



Keeping it Real

Issue No. 1, January - May 2020

EDITORIAL

Crime is Everybody's Business

Crime is a pervasive social problem that permeates all levels of society. The crime in Trinidad and Tobago continues unabated, with the homicide rate in excess of 500 for 2019. The New Year, 2020, has only just begun and the murder rate continues to escalate almost on a daily basis. Citizens are beyond frustrated with the current situation and many of us seem to be unaware of our power to reduce crime. While there is a heavy reliance on the criminal justice system to curb the amount of crime, perhaps justly so, as citizens we have a personal responsibility for our safety and that of our loved ones. We need to be more proactive not just as individuals, families and communities, but as a country, since crime is everybody's business.

This newsletter will focus on the issue of crime, but from a non-empirical perspective. The contributions are meant to be simple but meaningful. It aims to address crime at a practical level and is intended to be a unique newsletter without boundaries, able to reach people of diverse ages, genders, ethnicities and socioeconomic levels. Contributors are welcome to share their concerns in relation to crime as well as offer possible solutions and recommendations towards curbing this debilitating problem that currently plagues our society. As citizens, we all have our opinions on the crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago and can offer viable solutions to the powers that be. We welcome your views/perspectives on crime and invite you to

submit your contributions to
keepingitrealnt@gmail.com.

Editorial committee members:

Dr. Jerome Teelucksingh

Dr. Linda Mohammed

Mr. Ian Ramdhanie

Dr. Jerome Teelucksingh is a Lecturer in the Department of History at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

Dr. Linda Mohammed is an Assistant Professor and Discipline Leader at the Institute of Criminology & Public Safety at the University of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Ian Ramdhanie is the Academic Head of the Caribbean Institute for Security and Public Safety. He is a Lecturer in Criminology, Public Safety and Security.



<http://clipart-library.com/cartoon-crime.html>





Keeping it Real

Youth Deviance and the 'Zesser' Subculture in Trinidad

Dr. Karima Pragg



There is a multiplicity of cultures existing throughout Trinidad's social landscape that are differentiated by their respective cultural norms, are guided by their own value system and may therefore have their own responses to the law. Thus, it is possible to suggest that cultural ideals may not be shared by society's dominant and subcultural factions; each subset can be distinguished by its practices, cultural norms and – by extension – responses to general societal notions about crime and deviance.

The sociological community conceptualizes deviance as behaviours violating societal expectations and practices deviating from cultural norms. These expectations or norms include formally enacted laws differentiating criminal from noncriminal acts, and informal social codes favouring conformity and disapproving nonconformity. However, social context is the factor determining whether an act is labelled as deviant since all behaviours are not equally judged by the society's cultural subsets. A deviant act becomes so labelled if it violates socially constructed rules, norms and values that are culturally specific. Thus, one group's classification of deviance may in fact be the manifestation of the cultural goals of another. The youth category can arguably serve as a quintessential

deviant subculture personifying its own unconventional way of life, and expressing its own values and goals dissimilar from other demographics.

This youth subculture presents a very distinct adaptation to the overarching norms, values and goals characterizing the dominant way of life in Trinidad. Their ways of life, their styles, interests and practices, sharply contrast the norms, values and behaviours of older and younger generations in Trinidadian society. Members of this subculture tend to be involved in risky behaviours such as under-aged drinking, gang activity and other typical forms of juvenile delinquency. Hence, youths are not merely distinguished solely according to the age demographic, but also by youth-specific cultural activities.

Particularly, lower class youth subcultures represent a peculiar lifestyle. These youth conform to atypical adaptations of cultural elements including beliefs, clothing, music and language. Theorists like Cohen and Miller presume the value system and behaviours of lower class youth subcultures differentiate them from mainstream society and that lower class youth form completely dissimilar but collective views on the nature of criminal and deviant behavior.

Subcultural theories propose that lower class youth may reject and replace the socially approved goals of society since institutionalized means of attaining the former are obstructed. This subculture therefore forms its own value system that rewards deviance, classifies gang membership and 'zessing' as more appealing goals, and consequently gives youth a special identity. The 'zesser' identity has been immortalized in songs by Trinidadian artistes as one characterized by designer clothing, alcohol, excessive amounts of gold jewellery, and possession of wads of cash, guns and ammunition. These images have





Keeping it Real

become commonplace throughout Trinidadian media platforms, form part of local parlance, and reflect lower class youth subcultural values, classified by Miller as 'focal concerns.' Youths' interests in flaunting contraband, jewellery and alcohol give their subculture a special identity and actively encourage criminal and deviant acts.

Arguably, these focal concerns develop as a rejection to mainstream values that seem unattainable to youth. This idea is prevalent in Trinidadian society since many lower class youth – especially those residing in crime 'hot spots' – encounter labeling, prejudice and discrimination and consequently face formal and informal sanctions. Thus, they identify with the deviant 'zesser' youth subculture that – for them – provides more attractive, attainable and relatable values such as toughness, excitement, and street credibility.

These values or focal concerns are passed on and exalted through socializing agents such as the media and peer group. Music has moral and cultural impacts and when Trinidadian artistes glorify the 'zesser' lifestyle, it is presented as a suitable alternative to the dominant conformist culture and may therefore influence deviance among the youth. These compositions may actually reflect the way of life of Trinidad's lower class youth subculture and encourage the continuity of this culture through its acclamation. However, music is also a reflection of the social environment and may therefore describe the way of life for Trinidad's lower class youth. Hence, deviance may also be a result of association among deviant peers.

Consequently, it may be possible to understand Trinidad's experience of crime and deviance as the manifestation of lower class youth subcultural goals that have been created as a reaction

against the mainstream value system. Socialization through the peer group and the media markets and energizes this subculture and by extension, magnifies this phenomenon. However, it must be noted that youth subcultures are not coherent so subcultural explanations may not adequately explain the culture of all youth. Nevertheless, it is almost impossible to ignore the roles played by the media and peer groups in generating youth subcultures and promulgating ideological frameworks within which youth Trinidadian locate their behaviour.

Dr Karima Pragg has worked as a research assistant at the University of the West Indies, Augustine campus where she has also obtained her PhD in Sociology. Her research interests include animal welfare, education, and youth subcultures. She is currently a lecturer at the UWI School Of Business & Applied Studies (UWI ROYTEC).



WITH BRILLIANT DETECTIVE WORK
LIEUTENANT JACKSON CAUGHT THE
FUGITIVE BY CHECKING HIS
TWITTER STATUS.

<http://clipart-library.com/cartoon-crime.html>





Keeping it Real

Let Us Build a Peaceful Society By David Law

When men and women do not understand the power of the equation
Subtraction will always be a distraction
Superiority more often than not breeds insecurity
Please let us build a peaceful society.

When family values are now an endangered species
Domestic violence statistics just a series in an evolving morass
Forget the race, jump out of your class
Let us build a peaceful society.

When some of our children are holding this nation to ransom
Crime drugs violence juvenile delinquency may not go away easily
Blame it on parental failures, political miseries
Still let us build a peaceful society.

When our womenfolk are tokenly honoured and appreciated
Gender imbalances are impregnated in our cultural psyche
Dismantle all barriers, adopt an all inclusive philosophy
So we can build a peaceful society.

When poverty knows no region or race
It's time for us to share a humane space
Build on social capital, promote economic stability
Let us build a peaceful society.

When our homes have been ripped apart by moral and spiritual decay
And the onus is on our womenfolk to keep things at bay

Pray for our mothers, our sisters to cope
Their only ammunition, faith and hope
We must build a peaceful society.

When men abscond, true father figures still to be found
Single parenting becomes an adversary
The silent rage of a generation, is more than a tragedy
Men let us build a peaceful society.

When politicians pontificate and legislate on social values
Providing only short term economic clues
The road to social stability is longer than financial prudence
Let us build a peaceful society.

When housewives are not accepted as home managers
A perfect home will always be a myth
Greater income but no power sharing
Is not the structure for social family planning
Avoid the tensions, do a feasibility
Let us build a peaceful society.

When we as a people become void of race, class, colour
And unite with one vigour
To eradicate the scourges that limit our power
Building a peaceful society
Will no longer be a dream, but a practical reality
Peace, let us share the process.

Composed by David Law, one of the Management Coordinators of MEN AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (MAVAW) for the celebration of International Women's Day 2002 and read by him for the first time at 2.45pm, Friday 8th March 2002 on the Brian Lara Promenade, Independence Square, Port of Spain. (This was the seventh (7th) contribution to this Day by Men Against Violence Against Women.)





Keeping it Real

Missing Link in the National Crime Prevention Programme (NCP)

Donald Berment



The below link is the location for all of the information on the Proposed National Crime Prevention Programme.

<http://www.news.gov.tt/content/what-you-need-know-about-ncpp#.W-XSlwit4kZ.mailto>

Once this Programme is tailored and running smoothly, results can be seen in the shortest possible time. There is however a missing link at the community level, which can greatly increase the possibility of success.

After I attended five meetings of the Diego Martin Community Crime Prevention Council (CCPC), the conclusion was made that we need to broaden the support and action base, to assist the lone Liaison Officer for the 10 Electoral Districts, in Diego Martin, with a total population of 101,000 persons. I want to suggest there be a Field Officer for each District, reporting to the Liaison Officer in the first instance and whoever else requires data at the higher levels. The work to be done can be done at a much faster rate, than the present burdensome system, being placed on one Liaison Officer. These Field Officers should satisfy the following basic criteria:

1. Be very familiar with their Districts.

2. Have a home or office space from which to operate.
3. Demonstrate competency in the use of the Internet and have basic computer literacy skills.
4. Be able to work comfortably with the Liaison Officer and the Councillor for the area in the first instance.
5. Have the time, commitment and dedication for Nation Building, Sustainable Development, to attend to the work of the NCP and the CCPC.
6. Possess good communication skills and good relationship with the police station in the District and with the police.

The financial compensation package will be decided between the NCP management and the Field Officers interested in the position.

My advice here is, to make the best offer possible and/or agree on same, as our future peace and sustainable development depends on how this work is done at all levels, most importantly at the ground level. I am convinced that we can find the necessary money to recruit 10 Field Officers in Diego Martin, 8 Field Officers in Chaguanas and 12 Field Officers in Tobago. The loss of spending eventually on treating persons affected by crime in hospitals, prisons, courts, police and social services, will surely surpass any investment now, in the National Crime Prevention Programme (NCP).

Donald Berment is an Adult Educator, a specialist in the Housing and Settlement Development Sector and a Natural Growth Architect. He is also a Domestic Violence Counsellor and serves as Secretary/Director of Men Against Violence Against Women





Keeping it Real



<http://clipart-library.com/cartoon-crime.html>

Lend Me Your Ear, in the Fight Against Crime

Attish Kanhai



Gone are the days when most people would need to open a newspaper to know what was happening in the country. Now with social media the majority of the population knows almost immediately when something happens. Viral videos and citizen reporters often trump the media houses with on the ground reporting. It takes very little for a video or a story to go viral. Many viral videos are those that

feature brazen robberies taking place in broad daylight.

I am sure we have all seen them. Law-abiding citizens trying to go about their lives when they are interrupted by some gun-toting individual demanding their possessions. The focus of this piece, however, is not the gun-toting individuals but rather those who view these viral videos or read the stories. Crime has been front and centre in our news cycle and in our lives for far too long. This constant inundation of crime related news lends itself to apathy among the public. The most we might interact with one of the aforementioned viral videos is to comment, put an angry face emoji, and share it with a snide caption, "Look at these good boys."

When our society has come to this point, then what next? This is a sign of resignation that crime is here to stay and no longer worthy of our attention. Apathy, unless we are directly affected by it, is how we treat with crime. Every so often a murder happens that will shock us, remember Asami and Shannon? These murders were supposedly the last straw for many of us, but what changed? These crimes were deemed so heinous that something had to be done, but nothing was. How then can we not be apathetic? How then can we not just accept our fate, share these news stories on our social media platforms and then simply move on?

I'm not going to suggest for a second that we take the law into our own hands, or that we become any sort of vigilantes. How, then do we break this cycle? How then do we lay to waste the apathy that pervades our collective consciousness when it comes to the crime situation? The State of Florida may have a solution. Numerous Florida parishes have seen some measure of success with what is known as the EAR





Keeping it Real

Programme where EAR stands for Education, Accountability and Resources.

The first of EAR, Education: many administrations have spent a lot of money on our education system, but simply throwing money at a problem without a clear structure or plan will not have any kind of meaningful effect. The link between improved education and reduced crime is abundantly evident. The better educated a society is, the less violent it becomes.

The second aspect, Accountability, also has the effect of reducing crime. When the legal system provides the necessary support to those brave enough to come forward and report on crime, this has a ripple effect. When the expectation is that criminals are reported and prosecuted, then accountability becomes a major weapon in the fight against crime.

Finally, Resources. Normally the most challenging of the three, the police service in this country can ill afford to complain as they are regularly furnished with vehicles, some of which are useful and others, not so much (blimps?) however, resources alone are not a magic bullet to end all criminal acts.

I understand this is not as simple as it seems and there are a lot more factors at play when it comes to crime reduction, but we do need to start somewhere. There will be no successful crime plan without community and public involvement. More than brute force, a common sense and structured approach is required in order to get a handle on the runaway crime train.

If we do in fact expect to find our way out of the miasma of crime that has engulfed our nation for decades then effort on the part of many, other than the police service, is required. The authorities have to make it palatable for the general public in order for this

to occur. The question though remains, are we too far gone, or is this country worth the effort?

Attish Kanhai is a marine biologist and freelance author with regular publications in the daily newspaper as well as international magazines. He is also a drummer, avid gym goer and spends much time sitting in traffic listening to podcasts. In his free time he writes on several different topics of interest including politics and religion. He is also a keen observer of people and finds writing down his observations about them to be a rewarding past time. He makes his home in central Trinidad along with his family, an assortment of fruit trees and a lawn increasingly in need of cutting.



<http://clipart-library.com/cartoon-crime.html>





Keeping it Real

Realising a Vision of a Safer, Just and Peaceful Society

Leela Ramdeen



Trinidad and Tobago's response to crime is a moral test for our nation. Crime and fear of crime touch all our lives. The status quo is not working. Too many of our institutions are failing, and our entire approach to building a just, inclusive society that fosters respect for life, good neighbourliness, peace and harmony needs to be revised.

Unless we are committed to promote what the Catholic Church refers to as integral human development, that is the development of each person, and of every dimension of the person, we are 'spinning top in mud', as the saying goes. Catholics believe that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Every threat to the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person must be addressed with urgency.

It is time to change our lukewarm attempts to effect change. Marla Dukharan, economist, highlighted the fact that for every dollar spent on crime in TT in 2018, only 15 cents were spent on prevention. Are we serious about our crime prevention/reduction strategies?

Since the causes of crime are complex, we must have a multi-faceted/multi-sectoral response to

this scourge that threatens to overwhelm us. While we all have a part to play in crime prevention/reduction, it is essential that our Government develops an holistic approach to the crime situation. Such an approach requires us to address the root causes of crime and the risk factors that may contribute to crime, for example, poverty, urban decay and social exclusion / inequalities / inequities, family disintegration, lack of quality education and employment, poor housing, mental illness, the proliferation of guns, drug/substance abuse, gang violence, lack of respect for authority and the rule of law.

We must move away from retributive justice and embrace a restorative justice approach to the criminal justice system. As it exists at the moment, the criminal justice system may be an obstacle to sustainable development. We cannot continue to warehouse persons in our prisons for years. The scandal of the large numbers of those on Remand who have been there for many years waiting for their cases to be dealt with must be addressed urgently. Action by the Judiciary is to be welcomed, but more needs to be done to speed up the process.

The conditions in the overcrowded prisons are inhumane and contribute just as much to crime in the nation as poverty and social exclusion. Many are confined to their cells for 23 hours per day. The UN Standard Minimum Rules for the treatment of prisoners, known as the 'Mandela Rules', have not been embraced by countries in the region. Scientific literature outlines the psychological harms of solitary confinement. Rule 43 of the Mandela Rules specifically prohibits indefinite solitary confinement and prolonged solitary confinement. Rule 44 states that "solitary confinement shall refer to the confinement of prisoners for 22 hours or more a day without meaningful human contact. Prolonged solitary





Keeping it Real

confinement shall refer to solitary confinement for a time period in excess of 15 consecutive days.”

As I have said before, if we are going to be a country that considers human rights, then the systems must work. We have to ask ourselves: “What are we doing to stop the wheel of justice from grinding so slowly?” We cannot reduce crime without looking at the conditions that create it.”

Research shows that rehabilitation can reduce recidivism/reoffending. Our recidivism rate remains high. For more than 3 years (2004-2007) I worked with others on a Cabinet-appointed *Parole Introduction Committee*, seeking, inter alia, to determine the kind of infrastructure that will be required if TT is to introduce Parole. I was pleased to read in the *Trinidad Guardian* on 6 August 2019, that the Minister of National Security, Stuart Young’s statement that his Ministry is in the process of developing a parole system. Prisons should not be warehouses where people grow old, without hope, and where they waste their lives. We need to establish a parole system that is adequately supported by the right kind of infrastructure to ensure its success.

Over the years there have been numerous reports with many helpful recommendations that will help us to address the crime situation. Recommendations, such as those made in the UNDP’s *Caribbean Human Development Report 2012: Human Development and the Shift to Better Citizen Security* should be adopted. For example, the report states that Caribbean governments can reverse the trend of high murder rates. It calls for regional governments “to beef up public institutions to tackle crime and violence – including the criminal justice system-while boosting preventive measures.” It recommends that we should develop a better balance between law enforcement and preventive measures.

Here are a few other suggestions as to how we may be able to employ innovative and effective strategies to prevent and reduce crime and violence:

1. Strengthen family life. In the absence of strong family life and a failing education system, many are turning to gangs looking for their needs to be met, including love;
2. Overhaul our education system to meet the needs of our highly technological age. If there are gaps in the value systems in the home, the school must step in and nurture values and virtues that will enable our youth/adults to do what is right when no one is looking;
3. Develop/implement programmes that include: mentoring, mediation, skills training, substance abuse treatment, probation, parole and reintegration.
4. Improve our law enforcement agencies - their detection and conviction rates, their Forensic capabilities, and Court facilities which may serve to improve efficiency and processing of cases;
5. Deal with inordinate delays in the system due, for example, to Court backlogs and high case loads;
6. Develop and implement effective witness protection programmes;
7. Deal with incompetence and corruption. Corruption in TT is rampant at all levels. Corruption steals from the poor. We have a duty to address white-collar crime more robustly;
8. Address the needs of the victims of crime, as well as the families of the perpetrators of crime; find non-lethal means to protect society from offenders. Establish a moratorium on executions, with a view to abolish the Death Penalty and commute all death sentences to terms of imprisonment. Archbishop Desmond Tutu is





Keeping it Real

correct when he says: “There is no justice in killing in the name of justice....”

Today, 142 countries are abolitionist in law or practice. The trend is moving away from the death penalty. The last hanging in our region took place more than ten years ago when, on December 19, 2008, Charles la Place was hanged in St Kitts and Nevis.

Even though the Caribbean retentionist states have not carried out any execution for the last ten years, some have sentenced persons to death during this decade. Since the ruling of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in ‘Pratt and Morgan vs the Attorney General of Jamaica’ (1993) and following the restrictions contained in a number of rulings in subsequent Privy Council cases, it is now very difficult for these countries to implement the death penalty.

In June 2018 the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) ruled that the mandatory death penalty as stated in section 2 of the Offences Against the Persons Act, Ch141, for persons convicted of murder in Barbados is unconstitutional. The CCJ stated that savings clauses, which had ‘saved’ the mandatory death penalty in Barbados, should be condemned. Laws should not be “calcified to reflect the colonial times”.

The same savings clause exists in T&T’s Constitution, and with this CCJ judgement, T&T remains the only English-speaking country in the Caribbean that imposes the mandatory death penalty.

Let’s continue to invite TT’s government to approve the necessary reforms to overrule the mandatory death penalty as a first step towards abolition. While we stand in solidarity with the victims of crime, let’s promote respect for all lives.

It is time for a new national dialogue about how we deal with crime and violence, how we restore a sense of civility and responsibility to everyday life; respect for law and life; how we protect and rebuild

communities, and how we help offenders to redeem themselves. We need all hands on deck. I am on board, are you?

The author serves as Chair of the Catholic Commission for Social Justice; Chair, Catholic Archdiocese of Port of Spain’s Ministry for Migrants and Refugees; Attorney-at-Law; Lay Assessor, Equal Opportunity Tribunal; Director, Catholic Religious Education Development Institute; Director, CREDO Foundation for Justice

SPONSORS



PENNYWISE

