Topic Summary

RURAL CRIME PREVENTION

CANADIAN MUNICIPAL
NETWORK ON CRIME
PREVENTION
Together for Safer Canadian Cities

RÉSEAU MUNICIPAL
CANADIEN EN PRÉVENTION
DE LA CRIMINALITÉ
Ensemble pour des villes canadiennes plus sécuritaires

DISCLAIMER

This is a living document. New evidence, best practices, and promising practices emerge regularly. As a result, the information is neither comprehensive nor inclusive.

The purpose of the topic summary is to provide a starting point for those interested in learning more about crime prevention and community safety planning in rural settings.

This topic summary is part of the Building Capacity in Rural Crime Prevention Project, funded by the Government of Alberta. The lead organizations for the project are the Alberta Community Crime Prevention Association (ACCPA), REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities, Red Deer/Lacombe Rural Crime Watch, and the Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention (CMNCP).

SUGGESTED CITATION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 2018, the Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention (CMNCP) conducted a Community Needs Assessment survey across Canada. The results showed that 75% of rural communities indicated they have low or no capacity for assessing community readiness, leading a community needs assessment, creating multi-sectoral partnerships, and conducting evaluations or cost-benefit analyses. Rural communities also identified an example of evidence-informed programs, in-person training, consultation support, and so on as 'extremely helpful'. Additionally, a review of relevant literature revealed that research on crime prevention and community safety has largely focused on urban centres, leaving a significant gap in research and practices in rural areas. This literature review, along with expert consultations, and a review of existing documents was part of a larger CMNCP project addressing rural crime in Alberta funded by the Government of Alberta.

This topic summary provides an overview based on the full review of relevant literature and best practices. The purpose of the topic summary is to provide general guidelines on how to best reduce crime and build capacity among rural communities. Moreover, it aims to reduce perceptions of fear and insecurity in rural areas. This will require the development of partnerships between stakeholders and collaborative approaches that will allow for the improvement of community safety and well-being in the short and long-term.

DEFINITION OF RURAL CRIME

The broad definition of rural crime **is a crime that takes place in a rural location**. Often, the types of criminal offences committed in rural communities are different from those frequently committed in urban centres. For instance, property crime, such as vehicle theft, is more common in rural areas.

Additionally, the unique geographical and sociological context of rural locations can result in offences that are mostly exclusive to the rural context, such as agricultural and farm crime (i.e., theft of equipment or livestock).

DEFINITION OF RURAL CRIME PREVENTION

Rural crime prevention refers **to the prevention of crime that is committed in the rural context**. Similar to other approaches, the strategies employed to prevent crime in rural areas should be rooted in evidence-based practices and guided by local context and need. This includes being comprehensive, multi-sectoral, and focused on addressing the root causes and risk factors that lead to criminalization

and victimization. The specific needs and priorities of rural communities likely differ from those in urban settings, and therefore the programs and approaches to address those needs should be specific to the rural context, hence this topic summary and the larger forthcoming framework and toolkit (expected in 2021/2022).

MAIN FINDINGS FROM LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of literature and best practice conducted by CMNCP and reviewed by experts and practitioners[1] resulted in the identification of key considerations with respect to rural crime prevention.

TYPES OF CRIME

The literature review led to the identification of specific types of crimes that are particularly prevalent in rural areas and should therefore be considered in the development of rural crime prevention plans. These crimes include:

Theft and Burglary

Burglary is the act of breaking and entering a dwelling with the intent to commit a crime, such as theft (i.e., stealing). The prevalence of these types of offences can be explained in part by the lower probability of being caught due to the limited police presence in rural areas, the distance between neighbours, and the low rates of reporting.

Vehicle Theft

Motor vehicle theft is the act of stealing or attempting to steal a motor vehicle. Data from Alberta indicates that rates of motor vehicle thefts are 15% higher in rural areas compared to urban areas.[i]

Farm/Agricultural Crime

Farm crime relates to working farms, farm machinery, farm buildings, and small farms. Offences include theft of livestock, produce, machinery, or other property; farmhouse burglary; vandalism or sabotage; illegal hunting or fishing, or illegal dumping of waste.

Substance Use and Drug Production

Research shows that individuals living in rural areas – particularly youth – are more likely to report alcohol and drug use. Some studies have suggested that increased substance use among rural communities could be due to limited access to drug education and treatment services.[iii]

Violence

Violence and abuse affect all communities across Canada; however, their impacts in rural areas are often exacerbated by limited access to support services for victims, family connections with people in positions of authority, distance, transportation barriers, the stigma of abuse, lack of available shelters and affordable housing, poverty as a barrier to care, and other similar challenges. Violence against women, and particularly Indigenous women, tends to be highest in rural areas. For instance, in 2018, women living in rural areas experienced the highest overall rates of police-reported intimate partner violence in Canada which were significantly higher than women living in urban areas (789 versus 447 incidents per 100,000 population[iv]).

TYPES OF CHALLENGES

CMNCP and the expert reviewers/ practitioners also identified a list of priority areas/challenges that are common in the rural context and should be considered when developing a plan to prevent crime in these locations. These priorities are as follows:

Policing

According to victims in rural areas, police response time often is an important concern. Local RCMP officials tend to acknowledge the legitimacy of these concerns. Moreover, because this problem is well-known, it causes some offenders who live in urban municipalities to purposely travel to rural and isolated areas in order to take advantage of the delayed police responses.[vvivii]

Non-Reporting of Crime

Non-reporting of crime in rural areas is also an ongoing concern. People living in rural areas indicate that they often do not report crime either because they feel it is too trivial or they feel they will not get a response from the police. Several farmers indicated that they do not want to report because they prefer not to have police officers on their farm checking overloading, truck road worthies, etc. Finally, a key reason for not reporting is the lack of proof of ownership by the farmer if equipment or livestock was not adequately marked or identified.[viiiix]

Drug and Alcohol Use

Problems with drugs and alcohol can arise in rural areas as they may be the only source of entertainment and may be related to boredom, especially among youth. Among adults living in rural areas, drug and alcohol use can be related to stress over unemployment or insufficient income, isolation, and working long hours. Substance use disorder treatment programs are also less accessible, available, and affordable for people living in rural areas, making it difficult for residents to seek support.[xxi]

Fear of Crime

The perceptions and fear of crime have large impacts in rural areas (not unlike in urban centres). In 2017, the police-reported crime rate in rural areas (6,210 incidents per 100,000 population) was 23% higher than the urban crime rate (5,051 incidents per 100,000 population) in Canada.[xii] However, the higher crime rate in rural areas was driven by a small number of police services that reported very high crime rates (mainly in the Prairie provinces). In fact, most police services serving rural populations recorded relatively low rates of crime. Research shows that even in rural areas with low rates of crime, residents are under the impression that rural crime is increasing faster than urban crime. For a lot of people, even if they were never victimized, simply fearing the possibility of crime has detrimental effects on their quality of life. Rural areas can be quiet, dark, and relatively desolate. It could be speculated that these are all factors that contribute to a sense of vulnerability and unease. Fear of crime in rural areas may be higher than in urban areas, even though crime levels are generally lower.[xiiixiv]

Furthermore, farm crime has substantial impacts on farmers to the extent that some have considered giving it up[xv]. While some farmers believe that perpetrators are from surrounding urban areas, others think offenders are mostly local. This perception that rural crime is committed by community members, neighbours, or other individuals who are known to the victim increases the fear of crime and has negative impacts on trust within the community, which is also an important issue.[xvixvii]

Repeat Offenders

Research indicates that crime in rural areas is mostly committed by repeat offenders. Moreover, during consultations farmers said that offenders living in urban areas are coming into rural areas to commit crime, which creates additional challenges when trying to prevent crime and target programming, because perpetrators often do not reside in the area.[xviii]

Youth-Related Problems

Youth issues are different in rural areas than they are in cities. While the causes of youth crime may be similar, many risk factors for youth crime are exacerbated in rural areas. For example, school attendance, graduation rates, and youth employment tend to be lowered the more remote the area. There are also fewer recreational options for youth in rural areas (e.g., shopping malls, cinemas, sport facilities, etc.) and a lack of public transportation to get to these activities in urban areas. Youth suicide rates also tend to be higher in rural areas.[xix][xx]

Domestic Violence

The rural context brings some challenges with regards to isolation, insufficient access to transportation, and lack of access to services. This is particularly problematic in situations of domestic violence.

Other challenges specific to farming include the fact that farmers often live away from their farms. Indeed, the majority have a home in an urban area and drive to their farm during the day for work. However, that makes their farm vulnerable during the night because there is nobody home to guard it.[xxi] The size and location of the farm are factors that can influence the likelihood of victimization, but research on this topic is unclear – some researchers state that small farms are more at risk, while others assert that larger farms are more likely to be victimized. They all agree, however, that highly accessible farms close to regional or urban centres are more likely to experience theft of farm machinery, vehicles or tools, or burglary, whereas very remote farms experience the highest levels of livestock theft, illegal hunting and fishing, theft of materials, and illegal dumping of waste.[xxii][xxiii] Poverty is also noted as a key issue because often, livestock is stolen and killed for human consumption.

FRAMEWORK FOR RURAL CRIME PREVENTION

The crime prevention framework outlined below, which is based on the review and suggestions of a number of national experts and expert practitioners, will help guide rural communities and their partners in their crime prevention efforts, including the development of crime prevention plans and the implementation of adapted programs and strategies. To ensure that the approach to rural crime prevention is as effective and efficient as possible, it is important to familiarize all stakeholders with the following principles and include them in all aspects of crime prevention and community safety work.

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

The forthcoming framework includes four underlying principles, which are key for the development of a comprehensive community safety strategy. These principles are rooted in values that promote safety, dignity, empowerment, and respect of all individuals, while also promoting upstream approaches that focus on addressing the root causes of violence and victimization.

DATA-INFORMED AND EVIDENCE-BASED	SHORT AND LONG-TERM ORIENTED/ RESOURCED AND SUSTAINED FUNDING
LOCALLY-BASED AND SEEKING COLLECTIVE EFFORT WITHIN COMMUNITIES	CROSS-SECTORAL AND COLLABORATIVE

Data-Informed and Evidence-Based

At the onset of a crime prevention planning process, it is important to gather as much information and evidence as possible to paint a clear picture of what is happening in the community to support the identification of local priority risks. This is particularly important given the unique context of rural areas and the distinct types of crime that tend to be committed in this setting. Sources of information can include census, police, and crime data, as well as high-level statistics such as employment levels, educational attainment rates, social services, and health care information.[xxiv]

Short and Long Term Oriented/Resourced and Sustained Funding

The United Nations Guidelines for Prevention of Crime (2002) call for sustainable funding of crime prevention, noting that "crime prevention requires adequate resources,

including funding for structures and activities, in order to be sustained".[xxv] There should be clear accountability for funding, implementation, and evaluation. Research shows that many projects that have been effective in reducing crime were time-limited experiences (short-term oriented). When the experiment concluded and was shown to have been successful, too often the project ceased. To achieve real and sustained reductions in rural crime (long-term oriented), an adequate and sustained budget is needed alongside funding for short-term responses.

Locally Based and Seeking Collective Effort within Communities

Crime prevention in the rural context requires that community members and stakeholders understand their role in making the community a safer place to live. It is important to engage local individuals, groups, agencies, organizations, and elected officials to work collaboratively and develop an understanding of the community's needs and priorities to ensure prevention efforts are relevant to the local context. Effective prevention strategies should involve the community working together to promote awareness and understanding of the purpose and benefits of addressing community safety in a collaborative and strategic way.

Cross-Sectoral and Collaborative

Rural communities are full of hard-working, knowledgeable, and committed individuals who want to make their communities safe and healthy places, and it is important to leverage these individuals and their knowledge/experience when addressing crime and insecurity. Since the risk factors that may lead to crime are very diverse (i.e., individual, family, and social issues), to effectively prevent crime, efforts from a broad range of sectors is essential. These sectors include social services, education, health care, employment, and policing[xxvi]. Additionally, valuable information and guidance may also be found by talking to other communities to build on their successes and lessons learned[xxvii].

LEVELS OF CRIME PREVENTION

Rural crime prevention efforts should occur in all three levels of prevention, which are described below. While often there is greater emphasis on tertiary prevention, compared with primary and secondary prevention, to effectively address rural (and other) crime, prevention efforts at all three levels are necessary. Tertiary efforts often provide short-term, visible impacts in the community; however, without investing in primary and secondary prevention approaches, long term impacts are unlikely. Unlike tertiary prevention, which is reactive, primary and secondary crime prevention measures are proactive and focus on social development and risk intervention. As a result, investing in these measures "will ensure efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of crime prevention service delivery".[xxviii] Thus, in order to improve both perception of safety as well as actual safety in the community, a balance of investments in primary, secondary, and tertiary crime prevention efforts is imperative.

Primary Prevention

Primary crime prevention is directed at stopping the problem before it happens by avoiding risks early on. This requires long-term, multi-disciplinary efforts and investments to improve the social determinants of health (i.e., education, early childhood development, food security, quality housing, etc.) and thereby reduce the probability of harm and victimization. The key to successful primary prevention is working together in ways that challenge conventional assumptions about institutional boundaries and organizational culture, with the goal of ensuring that individuals, families, and communities are safe, healthy, educated, and have housing, employment, and social networks that they can rely on.

Examples include: community-wide programs to promote the social determinants of health (e.g., education, employment, housing, etc.).

> ❝
> **Tertiary crime prevention initiatives alone cannot be relied upon to increase community safety and prevent crime in rural areas**
> ❞

Secondary Prevention

Secondary crime prevention seeks to reduce risk to community safety before it results in crime by focusing on interventions among marginalized youth or delivering services within vulnerable neighborhoods. Planning in this area involves multiple sectors working together to address situations where there is an elevated risk of harm.

Examples include: social development programs for at-risk youth (focusing on things like education, pro-social activities, and mentorship); situation tables (collaborative groups that develop strategies to support vulnerable populations); and target hardening.

Tertiary Prevention

Tertiary crime prevention focuses on the operation of the criminal justice system and – most often – deals with offending after it has happened. The primary focus is on intervention in the lives of known offenders in an attempt to prevent re-

offending.[xix][xx] Many rural communities invest a significant amount of resources into tertiary measures and incident response, and although it is important and necessary, it is largely reactionary, and in some instances, enforcement dominated. Tertiary crime prevention initiatives alone cannot be relied upon to increase community safety and prevent crime in rural areas[xxx]; however, it should be noted that increased tertiary prevent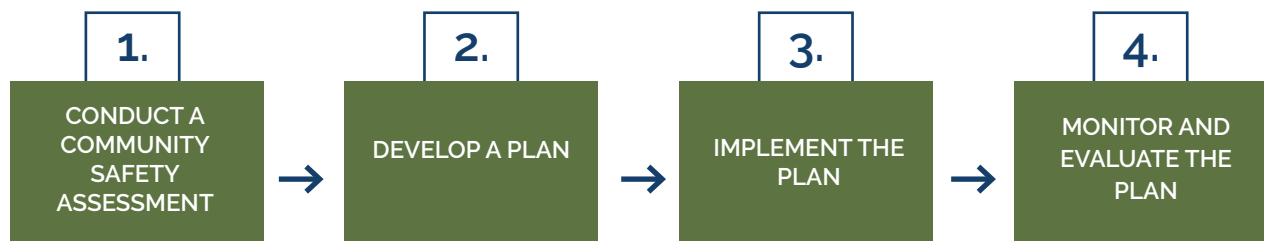ion efforts may have important short-term impacts. For example, if individuals that are caught committing crimes are provided with adequate, and often wrap-around services to address challenges such as those associated with mental health and substance use, they may be less likely to re-offend.

Examples include: policing measures (i.e., addressing response times), connecting those who have offended with services, and victim services (i.e., addressing barriers to service for rural residents).

NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGIES

For communities to identify their local issues and the appropriate crime prevention approaches and strategies to be implemented, the most effective approach is to conduct a comprehensive community safety strategy (CCSS). A CCSS embraces some way of mobilizing more of the services that can successfully tackle risk factors that lead to crime. It is about getting more investments "upstream"[2] and not just paying more "downstream"[3] to react to crime after it has happened. This process involves four steps:

1.		**2.**		**3.**		**4.**
CONDUCT A COMMUNITY SAFETY ASSESSMENT	→	DEVELOP A PLAN	→	IMPLEMENT THE PLAN	→	MONITOR AND EVALUATE THE PLAN

1. Conduct a Community Safety Assessment

This step is best completed by the local community and involves assessing current crime problems, their causes, locations, risk factors, and consequences at the local level. This process can be proactive (working with the community to identify priorities) or reactive (identifying priorities in advance and working with the community to identify solutions). It involves five steps: developing an assessment advisory committee, collecting and analyzing quantitative data, asset mapping, collecting and analyzing qualitative data through community consultations, and creating a report that includes the results which should then be presented to community stakeholders. These steps are vital to identifying key issues at the local level and the main challenges and priorities that the plan will address.

[2]Upstream crime prevention refers to addressing root causes (such as poverty, unemployment, and education) before they result in criminal behaviour.
[3]Downstream crime prevention refers to responses to crime after it has occurred to prevent it from happening again (e.g., sending people to jail).

Assessment Advisory Committee: If one does not already exist, it is important to establish an advisory committee to provide leadership, oversight, access to data, support for implementation, and avoiding duplication as well as supporting accountability and buy-in of key community, organizational, and municipal stakeholders. Members should include important stakeholders from multiple sectors, such as city staff, academics, community members, elected officials, police, and, if appropriate, the private sector.

Quantitative Data Analysis: This process involves the identification, collection, and analysis of numeric data to shed light on what and how much is happening in the community[xxxi]. Examples of relevant quantitative data include: demographic information, crime statistics, and economic costs of community challenges.

Asset Mapping: It is important to have a good understanding of the existing services, initiatives, social capital, stakeholders, and other assets in the community to inform crime prevention efforts. This allows the community to leverage the assets that already exist, identify gaps, and prevent duplication. The process of asset mapping includes taking an inventory of community stakeholders and existing services, mapping the service industry by catchment area, and identifying any service catchment overlaps and/or communities without service.

Community Consultations (Qualitative Data): Conducting community consultations in conjunction with quantitative data helps to provide a more complete picture of local circumstances. Qualitative data from interviews and consultations offers a more in-depth understanding of community issues by answering the how and why questions. Engaging communities is important for (re-)shaping social cohesion, increasing community buy-in and accountability, and strengthening protective factors. Examples include: focus groups, interviews, and talking/sharing circles.

Report and Reporting to Community Stakeholders: In addition to writing a report based on the findings from the Community Safety Assessment, the findings should be reported back to community stakeholders, including those who participated in the consultations. This could occur online or in-person via a presentation (i.e., at a town hall meeting). The sharing of information helps keep community members and agencies informed, demonstrates that their voices were heard, and creates buy-in as local challenges are identified and the need to address them is highlighted.

2. Develop a Plan

The plan should outline the most effective approach(es) to respond to the problems and priority areas identified in the community safety assessment. Interventions should be adapted based on the specific local context and needs of the community. This process should involve collaboration between multiple sectors to develop a comprehensive response to crime in the community.

3. Implement the Plan

Once a plan has been developed, it will need to be implemented in the community. This process involves organizing, training, and monitoring stakeholders to ensure that interventions are delivered in a way that is efficient, effective, and sustained.

4. Monitor and Evaluate the Plan

Finally, it is crucial to monitor and evaluate the outcome of efforts with qualitative information and measured results. Ideally, this process should be overseen by a leadership group that is a network of stakeholders that drive the process and make strategic decisions. While the municipality should identify a body responsible for accountability and moving things forward, the leadership group, comprised of external experts and practitioners, can analyze results from the assessment, identify priorities, and select evidence-based programs to include in the plan, and report back to the municipality to propose strategic direction.

CONCLUSION

Effective rural crime prevention efforts require a comprehensive and collaborative effort from the community. As outlined in this document, this process should be guided by four underlying principles. First, it should be informed by research on the core issues in a rural context and evidence of best practice. Second, there should be an emphasis on both short- and long-term outcomes, which can be accomplished through a balanced investment in the three levels of crime prevention. Third, crime prevention efforts should be based on a local context which emphasizes the importance of conducting a community safety assessment to generate an understanding of its priorities, assets, and needs. Finally, since the factors that lead to crime are diverse, effectively addressing them requires involvement from multiple sectors working collaboratively to improve safety for the entire community.

While this document provides general guidelines for preventing rural crime, ultimately, these suggestions will only be effective if they are adopted by the community in consideration with local needs and priorities.

REFERENCES

Australian Institute of Criminology. (2006). *Farm Crime in Australia.* Crime facts info no. 119. Canberra: Australian Government.

Australian Institute of Criminology. (2007). *Preventing Farm Crime.* Canberra, Australia: Australian Government.

Benson, G. F. (1991). *Developing crime prevention strategies in aboriginal communities*. Ottawa: Solicitor General Canada.

Bunei, E. K., Rono, J. K., & Chessa, S. R. (2014). Crime Prevention on Farms: The Opinion of Farmers. *International Journal of Rural Criminology*, *2*(2), 209–224. https://doi.org/10.18061/1811/61594

Ceccato, V., & Dolmen, L. (2013). Crime prevention in rural Sweden. *European Journal of Criminology*, *10*(1), 89–112. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370812457763

Fraser, J. (2011). *Rural Crime Prevention: A Literature Review.* Ottawa, Canada: Crime Prevention Ottawa.

Harkness, A. (2017). Crime Prevention on Farms: Experiences from Victoria, Australia. *International Journal of Rural Criminology*, *3*(2), 131–156. https://doi.org/10.18061/1811/81050

Institute for Rural Futures. (2010). *Crime Prevention on Farms.* New South Wales, Australia: Institute for Rural Futures.

Marshall, B., & Johnson, S. (2005). *Crime in Rural Areas: A Review of the Literature for the Rural Evidence Research Centre.* London, UK: Rural Evidence Research Centre.

McInnis, O., & Young, M. (2015). *Urban and Rural Student Substance Use: Technical Report.* ON, Canada: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.

Mears, D.P., Scott, M.L., & Bhati, A.S. (2007). Opportunity Theory and Agricultural Crime Victimization. *Rural Sociology, 72*(2), 151-184.

Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General. (2017). *Community Safety and Well- Being Planning Framework: A Shared Commitment in Ontario* (Booklet 3). Toronto, ON: Government of Ontario.

Perreault, S. (2019). *Police-reported crime in rural and urban areas in the Canadian provinces, 2017.* Retrieved from https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00009-eng.htm

Scott, J. & Barclay, E. M. (1997). Young People and Crime in Rural Communities. In E. Barclay, J.F. Donnermeyer, J.F. Hogg, & J. Scott (eds.) *Crime in Rural Australia.* Alexandria, Australia: Federation Press.

Smith, K. (2019). *Farm Crime Report to Industry: Behavioural Science and Farm Crime Prevention Decision Making: understanding the behaviour culture of farmers in England and Wales.* Newport, UK: Harper Adams University.

Smyth, K. & Byrne, R. (2017). Farm Crime in England and Wales: A Preliminary Scoping Study Examining Farmer Attitudes. *International Journal of Rural Criminology, 3*(2), 191-223.

United Conservative Party. (2018). *A Safer Alberta: United Conservative Strategy to Tackle the Rural Crime Crisis.* Alberta, Canada: UCP.

Status of Women Canada. (2020). *About Gender-Based Violence.* Retrieved from https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/violence/knowledge-connaissance/about-apropos-en.html

UN Economic and Social Council, Resolution 2002/13, "Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime," July 24, 2002, para. https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-andprison-reform/crimeprevention/resolution_2002-13.pdf.

---

[i] Perreault, 2019
[ii] Australian Institute of Criminology, 2006
[iii] McInnis and Young, 2015
[iv] Status of Women Canada, 2020
[v] Institute for Rural Futures, 2001
[vi] UCP, 2018
[vii] Benson 1991
[viii] Institute for Rural Futures, 2001
[ix] Mears, 2007
[x] Scott and Barclay, 1997
[xi] Fraser, 2011
[xii] Perreault, 2019
[xiii] Marshall and Johnson, 2005
[xiv] Ibid, 2005
[xv] Smith, 2019
[xvi] Bunei, Rono and Chessa, 2014
[xvii] Smith, 2019
[xviii] Ceccato and Dolmen, 2013
[xix] Fraser, 2011
[xx] Scott and Barclay, 1997
[xxi] Harkness, 2017
[xxii] Smith and Byrne, 2017
[xxiii] Smith, 2019
[xxiv] Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General, 2017
[xxv] United Nations, 2002
[xxvi] Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General, 2017
[xxvii] Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General, 2017
[xxviii] Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General, 2017
[xxix] Australian Institute of Criminology, 2003
[xxx] Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General, 2017
[xxxi] https://efus.eu/en/resources/publications/efus/11191/