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## PATTERNS OF ABORIGINAL CRIME

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### INTRODUCTION

Canada has one of the world's most diverse Aboriginal populations. From the small Inuit settlements of the Eastern Arctic, to the woodlands of western Ontario, to the West Coast, the 800,000 persons (about 3 percent of the Canadian population) who identify themselves as Aboriginal are distinguished by their culture and language, their legal status and the diversity of geographic settings in which they live (Statistics Canada, 1998). Aboriginal people live in isolated settlements accessible only by air and/or sea; on reserves; and in cities and towns from sea to sea.

Despite this diversity, there is one attribute that many Aboriginal bands and communities share — a high rate of violent crime and victimization. In recent years, numerous task forces and commissions of inquiry have documented the conflict which Aboriginal people experience with the criminal law and their overrepresentation in the criminal justice system (see Griffiths & Verdun-Jones, 1993; Silverman & Nielsen, 1992). And Aboriginal bands and communities have become increasingly involved in developing alternative, community-based programs and services which are designed to address the needs of Aboriginal victims and offenders. This has included Aboriginal police forces, community courts, and localized corrections programs. Considerably less attention, however, has been given to the patterns of Aboriginal crime. Understanding Aboriginal

crime is a prerequisite for the design of effective prevention programs and criminal justice services.

In the following discussion, we explore the patterns of Aboriginal crime in Canada. We will first consider the findings of research conducted in rural and remote areas of the country as well as in urban centres. From this, a general picture of Aboriginal crime can be constructed. The discussion will then shift to a consideration of the various explanations that have been offered for Aboriginal criminality and for the differences which exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal patterns of crime and victimization.

One way Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal crime patterns can be compared is by examining the proportion of the population in a given jurisdiction that is Aboriginal with the proportion of individuals who are accused of criminal offences that are Aboriginal. Where this proportion is high (i.e., Aboriginal peoples commit more offences than one would expect given the relative size of the Aboriginal population), it can be said that Aboriginal peoples are more likely to be represented in measures of criminal behaviour than are non-Aboriginal peoples. Three recent studies (Griffiths, Wood, Zellerer, & Simon, 1994a; Trevethan, 1993; Wolff, 1991) included such comparisons.

It is, of course, not possible to explore all facets of what is a very complex issue, and we must keep in mind that it is often difficult to compare the findings from different research studies. Neverthe-

less, it is possible to piece together a general picture of Aboriginal crime in Canada which can be utilized in attempts to explain the causes of Aboriginal criminality.

## **PATTERNS OF ABORIGINAL CRIME: A PROFILE**

There are several identifiable patterns of crime in Aboriginal communities and among Aboriginal populations in Canada:

- \* the rates of violent crime and property crime in Aboriginal communities and in Aboriginal populations are very high, particularly in comparison with the rates for non-Aboriginal peoples;
- \* there is considerable variation in official crime rates between Aboriginal communities and among Aboriginal populations across Canada; and
- \* the types of offences committed by Aboriginal persons vary by age: younger individuals tend to be more involved in committing property offences, while violent offences are generally committed by individuals who are somewhat older.

## **ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL CRIME PATTERNS**

Aboriginal peoples are overrepresented in crime statistics and in the criminal justice system in many areas of the country. This pattern extends to reserves, urban areas, and remote settlements. Generally, Aboriginal communities and populations experience much more violence than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. There are, however, fewer differences in the rates of property crimes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons and communities; in fact, in many areas of the country, Aboriginal communities have lower property crime rates than non-Aboriginal communities.

### **RESERVE VS. OFF-RESERVE, SASKATCHEWAN**

Wolff (1991) compared the crime rates of on-reserve and off-reserve populations in Saskatchewan. He

found that, although only 3 percent of the population resided on Indian reserves, 15 percent of all violent crimes in Saskatchewan were committed on reserves (Wolff, 1991:30). This means that, on reserves in Saskatchewan, where 98 percent of the population is Aboriginal, the violent crime rate is five times higher than one would expect. For property crimes in Saskatchewan, however, the proportion of the population that are reserve residents is equal to the proportion of property crimes that were committed on reserves (Wolff, 1991:33); this means that reserves in Saskatchewan have rates of property crime that are roughly equal to those of the rest of the province.

### **URBAN ABORIGINAL CRIME: FOUR WESTERN CITIES**

Table 1 includes findings from studies of urban Aboriginal crime conducted by Trevethan (1993) and Griffiths et al. (1994a). These studies allow a comparison of the percentage of the population that is Aboriginal with (1) the percentage of Aboriginal persons accused of property and violent offences, and (2) the percentage of Aboriginal individuals who were the victim of a violent offence. The figures in Table 18.1 indicate that, in Saskatoon, Regina, Calgary, and Vancouver, Aboriginal persons are more likely than non-Aboriginal persons to be accused of committing a property or a violent offence and are more likely than non-Aboriginals to have been the victim of a violent crime. More specifically, Aboriginal people are four to eight times more likely than non-Aboriginal people to be accused of a property offence, five to nine times more likely to be accused of having committed a violent crime, and three to six times more likely to be the victim of a violent offence.

### **THE BAFFIN REGION, EASTERN ARCTIC, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**

The Baffin Region is situated in the Eastern Arctic of the Northwest Territories and comprises thirteen communities, ranging in size from Grise Fiord with a population of 150, to Iqaluit, which has approximately 4200 residents. The average size of the

**Table 1**

Patterns of Crime and Victimization in Four Western Cities, 1990 and 1992

City	% Population That is Aboriginal	% Aboriginal of Accused of Violent Offences	% Aboriginal of Accused of Property Offences	% Aboriginal of Victims of Violent Offences
Saskatoon	6	36	29	(Not Reported)
Regina	5	47	42	31
Calgary	2	10	8	6
Vancouver	3	17	15	10

SOURCE: Adapted from material from S. Trevelyan., *Police-Reported Aboriginal Crime in Calgary, Regina and Saskatoon* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1993) and C.T. Griffiths, D.S. Wood, E. Zellerer, and J. Simon, *Aboriginal Policing in British Columbia*, report prepared for Commission of Inquiry, Policing in British Columbia, (Victoria, BC, Ministry of Attorney General, 1994a).

communities is slightly less than 1000, although most have under 700 residents. These communities are accessible only by air, or, for a few months during the late summer, by sea. The levels of crime for these communities generally are much higher than the national rates for all Canadians. The figures in Table 2 indicate that all of the Baffin Region communities had rates of violent crime which were

higher than the national rate in Canada. In 1996, the Baffin Region property crime rate was nearly double the Canadian property crime rate, and the violent crime rate was more than six times the national rate. In six of the communities, however, the property crime rate was lower than the national rate (see also Griffiths, Saville, Wood, & Zellerer, 1994b).

**Table 2**

Violent and Property Crime Rates per 1,000 Total Population, Baffin Region, N.W.T. Communities, and Canada, 1996

Community	Violent Crime Rate	Property Crime Rate
Broughton Island	36.9	90.2
Cape Dorset	75.1	81.4
Clyde River	42.4	48.0
Griac Fiord	13.5	6.8
Hall Beach	42.4	58.9
Igloodik	80.9	66.4
Igaluit	118.2	147.2
Lake Harbour	35.3	45.3
Nanasivik	29.2	47.5
Pangnirtung	20.9	69.2
Pond Inlet	20.8	25.1
Resolute Bay	111.1	40.4
Sanikiluaq	26.9	74.5
Baffin Region, Total	66.7	85.7
CANADA	9.7	52.0

SOURCE: Adapted from Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, *Uniform Crime Reports, 1996* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1997).

### AUTONOMOUS "STAND ALONE" ABORIGINAL POLICE JURISDICTIONS

As Aboriginal peoples have become increasingly involved in the creation and control of justice programs in recent years, a number of Aboriginal controlled autonomous police departments have been established. These "stand alone" departments, as they are sometimes called, have jurisdiction over the enforcement of the Criminal Code in the reserve communities they serve. Violent and property crime statistics compiled by these autonomous departments for the reserves they police are shown in Table 3. A comparison of these crime rates with those found nationally provides results similar to the comparisons made above. The Aboriginal police jurisdictions report violent crime rates that are much higher than average, while property crime is reported at levels similar to the national rate. As seen in Table 18.3, six of the eight "stand alone" jurisdictions had reported violent crime rates that were at least double those found nationally. The property crime rates, on the other hand, are much like those found in non-Aboriginal jurisdictions; three of the eight autonomous police jurisdictions had property crime rates less than the national rate.

### HOMICIDE RATES

Of all of the indicators of criminal behaviour, homicide statistics tend to be the most reliable and valid (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1984). Homicide statistics, therefore, can be utilized to determine the extent to which Aboriginal peoples are overrepresented in terms of criminal behaviour and as another basis of comparison with non-Aboriginal populations. Table 18.4 compares the rates (per 100,000 population) at which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons were suspected of committing homicides and were the victims of homicide in the major cities of Canada over the 10 year period 1980-1989.

The figures in Table 4 indicate that as one moves east from Ottawa, Aboriginal peoples are much more likely to be suspected of committing homicides than are non-Aboriginals and, except in Ottawa, Montreal, and Halifax, they were also more likely than non-Aboriginal persons to be the victim of a homicide.

### ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY

In addition to official statistics, the findings of general social surveys and victimization surveys provide insights into crime in Aboriginal communities and

**Table 3**

Violent and Property Crime Rates per 1000 Population, "Stand Alone" Aboriginal Police Jurisdictions, 1995 & 1996

Police Jurisdiction	Violent Crime Rate		Property Crime Rate	
	1995	1996	1995	1996
Unama'ki Tribal Police	57.4	47.2	41.1	46.5
Akwesasne Mohawk Police	8.4	10.0	22.6	25.4
UCCM Police Service	47.0	50.9	70.4	108.1
Lac Seul Police Service	133.3	161.7	83.3	108.3
Six Nations Police	15.0	17.7	33.6	28.8
Dakota Ojibway Police Service	65.8	80.5	69.5	64.6
Louis Bull Police Service	42.7	34.5	92.7	70.0
Siksika Nation Police		75.3		61.0
CANADA	9.9	9.7	52.3	52.0

SOURCE: Adapted from Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, *Uniform Crime Reports, 1995* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1996); Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, *Uniform Crime Reports, 1996* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1997).

**Table 4**

Non-Aboriginal &amp; Aboriginal Homicide, Suspect and Victim Rates (per 100 000 Population), Selected Cities, 1980-1989.

City	Non-Aboriginal Suspects	Aboriginal Suspects	Non-Aboriginal Victims	Aboriginal Victims
Halifax	3.4	0.0	2.9	0.0
Montreal	2.5	0.4	4.3	0.8
Ottawa	1.7	3.8	1.8	0.0
Toronto	2.1	7.5	2.3	4.8
Thunder Bay	1.3	17.4	1.5	15.3
Winnipeg	2.1	25.7	1.6	19.1
Saskatoon	1.1	19.9	1.0	12.9
Regina	0.9	76.6	1.2	45.3
Edmonton	2.6	27.9	2.7	21.1
Calgary	1.7	19.7	1.8	12.5
Vancouver	3.9	15.3	5.5	14.4

SOURCE: Based on material from C. LaPrairie, *Dimensions of Aboriginal Over-Representation in correctional Institutions and Implications for Crime Prevention* (Ottawa: Ministry of Solicitor General Canada, 1992), p. 6. Reproduced with the permission of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1999.

populations. A survey by Sacco and Johnson (1990) asked a sample of all Canadians (including Aboriginal peoples) whether they felt safe walking alone in their community at night. The same question was asked by Statistics Canada (1994) in the Aboriginal Peoples Survey, which surveyed Aboriginal persons in communities across Canada. In comparing the findings of these two surveys, it appears that Aboriginal people feel just as safe in their communities as non-Aboriginal people, a very interesting finding considering the high rates of violent crime and victimization that afflict many Aboriginal communities. More specifically, the figures presented in Table 5 show that 73 percent of Canadians in 1987 and 73 percent of Aboriginal peoples in 1991 said that they felt safe walking alone in their community at night. In only three of the twelve provinces and territories (Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario) was the percentage of Aboriginal peoples who said they felt safe less than the national average for Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal peoples.

Perceptions of personal safety, however, are much lower among Aboriginal peoples residing in metropolitan areas. Table 5 indicates that Aboriginal

peoples surveyed by the Aboriginal Peoples Survey in 1991 were 10 percent less likely to report feeling safe when walking alone in their community at night than their non-Aboriginal urban counterparts surveyed by Sacco and Johnson in 1987. In three metropolitan areas (Toronto, Vancouver, and Victoria), almost half of Aboriginal peoples reported feeling unsafe walking alone at night in their community (Statistics Canada, 1994).<sup>1</sup>

#### VARIATION IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES AND ABORIGINAL POPULATIONS

In our discussion thus far, we have identified some of the general patterns of Aboriginal crime and victimization and noted the similarities and differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and populations. These findings might lead us to expect that all Aboriginal communities are afflicted by high rates of crime and victimization. The findings of field research projects conducted in a number of provinces and in a number of different geographic settings, however, indicate that this is not the case. Table 6 presents the results of several research studies of Aboriginal crime, including (1) a study on several

**Table 5**

Perceptions of Safety among Aboriginal Peoples, by Province and by Metropolitan Area, 1991, and Perceptions of Safety of Non-Aboriginal Peoples, Canada, 1987

Province	Percentage That Feel Safe Walking Alone at Night in		Percentage That Feel Safe Walking Alone at Night in Their Community
	Their Community	Metropolitan Area	
Newfoundland	86	Halifax	61
PEI.	73	Montreal	64
Nova Scotia	81	Ottawa	60
New Brunswick	76	Toronto	48
Quebec	73	Winnipeg	65
Ontario	71	Regina	76
Manitoba	75	Saskatoon	70
Saskatchewan	75	Calgary	68
Alberta	69	Edmonton	62
B.C.	69	Vancouver	56
Yukon	81	Victoria	56
N.W.T.	80		
Aboriginal, Canada	73	Urban Aboriginal, Canada	61
Non-Aboriginal, Canada	73	Urban Non-Aboriginal, Canada	71

SOURCE: Adapted from Statistics Canada, *Aboriginal Peoples Survey: Language, Tradition, Health, and Social Issues* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1993); and V. F. Sacco & H. Johnson, *Patterns of Criminal Victimization in Canada* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1990). Reproduced with the permission of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1999.

Amerindian reserves in the province of Quebec; (2) two studies of crime patterns among Aboriginal peoples in urban areas; (3) an inquiry into crime in Nishnawbe-Aski Nation communities in northwest Ontario; and (4) Wolff's study of crime on Aboriginal reserves in Saskatchewan. The findings of these studies indicate that there is a great deal of variation in both property and violent crime rates among the jurisdictions in which Aboriginal people reside as well as among Aboriginal communities.

A comparison of the jurisdictions covered by the research studies indicates that the mean of the rates for violent crimes varied between 19 per 1000 population on Amerindian reserves in Quebec to 50 per 1000 population in the Baffin Region, N.W.T. For property crimes, the rates ranged from 22 per 1000 population on Amerindian reserves to 106 per 1000 population in the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation commu-

nities. Even within jurisdictions, there is a great amount of variation in crime rates. Several of the Amerindian reserve communities in Quebec experienced no violent or property crime between 1978 and 1983, while other Amerindian communities had rates that were many times the national average.

The studies of crime rates in four western cities found that Aboriginal peoples in Regina (at a rate of 246 per 1000) were 6 times more likely to be accused of a property crime than Aboriginal peoples in Calgary (at a rate of 36 per 1000). Similar ranges in the rates of crime exist among communities of the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation, on Saskatchewan reserves, and Baffin Region communities.

### Offence Type and Age of Offender

A final pattern in Aboriginal crime that will be examined is the age structure for property and

**Table 6**

Violent and Property Crime Rates per 1000 Population for Aboriginal Communities and Populations

Jurisdiction, Year, and Offence Type	Mean Offense Rate	Range of Offence Rates	Study Sources
Amerindian Reserves, Quebec, 1978 to 1983			Hyde & LaPrairie, 1987
Violent	19	0 to 57	
Property	22	0 to 58	
Aboriginal Residents, 4 Western Cities, 1990* & 1992**			Trevethan, 1993; Griffiths et al., 1994a
Violent	32	17 to 58	
Property	96	36 to 246	
Nishnawbe-Aski Nation Communities, Ontario, 1990			Auger et al., 1992
Violent	36	18 to 63	
Property***	106	50 to 161	
Saskatchewan Reserves, 1989			Wolff, 1991
Violent	51	32 to 93****	
Property	73	39 to 167****	
Baffin Region Communities, N.W.T., 1996			CCJS, 1997
Violent	50	14 to 118	
Property	62	7 to 147	

\* Calgary, Regina, and Saskatoon

\*\* Vancouver

\*\*\* Property crime rates for these communities include property damage.

\*\*\*\* Range for Saskatchewan reserves is across the 13 Justice Administration Areas in the province rather than across all Indian reserves.

violent offences. Research studies indicate that there is an indirect relationship between age and the likelihood that an offender will commit a property offence. More often than not, property offences are committed by youth or young adults in their early 20s. Violent crimes, on the other hand, tend to be committed by older persons. Up until age 40, there is a direct relationship between age and the propensity to commit violent crimes.

In their study of crime on 25 Amerindian reserves in the province of Quebec, Hyde and LaPrairie (1987:29-30) found that young offenders were more likely to have committed property offences, while adults were more likely to have committed violent offences. This pattern holds true

in other Aboriginal jurisdictions. On Indian reserves in Saskatchewan, where 98 percent of residents are Aboriginal, Wolff (1991) found that the rates of being charged for violent offences were highest among adults. On average, 51 out of 1000 adults age 18 and over were charged with violent offences, while only 16 out of every 1000 youths age 12 to 17 were charged with violent offences (Wolff, 1991:31-32). This relationship is reversed for property offences. Twenty-nine out of every 1000 adults were charged with property offences, while 88 out of 1000 youths age 12 to 17 were charged with a property offence (Wolff, 1991:35).

The relationship between age and type of crime also holds true for Aboriginal peoples in urban areas

Aboriginal individuals accused of violent offences were older than those individuals accused of property offences in the four western Canadian cities studied by Trevethan in 1990. In Saskatoon, 58 percent of offenders accused of property crimes were under the age of 25, while 61 percent of offenders accused of violent crimes were age 25 and over (Trevethan, 1993:50). Likewise, in Calgary in 1990, 56 percent of offenders accused of property crimes were under the age of 25, while 59 percent of offenders accused of violent crimes were 25 years old and over (Trevethan, 1993:42). An exception to this rule is in Regina, where the majority of individuals charged with violent crimes (56 percent) were under the age of 25, although 73 percent of Aboriginal individuals charged with property crimes were under the age of 25 (Trevethan, 1993:46).

Among the Inuit of the Baffin Region, Northwest Territories, individuals accused of violent offences tend to be older than individuals accused of property offences (Griffiths et al., 1994b). Information recorded from RCMP operational files in each of the communities for the year 1991 shows

that in the Baffin Region, the median age of Inuit accused of violent offences was 28 years, whereas the median age of Inuit accused of property offences was 20 years. Table 7 shows the median age of accused of property and violent offences in the 13 different Baffin Region communities. In 11 of the 12 communities in which Inuit were accused of violent offences, the median age of those who were accused of violent offences was higher than that of those who were accused of property offences.

## UNDERSTANDING ABORIGINAL CRIME PATTERNS

Any explanation that is offered for Aboriginal crime must consider the findings of the research studies discussed above. More specifically, the following questions must be addressed:

- \* Why are Aboriginal people, whether considered as a population or as communities, more likely than non-Aboriginals to be accused of committing offences and to be the victims of crime?

**Table 7**

Median Age of Individuals Accused of Property and Violent Offences, Baffin Region Communities, 1991

Community	Median Age, Property Offenses	Median Age, Violent Offenses
Pangnirtung	21	28
Lake Harbour	24	22
Cape Dorset	21	28
Broughton Island	23	24
Clyde River	19	26
Hall Beach	18	27
Igloolik	18	27
Pond Inlet	17	26
Sanikiluaq	21	27
Resolute	30	32
Grise Fiord	n/a	29
Nanasivik	19	28
Iqaluit	21	30
Baffin Region	20	28

SOURCE: Based on material from RCMP Operational Files.



- \* Why is there often considerable variation in the rates of crime between Aboriginal communities and populations in different regions of the country and within the same region?
- \* Why are property offences more likely to be committed by Aboriginal youth and young adults, while violent crimes are committed by older Aboriginal persons?

### **The High Rates of Crime, Particularly Violence, in Aboriginal Communities**

There are a number of approaches which have been taken in an attempt to explain the high rates of crime among Aboriginal peoples. One of the most common focuses on the colonization and conquest of Aboriginal peoples by the European settlers and the resulting destruction of Aboriginal culture, communities, and lifeways. A long-term consequence of colonization, it has been argued, is the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian society, which is reflected in high rates of unemployment, low levels of formal education, poverty, and substandard living conditions. Taken together, the condition of Aboriginal peoples is seen to contribute to high rates of criminal behaviour. Fleras and Elliott (1992:16-18), for example, have argued that Aboriginal overrepresentation in crime statistics is but one outcome of "colonialist domination" (see also Berger, 1991:36).

Colonization and its consequences for Aboriginal peoples has also been offered as an explanation for why the crime rates for Aboriginal peoples are higher than for non-Aboriginals. In explaining the patterns of Aboriginal crime in the urban centres of Calgary, Regina, and Saskatoon, Trevethan (1993:34) argues that "the differences in crime patterns between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons may be attributed to several socio-demographic variables" including lower levels of educational attainment, labour force participation, average income, and higher levels of unemployment.<sup>2</sup>

Another explanation that has been offered for why Aboriginal peoples have higher crime rates when compared with non-Aboriginal peoples is

that the Aboriginal population is, on average, younger than the non-Aboriginal population in Canada. Trevethan (1993) has argued that Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal differences in crime rates are due, at least in part, to the larger percentage of Aboriginal people in the 15-34 year old age group. Wolff (1991), however, considered the role of age in comparing on-reserve and off-reserve crime rates in Saskatchewan and found only modest support for this explanation. By adjusting the rates of on-reserve violent and property crime so that the on-reserve population age structure matched the off-reserve population age structure, the on-reserve charged rates for property crime dropped from 44 per 1000 to 36 per 1000, while the on-reserve charged rates for violent crime actually rose from 42 per 1000 to 47 per 1000 (Wolff, 1991:40). In other words, in Saskatchewan, the on-reserve age structure had a modest impact on the rate of property crime but not on the rate of violent crime.

Another explanation that has been offered for the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in official crime statistics is discriminatory treatment of Aboriginal people by the criminal justice system. Several task forces and commissions of inquiry have suggested that Aboriginal people are much more likely to be arrested, found guilty, and sent to a correctional institution than non-Aboriginal people (see Cawsey, 1991; Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991a). In particular, concerns have been raised about the discriminatory treatment of Aboriginal peoples by the police (see Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991b). Caution, however, must be exercised in assessing the extent to which such discriminatory treatment, where it exists, has an effect on Aboriginal crime rates. Research studies indicate that most criminal offences are discovered not by the police, but by community residents who report to the police. In the Baffin Region, for example, Griffiths et al. (1994b) found that only 6 percent of officially recorded offences were originally discovered by the RCMP.<sup>3</sup> And LaPrairie (1992:7) has argued that "some data allude to differential treatment by police but it is neither empirical nor recent." Suffice it to say that there is still a great deal of field

study which is required before the connections between high crime rates among Aboriginal peoples and the response to Aboriginal peoples by the criminal justice system can be firmly established.

### **The Variations in Aboriginal Crime Patterns**

Complicating our attempt to explain Aboriginal crime are the variations in crime patterns which exist between different regions of the country and between communities in the same jurisdiction. Why is it, for example, that there are differences in the patterns of crime among the thirteen isolated Inuit communities of the Baffin Region, Eastern Arctic? The colonization perspective would lead us to predict that the consequences of colonization were equally as disastrous for all Aboriginal cultures and communities, yet the findings of field studies suggest otherwise. Variations in crime patterns exist between communities that share many of the same difficulties — low levels of education, employment, and income, and loss of traditional cultural practices. This suggests that these types of variables are unable to tell us why some Aboriginal communities have higher rates of crime than others (Marenin, 1992; Wood, 1991).

Two different studies have shown the inability of the colonization perspective to explain variations in Aboriginal community crime patterns. Wolff (1991:28), in a rank order analysis of the crime patterns on Saskatchewan reserves, found no relationship between these manifestations of colonization (including single parent families, persons per dwelling, unemployment, labour force participation, education, average income, and income from government transfer payments) and violent and property crime rates. The only relationship that Wolff (1991:28) did discover was one between property and violent crime, meaning that communities that have high violent crime rates are also more likely to have high property crime rates. A similar study by Wood (1997), looking at the Inuit communities of the Baffin Region, found no relationship between the rates of violent crime and community relocation or the impact of the seal fur

market decline. Wood (1997) also found, contrary to the colonization perspective, that high violent crime rates were associated with high, rather than low, levels of income, employment, and education.

Other approaches have been more successful in explaining why some Aboriginal communities have higher crime rates than others. In an attempt to explain crime patterns between Aboriginal communities, LaPrairie (1988) compared the ways in which Aboriginal communities had responded to the pressures to modernize. By classifying reserves according to the extent to which they had adapted to modern conditions, and the methods that communities had used to adapt, LaPrairie (1988) was able to explain some of this inter-community variation. Bands which had responded to the forces of modernization by developing educational programs, administrative services, and an economic base on the reserve had higher levels of violent crime than those bands that had dealt with the pressures of modernization by developing the personal, educational, and job skills of individual band members in settings outside the reserve. These bands, in contrast, had higher rates of property offences.

LaPrairie (1988) argues that part of the reason why these two different approaches to modernization have produced a differential influence on the rates of property and violent crime is the impact of each of the approaches on the daily patterns of interaction between community residents. In other words, the ways in which the bands have modernized have affected their "routine activities." Aboriginal bands that have focused their energies on developing programs and services on the reserve have tended to keep more people on the reserve, which, in turn, leads to increased opportunities for interpersonal conflicts, including violent offences, to occur. On the other hand, bands which have reacted to modernization by becoming involved in off-reserve school systems and employment opportunities have, at the same time, become more vulnerable to property offences because of the absence of property owners.

### **The Role of Age in Aboriginal Crime Patterns**

Few attempts have been made to explain the role that age plays in the types of offences committed by Aboriginal persons (younger persons tend to commit property offences, while older Aboriginal persons tend to become involved in crimes of violence). However, it is important to note that a similar pattern exists among non-Aboriginal people as well. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990:127) point out that in official crime statistics, there is "a consistent difference in the age distributions for person [i.e., violent] and property offences [which] appears to be well established." These researchers (Gottfredson & Hirschi 1990:127) have also found that "person crimes peak later than property crimes, and the rate declines more slowly with age."

One possible explanation for the higher rates of violent crime, particularly spousal and sexual assault, among older Aboriginal peoples is that older individuals are more likely to be in a relationship than are younger persons. This would provide more opportunities for such behaviour to occur. An examination of the relationships between victims and offenders in the Baffin Region (Griffiths et al., 1994) shows that most violent offences occur in immediate family relationships. While it was impossible to determine the victim/offender relationship in 30 percent of the police files sampled, of the violent offence files where it was possible to determine the victim/offender relationship, 66 percent involved violence between two people who were in an immediate family relationship. Of the remaining cases involving violent offences, 30 percent involved violence between acquaintances, while only 4 percent involved an offender who was a stranger to the victim.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

In the preceding discussion, we have identified several major attributes of Aboriginal crime that future researchers and those involved in the formulation of policy and programs must address. To date, there

has been very little research on the causes of Aboriginal criminality or on ways in which crime among Aboriginal people can be prevented. It is important to point out that, although the rates of crime among Aboriginal peoples are much higher than those for non-Aboriginals, many of the pal-term of crime committed by Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals are the same. From research on crime patterns in Alaska Native villages, Marenin (1992:356) has argued: "... native American crime is not a sui generic category. It is crime done by people who happen to be native Americans. Their status is one, but not the only determining factor in behavior." And McCaskill (1985:62), who has conducted several studies of Aboriginal crime in Canada, has cautioned us that Aboriginal criminality is quite complex and that it must be considered to be, in many instances, the result of an individual pathology: "For some Native offenders being Native may be almost irrelevant to their criminal activity."

This suggests that the root causes of crime among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples may be similar and that researchers exploring Aboriginal criminality may want to utilize theoretical approaches which consider criminal behaviour across all races and ethnicities. Such lines of inquiry may be more productive than those adopted to date. As Aboriginal bands and communities and the federal, provincial, and territorial governments in Canada increase their efforts to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal peoples in the criminal justice system, more attention will be focused on the causes of patterns of Aboriginal crime. The extent to which criminologists can develop theories of crime which explain the patterns of Aboriginal criminality will contribute to the success of initiatives designed to prevent and respond to Aboriginal crime.

### **NOTES**

1. Given the four year time difference between the two surveys, it is difficult to determine the exact nature and extent of the differences in feelings of safety among Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal people, The General Social Survey of all Canadians was conducted in 1987, and since that time it is possible that non-Aboriginal perceptions of safety have decreased to the point that they may be similar to those of Aboriginal peoples.

2. While many observers have argued that there is an association between the use (and abuse) of alcoholic beverages and Aboriginal crime, it is important to point out that alcohol is also closely associated with criminal behaviour among non-Aboriginals. To date, there have been no published research studies which have compared Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alcohol use or consumption patterns with crime patterns. Studies of Aboriginal drinking in the United States (see May, 1989) which indicate that, per capita, fewer Aboriginal people drink than non-Aboriginals, suggest that the role of alcohol as a causal factor in Aboriginal crime should be closely examined.
3. Of the criminal offences discovered by the RCMP, more than half involved violations against the Narcotic Control Act, the N.W.T. Liquor Act, or were offences in which the RCMP or one of its members was a victim (e.g., assault on a police officer or property damage to a police vehicle).

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