Collaborative policing: networked responses to child victims of sex crimes

Anita Grace[a,*], Rosemary Ricciardelli[b], Dale Spencer[a], Dale Ballucci[c]

[a] Law and Legal Studies Department, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa ON K1S 5B6, Canada
[b] Memorial University, Canada
[c] University of Western Ontario, Canada

ABSTRACT

Background: In response to child victims of sex crimes, Canadian police agencies are required to work collaboratively with child victim oriented community organizations. Such collaborations involve the navigation of potentially competing objectives of partner agencies.
Objective: In our research, we examine police interpretations of collaborative responses to child victims of sex crimes in order to assess the challenges and benefits of police and community partnerships.
Participants and Setting: We conducted 52 semi-structured interviews and focus groups with police officers working on one of different ten police service organizations across Canada in order to unpack the joint responses of police and community partner agencies to child victims of sex crimes.
Methods: We coded and analysed focus group and interview transcripts for emergent themes pertaining to police interpretations of their collaborations with governmental and non-governmental organizations when responding to child victims of sex crimes. In focusing on the management and sharing of information, the complexities and practicalities of joint responses to child sexual abuse are revealed.
Conclusion: Collaborative tensions, such as differing mandates and blurred boundaries, were present in all participating policing agencies, but police working in and alongside CACs were more likely to recognize that the safety and best interest of children was a shared goal across partner agencies. Operating in successful partnership requires clearly demarcated roles and mutual understanding and respect between both police and partnerships agencies.

1. Introduction

In the last three decades, Western states are increasingly favoring collaborative and networked forms of governance, including those relating to the management of crime (2006, Brewer, 2013; Crawford, 1997; Garland, 1996). Crawford (1997, p. 4) describes this networked approach as "a dispersed and fragmented web of networks and 'partnerships', in which interests of the state collide with local power élites, established agencies, charitable bodies, private businesses, and representatives of other organized groups". Loader (2000) argues that police networks are fragmented and pluralized, which can blur agents' roles and responsibilities and create overlap in practices within institutions. Such descriptions raise questions about how amorphous, fragmented bodies of governance operate, and how the pluralization of policing functions co-exists with the objectives of potentially competing agencies.

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* Corresponding author.
  E-mail address: anita.grace@carleton.ca (A. Grace).

Literature on the networking of police with other agencies/institutions is fairly extensive, particularly as it interrogates the diversification of techniques of governance, surveillance, and punishment (Cohen, 1985; Dean, 2010; Garland, 2001; Rose, 2000; e.g. Simon, 2007). For example, Rose (1996) uses the phrase 'governing through community' to describe the mobilization and instrumentalization of the community into techniques and programs of governance. Haggerty and Ericson (2000, p. 611) identify the growth in formations of surveillant assemblages in which there is a coming together of various professionals (police, social workers, health workers, educators, etc.) and of the knowledge compiled within each particular institution. The engagement of police and other state security agencies with community organizations has been characterized as the expansion of the punitive state (Cohen, 1985; Garland, 2001) and the 'securitization' of state and society (Hallsworth & Lea, 2011). These perspectives focus on the punitive roles of "the criminal justice institutions that adjudicate and sanction criminal wrong-doing" (Beckett & Murakawa, 2012, p. 221). Within these frameworks of analysis, little to no attention is given to how networked policing and police partnerships are mobilized to support victims of crime, particularly child victims and their families.

National and international governing bodies have long recognized that responding to child victims requires a multi-sectoral approach involving social workers, educators, medical professionals, and police, among others (e.g. World Health Organization, 2006). Thus, police investigate child sexual assault and serious cases of abuse but are also mandated to share information with child welfare agencies (e.g. Ontario's *Child and Family Services Act* 2007, s. 72; Alberta's *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* 2000, s. 5) and in some jurisdictions to conduct joint investigations (e.g. A Coordinated Response to Child Abuse Investigative, Justice and Community Services for the City of Kingston and Frontenac County 2009; Protocol between The London Police Service and the Children's Aid Society of London and Middlesex 2002).[1] To illustrate, an estimated 85,440 substantiated child maltreatment investigations occurred in Canada in 2008, of which three percent (2,607) were identified as primarily sexual abuse (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008, p. 3). Of these cases of sexual abuse, about 55 percent were responded to by a joint investigation between police and child protection services (Tonmyr & Gonzalez, 2015, p. 133).

Yet although multidisciplinary interventions have the potential to provide holistic care for victims and their families, the efficacy of collaborative ventures can be impeded by variances in procedures, by different emphases on priorities for action between agencies, and by the potentially conflicting goals of preserving evidence and supporting children and families (Newman & Dannenfesler, 2005; Sedlak et al., 2006). If police are generally onboard with augmenting support for victims of crime, particularly child victims, yet frustrated by the challenges of networked responses, how do they navigate these tensions? In what ways do networked responses reify and/or disrupt the traditional police roles and responsibilities of responding to and investigating crime involving child victims?

In this article, we examine the networking of Canadian police agencies with governmental and non-governmental organizations in response to child victims of sex crimes. We analyze police interpretations of collaboration, and their expressed perceptions of its benefits and challenges. By examining how police organizations negotiate their partnerships with community organizations our research reveals the often vague and fluctuating boundaries of roles and responsibilities between police and community partners. This fluctuation creates challenges and tension and, in some cases, can jeopardize the ability of police to successful lay charges. Yet, police also recognize the value of support provided to child victims and their families through productive community partnerships.

By identifying the challenges and benefits of networked policing with regard to victim support, we contribute to Canadian criminological scholarship on networked policing in response to child sexual abuse in three key ways. First, by expanding analyses of networked policing from functions of governance and surveillance towards that of support for child victims of sex crimes, we offer a nuanced understanding of contemporary partnership practices. Second, by probing how traditional police roles and responsibilities are simultaneously entrenched and challenged through collaborative projects with child victim-oriented community partners, we show how police interpret the tensions and benefits that come with joint investigations and responses. Third, by examining how collaborative challenges are being addressed within Canada's relatively newly implemented Child Advocacy Centres (CACs), we draw attention to this development in Canadian policing and identify some of the possibilities and challenges ahead.

1.1. Networked policing and Child Advocacy Centres

Since the late 1960s, Canadian police officers have been mandated to collaborate with other sectors in response to child maltreatment and abuse (Tonmyr & Gonzalez, 2015). The movement toward the networking of police with other organization corresponded with a broader shift, in Canada and beyond, that toward community policing. This shift expanded the scope of policing to include efforts to increase social capital through multi-agency partnerships with social welfare agencies (McCarthy, 2013). Various groups and individuals also became involved in "sharing information, keeping records, making plans, setting targets, establishing networks for the surveillance and documentation" (Rose, 2000, p. 333). Such partnerships have the potential to foster communication and collaboration, yet international scholarship of the 1980s and 1990s characterized police partnerships as rife with tension (Bullock, Tilley, & Erol, 2006). Crawford (1997, p. 60) and suggested "the reality of competition, conflict, and organizational autonomy remain essential characteristics of criminal justice" and community policing networks. Although police are generally supportive of community partnerships and working relationships with agencies in the context of working with child victims (O'Neill & McCarthy, 2014; Finkelhor, Wolak, & Berliner, 2001; O'Neill & McCarthy, 2014), they still must navigate the tensions of such collaborations.

One identified area of tension in police partnerships is the lack of a clear chain of command in partnership processes (O'Neill &

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[1] Mandates to conduct joint investigations vary among Canadian jurisdictions. Additionally, in some jurisdictions, sexual abuse involving extra-familial perpetrators, such as babysitters or a relative living outside the home, are directed to police, not child services.

McCarthy, 2014). Another notable tension lays in police perceptions of 'social work' skills as inferior to traditional crime-fighting skills (McCarthy, 2013). Reiner (2000) describes traditional policing as involving use of force, excitement, and risk, and as the conduit for displays of masculinity and solidarity with fellow officers. Police collaboration with community agencies calls for a role change in policing that departs from this traditional model. The reduced focus on enforcement changes the experience of policing and expectations of police (see DeJong, Burgess-Proctor, & Elis, 2008). Scholars show that the integration of alternative forms of policing is highly dependent on officer's receptivity (Cross, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2005; Lumsden, 2016). For example, O'Neill and McCarthy (2014) found male officers to be more skeptical than female officers of collaborative partnerships, and to evaluate partnerships in terms of clear outputs such as intelligence and cost-savings as opposed to personal relationships

Multi-agency centres, such as CACs, exemplify collaboration between police and community organizations. They embody the type of "*institutional annexation* of sites and actors beyond what is legally recognized as part of the criminal justice system" (Beckett & Murakawa, 2012, p. 222 emphasis in original). CACs began operating in the United States (US) in the 1980s in response to concerns that the multi-sectoral response to child abuse subjected child victims to "repetitive and often distressing interviews" (Herbert & Bromfield, 2016, p. 341) and re-victimized them through the criminal investigative process (Cronch, Viljoen, & Hansen, 2006; Hornor, 2008; Hubel et al., 2014). CACs developed as community-based facilities that provide a child-friendly setting for young victims of crime to report allegations and seek assistance. They use multidisciplinary approaches to conduct forensic interviews and provide a range of services to victims, witnesses, and family members. There are currently over 900 CACs in operation in the US (National Children's Advocacy Center, nationalcac.org) and a robust body of literature examining their effectiveness and operations in America (Cross, Jones, Walsh, Simone, & Kolko, 2007; Herbert & Bromfield, 2016; Hornor, 2008; Jones, Cross, Walsh, & Simone, 2007; Newman & Dannenfesler, 2005). Researchers note favourable outcomes, which include increases in offender confessions, child disclosures, and filed criminal charges (Faller & Henry, 2000; Moran-Elis & Fielding, 1996). Yet scholars have identified collaborative tensions that include conflicting priorities, interagency barriers, and problems with coordination management (Faller & Henry, 2000; Newman & Dannenfesler, 2005; Sheppard & Zangrillo, 1996). That said, Herbert and Bromfield (2016, p.35) conducted a systematic review of literature on CACs and noted that the majority of studies focused on the efficacy of criminal justice outcomes such as disclosures, arrests, and convictions; child and family outcomes; or on service user satisfaction. However, evaluations of CAC efficacy do not consider police attitudes toward such collaborative responses to child victims of crime, or how police attitudes and perceptions of joint-responses can manifest in functional ways, such as shaping processes of information sharing within the partnership.

More importantly, there is a grave lack of scholarship on Canadian CACs. This may in part reflect their relative novelty. It was not until 2002 that the Zebra Centre, Canada's first CAC, was created in Edmonton, Alberta. To date, there are only 15 CACs across the country, although at least 10 more are in development.[2] Not only are CACs somewhat new to Canada, but their composition varies significantly. For example, the spacious Sheldon Kennedy Centre in Calgary, Alberta has an on-site staff of close to 100 people representing the police, Crown, Ministry of Health, and child services (as well as two resident trauma dogs). Yet other places with CAC designation can be simply child-friendly buildings or rooms equipped for forensic interviews that are available for use by law enforcement and child protection services; often operating with only a handful of staff. For example, Koala Place in Cornwall, Ontario is a small child-focused facility available to police, RCMP, and child protective services, all of which work off-site and use Koala Place primarily as a place to meet with child victims and families. These differences in CAC make-up are indicative of the wide variance of protocols regarding how and when joint investigations take place, variances not only between provinces, but also between jurisdictions and counties (Tonmyr & Gonzalez, 2015). Variances in the how joint investigations are conducted tend to exist along a continuum of formal joint investigations (e.g., collaboration is obligatory and procedures are clearly outlined) to separate investigations (e.g., one agency is solely responsible for the investigation); within that continuum are various informal joint investigations that include some degree of collaboration (Moran-Elis & Fielding, 1996; Tonmyr & Gonzalez, 2015).

The changing shape of investigative practices indicates that a state of transition is underway in Canada; police networking increasingly exists along a continuum that ranges from physically established advocacy centres to ad hoc negotiations. Given this range of environments for networked policing in Canada, how do police attitudes vary with regard to their roles and responsibilities in collaborative responses to child victims of sex crimes? Do these attitudes differ in respect to the presence or absence of a CAC, and the ways in which policing processes are implemented within CACs? By focusing on the management and sharing of information between partner agencies, we illuminate the complexities and practicalities of joint responses to child sexual abuse.

2. Method

Focusing on the Canadian context, this study is part of a broader project that examines how police investigate and respond to sexual violence committed against children, youth, and adults.[3]

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[2] Determining the number of CACs in Canada is impeded by variances in nature of CACs (from a single-site location in staffed by personnel from multiple agencies, to a room or small centre utilized by off-site police, RCMP and child protection services for forensic interviews, court support and other victim services). The Government of Canada lists 14 sites currently funded, and 10 under development (https://www.canada.ca/en/news/archive/2015/07/ child-advocacy-centres-child-youth-advocacy-centres.html), and the Canada CAC website lists 15 sites and 9 sites under development (http://cac-cae.ca). Additional Internet research revealed at least five more sites in operation or development.

[3] For more information on the project see Spencer, Dodge, Ricciardelli, & Ballucci, 2018.

2.1. Participants

Canadian police organizations vary in terms of the number and composition of units that investigate and respond to sexual victimization of children. Our research was conducted in police service organizations across five provinces and in urban centres of varying sizes: three cities with populations of less than 100,000, three medium-sized cities with populations between 100,000 and 500,000, and four cities with populations over 500,000.[4] The largest police service organization, located in a large city, had eight different sex crime-related units; the smallest had one. Six police organizations were affiliated with CACs, which represents more than one-third of operating CACs in Canada and is indicative, though not necessarily representative, of the variances in their compositions. Of these CACs, three had multi-disciplinary teams co-located on-site, two were off-site, and the other was in the process of development (See Table 1 for information about research sites).[5]

A pilot case study, that included five interviews and one focus group, was conducted with one police service organization in 2014. This helped to identify the main issues regarding policing sex crimes across age categories (child, youth, and adult) and the types of units created to investigate and respond to various types of sex crimes. Following a purposive sampling strategy (see Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2001), additional police service organizations were chosen on the basis that each 1) was embedded in an urban setting; 2) had one or more specialized units that respond to sex crimes which were separate from front line officers. Access was brokered through email and follow up phone conversations with key gatekeepers to the respective organizations.[6] In total, 70 interviews and two focus groups were conducted within ten different police service organizations across Canada from 2014 to 2016.

2.2. Procedure

This project was approved by Carleton University's Ethics Committee. Data collection continued until theme saturation was achieved (i.e., no new information emerged across respondents; Fusch & Ness, 2012). All interviews were conducted by one or more members of the research team in the participant's respective police service organization during their work hours. Participation was voluntary and subject to the availability and interest of participants at the time of the research team's visit.[7] In the initial pilot case study, the interviews were conducted by the principal investigator, were intentionally wide-ranging, and explored participant's experiences of investigating and responding to sex crimes, interviewing children and adults, interpreting the types of sex crimes and victims, and networking with other police organizations and community partners. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted by all members of the research team. Interviewers used a 42-question interview guide to identify the similarities between units in terms of responding to sex crimes, but interviewers had the flexibility to probe specific challenges or situations identified by respondents (Wengraf, 2001). In the focus groups, which included up to eight participants, questions from the interview guide were asked to participants. The emphasis was not on interpersonal group dynamics; instead the focus group acted as a group interview experience that was necessary given individual interviews were not possible with all interest participants due to organizational staffing and operational constraints. All interviewees were asked open-ended questions that include: the mandate of their unit, collaboration with community partners, and the process of investigating sex crimes against children. Interviews ranged in length from 30 to 150 min, averaging about 50 min in duration. Interviews and focus groups were voice recorded and transcribed verbatim by members of the research team.

2.3. Data analysis

This article focuses on the 52 interviews with officers from across the 10 research sites who work in units that respond to child and youth victims of sexual violence (see Table 2 for respondents' demographic details), and excludes those interviews done with officers who only have experience responding to adult victims.[8]

We used QSR NVivo qualitative research software to assist with the compilation, organization, and coding of the interview and focus group transcripts. After an initial review of the transcripts, the research team engaged in an interactive process of codebook construction. Data were then initially coded according to thematic theoretical, process, and attribute codes emerged form the data and operationalized within the codebook (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). After coding the first 20 interview transcripts, the research team met to discuss the themes, revise the codebook, and clarify the meaning of each code. Each transcript was coded by 4 research assistants, and any disagreement between the categorization of the data was resolved through an interactive process where thought processes behind the application of a code was explained. In this article, we focus primarily on the set of emergent themes pertaining to interpretations of collaboration between police organizations and governmental and non-governmental organizations in responding to child victims of sex crimes.

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[4] We sampled from police organizations in five provinces: Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia.

[5] The presence or absence of a CAC was not a selection criteria in this project since comparative analysis of the perspectives of officers who do and do not work with CACs was not part of the initial design, but rather emerged as a point of interest during data analysis.

[6] We contacted 12 organizations to participate in our study. Ten of the organizations responded and agreed to be included in our study.

[7] To our knowledge, no one who was asked to participate in our study refused to participate.

[8] We do not distinguish between units that ostensibly engage with sexual violence online versus offline.

Table 1
Research sites[*]: Types of police organizations and Child Advocacy Centres.

Police organization	Size of Urban centre	CAC Affiliation	# of interviews	Type of sex crimes to which unit responds[†]
A	Large	On-site CAC	Focus group with 3 members 5 interviews	Children and Youth
B	Large	On-site CAC	10 interviews	Children and Youth
C	Large	On-site CAC	Focus group with 8 members	Children and Youth
D	Small	Off-site CAC	4 interviews	Combined children and adult
E	Large	Off-site CAC	8 interviews	Children and Youth
F	Medium	CAC in development	20 interviews	Combined children and adult
G	Medium	No CAC	5 interviews	Children and youth
H	Medium	No CAC	3 interviews	Combined children and adult
I	Small	No CAC	12 interviews	Children and youth
J	Small	No CAC	3 interviews	Combined children and adult

[*] n = 10 police service organizations.
[†] Youth was variably defined as under the age of either 16 or 18 years.

Table 2
Respondent demographics (n = 52).

Sex	Male (26)
	Female (26)
Race	Caucasian (49)
	Indigenous/Inuit (3)
Age	31-40 (26)
	41-50 (21)
	Over 50 (5)
Years of service	5-10 (10)
	10-20 (31)
	Over 20 (11)
Working with CAC	Yes (23)
	No (29)

3. Results

Our research reveals the challenges and benefits of partnerships between police and community agencies, challenges which are grouped in two themes: 1) information sharing, and 2) roles and responsibilities. CACs serve to illustrate best practices in how these challenges are being addressed, particularly through memorandums of understanding that clarify policies and practices around the sharing of information and the overlapping of professional responsibilities. But before looking at challenges and best practices, we address the role of child victim support among police agencies across Canada, and how this role fosters, and even requires, partnerships with community agencies.

3.1. The Role of Child Victim Support

Law enforcement agencies have a dual mandate of child protection and criminal prosecution (Sedlak et al., 2006). Under provincial and territorial legislation such as Alberta's *Protection Against Family Violence Act* and Ontario's *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, police have the authority to assume child protection measures such as taking children to 'a place of safety'. Several officers described the goal or mandate of their unit as simply 'protecting kids', a mandate primarily realized through criminal prosecution. Officers suggest other professionals in the community best handle the therapeutic aspects related to victim support:

We do the investigations. … we're not social workers, we're not. We're detectives (Interview #16, on-site CAC affiliation).
There's all kinds of services out there. There's a child treatment center. There's all kinds of stuff that we can refer the people to. … We're not the professionals and they need somebody else (Interview #32, off-site CAC affiliation).

By differentiating between 'professionals' and themselves, officers are reifying their primary role as one of investigating crime. Yet, police recognize the multiple and complex needs of victims and rely on this network of professionals to address these needs in ways they cannot. Although delineations between jobs for professionals and police were consistently expressed, many participants identified an increased emphasis on victim support within their own agencies. Indeed, several officers expressed that police should present themselves within the community as *more* than criminal investigators. One child abuse investigator explained that:

We are responsible for plugging them in somewhere. Somebody has to take that person and give them what they need in the community. So, I find as a police service that has fallen on us because we are usually the first person on scene. We are triaging everybody (Interview #50, no CAC affiliation).

This officer suggested her job is to investigate child sexual abuse, 'triage' victims *and* connect them to community resources. She described acting as a service coordinator, noting that she would call victims to remind them of appointments or to encourage them to connect to a particular service, actions that clearly go beyond the role of investigating the crime. She evinces how the increased emphasis on victim support is adding to police responsibilities, even when diverting actual therapeutic labor to community partners (e.g., the officer took on an administrative role). Another officer suggested that during any investigation, police should conduct themselves in a supportive, empathetic manner—conduct not necessarily perceived as central to police investigative functions.

> I think in this role, and wearing this uniform, whether we like to admit it or not – we all like to say it's just a job – it carries a lot of weight and a lot of responsibility. … you can sit with them and be human (Interview #7, off-site CAC affiliation).

The phrase 'sit with them and be human' is striking since this officer was suggesting that officers have traditionally approached victims of crime in a detached manner, treating them as 'less human'. She suggests this could be mitigated with a more empathetic approach. Like others, she perceived the responsibilities of police officers as evolving to become more supportive of victims, describing this as a "huge shift" in attitudes and approaches. This trend toward victim-support was identified across our research sites, whether or not police organizations were affiliated with a CAC.

3.2. Challenges and Tensions within Partnerships

Police officer respondents were unanimous in their willingness to refer victims to community partners for psychological, physical, legal, and emotional supports. However, appreciation of community partnership and collaboration varied among respondents when it came to discussing how information is, and should be, shared amongst agencies. Additionally, several officers expressed frustration about partnerships when they felt their own roles and responsibilities were being compromised.

3.2.1. Overlapping or conflicting roles

Direct collaboration with community organizations was most frequently mentioned with regard to working with child protection agencies, such as Children's Aid Societies (CAS).[9] Officers who described these relationships as strained often attributed tension to a lack of clarity about each other's roles and expectations. Police officers' objective is to deploy investigation techniques, whereas agencies like CAS prioritize providing support and care for child victims. One respondent suggested police and CAS have traditionally operated "as two separate organizations" that historically "bump heads" (Interview #51, no CAC affiliation).

Some sex crime investigators articulated a deep frustration with what they interpret as a lack of respect for protocol by the local child protection agency. A child abuse investigator explains that:

> There's a few [child protection agency workers] that completely overstep what their role is. Like if you have a disclosure in a child, and 99% of the time under 16, discloses to you, it's not, 'I'll deal with it,' or 'I'm gonna see if it's true,' or 'I'm gonna look into it myself.' It's like get on the phone and call us. … And I find that's lacking (Interview #34, off-site CAC affiliation).

Police officers commonly expressed a sense of ownership in the process of investigation. When CAS staff attempt their own investigations, such as by talking to children to see if allegations of abuse are true, several respondents said their own processes were undermined. Even when investigations are done in partnerships, some officers expressed frustration about working jointly with child protection agencies. One described how CAS approaches to interviews jeopardized her own process:

> I've actually had to pull them aside saying, 'you can't say that. You can't say that to a parent, that you know, [the police are] gonna put' em jail forever,' you know. Like it's, you can't! You know what I mean? Like know your boundaries! (Interview #30, off-site CAC affiliation)

The call to 'know your boundaries' clearly reveals that this officer felt her boundaries were being infringed upon by the partner agency. Respondents suggested police objectives and processes for acquiring the evidence needed to lay a charge through investigative techniques has the potential to be jeopardized through community partnerships. This is not to say that the police are not empathetic to victims, but rather some see their role in responding to crime as a technical one. They are to gather and provide information that strengthens the potential for a conviction in order to protect the victim and the community at large. Not surprisingly, several officers expressed preference for collaboration scenarios where they remain in full control and can ensure their own protocols are followed.

Much of the unease, and occasional expressions of animosity, heard in interviews about joint responses came from police units that do not have memorandums of understanding with child protection agencies or other community members, and especially those that are not operating in an established or shared-location CAC. Indeed, there was a noticeable contrast in how officers spoke of their working relationship with child protection agencies amongst units with formalized agreements versus those operating on an ad hoc basis. One officer, affiliated with an off-site CAC, described the improvements in collaboration after senior leadership from her police unit and from the local child protection agency worked together to develop a process through which officers and child social workers meet to discuss cases and keep each other informed:

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[9] Child protection agencies are known by a variety of names such as Children's Aid Society, Child and Family Services, and Child and Youth Services. These agencies are typically non-profit, funded by provincial and territorial governments, and mandated to investigate reports or evidence of child abuse and neglect, and to intervene to protect children.

> I felt that we were really bridging the gap. They [child protection agency] kind of have their own policy and procedures and we have our own. A lot of times people who are not really familiar with the Criminal Code of Canada and the high standards you need to lay a criminal charge, would look at some of the investigations and would look at why, how could you not charge someone? So it was better to sit one-on-one, and sit with their higher-ups, to explain that to them so they could bring it back to other staff. I think that really helped (Interview #7, off-site CAC affiliation).

This response illustrates the recognition that child protection agencies and police organizations have different mandates, policies, and procedures and that each organization may not understand the other's mandate. It also reflects a common misconception; child protection agencies may expect police to convict or charge an individual because these agencies lack an understanding of the burden of proof that police must establish in order to lay charges. Open dialogue between police officers and child protection agencies allows officers the opportunity to explain why criminal charges could not be laid in a particular case, thus alleviating frustration on the part of both organizations. Consistently, we found at sites in which collaborative tensions have been, or are being addressed, police are much more likely to express positive opinions of joint work with partner agencies, particularly in key areas such the sharing of sensitive information.

3.2.2. Information sharing with child protection agencies

Collaborative relationships generate the need for the sharing of confidential information amongst police and various agencies, organizations, and institutions. This creates challenges, particularly in cases of highly sensitive information related to sexual and inter-personal violence (Gamache, 2012, p. 884). Notably, providing victims with information about local resources (counseling, child services, etc.) was portrayed as fundamentally distinct from providing local resource partners with information about victims, alleged offenders, and criminal investigations. In the former, police simply pass on publicly available resources, such as through the distribution of a flyer or a business card. In relation to the latter, the information is not publicly available but has been generated from criminal investigation. Sharing of this information is seen as a potential threat to the investigation process, even while police recognize that to protect children it is often necessary to reveal sensitive intelligence to community partners. There is a delicate balance between the protection of children's safety and the need to follow strict investigative, security, and privacy protocols.

Although police are at times reluctant to share information with community partners, they rely on the willingness of community partners to share information with them. Many police officers identified community agencies as the primary avenue through which cases of child sexual abuse are reported. The following interview excerpt expresses a common description of how child-related cases come to the police.

> With children a lot of the times we get a call from the Children's Aid Society. So it's been reported to them and then they need help from the police to investigate. I'd say most of the time with kids it's through the CAS (Interview #43, no CAC affiliation).

In addition to the CAS, this officer noted that other community partners who inform police of alleged child sexual interference include schools, hospitals, and counseling agencies. In this regard, community partners function as the providers of information, initiating an investigative process through which the police proceed to gather more information in order to process an investigation.

Despite the consensus that CAS is the main source of referrals, several police officers express that child protection agencies are not always forthcoming in providing information to police, or they delay informing police in order to pursue their own investigation. Given that the primary role of police is to investigate allegations of crime, failures by CAS to report allegations of abuse to police can be interpreted as generating risk for police and the broader community.

> It is a liability. There is a lot of risk attached to that in both ways, you know. Us not sharing information with them and letting them know a child is involved in a case, if someone forgets to send that email to them. And same with them, if they're not notifying us about on-going issues (Interview #63, no CAC affiliation).

The concerns expressed by this officer were typical of those working within organizations without a CAC affiliation and without established protocols of information sharing. Belief that community partners were withholding information was, not surprisingly, associated with reluctance to share their own investigative findings. Nonetheless, there is a recognition that the partnership between police and child protection agencies requires a two-way transfer of information. Police are recipients of information from child protection agencies and are mandated to share information; they inform child protection agencies about situations where children may be unsafe, neglected or abused. Child protection agencies follow up on this information, conduct assessments of the home environment, and can even remove children from a home deemed unsafe.

Information, however, is not simply pieces of data transferred from one organization to another. The quality of information, its provenance, and reliability frequently comes under scrutiny. Police may rely on receiving information from other organizations, but they expressed a degree of distrust about that information, which suggests certain ambivalence about its actual value. This was especially evident with regard to the forensic interviews of children where police must follow very strict rules and must not be perceived to lead the child in any way. Child protection agencies, schools, and other community partner organizations do not share the same protocols and procedures. An officer explained that:

> Sometimes I have had cases where I don't feel confident laying a charge because you look at the form of questioning beforehand, or you might see an interview from Children's Aid and it's a bunch of leading questions which resulted in allegations. So that's something I think we need to look at or work on. … that's something we'd have to talk to these people at different agencies like schools and Children's Aid and try to interview these people [the child victims] first before these interviews get tainted so to speak

(Interview #12, no CAC affiliation).

This officer referred to the challenges of using interviews completed by community agencies or practitioners (i.e., teachers, social workers) for their own investigations because these organizations do not follow police protocols or have the same threshold of burden of proof. As a result, children must be interviewed again by police and potentially re-traumatized. Other officers suggested that, at this point, it is already 'too late'; the investigation has already been undermined by what they perceived as leading questions on the part of community organizations.

Despite the tensions several police interviewees expressed, many demonstrated a commitment to collaborate relationships and offered examples how they attempt to mitigate the possibilities that an investigation will be compromised through collaborative engagement. For example, police may conduct interviews themselves according to their protocols, but allow child protection agency workers to be present, or to follow the interview from the observation room or through a video feed. Police officers were most likely to describe established processes and protocols for information sharing within the context of CACs.

3.3. Child Advocacy Centres

CACs are designed to "provide a coordinated approach to addressing the needs of child and youth victims and/or witnesses in the criminal justice system" (Department of Justice, 2016). CACs vary in composition, but all are equipped for forensic interviews and have adopted measures to make the interview process more comfortable and safe for children, such as using home-like furniture and play areas to foster a sense of security for child victims. An officer described an off-site CAC used for meeting with families and interviewing children, "the room the family sits in is nicer than most people's living rooms at home: big screen TV, computer, games, everything" (Interview #12). Other commonly described features of both on- and off-site locations were civilian dress for police officers and a general atmosphere that resembles a community centre more than a police unit. Simply put, each CAC is designed to be "a safe place for kids to come to tell their story" (Interview #33, on-site CAC affiliation). In describing their local CAC, police officers typically draw a contrast between its environment and that of their police station.

Used to be where we'd have our kids come into the lobby. They'd be paraded through the police station. … They'd be interviewed here, and then paraded back into the lobby – just not a good situation. Now we go down to [the CAC]. It's child friendly; it's safe; it's confidential. It's quiet, private (Interview #47, off-site CAC affiliation).

This description demonstrates the advantages of an advocacy centre, which include the friendly, secure, and private location, posited in contrast to the potentially distressing atmosphere of a police station. Descriptions of improvements brought about through CACs, particularly when compared with how police investigations operated prior to or without them, were common among the respondents.

The center is basically the place for the child to come and they are here to have their medical exam, they're here for therapy, they're here to see a detective, they're here for child family services. If they have to meet with the Crown before they go to court, they come here and meet with the Crown—everything is done here so this is a safe place for the kid to come (Interview #29, on-site CAC affiliation).

Such descriptions of efficacies and co-located services are consistent with research in the US that notes CACs have better facilities for child-friendly interviews and a greater commitment to joint processes (Newman & Dannenfesler, 2005; Sheppard & Zangrillo, 1996).

Although the aesthetics of advocacy centres are helpful for fostering a sense of security in child victims, their effective operation still depends upon collaboration between the various agencies on site. Many officers explained that the key to their success is the sharing of information and resources:

It's honestly the collaboration that happens here, it, it makes it, it makes it easy. … You can't operate in those, those silos anymore. It's just, it's ineffective, right? It's time consuming, it's frustrating, and it's costly (Interview #61, on-site CAC affiliation).
We don't ever want to duplicate existing services. And because we're a community-based child advocacy center, we want to use that wealth of experience and networks within our community (Interview #48, on-site CAC affiliation).

These officers' words illustrate not only the expanse of services made available to child victims through co-located advocacy centres, but officers' perceptions of the benefits and the efficacy of the collaboration emblematic of CACs. Child victims of sex crimes benefit by having access to multiple services, and police benefit by drawing on the knowledge and experience of partner agencies. Several officers working in CAC contexts noted they reach out to community partners when they have questions about a particular file. This suggests that although police still focus primarily on their role in criminal investigations, they recognize that the role of other organizations overlaps with their own and can make their work more efficient. Respondents were much more likely to volunteer positive accounts of information sharing and collaborative work in on-site CACs as compared with off-site CACs and, to an even greater degree, than with units not affiliated with CACs.

The sharing of information and the development of multi-agency responses to victims improves police function, and can mitigate the tensions and challenges identified above. One officer likened the process of information sharing at his CAC to emergency room triage:

Every morning at 9 a.m. we will triage those matters and identify what is the approach. So there may not be a police approach, but there may be a Child and Family Services approach. Or maybe it's determined that the best course is just therapy for the child. But,

everybody comes to the table and offers a piece of that puzzle. … We are just so good at information sharing, and that is the key to our success… our interest is what is best for that child (Interview #19, on-site CAC affiliation).

This officer hailed information sharing as a key to success in investigating and responding to sex crimes committed against children. He also noted that not all child protection and safety matters go through criminal justice processes. Unsurprisingly, clear communication between the various stakeholders involved allows organizations to work together rather than at cross-purposes.

Certainly, CACs are not the panacea for all collaborative challenges, and few have the benefit of co-located staffing. Officers working in on-site CACs described established protocols and practices for information sharing, such as the triage process described above. In contrast, officers in agencies with no CAC affiliation, or with a loose affiliation to an off-site centre, often referred to collaborative tensions that arise as organizations navigate the boundaries of their own roles and protocols with those of their partners. Yet even at an on-site location, one officer noted that "the hardest part is just the politics", explaining that while "everyone wants to do what's best for the child", some organizations have stricter policies than others (Interview #24). As noted, how information is shared between organizations, although certainly facilitated by having shared locations and memorandums of understanding, can still be restricted by conflicting organizational protocols, different management procedures, and distrust. Nonetheless, the identification of CACs as being in the best interest of child victims was unanimous among research participants, although many drew attention to lack of secure funding[10] and others called for 'standardized process' for CACs across Canada.

4. Discussion

In this study, we explore the complexity of police collaborative relationships with community agencies and how these relations contribute to the shaping of police responses to child victims of sex crimes. Given part of our focus in this research was on police networking more broadly, we asked interviewees about specific protocols and mandates around joint investigations and relationships to external organizations. In relation to police response to child sex crime victims, we consistently found that police are aware of the need for supports for child victims and their families, and accept that part of their role is to connect victims to these supports. The extent these efforts take time away from the primary tasks involved in criminal investigations varied among officers and organizations, often dependent on the degree to which collaboration was formalized (e.g., if through established CACs). Individual police organizations and the character of the relationships with community partners also inform how and where officers invest their labour. Few officers were willing to take on therapeutic support for child victims themselves, but the majority of officers in this study expressed appreciation for the community services to which they can refer child victims and their families. Such findings are consistent with those of scholars in the US; specifically that within police organizations 'soft' police functions are kept at the margins and 'hard' functions, such as criminal investigations, are prioritized (McCarthy, 2013; Rabe-Hemp, 2009). Officers viewed these community supports as distinct from other services police provide, but fundamental to child victims.

The reification of traditional police response to crime (namely the investigation of crime and laying of charges) is illustrated through the discussion of referrals. Processes of referral to other services allow police to delineate the boundaries of their role (e.g., police conduct criminal investigations and community organizations provide social services). When talking about referrals, police were almost unanimously positive, although several lamented that community organizations tend to lack funding, have long wait lists, or that there were insufficient organizations within the community to refer victims (particularly in small urban centres). Referral type of collaboration does not require police to share information with community organizations, as publicly available information about services is simply provided to victims. Some police organizations have units within or attached to their organization that act as hubs to help victims navigate the various services and the criminal justice processes. This allows investigators and detectives to focus their efforts on investigative matters and hand over victim support to others. Again, this type of collaboration serves to reinforce the police role as primarily focused on criminal investigations and security. At the same time, police expressed a recognition that they were doing more for victims of crime than in previous years, even if by simply investing more effort in facilitating community referrals. Thus, the expansion of policing roles to be more supportive of crime victims was a consistent finding during our research processes.

Many positive practices result from police collaboration, but challenges still exist during collaboration between agencies with different objectives. This was most evident when boundaries or protocols were not clearly established or were interpreted as being violated by one of the parties. In contrast to simply referring child victims and their families to community services, working jointly with community organizations (such as when interviewing victims and determining a course of action) was much more likely to cause tension. Researchers, indeed, have long identified joint interviews as the main source of conflict between police and child protection services (Lloyd & Burman, 1996). Police identified many of the same challenges noted in US and UK scholarship on CACs and collaborative responses to child sex abuse, such as conflicting priorities and communication difficulties (Faller & Henry, 2000; Newman & Dannenfesler, 2005). Yet at the same time, the majority of police respondents recognized that collaborative approaches with community partners can actually assist them in performing their role. Whether police perceive collaboration as assisting or impeding their duties depended significantly on how clearly processes of communication were defined, such as through memorandums of understanding for information sharing and joint responses to child abuse and sexual interference, a finding echoed by other researchers studying joint responses (Cross et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2007). Officers in sites where collaboration happens on an

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[10] CACs can receive funding from the Government of Canada, allocated from the federal Victims' Fund, for development and operation. To date, Alberta is the only province in Canada with legislated, sustainable funding for CACs as its *Children's First Act* reallocates funds from ministries including child welfare, social service, policing and health toward CACs.

ad hoc basis were likely to express frustration, dissatisfaction, distrust of the community organization, and claim that these organizations did not understand the roles, mandates, and responsibilities of police. In contrast, officers operating in on-site CACs, or in a combination of on-site and off-site networking, reported improvements in investigation process and collaboration.

Although some officers acknowledge that challenges remain, including how organizations collaborate within on-site CACs, police spoke positively of the collaboration made possible in these advocacy centres; suggesting it made their own job easier and produced better results for victims. Interviewees expressed trust toward community partners, appreciation for what they brought to the table, and reliance on them to 'put together the pieces of the puzzle' when addressing complex cases of abuse and assault. Collaboration appears to work best when protocols are clearly in place and respected by all parties involved. Our research indicates that this can be facilitated by co-location and structured processes of information sharing (such as the daily 'triage' meetings of partners). However, given that CACs are still a recent phenomenon in Canada, and that the size and scope of CACs vary significantly, more research is needed to understand how to measure the efficacy of CACs in relation to their specific compositions and to what standards they are held. Building trust, establishing joint-protocols, and strengthening processes of coordination require time and commitment from all involved parties (Cross et al., 2005). Given the gravity of sex crimes against children, the lack of attention to on-going implementation of CACs in Canada needs to be remedied.

4.1. Limitations

Our study provides a foundation for further research on networked responses to child victims and sex crimes, although with select limitations. First, respondents were all police officers, and as such, the perspective of community partner agencies, in terms of the benefits and challenges of partnerships, is notably absent. Second, we do not claim our findings are generalizable to all police services in Canada, rather we suggest that qualitative findings such as these can elucidate contemporary Canadian policing practices with regard to child victims of sex crimes, and provisionally offer insights to the problems and benefits associated with networked responses from the perspective of police.

5. Conclusion

Through our analyses, we provide qualitative insights into the networked role of police response to child victims of sex crimes, and show that variance in the degree to which partnerships are formalized and co-located impacts police attitudes toward community partners and their willingness to share information. Police officers were much more likely to speak positively about the process of joint investigations and information sharing in organizations affiliated with established CACs. Collaborative tensions, such as differing mandates and blurred boundaries, were present in all research sites, but police working in and alongside advocacy centres were more likely to recognize that the safety and best interest of children was a shared goal across all partner agencies. Several officers expressed the hope that more CACs will be established in Canada, and that existing ones receive adequate funding to continue and to grow.[11] The challenges they identify, however, demonstrate that there is a need for clearly demarcated roles, and a mutual understanding of those roles, for these partnerships to be most successful.

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[11] As successful as the model of CACs appears to be, they are currently limited to responding to crimes against children. Such a model of holistic, collaborative responses to adult sexual assault and domestic violence remains absent.

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