

- 64% think that the behaviour of young people in their community is “much worse” or “somewhat worse” than five years ago;
- 30% think that racial or ethnic relations in their community are “much worse” or “somewhat worse” than five years ago; and
- 40% believe that their personal safety from crime in their community is “much worse” or “somewhat worse” than five years ago.

By contrast, Professor Florian Sauvageau told the Committee about a British public opinion survey on the causes of violence in society in which only 12% of the respondents attributed the increased level of violence in British society to television:

*The Broadcasting Standards Council of Great Britain conducted a study in 1990 in which it asked people about the causes of violence. While I don't place too much importance on surveys, it is interesting and important to note that only 12 percent of the respondents in Great Britain felt that the primary contributor to the increase in violence in society in general, only 12 percent felt that it was television; 46 percent felt that the problem lay with the lack of discipline in the home; 21 percent felt unemployment was the cause; and 14%, lack of discipline in schools.*

*I would be interested to know what Canadians generally think causes violence in society, and to what extent they think violence on television is the main reason for violence in society.<sup>7</sup>*

In March 1993 the media reported the results of an American public opinion survey conducted by the Washington, D.C., *Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press*, in which Americans were asked about violence in television newscasts and in televised entertainment:

*... The overwhelming majority of Americans —72 percent of those surveyed —said entertainment TV has too much violence. About 25 percent described it as a “reasonable amount” and the rest said there is “very little” violence on TV or had no opinion. The opinion breakdown was virtually the same as found by a national poll taken in 1971.*

*... 80 percent said entertainment violence is “harmful” to society, compared with 64 percent in 1983. The number who think it is “very harmful” increased to 47 percent from 26 percent.<sup>8</sup>*

The fear that people express for their personal and household safety is inevitably fuelled to some extent by the mass media. The current popularity of television programs that recreate criminal events demonstrates the interest and the concern that people have for their own safety. However, some people argue that the importance given to crime in dramatic programming, and in news and current affairs shows, distorts reality and may contribute to the creation of an unwarranted amount of fear. The next section of this report is designed to outline the dimensions of that reality by presenting some facts about crime in Canadian society.