

# What Is Criminology?

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Identify the disciplines and areas of study that formed the foundation of modern criminology.
- Explain the social, cultural, and demographic trends in the 20th century that led to the rise in prominence of criminology as an area of study.
- Identify the range of subjects that criminologists study and the corresponding range of approaches they take to study crime.

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

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## Introduction

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford, 1964) defines “criminology” quite simply as the “science of crime.” More specifically, the word “crime” is derived from the Latin word *crimen*, and the “-ology” tacked onto our English “crimin” refers us to the study of crime.

The behaviours that are at the heart of crime have been a part of human conduct for as long as we have lived on the planet as *Homo sapiens*. In pre-state societies, there were assaults, robberies, thefts, and homicides—the kinds of activities that we regard today as criminal and punishable by the state. Some other behaviours have been more recently criminalized—the use and distribution of certain mind-active drugs, the sale of sexual services, and the evasion of taxation are examples.

And **criminology**—the scientific study of crime—is a relatively recent development. Although one can point to the *Code of Hammurabi* or the pronouncements of the Roman republic as examples of early codifications of crime, or to the work of an 18th-century philosopher of punishment such as Cesare Beccaria, the study of crime itself did not really begin in any systematic way until the 19th century (Rafter, 2009). And even then, there was not a great deal of coherence within the field, a phenomenon that arguably continues in the present. The German psychiatrist Krafft-Ebing wrote of sexual deviations, the Italian anthropologist Lombroso wrote of criminal man, and the French sociologist Durkheim wrote much more broadly of the normalcy of crime in all human societies. It’s also fair to note that criminology began, within a global context, as a subset of the discipline of sociology.

### **criminology**

The study of crime and criminal behaviour, which are defined by reference to criminal law.

## Criminology as an Academic Discipline

In Canada, the study of crime in universities began during the 1950s at the University of British Columbia. The new program in criminology was announced in 1954, originating from the division of sociology within the Department of Economics, Political Science, and Sociology. The spur for the development of the new program was an emerging sense that correctional efforts—the rehabilitation of offenders—would be assisted by an accumulating body of knowledge (Parkinson, 2008). The proponents of the program argued that offenders could no longer be seen as born criminals, and they pointed to the local Haney Correctional Centre as the site of an emerging progressive correctional administration that was concerned about developing educational and vocational programs, maintaining family and community ties for offenders, and developing programs of probation and parole.

Although this program was short-lived, closing in 1959 and becoming part of the School of Social Work, the impetus for the study of crime in Canada, and in other Western nation-states, was clearly building. In 1963, Denis Szabo declared the arrival of “a new discipline” and “a new profession” at the Université de Montréal. Similarly, also in 1963, the Centre of Criminology at the University of Toronto was established as a research entity by J.L.J. Edwards. In 1967, Tadeusz Grygier established the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa as an applied interdisciplinary program, with courses to be offered in both English and French. And in 1973, Simon Fraser University’s School of Criminology, led by a former faculty member of the Université de Montréal, Ezzat Fattah, began to offer its program, again interdisciplinary in structure. Additionally, from the 1960s to the present, criminology programs emerged within departments of sociology at many universities, focused on understanding crime as a form of **deviance** and then studying the processes of defining criminal law, the social precursors to involvement in crime, and the potential range of appropriate and/or effective responses to law breakers.

### deviance

Behaviour that differs from accepted social norms; it may include acts that violate specific rules (crime), sexual behaviours, or non-criminal acts that challenge accepted values.

### *The Emergence of Criminology in the Postwar Era: The Social Backdrop*

These developments necessarily raise the question of why, during the 1960s and 1970s, the study of crime emerged as a subject of scholarly inquiry, no longer limited to the relatively exclusive purview of philosophers, theologians, and politicians. Canada was not the only nation-state in which this kind of rapid growth of the discipline occurred. In the United States and the United Kingdom, the study of crime emerged as both a burgeoning and contested form of academic inquiry (Laub, 2004; Taylor et al., 1973).

Urbanization and industrialization were key features of social life in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. There was substantial migration from rural areas to urban areas and the creation of new categories of crime, which were often directed at the behaviours of the urban poor: new proscriptions against vagrancy, drunkenness, and prostitution. The early 20th century also witnessed the beginnings of globalization—immigration in the form of inexpensive labour arriving from China, Japan, and the developing world. And these new immigrants sometimes represented an economic threat to established labour. They also brought long-established parts of their cultures with them to their new world—smoking opium from China, hashish from India, and coca and cocaine from South America. These alternatives to tobacco and alcohol were resisted and criminally prohibited, and laws were passed to aid deportation of so-called foreign drug peddlers and to restrict immigration.

Put differently, the culture was changing. It was more urban and more global, and these changes created tensions. With increased literacy and increased access to information,

there were also challenges to the perpetuation of long-established institutions. The practice of capital punishment began to be criticized; public executions moved behind closed doors, out of sight of the population; and reformers began to urge more humane treatment of law breakers and to ask for more economic support for the urban poor.

By the end of the Second World War, social conflicts had become social threats. Global annihilation now appeared as a possibility, underlined by the Cold War between two dominant global powers: the United States and the Soviet Union. And so began the 1960s. Crime rates began to escalate in a time of youth rebellion. Young people were urged to “make love, not war” in the wake of the US entry into Vietnam, while Timothy Leary urged experimentation with a countercultural grouping of mind-active drugs. “Tune in, turn on, and drop out” was his rallying cry. There was also a **demographic** shift of some relevance. The percentage of young men within the populations of Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom increased dramatically, beginning in the mid-1960s. The so-called baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, entered their crime-prone years (between the ages of 15 to 29) in the mid-1960s. In every era of human history, and in every part of the world today, young men commit a disproportionate amount of crime relative to other age cohorts. It was perhaps not surprising, then, that in the postwar era, with this explosion in the relative contribution of young men to national populations, that crime rates should rise, though there has also been considerable debate within criminological literature as to the statistical importance of this demographic shift (Fox, 2000; Marvell & Moody, 1991). In any event, the changing nature of crime and increases in rates of crime propelled the new discipline of criminology to greater prominence.

### demographics

Statistical data relating to characteristics of a population, such as relative size of age groups, gender balance, or any other measurable information.

### correlates

Factors that do not cause crime but are strongly linked to criminal behaviour.

## BOX 1.1

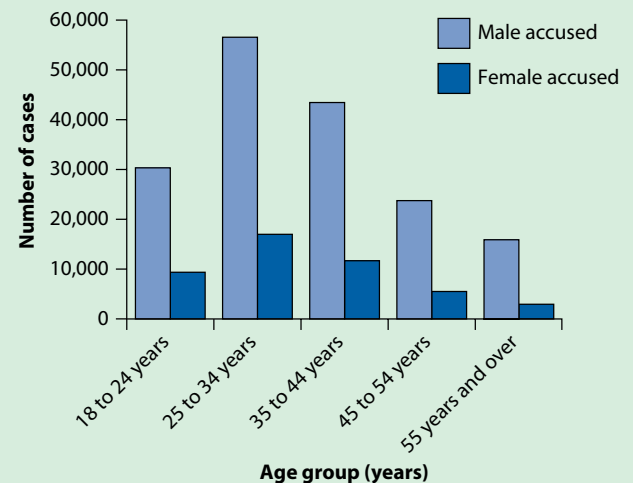
### Correlates of Crime

As we will see in Chapter 4, Measuring Crime, a full understanding of the prevalence of crime is highly dependent on how crime is defined and how it is then reported to, processed, and counted by police. It is safe to say, however, that young men—not just in Canada today, but in most times and places throughout history—tend to commit a disproportionate amount of crime, as Figure 1.1 illustrates. Both age and sex can be seen in this figure as important **correlates** of crime; that is, they are factors that do not *cause* crime, but they are strongly linked to criminal behaviour. Simply put, young men make contributions to crime statistics that are remarkably disproportionate to the size of their population in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere.

Several other correlates of crime will be discussed at relevant points in this book, including, for example, the disproportionate representation of poverty, race, and income inequality within certain criminal justice statistics. The difficult task for criminologists is to try to understand the significance of these correlations. They do not express cause-and-effect relationships, but responding to this information, and understanding the meanings of these

relationships, is important in constructing an effective criminal justice policy.

**FIGURE 1.1** Cases Completed in Adult Criminal Court, by Age Group and Sex of the Accused, Canada, 2020–2021



Source: Data from Statistics Canada (2022).

At the same time, alcohol consumption was increasing dramatically, approximately 50 percent per capita between 1966 and 1975. The birth control pill had also dramatically changed male–female relationships with its emergence in the mid-1960s, allowing women to experiment with sex without the risk of pregnancy and outside marriage. Not surprisingly, rates of divorce, aided by more social acceptance of the dissolution of marriage, increased fourfold, again within the space of a decade. Added to that social upheaval, young women were leaving the family or marital home for the workplace. In Canada, the number of women in the labour force increased from 2.2 million in 1966 to more than 5.5 million in 1975 (Boyd, 1988). These were dramatic social changes for both men and women, and they weren't always easy to accept, particularly for men.

Crime rates—perhaps understandably, given this backdrop—were increasing dramatically (see Figure 13.2 in Chapter 13, Crime Choice Theory). There were many ways in which the social changes of the 20th century, particularly those of the post–Second World War era, created the social conditions in which criminology emerged as an academic discipline. What was to be done about the use of cannabis and these other drugs flowing from far-flung regions of the globe? What was to be done about the conflict between youth and their parents' generation? What was to be done about the increasing disintegration of marriage and the problems of domestic violence? What was to be done about the new roles of women? Criminology entered the fray with multiple and sometimes conflicting agendas: controlling crime, reducing conflict, emancipating women and youth, and instituting and occasionally evaluating policies that might best respond to these new realities.

### ***Criminology: A Discipline or a New Home for Already Established Disciplines?***

What does it mean to be a criminologist? The field has typically been interdisciplinary in its orientation, drawing on long-established disciplines such as sociology, psychology, law, geography, history, political science, and economics, and more recently, with developments in understanding DNA and **forensic entomology**, the fields of chemistry and biology. Even more recently, with the emergence of online fraud, harassment, and theft, criminology has looked to experts in computer science, mathematics, and related disciplines to aid in our ability to respond effectively to these threats. Those educated in all these realms tend to bring to the study of criminology both a substantive base of knowledge from their disciplines and a corresponding range of methods for undertaking academic inquiry. Psychology, as the study of individual behaviour, tends to focus on the criminal individual, often classifying this individual, trying to predict the risk of reoffending, and then evaluating the effectiveness of various forms of rehabilitation or treatment. Psychological explanations of crime have evolved over the years, moving from Freudian psychoanalysis to personality theory, to theories of moral development, and, more recently, to developmental conceptions of criminal involvement (Moffitt, 1993). In all these constructions of crime, the individual is front and centre: An individual's psyche and behaviours are the focus of the study of crime.

Sociological analyses of crime are, not surprisingly, focused on the social order—the extent to which social forces work to define crime and to create conditions in which crime might either flourish or diminish. Sociological analyses of crime are essentially trying to understand how the social context of our lives works to create law and certain

#### **forensic entomology**

The study of insects to assist in legal investigations; insects found on a corpse can help identify facts about the time and place of the victim's death.

kinds of crime and crime rates, as well as to point to social and structural changes that might be made in order to effectively respond to the challenges that crime presents. Sociology has, historically, been the dominant paradigm within criminology, giving rise, among other conceptions, to social control theory, labelling theory, differential association, notions of anomie, and, more recently, to a range of critical theories of crime: moral panics and the culture of control, Marxian and neo-Marxian analysis, Foucauldian perspectives, and postmodern conceptions of **criminality**. For as long as criminology has been a subject for academic inquiry, social analyses of crime, law, and deviance have tended to be pre-eminent. Crime and criminal conduct have been regarded as more likely to be driven by social conditions than by individual aberrations.

### **criminality**

The state of being criminal; criminal acts or practices.

## BOX 1.2

### Understanding Deviance

All societies define some behaviours as deviant, and some of these deviant behaviours are also regarded, through the further step of criminalization by the state, as crimes. These shifting definitions of deviance and crime can differ markedly across societies. For example, some nations regard alcohol consumption as both deviant and criminal; others regard sex outside marriage as deviant and, in some circumstances, as criminal and deserving of severe penalties.

The history of crime teaches us that deviance and crime itself are both malleable constructions. In late 19th-century Canada, homosexuality was illegal and punishable by imprisonment. Today, however, marriage for same-sex partners is legal, and we have politicians, celebrities, and an ever-growing number of athletes and other public figures who are out about their sexuality. (Meanwhile, in some countries, particularly several in Africa, punishment for homosexuality has recently grown *more* severe, including life imprisonment—which illustrates how tolerance and definitions of deviance can trend in the opposite direction.)

Similarly, doctors who performed abortions in 19th-century Canada were subject to criminal conviction and even faced the possibility of a death sentence. Today, abortions are not subject to any criminal penalties, though we have recently witnessed some dramatic changes in the United States, with the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the Supreme Court in 2022, and subsequent legislation in some states that would make the provision of an abortion a criminal offence. We are also currently witnessing a significant debate about whether some kinds of illegal drug

use should be regarded as criminal or deviant, notably in response to the plague of overdose deaths in Canada since 2016. The legalization of cannabis in Canada in 2018 marked a dramatic departure from 95 years of criminal prohibition of that drug. Cannabis consumption can now be cast as similar to alcohol and tobacco use—a potential risk to an individual's health and subject to regulation but no longer a crime deserving of punishment.



Michael Leshner and Michael Stark celebrate a court's decision allowing them to wed. In 2003, they became the first legally married same-sex couple in Canada. This landmark decision was one clear illustration of how social attitudes had shifted in recent decades.

The study of law is also central to the study of criminology, arguably perhaps the most central of all disciplines, as it defines the landscape of crime, setting out the specifics of prohibited behaviours and the penalties that may attach to various acts of law-breaking. Study of the history of law provides insight into the changing nature of crime, allowing students to come to terms with the malleable nature of some forms of deviance, and the evolving nature of what might be viewed as appropriate responses to crime. A consideration of the evolution of criminal law provides insight into the creation of new forms of criminality. For example, legal analysis allows for discussion of the emergence of a global prohibition of certain mind-active drugs in the early 20th century, described in the case study that begins this chapter. Prohibition is an experiment that began as a moral crusade against intolerable harms but is now facing difficult challenges to both its empirical logic and its corresponding moral underpinnings. Similarly, study of the history of criminal law allows students to view changing responses to long-established and universally condemned forms of conduct. For example, in Canada in the latter half of the 19th century, capital punishment was regarded in law as an appropriate punishment not only for murder but for many other crimes. Study of subsequent amendments to criminal law, and the debates that surrounded these amendments, allows students to reflect on not only changing approaches to the punishment of crime but also on the logic and utility of these changing approaches.

The disciplines of history, geography, political science, and economics have, historically, been less central to the study of criminology than have psychology, sociology, and law, but they have each made different kinds of contributions. The social and spatial geography of crime have been critical to the development of programs of crime prevention through environmental design and to the tracking of serial predatory offenders across time and space (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1984; Rossmo, 1999).

Detailed histories of crime, law, and criminal behaviours have permitted greater understanding of the utility of law and a range of various legislative and policy initiatives, and of the kinds of variables that might either foster crime or serve to diminish it. More recently, the discipline of economics has also made important contributions to criminology, permitting evaluative analyses of the costs and benefits of various crime-reduction initiatives. With recent developments in the utility of gathering DNA at crime scenes, and in studying key elements of the decomposition of bodies to determine time of death (a key aspect of forensic entomology), the fields of chemistry and biology have both become a significant part of criminology, providing evidence that can be both inculpatory and exculpatory.

Is there, however, a discipline of criminology that will, in time, displace or unite all these long-established disciplines? Or is criminology better described simply as the study of crime, and, as such, wholly dependent on the methods and literatures of sociology, psychology, law, and other disciplines? Many universities across the Western world now offer MA, MSc, and PhD programs in criminology. In Canada alone, the Université de Montréal, the University of Toronto, Ontario Tech University, and Simon Fraser University all currently offer doctoral programs in criminology. But can any of these institutions claim ownership of a new academic discipline?

The faculty in departments and schools of criminology do appear to represent a variety of disciplines: law, psychology, sociology, economics, geography, and the natural sciences. But they also have individuals with doctorates in criminology.

**BOX 1.3****Why Study Crime?**

Before embarking on an in-depth examination of the many aspects of criminology covered in the chapters that follow, it is worthwhile to stand back and consider several general questions about the *value* of studying crime. Thinking about these issues helps one appreciate the role that criminology plays in defining and shaping our society, and why it is important and beneficial—both for individuals and society—to understand crime and criminal behaviour.

**What to criminalize and how to respond to crime?**

First, we need to think about what society should criminalize. The power to define a person as criminal, and then to be able to stigmatize and, potentially, to deprive that person of liberty, is an extraordinary power. We learn from the history of crime that its content is highly malleable—in Canada alone, within the past century, we have come to regard some previously criminal acts as tolerable behaviours and some forms of punishment as inappropriately harsh and counterproductive. We also know that the powers of the police and the criminal justice system have often been abused or misapplied. The questions of how the state defines and responds to crime say a great deal about our culture, and they are deserving of careful consideration.

**What does the best evidence tell us about our responses to crime and their effectiveness?**

Some forms of crime have always been defined as such: Physical offences against persons, theft, and fraud come quickly to mind. But how effective are the typical responses to these crimes? Does imprisonment for certain kinds of crime have significant impacts on crime rates—that is, is it an effective deterrent? What about probation, fines, or conditional sentences? Can neighbourhoods and communities be designed in ways that will reduce opportunities for crime and therefore crime itself? Do the media influence our responses to crime, and do they give us an accurate understanding of crime, particularly in our current world as social media networks have gained ascendancy and are challenging long-established facts, well-established

science, and the legitimacy of mainstream media? These are all important questions, and criminological research can provide important insights into the utility of various approaches and the creation of sound policies.

**Can the study of crime help us to respond to emerging challenges?**

Since the beginning of the 21st century, we have witnessed significant social changes in Western society. Concerns about terrorism since the attacks of September 11, 2001 have led to expanded security measures and surveillance, which have in turn raised fears about compromised privacy and human rights. More generally, we have seen the proliferation of the Internet and of telephones that are also computers and cameras. And as noted above, the Internet has helped create a variety of social media platforms that have, at times, served to question the legitimacy of democracy and the rule of law. What are the implications of these changes for crime and crime detection? We must now contend with identity theft, Internet and telephone fraud, and more, all within a virtual and global context. We all face the possibility of being victims of these new kinds of crimes. The nature of crime and its locations are changing. How can we effectively respond to these new challenges?

Furthermore, while reported crime rates have dropped in most Western nations, there is a great deal of ongoing debate about why this has happened, along with some more recent signs that this drop in crime may be starting to shift upward again. How reliable are our reported crime rates, relative to current realities? Can we imagine improvements in technologies for combatting crime? More effective policing? Or is a large proportion of crime simply shifting to a new, virtual, and global terrain? How will we combat this shift? If we are to understand both the present and the future of our society, and determine how best to deal with these challenges, these are some of the key questions we must attempt to answer. (See, e.g., Milivojevic & Radulski, 2020, and Mackenzie, 2022.)

Perhaps the difficulty for those who argue that criminology is a separate discipline, rather than simply a particular focus of study, is one of demonstrating a set of theories and methods that are specific to criminology and separate from those other disciplines. Some of the most recent and arguably innovative approaches within

criminology—life course development theory, geographic profiling, DNA profiling, and critical criminology—can be seen to have origins in psychology, geography, chemistry, and sociology, respectively.

## Criminology: What Do We Study?

As criminology is home to a host of disciplines, it is not surprising that the questions that criminologists ask tend to vary significantly, and this in part depends on the field of their training and in part depends on the lens or framework through which they understand the realities of crime. This issue of what to study takes us back to the social and political backdrop against which the study of criminology emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Crime rates were rising, and the social conflicts described earlier in this chapter did set the stage for a more rigorous analysis of crime. Perhaps not surprisingly, though, the questions of what to study and how to study produced multiple responses, as they still do today.

### criminalization

To define an act as a crime and thereby subject that act to formal punishment.

For example, the process of **criminalization** itself has been subject to considerable scrutiny. The criminalization of the possession and distribution of certain kinds of drugs is an ongoing process that has produced considerable research, as has the criminalization and subsequent decriminalization of abortion and the contested criminalization of sex work. In each of these instances, criminologists have examined the legal history of criminalization and its consequences, but they have also considered the effectiveness of the law, its intended and unintended consequences, the harms imposed by these illegal activities, and the harms imposed by the laws that control these activities.

In these contested terrains of criminal law, the disciplinary background of the criminologist remains critical. A historian will canvass and catalogue the emergence of law and legal amendments in substantial detail, attempting to explain the social, political, and economic context of changing law. A psychologist will consider the harms to the individual, not only from involvement in these typically consensual activities but also from the law itself. An economist will consider the cost-effectiveness of various sanctions. Does, for example, the provision of a supervised injection site for injection drug users reduce health care costs through avoidance of HIV and hepatitis C infections?

But once we move away from the contested terrains of crime—from those forms of conduct that might be viewed as socially tolerable and capable of regulation rather than as unacceptable behaviours deserving of the possibility of imprisonment—the focus of inquiry becomes quite different.

## Crime Rates: Why Do They Go Up? Why Do They Go Down?

Since 1960, we have amassed a considerable amount of data reported by police (e.g., the Canadian Uniform Crime Reporting Survey [UCR]) that documents the extent of particular types of crime. We are now able to look back at decades from the present, using data from dozens of nation-states, to determine whether specific types of crimes have increased or decreased over time within specific jurisdictions. We can also compare different nation-states over time to determine whether the trends observed are crossing national boundaries.

We have learned that the reliability of these police data varies: Reports of homicides do tend to have a very close relationship to the actual number of homicides committed in most jurisdictions. But police reports of theft, assault, and even sexual assault may represent a minority of all such incidents, depending on willingness to report the

For more on the UCR Survey, see Chapter 4.



crime, the perceived significance of the incident, the extent of police resources, and both individual and societal attitudes toward involvement with police and the **criminal justice system**. Fortunately, we also have a considerable amount of additional data generated by surveys of individual victimization that documents the extent of crime experienced by a random selection of citizens in a given jurisdiction (e.g., the *General Social Survey* [Statistics Canada, 2021]). The combination of police reports of crime and ongoing surveys of criminal victimization provides a more complete and nuanced understanding of changing crime rates.

Criminologists study these changing crime rates to explain increases and decreases. Put differently, what variables produce an increase in certain kinds of crime, and, more important, having understood what drives crime rates up, what can we do to push them in the opposite direction? Alternatively, once crime rates have fallen, what can we attribute this to? And how can we produce more of the same? Much has been written, for example, about the crime drop experienced in Canada and the United States from the 1990s to the present (Blumstein & Wallman, 2000; Farrell et al., 2011; Pinker, 2011).

What we have learned is that patterns of increase and decrease in crime rates are not universal; the explanations for these increases or decreases vary for different types of crime and are not consistent across nation-states. For example, motor vehicle theft has dropped significantly over the past 15 years, largely because improvements in motor vehicle alarm and access technology have made the possibility of theft much less likely (Kriven & Ziersch, 2007).

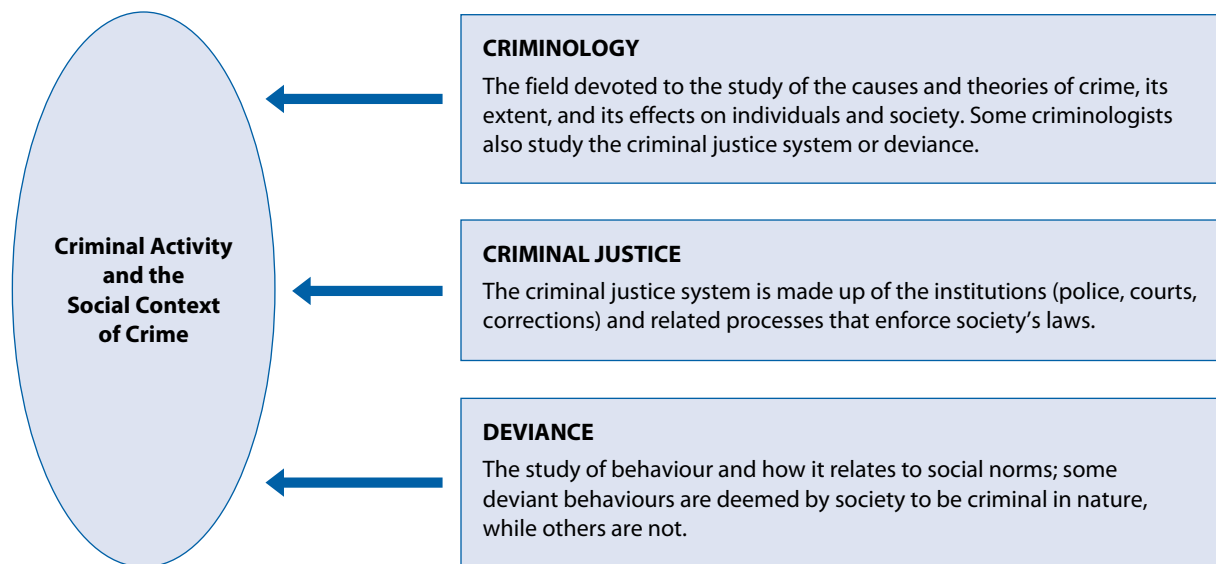
But why have homicides in Canada and the United States dropped to almost half the rates experienced in the late 1970s? There are many different explanations (Pinker, 2011; Zimring, 2006) but no universally accepted accounting for this change. We can point to a vast amount of correlational data regarding crime rates and other variables, but cause-effect descriptions and conclusions are simply not possible. Nonetheless, the tracking of crime and attempts to explain increases and decreases, notably the increases of the late 1960s and the early 1970s, and the decreases of the past 20 years, are a critical focus for criminology. Perhaps most recently, in the 2020 and 2021 crime data, there is evidence of an uptick in the more serious kinds of crime in Canada, though it is a little early to confirm this as a significant trend. If we are to reduce the impact that crime has on our everyday lives, we need to understand how and why particular kinds of crime increase and decrease over time. It is, for example, not surprising to learn that while many forms of personal and property crime have declined markedly over the past 20 years, online victimization, identity theft, and credit card fraud have all dramatically increased (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019). Further, credit card companies do not typically report these fraudulent activities to police, leading us to underestimate one critical area of increase in property crime.

### ***Studying Criminals and Their Pathways to Crime***

An important part of criminology, beyond understanding the creation of criminal law and concomitant penalties, and beyond understanding changing crime rates, is the task of understanding why particular individuals commit crime and, in some circumstances, continue to do so (see Figure 1.2). What, for example, are the characteristics of those convicted of crime, and why do some people commit a significant amount of crime, while others do not?

#### **criminal justice system**

The institutions and processes through which an offender passes, such as the police, the courts, and correctional facilities and programs.

**FIGURE 1.2 Criminology, Criminal Justice, and Deviance**

You've learned that most people convicted of crime are male and relatively young (typically between the ages of 15 and 34); they also tend to have few resources and little education. Early criminologists like Cesare Lombroso argued for the heritability of crime—a conception of a “born criminal,” while William Sheldon argued in the mid-1950s that body type or somatotyping is strongly linked to criminal behaviour, with well-muscled mesomorphs more likely to commit criminal offences. Neither of these conceptions linking biology to criminality were able to find much empirical support, but research in the past 20 to 30 years has begun to regard criminal conduct as a complex mix of both biology and environment.

#### traits

Those attributes or features that distinguish or characterize an individual.

It appears that some individuals have personality **traits** and characteristics that predispose them to crime (Raine, 2013), but biology does not predetermine criminality. A series of studies of adopted children and identical twins raised apart have prompted some rethinking of the relative significance of environment in predisposing individuals to involvement in crime. When Mednick et al. (1984) considered a sample of more than 14,000 Danish adoptions and discovered that these children were significantly more likely to commit crime if their biological fathers had criminal records—trumping the influence of any criminal records held by the adopted fathers who raised them—the findings were denounced in some quarters and met with disbelief in others. But other research has served to confirm the thrust of this finding. Although our tendency has been to view crime as environmental in origin, research data suggest that our biology can also create challenges and predispositions that can, in some circumstances, outweigh environmental influences. Again, while biology may not be determinative, we are learning that it is not as unimportant as was once thought. Just as intellectual and athletic abilities are widely acknowledged to have a genetic backdrop, we are now accepting that difficult personalities can have a biological origin (Raine, 2013).

We have also learned that acquired trauma can have a significant impact on predispositions to crime. Frontal lobe damage, for example, has now been clearly linked to an

increase in the likelihood of impulsively aggressive behaviour (Brower & Price, 2001). And the prevalence of brain injuries in prison populations has been very clearly identified as both disproportionate to the general population and a significant risk factor for reoffending (Raine, 2013).

In studying the criminal and the pathways to crime, criminologists have come to appreciate the complex mix of biological predisposition and environmental influences, permitting a more nuanced analysis of the genesis of crime. We now tend to regard biological risks, whether in the realm of a psychopathic personality, a brain injury, or the complex mix of mental health and substance misuse difficulties, as having a synergistic relationship with a dysfunctional environment, a social backdrop often characterized by physical and emotional abuse and neglect.

Further, study of the criminal has also allowed us to understand that some of our populist conceptions often have little **empirical** support. Just as during the 1960s and 1970s we came to reject the simplicity of Lombroso's criminal man and Sheldon's somatotyping, we have more recently come to realize that adult sex offenders are not specialists in that kind of crime—that is, men who predominantly commit a relatively narrow range of predatory sex offences.

Sex offenders are, rather, a much more diverse population, their crimes encompassing a range of offences, from incest and inappropriate touching to predatory attacks on strangers; predatory attacks on strangers are actually very rare events (Bonnar-Kidd, 2010; Bonnycastle, 2012). Sex offenders (with the notable exception of pedophiles) also tend not to specialize in sex offences; they are more accurately classified as anti-social deviants who commit a range of crimes, some of which happen to be sex offences (Lussier et al., 2010). We've also learned that most sex offenders have relatively low rates of reoffending, again contrary to populist conceptions (Hanson & Bussière, 1998). These findings raise important questions, for example, about the empirical logic of a sex offender registry or, perhaps put more critically, about the size of our sex offender registry. Why, we might ask, do we have a registry that houses such a varied range of offenders, particularly when the rates of reoffending for most of these kinds of crime are much lower than for other crimes?

It's clear, then, that much can be learned through the study of offenders, sometimes leading to findings that conflict with popular misconceptions and societal biases. And although those who study the individual offender are often criticized for failing to take account of social conditions and thereby inadvertently demonizing and **stigmatizing** offenders, it can also be argued that this kind of research can serve to create an improved understanding of the difficulties that offenders face and the challenges that we have, correspondingly, in responding appropriately and humanely to their circumstances. Studies focused on offenders can also allow us to understand when young people are at risk of involvement in crime, and this understanding may help us find ways to prevent the harms that these individuals may be inclined to impose upon others and upon themselves.

### ***Technologies of Crime Control: Criminology in Aid of Detection and Avoidance of Crime***

The study of criminology has also produced innovative and potentially valuable technologies for the control of crime; a rich academic literature has developed within this realm, documenting not only the techniques but also their costs, benefits, and potential limitations.

#### **empirical**

Understood or verified through experiment, measurement, or direct observation; as opposed to theoretical.

#### **stigmatize**

To strongly disapprove of a person or behaviour; to find disgraceful.

**interventions**

Strategies intended to shape the physical environment to mitigate crime; also various programs targeting individual offenders, offering alternatives to criminal behaviour.

Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) is a term that was originally set out by the late criminologist C. Ray Jeffery (1971). It is, essentially, a multidisciplinary approach, and almost all these **interventions** appear in an urban environment, using, among other initiatives, landscape and lighting design to increase natural surveillance. Crime prevention through environmental design seeks to manage crime by decreasing both the opportunity for a crime to occur and an individual's motivation to commit crime, and by simultaneously increasing the risk to the offender if the crime is to be committed. A considerable body of empirical evidence demonstrates the utility of this approach (Casteel & Peek-Asa, 2000; Cozens et al., 2005; Felson, 1987). Further, many criminology programs now offer courses focused on the practicalities of this approach and encourage students to both investigate and solve specific problems faced by local communities (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1993). Critics of CPTED argue, however, that environmental design can only displace crime into less-protected environments and that it does not address the root causes or motivations that underlie the commission of criminal offences. Further, some critics suggest that CPTED shifts the responsibility for crime prevention away from the state and onto the individual, expecting citizens "to become prudent consumers of crime prevention advice or else face moral and/or ethical sanction for not holding up their end of the proverbial bargain" (Parnaby, 2007, p. 73).

**geographic profiling**

A tool that permits police officers to focus on the likely residence of offenders in cases of serial crimes.

**Geographic profiling** is aligned with CPTED, drawing upon an understanding of urban environments and the behaviours of serial predatory offenders, and using mathematical tools to determine the likely home residence of a given offender. Developed by Dr. Kim Rossmo, a former detective with Vancouver police, it is a method that focuses an investigation of serial crimes into a relatively small geographic area through looking at the spatial patterns of such crimes and the specific hunting behaviours of the offenders (Rossmo, 1999). Although geographic profiling considers only the spatial behaviour of serial offenders, it has demonstrated success in specific cases and has spawned a literature that builds on the accuracy of its projections (Levine & Block, 2011).

Electronic monitoring, also known as electronic tagging, typically involves an offender wearing an electronic device that allows their location to be monitored through a control centre. Electronic monitoring permits both pre-trial release into the community and the serving of a sentence within the community, often referred to as home detention. The advantages of electronic monitoring can be significant; the process avoids the costs of placing the offender in a correctional facility and the well-documented negative impacts of incarceration on the individual. The concerns expressed regarding electronic monitoring have to do with its potential for **net widening**—imposing a form of control on individuals who might otherwise not be subject to such control—and its potential for demeaning intrusions into personal privacy. Additionally, there is the practical issue of how to respond quickly and effectively when an offender either removes the monitor or travels outside the permitted range.

**net widening**

Imposing a form of control on individuals who might otherwise not be subject to such control.

Empirical studies of the effectiveness and consequences of electronic monitoring have revealed, however, that it is a technology that does not appear to be used to widen the net of control over offenders. Rather, it seems that it is an effective public safety alternative to the use of imprisonment, reducing reoffending for the population placed under such surveillance (Padgett et al., 2006).

The trial of O.J. Simpson for the murder of his wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, focused global attention on the use of DNA evidence in criminal trials (Toobin, 1996).

Deoxyribonucleic acid is a molecule that encodes genetic instructions in all living organisms. It is akin to a fingerprint when used to identify an individual and, in fact, is often referred to as genetic fingerprinting. The forensic science of DNA testing has advanced considerably during the past 25 years and is now widely used in criminal trials to link an accused to a crime scene and to a particular victim or victims (and to exclude an accused from a crime scene). In the O.J. Simpson case, the defence team poked holes in the handling of the DNA evidence, arguing that it could have been contaminated at several points, leading to physical evidence that was unreliable. However, although police mishandling of the evidence was problematic in many ways, the evidence still pointed to Simpson's guilt—his blood was found at the crime scene, the blood of his wife was found on his sock, and the blood of the other victim, Ron Goldman, was found in his car (Toobin, 1996).

Although DNA evidence can be mishandled and inappropriately ignored (as in the Simpson case), it has become a very valuable tool in the detection of crimes, allowing conclusions regarding guilt that are both inculpatory and exculpatory. In Canada, both Guy Paul Morin and David Milgaard were compensated for their wrongful convictions, largely because of the contribution of DNA evidence (Mason, 2021).

## The Study of Crime: What Theories, What Methods?

As the preceding sections of this chapter demonstrate, criminologists employ a significant range of approaches in studying crime—from a detailed examination of the legal history of the criminal law, to evaluation of the effectiveness of various criminal sanctions and geographic profiling. At both the graduate and undergraduate level in university courses in criminology, courses on theory and methods are pre-eminent. Many other courses are in the curricula of criminology schools and departments: policing, corrections, criminal law, sentencing, penology, juvenile delinquency, drugs and crime, white-collar crime, and criminal investigations. But at the heart of the criminological enterprise are courses that are focused on theory and methods.

What theories guide criminology and criminologists? Some theorists, who might describe themselves as critically inclined, focus on the power of the state and its potential for abuse; others might describe themselves as rational choice theorists, arguing that crime occurs because of rational choices made by willing (or largely willing) actors. Still others use learning theory as a guide for their scholarly analysis. One prominent department of criminology focuses on teaching theories related to anomie, differential association, social control, social disorganization, routine activities, deterrence, and developmental approaches. A theory course in another department of criminology has a somewhat overlapping agenda that includes labelling theory, differential association, Marxist theories of crime, and moral regulation.

With the issues of methods to be employed by criminologists, there is a similar breadth, though most discussions of methods tend to focus on a distinction between **qualitative** and **quantitative** approaches. It's a distinction that is, at least to some extent, rooted in particular disciplines. Lawyers and sociologists are generally more likely to employ qualitative methods of analysis, though both also often employ quantitative methods. In contrast, psychologists and economists are more likely to employ largely quantitative frameworks.

But these distinctions also have some elasticity; as noted above, there are sociologists who conduct research that is very much quantitative, relying on the analysis of large

### qualitative

Relating to the study of phenomena based not on measurement but on an exploration of the reasons for human behaviour and the qualities of subjective experience.

### quantitative

Relating to the measurement of something—its quantity—rather than its qualities.

sets of data, and there are psychologists who focus on qualitative approaches to crime and criminal behaviour by interviewing offenders and their victims. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, also known as a mixed methods approach, has gained popularity during the past 25 years. Adam Trahan and Daniel Stewart (2013) argue, for example, that the current divide between quantitative and qualitative research is restricting our ability to develop a coherent understanding of crime and criminal justice, and that mixed methods—combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study—provide a way out of this difficulty (see Box 1.4).

But before we embark on any discussion of the relative merits of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches, we must think first about the nature of the questions we ask about crime, law, and offenders and their victims. Let's suppose that we want to know whether the extent, nature, or character of homicide has changed in Canada over a 50-year span—between 1964 and 2014. Statistics Canada can provide us with a substantial amount of quantitative data from police-generated forms, filled out after a homicide has been uncovered. We can document changing rates, any changes over time in the methods used to commit such crime, the gender and age of victims and suspects, provincial or territorial and municipal differences in prevalence, and potentially changing motivations for these killings.

## BOX 1.4

### Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches to Studying Crime

The study of crime has been dominated by quantitative analyses of crime. Richard Tewksbury (2009) noted that only 10 to 15 percent of all articles published in peer-reviewed criminological journals use qualitative methods. He goes on to make the bold claim that this is lamentable, as qualitative methods—interviews, field observations, and participant involvement—have superior value in “the creation of criminological and criminal justice knowledge” (p. 38). We do not have to agree with Tewksbury's claim, however, to see the value of both approaches, sometimes used in isolation of each other and most profitably used in combination.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods have their limitations. With quantitative methods, there is often a justifiable fear that the method dominates the inquiry—that increasingly sophisticated statistical manipulations of data may add little to our understanding of a particular phenomenon. Put differently, the questions we ask are at the heart of the criminological enterprise, and the quantitative responses we receive from quantitative study inevitably point to correlations, not cause–effect relationships. For example, even the startling finding by Mednick et al. (1984) that adopted male children are more likely to commit crime if their biological fathers (rather than their adopted fathers) had criminal records,

is not without its limitations. We don't really know what specific behaviours or attributes have been inherited and what impact these attributes might have on the development of criminality over time. The Mednick et al. data also revealed a strong genetic link with property crime but not with violent crime. With quantitative data, the methodology employed is always open to criticism, and our abilities to explain the variations that exist between two variables are typically quite limited. For example, David Weisburd and Alex Piquero (2008), after examining empirical tests of criminological theory in criminology between 1968 and 2005, concluded:

The overall level of variance explained is often very low, with 80 or 90 per cent unexplained. There has been no improvement over time . . . Criminologists will need to pay much more attention to what is not explained in criminological modeling if they are to make significant advances in understanding crime. (p. 453)

What sorts of things do you believe qualitative research can tell us about crime and criminal behaviour that quantitative methods might not? Conversely, what would quantitatively oriented criminologists cite as the shortcomings of research that is too reliant on qualitative approaches?

A significant part of the answer to this question depends, then, on the use of quantitative methods—engaging in a systematic empirically based inquiry; using numerical data; and depending on mathematical, statistical, or computational techniques. But this question could also benefit from qualitative research. Two possible examples are interviews with police officers who have investigated homicide during this time span and interviews with individuals convicted of homicides during this time span. These interviews could add much detailed and rich information about the potentially changing nature of homicide, complementing the rigour of quantitative analysis.

While the insights obtained from qualitative data may be useful contributions to building knowledge within a given field, they cannot be assumed to apply to a much larger group of individuals. In part, this is because the techniques—field observations or semi-structured interviews—are more subjective and more likely to be affected by the differing approaches and potential biases and inclinations of individual interviewers. But what also contributes to a lack of reliability with qualitative data is the typically small number of interviews (or number of data points). There is an irony here—the value of qualitative data usually increases as its similarities to quantitative data increase. For example, if one researcher conducts four interviews with users of crystal meth regarding the origins of their use of the drug, current patterns of consumption, reasons for using, and hopes for the future, the results may be somewhat useful, perhaps even illuminating. But if 10 different researchers each conducted 20 interviews of a similar kind, in 10 Canadian provinces, the finding would have much more relevance and utility. One might argue that this is the Achilles heel of qualitative research. To achieve a greater legitimacy and respect within the discipline of criminology, it must, at least in some important ways, begin to more closely resemble its older and more established sibling: quantitative methods.

## The Big Tent: Toward an Inclusive Criminology

Robert Gordon, the former director of the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University, refers to the philosophy of his approach in relation to research, teaching, and practice in the field of criminology as one that embraces a “big tent.” What he means to convey with the term “big tent” is that all credible approaches are welcome—from CPTED to critical analysis of the history of laws, practices of enforcement, and sentencing rationales; from understanding how and why individuals commit crimes to what can be done to make a continuing trajectory of crime less likely. Criminology can comfortably house such diverse subjects as improving our understanding of the hunting patterns of serial sex offenders, documenting and explaining the resilience of illegal markets, understanding what drives the spatial and temporal distribution of crime in urban neighbourhoods, and using forensic entomology to determine time of death in homicide investigations.

Professor Gordon also typically expresses a caveat that goes along with his “big tent” vision of the School of Criminology. “You are all welcome here,” he has said, “just don’t try to burn the tent down.” Put differently, this is a call for tolerance. We are best served by an inclusive criminology, one that is worthy of support and remains mindful of the many conflicts that have hampered—and stimulated—our field over time. As you read through the following chapters, we hope you will find work that will challenge you and encourage you to look at the subject matter of crime and criminology through many lenses. This is the challenge that criminology offers: a problem in search of multiple solutions, with many avenues of approach available.

## SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Although crime has been a part of societies throughout history, the serious scientific and academic study of crime is a relatively recent development.
- Criminology has typically been an interdisciplinary field of study, drawing on disciplines as diverse as law, sociology, psychology, geography, political science, economics, gender studies, and more.
- All societies define some behaviours as deviant, and some of these deviant behaviours become subject to criminalization by the state. These definitions of deviance and crime can differ markedly across societies but can also be quite malleable within individual societies. Consider, for example, recent changes in public attitudes and legal responses relating to cannabis and homosexuality in North America in only the last 20 years.
- Criminology can play a valuable role in determining how society copes with many new 21st-century challenges, including those relating to the current revolution in communications technologies. These revolutions in online technologies are also changing the nature of crime itself.
- The findings of criminologists often provide information that serves to correct popular misconceptions or societal biases about the nature of crime and criminals.
- Two categories of methods—qualitative and quantitative—are used to study crime, each with its own advantages and disadvantages, depending on the context or goal of the research. Many criminologists now see a fusion of quantitative and qualitative methods as a particularly compelling approach to the study of crime.

## QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL DISCUSSION

1. Can you imagine a time in which criminology will be regarded as an entirely distinct discipline, such as psychology, law, or sociology? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Given that most data gathered by criminologists are correlational, how much explanatory power does criminological research have? Does the use of correlational data represent a serious limitation for the field?
3. What do you think are the main reasons for the increase in crime rates in Canada from the late 1960s to the early 1970s? What do you think are the main reasons for the general decrease in crime rates that occurred in Canada from the early 1990s to around 2015?

## SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

*Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*: <https://www.ccja-acjp.ca/pub/en/criminology-journal/>

*Criminology* (journal): <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/17459125>

*Journal of Law and Society*: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14676478>

*Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*: <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jrc>

*The Yale Law Journal*: <https://www.yalelawjournal.org>

## Websites

The American Society of Criminology: <https://asc41.org>

## Legislation

*Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*, SC 1996, c. 19.

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## CASE STUDY 2.1

# Immigration, Public Safety, and Criminal Activity

In April 2014, an organization by the name of Immigration Watch Canada distributed a flyer in the city of Brampton targeting the Sikh community. The flyer featured two photos, the top one a group of mostly white Canadians and the bottom photo a group of Sikhs. “Is this what you really want?” asked the flyer, underneath the second photo. In April 2018, the same organization criticized the city of Vancouver for making an apology to its Chinese citizens for the ways in which they were discriminated against near the beginning of the 20th century. The organization claimed it was “probably one of the most outrageous acts ever committed against its European-based population,” adding that the apology “comes after immigrants, particularly Chinese from Mainland China, have driven housing costs into the stratosphere for hundreds of thousands of Metro Vancouver residents” (Immigration Watch Canada, 2018).

Concerns about Canada’s immigration system, while not as intemperate as these remarks, were also expressed by Andrew Scheer, the former leader of Canada’s Conservative Party. In July 2018, he tweeted, “Canadians expect our immigration system to be safe, orderly and compassionate. They expect the government to take a border crisis of their own creation seriously. For months our @CPC\_HQ team has been asking to see Justin Trudeau’s plan, but it’s clear he doesn’t have one” (Scheer, 2018). A poll undertaken by EKOS Research in August 2018 found that while only 12 percent of Liberal supporters and 17 percent of NDP supporters believed that too many members of racialized groups were immigrating to Canada, 73 percent of Conservative supporters believed this was true (Graves, 2018).

Candice Malcolm, a syndicated columnist, writing in the *Toronto Sun* in November 2017, complained that “our immigration system seems to put the desires of newcomers and the whims of political elites ahead of the well-being of all Canadians. Trudeau wants more refugees, with less security. He wants more immigration, but with less of a focus on integration and national unity. The Trudeau government’s immigration agenda is a dangerous combination, and it’s one that Canadians are understandably rejecting” (Malcolm, 2017).

Are these fears legitimate? Are Canada’s refugees a significant source of criminal activity? Is our collective security being compromised? Is our system of immigration, as Scheer implied, unsafe, disorderly, and lacking in compassion? Statistics Canada (2016) reported that from 2006 to 2014, when Conservative leader Stephen Harper was prime minister, the number of immigrants coming into Canada averaged about 250,000 annually. From 2015 to 2017, after the Liberal government of Justin Trudeau came to



Syrian immigrants, who fled from violence, make a new home in Canada.

power, the average annual number of immigrants was about 275,000, an increase of about 10 percent. Former Immigration Minister John McCallum stated in 2016 that he wanted to boost immigration levels to “help alleviate the demographic challenges of an aging population” (Grant, 2016). The *Globe and Mail* reported in September 2016 that the significant number of immigrants from Syria, Canada’s compassionate response to a humanitarian crisis in that country, largely explained the slightly unusual increase in the 2016 calendar year (Grant, 2016).

Are Canada’s immigrants a threat to law and order? A 2014 study in the Department of Economics at the University of British Columbia found no immediate relationship between immigration and property crime, but it noted that over time, through the creation of changing neighbourhood characteristics, there was a net reduction in crime committed by immigrants to Canada (Zhang, 2014). A Statistics Canada study from 2004 focused on rates of violent victimization, finding that immigrants were significantly less likely to report such victimization than were native born Canadians (Perrault et al., 2009). And perhaps the most comprehensive attempt to improve our understanding of this relationship is to be found in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethnicity, Crime and Immigration* (Bucerius & Tonry, 2014). Although there are difficult methodological issues involved in understanding the relationship between immigration and crime, there is little evidence of higher crime rates caused by immigration into either Canada or the United States. In sum, while there may be occasional violence committed by recent immigrants to Canada, even a conservative reading of the best available evidence suggests the threat to public safety is no greater than from native-born Canadians.

### Before You Read Chapter 2

- Who serves to gain from the misleading characterizations of immigration described here? In what ways might they benefit?
- What is the purpose of this kind of coverage of this issue? Why might a media organization, like the *Toronto Sun*, engage in such inflammatory rhetoric?
- Can you think of similar cases in which the media play a role in influencing public opinion on a controversial issue?
- What role *should* the media play in describing, reporting, or commenting on crime and the criminal justice system?