identify their assailants.

Home invasions account for a very small proportion of robberies reported to the police. However, home invasion offences have prompted public concern and fear because of the unique predatory nature of these crimes.



Data Qualifiers

The crime data contained in this report represent only those crimes reported to (or discovered by) police which upon preliminary investigation, have been deemed to have occurred or been attempted. These data do not imply a count of the number of charges laid, prosecutions conducted, informations sworn, or convictions obtained. The crime data contained in this report have been recorded by the police on the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey. Offences are scored according to the UCR Scoring Rules. If a single criminal incident contains a number of violations of the law, then only the most serious one is recorded. However, with the exception of robbery offences where one incident with multiple victims is scored as one offence, police record one offence for every victim of a violent crime, i.e., homicide, attempted murder, sexual and non-sexual assault, and abduction.

Population figures used in this report are based on the results of the Canada Census which is conducted every five years. Population figures for intervening years are estimated based on Census data.

The data contained in this report may vary when compared with previous reports produced by Police Services Division. Where variance occurs, the report produced at the latest date will reflect the most current data available.

Victimization surveys indicate that a substantial number of crimes are never reported to the police. In spite of this, victimization studies appear to support recent trends showing that the crime rate is declining.

Sources

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