

**U.S. Department of Justice  
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# JUSTICE

## RESEARCH NOTES

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## What Is the Relevance of Justice Research and Development in the 1990s?

**T**he dramatic social, political and economic changes taking place in Canada today bring into question many assumptions about long-held societal values and goals and the legal and other mechanisms that can best serve indi-

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vidual and national aspirations. This complex of forces poses an enormous challenge for the development of fair and equitable justice policies.

The Department of Justice Research and Development Directorate recently undertook a planning exercise that resulted in a comprehensive three-year plan to help the Department meet the demands of the 1990s. Uppermost in this plan was the development and maintenance of a sound information base.

The following excerpts from that planning document illustrate the overall rationale for the research and development program. It will also help to explain why the Department believes it is important that its research reports and the results

of the development activities generated here be shared more widely. A continuing objective is to make these materials available for comment, criticism and use by all Canadians who believe that good information — and, in particular, information obtained from good social science research and demonstration projects — provides a powerful instrument for sensitive and innovative problem solving. That, for example, is one of the major purposes of *Justice Research Notes*.

## Organization of the Policy Research Function

The Research and Development Directorate is responsible for a highly interdependent set of functions, all of which are intended to support and improve the ability of the Department to be innovative and effective in response to challenges and opportunities. The Directorate is responsible for all the social science-based (empirical) research; for the development and evaluation of demonstration projects; for statistical analysis; and, in conjunction with the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics and the Ministry of the Solicitor General, for the promotion and development

No. 2

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## IN THIS ISSUE

Justice for Canada's Native People	140432	3
Native People - Sentencing Study	140433	7
Effects of Pornography	140434	9
Responding to Wife Assault	140435	11



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of justice information systems that can help meet federal and national requirements for empirical data.

## The Relationship between Research and Policy Development

Justice policy analysts must sift through and weigh conflicting viewpoints about the nature and extent of the problems at issue. The solutions proposed can have a significant impact on Canadian society, especially where important pieces of legislation such as the *Criminal Code*, federal government regulations, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and the *Divorce Act* are concerned.

Research directly assists policymaking and decisionmaking by:

- ▶ Helping to clarify and clearly articulate the policy issues. This can be achieved by careful analysis of public opinion information and other special surveys that explore public attitudes toward justice issues; social, economic, and demographic trend information; trends in reported and unreported crimes (both

*Justice Research Notes* is produced by the Research and Development Directorate of the Department of Justice. Its purpose is to provide, in summary form, results of projects carried out under the Department's program of research into various areas of justice policy, as well as information and articles on other socio-legal matters.

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nationally and internationally); changes in marriage and divorce rates; trends in the utilization of courts, tribunals and other less formal dispute resolution mechanisms, and so on.

- ▶ Helping to determine the extent and nature of the problem. This can be done by undertaking in-depth empirical research and analysis.
- ▶ Helping to explore policy alternatives (including procedural and legislative policies). This can be achieved by participating in the development and evaluation of experimental projects.

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- ▶ Assisting in the implementation of policy changes by determining costs and benefits of new initiatives.
- ▶ Providing empirical feedback to policymakers and decisionmakers by monitoring and evaluating the impact of policies, legislation, and cost-shared programs, intended and unintended consequences of implementation (and nonimplementation, where applicable); and by providing timely research-based advice on possible modifications.
- ▶ Collaborating with the program evaluation function by ensuring that program evaluation information requirements are taken into account in the data that are generated in the course of the policy development research cycle.