

**A Comparative Analysis of Police Misconduct Reporting Across Canadian Provinces**

*by*

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*in*

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

*We accept this thesis as conforming  
to the required standard*

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates the link between Serious Incident Response Teams (SIRTs) and public trust in police oversight mechanisms in Canada. Drawing on social control theory, it examines how transparency practices within SIRTs can foster a stronger social bond between the public and the justice system, ultimately enhancing trust and perceptions of legitimacy. The core research question revolves around whether SIRTs with a greater emphasis on community engagement and transparent communication practices demonstrably contribute to a more trusting public. Employing a qualitative methodology —literature review and comparative analysis of SIRT practices across provinces— the study explores how transparency strengthens the four key elements of a strong social bond: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. The research suggests that increased transparency fosters trust and connection with SIRTs, reinforces public belief in the legitimacy of law enforcement, encourages public participation in oversight, and strengthens public confidence in the fairness of the justice system. Conversely, a lack of transparency weakens the public's social bond with the justice system, potentially leading to decreased trust and legitimacy. While acknowledging limitations of social control theory in its focus on individual behavior, the thesis argues that the theory offers valuable insights for informing best practices in SIRT transparency.

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## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

### **I-1) Chapter Overview**

Civilian oversight, such as Serious Incident Response Teams (SIRTs), play a vital role in achieving transparency and accountability when investigating allegations of serious police misconduct. However, those concerns have been raised about the degree of transparency exhibited by SIRTs across Canadian provinces, particularly when dealing with incidents involving significant harm or potential criminality by police officers. Driven by the need to understand the impact of these variations on public trust and police accountability, this chapter establishes the rationale and significance of the research. This research will utilize social control theory as the theoretical framework in guiding the research. Social control theory focuses on how social bonds and societal influences can encourage conformity and discourage deviant behavior (Hirschi, 1969). The chapter also states the research will involve comparative analysis of SIRT practices across diverse Canadian provinces. This suggests the researcher will be comparing and contrasting the transparency practices, information disclosure strategies, and potentially the mandates and structures of SIRTs in different provinces. Employing a nuanced lens of literature review and comparative analysis, this exploratory research delves into the transparency practices of SIRTs across diverse Canadian provinces. It also aims to expand Puddister's (2023) study to illuminate variations and potential inconsistencies in SIRT information disclosure and communication strategies to enhance transparency and strengthen public trust on oversight mechanisms.

This chapter lays a basic understanding of how SIRT practices differ across provinces. This nuanced analysis will be crucial in the subsequent chapters, where the research methodology, theoretical framework, and data analysis will be explored to answer the central

question and offer valuable insights for strengthening SIRT transparency and, consequently, public trust in Canadian law enforcement.

## **I-2) Background**

Civilian oversight of police has become an increasingly salient issue in Canada, driven by demands for greater accountability, transparency, and public trust in law enforcement. This demand has prompted a shift from traditional, internal police investigations to the establishment of independent, civilian-led oversight agencies (Ferdik et al., 2013). However, the landscape of civilian oversight in Canada remains fragmented, with varying models and levels of independence across jurisdictions (Puddister, 2023). This fragmentation raises concerns about the consistency, effectiveness, and public trust in these oversight mechanisms.

Existing literature has explored various aspects of police oversight, including the historical evolution of oversight models, the effectiveness of different approaches, and public perceptions of the complaint process (Murphy & McKenna, 2014; Hope, 2021; Stelkia, 2020; Kwon & Wortley, 2022). However, there remains a gap in understanding regarding the specific transparency practices of SIRTs, the agencies responsible for investigating serious incidents involving police. While Puddister (2023) offers a comprehensive analysis of police oversight agencies, it does not delve into the specific details of how SIRTs communicate their findings and engage with the public. Recent research has highlighted the critical role of transparency in fostering public trust and ensuring the legitimacy of oversight agencies. Stelkia (2020) found that increased accountability, attributed to independent oversight, was seen as a key benefit by a majority of participants in their study. Similarly, Kwon & Wortley (2022) found that the public overwhelmingly desires independent, non-police investigators and transparent processes for

handling complaints. However, concerns remain about the actual level of transparency and accessibility of information provided by SIRTs.

This exploratory research seeks to address this gap by examining the transparency practices of SIRTs across Canada. It aims to answer the following questions:

1. How transparent are SIRTs in their communication of investigative processes, findings, and decision-making rationale?
2. What are the barriers and facilitators to transparency in SIRT operations?
3. How can transparency be enhanced to improve public trust and accountability in police oversight?

### **I-3) Research Question**

Public trust in policing hinges upon transparency, particularly when serious incidents involving the public occur. Yet, Canada's landscape of civilian oversight remains fragmented, with diverse models and mandates across provinces. While traditional internal police investigations faced public scrutiny for lack of independence, the shift to civilian oversight agencies brought hope for greater accountability. However, concerns persist regarding variations in transparency practices across provinces, leaving a gap in the people's understanding of how effectively these agencies serve the public. This exploratory research looks into bridging this gap of knowledge by exploring and analyzing the extent of transparency discrepancies among SIRTs in Canada, focusing on the scope of information disclosed, the agency's mandates and practices, accessibility for the public, and engagement with communities. By delving into these dimensions and comparing practices across provinces, this exploratory research seeks to shed light on existing disparities and identify potential avenues for strengthening transparency and fostering public trust in police accountability mechanisms.

This exploratory research recognizes the diversity in SIRT mandates and investigation scope across Canadian provinces. A set of criteria to evaluate transparency practices will be implemented in a nuanced and consistent manner. These criterias encompass aspects like information disclosure, communication strategies, accessibility of reports, and community engagement. By applying this criteria for each SIRT, this exploratory research can identify variations in transparency while accounting for differences in their investigative mandates. While challenges may arise in applying the criteria across diverse contexts, this framework provides a valuable tool for comparative analysis and ultimately, for identifying areas for improvement in enhancing SIRT transparency and public trust in police oversight mechanisms.

*Serious Incident Response Teams (SIRTs) with a greater emphasis on community engagement and consultation in their mandate and operations will demonstrate higher levels of transparency.*

#### **I-4) Rationale and Significance**

##### *I-4-a) Rationale*

Traditional internal police investigations face immense criticism for their inherent lack of independence, highlighting the need for proper civilian oversight. While the shift towards SIRTs represented a significant step forward, the absence of a national standard for transparency practices has resulted in discrepancies across provinces. By employing a comparative analysis across provinces, this research seeks to understand the rationale behind these discrepancies, identify potential best practices, and provide insights to inform the development of more uniform and effective transparency standards for SIRTs nationwide. The goal for this research is to

enhance public trust in police accountability mechanisms and to bring awareness in creating a more just and equitable society.

#### *I-4-b) Significance*

This exploratory research delves into a critical yet understudied aspect of police accountability in Canada, specifically the variations in transparency practices among SIRTs across provinces. This research addresses a crucial gap in the understanding of SIRT transparency practices, providing valuable insights and data that can inform future research and policy development. By identifying disparities and best practices in transparency, this research can guide efforts in public trust in SIRTs and the broader police accountability system. The findings can inform the development of national transparency standards for SIRTs, leading to greater consistency and effectiveness across provinces.

### **I-5) Scope and Structure**

#### *I-5-a) Scope*

This exploratory research will focus on SIRTs in Canada, specifically analyzing their transparency practices when investigating a diverse range of serious incidents involving the public. SIRTs currently exist in only eight Canadian provinces: Alberta, BC, Manitoba, NL, Nova Scotia (encompassing New Brunswick), Ontario, Québec, and Saskatchewan. These provinces have established independent SIRT agencies mandated to investigate serious incidents involving the public and police officers.

By focusing on these eight provinces, this exploratory researches' goal is to achieve a comparative analysis of SIRT transparency practices across diverse jurisdictions and SIRT mandates. The comparative approach allows for a deeper understanding of how transparency variations influence public trust and police accountability within the existing framework.

Examining serious incidents involving the public ensures the research addresses a critical area of public concern, delving into the very situations where transparency plays a vital role in fostering trust and ensuring justice.

While acknowledging the limitations in coverage due to the absence of SIRT in other provinces, this research offers a comprehensive analysis of existing SIRT transparency practices. It is important to note that the territories rely on external SIRT or police forces from other provinces, and future research may explore the potential for expanding SIRT across Canada. This research, however, focuses on the current landscape of transparency within SIRT, accountability, and public trust in police oversight mechanisms.

#### *I-5-b) Structure*

This thesis is organized into seven chapters, each addressing a distinct aspect of the research on transparency in SIRT in Canada. The structure is designed to guide the reader through a comprehensive exploration of the topic, from the theoretical underpinnings to the empirical findings and their implications.

- Chapter I: Introduction provides an overview of the research, establishing the context, background, research question, rationale, significance, and scope of the study. It also outlines the structure of the thesis.
- Chapter II: Literature Review critically examines existing literature on civilian oversight of police in Canada. It explores the evolution of oversight models, identifies key themes and debates in the literature, and highlights the gap in knowledge regarding transparency practices of SIRT.
- Chapter III: Theoretical Approach introduces the theoretical framework that underpins the research. It discusses the concept of transparency, its significance in the context of

police oversight, and the theoretical perspectives that inform the analysis of SIRT practices.

- Chapter IV: Methodology and Research Design details the methodological approach adopted for the research. It explains the research design, data collection methods (e.g., document analysis, interviews), and data analysis techniques used to examine SIRT transparency practices.
- Chapter V: Data Analysis and Results presents the findings of the research. It analyzes the data collected from various sources to assess the level of transparency in SIRT operations, identify barriers and facilitators to transparency, and discuss the implications of the findings.
- Chapter VI: Discussion interprets the research findings in light of the existing literature and theoretical framework. It discusses the significance of the findings, their implications for policy and practice, and their contribution to the broader understanding of police oversight in Canada.
- Chapter VII: Conclusion summarizes the key findings of the research, reiterates the research question, and addresses the limitations of the study. It also offers suggestions for future research directions and identifies potential avenues for enhancing transparency in SIRT operations.

## **I-6) Chapter Summary**

This chapter establishes the critical role of transparency in police accountability and introduces the central research question. It explains the rationale and significance of the study, defines the scope, and outlines the thesis structure, creating a foundation for the in-depth



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exploration of SIRT transparency practices in the following chapters. The next chapter explores the evolution of civilian oversight and analyzing existing research on SIRT transparency, identifying knowledge gaps, and laying the foundation for this research.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **II-1) Chapter Overview**

The escalating demand for transparency and accountability within law enforcement has placed civilian oversight of police conduct at the forefront of public discourse in Canada. This chapter looks into an in-depth analysis of this landscape.

Delving into the historical trajectory of oversight models, this chapter traces the evolution from traditional, internal police investigations to the rise of independent civilian-led agencies. It will dissect the diverse range of oversight structures currently operating across Canadian provinces, each characterized by its unique mandate, investigative authority, and reporting practices. By critically evaluating both the successes and shortcomings of these models, the chapter aims to illuminate the ongoing debate regarding the most effective approach to civilian oversight. Other key themes woven throughout the chapter include a comparative analysis of different civilian oversight models, an examination of the fragmentation of oversight across jurisdictions, and a synthesis of existing literature that addresses gaps in knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, the chapter will offer a detailed overview of specific civilian-led oversight agencies in Canada, by looking into their organizational structures, investigative processes, and the outcomes they have achieved.

### **II-2) Evolving Landscapes of Civilian Oversight**

Civilian oversight of policing has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades, driven by a growing demand for accountability, transparency, and public trust in law enforcement agencies. This section seeks to understand the evolution of oversight in both police investigation and governance in Canada. While primarily presented in chronological order, these

trends must be contextualized within the broader social and political landscape that shaped them and within their dynamic interplay.

#### *II-2-a) The Development of Traditional Internal Police Oversight and Investigation*

During the late 1970s, the police experienced a crisis of legitimacy as there were growing concerns of public interest regarding procedures for processing police complaints (Ferdik et al., 2013). A study from Murphy and McKenna (2014) expressed that during this time, public complaints were handled inconsistently, with no guarantee that the police would be investigated, pursued, or resolved in accordance with contemporary standards of accountability and transparency. The study states that this early approach on oversight of public complaints against police is characterized as a closed system where the police were responsible for investigating and disciplining themselves.

This demand for increased responsibility and professional accountability of police officers by the public eventually led to the introduction of citizen oversight in Canada (Ferdik et al., 2013). The emergence of civilian oversight in Canada marked a pivotal shift from the historical model of internal police investigation. This transition, driven by public demand for increased police accountability and transparency, signalled a recognition of the inherent limitations of a closed system where the police investigated and disciplined themselves. While the current model with civilian oversight agencies monitoring investigations represents progress, further evolution is necessary to fully address the concerns that initially sparked the demand for reform.

#### *II-2-b) The Emergence of Civilian Oversight Agencies*

With the growing dissatisfaction on police management efficacy on public complaints against police, several jurisdictions established a civilian body to undertake these

responsibilities. Both Murphy and McKenna (2014) and Hope K. R. (2021) identified five main types of civilian review models: investigation, review, appeals, auditor/monitor, and hybrid/mixed. These five distinct comparative models of police civilian oversight are outlined below in Figure 1 which describes its key features, including the advantages and disadvantages of each model.

These models' effectiveness is contingent on the accuracy and thoroughness of the police investigation. Murphy and McKenna (2014) stated that the civilian review boards lacked any authority or resources to independently assess the quality, comprehensiveness, or sufficiency of the completed inquiry from these models. This renders their oversight as both limited and potentially unreliable. The study notes that the increased adoption of civilian reviews was met with fierce opposition from many police leaders and their respective associates. These powerful entities, armed with vast financial reserves, legal expertise, and sophisticated public relations strategies, actively sought to discredit and delegitimize the very notion of civilian oversight by viewing it as a potent threat to their traditional authority and autonomy. For example, the study describes how police oversight bodies, such as Ontario's Civilian Police Commission and British Columbia's Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner, faced limitations due to their restricted mandate to merely review completed police investigations. Their *post-facto* assessment of adequacy, fairness, and accuracy failed to satisfy either police or their critics which led to calls for a more proactive and impactful review process –independent of police involvement at both investigative and adjudicatory stages.

**Figure 1. Typology of Models of Civilian Oversight of Police**

Model Type	Key Features	Advantages	Disadvantages
Investigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigations are made by entities independent from the police department and at least one pro</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Best-equipped to enforce police accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The most expensive oversight body,</li> <li>Police can resist</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>investigator</li> <li>Receives public complaints about police misconduct</li> <li>Can conduct investigations of complaints about misconduct</li> <li>Reports findings to police and public</li> <li>Staff of non-police, investigators</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>investigators,</li> <li>Executive police can simply cast blame on civilian over sightbody (less incentive to create effective police accountability)</li> </ul>
Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Receives public complaints directly/indirectly</li> <li>Police do investigations and reports/records are reviewed</li> <li>Makes recommendations to police based on reviews</li> <li>Request for further investigation (if necessary, public meetings are held to see the public's opinion)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Least Expensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential for limited resources/authority</li> <li>Less independent than other types</li> <li>Review board members may have insufficient expertise who are undertaking duties</li> </ul>
Appeals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complaints received, scrutinized, and investigated by police</li> <li>Outcomes of investigations of complaints and accused officers may be appealed</li> <li>appeal body may be made of civilian and police</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complaints go straight to the police</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time from investigation to appeal may take long</li> <li>Lack of trust in the process (officers can be members of the review body and can sway appeals)</li> </ul>
Auditor/Monitor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examines patterns in complaint investigations: quality, fairness, accuracy, discipline, and thoroughness</li> <li>Some Auditors/Monitors can actively monitor/participate in open investigations</li> <li>Systematic Reviews of Police policies, practices, and training are conducted, and reforms are recommended</li> <li>Promotes broad organizational change by recommending changes for improvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less expensive than investigation type</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More expensive than review/appeal types</li> <li>Only a sample of misconduct cases gets audited</li> <li>A lot of expertise is required to meet the mandate of an auditing/monitoring program for a police service</li> </ul>
Hybrid/Mixed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Combination of two or more focus types into a unique approach to civilian oversight</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Combines two or more focus types for development of oversight processes that can be fitting for a political jurisdiction/ country</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Body employing its use can be overwhelmed by hybrid nature of mandate and lack of expertise to handle the workload</li> </ul>

The path towards fully effective civilian oversight remains arduous. While initial models focused on reviewing completed investigations, their limited scope and dependence on police-led inquiries fuelled public dissatisfaction. The struggle continues for a system with greater

autonomy –one empowered to conduct independent investigations, undertake audits, challenge police narratives, and uncover potential systemic biases.

### *II-2-c) Independent Civilian Oversight in Police Investigations*

Public dissatisfaction fueled the shift from internal police investigations to civilian-based models. Murphy and McKenna (2014) expressed the growing awareness of their limitations, particularly their inability to deliver accountability, transparency, and independence, which led to calls for reform. Public trust in civilian oversight decreased as civilians lacked control over complaint investigations and reinvestigations. The study implies that there is a trend towards more proactive and independent civilian involvement that gained momentum since the late 1990s. The Government of Alberta (2022) stated that two main approaches emerged. The radical model advocates for complete civilian control over complaint intake, investigation, and response. The other is a hybrid or “team” concept, involving police investigators and civilians working together on complaints. While there is a clear shift away from traditional oversight models from academic and policy literature, this trend seeks to move beyond police-controlled investigations and adjudication by embracing a more direct and comprehensive civilian involvement.

Other emerging methods were introduced by Walker (2001) which categorizes the process of civilian involvement and independence of these agencies. The Walker model categorizes police oversight agencies into four classes (I-IV) with varying levels of independence and civilian involvement which is displayed on Figure 2. Class I, the most independent, features civilian-led investigations and reviews. Class II involves police investigations with civilian review, while Class III relies on police investigations with a potential civilian appeal. And Class IV adopts an audit model, where civilians oversee the complaint process. Walker states that while perceived and process-based independence are crucial aspects of police oversight, the

Walker models prioritize structural independence as a foundation for building public trust and ensuring the legitimacy of oversight agencies.

**Figure 2. Models of Oversight Agency Responsibilities**

Responsibilities	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV
Complete investigative responsibility	✓			
Autonomous Agency	✓			
Non-police members	✓			
Mixed police–citizen investigation		✓		
Appellate-review only			✓	
Auditor system				✓
Policy recommendation ability	✓	✓		✓

### II-3) Navigating the Fragmented Terrain of Police Oversight

In Canada, police oversight is fragmented at both the federal and provincial levels (Puddister, 2023). At the federal level, there is no single agency responsible for overseeing the investigation of public complaints against police officers. Instead, complaints are investigated by a variety of different agencies. At the provincial level, there is also a lack of consistency in police oversight. Each province has its own oversight agency, and the mandates and powers of these agencies can vary significantly. This fragmented approach to police misconduct oversight raises concerns about the consistency, accountability, and accessibility of data (Murphy & McKenna, 2014).

In a report from the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia (BC) (2022), police oversight in BC suffers from a fragmented system, with multiple agencies bearing the responsibility for overseeing police conduct. The report stated that this decentralized approach

has resulted in inefficiencies, gaps in oversight, and unnecessary duplication of efforts. Moreover, it asserted a lack of transparency and accountability, coupled with a convoluted complaints process that erodes public trust in police. To address this issue, the report proposed the establishment of a unified, independent, and civilian-led oversight agency tasked with overseeing the conduct, complaints, investigations, and disciplinary matters of all police and public safety personnel in BC.

Puddister (2023) indicated that while all provinces possess the constitutional authority to establish their own police force, only Ontario and Quebec currently operate province-wide police services. In the case of NL, the study stated that the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary has jurisdiction over specific areas, while the RCMP oversees the rest of the province. It emphasized that provincial governments have delegated some policing responsibilities to municipal governments and police service boards, retaining ultimate authority over municipalities due to constitutional jurisdiction. Bearing the primary responsibility for police policy, provincial governments have established province-wide oversight agencies. However, the study denotes that the creation and oversight of these agencies may be shared between provinces.

#### **II-4) Existing Literature Addressing the Gap on Oversight Agencies**

Puddister & McNabb (2021) sought to address the gap in knowledge surrounding Canadian police prosecution by analyzing investigation outcomes from Ontario's Special Investigation Unit (SIU). The study revealed that the overwhelming majority (over 90%) of police assault charges stemmed from on-duty incidents, often arising during responses to service calls. The most common offenses for prosecuted officers were assault (34.5%), sexual assault (26.3%), and driving-related offences (11.2%). Notably, the study found that SIU rarely lays charges for off-duty assaults (only four instances documented, including the Theriault case).



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Sexual assault contexts differed significantly from force cases, occurring on-duty and off-duty with almost equal frequency, with a concerning 21.7% of off-duty cases involving minors and frequent co-occurrence of breach of trust charges. Interestingly, Puddister and McNabb saw that some off-duty assaults involved individuals previously assisted by the officer on-duty. The study further found that charges for officer interactions resulting in death or near-death are exceptionally rare, with only eight documented prosecutions for charges ranging from attempted murder to manslaughter, all occurring during on-duty situations. Half of these cases involved firearm discharge, resulting in two fatalities and two life-threatening injuries. The study saw that acquittal rates for officers accused of misconduct were found to be concerningly high (30%), particularly in sexual assault cases, where judges often cited issues with complainant credibility. The study also acknowledged the potential influence of other factors such as complainants committing crimes (41.5%) or resisting arrest (29.6%) on the verdicts in these cases. Despite revealing concerning trends, the study underscores the persistent gap in academic research on police prosecutions in Canada.

Expanding on existing research on police accountability, Stelkia (2020) delves into the complexities of oversight systems for the RCMP and municipal police forces in BC. The study examines both the benefits and drawbacks of these systems, exploring their impact on promoting accountability, bolstering public trust, and influencing police behavior. Stelkia's research unveils a significant barrier to accountability: BC's inconsistent oversight structure where it separates complaint processes for RCMP and municipal police. This system was criticized by 69% of interviewees, creating inconsistencies in oversight and discipline across the province, hinders equal access to justice, and consumes valuable resources even for minor complaints. It also identified challenges like lengthy complaint processing, resource-intensive minor complaints,

and persistent police resistance to civilian oversight. Despite these challenges, the study also identifies positive aspects of the current system. Notably, 69% of participants highlight increased accountability as the key benefit, attributing it to the role of independent oversight in building public trust in both the complaint process and broader policing practices. Ultimately, the research calls for a comprehensive reform of BC's police oversight system. Streamlined procedures, improved transparency, and efficient handling of minor complaints are crucial steps towards ensuring fairness, public confidence, and optimal resource allocation.

Adding a nuanced perspective to the discussion on police complaint processes, Kwon & Wortley (2022) examined the views of Toronto residents and their public perceptions of Ontario's police complaints system. While a willingness to file complaints against police misconduct is prevalent across racial demographics, particularly for serious incidents like verbal abuse or brutality, the study found that this optimism is tempered by widespread concerns about fair treatment within the system. Notably, Black individuals and those with lower police trust express particular skepticism. The study also reveals limited awareness of the existing civilian police oversight agency, with most respondents indicating alternative complaint pathways. Interestingly, despite these concerns, the desire for independent, non-police investigators remains overwhelmingly strong, highlighting a disconnect between public expectations and the current reality of police oversight in Ontario.

Puddister (2023) takes a closer look at the internal workings and limitations of police oversight agencies in Canada, shedding light on the specific difficulties in holding police accountable for serious misconduct. This comprehensive study examines the structures, procedures, and outputs of eight agencies across nine jurisdictions, offering a critical assessment of their effectiveness in holding police accountable.

While Puddister's study provides a comprehensive analysis of police oversight in Canada, encompassing all eight agencies, this exploratory research adopts a more focused approach, specifically examining transparency within each SIRT. This divergence in scope reflects a key distinction between the two investigations. Puddister's work dissects the structural, administrative, and output-based aspects of these oversight agencies, delving into areas such as case substantiation rates, independence levels, and overall transparency efforts. This comprehensive analysis paints a critical picture of police accountability in Canada, highlighting the challenges encountered in ensuring true police answerability. In contrast, this research focuses on the granular level of information disclosure, communication strategies, report accessibility, and community engagement within SIRTs themselves. The goal for this exploratory research is to illuminate discrepancies in transparency practices and bridge the knowledge gap regarding SIRTs' effectiveness in serving the public. In essence, Puddister offers a macro perspective, a thorough assessment of the entire police oversight system. This research, however, takes a micro approach, meticulously examining the transparency practices of SIRTs, a crucial aspect that Puddister's study necessarily touched upon but did not delve into with such granularity.

## **II-5) Overview of Civilian-Led Independent Oversight Agencies in Canada**

Civilian oversight of police is essential for maintaining public trust and ensuring law enforcement accountability. This section provides a general overview of SIRTs across Canada, highlighted on Figure 3 that details each SIRTs core functions and variations between provinces. The table breaks down details like the year each SIRT was established, the types of incidents they investigate, who conducts the investigations, and their authority to lay charges or manage general police conduct complaints. Following this table, a more granular examination of each

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SIRT will be undertaken. This examination will encompass the structure of each agency, including the composition of investigative teams and leadership roles. Additionally, the operational processes of each SIRT will be explored, focusing on how they receive and investigate complaints, along with the types of information they make publicly available through their reports.

**Figure 3 Overview of Serious Incident Response Agencies in Canada**

Province	Oversight Agency	Year Established	Types of Incidents Investigated	Investigators	Criminal Charges	Manages Complaints
Alberta	Alberta Serious Incident Response Team (ASIRT)	2008	Serious injuries; death; breach of trust; obstruction of justice; sexual assault; perjury; theft; fraud	Police officers and civilian investigators	Yes	No
British Columbia	Independent Investigations of BC (IIO)	2012	Death; serious harm	Civilian investigators	Recommends Charges	No
Ontario	Ontario Special Investigations Unit (SIU)	1990	Death; serious injury; discharge of a firearm at a person; sexual assault	Civilian investigators	Yes	No
Manitoba	Independent Investigations Unit of Manitoba (IIU)	2015	Death; serious injury; contravention of a prescribed federal or provincial statute; other matters, for which the Civilian Director considers it in the public interest to conduct an investigation	Civilian Investigators	No	No
Saskatchewan	Saskatchewan Serious Incident Response Team (SIRT-SK)	2021	Death; serious injury; sexual assault; intimate partner violence	Civilian Investigators	Recommends Charges	No
Newfoundland and Labrador	Serious Incident Response Team of Newfoundland and Labrador (SIRT-NL)	2019	Death; serious injury; sexual offence; domestic violence; any matter of significant public interest from police actions	Police officers and civilian investigators	Yes	Yes
Nova Scotia	Nova Scotia Serious Incident Response Team (SiRT)	2012	Death; serious injury; sexual assault; intimate partner violence; any matter of significant public interest from police actions	Seconded police officers and civilian investigators	Yes	Yes
Québec	Bureau des enquêtes indépendantes (BEI)	2016	Death; serious injury; injured by firearm during police intervention or while detained by police;	Civilian investigators	No	No

*II-5-a) Alberta Serious Incident Response Team (ASIRT)*

The ASIRT stands out as a progressive yet controversial force in Canadian police oversight. Established in 2008 through the initiative of the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police (AACP), it holds the distinction of being the only oversight agency not created in response to a specific police incident (Wakefield, 2018). ASIRT investigates a range of serious police conduct, including incidents resulting in death, serious injuries, and allegations of police misconduct like breach of trust, obstruction of justice, and fraud (Government of Alberta, 2024). Unlike some independent oversight bodies where police chiefs trigger investigations, ASIRT receives its cases from the provincial director of law enforcements. This agency employs a “hybrid model” that combines civilian and seconded police investigators for both internal police investigation reviews and their own independent investigations (Government of Alberta, 2024). However, concerns exist about this model’s effectiveness in achieving true civilian oversight.

Before ASIRTs launch, critics argued for a model like Ontario SIU, which pairs civilian investigators with former police officers. However, as of 2017, an article by Wakefield (2018) states that all ASIRT investigators were current or seconded police officers. While the article states that there is no hard data on how seconded police officers affect investigations and charges, the public strongly criticizes the current model of relying solely on former and seconded officers for ‘civilian’ oversight. This criticism suggests the model weakens public trust in the agency’s true independence (Savage, 2021).

Kinney (2021) reports that ASIRT is struggling with an “unmanageable” workload. The long-time executive director, Susan Hughson, had recently resigned as of 2021, citing an unmanageable workload and staff shortages within ASIRT. This comes amidst funding cuts and a backlog of investigations. Adding to the problems, the report states that prosecutors are reluctant

to press charges against police officers, even in serious cases. This lack of prosecution raises concerns that undermines public trust. Data also shows a significant gap between ASIRT's recommendations and actual charges laid. While prosecutors claim they follow proper procedures, there is no public explanation for dropped charges. This lack of transparency fuels public suspicion. Furthermore, the report questions ASIRT's structure. Though civilian-led, all investigators are current or former police officers. The potential for bias is evident in some of the findings, where serious injuries sustained by civilians have not resulted in charges against officers. The report claims that the problems were compounded by Alberta's outdated Police Act, criticized for loopholes and a lack of civilian oversight. However, as of December 2022, the Government of Alberta (2022) outlined significant changes to ASIRT's mandate introducing the Police Amendment Act of 2022. Previously, ASIRT was initially established as a review body, but the act transformed their role which grants them authority to lead their own investigations involving serious injury or death resulting from police actions. Additionally, ASIRT can now investigate serious and sensitive allegations against peace officers, including those beyond the police force, such as Alberta Sheriffs and community peace officers. The act also seeks to bolster public trust in oversight by establishing an independent Police Review Commission to manage public complaints and disciplinary actions. Lastly, the legislation promotes collaborations between police and communities. This is achieved by mandating police forces to develop and report on community safety plans, fostering transparency and allowing for public input on policing strategies. In an article by Ryan (2022), it states that ASIRT's funding was also increased by 35% (or \$5.3 million) to provide more staff for investigations. While these recent legislative changes were aimed to address issues identified by Kinney (2021), it remains to be seen how effectively it strengthens oversight and investigations.

Compared to most police oversight agencies that offer in-depth annual reports, ASIRTs transparency has limitations. The agency does not publicly release annual reports or allow public access to details of individual investigations. However, ASIRT does release statistics on the types of cases they handle, including the most recent such as use of force allegations, sexual offences, and corruption. Additionally, for deaths involving firearms or those occurring in custody, ASIRT releases notifications. While historical data access may be limited, they provide updates on the status of complaints directly to those who file them, typically every 45 days. As of 2022, ASIRT statistics show that a total of 54 cases were filed. From these files, 14 cases resulted in death, 16 for serious injury, 22 for sensitive allegations, and two assists. However, only one of these cases resulted in charges laid. The key challenge lies in the disconnect between ASIRT and Crown prosecutors. ASIRT has the authority to recommend charges, but the final decision on prosecution rests with the Crown, who possesses discretionary power (Wakefield, 2018). This gap can lead to situations where ASIRT recommends charges but the Crown decides not to proceed, leaving the public without a clear explanation for the dropped cases.

For any further details, refer to the ASIRT website:

<https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-serious-incident-response-team>

#### *II-5-b) Independent Investigations of British Columbia (IIO)*

Established in 2012, following the tragic death of Robert Dziekanski at Vancouver's airport in 2007 after being hit with a taser by police, the IIO is a civilian-led body overseeing all 11 police agencies in BC (IIO, 2023). IIO (2023) states that its authority stems from the provincial Police Act, which mandates police to notify the IIO in cases of serious harm or death.

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The Police Act defines “serious harm” in Part 11 as injuries likely to result in death; injuries causing serious disfigurement; and injuries causing substantial loss of mobility or organ/limb function.

Within the 2022-2023 annual reports, it states that the investigative process starts with a notification. A designated IIO team director assesses the reported incident, focusing on potential connections between officers actions/inactions and the injury, along with the severity of the injury itself. If the criteria are met, a comprehensive investigation ensues, gathering evidence like witness statements, video footage, medical reports, and forensic analysis. Following the investigation, the Chief Civilian Director (CCD) determines whether the evidence proves “reasonable ground to believe” an officer committed an offence. If so, the CCD refers the matter to the Crown Counsel for potential charges. In cases where the CCD finds no ground for charges but public interest is high, the IIO may release a public report detailing the incident and the rationale behind the decision. It is important to note that the CCD cannot directly lay charges. Their focus lies on investigation and establishing grounds for charges, with Crown Counsel holding the ultimate decision on prosecution.

The IIO operates by separating the Investigation and Operations division. The annual report details the staffing breakdown as of March 31, 2023, revealing a total of 61 employees. The larger Investigations unit houses 45 individuals, with the remaining 13 forming the Operations unit. Three additional staff members hold leadership positions outside these classifications: the CCD, General Counsel, and Executive Coordinator. The Investigations unit is led by two Chiefs of Investigations and five Team Directors that oversees three investigative teams –each with a capacity of 10 investigators. Additionally, there is an Investigations Support Services Team managing file audits with Affected Persons Liaisons and Investigative Assistants,



and a separate team of Forensic Investigators responsible for investigator training. There are also Frontline investigators, including part-time investigators working on special projects and audits, and an Investigative Analyst to round out the unit. It's crucial to note that the CCD, Chiefs of Investigations, Team Directors, all Investigators (including Forensic Investigators), and Affected Persons Liaisons hold Peace Officer designations. The IIO actively recruits investigators with a broad range of investigative backgrounds, extending beyond traditional law enforcement experience. This is reflected in the report's breakdown of investigator backgrounds: 54% possess civilian investigative experience, while the remaining 46% come from law enforcement backgrounds. This commitment to diverse expertise strengthens the Investigations unit's capabilities. The annual report also highlights key developments within the Investigations unit. The establishment of a Crown Referral Review Team ensures reports and disclosure are optimized for all investigations referred to Crown Counsel for potential charges. Additionally, the IIO has initiated the process of appointing two additional Indigenous Civilian Monitors to participate in investigations involving Indigenous Affected Persons. In order to enhance its operations and staffing, IIO secured additional funding of \$2 million. This allows new hires for 13 positions which will enable the creation of a new investigative team. However, the number of new hires compared to existing staff and workload is not specified, leaving a question about whether staffing is truly sufficient. Meanwhile, a legislative committee proposed consolidating police oversight into a single agency, potentially absorbing the IIO's functions. The IIO awaits the government's response to these recommendations, which could significantly impact their future role.

For the 2022-2023 fiscal year, the IIO received 385 notifications of incidents, representing a 19% increase from the previous year which initiated investigations in 210 cases

while the remaining 175 were classified as advice files. Advice files are incidents that did not meet the requirement for IIO to investigate and are excluded from IIO statistics. However, the conversion rate of notifications to investigations has dipped. While investigations were launched, this accounted for roughly 54% of notifications, while past years saw closer to 68% conversion. This shift suggests a rise in advice files. The reasons behind the increase in advice files could be multifaceted, potentially including heightened public scrutiny leading to more frequent reporting by police agencies of any use-of-force incidents. The report details the outcomes of 107 concluded investigations: 43 with a published media release, 64 were published public reports, and 10 were referred to Crown Counsel. The report highlights that there is an overall increase for advice files (35%), followed by notifications (19%), and investigations (19%). This suggests an overall increase in its workload. The IIO also reports other concerning trends. Self-inflicted incidents were the most common cause of investigations (27%) and deaths (48%). While use of force was not the leading cause of death, it did result in the most serious harm cases (32%). Notably, there were no deaths associated with conducted energy weapons (such as a taser) or police service dog use. These findings suggest a need for further investigation into the factors contributing to self-inflicted harm and a focus on de-escalation tactics during use of force situations. Lastly, IIO investigated a record number of 26 firearm incidents which is a substantial rise from the average of seven incidents per year. The cause for this surge remains unclear. These investigations addressed a mix of outcomes, with eleven involving serious injuries and the remaining fifteen resulting in fatalities. As of March 31, 2023, twenty investigations are ongoing. Of the six concluded investigations, four resulted in public reports, one concluded without public information being released, and one has an interim media release due to ongoing court

proceedings. A public report for this final case will be issued once the court proceedings conclude.

For any further details, refer to the the IIO website: <https://iiobc.ca>

#### *II-5-c) Ontario Special Investigations Unit (SIU)*

The SIU was established in 1990 and is Canada's first independent police oversight agency. Its creation followed recommendations from the Task Force on Race Relations and Policing formed after a series of police-involved killings of Black men in Ontario (Lewis, 1989). The Task Force called for an independent body with the power to investigate and lay criminal charges against police officers.

Over the past three decades, the SIU has faced public scrutiny regarding transparency and credibility. Thus, there have been calls for greater transparency, particularly from racial justice organizations, led to the appointment of Justice Michael Tulloch in 2016 to assess Ontario's oversight bodies (CBC Radio, 2016). The Tulloch Report (2017) recommended fines and imprisonment for officers who fail to cooperate with SIU investigations. The SIU's mandates and powers were further strengthened in 2015 when it gained subpoena powers to compel cooperation from police services and obtain necessary records (SIU, 2015, p.5). In 2019, the Special Investigations Unit was passed, granting the SIU its own governing legislation and replacing the "duty to cooperate" with a stricter "duty to comply" for police officers (Special Investigations Unit Act, 2019). Non-compliance became a provincial offence punishable by fines or imprisonment (Special Investigations Act, 2019).

The Special Investigations Unit Act (2019) states that the SIU is led by a Director, who cannot have a background in law enforcement. The Act also states that the Director oversees investigations, staff training, and ensures training promotes respect for Ontario's diversity and

the rights of Indigenous peoples. It details that the SIU investigates incidents involving police officers that results in incidents resulting death; allegations of sexual assault; discharge of a firearm at a person; and serious injury which includes injuries requiring hospitalization, fractures, significant burns, loss of body parts, or vision/hearing loss.

The SIU can also be notified by the public as well on police misconduct. The SIU's objective is to determine if there is evidence of criminal wrongdoings by the officer, not lesser offences like policy breaches or misconduct. Such matters fall under the Office of the Independent Police Review Director (OIPRD) (LECA, 2024). The Special Investigations Unit Act (2019) details that SIU investigations typically focus on on-duty incidents, but off-duty incidents can be investigated if the officer was involved in specific actions like pursuit or arrest, or if the incident involved official police equipment. The SIU gathers evidence through witness interviews, officer statements, and scene examination. The Act states that witness officers are required to provide notes within 24 hours and may be interviewed. Furthermore, officers involved are segregated during the investigation and can be fined for non-compliance (except the subject officer).

The investigative process commences upon notification from a police service about a potential incident falling within the SIU's mandate. The SIU (2023) takes charge of the investigation, deploying a team of civilian investigators with relevant expertise to gather evidence and conduct a thorough examination of the incident. This focus on civilian oversight helps to ensure impartiality and public trust in the investigative process. Following the investigation, the SIU director, a civilian appointee, makes a crucial decision based on the gathered evidence. If the director believes an officer committed a criminal offence, charges are laid against the officer. Alternatively, if the investigation reveals no wrongdoing or the Crown

Attorney advises against charges, all parties are notified, and a final report detailing the investigation and its findings is typically published on the SIU website.

SIUs recent annual report (2023) saw a decrease in activity in 2022-2023, opening 355 investigations, about 100 fewer than the previous year. The report shows that custody injuries remain the most common case type, accounting for roughly half (50.1%) of all investigations. A new category called the Firearm Discharge at a Person cases held steady at around 7.5% of all total caseload. The SIU closed 335 cases in total during this period, including previously opened investigations. However, this excludes cases that were still ongoing at the end of March 2023. The report states that 13 officers were laid charges in 11 cases (around 3% of all investigations). However, the report notes that these charges represent a belief that an offence may have occurred and not a finding of guilt. The courts determine whether the officers are ultimately found innocent or guilty. When charges are not laid, the Director publishes a report outlining the investigation's rationale, process, and findings. Furthermore, 89% of all investigations were concluded within the mandated 120-day deadline.

For any further details, refer to the SIU website: <https://www.siu.on.ca>

#### *II-5-d) Independent Investigations Unit of Manitoba (IIU)*

Following inquiries into the policing practices and consultations with stakeholders, Manitoba introduced a modernized Police Services Act in 2009 (IIU, 2022). This act established the province's first civilian-led Independent Investigation Unit. Within its 2021-2022 annual report, the IIU operates independently from all police forces in Manitoba, including First Nations, RCMP, and municipal forces. It investigates all serious incidents involving police officers, on or off duty. The IIU's mandate is defined under the Police Services Act (2009) which

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focuses on investigating incidents including death, serious injury, injury from a firearm discharge, and suspected violations of the Criminal Code or other laws by police officers.

Injury from a firearm discharge include:

- A. fractures from the skull, jaw, vertebrae, ribs, upper arm bone (humerus), forearm bones (radius and ulna), thigh bone (femur), shin bone (tibia), and outer calf bone (fibula);
- B. and significant injuries requiring hospitalization which includes burns, cuts, or lacerations; loss of any body part; loss of vision and hearing; and internal injuries (IIU, n.d.).

The Police Services Act (2009) states that the IIU is led by a civilian director to ensure independence from police forces. The director, appointed under the Police Service Act, cannot have a background in law enforcement and is responsible for the IIU's entire operation, including leadership and oversight of investigators and staff. Additionally, the law mandates the director to make independent decisions about investigations and ultimately determines whether charges are laid or if the investigations are submitted to the Crown Attorney for review.

The IIU (2022) investigative team itself is also structured to maintain civilian oversight. While the team consists of current or former officers from Manitoba, Canada, or the RCMP, it does not employ any active officers. It states that investigators can also be civilians with experience in investigation. Regardless of the background, all investigators must meet specific qualifications and experience requirements and are under the sole direction of the civilian director. Importantly, the IIU states that the director has the same legal powers and protections as police officers when conducting investigations.

Unlike some oversight bodies, the IIU (n.d.) does not handle public complaints directly. Police notification triggers IIUs involvement. Public concerns about police conduct of

performance fall under the Manitoba's Law Enforcement Review Agency (LERA). Upon receiving such notification, the IIU (2022) assesses the information to determine if the incident requires investigation. If it does fall within their jurisdiction, the IIU assumes full responsibility for the investigation by deploying an investigative team led by a civilian director. This team, which may include former or current police officers with specific qualifications and experience operating under the sole command of the civilian director, conducts a comprehensive investigation. The investigative process involves gathering evidence from various sources, including witness statements, video footage, and forensic analysis. Following the investigation, the lead investigator submits a detailed report to the civilian director, who makes the final decision on how to proceed.. The 2021-2022 fiscal year saw a rise in the IIU's workload, with June and October being the busiest period for notifications. While deaths remained constant at 10%, notifications involving serious injuries rose to 37%, and officer-involved shootings made up 9%.

The IIU prioritizes keeping the public informed throughout their investigations. Upon starting an investigation, they issue a press release summarizing the incident and actively seek witnesses or video evidence that could be helpful. After the investigation is complete, the lead investigator submits a detailed report to the civilian director. The course of action following the investigation depends on the findings. If the civilian director believes an officer committed a crime, charges are laid or the matter is referred to the Manitoba Prosecution Service (MPS) for review. In such cases, a final report may be withheld due to ongoing court proceedings. However, a news release detailing the charges and potentially identifying the officer is issued. If the investigation reveals no wrongdoing or the MPS advises against charges, all parties are notified, and the civilian director prepares a final report detailing the incident, investigation

steps, findings, and reasoning for the decision. This report is typically published on the IIU website for public transparency. However, there may be a delay if related court cases are ongoing. In sensitive cases, particularly those involving sexual assault allegations, the IIU protects the privacy of individuals involved by withholding details that could identify victims or accused officers.

For any further details, refer to the IIU website: <https://www.iiumanitoba.ca>

#### *II-5-e) Saskatchewan Serious Incident Response Team (SIRT-SK)*

The Government of Saskatchewan (2021) announced a significant reform in police oversight with the introduction of the Police (SIRT) Amendment Act in 2021. This act establishes a civilian-led SIRT, modeled after Alberta's ASIRT and Nova Scotia's SIRT. It is responsible for investigating police misconduct for both on-duty and off-duty actions by municipal officers, RCMP officers operating in the province, and certain special constables like Conservation and Traffic Officers. Their mandate is to ensure impartial investigations are conducted according to the same standards as any Criminal Code investigations. The SIRT-SKs operations are also guided by two key pieces of legislation: The Police Act, 1990, and the Police (SIRT) Amendment Act, 2021.

SIRT-SK is led by a Civilian Executive Director who will investigate several key areas in police misconduct or resulting from police actions including serious injury, death, sexual assault, and any other incident deemed to be in the public interest by the Executive Director. The Civilian Executive Director also oversees SIRT-SK investigations. They provide the authority to appoint investigators and acquire resources necessary to fulfill the SIRT-SKs mandate. They also address the specific needs of the First Nations and Metis communities. When the victim belongs to these groups, they will appoint a dedicated First Nations or Metis community liaison. These liaisons



will support the Executive Director by coordinating with the victim's family and advising investigators on community interactions. The Executive Director can also choose to appoint community liaisons in other cases.

Saskatchewan's approach aligns with the model of Ontario's SIU and recommendations for a similar liaison program in Manitoba's IIU. However, Saskatchewan's plan offers a more specific approach by prioritizing representation for First Nations and Metis communities. SIRT-SKs investigations are triggered by notification of serious incidents involving police, not by public complaints. To file a complaint against a Saskatchewan municipal police service, the individual must visit the Public Complaints Commission's (PCC) page. However, it is to note that the PCC only focuses on municipal police and specific special constables, not businesses, private individuals, or other organizations.

Following SIRT-SK's investigation, they released a public report within 90 days. These reports detail the incident, explain the final decision on the case (including whether charges are laid), and are available online along with other SIRT-related news and media.

For any further details, refer to the Government of Saskatchewan website:

<https://www.saskatchewan.ca>

#### *II-5-f) Serious Incident Response Team of Newfoundland and Labrador (SIRT-NL)*

Newfoundland and Labrador's Serious Incident Response Team (SIRT-NL) was established by the Serious Incident Response Team Act of 2017 (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, n.d.). This act empowers a Civilian Director who is appointed by and reports to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety in leading police conduct investigations (Serious Incident Response Team Act, 2017). The Director also has the authority to appoint investigators and establish agreements with relevant agencies or government bodies to support investigations.

SIRT-NL (n.d.) becomes involved when a police chief believes a “serious incident” involving a police officer may have occurred. These incidents encompass incidents involving death, serious injury, sexual assault, domestic violence, and any matter of significant public interest. Serious injury includes:

- A. the injured person requires admission to a hospital for treatment;
- B. the injury involves significant physical trauma, including but not limited to fractures, especially those involving limbs, ribs, vertebrae, or the skull (with potential head injury); major burns or abrasions; loss of any body part; paralysis or loss of mobility in any body part; loss of vision or hearing; internal organ injury; serious cuts; and loss of consciousness due to extreme mental distress, prolonged agitation, or combative behavior (potentially indicating excited delirium).
- C. cases where the full extent of the injury cannot be immediately determined and may require a prolonged observation period;
- D. and any gunshot wound sustained from a police officer's firearm automatically qualifies as a serious injury.

Transparency is a key aspect of SIRT-NLs operations. Upon notification, the Director can either initiate an investigation or refer the matter to another agency. They are also required to provide updates on investigations (every 45 days) to the Minister, the relevant Police Chief, the police officer under investigation, and those affected by the incident (or their families are deceased) (Serious Incident Response Team Act, 2017). Additionally, SIRT-NL releases public summaries of investigations after they are completed. These summaries detail the incident, the investigation timeframe, relevant legal considerations, and the reason(s) for charging or not charging an officer. Annual reports are also planned to further enhance transparency. However, to

date, a separate annual review document from Newfoundland and Labrador's Justice and Public Safety (2023) details the recent finances spent for the program with \$352,808 reported for the program's expenditures and revenues.

While SIRT-NL has not published annual reports yet, it is likely due to being in its early stages of development. The first Director, appointed in 2019, focused on establishing policies, hiring investigators, and developing regulations. SIRT-NL declared full operation in June 2021 and has released 29 Director's reports summarizing their investigations and findings. However, there are no current statistics of any charges laid. The act outlines expectations for police cooperation during investigations. Officers involved in or present at the scene must be separated. Police Chiefs are obligated to provide relevant investigative materials upon request (The Serious Incident Response Team Act, 2017). Furthermore, officers involved can be directed to attend interviews (excluding the subject officer) and are given the opportunity to consult with legal counsel beforehand. It is important to note that interfering with, obstructing, or failing to cooperate with an investigation is an offence (The Serious Incident Response Team Act, 2017).

For any further details, refer to the website: [www.sirtnl.ca](http://www.sirtnl.ca)

#### *II-5-g) Nova Scotia Serious Incident Response Team (SiRT)*

The Nova Scotia Serious Incident Response Team (SiRT)(2022), established in 2012 under the Nova Scotia Police Act, functions as a civilian oversight for police conduct in the province. SiRT operates as a completely independent civilian agency, ensuring its investigations are free from potential conflicts of interest. The annual report states that this independence is further bolstered by the Civilian Director, appointed by the Governor in Council, who possesses no prior law enforcement experience.

SiRT's (2024) mandate encompasses investigating death, serious injury, sexual assault, domestic violence, or other matters that spark significant public interest due to police actions. Serious injury includes fractures to limbs, ribs, head, or spine; burns, cuts, or lacerations that are significant or affect a large area of the body; loss of any body part; serious internal injuries; any gunshot wound; significant number of stitches; and hospital admission due to the injury. And according to the 2022-23 Justice and Public Safety Annual Review (2023), SiRT has been authorized to oversee investigations into serious incidents involving police in both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, following a finalized agreement between the two provinces.

Public participation plays a crucial role in triggering SiRT (2022) investigations. While the Nova Scotia Police Act mandates that police chiefs notify SiRT of relevant incidents, the Director also possesses the authority to initiate investigations based on public complaints submitted directly to SiRT or referrals from the Minister of Justice. This openness to public input stands in stark contrast to some oversight bodies that solely rely on police notifications for investigations.

Following notification of a potential incident, the Director, after careful consideration of the nature of the event, determines if it falls within SiRT's mandate. Cases can meet the mandate even in the absence of allegations of wrongdoing by police. This allows for proactive investigations to ensure proper police conduct. If the incident falls within the mandate, a team of investigators is assembled. This team typically includes a blend of civilian investigators with experience outside of law enforcement and seconded police officers who leverage their expertise while maintaining civilian oversight. SiRT's investigative process is thorough and balanced, typically involving securing evidence at the scene, consulting with medical professionals regarding injuries sustained, conducting witness interviews which may involve canvassing the

area for additional witnesses, and commissioning forensic examinations as necessary. Liaison with families of those involved and the affected community is also a key aspect of the investigative process, ensuring that all parties are kept informed and that the investigation is conducted with sensitivity. Upon completion of the investigation, a summary is released to the public within three months, outlining the Director's decision and the rationale behind it.

In fiscal year 2020-2021, SiRT saw a busy year, opening 44 files. Of these, 24 investigations were launched, while the remaining 20 files involved reviews to determine if the incident fell within SiRT's mandate. This investigative activity reflects a consistent workload for SiRT, with an average of 25 investigations initiated annually. The types of incidents reviewed and investigated by SiRT showcase the broad scope of their mandate. These included allegations of sexual assault, officer-involved shootings, uttering threats, breaches of trust, and domestic violence. Interestingly, public trust in SiRT appears to be growing. Public referrals to SiRT surged to 263 in 2020-2021, a significant increase compared to the previous year. This rise can likely be attributed, in part, to a widely shared social media video depicting a police officer aiming a firearm at an unarmed male and using inappropriate language. While many of these public referrals ultimately fell outside SiRT's mandate, the agency ensured that the concerns raised by the public were not dismissed but redirected to the appropriate agency for investigation.

Despite the increased workload, some investigations extended beyond the fiscal year. Nine of the 24 investigations initiated in 2020-2021 remained incomplete by year's end. Factors contributing to these delays included waiting for reports from subject matter experts, delays in receiving information from third parties, the inherent complexities of certain investigations, and the timing of when the investigation commenced. However, SiRT strives for efficiency, with the

average time to complete an investigation and file the Director's Summary of Investigation report clocking in at 108 days for completed cases in 2020-2021.

For any further details, refer to the SiRT website: <https://sirt.novascotia.ca/about>

#### *II-5-h) Bureau des enquêtes indépendantes (BEI)*

In response to mounting public pressure regarding police conduct, the Bureau des enquêtes indépendantes (BEI) was established in Quebec in 2013 through the Police Act (BEI, n.d.). This independent body was tasked with investigating specific incidents involving police officers, aiming to improve transparency and public trust. Bill 107, passed in 2018, further expanded the BEI's mandate (BEI, n.d.). Now, police chiefs are obligated to directly notify the BEI of situations that would necessitate an independent investigation. These situations encompass a wider range of incidents compared to the BEI's (n.d.) initial mandate, including deaths that occur during police interventions or while in custody, serious injuries inflicted by police actions, and instances where police officers discharge firearms. Notably, the BEI's reach now extends to investigating allegations of sexual assault perpetrated by officers on duty, as well as any criminal accusations against police personnel, with particular focus on cases involving Indigenous people. The BEI operates with a degree of autonomy, maintaining an "arm's length relationship" with both the Quebec government and its police forces. However, it does report its findings and investigation results to the Ministry of Public Security. This reporting structure has been a point of contention for some critics.

BEI investigators wield a broad range of powers to conduct thorough investigations. They are classified as peace officers in Quebec, granting them the authority to gather evidence at crime scenes, request warrants for searches, compel the production of medical records and documents, and even pursue legal action against individuals who obstruct their investigations.

The BEI's mandate extends beyond these specific situations outlined in Bill 107. At the Minister's request, the BEI can investigate additional allegations of criminal offenses committed by police officers or special constables. However, it's important to note that the BEI does not handle complaints concerning police ethics, which fall under the jurisdiction of a separate agency, the Commissaire à la déontologie policière.

Following a completed investigation, the BEI submits a comprehensive report to the Directeur des poursuites criminelles et pénales (DPCP), the prosecutorial arm responsible for determining whether criminal charges should be laid against the involved officer(s). In cases where a death has occurred, the BEI also forwards the report to the coroner's office after the DPCP makes a decision on potential charges. A key point of contention surrounding the BEI is the lack of public access to these investigative reports. Critics argue that withholding these reports hinders transparency and public trust in the BEI's process (LDL, 2020).

Another criticism levied against the BEI concerns its handling of sexual assault allegations against police officers. The BEI reserves the right to dismiss allegations deemed "frivolous or unfounded" (BEI, n.d.). The Ligue des droits et libertés (LDL), a Quebec civil liberties organization, argues that this language is insensitive to victims and reflects a wider issue of police dismissing such complaints altogether (LDL, 2020).

The BEI's effectiveness in ensuring police accountability has also been called into question. The LDL's 2020 report highlights several concerns, including the BEI's reliance on police forces for investigative assistance, which some argue compromises its independence. Additionally, the LDL criticizes the BEI's lack of transparency due to withheld reports. Furthermore, the report suggests that police impunity persists, with officers potentially not complying with BEI regulations and facing minimal repercussions for such violations. Finally,

the LDL raises concerns about potential bias within the BEI, particularly given that some investigators may have prior experience as police officers. The absence of publicly available data on BEI investigations and charges laid further complicates efforts to assess the agency's overall effectiveness. Without this data, it's difficult to gauge the frequency of investigations, the types of incidents investigated, and the outcomes of these investigations (CTV Montreal, 2019).

For more informations, refer to the BEI website: <https://www.bei.gouv.qc.ca/home.html>

## **II-6) Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented a comprehensive overview of the evolving landscape of civilian oversight of police conduct in Canada. It traced the historical development of oversight models, from traditional internal police investigations to the emergence of independent civilian-led agencies. The review highlighted the diversity of oversight models across provinces, each with its own mandate, structure, and investigative processes. It delved into the specific challenges faced by these agencies, including issues of independence, transparency, and public trust. The chapter also summarized existing literature that has examined the effectiveness of police oversight, revealing gaps in knowledge and areas for further research. The literature review underscores the ongoing debate surrounding the optimal model for civilian oversight. While there is a clear trend towards greater civilian involvement and independence, the ideal structure and processes remain contested. Additionally, the review emphasizes the importance of transparency and public reporting in fostering trust and accountability and an overview of each SIRTs in Canada. The next chapter will delve into relevant theoretical perspectives, exploring how they can inform our understanding of civilian oversight and its potential to enhance police accountability and public trust.



## **CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL APPROACH**

### **III-1) Chapter Overview**

This chapter explores the potential benefits of SIRT transparency through the lens of social control theory. While traditionally focused on individual behavior and conformity, social control theory offers a compelling framework for understanding the relationship between the public and the justice system. The chapter begins by outlining the core principles of social control theory, as developed by scholars like Travis Hirschi (1969). This theory posits that strong social bonds deter deviant behavior. In this context, the "public" can be viewed as having a social bond with the justice system. Stronger social bonds are associated with greater trust and belief in the system's legitimacy. The chapter then dives deeper into the four key elements of a strong social bond, as identified by Hirschi and then examines how SIRT transparency can potentially strengthen each of these elements, ultimately leading to a stronger social bond between the public and the justice system. The chapter acknowledges the limitations of applying social control theory to SIRT transparency. These limitations include the theory's original focus on individual behavior, its emphasis on social bonds formed during youth, and its potential oversimplification of public perception. Additionally, the causal relationship between social bonds and trust in the justice system requires further exploration.

### **III-2) Overview of Theoretical Approach**

Social control theory stands as a prominent and rigorously tested perspective within criminology. Central to this theory, Hirschi (1969) hypothesizes that individuals conform to prosocial behaviours due to the strength of their informal social controls. These informal social controls are most often embodied by family (particularly parents), teachers, schools, and other

social institutions with which individuals form strong bonds. The theory posits that the strength of these bonds acts as a deterrent against deviant behaviour.

One of the core assumptions of social control theory is the inherent human inclination towards hedonism. According to this perspective, humans do not necessarily require additional motivation to commit crime; it is the absence of sufficient social control that allows them to engage in deviance (Hirschi, 1969). As social creatures, humans crave interactions and positive relationships with others and having an inability to build strong social networks can lead to feelings of alienation and isolation (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Conversely, the stability and social order from social cohesion promotes conformity and discourage deviance (Hirschi, 1969).

Hirschi's work on social control theory is widely recognized as a seminal contribution to the field. However, it is important to acknowledge that Hirschi's theory draws upon earlier works on social control, such as Reiss's (1951) control theory. Furthermore, the concept of social bonds in Hirschi's theory shares similarities with Toby's (1957) notion of "stakes in conformity". This concept suggests that the stronger an individual's bond (i.e., connectedness) to society, the greater the potential cost (or "stake") they risk by engaging in non-conforming behaviours.

Social control theory identifies four key elements that make up the strength of social bond, influencing an individual's likelihood of engaging in prosocial behaviours. Donner et al. (2016), explains that the first element, attachment, refers to the emotional connectedness someone feels towards others, particularly those whose opinions they value. Strong attachment discourages deviance when individuals fear jeopardizing these important relationships. Commitment is the second element where it reflects an investment in a prosocial lifestyle. People with strong commitment are less likely to deviate because they have more to lose, such as educational opportunities or employment. The third element, involvement, focuses on how much

time someone spends engaged in conventional activities. Individuals occupied with school, work, or volunteerism have less time and opportunity to engage in deviant behavior. Finally, belief refers to a shared conviction in the rightness of societal rules and laws. If someone believes these rules are just and should be followed, they are less likely to act outside the boundaries of those norms. These four elements, working together, create a strong social bond that encourages conformity and discourages deviance.

Hirschi's (1969) initial analyses provided general support for social control theory, demonstrating a correlation between weaker social bonds and a higher likelihood of delinquent acts. Since then, the theory has received considerable attention and modest empirical support (Costello & Vowell, 1999; Stewart, 2003). However, the theory has also faced critiques, with some scholars arguing that it was formulated based on, and primarily tested with, juvenile samples and minor delinquency (Sampson & Laub, 1990, 1993).

Scholars like Sampson and Laub (1993) argue that social bonds are not just important during childhood and adolescence. They propose an age-graded theory of informal social control, emphasizing the importance of these bonds throughout life. This theory suggests that being connected to positive individuals and institutions at the right stages in life can significantly reduce the likelihood of criminal behavior. Research supports this notion, highlighting the significance of adult social bonds in deterring deviance (Piquero et al., 2002; Sampson & Laub, 2003; Wright & Cullen, 2004). For example, Piquero et al. (2002) found that factors like employment and marriage, representing "stakes in conformity," predicted a decrease in non-violent offending among high-risk males. Similarly, Wright and Cullen (2004) linked stable employment to a lower likelihood of criminal behavior. Interestingly, their study also suggested

that employment might influence offending by impacting peer networks. Their findings showed that having prosocial co-workers directly reduced general delinquency and drug use over time.

### **III-3) Rationale for Using the Chosen Theoretical Approach**

Social control theory, traditionally focused on individual behavior and conformity, offers a surprisingly compelling lens through which to examine the potential benefits of SIRT transparency. This theory emphasizes the importance of social bonds in deterring deviant behavior, and in this context, the "public" can be viewed as having a social bond with the justice system. Stronger social bonds are associated with greater trust and belief in the system's legitimacy. SIRT transparency has the potential to significantly strengthen this social bond between the public and the justice system in several ways.

Social control theory identifies four key elements of strong social bonds: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. The first element, attachment, shows that clear and open communication regarding SIRT investigations can foster a sense of trust and connection between the public and the oversight body. Regular updates and explanations of procedures can bridge the gap between the public and the often-opaque world of police accountability. Additionally, the second element, commitment, states that transparency can solidify the public's commitment to the legitimacy of law enforcement. Understanding how SIRTs investigate incidents involving officers can bolster public belief that the system is fair and holds law enforcement accountable. Furthermore, the third element, involvement, dictates that transparency can encourage greater public involvement in holding law enforcement accountable. By providing clear information about reporting incidents and the SIRT investigation process, the public can become more engaged in the oversight process. This empowers the public to participate and hold the system accountable, fostering a sense of agency and ownership over police accountability. Finally,

transparency strengthens belief—the fourth key element). Open communication about investigations can dispel myths and misconceptions, leading to a stronger public belief that the justice system functions with integrity (Hirschi, 1969). When the public can see how investigations are conducted and how evidence is evaluated, they are more likely to trust that the system will deliver just outcomes.

Conversely, a lack of transparency within SIRTs weakens the public's social bond with the justice system, potentially leading to decreased trust, reduced perceptions of legitimacy, and ultimately, a weakened belief in the fairness of the system. Without transparency, the public may perceive the SIRT process as secretive and biased, leading to a decline in trust in the system's ability to hold law enforcement accountable. Similarly, a lack of transparency can undermine the public's belief in the legitimacy of law enforcement and the justice system as a whole, fostering feelings of alienation and disengagement from the oversight process.

While social control theory offers a valuable framework for analyzing the potential benefits of SIRT transparency, it is important to acknowledge some shortcomings when applying this theory to this specific context. Social control theory was primarily developed to understand individual tendencies towards deviant behavior (Hirschi, 1969). While the theory can be adapted to examine the public's relationship with the justice system, it may not fully capture the complex social and political factors that influence public trust and perceptions of police accountability. The theory emphasizes the importance of social bonds formed during childhood and adolescence (Hirschi, 1969). However, SIRT transparency might be just as important, or even more so, in influencing the perceptions of adults who have already formed their social bonds with the justice system. The theory may not adequately address the ongoing process of strengthening or weakening these bonds throughout adulthood. Social control theory assumes a relatively

homogenous "public" with a single social bond towards the justice system. In reality, public perceptions of law enforcement and the justice system can vary greatly depending on factors like race, socioeconomic status, and personal experiences. The theory does not fully account for these diverse perspectives. The theory suggests that a strong social bond with the justice system leads to trust and belief in its legitimacy. However, it is also possible that trust and belief in a just system might lead individuals to be more willing to engage with it and strengthen their social bond. Lastly, the theory does not adequately distinguish between cause and effect in this dynamic. While research supports the general tenets of social control theory, there is limited research specifically examining the connection between SIRT transparency and the public's social bond with the justice system. Further studies are needed to validate the theoretical framework in this context.

#### **III-4) Chapter Summary**

This chapter explored the potential for SIRT transparency to strengthen the social bond between the public and the justice system, utilizing social control theory as a framework. Social control theory, traditionally focused on individual conformity, offers an insightful lens for examining public trust in institutions. The chapter also argued that a strong social bond, characterized by attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief, fosters trust and legitimacy in the justice system.

The chapter detailed how SIRT transparency can cultivate each element of this social bond. Open communication and clear procedures can foster a sense of connection (attachment) between the public and the SIRT. Transparency can solidify the public's commitment to the legitimacy of law enforcement by demonstrating a system that holds officers accountable. Furthermore, by providing clear information about reporting incidents and the SIRT investigation

process, transparency can encourage greater public involvement in holding law enforcement accountable. Finally, transparency strengthens public belief in the system's fairness by dispelling myths and misconceptions surrounding SIRT investigations.

While acknowledging limitations of social control theory, such as its focus on individual behavior and youth development, the chapter emphasized its value as a starting point. By strengthening the social bond, SIRT transparency has the potential to create a more legitimate and effective system of police accountability, with increased trust, commitment, involvement, and belief from the public.

The next chapter delves into the methodology and research design chosen for this study. Building upon the theoretical foundation established here, the following chapter will outline the specific methods used to investigate the relationship between SIRT transparency and the public's social bond with the justice system. The research design will explore how different levels of transparency (e.g., releasing investigation reports, holding public hearings) impact public perceptions and willingness to engage with the oversight process. By employing appropriate research methods, this research aims to empirically examine the theoretical propositions outlined in this chapter, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how SIRT transparency can enhance police accountability.

## **CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **IV-1) Chapter Overview**

This chapter outlines a qualitative research design to explore the variations in transparency practices used by SIRTs across Canada. The core research question driving this exploration is how SIRTs in different provinces approach transparency. This goes beyond the amount of information they disclose and delves into their communication styles, public engagement efforts, and the deeper meaning conveyed through their actions. To capture these nuances, the chapter utilizes qualitative methods such as literature reviews and comparative analysis.

Data collection and analysis will involve two primary methods. First, a heuristic tool will be used for a preliminary comparison of SIRT transparency practices. This tool acknowledges limitations but serves the purpose of identifying areas for improvement and guiding future research. Data collection for this tool involves creating a table that assesses each SIRT based on predetermined transparency criteria with a simple "yes" or "no" scoring system.

The main method of data collection and analysis, however, is secondary data analysis. Information will be gathered from official SIRT websites, annual reports, relevant government legislation, and reputable news articles. This data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes, complemented by a descriptive analysis for clear comparisons across jurisdictions. Finally, the chapter emphasizes the importance of triangulation (using multiple data sources), researcher reflexivity (acknowledging potential biases), and detailed methodology descriptions to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. By employing these qualitative methods and conducting a thorough analysis of secondary data, this chapter aims to provide valuable insights into the variations in investigative mandates and



transparency practices among Canadian SIRTs while also contributing to discussions about best practices in police accountability.

#### **IV-2) Overview of Methodological Approach**

This research project adopts a qualitative methodology to explore the variations in transparency practices employed by SIRTs across Canada. This section delves into the rationale behind the approach and the specific qualitative methods that will be utilized.

The decision to utilize qualitative methods hinges on the nature of transparency. Transparency encompasses more than just the sheer volume of information disclosed. It delves into the communication styles employed, the level of public engagement fostered, and the underlying meaning associated with SIRT practices. Qualitative methods, such as literature review and comparative analysis, prove adept at capturing and exploring the deeper significance of SIRT transparency efforts. Furthermore, this research is exploratory in nature, aiming to gain a comprehensive understanding of existing practices and identify potential areas of improvement. Qualitative methods, compared to their quantitative counterparts, facilitate a more in-depth exploration. They allow for a richer understanding of the "why" behind SIRT transparency practices, going beyond simply measuring the "how much" information is disclosed. It is also a powerful tool to analyze information and identify patterns and themes related to SIRT transparency practices.

A cornerstone of this research will be a comprehensive review of existing academic literature on police accountability, SIRTs, and transparency practices. This review will examine relevant scholarship, providing a solid foundation for understanding the current knowledge base on SIRT transparency. By critically analyzing existing research, the review will identify key themes and debates that inform the contemporary landscape of SIRT transparency efforts. A

detailed comparison of SIRT transparency practices across different Canadian provinces will be conducted. This analysis will dissect how SIRTs in various provinces disclose information, communicate with the public, and engage with the communities they serve. By examining documents from SIRTs themselves, news articles, and other relevant materials, the research can identify patterns and themes related to SIRT transparency efforts across diverse provincial contexts. Due to the focus on publicly available data and the absence of human participants, this research project is unlikely to require formal ethics approval.

#### **IV-3) Description of Methodology**

It is crucial to acknowledge from the outset that this is a heuristic tool, meaning it relies on experience and practical knowledge rather than a rigid set of criteria. The purpose of this tool is to prove a foundational comparison of transparency practices of SIRT, while recognizing limitations that pave the way for future in-depth research.

There are two key limitations to this approach. First, a lack of standardized reporting across Canada in regards to SIRT transparency practices hinders precise comparisons. Second, the tool relies on public documents and reports to identify if issues are perceived to be widespread within an agency. While media can be a valuable source of information, it may not always offer a complete picture. Given these limitations, the purpose of this tool is not to deliver a definitive qualitative assessment of each SIRT. Instead, it aims to serve two key functions. Firstly, by highlighting areas where some SIRTs excel and others fall short, the tool can identify potential areas of improvement across the board. Secondly, it can act as a springboard for future, more rigorous empirical research on SIRT transparency practices.

The data collection for this tool is designed to be straightforward. A table will be used, listing each SIRT in Canada. Each SIRT will then be assessed based on a predetermined set of

criteria relevant to transparency. These criteria encompass aspects such as the ease of public access to complaint procedures, the timeliness of investigations, the level of transparency surrounding investigation outcomes, and public education initiatives undertaken by SIRTs. Analysis will involve a simple score system. For each criterion, a “yes” or “no” response will be assigned to each SIRT, indicating their adherence to that specific criterion. Based on these binary responses, a preliminary comparison of transparency practices will be conducted using this heuristic approach.

#### **IV-3) Collection and Analysis of Data and Information**

This research project utilizes secondary data analysis to explore the variations in investigative mandates and transparency practices of SIRTs across Canada. Data will be collected from a variety of publicly available sources, including official SIRT websites, annual reports, relevant government legislation, and reputable news articles. Websites will be reviewed to gather information on investigative mandates, complaint procedures, and the power to lay charges and make policy recommendations. Annual reports will be examined to assess transparency practices, such as the content and detail provided, demographics of those involved (when available), and the publication of reports following investigations with no charges laid. Government legislation will be reviewed to understand the legal framework surrounding SIRT mandates and authorities. News articles may offer additional insights, but will be used cautiously with a focus on reputable sources and corroboration with other data.

Thematic analysis will be the primary method for analyzing the collected data. This qualitative approach involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting recurring patterns and themes within the data. Through a series of steps, the researcher will become thoroughly familiar with the data, assign codes to key concepts, group codes into broader themes, refine and

define these themes, and present the findings in a clear and well-organized manner. This thematic analysis will be complemented by a descriptive analysis summarizing key findings regarding the specific investigative mandates and transparency practices of each SIRT, allowing for a clear comparison across Canadian jurisdictions. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation of data sources, researcher reflexivity to acknowledge potential biases, and detailed descriptions of the data collection and analysis methods will all be employed. This comprehensive approach will provide a nuanced understanding of the variations in investigative mandates and transparency practices among Canadian police oversight agencies, informing discussions about best practices in police accountability.

#### **IV-5) Chapter Summary**

This chapter detailed the methodological approach employed in this research project, emphasizing the utilization of qualitative methods to explore the variations in transparency practices among SIRTs across Canada. The reasoning behind choosing qualitative methods was clarified, highlighting their appropriateness for capturing the nuanced nature of transparency and the exploratory nature of the research.

The chapter outlined the data collection process, which involves a comprehensive review of existing literature on police accountability, SIRTs, and transparency practices, as well as a comparative analysis of SIRT practices across different provinces using publicly available information. The chapter also introduced a heuristic tool for preliminary comparison of SIRTs, acknowledging its limitations due to the lack of standardized reporting and reliance on public documents. Thematic and descriptive analysis were identified as the primary methods for analyzing the collected data. The chapter emphasized the importance of triangulation, researcher

reflexivity, and detailed descriptions of data collection and analysis methods to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

The next chapter will delve into the specific outcomes of the data analysis, providing a detailed comparison of SIRT transparency practices across Canadian provinces and identifying potential areas for improvement in fostering transparency and accountability within police oversight.

## **CHAPTER V: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

### **V-1) Chapter Overview**

This chapter presents the key findings from the investigation into SIRTs. It offers a clear understanding of the research and its outcomes by laying out the research goals and structure used to analyze SIRTs. The chapter outlines the research objectives, centered on evaluating SIRT practices across different provinces. And any specific hypotheses tested regarding SIRT effectiveness, transparency, or consistency would be outlined here. The chapter structure will be described, explaining how the analysis is organized (e.g., by investigative mandate, reporting practices, etc.).

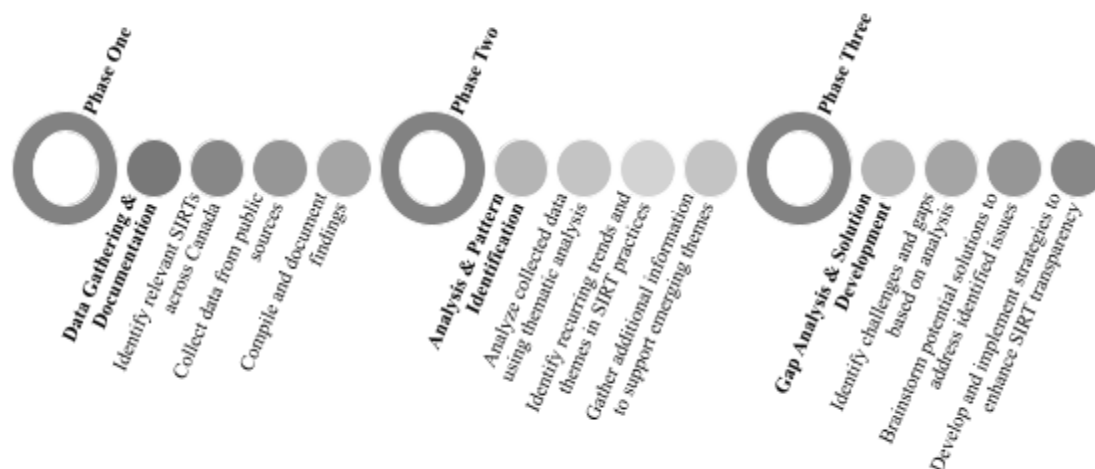
### **V-2) Data and Information Analysis**

#### *V-2-a) Collection of Data and Information*

Data collection for this study involved gathering information from a variety of publicly available sources, primarily focusing on official SIRT websites, annual reports, relevant government legislation, and reputable news articles. This approach allowed for an examination of each SIRT's investigative mandate, complaint procedures, and authority to lay charges or make policy recommendations. Annual reports were scrutinized to assess transparency practices, including the level of detail provided, demographics of those involved (where available), and the publication of reports for cases where charges were not laid. Government legislation was reviewed to understand the legal framework governing SIRT mandates and authorities. While news articles offered additional context, their use was limited to reputable sources and corroborated with other data.

The data collection process faced several challenges, including the lack of standardized reporting across SIRTs, the dispersed nature of information for some SIRTs on broader government websites, and the limited body of research specifically focusing on SIRTs. Additionally, the inability to access French-language reports prevented the inclusion of Quebec's BEI in this analysis. To address these limitations, this research facilitates a preliminary comparison of SIRT transparency practices based on publicly available information. While not exhaustive, this tool served to identify potential areas for improvement and trends across SIRTs, acknowledging the limitations posed by the language barrier and incomplete data.

Figure 4 visually summarizes the study phases, highlighting the issues encountered and the steps taken to collect and analyze data. This research project encompasses three distinct phases. The first phase involves data gathering and documentation, where relevant SIRTs across Canada are identified, and data is collected from their websites, annual reports, legislation, and news articles. This data is then compiled and organized in a structured format. The second phase focuses on analysis and pattern identification, employing thematic analysis to uncover recurring trends and themes within the collected data. Additional information may be sought to corroborate these emerging themes. Finally, the third phase entails a gap analysis and solution development, where the identified challenges and gaps in SIRT transparency are addressed through brainstorming and the development of strategies to enhance their practices.

**Figure 4: Study Phases in Evaluating Transparency in Canadian Police Oversight***V-2-b) Analysis of Data and Information*

Investigating investigative mandates, annual reporting, public accessibility, and community outreach practices of SIRTs across Canada reveals both progress and a pressing need for greater transparency. Undertaking this analysis presented significant challenges. Due to the fragmented nature of SIRTs across various provincial jurisdictions, with differences in funding, mandates, and overall structure, creating a unified picture proved difficult. Furthermore, limited research exists on SIRTs as a whole, likely due to these very discrepancies. Despite the shared core goals of SIRTs, they remain inherently distinct entities. Transparency emerges as a crucial element in overcoming these challenges. After all, the civilian nature of SIRTs, established to investigate police misconduct, inherently emphasized transparency. However, achieving transparency proved elusive. For instance, SIRT-SK lacks a dedicated agency website, and their annual reports reside within a broader provincial government website, making information gathering difficult. Compounding these difficulties, the lack of established frameworks for



comparison between SIRT's from previous research exists. In-depth, comprehensive analyses are scarce, making it challenging to benchmark practices across jurisdictions. Furthermore, valuable information and policy changes sometimes reside in reports not directly found in SIRT websites. For example, the recent 2022 amendment to the Police Act in Alberta significantly impacts ASIRT's mandates (Government of Alberta, 2022). These additional hurdles highlight the need for a more standardized and transparent approach to data collection and reporting across all SIRT's.

To address these hurdles, this research employed a heuristic tool – mentioned in Chapter IV– to create a preliminary comparison of SIRT transparency practices across Canada. Its purpose is to highlight potential areas for improvement and pave the way for future in-depth research. Two key limitations exist. First, the lack of standardized reporting across SIRT's hinders precise comparisons. Second, the tool relies on publicly available documents and reports, which may not always provide a complete picture. Given these limitations, the goal is not to definitively assess each SIRT, but rather to serve two key functions: (1) highlighting disparities in transparency practices between SIRT's where the tool can pinpoint areas where all SIRT's can potentially improve; and (2) this initial analysis can serve as a foundation for more rigorous empirical research on SIRT transparency in the future.

### **V-3) Results from Analysis**

#### *V-3-a) Investigative Mandates*

Figure 5 analyzes the mandates of seven SIRT's across Canada. The focus was on whether their mandates included investigations into specific incidents involving police officers. A significant finding was that all SIRT's, except the IIO, explicitly mentioned sexual assault within their mandates. This aligns with the growing recognition of police accountability for these

sensitive issues. The lack of clarity regarding sexual assault in the IIO's mandate creates a potential gap. While the table does not explicitly list sexual assault in the IIU mandate, it is important to acknowledge that they have conducted investigations into sexual misconduct involving police officers. This suggests a potential discrepancy between the written mandate and the IIU's actual conduct of investigations. The IIU's authority to investigate such incidents likely stems from their mandate to investigate death, serious injury, or alleged contraventions of Canada's Criminal Code or other laws, as defined in Part 7 of The Police Services Act (IIU, n.d.). This broad legal framework likely encompasses sexual assault investigations, even if not explicitly mentioned in the table or the IIU's mandate itself. For domestic violence, all investigated incidents involving police could potentially encompass domestic violence situations. However, only SiRT and SIRT-SK explicitly mentioned domestic violence as a separate category within their mandates. This suggests a potential area for improvement in clarity for other provinces, ensuring domestic violence receives specific focus during investigations. The definitions of "serious harm" or "serious injury" varied across each SIRTs. Other agencies such as IIO, IIU, SiRT, and SIRT-NL provided detailed descriptions, often including hospitalization, fractures, and loss of body parts. ASIRT and SIRT-SK did not provide specific definitions in the information reviewed. All IIUs investigated incidents involving both on-duty and off-duty police officers.

There were variations in the level of detail provided regarding SIRTs mandates. While all addressed serious injury, death, and discharging a firearm at a person, some like ASIRT and SIRT-SK offered less specific language. Provinces like SiRT and IIO presented more comprehensive descriptions, including domestic violence and sexual assault.

**Figure 5. Comparison of SIRT Investigative Mandates**

	ASIRT	IIO	SIU	IU	SIRT	SIRT-NL	SIRT-SK
Does the <b>mandate</b> for investigations:							
• Include sexual assault and domestic violence?	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Provide a definition of serious harm/injury?	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
• Include investigations for both in-duty and off-duty officers?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Clearly define the agency's mandate, including the types of incidents it investigates .	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Specify whether the mandate explicitly covers sexual assault and domestic violence as separate incidents, even if not reported by the police.	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No

*V-3-b) Annual Reporting Practices*

This analysis looks into the annual reporting practices of SIRTs across Canada. While all SIRTs, except ASIRT, are mandated to release annual reports, the available information in Figure 6 reveals inconsistencies in the content of these reports. Figure 6 reveals a positive aspect: all SIRTs report consistently detailed investigations conducted, their outcomes, and statistical data on complaints received, investigations completed, and charges laid. This information provides a basic understanding of SIRTs workload and case outcomes. However, a significant gap is identified where there is no standardized requirement for SIRTs to include recommendations for

policy and legislative changes in their reports. While some SIRTs include recommendations for policy and legislative changes such as IIU and IIO, the table suggests this is not a universal practice. For other SIRTs, information on this aspect is either unavailable or not included in the reports themselves. This omission hinders public understanding of the potential impact of SIRT investigations on broader police reform efforts.

Similarly, the table reveals inconsistencies in reporting on demographics. Some SIRTs such as IIO, SIU, and IIU report on the gender, but SIU is the only SIRT that reports on racial and ethnic distribution of affected individuals. Currently, this table does not provide a clear picture of all SIRTs as this information may not be available on their websites at the current time of this analysis.

**Figure 6. Comparison of SIRTs Annual Reporting Practices**

	ASIRT	IIO	SIU	IU	SiRT	SIRT-NL	SIRT-SK
Is the agency mandated to release <b>annual reports</b> ?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Specify the content of annual reports, including:							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summary of investigations conducted and their outcomes</li> </ul>	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statistical data on complaints received, investigations completed, and charges laid.</li> </ul>	Yes (website)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Details of any recommendations made for policy or legislative changes.</li> </ul>	-	Yes	No	Yes	No	-	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statistics on gender distribution of affected individuals?</li> </ul>	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	-	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statistics on race distribution of affected individuals?</li> </ul>	-	Yes	Yes	No	No	-	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gender demographics of the agency's personnel?</li> </ul>	-	No	Yes	No	No	-	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Racial/ethnic demographics of the agency's personnel?</li> </ul>	-	No	Yes	No	No	-	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of investigators/team members with prior law enforcement experience?</li> </ul>	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	-	-

*V-3-c) Public Accessibility Practices*

This analysis looks into Figure 7 which compares public accessibility practices of SIRTs in Canada reveals both positive aspects and areas requiring improvement. Encouragingly, transparency is promoted through a mandatory requirement for all SIRTs, except ASIRT, to publish reports following investigations where charges are not laid. Additionally, all SIRTs provide valuable public insights into their work by allowing data on charges laid and case dispositions available. However, limitations exist. While online access to reports is offered by all SIRTs, the lack of information regarding alternative formats (e.g., print, translations) could create a barrier for individuals who lack internet access or prefer physical copies. Furthermore, the public's understanding of SIRT goals and priorities is restricted by the absence of published strategic plans. It is important to consider that the table excludes BEI of Quebec because their reports are only available in French. This highlights the need for multilingual accessibility to ensure public understanding of police oversight practices across Canada.

More concerning are practices that raise potential conflicts of interest. The absence of concrete plans to phase out officer secondments practices suggests a risk of ongoing bias, as officers may be reluctant to investigate their colleagues (Puddister & McNabb, 2021). Finally, with only two SIRTs (IIO and SIU) explicitly mentioning diversity mandates, there appears to be a broader lack of emphasis on ensuring representativeness within SIRT teams.

**Figure 7. Comparison of Public Accessibility Practices Across SIRTs in Canada**

	ASIRT	IIO	SIU	IIU	SiRT	SIRT-NL	SIRT-SK
Mandated to <b>publish reports</b> following investigations where <b>no charges are laid</b> .	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Are statistics on charges filed and case dispositions made available by the agency?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No

Outline the agency's commitment to public accessibility of information, including:							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Availability of reports and other materials in various formats (e.g., online, different languages).</li> </ul>	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Does the agency publish their strategic planning?	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there concrete steps in place, with a defined timeframe, to discontinue the secondment of officers?</li> </ul>	-	No	Yes	-	-	No	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does it include diversity mandates?</li> </ul>	-	Yes	Yes	-	-	No	-

*V-3-d) Community Outreach Practices*

An analysis of Figure 8 in comparing publicly available information on community outreach practices of SIRTs in Canada reveals a lack of transparency and engagement with diverse communities. While IIO, SIU, IIU, and SIRT-SK confirm annual participation in community outreach, information regarding outreach activities for all other SIRTs is absent. This lack of publicly available information regarding the nature and extent of their outreach activities aligns with concerns raised in the literature review on police accountability about the need for improved transparency (Stelkia, 2020). This lack of transparency hinders public understanding of SIRTs efforts to connect with communities they serve. Notably, only IIO is listed as utilizing public forums. Furthermore, significant data gaps exist between three SIRTs (ASIRT, SiRT, and SIRT-SK). There is also no indication of whether any SIRTs explicitly advocate for diverse groups disproportionately affected by police violence except Indigenous-led organizations.

Similar to previous research on police oversight practices, the limited publicly available data impedes assessment of whether SIRTs are effectively fostering trust and collaboration with the public (Stelkia, 2020).

**Figure 8. Comparison of SIRTs Community Outreach Practices Across Canada**

	ASIRT	IIO	SIU	IIU	SiRT	SIRT-NL	SIRT-SK
Does the agency engage in community outreach	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Does the agency's participation in community outreach:							
• Happen at least once a year?	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Unclear	-
• Have public forums?	-	Yes	No	No	-	No	-
• Advocate for diverse groups that are disproportionately affected by police violence?	-	Yes	Yes	No	-	No	-
• Engage with a broad range of community stakeholders?	-	Yes	No	Yes	-	Yes	-
• Offer avenues for participation and support to those impacted by incidents and their families?	-	No	No	Yes	-	No	-
• Engage with Indigenous-led organizations?	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	-
• Engage with groups with disabilities?	-	No	Yes	No	-	No	-
• Engage with migrant justice groups?	-	No	Yes	No	-	No	-
• Engage with anti-poverty groups?	-	No	Yes	No	-	No	-
• Engage with harm reduction groups?	-	No	No	Yes	-	No	-



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with sex-workers rights groups?</li> </ul>	-	No	No	No	-	No	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with black-led groups?</li> </ul>	-	No	Yes	No	-	No	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with sexual assault victims?</li> </ul>	-	No	Yes	Yes	-	No	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with the LGBTQ+ community?</li> </ul>	-	No	Yes	No	-	No	-

#### **V-4) Central Findings from Analysis**

The central findings from this analysis revealed progress and inconsistencies in SIRT practices across Canada. While all SIRTs except IIO explicitly address sexual assault investigations, a potential gap exists regarding the clarity of the IIO's mandate on this issue. Inconsistencies were also found in how SIRTs define "serious injury" and prioritize domestic violence within their mandates. Annual reports, though consistently produced by most SIRTs, lacked standardization. While details on investigations and outcomes were readily available, recommendations for policy and legislative changes were not universally included, hindering understanding of SIRTs' potential impact on police reform. Reporting on demographics also varied, raising concerns about potential biases and the representativeness of SIRT teams.

Public accessibility practices offered mixed results. Transparency was promoted through the publication of reports where charges were not laid, and data on cases was generally accessible. However, the lack of alternative report formats (like print or translations) and the absence of published strategic plans created barriers for public understanding. The exclusion of Quebec's BEI due to language barriers further emphasized the need for multilingual accessibility.

Practices raising potential conflicts of interest included the continued use of officer secondments and the lack of emphasis on diversity mandates within most SIRTs.

The most concerning finding involved the lack of transparency surrounding community outreach efforts. While some SIRTs mentioned annual participation, information for others was entirely absent. This aligns with concerns raised in the literature review about the need for improved transparency in police oversight practices. There was also a lack of evidence regarding SIRTs explicitly advocating for diverse communities or actively fostering trust and collaboration with the public.

#### **V-5) Chapter Summary**

This chapter examined SIRTs across Canada, focusing on their investigative mandates, annual reporting practices, public accessibility efforts, and community outreach. The analysis revealed both positive strides and concerning inconsistencies.

##### **Key Findings:**

- All SIRTs, except the IIO (Ontario), explicitly included sexual assault investigations in their mandates. However, the lack of clarity regarding sexual assault in the IIO's mandate warrants further investigation.
- Definitions of "serious injury" varied significantly, and some provinces (e.g., Saskatchewan) lacked clear definitions altogether.
- Annual reports were generally produced, but inconsistencies existed in content. Recommendations for policy and legislative changes were often missing, hindering understanding of SIRTs' impact on police reform. Reporting on demographics also varied, raising concerns about potential biases.

- Transparency efforts included publishing reports where charges weren't laid, but limitations existed. Lack of alternative report formats and strategic plans limited public understanding. The exclusion of Quebec's BEI due to language barriers highlighted the need for multilingual accessibility. Practices raising potential conflicts of interest included the continued use of officer secondments and the lack of emphasis on diversity mandates within most SIRTs.
- A significant concern was the lack of transparency regarding community outreach efforts. While some SIRTs mentioned annual participation, information for others was entirely absent. There was also a lack of evidence regarding SIRTs explicitly advocating for diverse communities.

These findings expose the need for standardized practices across SIRTs, particularly in reporting, public accessibility, and community outreach. Increased transparency and a focus on diversity and inclusion within SIRTs are crucial for strengthening public trust and ensuring effective police oversight. The following chapter will delve into a discussion of these findings. It will explore the implications of these inconsistencies, analyze how they align with existing literature on police oversight, and identify potential recommendations for improving SIRT practices across Canada.

## **CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION**

### **VI-1) Chapter Overview**

This chapter delves into a comprehensive discussion of the research findings presented in Chapter V, analyzing their implications for the transparency and accountability of SIRTs in Canada, with a particular focus on the central research hypothesis. It will examine the degree to which the findings support or refute the central hypothesis, exploring the specific ways in which community engagement influences transparency practices. The discussion will also consider the limitations of the hypothesis, acknowledging the influence of other factors such as legislative mandates, resource availability, and public pressure on SIRT transparency.

The chapter will offer a critical analysis of the current state of SIRT transparency in Canada, particularly in relation to community engagement. It will highlight examples of SIRTs that have successfully integrated community engagement into their operations and demonstrate higher levels of transparency, as well as those that have struggled to do so. The discussion will also delve into the potential mechanisms through which community engagement can enhance transparency, such as fostering a culture of openness, accountability, and responsiveness to public concerns. The chapter will also further consider the implications of the findings for policy and practice, suggesting potential strategies for strengthening community engagement efforts and enhancing transparency across SIRTs. These strategies may include establishing community advisory boards, conducting regular public consultations, and providing training for SIRT personnel on effective communication and engagement with diverse communities.

### **VI-2) Addressing the Research Question**

This exploratory research aimed to address the hypothesis: "SIRTs with a greater emphasis on community engagement and consultation in their mandate and operations will

demonstrate higher levels of transparency." The findings offer partial support for this hypothesis. While the research confirms a positive correlation between community engagement and transparency, it also reveals nuances and limitations that warrant further discussion. The data reveals that SIRTs actively engaging in community outreach, such as IIO, SIU, and IIU, generally exhibit higher transparency levels. These agencies tend to provide more comprehensive information on their websites, publish detailed reports, and actively participate in public forums. This suggests that community engagement can foster a culture of openness and accountability within SIRTs. However, the relationship between community engagement and transparency is not always straightforward. Some SIRTs, like SIRT-SK, engage in community outreach but do not disclose detailed information about these activities. This suggests that community engagement, while important, may not be the sole determinant of transparency. Other factors, such as organizational culture, funding, leadership priorities, and legislative mandates, could also play a significant role. Additionally, the lack of standardized reporting on community outreach makes it difficult to quantify and compare engagement efforts across SIRTs. This limitation highlights the need for a more comprehensive framework for assessing and reporting on community engagement practices.

Beyond the initial focus on community engagement, this research uncovered additional factors that significantly influence SIRT transparency. The analysis suggests that legislative mandates play a crucial role, as SIRTs with broader mandates for information disclosure generally exhibit higher levels of transparency. Moreover, resource allocation and capacity emerged as key determinants, with well-resourced SIRTs being better equipped to engage in comprehensive reporting and outreach activities. Public pressure and scrutiny also appear to be influential, as SIRTs that have faced criticism may be more motivated to enhance transparency as

a response. These findings underscore the intricate relationship between legal frameworks, resource availability, and public accountability in shaping SIRT practices.

### **VI-3) Relation to Existing Research and Scholarship**

The findings of this exploratory research align with previous scholarship on police oversight and transparency, while also highlighting unique insights specific to the Canadian context. The observed variations in SIRT transparency practices across provinces mirror prior research emphasizing the fragmented nature of police oversight in Canada (Puddister, 2023). The lack of standardized reporting and inconsistent community engagement efforts identified in this study parallel concerns raised in previous studies about the need for greater transparency and accountability (Stelkia, 2020; Kwon & Wortley, 2022). The research also supports prior findings regarding the influence of legislative mandates and resources on transparency. SIRTs with broader mandates for information disclosure, such as the IIO and SIU, generally demonstrate higher levels of transparency, consistent with Puddister's (2023) observation that agencies with greater autonomy and resources tend to be more effective in fulfilling their mandates. However, this study also provides new insights into the relationship between community engagement and transparency. While the findings partially support the hypothesis that SIRTs with greater community engagement would be more transparent, they also reveal that this relationship is not always straightforward. Some SIRTs actively engage with communities but lack transparency in reporting these efforts, suggesting that other factors, such as organizational culture and leadership, may also play a significant role.

Alternative interpretations from the literature offer valuable perspectives for understanding these findings. Some scholars argue that the effectiveness of community engagement depends on the quality and authenticity of the interactions, not just the frequency

(Kwon & Wortley, 2022). Others suggest that transparency is not solely a function of community engagement but also a result of internal organizational values and external pressures for accountability (Stelkia, 2020). The strength of this research lies in its comparative analysis across multiple SIRTs, highlighting the diversity of approaches and outcomes. However, the limitations of relying on publicly available information and the exclusion of Quebec's BEI due to language barriers warrant caution in generalizing the findings. Future research, incorporating more in-depth data collection methods and including all Canadian SIRTs, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing transparency in police oversight.

#### **VI-4) Implications**

The findings of this exploratory research have several implications for theory, policy, and practice in the realm of police oversight in Canada. Theoretically, this research contributes to the ongoing scholarly discussion on transparency and accountability within law enforcement. By examining the specific practices of SIRTs, it provides empirical evidence to support existing theoretical frameworks that emphasize the importance of transparency in fostering public trust and legitimacy. The findings also challenge the simplistic notion that community engagement automatically leads to greater transparency, highlighting the complex interplay of factors that shape SIRT practices. This research underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of transparency and its relationship with other organizational and contextual factors. From a policy perspective, the findings underscore the need for standardized reporting frameworks across SIRTs to ensure consistency and comparability of information. The research also highlights the importance of clear and comprehensive legislative mandates that prioritize transparency and community engagement. Policymakers could consider incorporating specific requirements for demographic data collection and reporting, as well as establishing mechanisms for independent

review and evaluation of SIRT practices. In terms of practice, this research offers valuable insights for SIRT leaders and practitioners. By identifying areas where transparency could be enhanced, such as the publication of strategic plans, the provision of alternative report formats, and the phasing out of officer secondments, the research provides a roadmap for improving SIRT practices. The findings also emphasize the importance of meaningful community engagement that goes beyond tokenistic gestures and actively seeks to include diverse voices and perspectives.

This thesis complements existing research by providing a comprehensive overview of SIRT transparency practices across multiple provinces. While previous studies have focused on specific aspects of oversight or individual SIRTs, this research offers a comparative analysis that highlights both commonalities and variations across jurisdictions. By identifying best practices and areas for improvement, it contributes to the development of a national conversation on how to strengthen transparency and accountability in police oversight. However, this research also differs from previous work in its emphasis on the relationship between community engagement and transparency. While existing literature has acknowledged the importance of community engagement, this study specifically examines how such engagement is reflected in SIRT transparency practices. The findings suggest that community engagement is a positive factor influencing transparency, but it is not the sole determinant, and other factors play a significant role.

## **VI-5) Chapter Summary**

This chapter has critically examined the research findings on transparency within Canadian SIRTs. The analysis reveals a diverse landscape, with both positive practices and areas



needing improvement. While community engagement does appear to correlate with increased transparency, other factors such as legislative mandates, resources, and public pressure also play a significant role. This nuanced understanding of SIRT transparency leads to the concluding chapter, where the research question will be definitively addressed, limitations acknowledged, and potential avenues for future research outlined.

## **CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION**

### **VII-1) Chapter Overview**

This chapter will revisit the central research question, examining the extent to which transparency varies across provinces and how it relates to community engagement. The chapter will summarize the key findings of the data analysis, highlighting both promising practices and areas for improvement identified in the investigation of SIRT mandates, reporting practices, public accessibility, and community outreach efforts. This chapter will reflect on the strengths and limitations of the study. It will also discuss the implications of the findings for policy and practice, offering recommendations for enhancing SIRT transparency and fostering greater public trust in police oversight mechanisms. Furthermore, the chapter will also situate the research within the broader context of police oversight and accountability in Canada. It will examine how the findings contribute to the ongoing scholarly discussion on transparency and how they can inform future research and policy initiatives.

### **VII-2) Addressing the Research Question**

The findings of this exploratory research reveal complex transparency practices among Canadian SIRTs. While the central hypothesis which states that greater community engagement correlates with higher transparency, is partially supported, legislative mandates, resource availability, and public pressure all emerge as significant influences on SIRT practices, alongside community engagement. The variations in transparency observed across provinces underscore the need for a more standardized and comprehensive approach to information disclosure, reporting, and community outreach. The research suggests that SIRTs could benefit from adopting more detailed and accessible reporting formats, including information on policy recommendations, demographic data, and community engagement initiatives. Additionally,

strengthening legislative mandates to explicitly require comprehensive reporting and ensuring adequate resources for SIRTs to fulfill these mandates could further enhance transparency. Moreover, the findings highlight the importance of fostering meaningful and inclusive community engagement. While some SIRTs demonstrate strong efforts in this area, others could benefit from more proactive and targeted outreach to diverse communities, particularly those disproportionately affected by police violence. By actively involving communities in their work and seeking their input, SIRTs can build trust, enhance legitimacy, and ensure that their practices are responsive to the needs and concerns of all Canadians.

This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on police oversight and transparency in Canada. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and the public, highlighting the need for continued efforts to strengthen transparency and accountability within SIRTs. Future research could build upon these findings by exploring the effectiveness of specific strategies for enhancing transparency, examining the impact of transparency on public trust and police accountability, and investigating the role of other factors, such as organizational culture and leadership, in shaping SIRT practices.

### **VII-3) Limitations and Other Considerations**

This exploratory research, while providing valuable insights into SIRT transparency practices across Canada, acknowledges several limitations. The reliance on publicly available information may not fully capture the nuances of SIRT activities and decision-making processes. Access to internal documents or interviews with SIRT personnel could provide a more comprehensive understanding of transparency practices. The lack of standardized reporting across SIRTs presents challenges in comparing practices across jurisdictions, hindering a precise assessment of relative transparency. Additionally, the exclusion of Quebec's BEI due to language

barriers limits the scope of analysis and prevents a truly national assessment of transparency practices. The heuristic tool employed for preliminary comparison, while valuable in identifying potential areas for improvement, relies on subjective interpretations of publicly available information. A more rigorous and standardized assessment tool could provide a more objective evaluation of SIRT transparency. Despite these limitations, the qualitative methodology remains appropriate for this exploratory study, given its focus on understanding the nuances and complexities of transparency practices. The triangulation of data sources, researcher reflexivity, and detailed descriptions of the data collection and analysis methods enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Future research should address these limitations by incorporating in-depth interviews with SIRT personnel, conducting surveys with community members, and analyzing internal documents. Developing a standardized framework for assessing SIRT transparency and ensuring the inclusion of all Canadian SIRTs, regardless of language barriers, would further enhance the rigor and generalizability of future research in this area

#### **VII-4) Suggested Future Research**

This exploratory research found several avenues for future investigation to deepen the understanding of transparency in Canadian SIRTs:

1. Conducting in-depth case studies of individual SIRTs could provide richer insights into the specific factors that influence their transparency practices. This could involve examining internal organizational cultures, leadership styles, and the impact of specific incidents or controversies on transparency efforts.
2. Expanding the comparative analysis to include all Canadian SIRTs, including Quebec's BEI, would offer a more comprehensive picture of national trends and variations in

transparency. This could involve developing a standardized framework for assessing transparency and collecting data from all agencies using consistent methods.

3. Conducting interviews or focus groups with SIRT staff and community members could provide valuable qualitative data on their perspectives and experiences regarding transparency. This could help to identify barriers to transparency and potential strategies for improvement.
4. Tracking changes in SIRT transparency practices over time could reveal the impact of policy changes, public pressure, or organizational developments. Longitudinal studies could also assess the long-term effects of transparency on public trust and police accountability.
5. Investigating the effectiveness of specific transparency measures, such as the publication of detailed investigative reports, community consultations, and the use of social media, could inform best practices and guide future policy development.
6. Comparing Canadian SIRTs with similar oversight bodies in other countries could provide valuable insights into international best practices and potential areas for improvement.
7. Investigating the relationship between SIRT transparency and public trust in police oversight, as well as the impact of transparency on police behavior and accountability, could provide valuable evidence for policymakers and practitioners.

## **VII-5) Chapter Summary**

The research findings reveal that multiple factors contribute to the transparency of Canadian SIRTs, with community engagement being just one aspect. Legislative mandates, resource availability, and public pressure also significantly shape transparency practices. The

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study has identified both positive practices and areas for improvement, offering insights to inform policy reforms and enhance transparency within police oversight. By acknowledging the study's limitations and proposing future research directions, this thesis contributes to the ongoing conversation about accountability and public trust in law enforcement, ultimately aiming to establish a more transparent and equitable system of police oversight in Canada.

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