

POLICE AND JUSTICE COSTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PERPETRATION

Researchers frequently examine the costs borne by victims of domestic violence. Less attention has been paid to the costs borne by police and the justice system.

Recent research published by the School of Public Policy provides compelling evidence that domestic violence is not random. Warning signs often appear through police interactions long before an offence occurs. These patterns create opportunities for targeted early interventions, enabling police and community partners to interrupt the progression of behaviours that can lead to violence. But prevention isn't only about safety—it's also about lowering costs. Reducing perpetration lowers the substantial costs borne by police and the justice system in investigating, arresting, and processing domestic violence cases.

In 2019, responding to incidents of domestic violence accounted for 13 per cent of the Calgary Police Service budget allocated to addressing criminality, an amount in excess of \$57.9 million in 2024 dollars.

In a report recently published by the School of Public Policy, researchers calculated the costs incurred by Calgary Police Service (CPS) and the justice system from interacting with 934 men who would eventually be charged with a crime involving domestic violence in 2019. In the 10 years prior to their 2019 charge, CPS interacted with 73 per cent of these men at least once. For 64 per cent of the men, CPS interacted with them on average 4.5 times in those 10 years.

The 934 men in the research sample amassed an astonishing 2,400 criminal charges in the 10-year period prior to them being charged with a crime involving domestic violence. The policing and justice system costs of dealing with these crimes vary by their severity.

| Offence Type | Police cost per incident | Number (%) of incidents | Total Cost | % of total costs |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Forcible confinement | \$27,269 | 33 (4%) | \$1,056,183 | 21% |
| Assault with a weapon | \$4,424 | 201 (22%) | \$1,045,726 | 21% |
| Common assault | \$1,339 | 551 (59%) | \$866,249 | 17% |
| Aggravated assault | \$23,145 | 28 (3%) | \$760,649 | 15% |
| Cost for Sexual assault | \$12,061 | 23 (2%) | \$325,597 | 6% |
| Attempted murder | \$80,664 | 2 (<1%) | \$189,353 | 3.8% |
| All Other Offences | | 96 (10%) | \$717,240 | 14.5% |
| Total | | 934 | \$4,960,997 | |

Notes: Costs are measured in 2024 dollars. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Details of these calculations are provided in the published paper.

The table provides a breakdown of the policing costs associated with only the most serious criminal charge laid against each of these 934 men. In total, these 934 crimes cost the CPS budget just short of \$5 million. If we add the cost of responding to those incidents (\$4.1 million), and the court system (\$4.4 million), the authors calculate the cost of addressing just these 934 offences exceeded \$13.5 million.

Were they to add the costs incurred by the police and justice system for all 2,400 criminal charges laid against the 934 men and include the cost of police encounters not resulting in a criminal charge, the total exceeds \$29.5 million. Even this amount pales in comparison to the costs borne by victims, the costs for the social agencies established to assist them, and the health system that bears the costs of treating the harm to their physical and mental health.

The costs of interventions to prevent domestic violence would have to be extraordinarily high to make them unjustifiable. They are not. Evidence from Calgary and beyond consistently shows the benefits of prevention efforts far exceed their costs. The report discussed here calculates intervening earlier with domestic violence offenders is highly cost effective and reoffences and subsequent victimization can be reduced on average by 40 per cent.