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PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

by Jennifer Tufts

HIGHLIGHTS

- According to the 1999 General Social Survey (GSS), the majority of Canadians believe their local police are doing a good job. Their views of the criminal courts, prison and parole systems are less favourable.
- Public satisfaction with the police has improved slightly since 1993, when the survey was last conducted. In 1999, satisfaction with police was back up to about the same level as it was for the 1988 survey. In general, the levels of satisfaction toward the criminal courts, although low, have improved slightly since 1993. The highest levels of satisfaction with the courts were reported in 1988.
- Rural residents, women, people aged 65 or over, those with less than a high school education, people with no recent victimization experience, and persons satisfied with their overall personal safety are among those who are more likely to have positive assessments of the police.
- When rating the criminal courts, prison and parole systems, men, young people aged 15 to 24, those with less than a high school education, and those who were satisfied with their overall safety are consistently more likely to have positive attitudes.
- In most cases, people who have come into contact with the police (as a victim or perpetrator) or the criminal courts have less positive attitudes toward them.
- Results of hypothetical crime-scenario questions on the 1999 GSS indicate that Canadians support the use of community-based sanctions (e.g., probation, fines, and community work) in certain situations. In particular, non-prison based sanctions are preferred for first-time offenders convicted of either a break and enter or a minor assault. For repeat offenders, non-prison is preferred for young offenders, but prison is preferred for adult offenders.
- Men and women differ in their attitudes toward sentencing adult offenders. For example, men are more likely than women to prefer a prison sentence for an adult offender convicted of a repeat break and enter. Women are more likely to prefer a prison sentence in a case involving an adult offender convicted of a minor assault. Alternatively, men and women have similar attitudes toward sentencing young offenders, whereby both men and women are equally likely to prefer a prison sentence in most cases involving young offenders.
- In most cases, support for prison-based sanctions is highest among those who are young (aged 15 to 24), those who have less than a high school education, those who have recently experienced some form of victimization, and those who are dissatisfied with their overall personal safety from crime.



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Introduction

Governments, academics, political groups, and journalists often measure public attitudes toward the criminal justice system, crime and offenders in an attempt to discover how members of the public perceive crime and various justice issues. It is important to examine public attitudes because they have the ability to influence the development of social policy.

This *Juristat* will examine public attitudes toward the criminal justice system. In particular, it will show how Canadians rate the local police, criminal courts, prison and parole systems, and it will identify some of the factors which may influence a person's attitudes including their sex, age, level of education, satisfaction with personal safety, and victimization experience. In addition, public attitudes toward sentencing will be examined. Both situational factors (e.g., the offender's age and criminal history) and respondent characteristics (e.g., their sex, age, level of education, satisfaction with personal safety, and victimization experience) will be analyzed in order to determine what impact they may have in shaping attitudes.

Data for the report come from Statistics Canada's 1999 General Social Survey (GSS). This survey collected information on the nature and extent of criminal victimization in Canada. Information was also collected on the impact and consequences of crime to the victim, frequency of, and reasons for, reporting to the police, and the use of social services. Similar surveys on victimization were conducted in 1993 and 1988. For the 1999 survey, households in the 10 provinces were selected and an individual 15 years or older was randomly selected to respond to the survey. About 26,000 people were interviewed. Results are representative of the Canadian population 15 years and older living in the 10 provinces (see Methodology section and Box 1 for more details).

In addition to this *Juristat*, there are other recent and forthcoming publications which present results from the 1999 GSS. In particular, an overview of the findings of the 1999 survey is provided in the *Juristat* entitled "Criminal Victimization in Canada,

Box 1 Interpreting the 1999 General Social Survey (GSS) Data

The data presented in this *Juristat* are estimates of a given proportion of the total population based on information collected from a sample of the population. As a result, somewhat different results might have been obtained if the whole population had been surveyed. The difference between the estimate obtained from a sample of the population and the one that would have resulted had a complete census been taken is called the sampling error of the estimate. The sample size and sampling technique for a survey are chosen to minimize this error.

One measure of the sampling error is the coefficient of variation (CV). The CV gives an indication of the uncertainty associated with an estimate. For example, if an estimate is 1,000 persons aged 15 years or older in the 10 provinces with a CV of 4%, the true value likely lies between 960 and 1,040 (i.e. $1,000 \pm 4\%$). Any estimate with a CV of more than 33.3% is considered unreliable and is not published. When the CV of the estimate is between 16.6% and 33.3%, the symbol "†" is used. These estimates should be used with caution.

Estimates based on smaller sample sizes will have larger sampling errors. Thus provincial estimates will usually have larger sampling errors than estimates for Canada as a whole. As well, the sampling error for estimates of the same measure (e.g., rating the police on doing a good job) will likely be smaller in 1999 than in 1993 because of the larger sample size in 1999.

A second kind of error that occurs in both census and sample surveys is called non-sampling error. This includes errors due to coverage (e.g., the GSS had to exclude households without telephones even though the target population was all households), processing (e.g., errors introduced while capturing and processing the GSS results) and non-response (the chosen respondent does not answer some or all of the questions). These errors are difficult to quantify. However, considerable effort was made to minimize non-sampling error for the GSS.

2000¹ and data on the issues of spousal abuse and abuse of older adults are presented in the report “Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2000”.² An upcoming special report, to be released early next year, will provide a more detailed analysis of the survey results.

Attitudes Toward Criminal Justice Agencies

Through academic research and polling results, it has been found that Canadians are confident in the police, but are generally dissatisfied with other sectors of the criminal justice system.³ For example, a recent Environics poll found that Canadians have more confidence in the RCMP and local police than in the courts, lawyers, judges, and parole boards.⁴

The 1999 General Social Survey (GSS) examined public attitudes toward four sectors of the justice system: the police, the criminal courts, the prison and parole systems. The findings are consistent with previous research.

Box 2 Sources of Public Information about Criminal Justice Issues

Crime is always in the news. This has implications for the criminal justice system, and its processes, as it has been suggested that the media help shape the attitudes and perceptions of the public.⁵ For most people, knowledge about various things for which they have no experience comes from the media. Several studies have been conducted to determine just how many people depend on the media as their source of knowledge. Findings indicate that there are many people who consider newspapers, television, and other media their main source of education for information about crime, offenders, and the criminal justice system.⁶

For example, in 1995, a study of public opinion regarding criminal justice was conducted in Prince Edward Island. During the month of March, a total of 267 telephone interviews were carried out with a random sample of residents, 18 years of age or older. The *1995 Criminal Justice Survey* assessed attitudes and perceptions regarding important crime and justice topics and collected information on the sources of public information about criminal justice issues.⁷

The P.E.I. survey found that 5 out of 6 respondents closely followed crime-related issues and stories in the media. Respondents reported that newspapers (71% of respondents) and television (68% of respondents) were their most important sources of information about crime and justice issues. Less frequently reported sources of information included the radio (16%), magazines (5%), and family/friends (1%).

The majority of Canadians rate their local police positively

Canadians are quite satisfied with, and generally hold positive attitudes toward, their local police. In 1999, when asked to rate their local police on five measures of performance, the majority of Canadians expressed the belief that the police were doing a good job at being approachable (66%), ensuring

the safety of citizens (62%), enforcing the laws (60%), and supplying information on reducing crime (54%). Just under half (49%) of the population thought that the police were doing a good job at responding promptly to calls (see Table 1). Small proportions (between 4% and 9%) of the population felt that the police were doing a poor job. As well, between 5% and 23% of Canadians were uncertain about how they should assess the performance of the police⁸ on each of these aspects. The highest level of uncertainty was reported for rating the police on responding promptly to calls (23% of the population).

“Positive Attitudes”

The 1999 GSS asked respondents to rate the performance of their local police, the criminal courts, prison and parole systems on the scale of good job, average job, or poor job. In this *Juristat* the term “positive attitudes” and “good job” are used interchangeably.

Public satisfaction with the police has improved slightly since 1993. For example, in 1999, 62% of Canadians felt the police were doing a good job at ensuring the safety of citizens, compared to a figure of 58% in 1993 (see Table 1). In general in 1999, satisfaction with police was about the same as it was in 1988.

Courts not rated as favourably as the police

Canadians’ views of the courts are not as favourable as their views of the police. In particular, in 1999, less than one-quarter of the population felt the criminal courts were doing a good job of determining whether or not the accused is guilty (21%), helping the victim (15%), and providing justice quickly (13%, see Table 1). Canadians were most likely to rate the courts positively at ensuring a fair trial for the accused (41%). When compared to assessments of police performance, more people felt that the courts were doing a poor job. Between 11% and 17% of Canadians did not have an opinion concerning the performance of the criminal courts (see Table 1).

In general, the levels of satisfaction, although low, have improved slightly since 1993. However, the level of satisfaction relating to ensuring a fair trial for the accused has decreased somewhat since 1993, when 46% of Canadians felt that the courts did a good job with this aspect of court activity (see Table 1). Overall, the highest levels of satisfaction regarding the criminal courts were reported in 1988.

¹ See *Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-XPE Vol.20 No.10.*

² See *Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-224-XIE.*

³ See *Doob and Roberts (1982) and Roberts and Stalans (1997)*

⁴ See *Environics Research Group (1998)*

⁵ See *DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1996) and Surette (1998)*

⁶ See *Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1991) and Roberts (1992)*

⁷ See *Bradford (1995)*

⁸ *The analysis in the Juristat is based on the responses from all survey respondents and therefore considers the respondents who gave an answer of “don’t know/not stated”. This was done in order to acknowledge the importance of those who had no response since this information is an important element in data regarding public opinion.*

The prison and parole systems are also rated much less positively than local police

Similar to attitudes toward the courts, Canadians do not rate the prison and parole systems as positively as they do the police. In 1999, over one-quarter (26%) of the population felt that the prison system was doing a good job at supervising and controlling prisoners, while 14% felt that it was doing a good job at helping prisoners become law-abiding citizens. Approximately 1 in 3 Canadians (28%) were of the opinion that the prison system was doing a poor job at helping prisoners become law-abiding citizens (see Table 2). This number reduces to 20% when asked about supervising and controlling prisoners.

As for the parole system, 15% of Canadians were of the belief that it was doing a good job at releasing offenders who are not likely to re-offend, and 13% believed that it was doing a good job at supervising offenders on parole. Approximately 30% of Canadians were of the opinion that the parole system was doing a poor job. In comparison to responses for performance of the police and the courts, more people (about 20% of the population) were uncertain about how to assess the performance of the prison system or the parole system.

Items assessing public attitudes toward the prison and parole systems were new to the GSS in 1999, so it is not possible to assess if attitudes have changed over time.

Westerners less satisfied with the justice system

Attitudes toward the police vary considerably across provinces, however it appears that residents in the four Western⁹ provinces are less satisfied with the police, when compared to residents in the other provinces. For example, when rating the police on ensuring the safety of citizens, between 52% and 61% of the residents in the Western provinces rated the police as doing a good job. In comparison, between 64% and 73% of those living in the Atlantic¹⁰ provinces did the same (see Table 3). This is not surprising since, in 1999, victimization rates for household offences were higher in the provinces west of the Ontario-Manitoba border and rates for personal offences were the highest in British Columbia and Alberta.¹¹ In most instances, at least one-half of Canadians, regardless of their province of residence, felt that the police were doing a good job.

Similar results were found when asking Canadians about their attitudes toward the criminal courts, prison and parole systems. In particular, residents in the Atlantic provinces were most likely, and residents in the Western provinces were least likely, to express the belief that the courts, prison and parole systems are doing a good job. For example in 1999, higher proportions of Canadians in the Atlantic provinces (between 28% and 37%) than in the Western provinces (between 21% and 25%) felt the prison system was doing a good job at supervising and controlling prisoners (see Table 3).

Urban residents are generally less satisfied with the police

Rural residents were more likely than those living in urban areas to rate the police positively at being approachable (71%

versus 65%), supplying information on reducing crime (57% versus 53%), and ensuring the safety of citizens (66% versus 62%). For each of the other aspects of police performance, rural residents did not differ in their assessments of the police, when compared to those living in urban areas.

Similarly, rural residents were more likely than urban residents to feel the prison system was doing a good job at supervising and controlling prisoners (29% versus 26%) and helping prisoners become law-abiding citizens (16% versus 14%). In contrast, rural area residents were no more likely than urban area residents to hold positive attitudes toward the criminal courts and the parole system.

Factors Associated with Attitudes Toward the Criminal Justice System

The nature of public reaction and assessment, and thus public attitudes toward the criminal justice system, is complex. The social attitudes pertaining to criminal justice processes are linked to both personal characteristics and other beliefs regarding the nature of crime and the operation of the criminal justice system. For instance, the level of public satisfaction is often related to a variety of factors including, the respondent's sex, age, level of education, previous contact with the criminal justice system, history of victimization, and satisfaction with personal safety.¹²

Overall, men have slightly more positive attitudes toward the criminal justice system

While women are generally more likely than men to have positive attitudes toward the police, men are slightly more likely to have positive attitudes toward other sectors of the criminal justice system. In 1999, women were somewhat more likely than men to rate the police positively at enforcing the laws (62% versus 59% respectively), supplying information on reducing crime (56% versus 52%), and responding promptly to calls (50% versus 48%). Alternatively, women and men gave similar ratings for each of the other aspects of police performance.

In contrast, men are generally more likely than women to hold positive attitudes toward the criminal courts (see Figure 1). In 1999, with the exception of helping the victim, slightly higher proportions of men than women gave a positive rating.

Men also rated the prison and parole systems somewhat higher than did women. In 1999, with the exception of rating the prison system at helping prisoners become law-abiding citizens, slightly higher proportions of men than women gave positive ratings for each of the other aspects of both prison and parole system performance.

⁹ Western provinces include British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

¹⁰ Atlantic provinces include Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick.

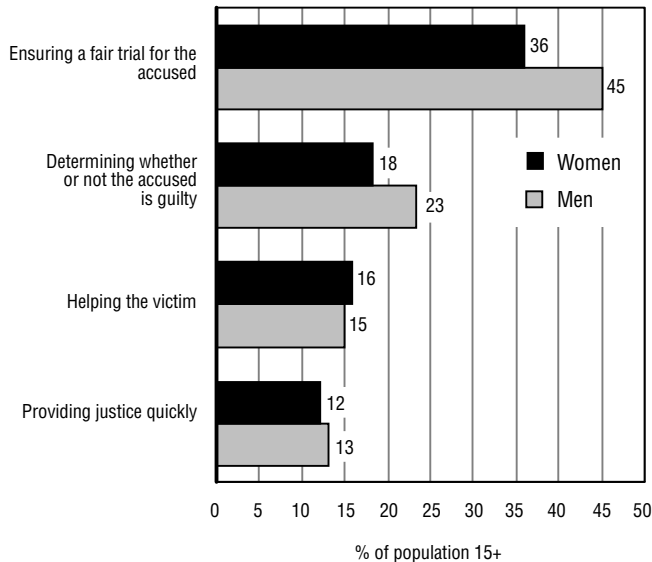
¹¹ For more information see Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-XPE Vol.20 No.10.

¹² See among others Flanagan, McGarrell and Brown (1985) and Sprott and Doob (1997)

Figure 1

Men generally rate the courts more positively¹

Courts doing a good job at:



¹ Based on the proportion who believe the criminal courts are doing a "good" job. Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Older Canadians satisfied with the police, younger Canadians satisfied with the other sectors of the criminal justice system

Overall, satisfaction with the police appears to increase with age. In 1999, for example, 7 in 10 Canadians aged 65 years and older rated the police positively on enforcing the laws, compared with 63% of those aged 45 to 64, 57% for those aged 25 to 44 and 56% of those 15 to 24 years of age (see Table 4). This could be related to the fact that older people aged 65 and over reported the lowest rate of personal victimization in 1999.¹³

In contrast, younger Canadians, primarily those 15 to 24 years of age, are more likely to be satisfied with the criminal courts. In 1999, with the exception of ensuring a fair trial for the accused, Canadians 15 to 24 years of age were most likely to feel that the criminal courts are doing a good job (see Table 4).

Similarly, Canadians between the ages of 15 and 24 years of age were most likely to feel that the prison and parole systems were doing a good job. For example, in 1999, one-quarter of those aged 15 to 24 expressed the belief that the parole system was doing a good job at releasing offenders who are not likely to re-offend. In comparison, 14% of Canadians aged 25 to 44, 14% of those aged 45 to 64 and 9% of those 65 years or older felt the parole system was doing a good job (see Table 4).

Canadians with less than a high school education have more positive attitudes toward the criminal justice system

In general, Canadians who have lower levels of formal education have more positive attitudes toward the police. For example, in 1999, Canadians with less than a high school education were most likely (67%), and those with a university degree were least likely (60%), to rate the police as doing a good job at ensuring the safety of citizens (see Table 5).

There is also variation in the distribution of positive attitudes toward the courts across levels of education. In 1999, similar to attitudes toward the police, those with less than a high school education were more likely to feel that the criminal courts were doing a good job at providing justice quickly (19%) and helping the victim (23%, see Table 5). In contrast, Canadians having a university degree were more likely to believe that the courts were doing a good job at determining whether or not the accused is guilty (24%) and ensuring a fair trial for the accused (48%).

Positive attitudes toward the prison and parole systems were more often reported by Canadians with less than a high school education, when compared to those with a high school diploma, some post-secondary education or a college diploma, or a university degree (see Table 5).

Other personal characteristics such as the level of income, marital status, and main activity¹⁴ of the respondents did not seem to have an impact on their attitudes toward the criminal justice system, once the effects due to age were removed.

Contact with the justice system¹⁵ influences attitudes

In general, Canadians who came into contact with the police in the 12 months preceding the survey were less likely to feel that the police were doing a good job. However, ratings of the police varied depending upon the nature of police contact (see Table 6). In particular, those who came into contact with the police for a traffic violation, as a victim of crime, as a witness to a crime, or for being arrested, rated the police lower than those with no such contact. However, those who came into contact with the police for a public information session rated the police higher than those with no such contact. This was true for all five aspects of police performance.

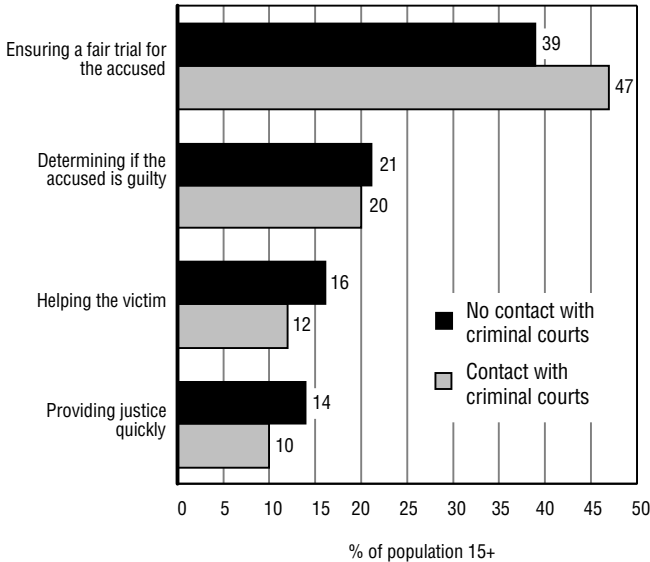
Similarly, contact with the criminal courts¹⁶ has an influence on attitudes toward them (see Figure 2). For instance, those

¹³ For more information see Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-XPE Vol.20 No.10.
¹⁴ The 1999 GSS asked respondents to identify their main activity during the previous 12 months. Categories included: working at a paid job or business, looking for paid work, going to school, caring for children, doing household work, and being retired.
¹⁵ Previous cycles of the GSS in 1988 and 1993 asked about contact with the police. New to the 1999 GSS is a question on contact with the criminal courts. The survey has never included questions regarding contact with the prison or parole systems.
¹⁶ Unlike contact with police, respondents were asked if they had "ever" had contact with the criminal courts.

Figure 2

Contact with criminal courts influences attitudes¹

Courts doing a good job at:



¹ Based on the proportion who believe the criminal courts are doing a "good" job. Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

who had contact with the criminal courts were less likely than those with no such contact to feel that the courts were doing a good job at providing justice quickly (10% versus 14%) and helping the victim (12% versus 16%). However, those who had contact with the courts were more likely than those with no such contact to feel that the courts were doing a good job at ensuring a fair trial for the accused (47% versus 39%). Contact with the courts had little impact on rating the courts at determining whether or not the accused is guilty (20% versus 21%).

Victims, and in particular, victims of violence in the 12 months preceding the survey, were less likely than non-victims to have positive attitudes toward the police. In 1999, the largest differences could be seen in the ratings on enforcing the laws. Almost two-thirds (64%) of non-victims gave the police a positive assessment, while the proportions for victims of non-violent crimes (53%) and violent crimes (48%) were much lower (see Table 7). Levels of satisfaction with the police were lower for people who reported a higher number of victimizations. This was true for each of the aspects of police performance.

In general, on all other sectors of the justice system, there are only slight differences in the levels of satisfaction between victims and non-victims. The number of victimizations reported by Canadians had only a slight impact on performance ratings of criminal courts, while the frequency of victimization in the 12-month period before the survey had no discernible effect on attitudes toward the prison and parole systems.

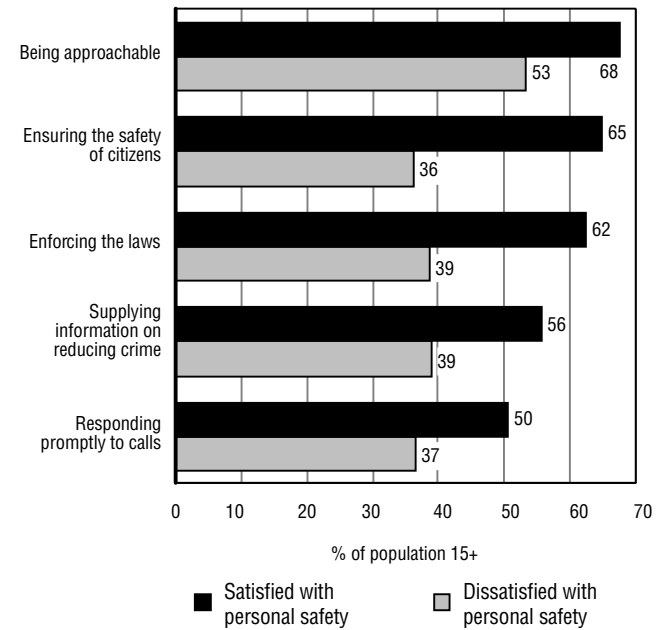
Confidence in the criminal justice system is lower for those who are dissatisfied with their personal safety from crime

Canadians who were more satisfied with their overall personal safety from crime¹⁷ were much more likely than those who were dissatisfied to rate the police positively on each of the aspects of police performance. The largest difference could be seen in the ratings on ensuring the safety of citizens, where 65% of Canadians who were satisfied with their personal safety thought the police were doing a good job, compared to 36% of those who were dissatisfied with their safety (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Canadians satisfied with their safety have more positive attitudes toward the police^{1,2}

Police doing a good job at:



¹ Based on the proportion who believe the police are doing a "good" job.

² Respondents were asked to provide an overall rating of their feelings of satisfaction with their personal safety from crime. For analysis purposes, the responses have been combined into two categories "Satisfied" and "Dissatisfied".

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

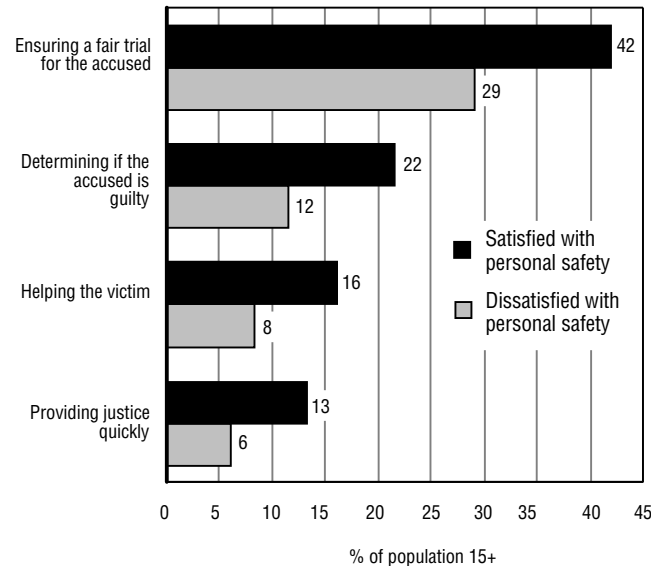
Similar to the findings related to public attitudes toward the police, Canadians who were satisfied with their personal safety from crime were more likely than those who expressed concern for their personal safety to have positive attitudes toward the criminal courts. For example, Canadians who were satisfied with their personal safety from crime were much more likely than those who were dissatisfied to rate the courts positively at determining if the accused is guilty, 22% versus 12% respectively (see Figure 4).

¹⁷ Respondents to the 1999 GSS were asked to provide an overall rating of their feelings of satisfaction with their personal safety from crime. For analysis purposes, the responses have been combined into two categories: "Satisfied" and "Dissatisfied".

Figure 4

People satisfied with their safety have more positive attitudes toward the courts^{1,2}

Courts doing a good job at:



¹ Based on the proportion who believe the criminal courts are doing a "good" job.
² Respondents were asked to provide an overall rating of their feelings of satisfaction with their personal safety from crime. For analysis purposes, the responses have been combined into two categories "Satisfied" and "Dissatisfied".
 Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

As well, attitudes toward the prison and parole systems vary according to Canadians' level of satisfaction with their personal safety from crime. In particular, in 1999 those who were satisfied with their overall safety were consistently more likely than those who were dissatisfied to have positive attitudes toward both the prison and parole systems (see Figure 5).

Attitudes Toward Sentencing

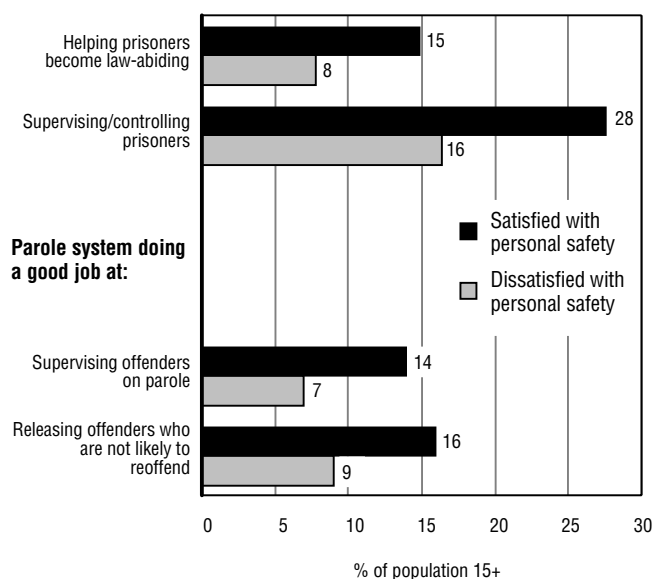
Sentencing is one component of the criminal justice system that consistently attracts public criticism and concern. As indicated earlier, members of the public generally are not satisfied with the job being done by the criminal courts. These findings have emerged from Canadian public opinion polls for decades¹⁸ and are also reflected in surveys conducted in other countries¹⁹ (see Box 6). However, research conducted in the area of public opinion has revealed that when respondents are given more information about a specific case they are more likely to recommend sentences that are no harsher than those imposed by judges.²⁰

For the first time in 1999, the GSS sought to examine public attitudes toward sentencing in Canada. In particular, the public's sentencing preferences for criminal offenders were investigated through the use of scenario-type queries. Respondents were presented with a hypothetical case for which they were asked to choose "prison" or "non-prison" for their sentencing preference (see Box 3). The purpose of the

Figure 5

People satisfied with their safety have more positive attitudes toward the prison and parole systems^{1,2}

Prison system doing a good job at:



¹ Based on the proportion who believe the criminal courts are doing a "good" job.
² Respondents were asked to provide an overall rating of their feelings of satisfaction with their personal safety from crime. For analysis purposes, the responses have been combined into two categories "Satisfied" and "Dissatisfied".
 Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

questions was to assess public attitudes toward the use of prison sentences and alternatives to incarceration.

Public Support for Prison and Alternatives to Prison

Canadians support the use of community-based²¹ sanctions in certain situations. In particular, community-based sanctions are preferred for first-time offenders whether they are convicted of either a property offence (break and enter) or a violent offence (minor assault). For repeat offenders,²² non-prison is preferred for young offenders, but prison is preferred for adult offenders (see Table 8). Between 7% and 9% of the population did not have a particular sentencing preference (prison or non-prison) when sentencing offenders (see Table 8).²³

¹⁸ See Doob and Roberts (1983), Canadian Sentencing Commission (1987), Roberts (1988), Roberts and Stalans (1997), and Angus Reid (1997)
¹⁹ See Walker and Hough (1988)
²⁰ See Doob and Roberts (1984), and Canadian Sentencing Commission (1987).
²¹ Community-based sanctions include non-prison-based sanctions such as probation, fines, and community work.
²² The crime scenario questions included on the 1999 GSS that asked about repeat offenders were intended to capture information on the sentencing preferences of the public for those offenders who have been convicted of one previous offence.
²³ Readers are reminded that the analysis in the Juristat is based on the responses from all survey respondents and therefore considers the respondents who gave an answer of "don't know/not stated". This was done in order to acknowledge the importance of those who had no response since this information is an important element in data regarding public opinion.

Box 3 Assessing Attitudes Toward Sentencing

The 1999 General Social Survey (GSS) measured public attitudes toward sentencing through the use of the specific case-scenario method of questioning. Through the hypothetical situations presented to respondents, it was possible to examine three facets of sentencing: attitudes regarding an adult versus a young offender, attitudes toward a first-time versus a repeat offender, and attitudes when the offence is a violent offence (minor assault) versus a property offence (break and enter).

GSS respondents were randomly asked one of four crime-scenarios for which they were asked to choose “prison sentence” or “non-prison sentence” for their sentencing preference. For any given scenario, respondents were asked about their attitudes toward sentencing both an adult and a young offender. In order to eliminate order effects, half of the respondents were asked about sentencing an adult offender prior to being asked about sentencing a young offender, while the other half were asked about sentencing a young offender prior to being asked about sentencing an adult offender.

Respondents who selected prison sentences for the hypothetical crime scenarios were given a follow-up question that asked them whether or not it would be acceptable for a judge to sentence the offender to one year of probation and 200 hours of community work.

One of the following hypothetical situations was presented to each survey respondent:

A. If an adult offender is found guilty of breaking into a house when the owners are on vacation and taking goods worth \$400 and this is the offender’s first offence, which sentence would you consider the most appropriate, a ...

If a young offender is found guilty of breaking into a house when the owners are on vacation and taking goods worth \$400 and this is the offender’s first offence, which sentence would you consider the most appropriate, a ...

B. If an adult (young) offender is found guilty for the first time of an assault and the victim received minor injuries but did not require medical attention, which sentence would you consider the most appropriate, a ...

C. If an adult (young) offender is found guilty of breaking into a house when the owners are on vacation and taking goods worth \$400 and the offender was found guilty of a similar offence once before, which sentence would you consider the most appropriate, a ...

D. If an adult (young) offender is found guilty of an assault and the victim received minor injuries but did not require medical attention and the offender was found guilty of a similar offence once before, which sentence would you consider the most appropriate, a ...

Prison favoured more often for adult offenders

When presented with the same scenarios, more Canadians favour a prison sentence for adult offenders, in comparison to youth offenders. For example, in 1999 over two-thirds (68%) of Canadians chose a prison sentence for an adult offender convicted of a repeat break and enter, while less than one-half (44%) of the population preferred prison for a young offender convicted of the same offence (see Table 8).

Prison often chosen for repeat offenders

Canadians believe that offenders who have criminal records ought to receive prison-based sanctions. In 1999, a larger proportion of the population selected prison for repeat offenders, in comparison to first-time offenders. For example, 63% of Canadians are supportive of imprisonment for an adult offender convicted of a repeat assault, while 28% of the population supported prison when the conviction is for a first-time assault. Similar results were observed when comparing first-time and repeat young offenders. However, the figures reported for young offenders never reach those for adult offenders (see Table 8).

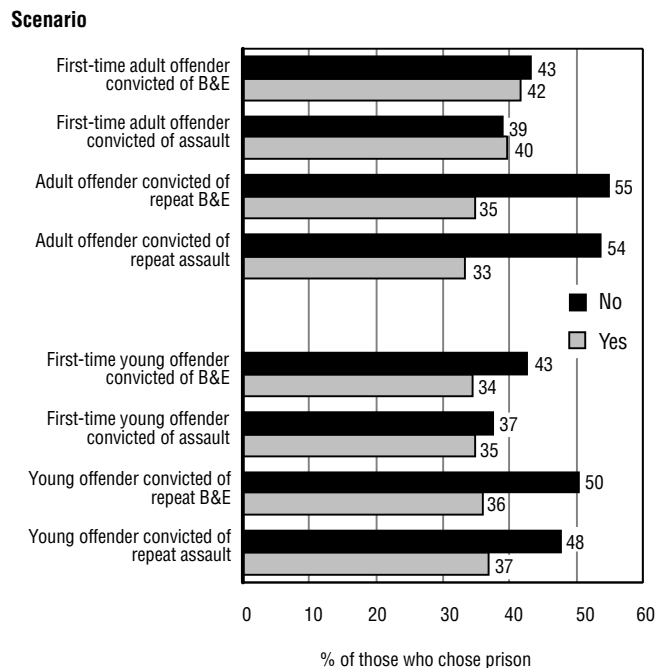
Prison selected more frequently for break and enter offences with an adult offender

The nature of the offence seems to have an impact on public attitudes toward sentencing adult offenders. In 1999, for cases involving an adult offender, a prison sentence was favoured more often for break and enter offences, when compared to minor assault. For example, a first-time adult offender convicted of a break and enter attracted a more punitive response, in comparison to a minor assault involving a first-time adult offender (37% and 28% respectively).

In contrast, the nature of the offence had very little influence on public attitudes toward sentencing young offenders. For instance, when sentencing a young offender convicted of a

Figure 6

At least one-third of prison supporters accept an alternative to incarceration^{1,2}



¹ Respondents who selected prison sentences for the hypothetical crime scenarios were given a follow-up question that asked them whether or not it would be acceptable for a judge to sentence the offender to one year of probation and 200 hours of community work.

² Between 10% and 28% of Canadians who chose prison were uncertain about whether one year of probation and 200 hours of community work was an acceptable alternative to incarceration.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

repeat offence, 44% of Canadians advocated a prison sentence regardless of whether the offence was a break and enter or a minor assault (see Table 8). With the exception of first-time young offenders, similar results were found in the other cases involving young offenders.

At least one-third of prison supporters accept an alternative to incarceration

As another measure of public attitudes toward alternatives to incarceration, GSS respondents who selected prison sentences were given a follow-up question that asked them whether or not it would be acceptable for a judge to sentence the offender to one year of probation and 200 hours of community work instead of prison.

In 1999, at least one-third of Canadians who selected prison expressed the belief that one year of probation and 200 hours of community work was an acceptable alternative to incarceration in cases involving both adult and young offenders (see Figure 6). Alternatively, the highest level of opposition to an alternative

sanction was found in cases involving both adult and young repeat offenders. For example, in 1999, the majority (54%) of Canadians who initially selected prison for an adult offender convicted of repeat assault felt that one year of probation and 200 hours of community work was not an acceptable alternative to incarceration for this case. Similar results were found in each of the other cases involving repeat offenders.

Westerners no more likely than Atlantic Canadians to select prison sentences

Public attitudes toward sentencing vary across the provinces. It appears that in 1999, unlike the results found when examining attitudes toward the criminal justice system, residents of the Western²⁴ provinces were no more likely than those in the Atlantic²⁵ provinces to strongly support the use of imprisonment for criminal offenders.

²⁴ Readers are reminded that Western provinces include British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

²⁵ Readers are reminded that Atlantic provinces include Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

Box 4 Mediation: Are Victims Interested?

With the increased availability of options like police discretion, alternative measures and various restorative approaches (i.e., family group conferencing, sentencing circles) to intervention, there are a number of ways to deal with a criminal offence outside the normal traditional police-court process. Victim-offender mediation is a non-traditional approach to criminal justice, which aims to address the needs of both offenders and victims. Generally, it involves a formal meeting where the victim and the offender meet face-to-face, with a skilled mediator in attendance, to discuss an appropriate way to deal with the offender.

The 1999 General Social Survey (GSS) measured the level of interest in victim-offender mediation programs. Each victim was asked to think about the criminal incident they had just reported and indicate how interested they would have been in participating in a mediation program: very interested, somewhat interested, or not at all interested.

Survey results indicate that victims in Canada are divided in their interest in participating in victim-offender mediation. For instance,

in 1999, 51% of victims were very or somewhat interested in dealing with their criminal incident outside the normal police-court process, while 46% of victims were not at all interested. There was very little difference between the interest of female victims and that of male victims. Specifically, 47% of female victims and 44% of male victims were very or somewhat interested in participating in victim-offender mediation. As well, victims aged 45 to 64 years (50%) were the most likely to be very or somewhat interested compared with 41% of those aged 15 to 24, 47% for those aged 25 to 44 and 47% of those aged 65 years or older.

In general, victims of more serious crimes are less likely to be interested in participating in victim-offender mediation programs. For example, in 1999, over one-half of the victims of sexual assault (61%), assault (60%), and robbery (50%) indicated that they were not at all interested in a victim-offender mediation program. These proportions were much higher than those reported for victims of break and enter (38%), theft of household property (39%), and vandalism (40%).

Interest in victim-offender mediation, by type of victimization¹, 1999

	Total Incidents		Level of Interest					
			Very Interested		Somewhat Interested		Not at all Interested	
	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%
All incidents	6,460	100	1,553	24	1,730	27	2,982	46
Total personal	3,804	100	807	21	921	24	1,933	51
Theft personal property	1,831	100	494	27	541	30	768	42
Total violent	1,973	100	313	16	380	19	1,165	59
Sexual assault	499	100	43	9†	83	17	302	61
Robbery	228	100	43	19†	63	27	115	50
Assault	1,246	100	227	18	234	19	748	60
Total household	2,656	100	745	28	808	30	1,050	40
Break and enter	587	100	163	28	184	31	222	38
Motor vehicle/parts theft	501	100	129	26	154	31	213	42
Theft household property	760	100	223	29	230	30	294	39
Vandalism	808	100	230	28	240	30	321	40

† Coefficient of variation between 16.6% and 33.3%.

Figures may not add to total due to rounding.

¹ Victimization incidents occurred some time during the 12 months preceding the survey

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

On the other hand, with the exception of an assault involving a first-time adult offender, Quebec residents were the strongest supporters of non-prison based sanctions for all cases. For example, in 1999, more than 8 in 10 Quebec residents advocated a non-prison sentence for a first-time young offender convicted of a break and enter offence. Residents in Newfoundland (76%), Prince Edward Island (73%), and New Brunswick (73%) were also strong supporters of alternatives to incarceration in this situation. The lowest level of support was found in Manitoba (65%).

As well, in all cases involving both adult and young offenders, the sentencing preferences of rural residents and urban residents were generally quite similar.

Comparing Public Preferences with Sentencing Practice

A discussion on public attitudes toward sentencing is incomplete without investigating how, or if, public attitudes deviate from the practices of the Canadian criminal courts. An examination of official court data reveals that the public's sentencing preferences in the two specific situations considered (break and enter and minor assault cases) are quite similar to the sentences imposed by judges in both youth and adult criminal courts. Specifically, similar to the preferences of the public, the courts more often impose a prison sentence for break and enter when compared to assault. However when more details of a case are considered, some discrepancies become evident.

Sentencing of adult offenders²⁶

In 1998-99, adult criminal courts in 7 provinces and 2 territories heard 394,884 cases. Minor assaults²⁷ accounted for 12% of cases (46,859) and break and enter, 4% (14,268 cases).²⁸

Similar to the sentencing preferences of the public, the adult courts imposed more prison sentences in convictions involving a break and enter (63%), when compared to minor assault (29%, see Table 9). These figures include both first-time and repeat offences. Less than two-thirds (63%) of adults convicted of break and enter received a prison sentence, a figure that is higher than the public's preference for first-time offences (37%) and slightly lower than that for repeat offences (68%). In comparison, the court figure for assault is approximately the same as the public's preference for first-time offences (29% versus 28%) and much lower than that for repeat offences (29% versus 63%, see Tables 8 and 9).

Sentencing of young offenders²⁹

In 1998-99, there were 11,613 break and enter crime cases processed in the youth courts of Canada. This figure represented 11% of the total caseload. Similarly, the 10,383 minor assault cases accounted for 10% of the total cases.³⁰

Echoing the views expressed by Canadians, the youth courts imposed a sentence of custody³¹ (open or closed) more often for break and enter convictions in comparison to minor assault cases. This was true for both first-time (17% and 11% respectively) and repeat young offenders³² (50% and 32% respectively, see Table 9). Overall, the practices of the youth courts for cases involving break and enter are fairly consistent with the preferences of the public, while the public is slightly

harsher than the youth courts in its sentencing preferences for cases involving assault. For example, 17% of first-time young offenders convicted of break and enter received a custody sentence compared to the public preference of 21% (see Tables 8 and 9). In comparison, 11% of first-time young offenders convicted of an assault were sentenced to custody by the courts, slightly lower than the public's preference of 18%. Comparable results were found when looking at cases involving young offenders convicted of repeat offences.

Box 5 The Use of Alternative Measures³³

Alternative measures are formalized programs across Canada by which offenders who would otherwise proceed to court may be dealt with through non-judicial, community-based alternatives. Typical programs could include community service, personal service or financial compensation to a victim, apologies, or educational sessions.

In 1998-99, the Alternative Measures Survey for Youth and Adults, administered by Statistics Canada, collected data for alternative measures cases involving youth aged 12 to 17 and for adults 18 and older at the national level.³⁴ Results of the survey reveal that in 1998-99, there were 33,173 youth alternative measures cases that reached agreement in Canada and 13,226 cases for adult alternative measures in the six reporting jurisdictions.

For youth alternative measures cases, minor assault accounted for 7% of the cases that reached agreement in 1998-99, while break and enter accounted for 5% of cases. In comparison, for adult alternative measures cases, minor assault accounted for 12%, while break and enter accounted for 1% of cases. Less use of alternative measures for break and enter offences, in comparison to common assault, corresponds with the sentencing preferences of the public.

²⁶ Data on adult courts come from the Adult Criminal Court Survey. In 1998-99, this survey collected information on cases disposed in the provincial/territorial courts of Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories. These jurisdictions represent about 80% of the national caseload in provincial/territorial courts. Sentencing information does not include cases that are transferred to superior courts. The cases heard by superior courts tend to be the most serious.

²⁷ Minor (level 1) assault refers to the least serious form of assault and includes pushing, slapping, punching and face-to-face verbal threats. It is comparable to the minor assault description presented in the scenario questions posed on the GSS.

²⁸ For more information see Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-XPE Vol. 20 no. 1.

²⁹ Information on youth court cases comes from the Youth Court Survey, which has full national coverage. Youth refers to any person between the ages of 12 and 17 at the time of the offence.

³⁰ For more information see Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-XPE Vol. 20 no. 2.

³¹ In youth court, there are two types of custody dispositions where the young person is required to spend time in a designated correctional facility. These include secure (closed) custody and open custody. In adult court, prison is the only custody alternative for offenders convicted of a criminal offence.

³² Recidivism data from the Youth Court Survey excludes data from Nova Scotia and convictions for a violation of the Young Offenders Act and post-disposition administrative offences in the Criminal Code (i.e., failure to appear and failure to comply with a disposition).

³³ For more information see Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-XPE Vol. 20 no. 6.

³⁴ The Alternative Measures Survey collected data on youth alternative measures from all jurisdictions. Six jurisdictions provided data on adult alternative measures. These jurisdictions include: Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. These provinces represent 32% of the Canadian adult population.

Factors Influencing Attitudes Toward Sentencing

The age of the offender, the nature of the offence, perceptions regarding repeat offending, age, level of education, history of victimization, and satisfaction with personal safety are all factors that have an impact on a person's attitudes toward sentencing of criminal offenders.³⁵

Men and women differ in their sentencing preferences in certain cases

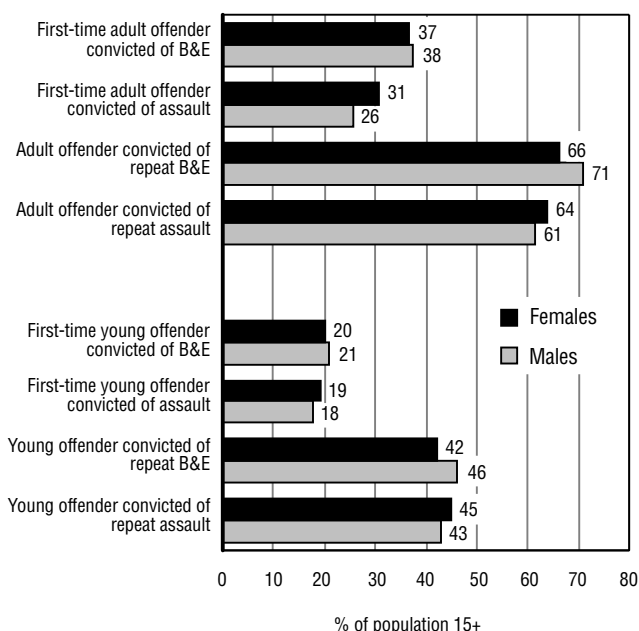
In general, men and women differ in their attitudes toward sentencing adult offenders. However, one is not necessarily more punitive than the other since the nature of their attitudes differs according to the type of offence involved. For instance in 1999, for both first-time and repeat adult offenders convicted of an assault, women were more likely than men to prefer a prison sentence (see Figure 7). Alternatively, men were more likely than women to advocate a prison sentence for an adult offender convicted of a repeat break and enter. Men and women had similar sentencing preferences for a first-time adult offender convicted of break and enter.

Alternatively, men and women have similar attitudes toward sentencing young offenders. For example, in 1999, 19% of women preferred a prison sentence for a first-time young offender convicted of an assault, compared to 18% of men (see Figure 7). With the exception of a young offender convicted of a repeat break and enter, similar results were found in the other cases involving young offenders.

Figure 7

In some cases, men and women differ in their preferences for prison sentences¹

Scenario



¹ Based on the proportion who chose "prison".
 Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Younger Canadians more harsh in their sentencing preferences

Younger Canadians are more supportive of prison sentences when compared to older Canadians. For example, in 1999, prison was selected by 75% of Canadians aged 15 to 24 when asked about an adult offender convicted of a repeat break and enter offence. In comparison, 71% of those aged 25 to 44, 64% of those aged 45 to 64, and 61% of those 65 years of age or older, chose prison for the same situation (see Table 10). With the exception of a young offender convicted of a repeat assault offence, there were similar findings in each of the other hypothetical crime scenarios.

University graduates are least likely to support prison sentences

Canadians who have lower levels of formal education are more punitive in their sentencing preferences for both youth and adult offenders. In 1999, with the exception of cases involving a repeat assault offence, Canadians with less than a high school education were most likely to favour prison sentences for adult offenders. For example, 72% of those who had not completed high school indicated a preference for prison for a repeat adult offender convicted of a break and enter, while 63% of those with a university degree did the same (see Table 11).

For cases involving young offenders, the strongest support for prison was found among high school graduates, while the lowest support was among those with a university degree. For example, in 1999, almost one-half (49%) of those who had completed high school favoured prison for a repeat young offender convicted of either a break and enter or an assault, compared to 40% of those with a university degree (see Table 11).

As with attitudes toward the justice system, other personal characteristics such as main activity,³⁶ marital status, and level of income, appear to have no impact on sentencing preferences, once the effects due to age are removed.

Victims more likely to favour prison sentences for repeat offenders

Victims of both violent and non-violent crimes in the 12 months preceding the survey are more likely than non-victims to advocate a prison sentence for repeat offenders, regardless of the age of the offender or the type of offence committed. For example, in 1999, almost 8 in 10 victims of violent crimes (77%) and three-quarters (75%) of victims of non-violent crimes supported the use of prison for an adult offender convicted of a repeat break and enter. The level of support for prison in this situation was much lower for non-victims (66%, see Table 12).

Similarly, victims of violent crimes (52%) and non-violent crimes (50%) were much more likely than non-victims (42%), to prefer prison for a young offender convicted of a repeat

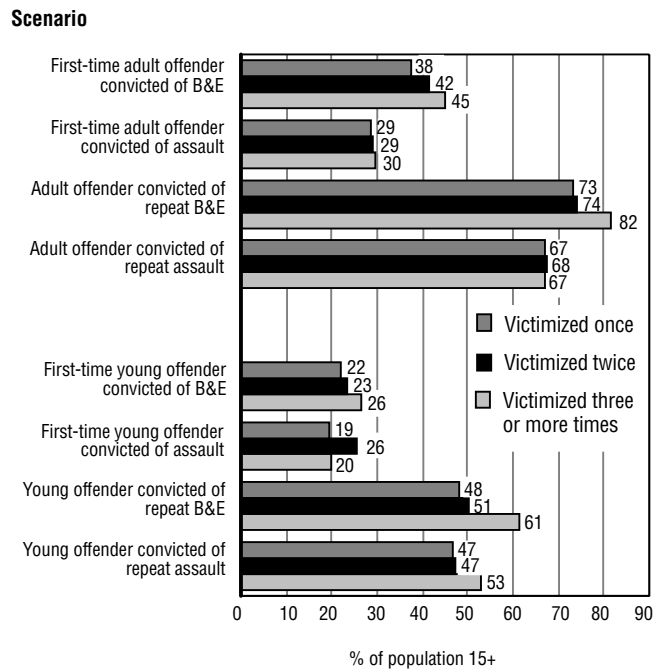
³⁵ See Roberts (1996) and Spratt and Doob (1997)
³⁶ Readers are reminded that the 1999 GSS asked respondents to identify their main activity during the previous 12 months. A main activity could be one of the following: working at a paid job or business, looking for paid work, going to school, caring for children, doing household work, and being retired.

break and enter offence (see Table 12). When sentencing first-time offenders, there is very little difference between the sentencing preferences of Canadians who were victims of crime in the previous year and those who were not.

Generally, there is little difference in support for prison-based sanctions between Canadians who reported being victimized once in the 12 months preceding the survey and those who reported a higher number of victimizations. However, the number of victimizations reported by Canadians has an impact on sentencing preferences for adult and young offenders convicted of a repeat break and enter offence. For instance, when choosing an appropriate sentence for a young offender convicted of a repeat break and enter, 61% of those who reported three or more victimizations in the previous year favoured prison. In comparison, 51% of those who had been victimized once in the 12 months preceding the survey, chose prison (see Figure 8). Similar results were found for an adult offender in a similar case.

Figure 8

 **In repeat B&E cases, support for prison higher for those who report more victimizations^{1,2}**



¹ Based on the proportion who chose "prison".
² The GSS collects information on the type and number of time the respondent has been a victim of crime over the past 12 months for 8 types of crimes, according to Criminal Code definitions.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

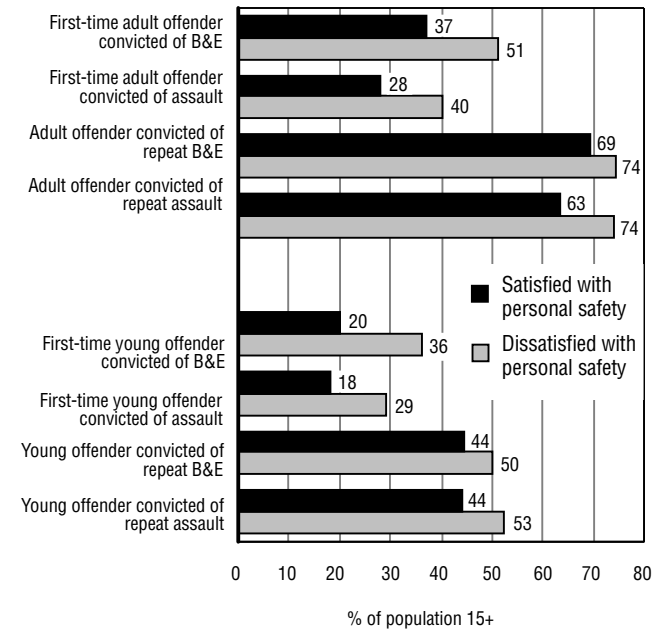
Prison sentences more often preferred by those who are dissatisfied with their personal safety

Canadians who are dissatisfied with their overall personal safety from crime more often support the use of prison-based sanctions for criminal offenders. For example, in 1999, more than one-half (51%) of Canadians who were dissatisfied with their personal safety from crime advocated prison for a first-time adult offender convicted of a break and enter, compared to (37%) of those who were satisfied (see Figure 9). As well, in a similar case involving a first-time young offender, over one-third (36%) of those who were dissatisfied chose prison, while 20% of those who were satisfied did the same. Similar results were found for each of the other cases involving adult and young offenders.

Figure 9

 **Greater support for prison when dissatisfied with personal safety^{1,2}**

Scenario



¹ Based on the proportion who chose "prison".
² Respondents were asked to provide an overall rating of their feelings of satisfaction with their personal safety from crime. For analysis purposes, the responses have been combined into two categories "Satisfied" and "Dissatisfied".
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Box 6 International Comparisons

The investigation of public attitudes regarding the criminal justice system and its processes has been the focus of numerous international research studies over the last three decades. Such research studies have produced results that are comparable to the findings from research conducted within Canada.

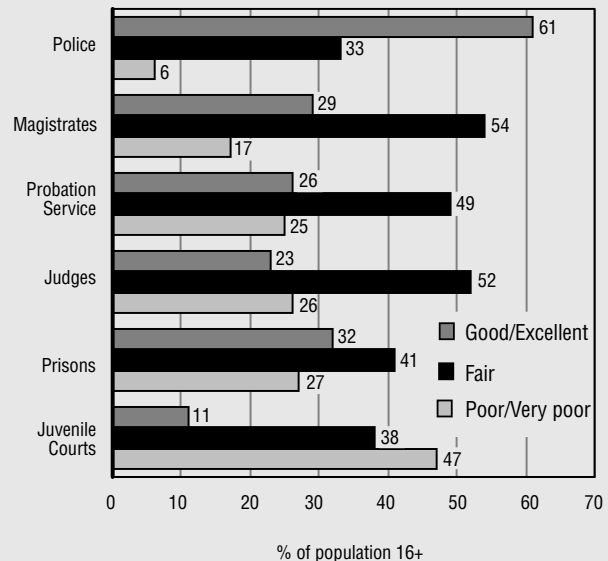
Similar to the 1999 General Social Survey (GSS), the 1998 British Crime Survey (BCS) administered throughout England and Wales, measured public attitudes toward the criminal justice system and, using specific case-scenario type questions, assessed public attitudes regarding sentencing. A total of 14,947 face-to-face interviews were conducted with a random sample of residents, 16 years of age or older. Findings from the 1998 BCS³⁷ reveal that, members of the public in England and Wales were most satisfied with the job being done by the police (61%), followed by the prison service (32%), magistrates (29%) and the probation service (26%). Levels of satisfaction were lowest for juvenile courts (11%).

As well, respondents to the 1998 BCS were presented with hypothetical crime scenarios and asked to consider the most appropriate way to deal with the youth or adult offender described. For a case involving a repeat adult offender convicted of burglary, financial compensation (56%) and imprisonment (52%) were the public's preferred sentences. Less favourable sentencing options included community service (26%), fines (21%), suspended sentence (17%), and probation (9%). Overall, sentencing preferences of the public for this case were more lenient than the current sentencing guidelines in Britain.

In comparison, for cases involving young offenders, respondents were asked about both first-time and persistent offenders. In a case involving a first-time young offender convicted of burglary, members of the public favoured community sentences (42%) and cautions (22%), followed by reparation orders (16%), imprisonment (9%) and punishing the parents (5%). In contrast, for a persistent young offender convicted of a similar offence, the public most frequently advocated a sentence of imprisonment (59%), followed by community sentences (29%). Less frequently reported



Public attitudes toward various criminal justice agencies in England and Wales, 1998



Source: London Home Office, British Crime Survey, 1998.

sentencing preferences included cautions (3%), punishing the parents (3%), fines (2%) and reparation orders (1%). Generally, the sentencing suggestions offered by the public for young offenders were more punitive than the current sentencing practice.

³⁷ See Mattinson and Mirrlees-Black (2000)

Methodology

The GSS is an annual survey that monitors changes in Canadian society and provides information on specific policy issues of current or emerging interest. Each year, the GSS focuses on various regular topics (including time use, social support, the family, technology and victimization). In 1999, Statistics Canada conducted the victimization cycle of the GSS for a third time. Previous cycles were conducted in 1988 and in 1993. The objectives of the survey are to provide estimates of the prevalence of eight offence types (based on the *Criminal Code* definitions for these crimes) in the population, to examine factors related to the risk of victimization, victims' willingness to report crimes to the police, reasons for not reporting, and to measure public perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system.

The 1988 and 1993 cycles of the GSS interviewed approximately 10,000 Canadians aged 15 years and older residing in households in the ten provinces. For the 1999 survey, the sample was increased to approximately 26,000 in order to allow for more reliable estimates and more detailed analysis of small populations and crimes that occur less frequently.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted over the period from February 1999 to December 1999 inclusive. Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) was used. With this process, the survey questionnaire is programmed into a network computer allowing the interviewers to view the survey questions on their workstation computer monitor. A typical interview lasted 30 minutes.

Sampling Procedures

Each province is divided into a few (from 1 to 3) broad geographic areas known as strata, and telephone numbers within each stratum have the same chance of being selected. Households in the 10 provinces were selected using random digit dialing (RDD) sampling techniques. Once a household was contacted, an individual who was 15 years of age or older was randomly selected from those living in the household. Households were excluded from the survey when they had no telephone. Also excluded were individuals living in institutions (1%). In all, approximately 2% of the population was excluded. This figure is not large enough to significantly affect the results.

Response Rates

In 1999, as with previous cycles of Statistics Canada's GSS on victimization, the response rate was quite high – 81.3%. Approximately 26,000 people, 15 years of age or older, living in the 10 provinces were interviewed. The respondents in the sample were weighted so that their responses represent the approximately 24,260,000 non-institutionalized persons aged 15 years or older in the Canadian population. Using the 1999 GSS sample design and sample size, an estimate of a given proportion of the total population, expressed as a percentage, is expected to be within approximately 0.8% of the true proportion 19 times out of 20.

Data limitations

It is important to note that the GSS data are estimates. Since measures from the survey are based on a sample, they are always estimates of the true values and are subject to sampling error. Estimates of proportions of sub-populations will have wider confidence intervals. This *Juristat* uses the coefficient of variation (CV) as a measure of the sampling error. When the CV of an estimate is higher than 33.3%, this is considered unreliable and is not published.

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Table 1

	Public perceptions											
	Good job			Average job			Poor job			Don't know/ Not stated		
	1988	1993	1999	1988	1993	1999	1988	1993	1999	1988	1993	1999
	% of population 15+											
What kind of job are your local police doing at ...												
Being approachable	66	64	66	17	19	17	5	5	4	12	12	12
Ensuring the safety of citizens	..	58	62	..	29	26	..	7	5	..	6	6
Enforcing the laws	60	58	60	29	31	29	5	6	5	6	5	5
Supplying information on reducing crime	56	52	54	21	26	26	9	12	9	13	10	11
Responding promptly to calls	50	47	49	21	23	21	9	9	8	21	21	23
What kind of job are criminal courts doing at ...												
Ensuring a fair trial for the accused	44	46	41	30	29	35	9	12	11	18	14	14
Determining whether or not the accused is guilty	25	20	21	37	41	43	17	21	20	21	17	17
Helping the victim	16	12	15	31	31	33	33	42	35	20	14	16
Providing justice quickly	14	10	13	34	30	35	37	50	41	16	11	11

.. figures not available

Figures may not add to total due to rounding.

¹ The proportions are based on a total population of approximately 20,194,000 in 1988, 21,644,000 in 1993, and 24,260,000 in 1999.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1988, 1993, and 1999.

Table 2

	1999					
	Total	Good job	Average job	Poor job	Don't know/ Not stated	
	000s	%	% of population 15+			
What kind of job is the prison system doing at ...						
Supervising/controlling prisoners	24,260	100	26	32	20	21
Helping prisoners become law-abiding	24,260	100	14	32	28	26
What kind of job is the parole system doing at ...						
Releasing offenders who are not likely to re-offend	24,260	100	15	34	32	19
Supervising offenders on parole	24,260	100	13	30	33	24

Figures may not add to total due to rounding.

¹ The 1988 and 1993 GSS did not examine the performance of the prison and parole systems. This was new to the GSS in 1999.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 3

	Total		Province									
			Nfld.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.	Que.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.
	000s	%	% of population 15+									
Local police are doing a <i>good</i> job at ...												
Being approachable	16,044	66	76	76	73	72	66	65	64	66	67	67
Ensuring the safety of citizens	15,138	62	71	73	64	67	71	61	58	55	61	52
Enforcing the laws	14,650	60	63	63	61	62	67	60	54	47	59	53
Supplying information on reducing crime	13,133	54	65	58	57	57	59	51	50	51	54	53
Responding promptly to calls	11,910	49	56	59	54	57	58	45	44	39	45	46
Criminal courts are doing a <i>good</i> job at ...												
Ensuring a fair trial for the accused	9,851	41	44	47	45	52	37	41	38	39	40	43
Determining whether or not the accused is guilty	5,028	21	29	29	23	31	24	20	18	17	18	17
Helping the victim	3,743	15	27	23	16	24	20	14	11	12	11	12
Providing justice quickly	3,114	13	25	19	12	22	16	12	10	11	9	9
The prison system is doing a <i>good</i> job at ...												
Supervising/controlling prisoners	6,402	26	32	37	28	36	31	25	23	25	23	21
Helping prisoners become law-abiding	3,471	14	25	20	15	25	21	12	10	11	10	10
The parole system is doing a <i>good</i> job at ...												
Releasing offenders who are not likely to re-offend	3,699	15	20	24	16	21	26	12	11	12	12	9
Supervising offenders on parole	3,220	13	23	24	15	21	19	11	11	10	10	8

¹ Only the number and proportion who perceive justice agencies as doing a "good" job is shown.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 4

	Total		Age of population (years)			
			15-24	25-44	45-64	65+
	000s	%	% of population			
Local police are doing a <i>good</i> job at ...						
Being approachable	16,044	66	59	65	71	70
Ensuring the safety of citizens	15,138	62	61	59	64	69
Enforcing the laws	14,650	60	56	57	63	70
Supplying information on reducing crime	13,133	54	48	51	58	61
Responding promptly to calls	11,910	49	44	46	53	56
Criminal courts are doing a <i>good</i> job at ...						
Ensuring a fair trial for the accused	9,851	41	42	40	43	36
Determining whether or not the accused is guilty	5,028	21	28	20	19	17
Helping the victim	3,743	15	28	14	11	14
Providing justice quickly	3,114	13	20	12	10	12
The prison system is doing a <i>good</i> job at ...						
Supervising/controlling prisoners	6,402	26	38	27	23	18
Helping prisoners become law-abiding	3,471	14	22	13	12	14
The parole system is doing a <i>good</i> job at ...						
Releasing offenders who are not likely to re-offend	3,699	15	25	14	14	9
Supervising offenders on parole	3,220	13	26	12	10	9

¹ Only the number and proportion who perceive justice agencies as doing a "good" job is shown.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 5


Perception of the criminal justice system doing a good job, by level of education, 1999¹

	Total		Level of Education			
			Less than high school	High school diploma	Some post-secondary/college diploma	University degree
	000s	%	% population 15+			
Local police are doing a <i>good</i> job at ...						
Being approachable	16,044	66	67	69	67	65
Ensuring the safety of citizens	15,138	62	67	63	62	60
Enforcing the laws	14,650	60	63	61	59	61
Supplying information on reducing crime	13,133	54	56	56	55	51
Responding promptly to calls	11,910	49	54	48	48	48
Criminal courts are doing a <i>good</i> job at ...						
Ensuring a fair trial for the accused	9,851	41	37	39	42	48
Determining whether or not the accused is guilty	5,028	21	22	19	20	24
Helping the victim	3,743	15	23	14	14	11
Providing justice quickly	3,114	13	19	11	10	11
The prison system is doing a <i>good</i> job at ...						
Supervising/controlling prisoners	6,402	26	29	26	27	27
Helping prisoners become law-abiding	3,471	14	21	14	13	10
The parole system is doing a <i>good</i> job at ...						
Releasing offenders who are not likely to re-offend	3,699	15	18	14	15	16
Supervising offenders on parole	3,220	13	19	12	12	10

¹ Only the number and proportion who perceive justice agencies as doing a "good" job is shown.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 6

	Perception of the local police doing a <i>good</i> job				
	Being approachable	Ensuring the safety of citizens	Enforcing the laws	Supplying information on reducing crime	Responding promptly to calls
	% of population 15+				
Total Population	66	62	60	54	49
Contact with the police²...					
for a public information session					
Yes	76	69	64	68	55
No	65	62	60	53	48
for a traffic violation					
Yes	61	56	55	51	46
No	67	63	61	55	50
as a victim of crime³					
Yes	64	52	51	47	46
No	66	64	62	55	49
as a witness to a crime					
Yes	61	52	49	48	44
No	66	63	61	55	49
by being arrested					
Yes	50	47	40	41	42
No	66	63	61	54	49

¹ Only the proportion who perceive local police force as doing a "good" job is shown.

² Includes the 12-month period prior to the survey.

³ Crimes are those defined by the respondent and may therefore not fall within the eight specific offence types measured by the GSS.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 7


Perception of the criminal justice system doing a good job, by type of victimization, 1999¹

	Total		Type of Victimization (over the last 12 months)			
			Total Victims ²	Victims of Violent Crime ³	Victims of Non-Violent Crime ⁴	Non-Victims
	000s	%	% of population 15+			
Local police are doing a <i>good</i> job at ...						
Being approachable	16,044	66	62	59	63	68
Ensuring the safety of citizens	15,138	62	54	51	56	65
Enforcing the laws	14,650	60	52	48	53	64
Supplying information on reducing crime	13,133	54	48	43	50	56
Responding promptly to calls	11,910	49	45	44	46	51
Criminal courts are doing a <i>good</i> job at ...						
Ensuring a fair trial for the accused	9,851	41	41	40	41	40
Determining whether or not the accused is guilty	5,028	21	20	21	20	21
Helping the victim	3,743	15	14	15	13	16
Providing justice quickly	3,114	13	10	11	10	14
The prison system is doing a <i>good</i> job at ...						
Supervising/controlling prisoners	6,402	26	28	29	27	26
Helping prisoners become law-abiding	3,471	14	13	14	13	15
The parole system is doing a <i>good</i> job at ...						
Releasing offenders who are not likely to re-offend	3,699	15	16	20	15	15
Supervising offenders on parole	3,220	13	14	16	13	13

¹ Only number and proportion who perceive justice agencies as doing a "good" job are shown.

² Includes victims of crimes that were not classified by crime type.

³ Violent crimes include sexual assault, robbery, attempted robbery, and assault.

⁴ Non-Violent crimes include break and enter, attempted break and enter, motor vehicle/parts theft, attempted motor vehicle/parts theft, theft of personal property, attempted theft of personal property, theft of household property, attempted theft of household property, and vandalism.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 8


Sentencing preferences of the public in specific situations, 1999

Situational Factors	Total		Sentencing Preference					
			Prison		Non-Prison		Don't Know/ Not stated	
	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%
Adult Offender								
First-time Offence								
B&E	24,260	100	8,999	37	13,341	55	1,921	8
Assault	24,260	100	6,892	28	15,102	62	2,266	9
Repeat Offence								
B&E	24,260	100	16,596	68	5,956	25	1,709	7
Assault	24,260	100	15,195	63	6,808	28	2,257	9
Young Offender								
First-time Offence								
B&E	24,260	100	5,053	21	17,384	72	1,823	8
Assault	24,260	100	4,486	18	17,801	73	1,973	8
Repeat Offence								
B&E	24,260	100	10,692	44	11,809	49	1,759	7
Assault	24,260	100	10,673	44	11,491	47	2,097	9

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 9

	Sentence Imposed ¹		
	Total	% of convictions	
		Prison ²	Non-Prison ²
Adult Court³			
B&E	69	63	37
Minor Assault	54	29	71
Youth Court⁴			
First-time offenders⁵			
B&E	57	17	83
Minor Assault	64	11	89
Repeat offenders⁶			
B&E	32	50	50
Minor Assault	29	32	68

¹ Based on the most significant sentence.

² In youth court, there are two types of custody dispositions where the young person is required to spend time in a designated correctional facility. These include secure (closed) custody and open custody. In adult court, prison is the only custody alternative for offenders convicted of a criminal offence.

³ Data on adult courts come from the Adult Criminal Court Survey, which has about 80% national coverage. It is not possible with this data source to provide figures for offenders with prior convictions.

⁴ Information on youth court cases come from the Youth Court Survey, which has full national coverage. Recidivism data from this data source excludes data from Nova Scotia.

⁵ Based on offenders with a break and enter or minor assault with no priors.

⁶ Based on recidivists with a break and enter or minor assault with only one prior similar offence.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Adult Criminal Court Survey, 1998-99 and Youth Court Survey, 1998-99.

Table 10

	Sentencing preferences of the public in specific situations, by age of respondent, 1999									
	Total		Age (years)							
			15 - 24		25 - 44		45 - 64		65 +	
000s	%	Prison	Non-Prison	Prison	Non-Prison	Prison	Non-Prison	Prison	Non-Prison	
Situational Factors			% of population 15+							
Adult Offender										
First-time Offence										
B&E	24,260	100	45	51	37	57	34	59	35	46
Assault	24,260	100	33	61	29	64	25	66	28	50
Repeat Offence										
B&E	24,260	100	75	22	71	24	64	30	61	20
Assault	24,260	100	67	29	64	28	61	30	56	24
Young Offender										
First-time Offence										
B&E	24,260	100	22	73	22	72	18	75	21	61
Assault	24,260	100	20	75	20	74	16	76	16	64
Repeat Offence										
B&E	24,260	100	48	49	48	47	40	54	38	42
Assault	24,260	100	44	53	46	47	44	49	39	40

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 11

		Sentencing preferences of the public in specific situations, by level of education, 1999									
		Level of Education									
		Total	Less than high school		High school diploma		Some post-secondary/college diploma		University degree		
			Prison	Non-Prison	Prison	Non-Prison	Prison	Non-Prison	Prison	Non-Prison	
Situational Factors		(000s)									
		%	% of population 15+								
Adult Offender											
First-time Offence											
B&E	24,260	100	45	47	38	55	38	59	30	67	
Assault	24,260	100	32	59	32	61	28	66	26	68	
Repeat Offence											
B&E	24,260	100	72	20	71	24	71	25	63	32	
Assault	24,260	100	63	27	66	27	66	29	63	31	
Young Offender											
First-time Offence											
B&E	24,260	100	24	67	25	69	20	76	16	82	
Assault	24,260	100	21	71	20	74	18	77	16	80	
Repeat Offence											
B&E	24,260	100	45	47	49	46	46	50	40	56	
Assault	24,260	100	45	46	49	45	47	49	40	54	

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Table 12

		Sentencing preferences of the public in specific situations, by type of victimization, 1999									
		Type of Victimization (over the last 12 months)									
		Total	Total Victims ¹		Victims of Violent Crime ²		Victims of Non-Violent Crime ³		Non-Victims		
			Prison	Non-Prison	Prison	Non-Prison	Prison	Non-Prison	Prison	Non-Prison	
Situational Factors		000s									
		%	% population 15+								
Adult Offender											
First-time Offence											
B&E	24,260	100	40	57	42	55	39	58	36	54	
Assault	24,260	100	29	67	30	67	28	68	28	61	
Repeat Offence											
B&E	24,260	100	75	22	77	22	75	23	66	25	
Assault	24,260	100	67	28	68	30	68	27	61	28	
Young Offender											
First-time Offence											
B&E	24,260	100	23	74	24	74	22	75	20	71	
Assault	24,260	100	21	76	22	76	20	77	18	72	
Repeat Offence											
B&E	24,260	100	51	47	52	46	50	48	42	49	
Assault	24,260	100	48	48	52	45	47	49	43	47	

¹ Includes victims of crimes that were not classified by crime type.

² Violent crimes include sexual assault, robbery, attempted robbery, and assault.

³ Non-Violent crimes include break and enter, attempted break and enter, motor vehicle theft/parts, attempted motor vehicle theft/parts, theft of personal property, attempted theft of personal property, theft of household property, attempted theft of household property, and vandalism.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999.

Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics

For further information, please contact the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 19th floor, R.H. Coats Building, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0T6 at (613) 951-9023 or call toll-free 1 800 387-2231. To order a publication, you may telephone (613) 951-7277 or fax (613) 951-1584 or internet: order@statcan.ca. You may also call 1 800 267-6677 (Canada and United States) toll-free. If you order by telephone, written confirmation is not required.

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