



BULLETIN

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Home Invasions

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Recent high-profile incidents of ‘home invasion’ have received significant exposure in the media, particularly those where the elderly have been targeted. The impact of ‘home invasions’ extends beyond the violence of the crime itself to a long-term loss of the victim’s sense of safety at home. Bill C-15A, currently before the Senate, proposes an amendment to the *Criminal Code* that specifically identifies ‘home invasion’ as an aggravating circumstance that requires stiffer penalties.

Definitions

Although no formal definition presently exists, a ‘home invasion’ is generally thought to be different from a break and enter in that there is premeditated confrontation with the victim with the intent to rob and/or inflict violence on the occupants of the household.

One of the biggest obstacles in measuring ‘home invasion’ is the lack of an agreed-upon definition. While some incidents appear to be obvious, others are not so clear:

- a homeowner returns home unexpectedly while a break and enter is in progress and there is confrontation
- a person breaks into a home believing that no one is home and someone is, or believing that the occupants are all asleep and they wake up, and there is confrontation
- someone forcibly enters the home of a person known to them to “settle a score”.

The following definitions of ‘home invasion’ represent those of three police services who specifically capture data on ‘home invasions’:

- (i) Vancouver: “where the suspect(s) choose a residential premise in which they know a person or persons are present with the pre-formulated plan of confronting the occupant(s), attacking them, holding them or binding them thereby committing assault and unlawful confinement, then a theft is attempted or completed, thereby committing robbery”;

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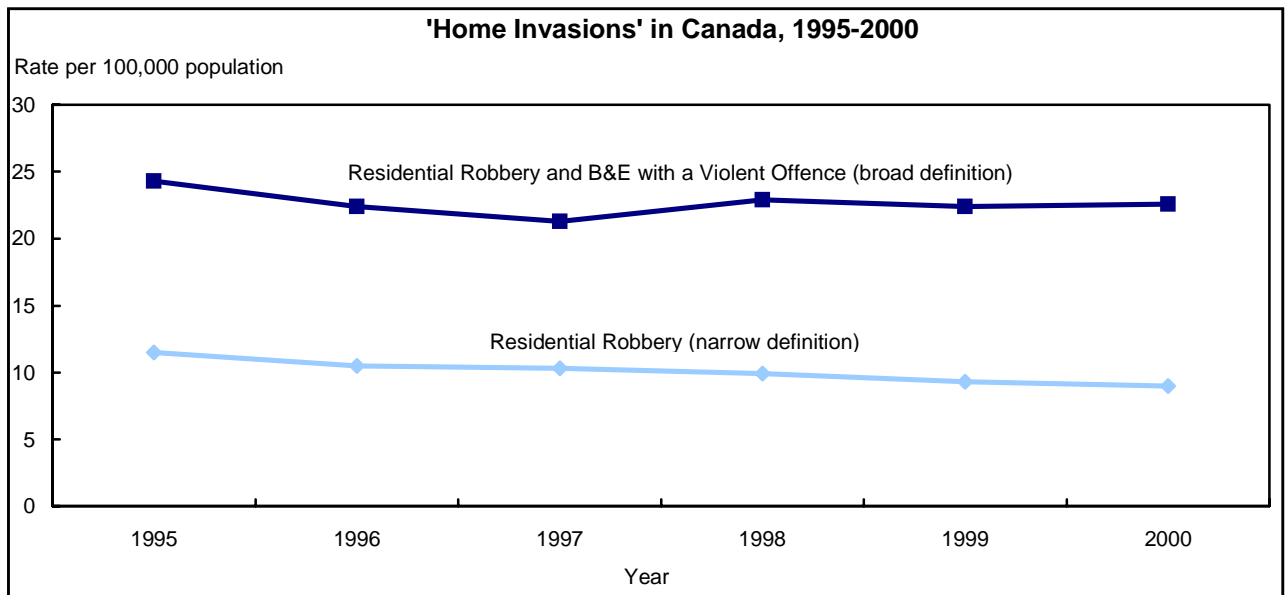


- (ii) Toronto: “a robbery committed in the living quarters of a residence”; and,
- (iii) Calgary: “when the culprit(s) enter a residence by force, threats, intimidation, or permission, either knowing or expecting the residence to be occupied. Or, culprit(s) break in to residence and wait for the residents to return. Culprit(s) must have pre-formulated intention of taking property, money or drugs, etc., and use force, threats, or intimidation towards any person in the residence to achieve their goal.”

Data collected by police services

As there is currently no specific offence in the *Criminal Code* called ‘home invasion’, data reported by police agencies do not include this type of crime specifically. However, it is possible to estimate trends and characteristics of this type of crime by combining existing variables from the incident-based UCR2 Database. This database includes 106 Canadian police forces, representing 41% of the annual national volume of crime (including Toronto, Montreal, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver) who have been reporting incident-based crime statistics since 1995.

The UCR2 data are examined in two ways. First, a “narrow” definition which examines only incidents where police have reported a robbery occurring in a private residence. Using this definition, ‘home invasions’ show a steady decline (-22%), from a rate of 11.5 per 100,000 population in 1995 to 9.0 in 2000.



Second, a “broad” definition includes robberies of a residence as well as any residential break and enter incidents where there was also a violent offence. Using this definition, the rate of ‘home invasions’ has remained relatively stable over this six-year period at a rate of around 23 per 100,000 population.

Characteristics of 'Home Invasion' Incidents

The analysis below uses all incidents of 'home invasion' (according to the "narrow" definition of residential robberies) occurring between 1995 and 2000 from the UCR2 Trend database.

Between 1995 and 2000, where the relationship between the victim and accused was known, two-thirds (68%) of all accused were strangers, and a further 21% were casual acquaintances of the victim. The remaining 11% involved family, friends and business relationships.

Half (55%) of 'home invasion' incidents involved a weapon being present in the incident compared with 60% of all other robberies. The most common weapons present in both 'home invasion' incidents and other robberies were knives/other cutting instruments (21% versus 23%) and firearms (18% each). In 47% of 'home invasion' incidents the victim reported physical injuries: 38% reported minor physical injuries and 8% reported major injuries that required professional medical attention at the scene of the incident.

It appears that elderly victims are more frequently victims in this type of crime as compared to robberies. Of all victims of a 'home invasion' incident between 1995 and 2000, 17% were aged 60 or over, compared with 6% of all other robbery victims.

Although 'home invasions' ("narrow" definition) account for a small proportion of robberies reported to the police (7%), these offences have prompted public concern because of the unique predatory nature of these crimes. The analysis of available data suggests that the number of 'home invasions' may actually have declined over the past six years. However, until such time as there is a uniform definition of a 'home invasion' and more police services begin collecting these data, it is difficult to provide definitive information on this type of crime.

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