

Legislative Influences

Changes in legislation and the resulting change in the offence classification creates discontinuity in the historical record of particular criminal offences. Legislative changes to assault, sexual assault, theft, arson, mischief, prostitution and youth crime must be considered when making comparisons over time. Some of the more significant changes are as follows:

Sexual Assault: Bill C-127 (1983):

Bill C-127 abolished the offences of rape, attempted rape and indecent assault and introduced a three-tiered structure for sexual assault offences. The Bill also eased the circumstances under which police could lay charges in incidents of sexual and non-sexual assault.

Young Offenders Act (1984):

With the proclamation of the YOA in April 1984, 12 years became the minimum age for which criminal charges could be laid. However, the maximum age continued to vary until April 1985, when the maximum age of 17 (up to the 18th birthday) was established in all provinces and territories. Youths, as defined in this publication, refer to those aged 12 to 17 (inclusive). This definition applies to the target group who fall under the delegation of the *Young Offenders Act* (YOA).

Dangerous and Impaired Operation: Bill C-18 (1985):

Bill C-18 imposed more stringent sentences for dangerous driving and drinking and driving. It also facilitated the enforcement of impaired driving laws by authorizing police to take blood and/or breath samples under certain circumstances.

Property value limits: Bill C-18 (1985) and Bill C-42 (1995):

In 1985, Bill C-18 altered the property value limits from under and over \$200 to under and over \$1,000. This applies to offences such as theft, possession of stolen goods, mischief and fraud.

As of February 1995, Bill C-42 revised the property value limits to under and over \$5,000.

Alternative measures: Bill C-41 (1996):

Bill C-41 was proclaimed into law September 3, 1996. One of its highlights was the introduction of "alternative measures" for adults, which provided ways of dealing with disputes and minor offences outside the formal court proceedings.

Firearms: Bill C-68 (1997):

Bill C-68, proclaimed on January 1, 1997, requires that all firearm owners must obtain a Firearms Licence by January, 2001. This licence replaces the Firearms Acquisition Certificate in use since 1977. Commencing October 1, 1998, each weapon must be registered within five years and a Registration Certificate will be issued. Bill C-68 also provides for tougher penalties for using a firearm while committing a crime.

Controlled Drugs and Substances Act: Bill C-8 (1997):

This new legislation came into force on May 14, 1997. This new legislation repeals and replaces the *Narcotic Control Act* and Parts III and IV of the *Food and Drugs Act*.

Dangerous Operation Evading Police: Bill C-202 (2000)

Law C-202 came into effect March 30th, 2000. This legislation modifies section 249 of the Criminal Code, thus creating new offences of dangerous operation of a motor vehicle when used for evading police.

Youth Criminal Justice Act: Bill C-7 (2003):

The extrajudicial measures encouraged by the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, proclaimed on April 1, 2003, include taking no further action, informal police warnings, referrals to community programs, formal police cautions, Crown cautions and extrajudicial sanctions programs. It is presumed that extrajudicial measures are adequate to hold accountable non-violent offenders who have not previously been found guilty in court.

Comparing UCR Data with Courts and Corrections Data It is difficult to make comparisons between data reported by police and data from other sectors of the criminal justice system (i.e., courts and corrections). There is no single unit of count (i.e., incidents, offences, charges, cases or persons) which is defined consistently across the major sectors of the justice system. As well, charges actually laid can be different from the **most serious offence** by which incidents are categorized. In addition, the number and type of charges laid by police may change at the pre-court stage or during the court process. Time lags between the various stages of the justice process also make comparisons difficult.