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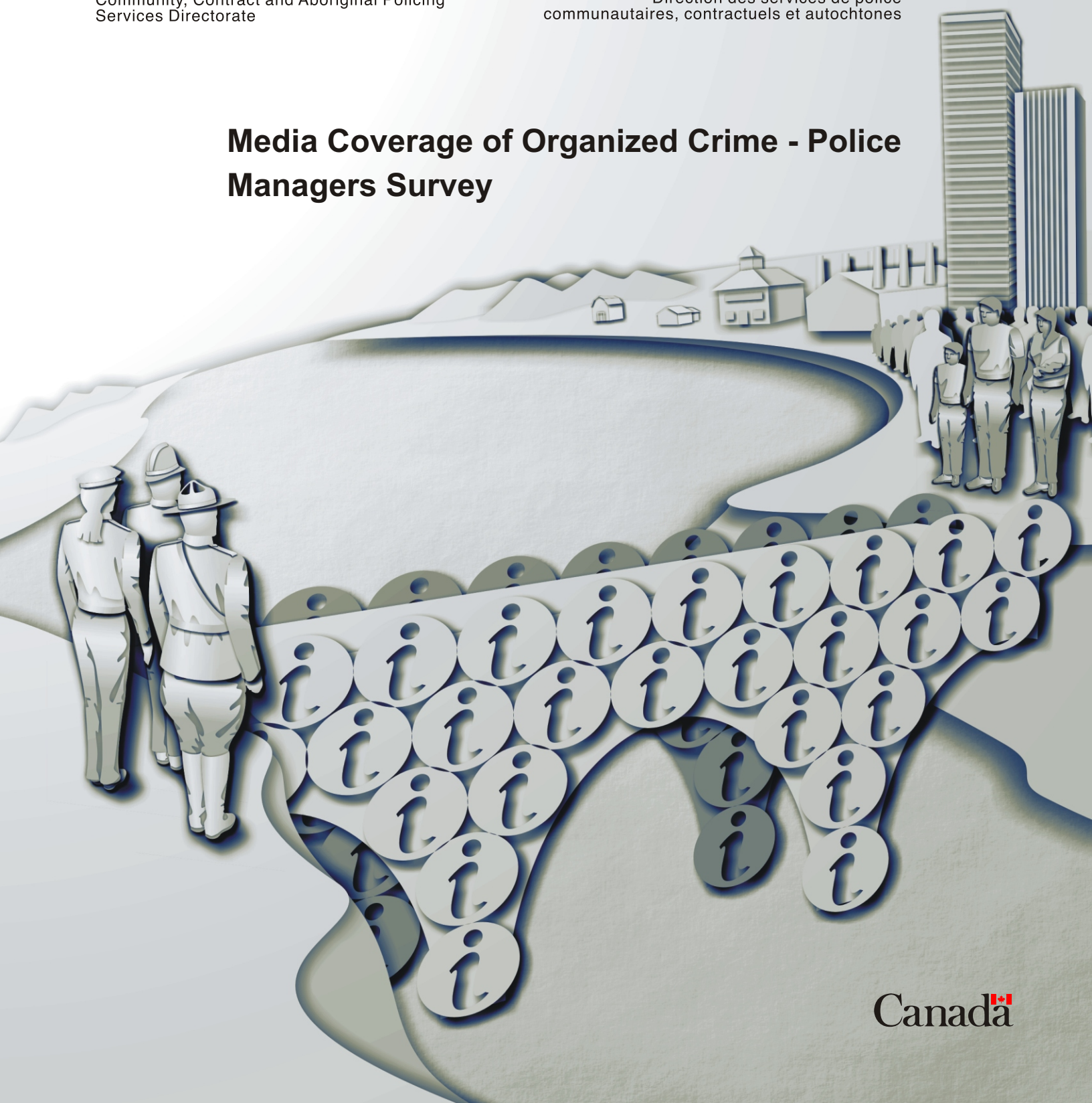
Research and Evaluation Branch

Community, Contract and Aboriginal Policing
Services Directorate

Sous-direction
Recherche et Évaluation

Direction des services de police
communautaires, contractuels et autochtones

Media Coverage of Organized Crime - Police Managers Survey



Media Coverage of Organized Crime - Police Managers Survey

by

Judith Dubois
Université du Québec à Montréal
dubois.judith@uqam.ca

Research and Evaluation Branch
Community, Contract and Aboriginal Policing Services Directorate
Royal Canadian Mounted Police
Ottawa

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Table of Contents

Summary	3
Acknowledgments	5
Introduction	6
Aims of the Study	6
Methodology	7
How Media Coverage of Organized Crime is Perceived	7
Non-Violent Events	8
Violent Events	9
Positive or Socially Acceptable Events Linked to Organized Criminal Groups	11
Police Operations	12
Trials	12
Political Interventions Related to Organized Crime	13
In-Depth Articles, Editorials and Investigative Reporting	14
Emphasis on Specific Activities	15
Criminal Activities Overlooked by the Media	16
In short	17
Influences	18
The Media's Influence on Public Opinion	18
Perception of Violence	19
Perception of Organized Criminal Groups	21
Influence of Public Opinion on Police Managers' Decisions	22
Decisions Influenced by Public Opinion	23
Decisions Not Influenced by Public Opinion	24
Crimes the Population is Less Concerned About	25
The Media's Influence on Police Decisions and Actions	26
Media Coverage Considered	26
Fact-Checking and Communication Processes	27
Direct Influence	28
Exceptions and Political Influence	29
In short	30
Notes	32
References	33

Summary

Police managers feel that the media tend to focus too much on organized crime activities that involve violence. Because of this emphasis on violence and sensationalism, the media often underplay organized crime activities with no apparent violence. The activities downplayed the most by the media, in terms of impact, are money laundering and economic crimes. Police managers also stated that the media give too much exposure to positive or socially acceptable events linked to organized crime. They consider, however, that police operations, trials and political interventions related to organized crime receive adequate and relatively proper coverage. Police managers are concerned about a lack of in-depth articles, editorials and feature stories that could provide an in-depth look at issues related organized crime. According to some managers, the biggest shortcoming is that the media never provide a comprehensive view of the actual causes and overall impact of organized crime in Canada.

Impacts

Almost all interviewed police managers stated emphatically that public opinion regarding organized crime is definitely influenced by the media. This situation is said to have a negative impact. In fact, several managers argue that the media give citizens the impression that organized crime generates much more violence than it actually does. The way organized crime-related events are covered by the media heightens the sense of insecurity in the community and causes citizens to call on the police more often to deal with violent criminal activities. On the other hand, it is felt that the public is unaware of the adverse effects of non-violent organized crime activities.

What is the likely impact of community concerns on police management? About two thirds of respondents said they have to take public opinion into account in their decisions and actions. Most interviewed police managers agreed that law enforcement's role is, first and foremost, to serve the community and to listen and remain accountable to them. However, several stated that public opinion could sway their decisions, providing it was warranted by circumstances.

Respondents were qualified in their opinions regarding the influence that media coverage of

organized crime activities might have on their decisions and actions. Police managers generally contend that police priorities and procedures are not affected by the media. However, several respondents stated that they take into account what is disseminated in the media, because they are accountable to the community and are concerned about what is perceived by the public through the media. Many respondents also stressed that the information on organized crime disseminated through the media has an impact on their communication and fact-checking procedures. A few managers explained that, even though they are not generally affected by the media, there may be exceptions for special, unavoidable cases such as the death of an 11-year old child caused by a car bomb or the shooting of crime reporter Michel Auger. Lastly, some respondents stated that they are not influenced by the media, but they sometimes have to take into account the positions taken by elected officials, who obviously can be influenced.

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Introduction

News media have tremendous power in a democratic society. Through their coverage of current events, they give citizens an opportunity to inquire and develop their own views about the world in which they live. They are also used as sounding boards for the community and they act as defenders of the public interest by holding the authorities accountable for their actions and decisions

The administration of justice in criminal matters (including organized crime) can't escape the glare of the media. On the one hand, the mass media provide extensive coverage of facts and events related to organized crime (Beare and Ronderos 2001) and this can shape the public's perception of crime (Gerbner and Gross 1976; Sheley and Ashkins 1981; Kemshall 1997; O'Connell 1999), including organized crime. On the other hand, because of the power granted to them by governments, police managers have an obligation to account for their actions.

Contemporary administrated societies are obsessed with procedural propriety or accountability in all institutions, and showing conformity to formal mechanisms of accountability has become a primary requirement for sustaining legitimacy... This obsession with procedure is accentuated in relation to the police organization because of its centrality to the state's representations of rule-governed order. (Ericson, 1995, p.143)

If media coverage of organized crime influences public opinion, can the police managers' perception of public opinion influence their decisions and policies regarding organized crime? How can the media influence the police managers' decision making process?

Aims of the Study

Through this study we wanted to find out how media coverage of organized crime and its potential influence on public opinion are perceived by police managers. We inquired whether police managers feel media coverage is consistent with their everyday reality. We also asked if they think the media and the public have a realistic perception of organized crime (in terms of its impact on the community).

This study also sought to determine whether media coverage of organized crime influences

police managers' activities (management, operations, administrative policies, communications, etc.).

Methodology

To get answers to these questions, we contacted 20 of the most senior police managers in the country ¹. They included RCMP assistant commissioners and deputy commissioners from five provinces, two provincial police department directors, police chiefs ² from 10 of the 16 largest cities in Canada, and three municipal police chiefs selected because of their geographical location ³. Overall, these managers have jurisdiction over 27,166,000 people or 86.47% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada). The interviews were conducted by telephone in February and March 2003. The respondents were asked to fill out a questionnaire before the telephone interview.

The findings of this survey are divided in two parts. The first deals with police managers' perceptions of media coverage of organized crime (OC). The second discusses the influence of OC media coverage on public opinion and, conversely, the influence of the media and public opinion on police managers' decisions.

How Media Coverage of Organized Crime is Perceived

Police managers' perceptions of media coverage were revealed through answers to a written questionnaire (Table 1). The respondents were asked to give their opinions regarding the emphasis put on various types of OC-related events by the media (Too much: T; Sufficient: S; Not enough: NE) and the quality of that coverage (Good: G; Adequate: A; Poor: P) ⁴. Afterwards, they were given an opportunity to discuss their answers.

Results: The police managers who responded to this survey seem to think, on the whole, that the media put sufficient emphasis on OC-related activities and the quality of their coverage is generally adequate. However, a more detailed review of their answers and comments reveals a feeling that the media focus too much on certain types of events and the quality of the coverage is not always consistent.

Table 1: Types of Organized Crime-Related Events

Events or Types of Coverage	Emphasis %	Quality %
Non-violent events (e.g. thefts, fraud, etc.)	T: 0.0 S: 63.2 NE: 36.8	G: 5.3 A: 78.9 P: 15.8
Violent events (e.g. murders, assaults, explosions, etc.)	T: 36.8 S: 63.2 NE: 0.0	G: 47.4 A: 31.6 P: 21.0
Positive or socially acceptable events linked to organized criminal groups (e.g. marriages, burials, social activities, etc.)	T: 57.9 S: 31.6 NE: 10.5	G: 5.3 A: 52.6 P: 42.1
Police operations (seizures, arrests, investigations, etc.)	T: 5.3 S: 78.9 NE: 15.8	G: 36.8 A: 47.4 P: 15.8
Trials (various proceedings, legal actions, etc.)	T: 0.0 S: 89.5 NE: 10.5	G: 36.8 A: 52.6 P: 10.5
Political responses to organized crime (legislative actions, statements, etc.)	T: 0.0 S: 78.9 NE: 21.0	G: 21.0 A: 57.9 P: 21.0
In-depth articles, editorials, investigative reporting, etc.	T: 0.0 S: 10.5 NE: 78.9 N/A: 10.5	G: 21.0 A: 36.8 P: 31.6 N/A: 10.5

Non-Violent Events

There is a feeling among police managers that the media could put more emphasis on non-violent organized crime activities. Although nearly two thirds (63.2%) of the respondents stated that the emphasis placed on non-violent organized crime activities by the media was sufficient, more than a third (36.8%) argued that there was not enough emphasis on these types of crimes. Some police managers stressed that a large portion of the activities of organized criminal groups are often carried out without violence (e.g. thefts, racketeering, economic crimes, counterfeiting); they feel that the media should put a greater emphasis on these crimes because they represent an extremely serious problem. One of them said:

I don't think you can ever give too much on organized crime. I believe organized crime is the biggest menace for Canadians; it is bigger than terrorism, it is bigger than anything. Therefore, you can never give it enough attention. (#9)

Another manager stated that non-violent organized crime activities are not given the exposure they deserve in the news:

I think there seems to be a lack of interest on the media's part. I would assume that the facts might be accurate, but probably perhaps the way it is portrayed... I find that in terms of where it lines up in their news line up. (#11)

Several police managers believe that some events are overlooked because their apparent lack of violence makes them less interesting to the media. The negative comments about the quality of the coverage were aimed precisely at the lack of interest for this type of activities. For example:

The non-violent activity; they don't very much pay attention to. (...) If it doesn't bleed, it doesn't lead. If there isn't shootings, killings, things blowing up or people being assaulted, there is minimal attention given to the other activities involving organized crime. (...) Unless it is violence related, the activities of organized crime receive very little attention from the media and probably even less care and concern on the part of the public. (#21)

News generally likes to talk about the 'quick hit' so to speak. So anything that is violent is what is the personal impact. It is really rare that you will get anything in depth on anything, for instance, like white-collar crime. Quite frankly, people don't really read it, so they only write what sells although its tremendous impact. (#7)

Violent Events

Police managers contend that, unlike non-violent events, violent events are given extensive exposure in the media (too much, 36.8%; sufficient, 63.2%). For instance, one respondent said:

The media tends to get carried away on anything glamorous and the violence is the something that they sort of 'beat to death'. They overplay issues on violence, so it gives a general perception that violence is a big problem when in fact it is single event rather than what goes on everyday. (#3)

This view by police managers is validated in some studies, which contend that the criminal events that the media decide to cover are not necessarily the most significant in terms of frequency, trends and types of offenders involved. For example, a study by Sheley and Ashkins (1981), based on seven FBI-developed criminal indices, compared trends reported by the police, newspapers and television and verified the public perception of these trends. They found that the trends projected by the media were generally at variance with police statistics. Also, the relative distribution of crimes on television is said to deviate even more from police statistics than what is reported in print. According to this study, there is a major discrepancy between the

representation of violent crimes in the media and what is contained in police data:

Murders and robberies account for about 80 percent of the crimes reported in newscasts. The same offenses represent 45 percent of the crimes reported in print. Yet the police department reports that only 12,4 percent of the city's crimes are homicides and robberies. (Sheley et Ashkins, 1981, p.499)

Another study, based on a review of crime-related articles published in the Ottawa daily newspaper *The Citizen* in 1984 and 1985, found that:

[Translation] half of them dealt with violent crimes, thus confirming the media's propensity to indulge in sensationalism, while thefts were understated and crimes committed by businessmen, wealthy individuals and people in positions of power were largely ignored (Gabor and Weimann, p. 94-95).

An explanation for the media's focus on violent crimes could be that criminal events are selected based on public interest. This trend was confirmed by journalists interviewed for a study on the impact of organized crime on public opinion (Dubois, 2002). In this study, reporters covering current events or trials or doing investigative work argued that not all OC-related topics attract the interest of the public. Citizens are mostly interested in news that touch their lives, such as crimes against people, and events that have spectacular aspects to them.

Quality of the Coverage

While several managers are concerned about this sensationalism trend, it is surprising that nearly half of them (47.4%) consider that the quality of the coverage for this type of events is good. For example:

[Translation] There are always exceptions, but as a general rule, I find that reporters do a good job when covering this type of events. They do it with sensitivity because of what it entails. Of course, I don't read papers like *Allo Police* where the coverage is slanted more towards entertainment than anything else. The media outlets identified earlier (La Presse, Le Soleil); these newspapers deal quite well with violent events in my opinion. (#15)

One respondent even claimed that the media are investing more resources in this type of events, which is a positive trend in his view.

[Translation] Violence gets everyone's attention [...]. Major media outlets really focus (dépêchent des journalistes sur place) on events that involve violence, such as murders and high-profile cases [...] while other events are really just glanced over. (#17)

In fact, even though several managers recognize that the media put a lot of emphasis (too much sometimes) on this type of events, some still feel that the facts are properly and accurately reported, as evidenced in these comments:

It gets a lot of attention; anything to do with violence will get attention from the media... It is not exaggerated, but the media in a lot of cases don't have all the information so they basically report what they can find out, but they are pretty accurate. (#21)

The quality is good, but it is all about sensationalism, in my view... So yes, as a general observation, I would say that the media tends to focus on the violence. The more violence, the more they focus and sometimes there is a point where, in my view, enough is enough. News becomes more focused on the sensationalism than it is facts. (#2)

On the other hand, 21% of police managers think that the coverage of violent events is of a poor quality (lack of thoroughness and/or ethics). One respondent stated:

When I say poor, I mean I am looking at those examples where things are done in a more shot way. Anything that I say here, there will be examples in one publication that will be better than another, but generally speaking the more violent the incident, the more likely it is the media will not be as careful in their reporting. Mainly because of the profile of it, they all want to compete and go out there against each other. (#4)

Another respondent argued that the media are sometimes rude:

[Translation] You know as well as I do that when a violent event occurs there is wall to wall coverage. It sometimes verges on the obscene when reporters try to interview family members in their homes. (#6)

Positive or Socially Acceptable Events Related to Organized Criminal Groups

A majority of respondents (57.9%) believe that positive or socially acceptable events linked to organized criminal groups are given too much media exposure, while 31.6% think the coverage is sufficient. There is much criticism of the way these events are reported in the media: 42.1% of police managers think the coverage is poor. Most negative comments reflected the managers' belief that criminal groups are too often portrayed in a positive light in the media.

Too much...anything is probably too much! You see that around the bikers. It is a very good example where the coverage that they are often given is coverage that portrays them very differently than what they are truly doing in their business... My sense is it's poor, but their sense might be that they are being fair to them. (#7)

My general impression is that there is too much. The media is glamorizing, for lack of a better word, they are glamorizing the role of organized crime and some of these figures and making them into heroes in some cases...I think the quality is poor. I think the whole

objective is wrong. They are putting them on pedestals like some of that coverage on Maurice Mom Boucher. After a while, people were saying ‘ Good God, this guy is a bit hero’. That is the downside on too much coverage and too much emphasis. (#2)

[Translation] When they go to an event like the wedding of a Hells Angels member to find out who will provide the entertainment and what they will eat or drink, it looks as if they’re eulogizing people who got rich by taking advantage of unsuspecting victims. To me, that makes no sense. (#6)

[Translation] They’re somehow given a status [...] Through such events, the social standing and reputation of these criminal groups are enhanced. The true face of these groups is not really shown. They’re treated like any other group! (#18)

Police Operations

Most respondents (78.9%) consider that media coverage of police operations is sufficient. In addition, police managers seem rather satisfied with the quality of the coverage: over a third of respondents (36.8%) think the quality is good and nearly half (47.4%) find it adequate.

Only 15.8% of respondents feel that police operations related to organized crime are poorly covered by the media. One interviewee stated however that the police point of view is not always conveyed appropriately:

Poor in the sense that I am not sure the police point of view gets across as good as it should, even when there are background interviews that are done by the media. There is a tendency to not report the police perspective on things the way it should be done. (#4)

Another manager was concerned about a lack of follow-up reporting by the media:

I think that what is very interesting here is that when it comes to reporting this particular issue, this is where the media could actually try to strike a balance between the glossiness, the jazziness, the appeal to the public and some really hard focused informed reporting. It is very nice and easy and it sells paper if you report on the beginning of an event- an explosion, an execution- but when it comes to a successful conclusion of that, that is where they are a little bit lacking. Another reason, many times the police have been criticized for something that they did - allegedly did- in the course of investigating one of these high profile cases. Yet, when the record is clear, there is really no follow up to make sure that everybody now understands the situation as it really happened (#5)

Trials

Most respondents(89.5%) feel that trials are sufficiently covered by the media. Also, police

managers seem to be satisfied with the quality of the coverage: more than a third (36.8%) think the quality is good and over half (52.6%) feel it's adequate. Some managers said this is due to the skill and experience of the reporters.

[Translation] The reason is that trials are often covered by reporters that specialize in legal issues and this comes across in the articles and stories they publish. (#15)

[Translation] The quality is often good because these people are assigned to the courthouse and they sit in the courtroom everyday. (#17)

However, a minority of respondents (10.5%) did not share this view. They feel that in their region journalists do a poor job.

They tend to, again, sensationalize the issues around what the police have done wrong or the controversies around testimony before the cases are done. They lead people to conclusions before court cases are finished. For instance, if the defense is just putting their case in... There are a lot of people in the media and there is a lot of people in the public that don't understand that a defense case is just that; it is the defense's side of the investigation. They will print a big splash 'Police officer accused of such and such...' when really all it is, is the defense theory. They only sensationalize one side of the investigation or the other so I would say it is poor quality. (#1)

Political Interventions Related to Organized Crime

Respondents feel, for the most part (78.9%), that media coverage of political interventions related to organized crime is sufficient. Regarding the quality of the coverage, opinions were mixed. A majority of them (57.9%) said the quality was adequate and 21% said it was good, even though some believe politicians should get more involved:

[Translation] If you ask me if there are enough political interventions, I would say no, but those that do occur are sufficiently covered, I think. (#6)

A minority of managers (21%) said the coverage was poor. Some argued that media coverage of political interventions is shallow:

I don't think that in terms of reporting and media coverage that the detail is provided, for example, legislative change or the analysis that informs legislative change or changes in operation. That is why I would say poor. (#12)

[Translation] Not necessarily in terms of the contents of the legislation, but more on the impact it will have and so forth. People often hear about the government taking action or

setting up a group; they make an announcement, but there is no explanation as to their goals. It is not required to discuss the goal or method of the operation, but there should be more information about people. (#20)

In-Depth Articles, Editorials and Investigative Reporting

Most police managers (nearly 78.9%) said the media do not carry enough analysis, editorials and stories providing in-depth discussions of organized crime-related issues. Some respondents commented:

I don't think I can recollect, except in a few isolated cases, a very complete and thorough journalistic report on organized crime or analysis of an aspect of organized crime. (#12)

[Translation] Except for Auger, not many do it. Maybe a few once in a while, but it's not enough as far as I'm concerned [...] It's generally well done. (#20)

But opinions are mixed regarding the quality of editorials, in-depth articles and investigative reporting on organized crime. While some interviewees (21%) think the quality is good, nearly one third (31.6%) view it as poor. In some cases, journalists were described as being biased:

It depends on who it is. Put it this way, some of those documentary shows like the 5th *Estate* and *W5*, when they go at an issue and do the research, they are very biased and they are very biased usually against the police, government and authority because that is what sells. If they are going to on there and say 'the police did a great job' well it is not controversial. But if they go on there and present the victims view or the minority view then find fault with the way police handled something, well that sells newspaper. I wonder sometimes if they are really looking for the truth or are they really looking for a story that is controversial? I find a lot of the journalistic investigations are biased. I think that it comes from a need to make it controversial to sell the story. (#2)

It tends to be opinionated or one sided as opposed to balanced journalism. Let me give you an example. There was a national investigation concluding here two weeks ago involving drugs and organized crime activity between (three provinces). It just so happens that the drugs that were seized were hydroponic marijuana in (one province), but the whole organized crime picture...it was a big picture. However the editorials and analysis tended to stick to decriminalization of marijuana and a waste of resources and all those types of things, which was nothing more than the journalist expressing their personal views rather than a balanced approach like the overall impact of the organized crime activity upon the province. (#3)

One respondent stated that editorial writers are not always well documented:

[Translation] When I look at the cases I'm familiar with, I find that editorial writers base their opinions on articles published by other journalists. If these articles were poorly documented, so will the editorial in all likelihood. They're not necessarily critical of the article per se, but of the contents of the articles versus the event. (#18).

Other managers feel that the main problem regarding not only in-depth articles but media coverage in general, is that the media take the easy route and avoid discussing the impact of organized crime on society.

I don't think it is done enough to get good at it and I don't think that the media wants to get in a wider discussion about the impact of organized crime on society. I think they would much rather take the easy route, which is to simply write about the violence that is taking place... I think what is missing is wider policy discussions about the influence of organized crime and wider analysis; a more public debate about the issue. (#14)

Emphasis on Specific Activities

We tried to find out whether police managers think the media set the right priorities regarding the coverage of criminal activities. We asked them to identify (based on their own experience) which organized crime-related activities have the greatest impact on society. The managers had to rank them in order of importance (on a scale of 1 to 15, from the most to the least important) and give their opinion on the level of emphasis placed by the media on these activities (table 2).

Our first finding was the wide range of opinions among police managers concerning the importance of organized criminal activities. While there was a degree of unanimity on some activities, such as hard drugs production and trafficking (all answers were between 1 and 6), on an issue such as weapons trafficking the answers ranged from 1 (the most important) to 15 (the least important) and everything in between. A similar divergence of views was observed on issues such as smuggling, counterfeiting, environmental crimes, intimidation of justice officials, migrant smuggling, soft drugs production and trafficking, and procurement of prostitutes.

An average of all the answers gave us an order of importance for all respondents against that of the media (as perceived by police managers).

Table 2: Organized Crime-Related Activities

(Order of importance: Most important = 1; Least important = 15)

Criminal activities	Police managers	Media
Hard drugs production and trafficking	3.11	3.67
Drug import and export	3.44	4.06
Intimidation of justice officials	4.50	5.65
Money laundering	4.94	8.81
Intimidation/extortion of the public	5.28	5.35
Soft drugs production and trafficking	6.06	7.31
Economic crimes (telemarketing scams, securities fraud, etc.)	6.50	8.33
Weapons trafficking	7.44	8.24
Smuggling	7.89	9.35
Prostitution procurement	8.67	9.88
Migrant smuggling	9.11	7.83
Environmental crimes (illegal disposal of hazardous waste, etc.)	9.17	10.29
Auto theft(networks)	9.59	10.38
Counterfeiting	10.06	12.06
Gambling	12.22	12.63

Criminal Activities Overlooked by the Media

Based on respondents' answers, the three activities that show the biggest differential (more than 20%) between the importance assigned by police managers and the perceived importance given by the media are money laundering, economic crimes and intimidation of justice officials.

Several police managers believe that economic crimes are often overlooked by the media. Some provided examples:

[Translation] Take money laundering. To me, this is a major and extremely serious problem. For the media, it is fairly serious, but not that bad after all. As for the public, they seem almost unconcerned. There is a sharp difference between police perception, which is mine, and that of the public at the other end of the spectrum; journalists come somewhere in between [...] This suggests to me that they do not see all the consequences of money laundering as a destabilizing factor in society. It has become almost routine for individuals who make money through crime to invest it in a company or on the equity market. This is part of the "good crook" image. I think there is a real difference of

perception here. (#15)

The real issue is that if organized crime becomes sufficiently wealthy, they will supplant legitimate forms of government and legitimate forms of businesses and will start to subvert political processes. That is the real issue. (#14)

Let's talk about softer crimes like frauds and telemarketing frauds, because that is organized crime. A lot of people get hurt financially over that but sometimes it is seen as not having the same kind of impacts as murders and the physical damage that drugs does to people. We do a lot of education or we try to through the media in regard to those kinds of crime. To put more to the floor the extent of the damage that people suffer as a result to that. When you see it as just fraud, somebody loses some money, the media tends to report that way. They don't talk about the damage of families. Some people commit suicide over it, the broken families and the marriages that fail because of it. All those kinds of things are there and the damage to the credibility to our institutions is in play there as well. All those things don't tend to get out there in the media like they should in my view.(#4)

This perception by police managers is consistent with the findings of studies which contend that some issues, such as corporate crimes, are often shunned by the media. A study by Lloyd and Walton (1999) found, for example, that despite a major increase in corporate fraud in the United Kingdom (linked to technological advances and the involvement of organized crime), economic investigative reporting was on the decline. The researchers explain that this type of coverage requires too much resources for too little benefit.

Journalists also confirmed (Dubois 2002) that some criminal activities, such as economic crimes, are less attractive to the media because they are not very spectacular or disturbing and it requires an extra effort by journalists to make them interesting.

In short

Police managers feel that the media tend to give too much emphasis to organized crime activities involving violence. While most agree that these events are covered well and accurately (i.e. no mistakes in the reported facts), several managers stated that the media often fall into the trap of sensationalism. Because of this attraction to violence and spectacular events, the media tend to skip over organized criminal activities without apparent violence. The most understated activities in terms of their impact include money laundering and economic crime. Police managers also stated that too much media exposure is given to positive or socially acceptable events linked to organized criminal groups. They nevertheless consider that the coverage of police operations, trials and political interventions related to organized crime is sufficient and adequate. Lastly, they

are concerned about a lack of in-depth articles, editorials and feature stories that could provide an in-depth look at issues related to organized crime. Some managers think the biggest shortcoming is that the media never provide a comprehensive view of the actual causes and overall impact of organized crime in Canada.

Influences

The Media's Influence on Public Opinion

The Canadian public is exposed to extensive media coverage of events related to organized crime. Every day, an impressive array of stories appear in both print and broadcast media. A study estimated at more than 27,000 the number of articles that referred to organized crime in 15 Canadian dailies and magazines over a six-year period (Beare & Ronderos, 2001).

Is the public's perception of organized crime affected by this media coverage? Almost all interviewed police managers stated emphatically that public opinion is definitely influenced by the media.

According to some respondents, this influence can be explained by the fact that people use the media as their main source of information on organized crime:

[Translation] We have an advantage: we are familiar with organized crime, we know the people, we know how they operate. People in the street know nothing about organized crime; my mother and father know nothing about organized crime. Whatever they know about biker gangs they have read in the newspapers or seen on television. This is beyond being influenced; their understanding of the issue is shaped by the media. (#6)

A lot of people I know think that if it is in the paper, it is gospel. We know differently of course. Definitely there is an influence. (...) If you talk about the average person- that doesn't have interaction with the media - they tend to probably accept what is said to them. (#9)

[Translation] Depending on what is written in the media or how organized crime-related events are covered, the public will draw its own conclusions and develop its own perception of organized crime or crime in general in Quebec. I feel they have a responsibility... (#17)

This view by police managers is consistent with the results of a survey conducted in the U.S. which shows that up to 95% of the population use the media as their main source of information

on crime. (Graber, 1979).

One manager interviewed in our survey argued that with respect to organized crime, the media not only mold the public's perception, they have more credibility than the police among citizens:

They suggest opinion. They guide opinion. They are the main source of information to the public. Therefore, the public is more likely to accept stories coming out of the media than anything the police has to say because we are not free to give out that information as the media does. We are sort of between a rock and a hard place, knowing that the story is either wrong or misleading or totally erroneous. There are privacy issues; there is any number of a thousand issues that keep us from correcting, not sometimes just honest mistakes, but certainly misleading and poorly reported events. Media has a huge influence in what public knows and believes in. (#1)

Police managers believe public perception of crime is skewed by the way organized crime-related events and activities are handled by the media. This distortion mainly affects two aspects: violence (and risks to the community) and the image of organized criminal groups.

Perception of Violence

Several police managers asserted that the media give citizens the impression that organized crime generates much more violence than what is actually observed by the police on the ground. The way organized crime-related events are handled in the media gives citizens the feeling that they live in a violent world and it increases their sense of fear, as emphasized in these comments:

I think the biggest thing is by repetition of the message on organized crime activity leaves people to believe that organized crime is running rampant in the community and that the world is bad place. Reality is with organized crime types are that it may be restricted to certain groups for example, outlaw motorcycle gangs perhaps. It doesn't affect the community overall. From a perception of security, it involves a segment. I think that media quite often can portray ' your community has become overrun with organized crime or has become extremely violent' when in fact it is not necessarily the case. There may have been cases; examples of violence to certain people, but that is not society in general. That is the perception that people are left with.(...) In some communities, if you watch the local news, the media will always start off with the murders that have happened or the violence that has happened. Maybe that is all they are going to report and you come away from there saying 'Holly Gee! Who would ever want to live in that community!'
(#3)

We have had a incidents here in the city where we have had a number of drive by shootings and those type of offences. We know that they were targeted at individuals that were involved in that type of activity. These aren't random shootings. The media plays a tremendous role in how they report that. They could either set the stage with their

headlines and their opening remarks referring it under a city under a siege or that the streets aren't safe compared to the reality of the situation that you may have rival gang faction that were targeting each other in a very public way. They could certainly influence the public thinking in terms of whether or not the streets are safe. (...) I think that even though most people realize that the media or certainly some media will exaggerate and maybe sensationalize stories. I think the average person who really doesn't have much contact or no contact with the police or much knowledge in terms of what public safety is about will see that and be very concerned. (#11)

[Translation] The media clearly play a very important role. Also, I've always been struck by the surveys conducted: even though crime rates have been dropping for several years in Quebec and Canada, the feeling of insecurity keeps increasing. (#15)

Several studies provide evidence of the media's influence on the public's perception of crime. The fact that the media give more coverage to specific types of crimes might explain why, despite a relatively low crime rate in Ireland, the Irish apparently believe themselves to be in the midst of a crime epidemic. According to O'Connell (1999), the media are to blame for this distorted sense of reality. His study, based on articles published in Irish newspapers, argues that the media shape the perception of crime in four ways:

- by more frequently reporting extreme or atypical crimes
- by giving much more space to extreme crimes
- by mostly covering crimes involving vulnerable victims and invulnerable offenders
- by being pessimistic about the justice system

Several researchers also claim that there is a connection between the way crime is covered by the media and the public's sense of fear and preferences regarding crime-fighting policies.

For example, a researcher from Birmingham University (Kemshall 1997) found that the Dunblane massacre heightened the perception of crime-related risks both in the public and the media.

This researcher looked at the perception of risk and danger, the possible exaggeration of these perceptions, the potential impact of such an exaggeration on discussions about risks to citizens, and the effect this might have on the development and implementation of crime-fighting policies. His study makes a connection between the public's perception of risk and their demand for more crime-fighting policies.

Other researchers have shown that those who watch television more are more likely to develop a sense of fear and vulnerability, which motivates them to demand stricter crime-fighting policies.

“Ritualized displays of any violence (such as in crime and disaster news, as well as in mass-produced drama) may cultivate exaggerated assumptions about the extent of threat and danger in the world and lead to demands for protection. What is the net result? A heightened sense of risk and insecurity (different for groups of varying power) is more likely to increase acquiescence to and dependence upon established authority, and to legitimize its use of force, than it is to threaten the social order through occasional non-legitimized imitations.” (Gerbner et Gross, 1976, p.193-194).

It is not surprising in this context that police departments often have to respond to citizens who have security concerns which may have been raised by the media.

Perception of Organized Criminal Groups

The coverage of organized crime in the media also affects the public’s perception of organized criminal groups. According to police managers, these individuals are portrayed as good people and heroes in the media, and citizens come to believe that they are not threatening to society:

I think the majority of the public are not exposed to the point where they see organized crime for what it is. Even when we speak, sometimes people are very cynical about it and believe we are only saying these things because we want bigger budgets. There is a dichotomy of issues here. The public perception is nowhere near the reality and we don’t seem to be able to get the information across accurately because of the efforts of organized crime to sanitize their own image. (#21)

I am a believer that - I will use, for instance, the Hell’s Angels organization prior to all the wars ahead in Quebec- there is parts in this country where people think they aren’t all bad guys. That is because they have made a major point in moving out and doing parts of the public relations. Locally here, they held golf tournaments to raise money for cancer. Out in Western Canada, they have ‘teddy bear’ runs. They show up in England; the Hell’s Angels rode with their colours on in the parade for the Queen. That stuff doesn’t just happen; that is well orchestrated by these very well organized criminal groups. They are trying to get the message out that they are not everything that the police say that they are. Does it influence people? Maybe in the end, maybe not that much, but I suppose there are some people out there that may sit back and say ‘are they really as bad as what people are saying?’ (#8)

I think we talk about some of it earlier about placing these individuals on a pedestal and glamorizing these individuals because it sells papers. But at the end of the day, people would probably look at a Mom Boucher or the ‘Teflon Don’ (John Gotti) in New York, but they placed him on a pedestal and basically said that charges can stick with this guy. He’s beating the system so they look at him almost as a hero. I am sure that biker gangs hire marketing experts and then have photo-ups giving to charity groups and doing charitable things and after a while media portrays this. People then start thinking ‘maybe the Hell’s Angels are not that bad’, but good God, they are killers, they traffic drugs and they’ve ruined people’s lives and the list goes on. Because of the image presented by the media sometimes, people get the wrong impression. (#2)

Influence of Public Opinion on Police Managers' Decisions

We attempted to find out whether police managers could be influenced by citizens' views and concerns about organized crime.

On this topic, about two thirds of the interviewees said they have to consider public opinion in their decisions and actions. Most respondents specified that law enforcement's role is first and foremost to serve the community. Their duty is to listen to the people, and remain accountable to them, as emphasized in these comments:

You always have to consider public opinion, always. You need the support and confidence of the public; it is a prerequisite to what we do. You must always consider it. (#12)

The public are ultimately the client. It is hugely important that the public have a level of comfort with the way the police are looking after their communities. Safe homes and safe communities is sort of the goal of policing for us. If people don't feel safe, people don't feel that the police are not doing a good job then you fail. (#1)

[Translation] I think it is unavoidable in the sense that, while I may be able to make decisions and explain them, I can't make decisions that run counter to public opinion or to what is deemed socially acceptable. If I actually defy public opinion, I need at the very least good arguments to justify it. (#6)

We are a proactive organization that communicates on an ongoing basis. If I have a decision to make on budget cuts or allocation of resources, I have the input that I receive from the community that decides how we are going to do together. (#10)

[Translation] My primary concern, my ultimate goal is to make sure that no robbery or anything else happens, but my reality is such that I must establish a feeling of security so that people feel comfortable and can move around the city with a minimum of risk. I have to consider public opinion. (#20)

One respondent stated that meeting the community's expectations was not only his duty but his obligation:

Everything I do has to meet what the community needs are. For instance, when I do a business plan to do a new program or seeking more money to do something, I have to be able to show how that ties in the corporate score card. (Within that corporate score card, there are concepts of safe cities, excellence in governance, excellence in service to the community...) The measures on how successful I am are those surveys that are done and town hall meetings where I meet with the community and tell them my plan for this year. 'This is what I want to do.' Then, the community tells me if that meets what they feel their needs are. (#8)

Decisions Influenced by Public Opinion

Some of the managers provided examples of how decisions can be influenced by the public. In some instances, it can be direct actions, in other cases it is more like increasing police presence or streamlining a procedure:

I could give you an example here just up the road, at an hours drive. The community there was very concerned with prescription drugs. They were so concerned that the kids were going to school and there were lots of incidents of it and there were traffickers. The community gets involved and they call a public forum and they invited some politicians there and of course we were invited. They basically said 'Look, we've had enough. We got to do something about this. This is crazy. Our kids are being exposed to serious drugs'. Coincidentally, days after that meeting we had a major drug bust of prescription drugs and got one of the top traffickers there. So everyone was very happy. Were we influenced by that public outcry? Absolutely. (#2)

[Translation] This can happen sometimes. When Daniel Desrochers was murdered – a biker explosion – before that, there were explosions but it did not affect people too much. But this time, public opinion was up in arms and we had to [...]. After Michel Auger was shot, we had to take positions very quickly and reassess things. (#6)

I think when we go about the process of setting our priorities; obviously the public interest plays a part in it. It would be accurate to say that yes we have to put more resources in areas that really more or less satisfying to public interest compared to working on certain types of criminal activity. An example would be that we realized that the public perception of safety is one that they feel safer is there is a higher degree of visibility of police. If we put more resources into programs such as a 'foot patrol program' where we have more officers being visible, that could be at the expense of not being able to do other type of activities that would probably produce more law enforcement results. You have to balance it out. If that is what the public is crying for and saying 'we want to have more visibility of police officers' - and if that means just having police officers walking the beat and not actually investigating crimes- that could certainly influence some decisions. (#11)

We had a very high profile shooting in one part of the city about two years ago. We have this high profile homicide in one part of the city and the citizens are really concerned because of that. Even though we had requested sufficient police presence in that part of the city, based on our opinion of the public perception of the decrease in safety, we increased our uniform presence there. We set up a mobile police station in that part of the city as well. The homicide itself was quite notorious, quite violent and because people were quite upset and concerned, we tried to do everything in our power to accelerate the investigation as much as we could. So, I suppose to what degree does public opinion affect us? It is not going to change our direction completely; it may just make an investigation a little bit more urgent. It may lead us to increase our presence somewhere. (#5)

However, several managers stressed that they would not go as far as supporting pointless

operations just to please the public. They explained that public opinion influences law enforcement to the extent that the actions are warranted, as suggested in these comments by respondents:

[Translation] When public opinion matches our reading of the situation, we respond to the extent of our capabilities and with the means at our disposal. [...] Take for example the marijuana issue; obviously, if public perception and our own observations show that it's a real problem, we will respond appropriately to public opinion to the extent of our capabilities. We won't commit huge police resources to operations aimed simply at reassuring public opinion. (#15)

[Translation] Public opinion may say: "We should not do this, we should not do that." We would look at that. People talk to us. We look at their suggestions and if we feel they're valid, reasonable and consistent with current laws and regulations, we implement them. (#17)

Some managers indicated that public opinion sometimes falls directly in line with police concerns:

I think it would be wrong for me to suggest otherwise. I guess using that motorcycle gang situation where the young boy was killed and then the public was up in arms. Once the public is up in arms and screaming for action, then guess what, the government and politicians get interested because they are interested in votes and everything else. The police would say that they have tried to raise this issue for a long time, but then it takes a crisis and a tragedy to bring it to the floor. When the public becomes very involved in a particular issue and screaming for action, then absolutely that makes us pay attention. (#2)

Decisions Not Influenced by Public Opinion

Not all managers said they were influenced by public opinion. About one third stated that public opinion did not affect their decisions:

I work within the parameters of the law. (...) We do what we can according to our priorities. We deal with issues depending on resources, depending on the severity of the situation, depending on the priorities; not necessarily swayed by public opinion. (#21)

On overall priorities yes, not individual cases. (...) On an individual case, the worst-case scenario would be that you make certain priorities based on something you read in the media about pressure on a particular case. You should never do that. The court system, at the end of the day, will sort that through for you. On a priority-setting basis, I think in particularly if people start to feel unsafe, there are steps that you can take to make them feel safe. (#7)

[Translation] We won't work on something if there are no priorities. We refuse; we're not just trying to please people. If we can satisfy them, that's great, if we can't, it's too bad. If we just try to please people in the community, it means that only the squeaking wheel will get the grease and we won't deal with the real problems we know exist. (#18)

Also, for cases where people demand crime-fighting actions that may not be necessary or justified, all respondents stated that a communication or education initiative has been undertaken to provide explanations and to reassure people. This process is being conducted via a communication network linking the police with the community or through the media.

Crimes the Population is Less Concerned About

If the pressures of public opinion sometimes affect police decisions or actions related to certain types of crimes, is it possible that, conversely, a lack of concern by the public for other criminal activities (such as economic crime) could cause the police to limit its actions? Some respondents emphasized that even if the population is unconcerned about specific types of crimes, this does not keep the police from committing resources to fight them:

[Translation] Public opinion is something very important. We have to be sensitive to it, but we can't expect public opinion to address every issue that may be of concern to the police department. The public will contact the police when something affects their own lives : their community, their neighborhood, their family. Organized crime doesn't affect the whole community in one sense. It does have a social impact, but it doesn't affect people individually. All narcotics cases, in our trade they're called initiated crimes. Why initiated crimes? Because nobody files a complaint. There are no complaints against prostitution – except perhaps for juvenile prostitution cases such as in Quebec City. This doesn't prevent us from working on this issue. [...] When we talk about drug import, export, production and trafficking, there again these are initiated crimes in the sense that the police have information that something is going on and we work on it. (#17)

However, another manager noted that some areas may have a lower priority than others because resources are not limitless. He gave the example of money laundering:

[Translation] Priorities have to be set. Money laundering would have to become a priority for elected officials or the public, or more resources would have to be made available or existing resources would have to be reassigned from a criminal activity considered less important by the public. This happens from time to time. It's like the stock market: stock values rise and fall. It's the same thing in the crime-fighting area. Currently, there is a criminal activity that is rising in value: pedophilia and the use of the Internet by pedophile networks. As recently as one or two years ago, this problem was not even on our radar screen. (#15)

The Media's Influence on Police Decisions and Actions

The opinions of police managers are mixed regarding the influence of media coverage of organized crime activities on their decisions and actions.

They generally feel that the media have no influence on the way they set priorities and on police procedures. For several interviewees, these principles are not debatable:

You can't be driven by what the media thinks might be happening. The objectivity of the process is to continue and do things in a professional way that you do them despite what media might be saying around you. Do not do and that may drive investigators forward to take steps that they are not ready to take because they are feeling pressure. My officers would be clear and understood that you just ride those things out. At the end of the day, all the right steps will be taken because those were the steps that should have been taken in the first place. (#7)

The processes that are there right now for setting priorities on organized crime are based on intelligence. If you let the media take over rather than relying on the intelligence that you have, you are not doing it justice. I would say no, absolutely not. (#4)

Media Coverage Considered

While stressing that operations and investigations should not be affected, respondents often stated that what is said in the media about organized crime is taken into consideration, as shown in these comments:

I guess being human and human nature being what it is, it is difficult not to take into consideration, but we certainly try to avoid directing an investigation based on what the media might be saying. Our usual approach would be to stick with procedures and stay with the facts and go with what you know, but don't let the media direct or influence your investigation or make you do something in a hasty fashion or not do something. Ideally, that is the way most people would work. But is it fair to say that the media can influence police personnel in investigation? I think yes, but I hope to think that they wouldn't change the course of action or make operational investigative decisions based that influence. (#2)

Yes they are, but what is really interesting in this question is: to what degree? I think I am quite safe in saying that obviously we are keenly mindful of the news reports. But will the news reports end up dictating the course of action? No. We are nevertheless very mindful of them. (#5)

Some police managers said they were not influenced by the media, but added they could not ignore them because they are accountable to the public and they are concerned about what is

perceived by the public through the media:

What I do is I accept the fact that the public will hold us accountable for information that is reported in the press. In most cases, we will provide that information whether it is good news or bad news. I don't have the press influence, but I let public opinion influence me. (...) I don't respond to media criticism, I respond to public criticism. (#10)

I don't think they do put pressure on us, but they create public perceptions that sometimes result in pressure. I don't feel pressure by what the media expect. I work within the law and within my mandate. The media has an agenda that is basically to generate profit, so I don't follow what the media do; I follow more what the public and political people are concerned or conscientious about. Very often, that comes with the result that the media counts. (#21)

It is a sad reality that policing news generates publicity so we have to respond accordingly. It is a never-ending attempt for us to try and get our story out.(...) Anyone that says 'no' isn't faced with a predatory media because media sways public opinion. If you are a public chief like I am where you are out in the public all the time, they constantly remind you of stories they have read in the paper or seen on the news. (#19)

The media certainly doesn't drive the setting of our priorities, but it is an aspect of it. The media really will represent what is on the mind of the public. So if we are going to try to satisfy the public, we need to be cognisant. If the media is calling for certain action and the media is speaking - and that is not coming from only 2 or 3 individuals- then I sure they are giving the sense from the public. The public has those concerns too. It is a balancing act to try to ensure that the media is not driving your priorities. But you certainly keep in mind the influence the media plays in the minds of the public. (#11)

Fact-Checking and Communication Processes

Most respondents agreed that what is said about organized crime in the media influences at least the fact-checking processes. Some perceive the news and media reports like any other information while others see them as useful contributions:

Public opinion is one thing and we are very concerned about that, but when you look at what the media is saying, it puts you on alert to get the real story, get the real picture. Then you make your decisions around that. I can't really say that the media influences the decision-making directly. Indirectly, it may take you those next steps to find out. (...) The media is just sort of a flag that may or may not call for more inquiry...(#1)

If somebody were to stand up and say 'this is the worst thing that is happening here', we would take that into consideration, but then look for supporting evidence to show that in fact it is and that we should be doing something about it. If the media reported that this is in fact the worse thing that is happening, we would take that as a information source but we would confirm with our own to make sure that that is the case and it is not merely somebody that is reporting the loudest voice around. (#3)

[Translation] The media have never made me change a position or a course of action I

had taken. [...] However, what is written or said in the media will lead me to take action to check and validate. They may point to a problem that we missed because we were busy somewhere else. This is how they can become partners. I do my assessment and if I have to conduct an operation, I will do it, no doubt about it. (#17)

It would influence me from the point of view that I would go look to maybe do further research in an area or a subject; go look into something that maybe normally I wouldn't have. (#8)

[Translation] It has an influence on me. If I read the media and find out that an activity or something is going on that I was not aware of or that we had put on the back burner, I will ask my staff to look at it. [...] Often, it is not necessarily a reality of organized crime, it may be a perception problem; people are under the impression that [...] A sense of security has to be restored. If you look at the situation and you discover there is a real problem, actions will be taken and resources will be committed to solve the problem. If it's a matter of perception, you have to work on that. (#20)

Some police managers said that the media have no influence on their operations related to organized crime but they may affect their communications with the community and the media:

[Translation] It doesn't affect me directly, but when I read the papers and watch television I can't help but be influenced by what I see. [...] We are influenced at least by the way our decisions are perceived by people [...] maybe not to the extent that our decision would be changed, but we may communicate it differently or use a different strategy next time. (#6)

There might be some influence in regard to how you might time the media reporting of an incident. We look at media strategy obviously when we are reporting things and timing is sometimes very important. The message that you want to pass- you could be influenced by what you know from the past on how media reports things - to put together a media package to take the best advantage of that. (...) Sometimes we end up responding to the media and most the time we are doing things that we just don't publicize. When we start being criticized by the media, then it causes us to inform them and make them aware of other things we hadn't after that point. (#4)

[Translation] I read and follow very closely what is said and written in the media. When I feel something should be corrected, I ask my public relations officer to contact them [...] Are they influencing me? No. I simply want to be sensitive to my external environment. (#17)

There is nothing that is raised from the media that I don't know about. If I didn't agree, I am required by the media to use energy to appear publicly to justify why I am doing it a certain way. That takes time and energy, but I am not changing my tactics and assigning people to a concept the media has just dreamed up. (#19)

Direct Influence

A few respondents admitted that operations against organized crime are sometimes conducted as

a response to concerns raised in the media. They stressed, however, that these operations must not keep the police from acting on their own priorities:

I wouldn't want to think that I would not do something that I should be doing that is very important. My answer would be that it influences me from the point of view that I would have to look at how I can address that other issue also. It may influence me that I would redirect resources, let's say, to maybe something less serious. But I wouldn't stop doing something that was very important because of the media. (...) If the media is focusing in on issues, they are not always wrong either. It may mean that something does need to be addressed, but I wouldn't stop my very important project to do it. (#8)

Another respondent stated that what he learns in the media can affect the level of his response to emerging situations:

It is broader backdrop for decisions that are made. If I make a decision on an organized crime matter and I have been reading about very serious events occurring back East, it affects the level of severity that I would consider... For example, an Eastern European crime group engaged in environmental dumping activities in the East; I might jump on that more quickly because I am aware of how it has manifested itself back East through the media reporting. (#14)

Exceptions and Political Influence

A few managers explained that even though they are not generally influenced by the media, there may be unavoidable exceptions:

[Translation] I would say that, as a general proposition, the answer is no; but in some specific cases, the answer is yes. I will give you a concrete example: the shooting of crime reporter Michel Auger. Some crimes, objectively speaking, are not any worse than the ones committed the day before on completely anonymous people. It may be a case of the straw that breaks the camel's back, or the police department or elected officials taking concrete steps because some crimes have a high profile in the media. Let's take the case of Michel Auger – although we could also use the example of Daniel Desrochers, the kid who was killed by a bomb; cases like these are covered extensively. [...] They're obviously compelling events that influence the police and the politicians. When I say "influence the police", I'm not referring to investigative procedures, because these procedures are just as professional whether it is an anonymous or a high-profile murder case. There is no difference from a technical point of view because they are processed in the same manner. As it relates to the authorities and also at my level [...] efforts will be made, maybe more police officers will be assigned to operations like these to help solve the crime because media pressure is intense. We can't deny that. It's part of the job... (#15)

Some respondents stated that they are not influenced by the media, but they sometimes have to take into account the positions taken by elected officials, who obviously can be influenced:

To the extent that media can put pressure on elected officials from a 30 000 foot level- if they put a lot of emphasize on a particular type of activity like drug smuggling and report strongly that there is not sufficient attention being paid to that - that could influence our political people as opposed to taking a different approach to resource and that kind of thing. That could have influence at that level. If the government priorities become influenced by the media, that is reflected sometimes in our priorities. We are influenced by two things; the intelligence that we get through criminal information and the government priorities. They have obviously the right to look at the police community across the country and based on what the public interest is say 'we believe you should be paying more attention to this area'. (#4)

In short

Almost all interviewed police managers stated emphatically that public opinion regarding organized crime is definitely influenced by the media. According to some respondents, this influence can be explained by the fact that people use the media as their main (and sometimes their only) source of information on organized crime. This situation is said to have a negative impact. In fact, several managers feel that the media give citizens the impression that organized crime generates much more violence than it actually does. The way organized crime-related events are covered by the media heightens the sense of insecurity in the community. Several managers also believe the public's perception of organized criminal groups is influenced by the media. For example, they think outlaw motorcycle gang members are portrayed as "good guys" or heroes and, as a result, people start believing that these criminals are not as bad as the police claim they are.

Also, about two thirds of respondents said they have to take public opinion into account for their decisions and operations. Most interviewed police managers agreed that law enforcement's role is, first and foremost, to serve the public and to listen and remain accountable to them. However, several stated that public opinion could sway their decisions, providing it was warranted by circumstances.

With respect to the influence that media coverage of organized crime activities might have on the decisions and actions of police managers, respondents were qualified in their opinions. Police managers generally contend that law enforcement priorities and procedures are not affected by the media. However, several respondents stated that they take into account what is disseminated in the media, because they are accountable to the community and are concerned about what is

perceived by the public through the media. Many police managers also said that their communications process is influenced by the media. Some stressed that they have to intervene in the media to justify their actions or correct inaccurate information. Others indicated that they adjust their communications strategy when they realize that a piece of information has been misconstrued. Many respondents also said that organized crime-related information disseminated by the media has an influence on fact-checking processes. When it is confirmed that an operation has to be conducted, decisions are made accordingly. A few managers explained that, even though they are not affected generally by the media, there may be exceptions for special, unavoidable cases such as the death of an 11-year old child caused by a car bomb or the shooting of crime reporter Michel Auger. Finally, some respondents stated that they are not influenced by the media, but they sometimes have to take into account the positions taken by elected officials, who obviously can be influenced.

Notes

1 To protect their privacy, respondents were identified with a randomly assigned number(1 to 20).

2 In one case a deputy was selected (superintendent).

3 A border town, a town on the Pacific coast and a town in the center of the country.

4 Emphasis refers to the extent of the coverage (number of stories, news space, order of precedence in newscasts, etc.) as compared to the relative importance given these activities by police managers. Quality refers to the accuracy and truthfulness of the facts and the ethics of the process.

5 Police managers mentioned that they keep abreast of public opinion by conducting community surveys and through telephone calls and emails received from citizens. Hot lines (such as Info-Crime) are also used. They explained that their departments inquire about public grievances at town council meetings and take part in safety promotion committees, citizens committees and other community meetings. Also, the media were often cited among the sources of information used by police managers to understand public opinion.

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