TRENDS ANALYSIS: CRIME

FALL 2014

What does this measure & why is it important?

The Composite Index of Crime is an index formed by the weighted averages of three indicators: serious violent crime rate (weight of 0.35), serious property crime rate (weight of 0.50), and number of serious crimes per police officer (weight of 0.15). Rates are based on the number of reported offences for every 1,000 people. Serious violent crime rate is based on reporting within the crime categories of homicide, attempted murder, sexual and non-sexual assault as well as robbery and abduction. Serious property crime includes breaking and entering, but does not include motor vehicle theft and minor crimes such as bicycle theft and pick pocketing. Data were sourced from BC Stats' Socio-Economic Indices. Crime rates are based on resident population and do not take into consideration non-resident or transient populations such as tourists or seasonal workers.

Crime rates are a common objective indicator of public safety. They can help measure the effectiveness of law enforcement and community engagement initiatives, and inform decision-making about law enforcement policies and practices. Crime rates have been associated with areas of higher poverty and thus could inform poverty reduction strategies (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2013). Crime rates also contribute to perceptions of safety, which is an important determinant of subjective wellness (Eriksson, Hochwalder, & Sellstrom, 2011). Research suggests that residents of rural areas report higher levels of trust and perceived safety than those in urban areas (Onyx & Bullen, 2000).

What are the trends & current conditions?

The Composite Index of Crime provides a numeric value for each Local Health Area (LHA) in the province. Positive numbers mean that a particular LHA is worse than the median area; negative numbers mean the LHA is better than the median. The index value is used to rank the 78 LHAs as a way to compare crime and public safety across areas.

According to BC Stats (2012), five of the LHAs in our region have crime indices that are among the 10 lowest in the province. Eleven rank among the lowest 20. Most LHAs in our region therefore have comparatively low incidences of crime. Grand Forks and Windermere however have a considerably higher index of crime. Table 1 shows the Composite Index of Crime and the three sub-indices, as well as the provincial ranking of LHAs for the Columbia Basin-Boundary region.

As shown in Table 1, serious violent crime rates are well below the BC average for all LHAs in the region, with Golden showing the lowest crime rate at 0.8 offences per 1,000. Serious property crime rates are also well below the BC average for all areas, except Windermere and Grand Forks which have values of 10.6 and 9.4 respectively. The number of serious crimes per police officer is also high and above the BC average for Windermere and Grand Forks, with rates at 12.0 and 9.7. The Kootenay Lake and Nelson LHAs have the lowest serious property crime rates in our region, both at 3.0. The lowest number of serious crimes per police officer is in Fernie at 2.7 offences per 1,000.

Local Health Area	Composite Index of Crime	Serious violent crime rate	Serious property crime rate	Number of serious crimes per police officer	Ranking in BC (out of 78 LHAs; the higher the number the better ranking)
Fernie (LHA 1)	-0.54	1.5	5.0	2.7	63
Cranbrook (LHA 2)	-0.45	1.9	4.6	5.6	61
Kimberley (LHA 3)	-0.80	0.9	3.7	3.9	72
Windermere (LHA 4)	0.56	1.6	10.6	12.0	19

Creston (LHA 5)	-0.59	1.2	4.3	5.9	65
Kootenay Lake (LHA 6)	-0.88	1.0	3.0	3.7	76
Nelson (LHA 7)	-0.78	1.5	3.0	4.1	71
Castlegar (LHA 9)	-0.60	1.4	4.3	4.9	66
Arrow Lakes (LHA 10)	-0.40	1.3	5.5	5.6	58
Trail (LHA 11)	-0.74	1.5	3.4	4.3	70
Grand Forks (LHA 12)	0.40	1.5	9.4	9.7	25
Golden (LHA 18)	-0.83	0.8	3.8	3.1	73
Revelstoke (LHA 19)	-0.61	1.5	4.5	3.5	67
British Columbia		*3.3*	*7.8*	*7.7*	

Table 1: Indicators of crime by Local Health Area, offences per 1,000 population, averages from 2009 – 2011 Source: BC Stats, 2012

While the Composite Index of Crime provides a snapshot of crime across the region, it is also useful to look at how crime rates are changing over time. Figure 1 shows the percent change in total serious crime from 2006 – 2008 averages to 2009 – 2011 averages. Total serious crime is the combination of serious violent crime and serious property crime.
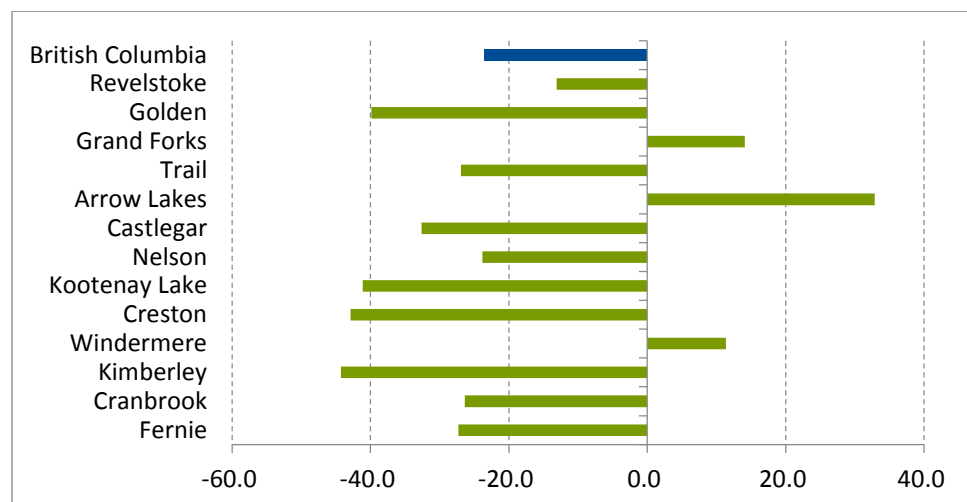

Figure 1: Percent change in total serious crime by Local Health Area, averages from 2006 – 2008 to 2009 – 2011 Source: BC Stats, 2012

Total serious crime decreased in British Columbia and in most areas in the Basin-Boundary region from 2006 to 2011. Windermere and Grand Forks show an increase in total serious crime over this period, related to the higher crime rates found in those areas. Arrow Lakes LHA also shows an increase in total serious crime; however it is important to note that Arrow Lakes had low initial crime rates, and the rate of change may not therefore indicate a significant increase in crime. In our small communities one incident can affect the statistics dramatically.

Related to indicators of crime are not only the statistics, but perceptions of residents. According to a 2014 poll of 400 Basin-Boundary residents, 86% say they love where they live. In 2013, residents were polled and 89% said they feel safe in their community, while 69% reported feeling a strong sense of belonging to their community. These perceptions may be related to the fact that for much of our region crime rates are well below the provincial average.

References

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