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# Youth Attitudes Research: Key Findings 2005-2011



Canada

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SECTORIELS DU GOUVERNEMENT DU CANADA

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## The Research - Youth Attitudes Towards Policing

**To monitor youth interests in a career in policing, 6 studies were conducted, using two different research methods:**

- surveys(on-line)
- focus groups – youth and influencers
- over 3000 youth surveyed

**Participants in the research included: youth in the general population, and youth currently enrolled in law enforcement studies at select Community Colleges, influencers of youth attitudes.**

**All studies conducted by Ipsos Reid**

- Youth Attitudes Towards Policing (2011)
- Focus on Career in Policing (2010)
- Community College Student Survey (2010)
- Perceptions and Attitudes about Police and Policing as a Career (2009)
- Views on Policing (2007)
- Reconnecting Government with Youth (2005)

**The background and general information from these studies provides useful contextual information for targeted recruitment strategies designed attract young people to work in policing.**





## Findings - Downward trend lines in attitudes 2005-2011

### No more interest in policing now than in 2005

- all studies show persistent low levels of “interest” among youth to pursue a career in policing
- many youth find some elements of policing appealing, but this attitude is generally negated by the perceived image – police officers are typically “Caucasian, male, robotic, rigid, unapproachable, and physically authoritative”
- however, indications are that youth do not completely reject the notion of becoming an officer they need more “social marketing.”
- consistently, youth surveyed noted that police play a positive role in society and in communities

### Negative associations persist about the career

- early negative experiences “run-ins” with police, public scrutiny of police abuse of power, and inaccurate portrayals of the police in popular culture and the media
  - these stereotypes appear to have a strong influence on how youth view the day-to-day work of policing
- the most distinctive and compelling features of the career - the varied nature of the job, the stability of the job, and the opportunity to pursue further education
- lack of clarity persists about the day-to-day work of policing, potential wages and benefits, specific details related to the hiring process

### Youth, their family & friends do not perceive policing as a viable career option

- number of youth who view policing as a potential or desired career path has continued to decrease
- perceived level of support from the family and friends to a potential policing career continued to decline



## Findings - Downward trend lines ...

### Negative perceptions have changed little over the past 5 years

- despite strong wage potential, and varied work days, many youth reported considering alternative career options such as: education, health care, technology, or skilled trades
- consistently, policing falls at bottom of the list for both males and females.
- youth, families and friends perceive police work as dangerous, not conducive to a healthy work/life balance, and stressful
- the hiring process that is both lengthy and arduous
- knowledge of starting wages and wage potential is somewhat mixed

### Those already “invested” buck the trends

- majority of college students enrolled in law enforcement foundations studies say family and friends would support their interest in pursuing policing
- most would encourage others they know to consider policing as a career
- these students are more knowledgeable of starting salaries and benefits

### What do youth want in a career

- consistently youth report 3 important factors when considering future employment prospects
  - pay and other forms of monetary compensation
  - having fun at work
  - opportunities to do interesting work
- most youth agree that policing offers a stable job, varied work day, and good pay, and does allow for independent thinking





# Findings – Youth interest in career declining

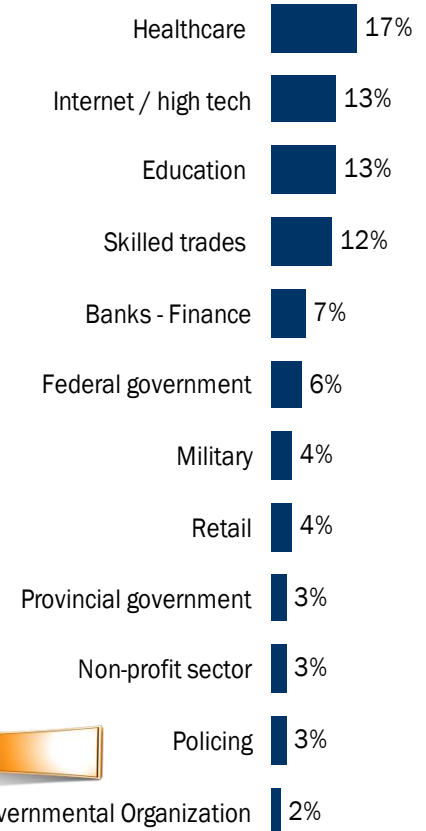
**2005 - 5% of youth surveyed were interested in policing as career - ranked 6th out of 12 career choices**

**2009 - 4% of youth were interested in policing career - ranked 9th out of 12 careers**

**2010 - only 3% of youth were interested in policing**

Those most likely to express an interest in a policing career are:

- aged 16-17
- has/had a member of family employed as a police officer
- male





# Findings – decreased perception of employment opportunities

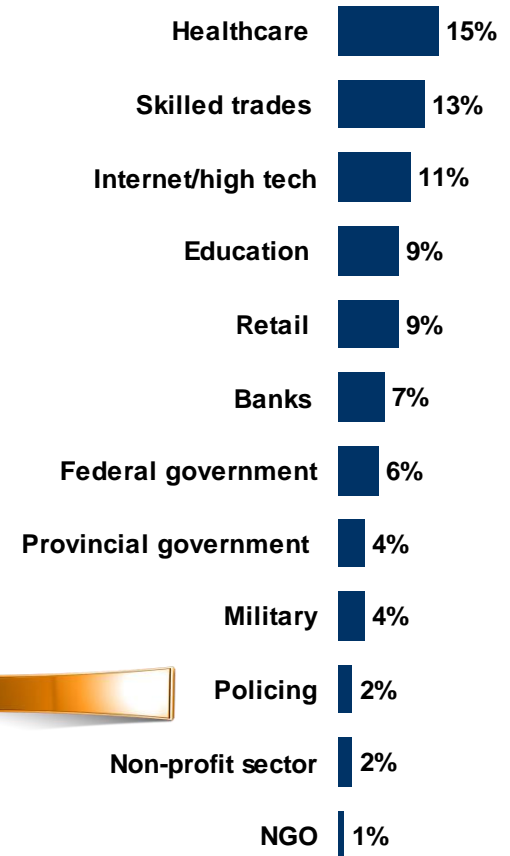
**2005 - 3% of youth say policing offers the most employment opportunities - ranked 7th out of 12 careers**

**2009 - 3% of youth said policing offers the most opportunities - ranked 11th out of 12 careers**

**2010 - 2% of youth said policing offers the most opportunities - ranked 10th out of 12 careers**

Those most likely to feel policing offers the most employment possibilities, include:

- those with member of family employed as a police officer
- those aged 16-17
- males





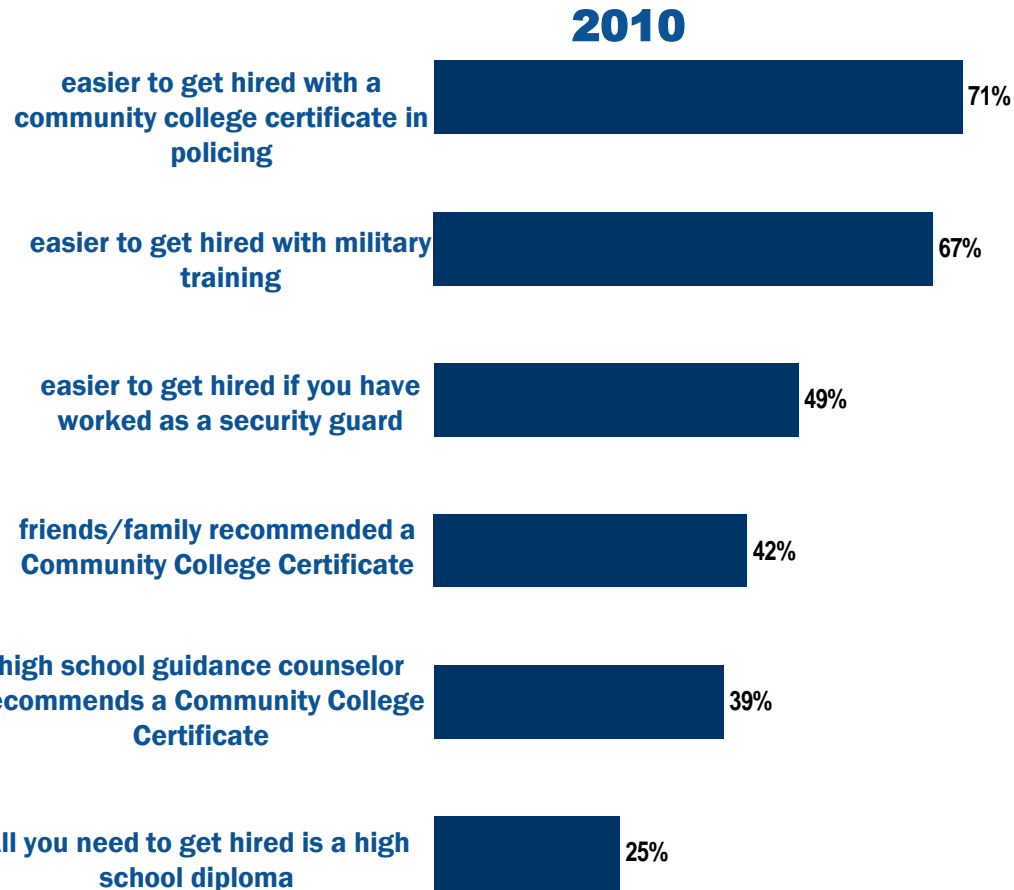
# Findings - Fewer youth see value in community college course

**Do youth think they are more likely to be hired with community college certificate in policing - 82% in 2009 decreased to 71% in 2010**

**More likely to be hired with military training - 77% in 2009 decreased to 67% in 2010**

**More likely to be hired with security guard work experience - 55% of youth 2009 thought it would be beneficial**

NOTE - these three statements in the 2010 survey were not asked in 2009 - no comparative values available



## Findings – positive trends

### **Decreasing percent of respondents who think policing is an avenue they would pursue only if all other options were exhausted**

- 2007 - 27% of respondents were of this opinion
- 2009 it was 17%
- 2010 it is 15%

### **Policing is seen as more of a “middle of the pack” type career**

### **Youth not particularly enthusiastic about a career in policing, but they do see some merit or benefits to the career**

### **Youth appear to genuinely understand the qualifications to become police officers**

- youth reject the notion ethnicity, sex, and sexual orientation could help or hinder one’s ability to become an officer
- youth pointed towards physical conditioning/attributes, mobility, and academic achievement as being the most sought after characteristics



## Other observations

### Persistent attitudes towards 'getting into' policing

- consistently, youth feel that 'you're more likely to get hired if you already know a police officer'
- youth agree that physical conditioning level, education and past (positive) behaviour are key to 'getting a job in policing'
- lack of available job opportunities is a persistent view among youth

### The imperative to change perceptions

- youth have a very specific image of who a police officer "is" - unfortunately this firm image often does not correspond with how they see themselves
- highlighting the various benefits of a policing career will not likely be sufficient
  - youth need to see themselves reflected in a policing image
- key to deconstructing stereotypical images - positive interactions between youth and a variety of police officers throughout adolescence – focus on ethnicity, gender, nature of work etc
- allowing youth to see officers in a more human capacity will help bridge the gap

### Why these results over 5 years matter

- cause for concern in attracting and selecting quality future police officer candidates
- police sector facing significant human resource challenges: a diminishing youth cohort, an aging work force, forecasted high attrition rates, increasingly complex and demanding work environments, enhanced and changing skill/knowledge requirements, etc
- a large applicant pool is necessary to ensure the sustainability of the sector and the continued delivery of quality police services



## In Summary

**“If Canada’s youth are disinterested in a policing career, the sector could be in jeopardy and face shortages of qualified workers”**

**The police sector needs to**

- **continue to research and understand the dynamics of the labour market segment**
- **actively address the sector vulnerability**
- **communicate/market the scope and quality of police services to the Canadian population**
- **develop a national police information portal for Canadians**

**Detailed research can be found on the Police Sector Council web-site**

**[www.policouncil.ca](http://www.policouncil.ca)**

