PROPOSED STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING CRIME IN BARBADOS

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Introduction

A glance at the local daily newspapers reveals various reports of crime. There is an emerging belief that the incidence and prevalence of crime in this island are becoming endemic. Best (2001: 8) wrote

Within a matter of hours, the headlines were telling us of visitors being robbed at gunpoint and locals being shot at in public, along with a man being shot in public.

In addition, Prescod (2001: 2) stated

A St. Philip mother had to turn away from her window on Sunday morning when she saw her son being chopped with a cutlass before her eyes.

These are but a few examples of an emerging trend in criminal activity in Barbados, a trend which appears consistent with the situation in many other Caribbean countries, especially Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. This trend presupposes a need to identify, develop and implement strategies to arrest the undesired high incidence and prevalence of criminal activity in Barbados. This is the rationale behind this study. While the strategies are directed primarily at Barbados, they may be useful and have ramifications for many other Caribbean countries.

The purpose of this article is, therefore, to throw more light on crime in Barbados, discuss criminal activity in Barbados and propose strategies to reduce crime on the Island. The article commences with a brief discussion of criminal activity and continues to present a number of strategies to improve the situation.

Methodology

The methodology involves a description of crime in Barbados, including a brief analysis of crime statistics, followed by a discussion of the proposed strategies. The source of data for the statistical analysis of crime is the Police crime statistics. The discussion of crime statistics, therefore, relates only to crimes which were reported to the Police.

Results

Criminal Activity

That crime is rising in Barbados is not in question (see, for example, National Taskforce on Crime Prevention, 2000; Evanson 2001). Table 1 shows recorded crimes by type in 1990 and 1999.
Table 1. Recorded Crimes in Barbados, 1990-1999 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>*Type of Crime</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>% Change 1990-99</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burglary of Dwelling House</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>-17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Burglary</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Damage</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>95.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Deception</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>-26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft of Motor Vehicle</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>750.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft from Motor Vehicle</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft from Shops</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Theft</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>-37.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Derived from National Taskforce on Crime, 2000 and Police Statistics.

* Barbados Police crimes classifications

Burglary of dwelling houses continues to be the largest single crime in Barbados, recording 30.2% and 25.0% of criminal activity in Barbados in 1990 and 1999 respectively. This is followed by other theft (which includes theft from individuals etc.), which recorded 26.2% and 16.3% of crimes in 1990 and 1999 respectively. Other burglary (9.2% in 1990 and 9.7% in 1999), drugs (6.1% in 1990 and 11.9% in 1999), violence (5.3% in 1990 and 8.1% in 1999) and criminal damage (5.0% and 6.8% in 1990 and 1999 respectively) also recorded higher proportions. Theft of a motor vehicle recorded the lowest proportion of 0.4% in 1990, while criminal deception (3.1%) recorded the lowest proportion in 1999.

In terms of changes in percentage points between 1990 and 1999, the largest change was recorded for other theft (9.9%), followed by drugs (5.4%), burglary of dwelling houses (-5.2%). Another way to analyze the statistics is to look at % changes in proportion (which is different from changes in percentage points). Percentage points presents the changes in terms of magnitude of the proportion, while % changes provide the changes as a proportion of the base year percentages (i.e., 1990).

The largest % change in proportions was recorded for theft of motor vehicles; the recorded cases of this crime increased by
750.0% from 1990 to 1999. Other large increases were recorded for drugs (95.1%), violence (52.8%), criminal damage (36.0%) and robbery (35.9%). Other theft (-37.8%) and burglary of dwelling houses (-17.2%) recorded negative % changes or decreasing number of recorded cases from 1990 to 1999.

The crime situation in Barbados is exacerbated by the increasing incidence of serious crimes involving the use of firearms. Firearm-related crimes increased by more than 50% during 1999 and 2000 (Evanson, 2001: 11). Table 2 shows the recorded cases of firearm-related crimes for January to November 1999 and January to November 2000.

Table 2
Number of Firearm-Related Crimes, Barbados, 1999-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murders</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery/Robbery with Assault</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>84.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endangering Life/Shooting at</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>74.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlawful Possession</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firearm Theft</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In both 1999 and 2000, the single largest firearm-related crime was robbery and robbery with assault, recording 75 and 138 cases in 1999 and 2000 respectively. This was followed by unlawful possession of firearms (61 in 1999 and 73 in 2000), and endangering life or shooting at, which recorded 35 and 61 cases in 1999 and 2000 respectively. There was no change in the recorded cases of firearm theft in 1999 and 2000 (5 cases each), while numerically recorded cases of murder involving the use of a firearm decreased from 7 to 6 during the 1999-2000 period.

With regards to % changes in firearm-related crimes between 1999 and 2000, the largest change occurred in the recorded cases of robbery and/or robbery with assault (84% increase). This was followed by endangering life/shooting (74.3%), and unlawful possession of a firearm (19.7%). The number of murders involving the use of a firearm recorded the only decline of -14.3%. 
Strategies

The underlying principle for strategies is that strategies aimed at reducing crime in Barbados have a good potential to be successful if carefully planned, developed and implemented. Corroborating this view, National Task Force on Crime Prevention (2000: 18) stated for example that “targeted crime prevention could reduce crime against visitors even further.” The proposed strategies cover three principal areas, namely prevention, reparation and retribution, and rehabilitation. These principal strategic areas are augmented by interagency collaboration and research, monitoring and evaluation and funding (see also Davidson et al., 1981).

Prevention

As the old adage goes, “prevention is better than cure,” and this is the philosophical basis for proposing preventive strategies. Crime prevention should occur at two levels, i.e., stopping first time offenders or potential offenders from becoming criminals and secondly reducing recidivism among those who are already criminals.

Crime prevention can take various forms, but the strategy being espoused here is proper education of both potential victims and the perpetrators, and the creation of conditions, which would not encourage the commission of crime, conditions which would make crime unattractive as an option to the perpetrators. Thomas et al. (1998) and other researchers point out that many factors are known to prevent crime. They include the creation of employment opportunities, education, strong family and societal support, and good social environment, reduction in gang, group, or peer pressure, and protection and opportunities for those who decide to relinquish association with the group.

There is growing empirical evidence to support the links between employment and crime (see Thomas et al., 1998). The basic relationship is that gainfully employed people have a lower propensity to commit crimes than the unemployed. Creating employment opportunities for the population, especially the youth and ex-convicts has the potential to prevent crime.

In Barbados, the youth are urged to enroll in the Barbados Youth Service, a program which requires the youth to spend up to a year in a secluded facility where they are taught various skills and discipline. It is the contention of this study that an attempt is made to expand the intake of youth by making more places available, and also to promote the existence of the facility to a broad segment of the youth population as possible.

There is also some theoretical and empirical support for the position that youth who stay in school longer and acquire relevant qualifications, increase their employability and, in the process, are more likely to obtain jobs. In addition, strong family and social supports are essential ingredients for preventing the occurrence of crime. Broadhurst (1991), Motiuk (1995) and Yeboah (2000) provide a synthesis of evidence to show that supportive family and other social environments assist in crime prevention and reduction. Negative family and social environments do not only facilitate the occurrence of crime, they also impact adversely on various measures adopted to fight crime. For example, Yeboah (2000: 228) pointed out that “personal change is difficult in the context of negative environment.”
Most of the time, gang, group or peer pressure constitutes a driving force which encourage and, sometimes, compels people to commit crime. An effective crime prevention strategy should include measures to enhance and facilitate people leaving gangs, criminal groups and bad peers. Measures, such as sanctuary and protection for those who want to leave bad company, tend to encourage people to leave their gang or group affiliations and help reduce crime.

The situation in Barbados where many young adults just idle the time away in what is known locally as ‘liming’ can and do contribute to crime. There must be something fruitful and worthwhile for the youth to do. For example, the youth should be encouraged to stay in school longer, special recreational programs could be developed and employment and related opportunities improved.

The presence of the Police in localities of major criminal activity tends to serve as a deterrent, and a crime prevention strategy would not be complete without a strong Police presence. The strategy espouses further that the Police should be well trained, equipped and adequately remunerated to enable them to perform effectively and efficiently. Recent efforts in Barbados to pay the Police various allowances for extra work, the introduction of a six day week for the Police are all steps in the right direction. Police patrols must increase especially in Brittons Hill in the Parish of St Michael and Four Roads and Six Roads in the Parish of St Philip, where gun touting youth have been tormenting residents in recent times.

Closely associated with strong Police presence is the establishment of community watch groups referred to in some jurisdictions as “Neighbourhood Watch.” Non-vigilante community groups such as Neighbourhood Watch could deter and prevent crime in Barbados.

Measures aimed at preventing crime should begin early, with parents inculcating good values, honesty and various disciplines in their children. Children being taught early at school that crime does not help society, does not pay and could land the perpetrators in prison. The plan of action is to change the thinking of criminals and potential criminals through changing their cognitive skills and making them think straight (see also McFarlane - Nathan 1994).

Sight should also not be lost of the fact that, for crime prevention measures to work, they must be well targeted. The groups and individuals to whom the measures are directed, should be clearly defined and identified. Crime prevention education involving various advertisements in newspapers and on television can assist with crime reduction, but they must address pressing crimes.

Retribution and Reparation

A second group of strategies is broadly headlined retribution and reparation. This strategy incorporates plans of action which are intended to ensure that criminals do not escape punishment for their crimes. There is a school of thought which espouses that criminals must be punished to serve as a deterrent, while another school of thought emphasizes rehabilitation (the third strategy proposed in this article). The thrust of the proposed strategy is for the level of sentencing to reflect the nature of the crime.
Central to the reparation and retribution strategy is the proposal for Barbados to establish and employ a range of sentencing options in the criminal justice system. In many other countries, sentences range from caution, reprimand and discharge, community services and orders, fines, periodic detention to imprisonment (see Petersilia 1996; and Yeboah 2000). In Barbados, the common sentences are imprisonment, fines and what is known locally as “convicted, reprimanded and discharged or CRD.” Inherent in the proposed strategy is the urgent need for non-custodial sentences such as fines to be enforced.

Closely related is a plan of action for including restorative justice in the Barbados criminal justice system. Restorative justice is a victim-offender mediation process which brings the offender into contact with the victim after the event. Restorative justice is now an integral component of the criminal justice systems in many countries, especially Canada, and according to Achtenberg (2000: 32), restorative justice is “founded on the belief that criminal behaviour is primarily caused by the alienation of certain members from society at large.”

With regards to reparation, it is the contention of this article that certain categories of offenders should not only be punished for the damage and related offences they commit, but also they should be made to pay reparations to the victims. Offenders convicted of robbery, burglary and theft (whether aggravated or non-aggravated) should be made to reimburse the victims for what was stolen and/or damage caused.

Rehabilitation

While not losing sight of the second group of strategies headlined reparation and retribution, it is the contention of this article that a third strategy with emphasis on rehabilitation will be in order. There is a synthesis of research evidence which discusses the potential contribution of rehabilitation programs to crime reduction (Yablonsky 1989; Wexler et al 1990; Palmer 1991; and Yeboah 2000). According to this school of thought offenders should be rehabilitated instead of imprisoned or at least there should be opportunities for rehabilitation alongside imprisonment.

Rehabilitation programs, according to this paper, may be located within the prisons environment, i.e., in Glendairy Prison or within the community. Also, the rehabilitation programs can be operated by either government agencies or private community groups or jointly by both.

Inter-agency Collaboration

As a number of agencies are involved in the fight against crime, a strategy to strengthen inter-agency co-ordination is essential to the successful implementation of any crime reduction measures in Barbados. The Barbados Police and Defence Force must work in close collaboration with the National Task Force on Crime Prevention, Crown Counsels, Prison Department and other law enforcement authorities as well as non-government organizations, community groups and regional and international agencies.
Research, Monitoring and Evaluation

The strategy on research, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in the Barbados criminal justice system is based on the philosophy that adequate knowledge, information, and understanding of criminals and the criminal justice system is essential to reduce crime. The proposed strategy is for consistent research to be undertaken on pertinent issues, collection and compilation of adequate quantitative and qualitative information on crime, as well as the monitoring and evaluation of intervention policies and programs (see also National Taskforce on Crime Prevention 2000).

Funding

Central to all the strategies proposed in this paper is the issue of adequate funding. A strategy is proposed requiring the government of Barbados and its relevant authorities to ensure adequate funding of institutions within the criminal justice system (see Mainprize, 1992).

Discussion

The unprecedented rise in criminal activity (especially serious violent crimes) in Barbados in recent times is now becoming endemic. Serious violent offences, including offences involving the use of a firearm are very rife in various segments of Barbados society, and the position that strong measures have to be developed, adopted and implemented to reduce crime cannot be overemphasized. As reported in the media, there is genuine fear among many residents for their personal safety as the occurrence of violent and firearm-related crime continues to escalate.

Crime reduction in Barbados is most likely to succeed if some effort is directed at stopping the commencement of crime. Proper education of victims and potential victims about how to avoid crime is essential to create awareness among the general populace about crime avoidance and, subsequently, crime reduction.

Crime prevention programs including safety education should be well targeted and directed at prevailing crimes. A case in point is television advertisements advising the people of Barbados not to accept rides from strangers. This National Task Force on Crime Prevention advertisement shows two young girls waiting at a bus stop when a car pulls up and offers them a ride to the city. One accepts the ride and ends up being murdered, while the other waits for the bus. While this lesson is clear it is of little value because the crime the advertisement is targeting is virtually non-existent in Barbados, or rare at best.

The statistical evidence provided earlier indicate that robbery, burglary and offences involving the use of firearms are increasing. Hence the need for an advertisement which will address those offences, not a non-existent crime.

The rising youth criminal activity requires stringent measures directed specifically at the youth. Many Barbados youth have nothing to do and spend their time ‘liming’ on the block, as it is called locally. As a result, many fall prey to bad company and undesired peer pressure and find themselves in the law courts. While the Barbados Youth Service is assisting many young persons, the number of available places is very limited. A need therefore exists to increase the number of available places and/or create other new avenues for the youth to
occupy their minds and reduce their propensity to commit crime from idleness. The youth should be encouraged to stay in school longer. This could allow them to acquire some qualifications and increase their employability.

While gang affiliation is not an issue in Barbados, peer pressure to commit crime is rife and needs to be addressed. A possible way of easing this peer pressure is education and the use of the media, churches, schools, community groups and parents to inculcate good behaviour, discipline among the youth, emphasizing the need to resist jumping on the bandwagon.

Police presence is a useful deterrent to crime in most jurisdictions, and Barbados is no exception. Visible Police presence and community activities such as Neighbourhood Watch tend to deter crime. Neighbourhood Watch groups exist in Barbados but, as noted by Jerson (2001: 2), “many of the 107 Neighbourhood Watches around the island are not functioning, despite their success in reducing the level of crime.” Indeed, many of these dormant groups would have to be revamped and reactivated to enable them to contribute to crime deterrence and reduction.

There has been public outcry over the length of sentences that serious offenders have been receiving in Barbados. There have been calls made to the Government for harsher punishment for serious offenders. Many people believe that more severe sentences serve as a deterrent and should be encouraged. The standpoint taken in this study is that the retribution and/or reparation must reflect the seriousness of the crime committed.

Even though there is no conclusive link between sentencing to imprisonment and deterrence to crime, once an offender is incarcerated, that particular offender would not be available to torment society, reducing that particular offender’s recidivism rate. The more severe the sentence, the longer the society is protected from that offender, and there could even be an added bonus of some deterrence arising from it.

The use of a range of sentencing options would enable the courts to exercise some flexibility in sentencing offenders. First time offenders and non-serious offenders could be sentenced to various non-custodial sentences which may not bring them into contact with hardcore criminals, and possibly stop them from becoming hardened criminals (see also Petersilia 1996). Having a range of sentencing options creates the situation where first time non-serious offenders, for example, may still be punished for their crime, but the sentence is such that they still have a chance to get their lives back together without further recidivism.

Fines where imposed must be enforced within the timeframe set by the courts for payment, otherwise the purpose is defeated. In Barbados, many offenders do not pay their fines and no monitoring of fined offenders occurs to ensure that fines are paid. Most of the time the issues of unpaid fines comes up when the offender re-offends and appears in court, and the offender’s antecedents are researched and reported to the Court.

Another proposed sentencing option is restorative justice. According to proponents of restorative justice, this process has a good potential to succeed and reduce recidivism (see, for example, Achtenberg 2000; and Bayda 2000). Linkages between and among families and the need for family support for both victims and perpetrators in Barbados.
mean that restorative justice could work to reduce crime.

The small population of Barbados and the situation of many families knowing one another have the potential to seriously embarrass offenders and their families in the restorative justice context. Culturally, it may thus put added pressure on parents and families to instill discipline in the children and put pressure on family members to refrain from crime.

Besides, restorative justice works on the basis of remorse, compassion and shame, and could work in Barbados because of the large proportion of Christians in the population of this society.

The debate on whether to rehabilitate offenders or throw them into jail continues unabated in all jurisdictions (see, for example, Andrews et al. 1990; and Yeboah 2000: 227) and is present, to some extent, in Barbados. This article espouses strategies which incorporate rehabilitation with retribution and prevention, which are supported by research, monitoring and evaluation of crime policies and programs.

There should be opportunities within the criminal justice system of Barbados to rehabilitate all types of offenders, from those convicted of drug related crimes to serious violent offenders, including rapists, firearm offenders, robbers andburglars. In terms of the proposed strategy, the plan of action is for Barbados to take steps to include in the criminal justice system, rehabilitation programs fully supported by adequate legislation and funding. Where offenders are incarcerated without any attempt to rehabilitate them, the potential for recidivism is likely to increase when they are released into the community after serving their custodial sentence. Indeed, Dyer (1994) concurred with this view and reported that recidivism was likely to increase if offenders lived in a non-therapeutic environment during the period of incarceration.

There is an ongoing debate in the criminological research literature about the best place to locate rehabilitation programs, i.e., in prison or within the community (see, for example, Yeboah 2000). While Wexler et al., (1990) and Antonowicz and Ross (1994) contended that prison-based rehabilitation programs could reduce recidivism, other researchers found no difference between prison-based and community based programs (Asher and Norris 1991; and Lloyed et al., 1994). This debate has very little significance in Barbados at the moment because community groups and organizations are not particularly well equipped to provide therapeutic rehabilitation programs, leaving rehabilitation of offenders in prison the only logical choice.

Even so, this study proposes that due consideration be given to improving the capacity of community groups to deliver rehabilitation programs as in other jurisdictions. This has the added advantage of providing rehabilitation opportunities for offenders who receive non-custodial sentences.

Rehabilitation programs have the potential to work if carefully planned and if certain general requirements are met. These requirements include *inter alia*, supportive family environment (Broadhurst 1991; Motiuk, 1995), adequate length of time spent on program (Wexler et al., 1990; Minor and...
Hartmann 1992; Yeboah 2000), and successful program completion (Barker and Riley 1993; and Hartmann et al., 1994).

Other necessary contributors to successful rehabilitation include the use of cultural factors (McFarlane-Nathan 1994, Thomas et al., 1999 and Yeboah 2000), adequate identification and referral of residents (Begg 1991), use of peer groups (Yablonsky 1989; McLaren 1992) as well as gender appropriateness of programs (Dowell et al., 1985 and Calathes 1991). Barbados would, therefore, have to consider developing guidelines for the delivery of rehabilitation programs for existing criminals to reduce recidivism.

Given the many and diverse agencies involved in the fight against crime in Barbados, interagency liaison and coordination are crucial to successful crime reduction. Successful interagency co-ordination depends to a large extent on the clear definition of each agency’s role and mutual understanding of and support for each other’s role.

Sight should not be lost of the need to adequately fund the Police and Prison Departments and related crime fighting agencies. The Police need to be well trained, well equipped and well remunerated to lead the fight against crime. The National Task Force on Crime Prevention should also be adequately resourced financially, materially and in terms of staffing to enable it to undertake its duties efficiently and effectively.

In November 2000, the Government of Barbados announced the introduction of a range of allowances for the Police. This is a good initiative, but more funding is still required for actual wages and salaries, and to provide the Police with up to date equipment, vehicles and related items.

Finally a strong research base is necessary to identify the underlying causes of criminal behaviour in Barbados, establish patterns and trends in criminal activity, and provide adequate information for decision making, policy and program development, and for establishing best practice in the management of crime. Deosaran (2000: 12) concurred with this view and “called for Caribbean Governments to have policy-oriented crime data in place, noting that this was [a] crucial foundation for fighting drug-related crime and other crimes.”

A strong research and information base should be augmented with systematic monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs to identify the effectiveness and efficiency of policies and programs, to ensure that policy and program objectives are achieved and to identify areas for further improvement.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to throw more light on criminal activity in Barbados using recent statistical and qualitative information. It has been shown that criminal activity is now becoming endemic, with the incidence and prevalence of serious violent offences, especially firearm-related crimes increasing significantly in recent times.

The contention of the study is that a need exists to arrest the crime situation in Barbados, as many islanders are living in fear. A number of strategies have been proposed which collectively have a good potential to tackle crime if carefully implemented. Some of these strategies are already in place in
Barbados, but many are conspicuously missing in the crime reduction measures of Barbados. The thrust of the proposed strategies is their collective potential to reduce crime, and the need to carefully target and implement the strategies.

Strategies have been proposed in the areas of prevention, retribution and reparation, rehabilitation, as well as inter-agency collaboration, research, monitoring and evaluation of programs and policies. Needless to add that this article also proposes adequate funding for the Police and Prison Departments and other agencies involved in crime control.
References


