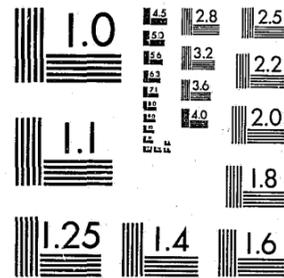


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# VIOLENT CRIME IN ALBERTA

PAPER #1  
Background Statistics

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VIOLENT CRIME IN ALBERTA:  
SOME BACKGROUND STATISTICS

By  
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and  
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June, 1980

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Population Research Laboratory  
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NCJRS

APR 17 1981

ACQUISITIONS

This is Paper #1 from THE VIOLENT CRIME STUDY by the Office of Robert Clark, Leader of the Official Opposition, Legislative Assembly of Alberta under contract with the Centre for Criminological Research, Population Research Laboratory, The University of Alberta.

Additional papers are:

- #2 Sentencing Strategies and Violent Crime
- #3 Parole and the Violent Offender
- #4 Strategies for the Prevention of Violent Crime

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ABSTRACT

This first paper in a series of four on violent crime in Alberta provides some general background statistics for Canada and Alberta. We review the tendency to ignore the larger picture of violence in our society and focus instead on dramatic, exotic but relatively rare violent crimes. Most of the violent crime rate is comprised of assault not indecent, not the more serious crimes such as murder and rape which receive more attention from the public and policy makers. The authors suggest that this broader index of violent crime may provide the more meaningful indication of the pool of potential violent offenders in a community. Policies that will reduce violence in this broad base will be more effective than those aimed at the violent few.

Problems and limitations of official statistics are also discussed and a variety of statistics are presented to provide a profile of violent crime across Canada. Alberta is presented in more detail and trends in violent crime over time are shown. Western Canada seems to have more violent crime than Eastern Canada and in Alberta violent crime is more prevalent in the smaller towns than in the large cities. The data also indicate that the image of the vicious killer or rapist who stalks strangers in the street in reality is more likely to be a relative, friend, or acquaintance and that violence frequently takes place in a domestic situation.

Violent Crime in Canada

Introduction - Hindsight versus Foresight

Concerned citizens frequently read in the newspaper a description of a violent crime by a person whose history of violence is well known. A natural response is to ask why he was not put away at an earlier period. It seems logical that if some of these dangerous persons were locked up in secure prisons and were not given bail, short sentences, or parole; many lives could be saved and many injuries avoided. While such reasoning appears sensible, it gives rise to many difficulties in practice. As in so many other situations, hindsight is much more accurate than foresight.

When we hear of someone who has murdered for a second time, we look for someone to blame. Someone should have known that this person was very dangerous. We hear about murderers who tell a psychiatrist that they think they are going to kill somebody. Later, we ask why something wasn't done when the offender made such a statement. Many people tell psychiatrists that they are going to kill someone; while in fact, very few who make such statements carry out the threat and many murderers do not provide such a clue. It is true that many clues are given which can identify persons who are a higher than average risk. These are clues recognized by everyone - a man beats his wife, becomes violent after drinking, gets into bar fights, etc. Similarly, we can detect reckless drivers who are more likely to kill people with automobiles. However, most of these potentially dangerous people do not become killers. So far, we do not have the diagnostic tools to identify accurately those who are much more dangerous than others.

Take, for example, the child psychologist who was talking with a seven year old girl who seemed to be jealous of her baby sister. The psychologist

had provided a doll house and tiny dolls for the seven year old and she was creating various scenes around the house and explaining them to the psychologist. In the first situation the seven year old showed a baby doll on the back steps of the house. Big sister has just arrived at the back door, but she was too late to save baby sister who had just fallen down the back stairs and broken her neck. The next story had baby sister in the bathtub and big sister has just arrived at the door of the bathroom, but alas, she was too late to save baby sister from drowning. The scenario went on with baby sister dying in a great variety of circumstances and big sister always arriving too late to save her.

In this admittedly upsetting situation, what does one do? At what stage does one intervene? In the world of psychiatry there is a tendency to intervene at a early stage even though objective evidence shows that predictions of dangerousness on the part of psychiatrists are not very accurate in and of themselves (Cocozza and Steadman, 1976, 1978), and no more accurate than predictions made by those in other occupations (Taft, 1955). The criminal justice system tends to be much more cautious, taking action after a crime has been committed and hoping that conviction will have a deterrent effect. Obviously, there is the danger of committing two different types of errors: we could fail to lock up dangerous offenders who then commit other serious crimes, or we could lock up offenders or potential offenders who would have caused no damage to others in society. Social policy tries to reach a balance between these two types of errors.

Simple slogans ("Hang all rapists," etc.) that irate citizens shout at policy makers frequently ignore the fact that we have found no way of reducing both of those errors at the same time. The emotional reaction of the public to sensational crimes becomes a real political force, but those in leadership

positions must constantly weigh the pressures being created by emotions and the objective gains and losses of a particular public action.

The purpose of this study is to provide some sense of the risks involved in different courses of action. The discussion will provide no single answer that will satisfy most of the people in decision making situations, but there is the possibility of separating out strategies in terms of their potential consequences for violent crime.

The Ideal Research Strategy

Since this research project is restricted in time and resources, we might look at the ideal study and ask how we might gather information that would approximate it. If we could use a large sample of offenders who committed violent crimes and divide them into various experimental groups, we could get better information on these perplexing questions. One group could be incarcerated for a long period of time. Another group might be released on probation. After ten years or so, we could compare the two groups and assess the results. Obviously, there would be difficulties in comparison since those on probation would have a higher crime rate than those who had been in prison, but at least this experimental design would provide some objective evidence regarding risks. Clearly, an experiment of this type would not be acceptable in our society, and therefore, we must rely on other information gathering procedures.

Another possibility would be to look at individual case files, identifying offenders at an early stage and following these offenders through significant periods of their lives. Here again, there are considerable difficulties. There are ethical questions, as well as practical ones, in terms of finding accurate data and tracing them with any degree of accuracy over time. Since

systematic studies of this nature are rare in Canada, the best we can do is look at such work done elsewhere and see if it can be interpreted for the Canadian scene. In short, this brief study is going to have to be a compromise. Indirect methods will be used in an attempt to answer some important questions. The study will have to rely on research projects done elsewhere and will have to make use of official statistics which are not ideally suited for answering the necessary questions. This is the thrust of the second paper in this study (Hackler and Gauld, 1980b).

Given the limitations of a study of this nature, which questions deserve the most attention? Those who are in public office would like to have a fairly direct answer to the question, "would it help to lock up violent offenders for a longer period of time?" Such a question will probably never be answered satisfactorily partially because the person reviewing the information will have a different hierarchy of values. But perhaps there are other questions that could provide more useful answers. Are there some practices which simply have no impact on the situation? Are there other strategies that might have an impact on violence in an indirect manner? In addition, should we try to see where violent crime fits in our society and whether an objective view of this problem would lead to more reasonable policy decisions? Before presenting some background statistics on violent crime in Canada and Alberta, it might be worthwhile to note two pitfalls that will plague any public official who attempts to deal with such an emotional issue as violent crime in a rational manner. We might group these two pitfalls under the headings, "Spitting into the wind," and "Focusing on the Exotic."

Spitting into the Wind

If someone told you that he was concerned about the water level at Lake

Wabamun and therefore every Saturday he was driving out to the lake with a five gallon can of water from the Edmonton water supply, one might well describe the activity as futile in terms of actually raising the water level of that lake. Similarly, some of our actions regarding crime are futile. It is possible that our response sometimes makes us feel better, just as the man carrying water to Wabamun may feel better, but this should not be confused with having a genuine impact on reality. At other times our gestures are symbolic, and even though they are not effective, they support widely held values in society. The search for justice can sometimes dictate a course of behavior that may not be particularly effective. This should not be seen as "spitting into the wind" because "effectiveness" cannot always be measured in a convenient manner if we are trying to achieve justice.

However, if one is searching for justice it is frequently difficult to separate deeply held values with traditional practices. For example, when the Ford Motor Company decided not to invest \$11.00 in each Pinto automobile in order to change the position of the gas tank, they apparently knew that a certain number of people would die a flaming death in auto accidents. But Ford officials seemed to decide it would be cheaper to pay for the resulting law suits than to make the necessary changes in the automobiles.

We should note that if a strangler kills 10 people in 10 months, the media provides extensive coverage. When the decisions of a large corporation leads to more than ten deaths in flaming automobiles, the mass media is less attentive. In addition, our mass media give much more attention to public figures who heartily proclaim procedures which are clearly ineffective (e.g., life imprisonment for all murderers) but have a strong emotional appeal. On the other hand, actions that would be compatible with justice, and possibly even effective, frequently do not get much support from politicians. We must

accept the fact that spitting into the wind sometimes makes a person appear courageous.

#### Focusing on the Exotic

Closely related to the above theme is the tendency to focus on the exotic. A murder makes news, but more often than not we fail to see that many murders are actually chance occurrences. When two juvenile gangs meet in a rumble, a death usually does not result. But if the boys are carrying knives the odds increase. If firearms are present the odds are even greater that someone will get killed. The fact that a violent death results in one situation but not in many other similar situations should make us realize that the dramatic outcome does not mean that the processes that lead to that outcome were necessarily unique. If we focus just on the exotic and unusual, we lose sight of the larger situation which generates those unusual results from time to time. Frequently, pressure is put on students of crime to pay attention to only "real" crime and to spend less time on these other activities which seem to be of less importance. Such a perspective ignores the fact that violence is clearly related to other aspects of society. Rape does not stand alone as a subject of study but must be seen within the context of a society that defines the nature of relations between men and women in a certain way. Murder is not so much a specialized crime but an occasional product of violence producing situations. Limiting our attention to the exotic keeps us ignorant of the larger picture.

Although many readers of this report will claim that we have digressed from the main questions at hand, we feel that to focus on some of the narrow topics that give the appearance of yielding an answer would be dishonest and misleading. Therefore, it is imperative that we have some awareness of the

nature of violent crime in Alberta before we can speak intelligently of policies that might reduce it. In the same way, focusing our attention only on those offenders who are being considered for long term incarceration would provide a distorted and relatively useless picture for those interested in intelligent policy making. We acknowledge the fact that there are many people who prefer to ignore the larger picture and focus instead on the dramatic and exotic. We warn the reader in advance that this report will offer little consolation for those seeking scientific support for certain popular public postures, but those who are willing to recognize the dilemmas and uncertainties surrounding violent crimes may find this material useful.

#### Problems with Official Statistics

The average person is frequently ambivalent about statistics. While some people are very reassured about these "facts," others will claim that you can "prove anything with statistics." The truth is somewhere in between. There are many factors that make statistics believable, and while Canada produces many official statistics which are both accurate and useful, criminal statistics are subject to many influences that make interpretation difficult. For example, the police cannot respond to or record all crime; information is handled in slightly different ways in different areas at different times; and pressure from the community may influence information gathering and reporting. However, crime statistics do tell us something about the way society responds to crime. Hence, they may be a good measure of societal response to crime even though they may be an imperfect measure of criminal or violent behavior. Before examining violent crime across Canada and in Alberta, let us look at a few illustrations of official statistics which could be misleading.

In 1961 Montreal reported six cases of fraud. That same year Toronto

reported 1,800 cases (Giffen, 1965). In 1962 Montreal reported 81 cases of fraud and Toronto reported 364 (Giffen, 1976). By 1971 there are further signs of convergence. Montreal reported 171 and Toronto 556. To assume that the discrepancy in these figures are an accurate reflection of criminal activity seems unwise. It may be that different reporting practices by the two police forces make sound comparisons of criminal activity in the two cities impossible.

We frequently assume that data on murders should be more accurate. While this may be true, we should be aware that there are pressures on police forces which can influence the recording of serious crime as well. Some police forces are sensitive to their clearance rate. A high clearance rate is sometimes seen as an indicator of police efficiency. This could lead to a pressure to underreport serious offences that are difficult to solve. The classic case concerning the underreporting of crime is New York City between the years 1933 and 1949. These figures were so incomplete, unreliable and misleading, that they were excluded from national computations in the U.S. (The Institute of Public Administration, 1952). When changes were made in 1950, robberies immediately showed a four-fold increase, assaults with guns and knives doubled, larcenies increased seven times, and burglaries increased thirteen times. Of course, these "increases" were products of the reporting system, not criminal behavior. Although we have few systematic studies of crime statistics in Canada, there is little indication of the deliberate abuse of official statistics on the same scale.

Another type of problem arises out of the interpretation that is placed on certain data. The category of sexual offences in particular illustrates this problem. For example, indecent assault usually suggests a rather unpleasant experience for a female victim. However, it seems that during the

Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto the police have, in the past, kept their eyes open for men who stand in line behind women and snuggle up rather close. Being on the alert for this activity, the police have arrested men for indecent assault even though the "victim" may not be aware that she had been "assaulted" (Mohr, 1973). In this situation, one can see that many of the offences that are recorded and dealt with as violent crime, may not contain recognizable elements of violence. Rape provides another example. Due to the stigma attached to being the victim of an offence such as rape, many victims do not report the offence to the police. If offences are reported, due to the problems involved with processing a charge of rape through the criminal justice system, police are reluctant to classify many of these offences as rape. Although rape rates have been rising, which in part may reflect the activities of rape crisis centers and other organizations who are encouraging women to report offences, it has been estimated that the actual numbers of rapes occurring is from five to ten times greater than the number reported by the police (Clark, 1977).

There are ways of compensating for some of these statistical deficiencies. While reporting practices may shift some crimes between adjacent categories, such as murder and attempted murder, rape and indecent assault, etc; there is the possibility that losses in one category are balanced by increases in other categories. If we use the larger and more general category of "violent crime", there is some possibility that we balance out some of these errors. When we attempt to use this general category, researchers are frequently criticized because some members of the public wish to focus only on more serious crimes and do not want to be bothered by the more numerous minor crimes that are included in the overall category of violent crime. On the surface such logic makes sense. We can tolerate many of these minor acts of violence, but we

would certainly like to reduce the more serious ones even though they are much less frequent. The fallacy in this argument, however, is that a serious violent crime is frequently a somewhat accidental result of something that begins as violence on a lesser scale. While most bar fights do not lead to murder, a large number of murders begin as bar fights. Most wife beatings do not lead to murder, but many deaths in the family are related to violence in the family. Therefore, the more inclusive index of violent crime might actually be a better indicator of murder or rape in different communities. With these thoughts in mind, let us turn to some of the official statistics on violence in Canada.<sup>1</sup>

Comparing Data Across Canada

Differences Among Reporting Systems

Before presenting a profile of violent crime across Canada, we should be aware of the possibility of systematic errors and differences in reporting by different police systems. Ontario and Quebec have provincial police forces and the major cities in Canada have their own police forces as do some of the smaller towns. The R.C.M.P. polices most of the smaller towns and rural areas through contract agreements signed with the provincial governments or individual municipalities. We should not expect to see the same type of statistics generated by the R.C.M.P. and by individual police forces. Even though there may be sincere efforts to standardize crime statistics through the use of unified crime reports, how actual incidents are perceived, dealt with and classified may vary with different types of police forces and local strategies that may be used. However, we may be able to assume that the mixture of R.C.M.P. units and municipal police forces will tend to balance out these differences so that comparisons from province to province may be somewhat

valid.

The Frequency of Violent Crime

A concerned citizen questioning government officials and elected representatives about what they are doing to prevent and control increasing violent crime and criminals in the community does not wish to be told merely that violent crime is a relatively small portion of the total crime picture and other social problems. However, in order to develop and implement intelligent policies that will help us cope with violence and crime in our society, the magnitude and nature of the problem must be understood.

Table 1 shows that over several years, crimes of violence have accounted for less than 10% of the criminal code offences committed in Canada and Alberta. This table also reflects the tendency for Alberta to have a higher percentage of violent crime than Canada as a whole. Table 2 shows the causes of death in Canada and Alberta. We note that there were 59 homicides in Alberta in 1977, 41 men and 18 women. By contrast, 440 men were killed in motor vehicle accidents and 1981 died of heart disease. We also see that male deaths are approximately twice that of female deaths.

While these data should not justify a lack of concern for homicide and violent crime, one must ponder the societal concern for one child who is murdered versus ten children killed by being thrown through the windshield of a car in an accident. If policy makers focus their energy on one cause of death, because it gets a great deal of news coverage and enrages the population, and then neglect other concerns that have a greater impact on the lives of citizens; is society being well served?

Table 1  
Ratio of Criminal Code Offences  
Canada and Alberta 1974 - 1978

Year	Crimes of Violence		Crimes Against Property		Other Crimes	
	Canada	Alberta	Canada	Alberta	Canada	Alberta
1974	8.6	9.8	65.0	65.3	26.4	24.8
1975	8.5	9.3	65.6	65.5	25.8	25.2
1976	8.4	9.1	64.9	64.1	26.7	26.7
1977	8.2	8.8	64.1	64.6	27.7	26.6
1978	8.1	9.1	64.0	64.7	27.9	26.1

Source: Statistics Canada. Crime & Traffic Enforcement Statistics, 1974-1978.

Table 2

Cause of Death; Actual Number & Rates/100,000 for Specific Causes 1977

Cause of Death	Canada				Alberta			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate
Homicide & injury purposely inflicted by other persons	399	2	198	1	41	2	18	1
Motor vehicle traffic accidents	3,767	16	1,400	6	440	23	165	9
Suicide	2,459	11	858	4	267	14	77	4
Injury resulting from undetermined intention (whether accidentally or purposely inflicted)	611	3	282	1	59	3	25	1
Heart disease	31,180	134	20,228	87	1,981	109	1,086	57

Source: Statistics Canada. Causes of Death Statistics, 1977.

Canadian Violent Crime Profile

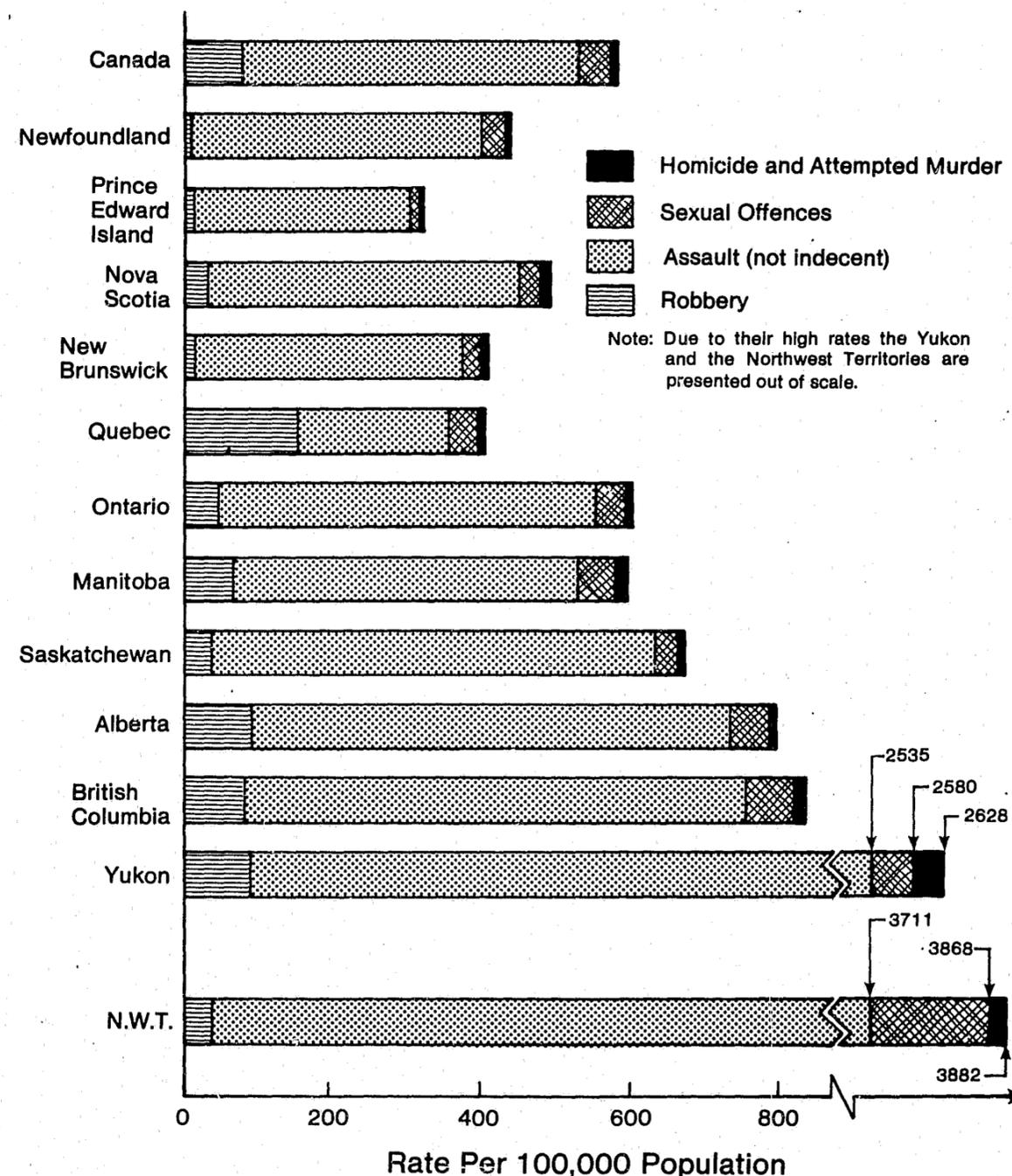
Figure 1 attempts to look more closely at the less than 10% of criminal code offences reflected by violent crime rates across Canada. While only 1977 violent crime rates are shown, it illustrates the tendency for crime rates to be higher in the West than in the East. To a large extent there has been a west to east continuum, with British Columbia usually leading the nation in crime and the maritimes usually being rather low. In addition, Quebec tends to be slightly higher than the maritimes and Ontario slightly higher than Quebec but lower than the western provinces. There are exceptions to this pattern, but the trend has persisted for many years. To date, no criminologist has offered an adequate explanation for this phenomenon and supported such an argument with objective data.

One can also note that without exception, assault accounts for most of the violent crime rate; and the more serious crimes of homicide, attempted murder and sex offences account for a relatively small portion of the violent crime rate. The reader should keep in mind, however, that these assaults may easily be the base from which many of the rapes and homicides come. Therefore, the more inclusive rate may provide the more meaningful indication of known violence in a community.

In terms of how homicides come about, there are some regional differences across Canada (Figure 2). In British Columbia 25% of the homicide incidents result from domestic affairs, while this category makes up 30% of the Ontario homicides, and 48% of the homicides on the Prairies. Social and business relationships (which include lovers' quarrels, close acquaintances, casual acquaintances and business relationships), make up 30% to 39% of the homicides in these three provinces. When one looks at the Prairies it is clear that 83% of the homicides arise out of family, social, or business relationships. The

Figure 1

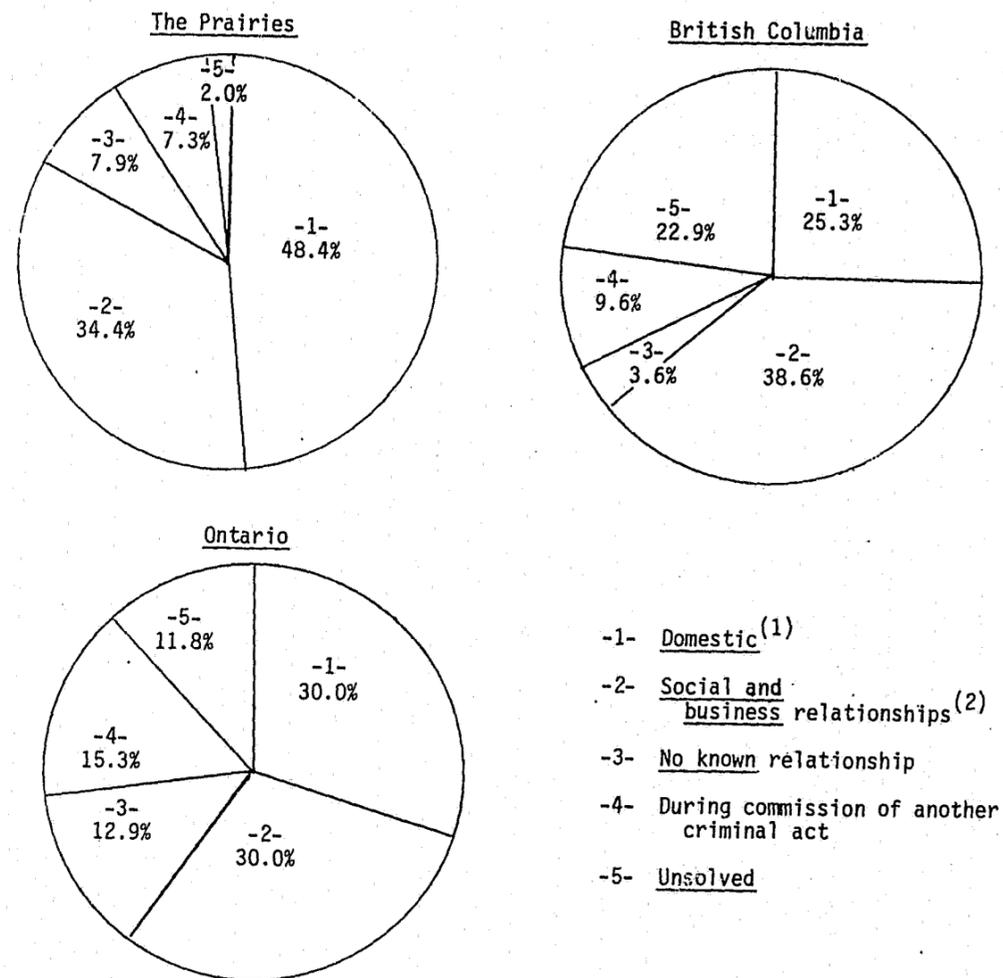
Overview of Violent Crime Rates, Canada & Provinces 1977



Source: Table A1 (See Appendix)

Figure 2

Percentage Distribution of Homicide Incidents  
by Suspect-Victim Relationship, by Region, 1978



(1) "Domestic" includes "Immediate Family", "Other Kinship" and "Common Law Family".  
 (2) "Social and Business Relationships" includes "Lovers' Quarrels and Love Triangles", "Close Acquaintances", "Casual Acquaintances" and "Business Relationships".

Note: This chart shows the proportion of each type of homicide incident within each geographic region.

Source: Statistics Canada. Homicide Statistics, 1978.

murder of strangers is relatively uncommon (8%) and murders committed during another criminal act are similarly infrequent (7%).

These facts must be taken into account when some sort of policy is being considered by the criminal justice system. Deaths resulting from family feuds and other situations are frequently acts of passion and not easily deterred by judicial procedures. When we are arguing for a particularly severe response from the criminal justice system, we usually have in mind the murderer who kills during a robbery or something of this nature. The point is that social policy may be concentrating on a very small segment of the problem. While this focus may serve "justice" to some extent, a broader approach to overall societal violence may be more effective. This theme will be developed in a later part of this study.

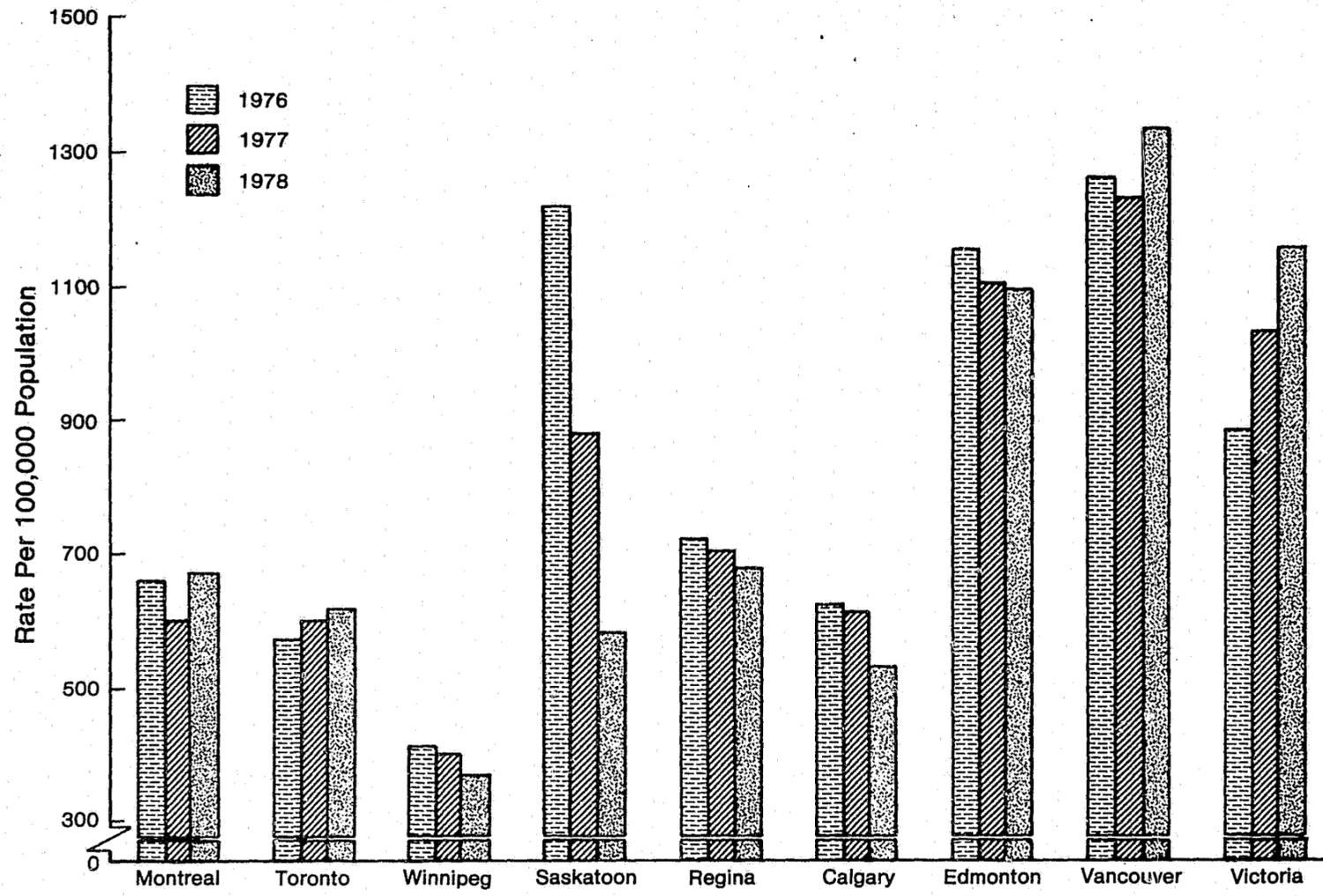
Violent Crime in Selected Canadian Cities

When we look at violent crime rates by city, we get some surprises (Figure 3). Montreal has rather moderate violent crime rates, which may be somewhat surprising to the average Canadian. Toronto has still lower rates and Winnipeg seems to have one of the lowest rates for a major Canadian city. Saskatoon and Victoria might surprise us. In 1976 it appeared that Saskatoon was the violent crime capital of the nation. Although Saskatchewan has been concerned with some of the violence concerning native peoples, the differences between Saskatoon and Regina are somewhat surprising. Vancouver has persistently reported high violent crime rates, but when one thinks of Victoria, one imagines elderly ladies sipping tea in front of the Empress Hotel. In 1978, however, Victoria recorded higher crime rates than Edmonton.

Some of the differences between cities (i.e. Edmonton and Calgary) and the drastic fluctuations from year to year (i.e. Saskatoon) reflected in

Figure 3

Violent Crime Rates for Selected Canadian Cities 1976, 1977, 1978



Source: Table A2 (See Appendix)

violent crime rates, may be explained by different police systems and administrative procedures. At present we cannot separate out all the factors that may influence these rates, but the assumption that the West has more violent crime than the East seems justified.

#### Violent Crime Rates and Population Size

When comparing cities of different size across Canada and in Alberta (Figures 4A and 4B), we find some interesting differences. For Canada as a whole, cities with populations over 250,000 tend to have the highest crime rates. For most of Canada, however, if the city size is below 100,000 it does not seem to make a great deal of difference. In Alberta, however, we note that our smaller towns frequently have rather high violent crime rates (Figure 4B). In fact, in 1976 and 1978 the communities with the highest crime rate in Alberta were those with populations between 750 and 2,500.

At this stage, it would be profitable to ask ourselves just where violent crime is centered in Alberta. The typical citizen is concerned that our big cities are becoming dangerous places to which to live. But it seems that smaller towns in Alberta may in fact contribute more than their share of violent crime.

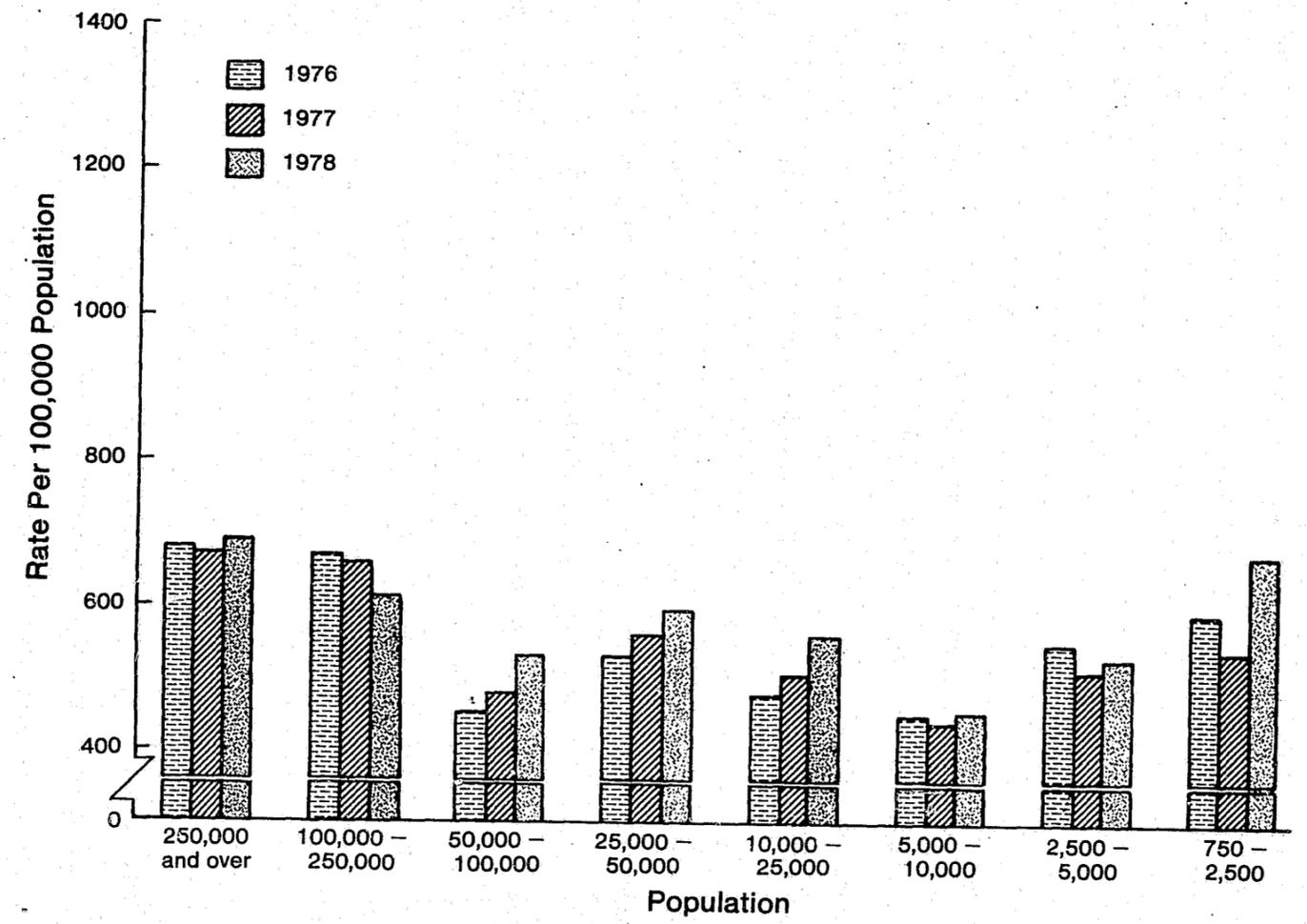
#### Focusing on Alberta

##### Trends Over Time

Thus far we have tried to briefly present the extent and nature of violent crime in Canada and look generally at how Alberta relates within the Canadian context. At this point we would like to focus our attention on developing a more detailed understanding of violent crime in Alberta.

Several features of our crime statistics in Alberta are difficult to

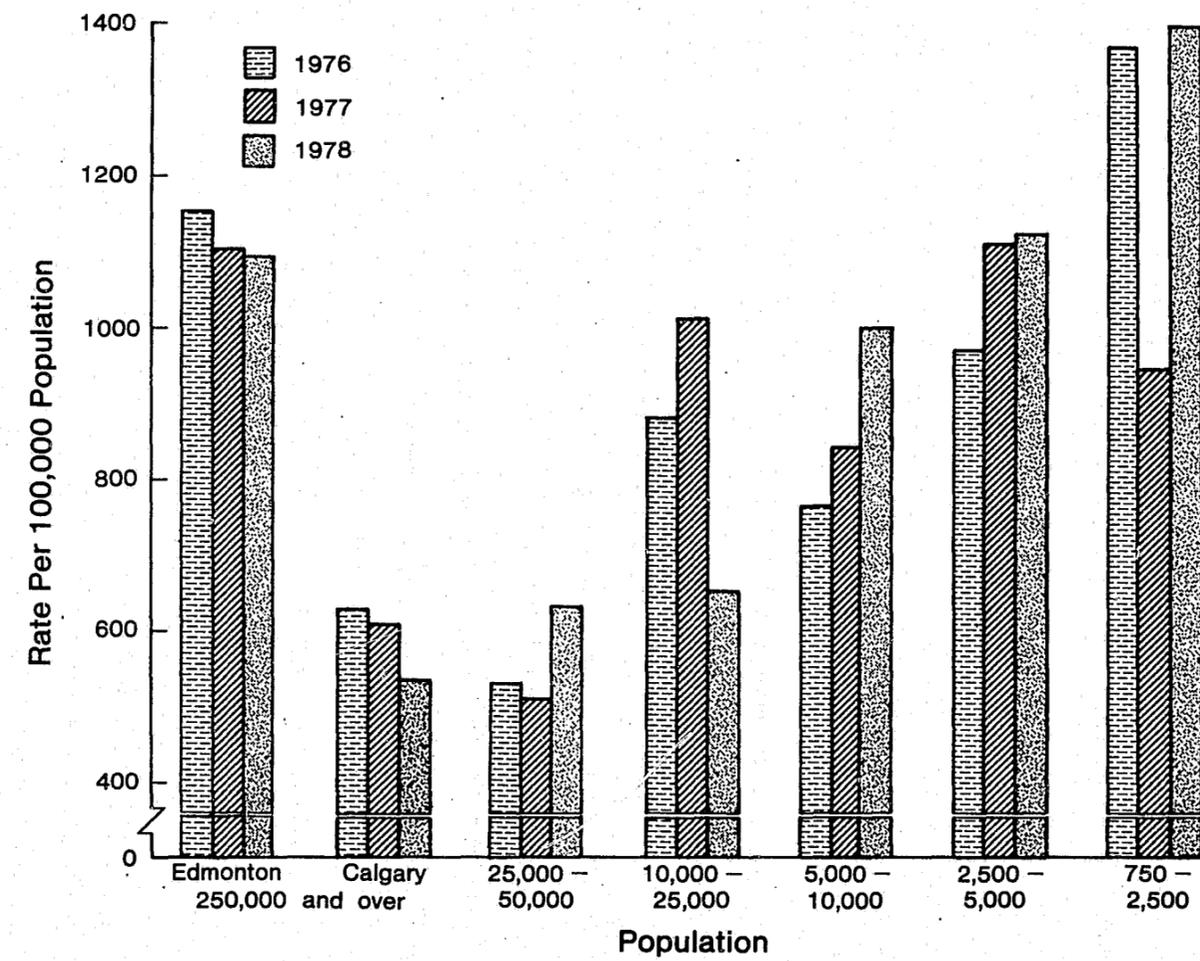
Figure 4A  
Violent Crime Rates for Canadian Municipalities by Population Size 1976 - 1978



Source: Table A3 (See Appendix)

Figure 4B

Violent Crime Rates for Alberta Municipalities by Population Size 1976 - 1978



Source: Table A3 (See Appendix)

explain. For example, Calgary has had generally lower crime rates than Edmonton for many years (Figures 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, and 5E). Since the two cities are very similar on many demographic characteristics, it is still a puzzle why this difference should persist. Robert Silverman discovered one source of variation in the reporting of assaults (1977). Assaults cases in Edmonton were recorded each time a case was known to the police. In Calgary, assaults were screened by the police and only when further action was taken was the case recorded. This led to an assault rate approximately 50% higher in Edmonton than in Calgary. But procedures for record keeping in other crime categories did not provide an adequate explanation of the differences in the two cities.

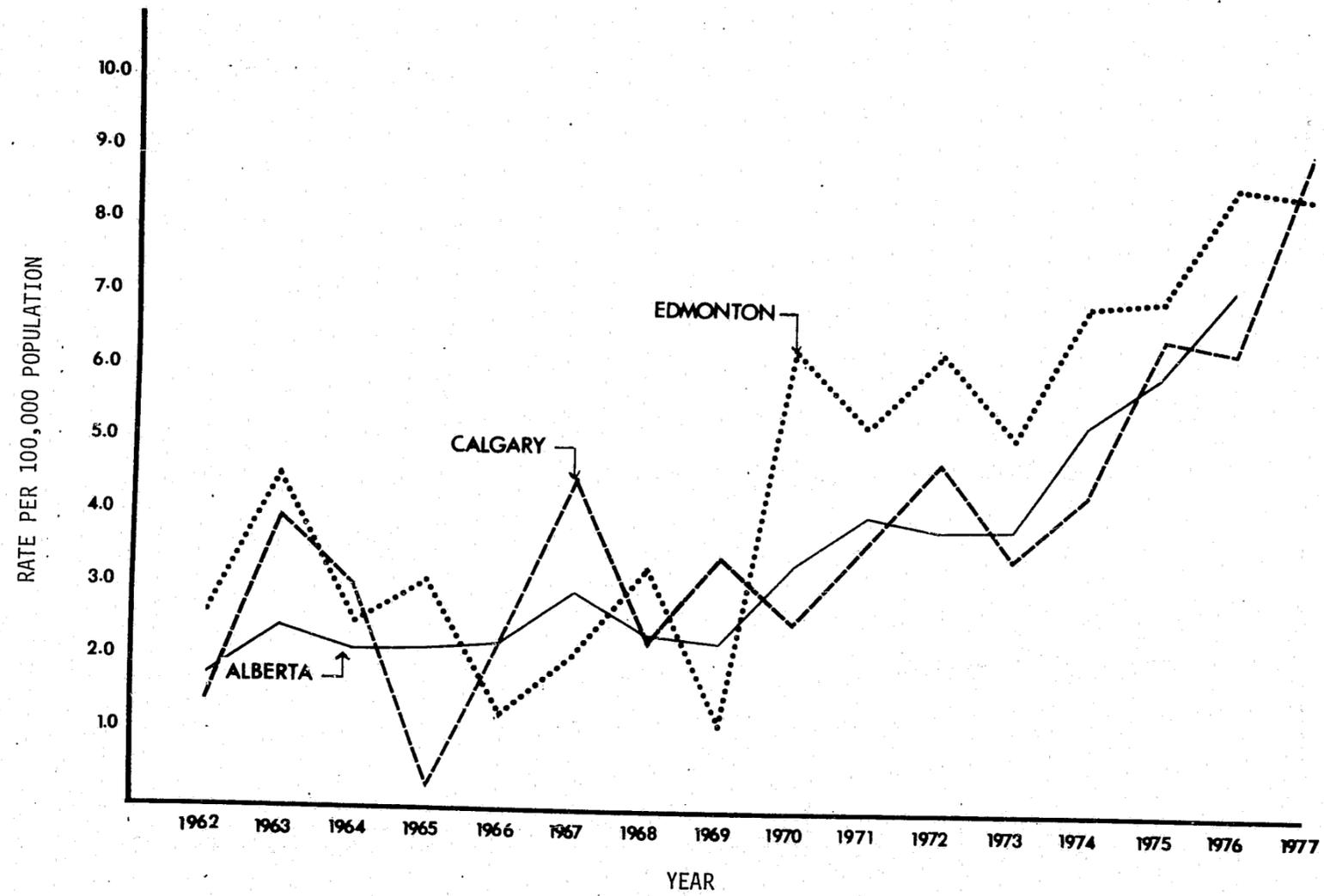
There is also some possible evidence that central cities with suburban areas may have higher crime rates than those cities with smaller suburbs (Gibbs and Ericson, 1976). Even though the population base for the crime rate is recorded for a city, people living in suburbs or smaller nearby towns may be attracted to the larger city for criminal activities. Sherwood Park and St. Albert are communities which could influence Edmonton in this way, while Calgary has practically no suburbs. However, even this factor and differences in record keeping in Calgary and Edmonton do not seem to account for the rather systematic and major differences between the two cities. For the time being, the mystery remains.

#### Alberta Violent Crime Profile

In Figure 6, one can see what portion of violent crime in selected Alberta municipalities, is made up of robbery, assault, sexual offences and murder and attempted murder. If most of the violent crime rate is made up of common assault, there is the possibility that the police force is reacting

Figure 5A

Homicide Rates for Edmonton, Calgary & Alberta: 1962 - 1977



Source: Table A4 (See Appendix)

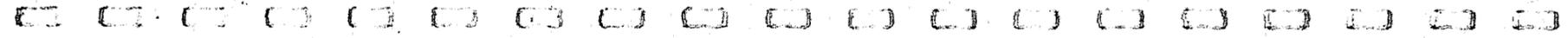
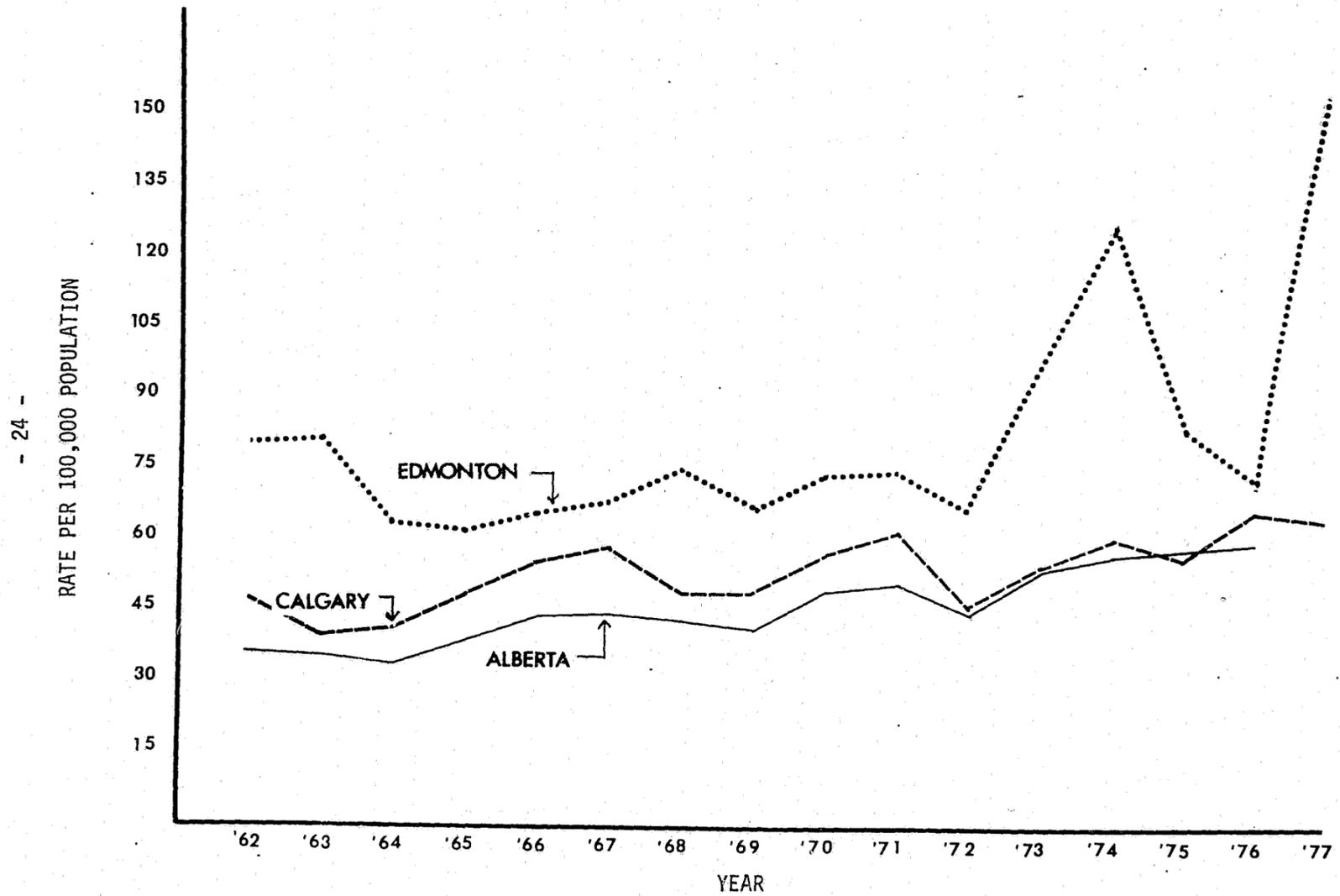


Figure 5B

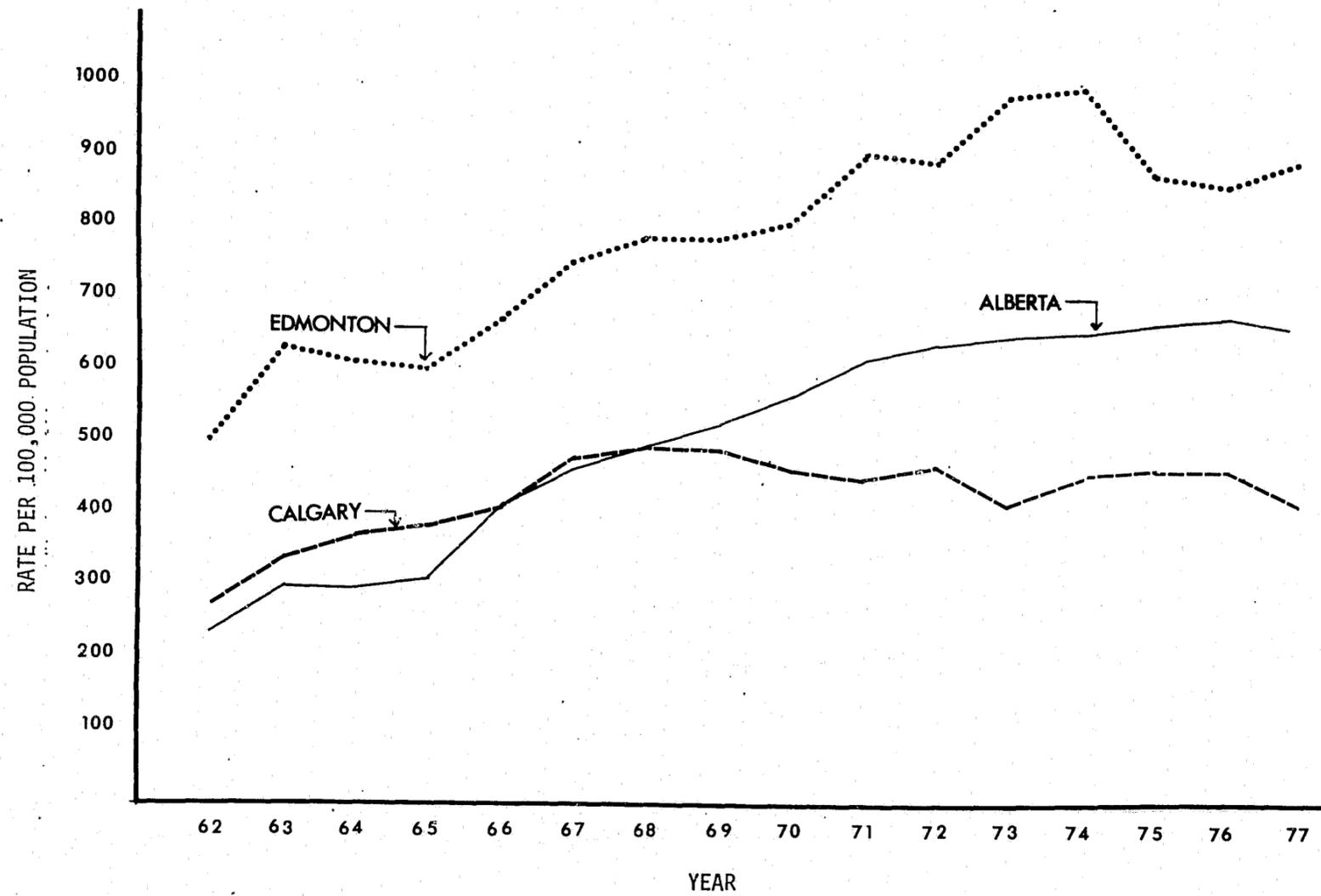
Sexual Offences Rates for Edmonton, Calgary & Alberta: 1962 - 1977



Source: Table A4 (See Appendix)

Figure 5C

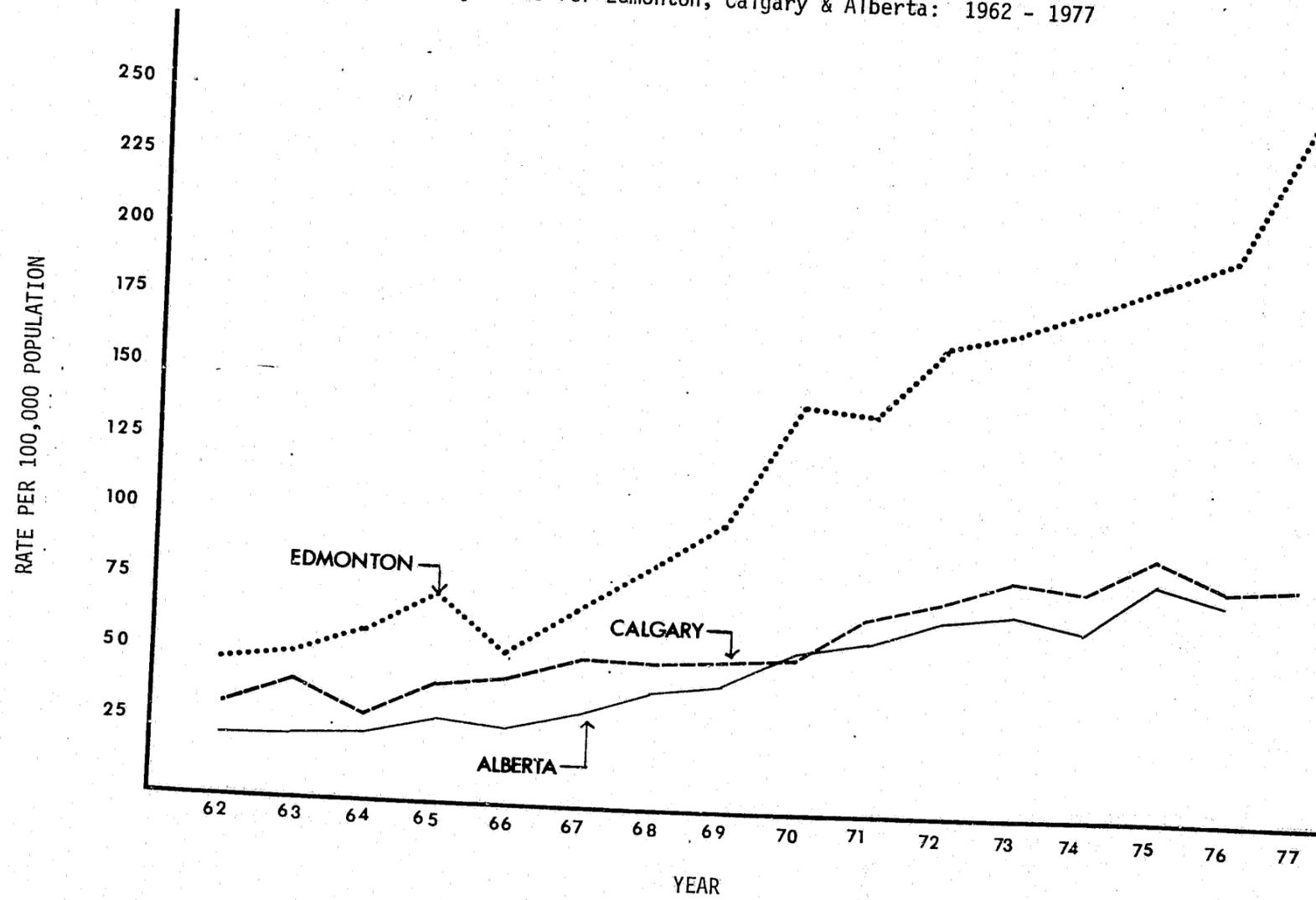
Assault not Indecent, Rates for Edmonton, Calgary & Alberta: 1962 - 1977



Source: Table A4 (See Appendix)

Figure 5d

Robbery Rates for Edmonton, Calgary & Alberta: 1962 - 1977

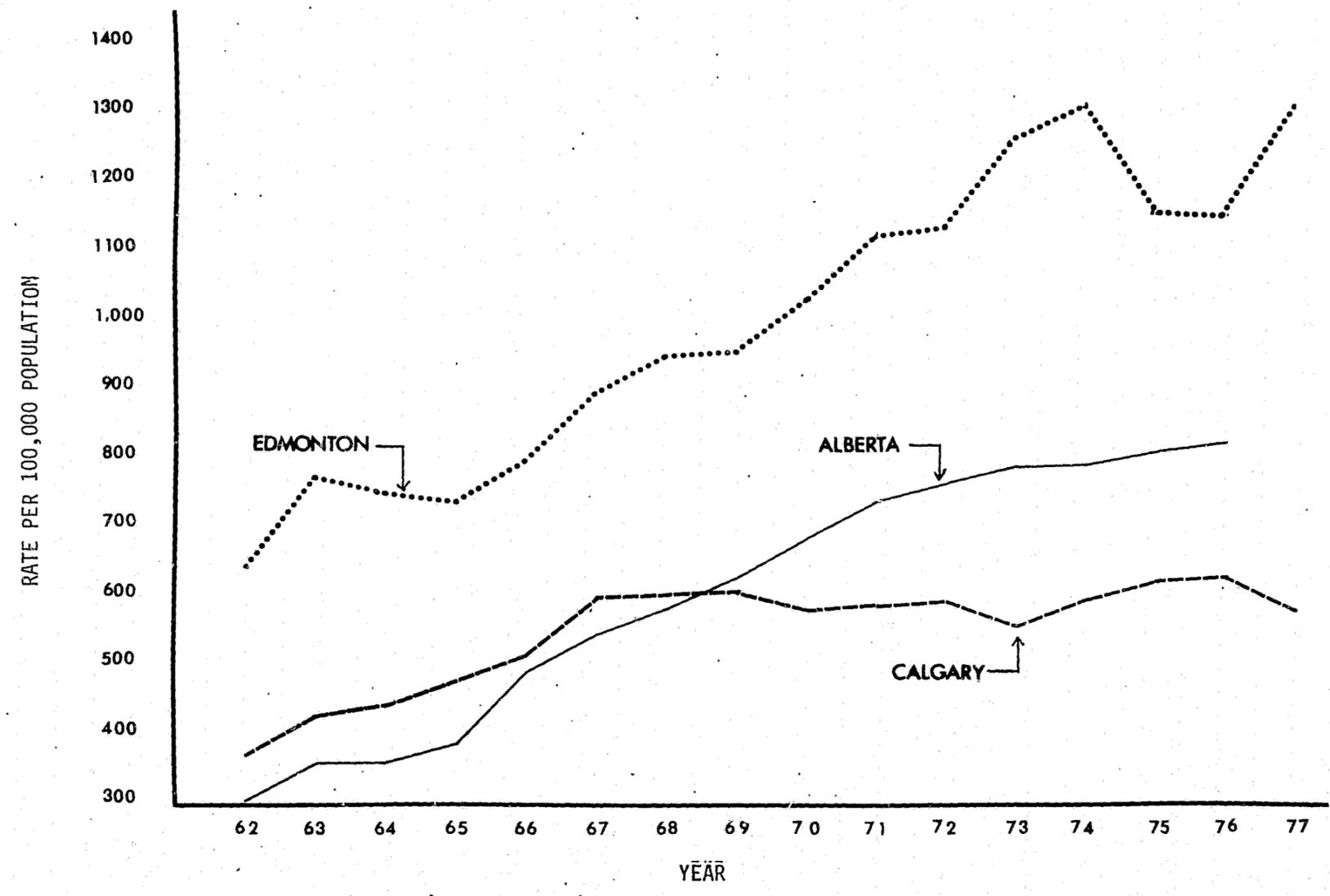


Source: Table A4 (See Appendix)



Figure 5E

Violent Crime Rates for Edmonton, Calgary & Alberta: 1962 - 1977



Source: Table A4 (See Appendix)

officially to such things as fights in bars which may not lead to anything more dangerous in most circumstances. Spruce Grove, for example, has a relatively low violent crime rate in general and none of it is accounted for by robbery and murder. By contrast, Edmonton is somewhat higher, and rape, murder, and robbery contribute to violent crime to a larger degree.

Another interesting point is that the size of the city or town does not follow the traditional patterns for violent crime rates (Figure 6 and Table 3). The communities of 25,000 - 50,000 in Alberta, such as St. Albert, Red Deer, and Medicine Hat have rather moderate violent crime rates -- lower than larger and smaller communities. Usually large cities are thought of as places with higher crime rates. But if we look at some other cities and towns in Alberta we see that some of the smaller communities actually have higher violent crime rates. For example, Rocky Mountain House, Bonnyville, and Lac La Biche have considerably higher crime rates than Edmonton.

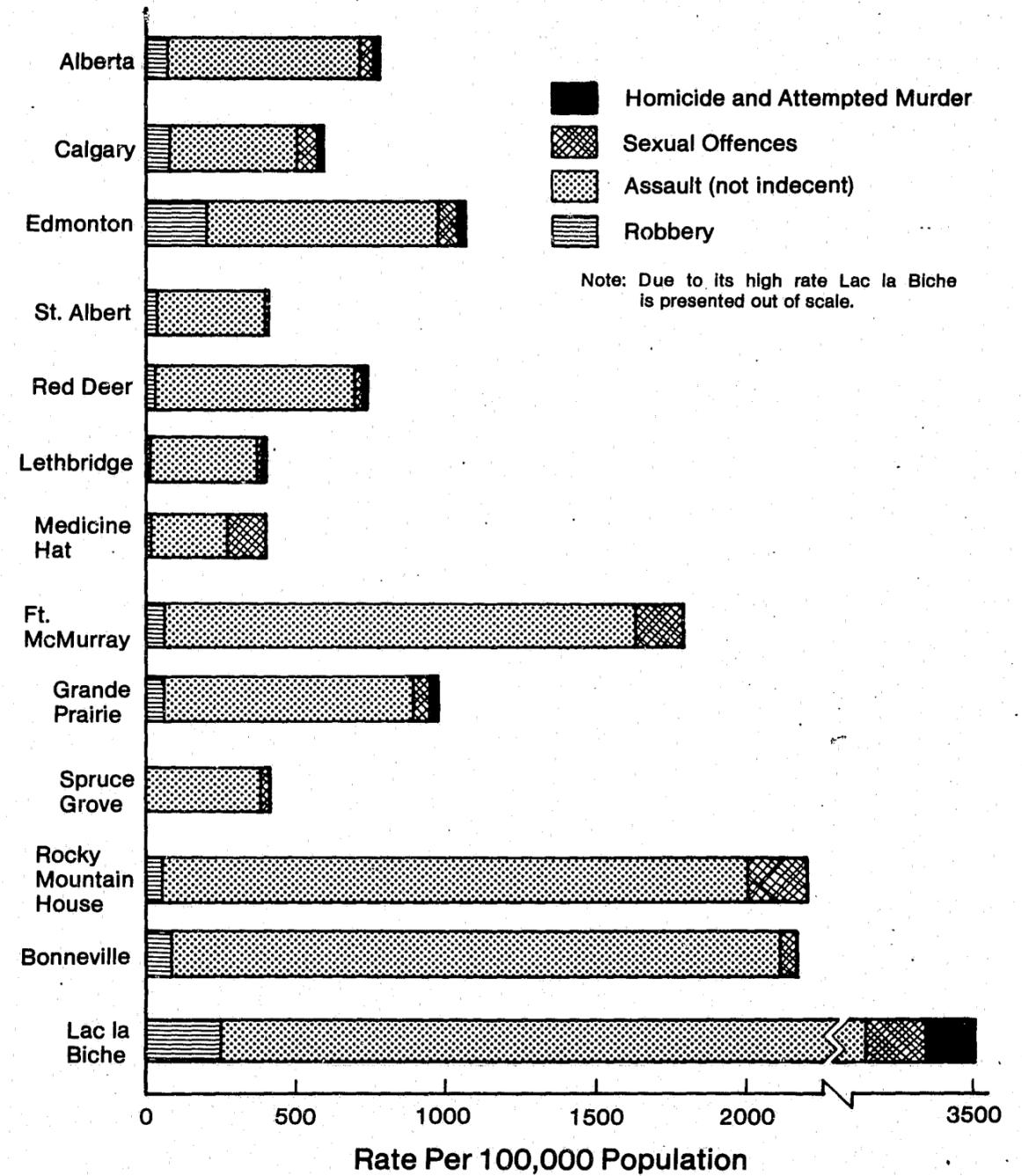
One would expect "boom towns" to have higher than average crime rates because they have a surplus of young men who are more likely to contribute to the violent crime rate. Fort McMurray fits this pattern. At the same time statistics for "boom towns" may be less reliable because the police must cope with rapid changes. An article on Grande Prairie in one of the recent McLean's magazines suggests high crime rates that are not apparent in 1977 statistics at least.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to identify some of the difficulties inherent in studying the impact of various strategies for responding to violent crime. Demands for justice and for effectiveness are sometimes incompatible, but some of our activities might be described as "spitting into the wind." To get

Figure 6

Violent Crime Rate Profile Alberta and Selected Municipalities 1977



Source: Table 3

Table 3  
Violent Crime Rates for Alberta and Selected Municipalities 1977

Municipalities by Population Size	Violent Crime Total	Homicide	Attempt- ed Murder	Sexual Offence	Assaults Not Indecent	Robbery
Alberta	793.0	3.6	4.2	57.7	640.7	86.6
250,000 & over	856.6					
Calgary	584.4	2.4	6.7	64.4	424.2	85.6
Edmonton	1060.0	4.0	4.2	72.7	766.7	212.6
25,000 - 50,000	512.6					
St. Albert	405.9	0.0	0.0	7.4	368.7	29.8
Red Deer	740.4	0.0	2.9	40.5	659.4	37.6
Lethbridge	412.4	3.2	0.0	29.0	349.6	30.6
Medicine Hat	414.5	0.0	0.0	129.0	276.3	9.2
10,000 - 25,000	1012.4					
Ft. McMurray	1779.6	0.0	0.0	137.7	1573.0	68.8
Grande Prairie	964.7	5.4	0.0	59.0	836.1	64.3
5,000 - 10,000	844.1					
Spruce Grove	418.5	0.0	0.0	27.0	391.5	0.0
2,500 - 5,000	1106.7					
Rocky Mountain House	2209.0	0.0	0.0	198.2	1954.1	56.6
Bonnyville	2185.6	0.0	0.0	63.4	2027.2	95.0
750 - 2,500	944.4					
Lac la Biche	3517.6	50.2	100.5	201.0	2914.6	251.2

Sources: Statistics Canada. Crime & Traffic Enforcement Statistics, 1977.

Unpublished Crime reports of Alberta-Municipalities, 1977.

Alberta Solicitor General Department. Unpublished populations for Alberta RCMP detachments, 1977.

a better picture of the violent crime in Alberta, a variety of statistics were presented. These data suggest that Western Canada seems to have more violent crime than Eastern Canada. Furthermore, in Alberta violent crime seems to be more prevalent in our small towns than in our large cities.

The image of the vicious killer or rapist who stalks unsuspecting victims who are complete strangers, especially in large cities, provokes strong reactions; but it may focus societal responses on those situations that do not typify the majority of killings and rapes. On the Prairies particularly, homicides are frequently related to domestic disputes.

Some readers would argue that we are not primarily concerned with deaths arising from domestic disputes, that we want to know what should be done about those "real" criminals. This ignores the fact that many "real" criminals are produced in families where violence is common. One can develop a rationale approach to justice that only decides on action after human beings have sinned. If one is concerned with change, should one consider policies that might be utilized as preventive measures. Such choices usually present dilemmas.

Later papers in this study will try to suggest strategies that may be meaningful, but the reader should be assured that there is no single, simple, dramatic change that will bring about a significant reduction in violent crime.

Footnote

<sup>1</sup> The Research Division of the Department of the Solicitor General of Alberta has cautioned us about various errors that have been discovered in crime statistics. Despite the still undiscovered errors contained in these data, the generalizations made in this next section are probably valid.

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APPENDIX

Table A1

Overview of Violent Crime Rates per 100,000 Canada & Provinces 1977

	Homicide & Attempted Murder	Sex Offence	Assault	Robbery	Total
Canada	5.9	46.9	446.2	83.6	582.8
Newfoundland	1.4	37.1	392.5	8.8	440.0
Prince Edward Island	1.6	12.4	293.4	11.6	319.2
Nova Scotia	2.9	33.5	416.5	34.8	487.9
New Brunswick	6.8	23.7	359.9	16.8	407.4
Quebec	6.4	44.5	196.6	155.6	403.3
Ontario	4.3	46.2	497.6	53.1	601.4
Manitoba	8.3	50.8	465.2	64.8	589.3
Saskatchewan	9.4	30.6	591.3	37.2	668.7
Alberta	7.8	57.7	64.7	86.6	793.0
British Columbia	7.4	64.3	671.2	83.8	826.7
Yukon	37.2	55.8	2446.5	88.3	2627.9
North West Territories	13.8	157.0	367.2	39.2	3882.2

Source: Statistics Canada. Crime & Traffic Enforcement Statistics, 1977.

Table A2

Violent Crime Rates for Selected Canadian  
Cities 1976, 1977 & 1978

	1976	1977	1978
Montreal	663.6	603.2	673.9
Toronto	571.8	604.8	617.2
Winnipeg	409.7	400.9	372.3
Saskatoon	1216.7	975.5	581.8
Regina	716.6	705.1	676.6
Edmonton	1148.2	1103.1	1091.6
Calgary	626.2	610.0	535.7
Vancouver	12590.8	1229.6	1328.9
Victoria	885.3	1029.4	1155.8

Source: Statistics Canada. Crime and Traffic Enforcement  
Statistics, 1976, 1977, 1978.

Table A3

Mean Violent Crime Rates for Canadian and Alberta  
Municipalities by Population Size 1976, 1977, 1978

Popula- tion Size	1976		1977		1978	
	Canada	Alberta	Canada	Alberta	Canada	Alberta
250,000 & over	682.9	887.2	677.5	856.6	686.8	813.6
100,000 - 250,000	662.6		655.9		613.3	
50,000 - 100,000	450.5		477.6		532.2	
25,000 - 50,000	530.8	530.5	560.9	512.6	595.1	632.7
10,000 - 25,000	479.6	876.2	508.0	1012.4	561.7	650.6
5000 - 10,000	447.8	763.5	440.5	844.1	453.5	999.2
2500 - 5000	553.9	964.7	514.4	1106.7	534.3	1122.2
750 - 2500	590.0	1363.0	537.2	944.4	674.1	1394.6

Source: Statistics Canada. Crime & Traffic Enforcement Statistics, 1976, 1977, 1978.

Table A4

Violent Crime Rates per 100,000 for Edmonton, Calgary and Alberta 1962 - 1977

Year	Homicide			Sexual Offences			Assaults (not indecent)			Robbery			Crimes of Violence Totals		
	Edmon- ton	Calgary	Alberta	Edmon- ton	Calgary	Alberta	Edmon- ton	Calgary	Alberta	Edmon- ton	Calgary	Alberta	Edmon- ton	Calgary	Alberta
1962	2.7	1.5	1.8	80.0	47.6	37.0	514.2	282.2	245.4	49.2	34.2	21.5	646.1	365.4	305.7
1963	4.6	4.0	2.5	82.3	40.1	36.4	635.4	348.0	300.1	52.0	41.2	21.9	774.3	433.3	360.8
1964	2.6	3.1	2.2	63.8	42.0	34.6	619.9	368.8	304.4	62.2	32.2	23.2	748.5	446.1	364.3
1965	3.1	.3	2.2	62.2	48.9	39.0	603.1	389.6	318.3	70.6	41.5	29.1	738.9	480.2	388.6
1966	1.3	2.4	2.3	66.1	56.2	44.8	671.8	416.3	416.4	55.4	42.0	27.7	794.6	516.9	491.1
1967	2.1	4.5	3.0	68.5	59.0	45.0	753.0	485.1	463.8	69.3	52.7	32.2	892.9	601.2	546.0
1968	3.3	2.3	2.4	75.7	49.3	44.3	783.9	499.4	493.8	84.9	52.1	39.6	947.6	603.1	580.1
1969	1.2	3.5	2.3	67.1	49.3	41.9	782.0	498.6	529.0	102.0	53.1	43.9	952.2	604.6	617.1
1970	6.3	2.6	3.9	74.9	57.9	49.7	810.0	468.8	567.2	144.0	54.8	57.9	1053.3	584.2	678.7
1971	5.3	3.7	4.6	75.6	62.7	51.7	910.6	451.8	618.7	140.2	70.9	61.2	1122.6	589.1	736.2
1972	6.3	4.8	4.4	66.0	47.2	45.1	892.3	467.3	643.7	169.8	75.8	69.2	1136.7	595.2	762.4
1973	5.2	3.5	4.4	97.6	55.5	54.7	986.3	421.6	654.4	171.7	82.4	71.6	1260.8	562.8	785.1
1974	7.0	4.4	5.4	124.3	61.9	57.6	995.3	450.3	658.6	182.9	81.5	67.4	1309.6	598.2	789.0
1975	7.1	6.6	6.1	84.9	57.9	58.3	875.4	464.1	660.8	188.5	93.6	82.0	1155.9	622.2	807.2
1976	8.7	6.4	7.3	74.8	67.2	60.6	866.6	468.7	675.5	199.3	83.8	79.6	1149.5	626.2	823.0
1977	8.3	9.2	7.8	148.3	65.8	57.7	859.1	426.4	640.7	236.3	86.1	86.6	1251.9	587.5	793.0

Source: A Compendium of Criminal Justice Statistics: Alberta, 1978.

**END**