



Taking the Pulse: perceptions of crime trends and community safety and support for crime control methods in the Canadian Prairies

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ABSTRACT

The present study analyzed crime survey data extracted from the 2012 Saskatchewan Taking the Pulse survey on a sample of 1,700 adult Saskatchewan residents. The focus was on examining perceptions of crime trends, perceived effectiveness of various methods for controlling crime, and their sociodemographic correlates. The majority of survey respondents perceived crime in general to be on the rise (37%) or to have not changed at all (48%) over the last three years. Individuals who perceived crime to have decreased were significantly more likely to support alternatives to punishment as effective methods for reducing crime, while individuals who perceived crime to be on the rise were twice as likely to support the use of punitive methods. Perceptions of community safety were unrelated to preference for one crime reduction method over another. Education level was inversely related to crime trend perceptions ($r = -.14$) and preference for punitive methods to reduce crime ($r = -.20$). Finally, the results of logistic regression indicated higher levels of education, higher income, and perceptions of crime decreasing were all uniquely associated with a preference for alternatives to punishment in reducing crime. In these analyses, younger age was predictive of a preference for alternatives in reducing youth crime, while urban residential setting was associated with a preference for alternatives to punishment in reducing crime in general.

Key Words Public perceptions of crime; punishment; alternatives to punishment.

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INTRODUCTION

Public perceptions of local crime trends are often misperceptions. Canadians tend to hold firmly to the view that crime rates in their communities are either increasing or remaining stable, despite over two decades of decline in official crime rates (Brennan, 2011; Roberts, 2001; Sprott, 1999). Paradoxically, most Canadians also report feeling safe in their neighbourhoods (Brennan, 2011; Roberts, 2001). Perceptions of crime and perceptions of community safety have important ramifications because they are linked to other beliefs about various forms of crime control. Examining the link between these perceptions and views on crime control in the Canadian context is important because an enhanced understanding of what affects support for crime control policies may aid efforts to reduce public misperceptions that underlie support for more traditional, and expensive, methods of crime control. The present study is an examination of Saskatchewan residents' perceptions of crime trends, community safety, and support for crime control strategies from a larger Saskatchewan-wide survey on a series of important social issues.

Canadian Perceptions of Effective Crime Reduction Methods

Examination of public perceptions of the effectiveness of crime reduction methods is important for several reasons. Crime reduction methods can include more traditional, deterrence-based strategies, such as punishment (e.g., jail time) or policing, or strategies that align with restorative and social justice goals (e.g., treatment, prevention programs, and social equality). One important reason for examining public support for criminal justice issues is that policy and legislative efforts to control crime are linked to public perceptions. The impact of public support for punishment-based methods appears to be causal; changes in punitive attitudes are linked to more political attention paid to criminal justice issues and affect the development of punitive policies (Hindelang, 1974; Jennings, Farrall, Gray et al., 2016; Nicholson-Crotty, Petersen, & Ramirez, 2009; Page & Shapiro, 1983; Wozniak, 2016). A potential causal link also exists between increasing public punitiveness and increasing incarceration rates, at least in the U.S. context (Enns, 2014). Indeed, governments aim to be responsive to issues that the public supports (Roberts, 2001).

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Perceptions of increasing crime trends may illustrate why some individuals support punishment-based crime control methods over rehabilitative methods. Over time, crime trends may impact the level of public punitiveness at the societal level (Jennings *et al.*, 2016). Ample evidence indicates that most Canadians continue to inaccurately believe that crime rates are either increasing or remaining the same, even after years of steady decline in the frequency and severity of crime in the country (Brennan, 2011; Roberts, 2001). Thus, only a minority of Canadian citizens appear to believe crime rates are decreasing in their communities. Perceptions of crime trends, in turn, are strongly predictive of more popular support for traditional, punitive, and ultimately, deterrence-based methods of reducing crime, such as longer sentences, more punitive sanctions, and increased policing (Brookman & Wiener, 2015; Costelloe, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2009; Hogan, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2005; Sprott, 1999; Roberts & Indermaur, 2007; Spiranovic, Roberts, & Indermaur, 2012).

The *Safe Streets and Communities Act (Bill C-10)*, also known as the so-called “Omnibus Crime Bill”, received royal assent under the former Conservative government in 2012 and had, as a common thread, the imposition of mandatory minimum sentences for a series of crimes, which would have the net effect of lengthening sentences. *Bill C-10* was thus arguably more ideological than empirical, as the net effect would be to curry public support based on a notion that “deterrence works” and that crime trends justify such approaches, evidence notwithstanding. The Canadian public tends to be more supportive of sentences to prison terms for a range of offences (e.g., sexual assault, impaired driving, employee fraud) but conditional sentences for other types of offences (e.g., assault, domestic violence) (Stein, 2001). In addition, most Canadians believe sentencing practices are too lenient (Roberts, Crutcher, & Verbrugge, 2007) and prefer a prison sentence for repeat adult offenders (Tufts, 2000). Developing a better understanding of some of the factors that predict public support for punishment-based crime reduction strategies appears important for enhancing efforts to improve public support for effective and more cost-efficient crime reduction strategies (Cohen & Piquero, 2015; Farrington & Koegl, 2015; Welsh, Farrington, & Gowar, 2015).

Moreover, capital punishment, as the most extreme form of punitiveness for crime, has been abolished in Canada for decades, although public support for reintroducing this punishment for serious offences (i.e., first-degree murder) remains strikingly high. In the general Canadian public, support for capital punishment has decreased; however, a majority of Canadians were supportive in 2001 (Roberts, 2001). Samples of Canadian university students also show that a majority support capital punishment for first-degree murder (Winterdyk & Hincks, 2013). The limited research that has examined whether perceived crime trends carry predictive weight for support of capital punishment indicates support for this link (Unnever & Cullen, 2007).

How safe residents feel in their neighbourhoods is also an important issue and may impact how they assess the effectiveness of different crime reduction methods. Perceptions of community safety and fear of crime predict a preference for punishment-based crime reduction policies (Baker, Metcalfe, Berenblum *et al.*, 2015). Those who perceive their neighbourhoods as relatively safe from crime may be

more likely to endorse less punitive approaches, such as treatment or early intervention strategies, to prevent offenders from either committing crimes in the first place or from re-offending.

Present Study

The present study examines perceptions of criminal justice issues in a representative sample of Saskatchewan residents. The purpose is to examine, in the Canadian Prairie context, whether perceptions of crime trends, perceptions of community safety, and select sociodemographic characteristics have an impact on support for punitive methods, including capital punishment, versus rehabilitative crime control methods.

METHODS

Participants

Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 was a telephone survey administered in March 2012 that took respondents approximately 15 minutes to complete. The survey resulted in interviews completed by 1,750 randomly-selected Saskatchewan residents who were 18 years of age or older. The response rate for the survey was 34.3% and is generalizable to the population of Saskatchewan. Table I provides demographic information regarding the respondents who completed the survey. The respondents were on average 53.07 (SD = 16.47) years of age. The respondents were mainly from urban centres, 49.4% held a post-secondary degree or diploma, 5.9% were First Nations, 5.6% were a member of a visible minority, and 58% were currently married.

Measures

The Taking the Pulse of Saskatchewan 2012 survey asked respondents about a variety of themes, including sustainable resource development, the economy, Aboriginal issues, immigration and diversity, health and wellbeing, and moral issues. This research focused on questions within the survey about crime and public safety.

Perceptions of Crime Trends and Community Safety

Respondents were asked whether general and youth crime trends in their neighbourhood had increased, remained the same, or decreased over the last three years on a 5-point Likert scale (Increased Substantially, Increased Somewhat, Remained the Same, Decreased Somewhat, and Decreased Substantially). To assess perceptions of community safety, respondents were asked whether they felt safe from crime in their neighbourhoods (Very Safe, Reasonably Safe, Somewhat Unsafe, and Very Unsafe).

Crime Control Methods

Respondents were asked to identify the strategies they viewed would be most effective to reduce general and youth crime in Saskatchewan, such as increasing policing, punishments (e.g., prison sentences), treatment and rehabilitation, restorative justice (e.g., sentencing circles), and increasing social equality. Respondents were asked about whether they agreed or disagreed that capital punishment should be re-introduced as a punishment for those convicted of first-degree murder.

TABLE I Sociodemographic information of the respondents

Sociodemographic Variable	% (n)
Sex	
Female	44.8 (784)
Male	55.2 (966)
Education	
Less than high school	11.9 (209)
Graduated high school	21.0 (367)
Some technical/community college	6.4 (112)
Graduated technical/community college	20.6 (360)
Some university	11.3 (197)
Bachelor's degree	21.6 (378)
Master's degree	4.6 (81)
Professional degree	1.3 (22)
Doctoral degree	1.1 (20)
Household Income	
Less than \$20,000	5.0 (88)
\$20,000 to \$59,000	24.9 (437)
\$60,000 to \$99,000	20.1 (351)
\$100,000 and above	4.2 (73)
Ethnicity	
First Nations, Métis, Inuit	5.9 (104)
Visible minority	5.6 (98)
Marital Status	
Never married	13.6 (238)
Married	58.0 (1,015)
Common law	6.3 (110)
Separated	2.7 (48)
Divorced	8.6 (150)
Widowed	9.7 (169)
Location	
Rural	38.9 (680)
Urban	61.1 (1,070)

Planned Analyses

To examine the relationship between perceptions of crime trends and support for crime control methods, respondents were categorized into three groups according to their perceptions of crime trends: crime has increased, crime has remained the same, and crime has decreased. In order to examine the relationship between perceptions of community safety and support for crime control methods, respondents were also categorized into two groups according to their perceptions of community safety: feeling safe and feeling unsafe. The relationship between rural versus urban residence and support for crime control methods was also examined. Chi-square analyses were conducted to examine the significance of these relationships. An effect size metric, Cramer's *V*, is provided to aid in interpreting the magnitude of a relationship when the number of cells in the table exceeds

2×2 ; for 2×2 tables, ϕ (phi) and odds ratios (OR) are reported to facilitate interpretation. A general heuristic for interpreting effect sizes metrics when at least one of the variables is binary or categorical (due to a loss of variance), as in the case of Cramer's *V* and Phi, indicates that .10 is a small effect, .24 is a medium effect, and .37 is a large effect (Rice & Harris, 2005). The relationship between various sociodemographic characteristics in the sample and perceptions of general and youth crime trends and support for crime control strategies were examined using zero-order correlations and logistic regression. The purpose of the correlational analyses was to examine the simple bivariate associations of crime control strategies to important sociodemographic and crime opinion variables prior to examining unique predictor-criterion associations within the context of logistic regression. Correlation magnitudes between two continuous variables are traditionally interpreted as .10, .30, and .50 for small, medium, and large effects, respectively (Cohen, 1988).

RESULTS

Table II shows a significant, small relationship between perception of crime trend and support for alternative crime prevention strategies [$\chi^2(4, N = 1,617) = 36.71, p < .001, V = .11$]. This significant effect is likely due to the majority of respondents who perceive crime as increasing being in support of punishment as a primary crime reduction strategy [$\chi^2(2, N = 1,617) = 28.84, p < .001, V = .13, OR = 2.75, 95\% \text{ confidence interval (CI)} = 1.89, 4.02$]. A small significant relationship also exists between perceptions of youth crime trends and support for alternative crime control strategies [$\chi^2(4, N = 1,617) = 38.74, p < .001, V = .11$]. Respondents who perceive youth crime as rising support punishment as a crime reduction strategy at twice the odds of those perceiving crime as decreasing [$\chi^2(2, N = 1,581) = 23.82, p < .001, V = .12, OR = 2.61, 95\% \text{ CI} = 1.74, 3.91$]. Table II also shows that perception of community safety is unrelated to support for alternative crime prevention strategies [$\chi^2(2, N = 1,655) = 2.62, p = .27, V = .04$]. A small, significant relationship is evident between location of residence and support for different crime reduction strategies [$\chi^2(2, N = 1,655) = 8.57, p = .01, V = .07$], with urban residents supporting alternatives to punishment at a significantly greater rate ($\chi^2(1, N = 1,655) = 11.44, p = .001, V = .08$).

Table III shows a small, significant relationship between living in a rural location and agreeing that capital punishment should be re-instated for first degree murder [$\chi^2(1, N = 1,678) = 37.35, p < .001, \phi = .15$]. Living in a rural location is associated with approximately twice the odds of supporting capital punishment [OR = 1.88, 95% CI = 1.54, 2.31]. A significant, moderate relationship is noted between endorsing a punitive orientation toward reducing crime and agreeing that capital punishment should be re-instated for first degree murder [$\chi^2(1, N = 1,620) = 172.85, p < .001, \phi = .33$], with a majority of these respondents supporting capital punishment (82.3%). Support for punishment as an effective crime reduction strategy is associated with a five-fold increase in the odds of supporting capital punishment [OR = 5.28, 95% CI = 4.06, 6.86].

Table IV presents correlations between crime opinion and sociodemographic variables. Perceiving general crime rates as increasing is generally associated with the perception

TABLE II Percent of respondents supporting different crime prevention strategies by perceptions of crime trends and community safety

Crime Trend Perception	Preferred Crime Control Method			(row <i>n</i> total)
	Policing	Punishment (row percent (<i>n</i>))	Alternatives	
General Crime				
Increased	16.4 (98)	35.3 (211)	48.3 (289)	598
Same	13.1 (102)	30.8 (239)	56.1 (436)	777
Decreased	14.0 (34)	16.5 (40)	69.4 (168)	242
Column <i>n</i> total	234	490	893	1,617
Youth Crime				
Increased	9.0 (56)	34.6 (216)	56.6 (353)	625
Same	5.5 (42)	27.6 (210)	66.9 (509)	761
Decreased	4.0 (8)	17.1 (34)	78.9 (157)	199
Column <i>n</i> total	106	460	1,019	1,585
Community Safety				
Safe	14.5 (221)	29.6 (450)	55.9 (851)	1,522
Unsafe	12.0 (16)	36.1 (48)	51.9 (69)	133
Column <i>n</i> total	237	498	920	1,655

youth crime has increased ($r = .63$), more support for punishment as a crime control strategy for general and youth crime ($r = .12$ and $.10$, respectively), and support for reinstating the death penalty ($r = .17$). Correlations of similar magnitudes are found for perceptions of youth crime. Support for punishment as an effective means of reducing general crime is strongly associated with supporting punishment to control youth crime ($r = .64$) and reinstating the death penalty ($r = .33$). The relationship between support for punishment to control youth crime and support for reinstating the death penalty is similarly strong ($r = .32$).

Correlational analyses in Table IV demonstrate that educational attainment has the most consistent relationship with crime opinion variables. Small in magnitude but robust associations suggest higher education is associated with perceiving crime as decreasing, as well as less support for punishment (general crime $r = -.20$; youth crime $r = -.18$) and reinstating capital punishment ($r = -.28$). Being older and male is associated with perceptions of crime as decreasing (general crime $r = -.06$ and $.12$, respectively; youth crime $r = -.08$ and $.09$, respectively). Female respondents are less likely to support punishment of general crime ($r = -.05$) and capital punishment ($r = -.08$). Living in a rural location is associated with perceptions of general crime as increasing ($r = .10$), support for punishment for general crime ($r = .08$), and support for capital punishment ($r = .15$). Income is unrelated to the crime opinion variables.

A logistic regression was completed to examine sociodemographic characteristics in the sample that predicted perception of the effectiveness of punishment as a crime reduction strategy for general and youth crime compared to alternative strategies (Table V). For general crime, preference for alternatives to punishment is predicted by higher level of educational attainment, higher household income, and a perception of crime as decreasing. These predictors improve classification by 7.9% over the constant-only model. For youth

TABLE III Percent of respondents supporting re-introduction of capital punishment by perceptions of crime trends, community safety, residency, and support for punitive crime reduction strategies

	Canada Should Re-Introduce Capital Punishment		(row <i>n</i> total)
	Disagree (row percent)	Agree (<i>n</i>)	
General Crime			
Increased	31.6 (188)	68.4 (407)	595
Same	45.7 (367)	54.3 (436)	803
Decreased	54.8 (132)	45.2 (109)	241
Column <i>n</i> total	687	952	1,639
Community Safety			
Safe	43.4 (668)	56.6 (872)	1,540
Unsafe	30.4 (42)	69.6 (96)	138
Column <i>n</i> total	710	968	1,678
Residency			
Rural	33.1 (216)	66.9 (437)	653
Urban	48.2 (494)	51.8 (531)	1,025
Column <i>n</i> total	710	968	1,678
Crime Reduction Strategy			
Punishment	17.7 (85)	82.3 (395)	480
Alternatives	53.2 (595)	46.8 (524)	1,119
Column <i>n</i> total	680	919	1,599

crime, sociodemographic predictors include younger age, higher educational attainment, higher household income, and perceiving crime as decreasing. These predictors improve classification accuracy by 5.7% over the constant-only model. Support for re-introducing capital punishment is predicted by

perception of crime as increasing, support for punishment in general, lower educational attainment, rural residency, and

sex. These predictors improve classification accuracy 23.2% over the constant-only model.

TABLE IV Correlations between variables in logistic regressions

Variable	General Crime		Youth Crime		Support for Capital Punishment
	Crime Increasing	Support for Punishment	Crime Increasing	Support for Punishment	
Crime Opinion Variables					
General increasing	–				
General support for punishment	.12 ^c	–			
Youth crime increasing	.63 ^c	.12 ^c	–		
Youth support for punishment	.10 ^c	.64 ^c	.12 ^c	–	
Reinstate death penalty	.17 ^c	.33 ^c	.12 ^c	.32 ^c	–
Sociodemographic Variables					
Age	-.06 ^b	-.03	-.08 ^c	-.04	.04
Education	-.14 ^c	-.20 ^c	-.08 ^b	-.18 ^c	-.28 ^c
Income	-.01	.04	.01	.04	-.02
Rural	.10 ^b	.08 ^c	.02	.06	.15 ^c
Female	.12 ^c	-.05 ^a	.09 ^c	-.04	-.08 ^c

^a $p < .05$

^b $p < .01$

^c $p < .001$

TABLE V Sociodemographic predictors of perceptions of effectiveness of crime reduction methods (punishment versus any alternatives to punishment)

Regression Model	B	SE	p	e ^B	95% CI for e ^B
1. Support for Punishment (general crime)					
General crime increasing	.33	.10	<.001	1.39	1.15, 1.69
Age	-.01	.004	.12	.99	.98, 1.00
Education	-.21	.04	<.001	.81	.76, .87
Household income	.05	.02	<.05	1.05	1.00, 1.10
Residency	-.28	.13	<.05	.75	.58, .97
Sex	-.16	.14	.24	.85	.66, 1.11
2. Support for Punishment (youth crime)					
General crime increasing	.26	.10	<.01	1.29	1.07, 1.57
Age	-.01	.004	.03	.99	.98, 1.00
Education	-.19	.04	<.001	.83	.77, .89
Household income	.05	.02	.03	1.05	1.01, 1.10
Residency	-.11	.13	.42	.90	.69, 1.17
Sex	-.01	.14	.96	.99	.76, 1.30
3. Support for Capital Punishment					
General crime increasing	.39	.10	<.001	1.48	1.22, 1.79
Support for punishment (general)	1.46	.16	<.001	4.31	3.17, 4.93
Age	.00	.004	.96	1.00	.99, 1.01
Education	-.19	.04	<.001	.83	.77, .89
Household income	.01	.02	.92	1.01	.96, 1.05
Residency	.39	.13	<.01	1.48	1.14, 1.93
Sex	.43	.14	<.01	1.54	1.18, 2.00
Perception of community safety	.42	.25	.10	1.52	.93, 2.49

DISCUSSION

The present study examined whether perceptions of crime trends, perceptions of community safety, location of residence, and sociodemographic characteristics are associated with perceptions of effective crime reduction strategies, including capital punishment. Using a large, representative sample of Saskatchewan residents, the present study enhances understanding of which crime reduction strategies are supported in the Canadian Prairies and the perceptions and characteristics that affect this support. The associations among sociodemographic characteristics, location of residence, and perceptions of effectiveness of crime reduction strategies have implications for targeting educational and policy efforts.

Understanding Support for Crime Control Methods

The present results suggest that the perception of the effectiveness of punishment to reduce crime hinges on a number of other perceptions and respondent characteristics. Saskatchewan residents that perceive crime in their neighbourhoods over the past three years as increasing or remaining the same are more likely to see punishment as being an effective crime reduction strategy. The rate of endorsement for punishment in those seeing crime as increasing (35.3%) is over twice that of those seeing crime as decreasing (16.5%). Perceptions of effectiveness of alternative methods of reducing crime are markedly lower for those residents seeing crime as increasing (48.3% vs. 69.4%). Further findings suggest that perception of general and youth crime trends is a significant and unique predictor of viewing punishment as effective. These findings regarding crime salience being a significant predictor of support for punitive crime control measures are consistent with research examining this relationship in Canadian (Sprott, 1999) and international contexts (Brookman & Wiener, 2015; Costelloe *et al.*, 2009; Hogan *et al.*, 2005; Pfeiffer, Windzio, & Kleimann, 2005; Roberts, 2007; Spiranovic *et al.*, 2012). The current research adds to previous findings by showing perceptions of increasing rates for both youth and general crime predict a specific type of punitiveness (*i.e.*, the belief that punitive methods are the most effective method for reducing crime).

It is important that the public has accurate views on crime trends in their neighbourhoods since these are associated with increased punitiveness and the potential downstream consequence of increasing support for more extreme punitive measures. Punishment, especially in the form of incarceration, has enormous social and financial costs. Social costs include loss of opportunities for the offender (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Heubner, 2005), increased crime and instability in neighbourhoods with high rates of returning offenders (Drakulich, Crutchfield, Matsueda *et al.*, 2012), and increased difficulties for children of incarcerated parents (Murray & Farrington, 2005; Murray, Farrington, Sekol *et al.*, 2009). At a macro level, public officials try to respond to public perceptions of criminal justice methods, so understanding the links between perceptions of crime trends and support for crime control measures has implications for developing criminal justice policy (Hindelang, 1974; Roberts, 2001). The public's fear of crime may also impact sentencing recommendations by court staff (Ouimet & Coyle, 1991). In American and British contexts, public opinion on criminal justice often

leads to political developments, especially in the direction of increased punitiveness (Jennings *et al.*, 2016; Nicholson-Crotty *et al.*, 2009; Page & Shapiro, 1983; Wozniak, 2016). Troublingly, increases in incarceration rates appear to be partially driven by punitive public attitudes, over and above other known causes, such as crime rates (Enns, 2014).

These potential consequences speak to the importance of providing education and access to evidence regarding crime rates, as the erroneous support by residents for punitive crime reduction strategies has ramifications for how Canadian society pursues civil and institutional strategies to reduce crime. The present research provides some indications of which subgroups of residents are most likely to endorse punitive approaches to crime control, and some guidance regarding which audiences to target with information regarding crime control methods in the Saskatchewan context. Roberts (2001) suggests that research such as the present study can improve the ability of "public criminology" to target criminal justice messages to specific audiences in Canadian society (Drakulich & Kirk, 2016). Targeted criminal justice messages are also more efficient when limited resources are available to craft and deliver such messages. It might be the case that, as residents' perceptions of crime trends become more aligned with available evidence regarding declining crime rates, support for punishment may see a concomitant decline, and support for alternative methods aimed at crime reduction may increase.

Interestingly, perception of community safety in the sample is not related to perceptions of crime strategy effectiveness. Higher dissatisfaction with personal safety is a significant predictor of support for prison sanctions among Canadians (Tufts, 2000; Tufts & Roberts, 2002). The fact that this result is not replicated here may be due to the large majority of respondents feeling safe in their neighbourhoods (91.9%; McDowell, Jones, Keatings *et al.*, 2012), which is similar to the rest of the nation (Brennan, 2011; Roberts, 2001). In addition, even though a majority of respondents perceive crime as increasing or remaining the same in their neighbourhood, this perception did not appear to affect how safe the vast majority of Saskatchewan residents feel in their neighbourhoods. Accurate information about rates of crime reduces fear of crime but does not translate into individuals endorsing less punitive attitudes (Wanner & Caputo, 1987); the present findings support the last link in that chain.

The present research provides some understanding of what respondent characteristics may be associated with support for different crime reduction strategies. A higher level of educational attainment and lower annual household income are both associated with supporting alternative crime reduction strategies, as per previous works (Baker *et al.*, 2015; Cullen, Fisher, & Applegate, 2000; Roberts & Indermaur, 2007; Sims & Johnston, 2004; Spiranovic *et al.*, 2012; Sprott, 1999). Interestingly, those who reported less annual income endorsed alternatives to punishment or policing, while those who had slightly higher incomes were more likely to support policing as an effective crime reduction strategy. Living in a rural location was associated with approximately three-quarters of the odds of supporting alternative crime reduction strategies. Respondents' sex was not a predictor of support for punitive crime control measures. The finding that women and men support punitive measures at approximately the same

rate is consistent with some of the available literature; while women are expected to be less supportive of punitive crime control measures, some literature supports this relationship while some finds no relationship either way (Applegate, Cullen, & Fisher, 2002). Such conflicting findings support the notion that the relationship between sex and punitiveness is likely complex (Spratt, 1999).

Capital punishment is the most extreme form of punishment that a society can mete out. While capital punishment has not been legal in Canada since 1967, understanding the rate at which Canadian citizens support this form of punishment and the associated perceptions is an important empirical task. Past research in the Canadian context indicates support for capital punishment is relatively high among the general public (Roberts, 2001) and university students (Winterdyk & Hincks, 2013). The present research suggests that Saskatchewan residents endorse capital punishment for first-degree murder at a rate similar to past research reports, but lower than found historically in the Canadian context (Roberts, 2001).

Support for re-introducing capital punishment partially depends on support for punitive crime control methods and living in a rural area. A belief that punishment is an effective crime reduction strategy is associated with a five-fold increase in the odds of supporting the re-introduction of capital punishment and a rate of endorsement higher than that of Canadian residents in the 1980s (73%; Roberts, 2001). This finding suggests that residents in Saskatchewan who perceive punitive methods, such as increasing the use of prison sentences, as effective crime deterrents may believe in the effectiveness of the most extreme forms of punitive crime control. In addition, a host of previous research finds that residents living in rural areas are more likely to support capital punishment (Britto & Noga-Styron, 2014; Kelley & Braithwaite, 1990; Unnever & Cullen, 2007, 2010). The present research suggests that this association is also relevant in the Saskatchewan context. Lower educational attainment and sex also emerged as related to higher support for capital punishment.

Limitations

The perceptions of effectiveness for crime control strategies were asked in a general manner, with no question about how effective these methods might be for different types of offences (nonviolent, drug, violent, sexual offences). Looking at perceptions of effectiveness for preventing crime such as violent offences might result in the majority of residents supporting punitive measures (Cullen *et al.*, 2000). As the design of the study is correlational, we do not have the ability to assume the direction of causality from these results.

CONCLUSIONS

The majority of Saskatchewan residents surveyed in the present research believe that crime rates in their neighbourhoods have increased or remained constant over the past three years. These perceptions, in turn, are predictive of greater support for punishment-based crime reduction measures. This relationship is significant and suggests that inaccurate beliefs about crime trends may affect support for increased punitive measures among Saskatchewan residents. Further, a strong relationship is found between support for punitive measures and support for capital punishment. These

relationships have implications for “public criminologists”, who can use the current research findings to more accurately target messages to audiences in Saskatchewan, and policy makers who aim to reduce crime and promote public safety.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

The authors have no conflict of interests to declare.

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