CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN BARBADOS: UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM FOR A BETTER RESPONSE

While the concern over crime across the Caribbean has increased, it remains difficult to design, implement and evaluate data-driven violence prevention programs without quality comparable and detailed data. In recent years, the IDB has both supported data generation in the region and is also supporting governments in addressing the problem. To better understand the problem, the IDB has produced the regional report *Restoring Paradise in the Caribbean: Combating Violence with Numbers*, which analyzes the results of victimization surveys for individuals in capital metropolitan areas (five countries) and of businesses (13 countries).

In many aspects, Barbados seems to be the exception to the high rates of violent crime in the Caribbean region. It has one of the lowest homicide rates in Latin American and Caribbean region (11 per 100,000 in 2015), although that rate has increased in recent years. Victimization rates (percentage of the population victimized) for the five crimes measured in the survey were among the lowest in the region. However, there are two important factors to highlight: 1) violent crime – specifically assault and threat – while low for the region have increased in the last decade and are still high compared to the international average and 2) despite lower levels of police reported homicide, the percentage of the population indirectly effected by violence is high. Barbados is at a point where anti-crime efforts (both crime prevention and control), that are evidence-based and targeted at high-risk individuals and geographic areas, could prevent higher crime rates in the future.

**What are the size and dimensions of the problem?**

- *A comparison of the national victimization rates reported in 2015 with those of 2002*¹ in Barbados shows that the percentage of the population victimized by burglary has gone down (3.2% to 1.7%), while rates of assaults & threats have gone up significantly (3.2% to 5.1%). Robbery (0.8%; 1.1%) and theft of personal property (2.5% to 2.7%) increased slightly, though not significantly.

- *The Greater Bridgetown Area has some of the lowest victimization rates for common street crimes compared to five other capital cities (C5) covered in the report (Figure 1).* Only 3.4 % of residents reported being a victim of theft of personal property (stealing without violence) and 1.9 % of robbery (stealing with violence) in a 12-month period.² These victimization rates were significantly lower than international averages.³ Prevalence of burglary in Bridgetown (3.2 %) was slightly lower than Caribbean regional and international averages (4.1 and 4.5 respectively). However, assault and threat of assault rates while lower than the regional average (6.1% versus 6.8%) was still high in comparison to the international average for capital cities (4.4 %).

- *Indirect victimization rates were relatively high.* 31% of survey respondents in Bridgetown reported having witnessed a serious attack, shooting, or beating that resulted in injury or murder in their lifetime (compared to an average of 30.8% for C5). While police-reported homicide rates are relatively low, more than one in four individuals (28%) reported having lost someone close to violence in their lifetime. The results reflect how each homicide can have far reaching traumatic effects on small, tightly connected island populations.

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¹ Barbados is the only one of the five countries in the IDB victimization study that conducted a previous ICVS survey (2002).
² Victimization rates are calculated based on data collected in a victimization survey module added to the Latin American Public Opinion Poll in 2014.
³ World averages are for capital cities where the ICVS has been implemented between 1996 and 2005 are 8% and 2.9% respectively.
Victims of assault are predominantly young males. Being 18-24 years old and male were associated with significantly higher victimization rates for assault and threat. Victimization by assault was also highest among the lowest 25% of the wealth index.

Victims of crime reported higher scores for levels of neighborhood physical disorder (graffiti, trash and abandoned buildings) and with a gang presence. Barbadians were the least likely to report having a gang presence in their neighborhood (18% in Bridgetown), but gang presence in one’s neighborhood was significantly associated with being a victim of a crime.

Use of guns in crime was the lowest in the region and on par with international averages. Firearms were involved in only 38% of homicides, 8% of assaults and 22% of robberies in Bridgetown. This is far lower than the Caribbean averages (65%, 17% and 35%) and close to international averages (45%, 8% and 15% respectively). In Barbados crimes are more likely to be committed with knives, glass bottles and other weapons than in the rest of the region.

High tolerance for violence against women and use of physical punishment of children. In Barbados, one in three (31%) say they would approve or understand of a man hitting his wife if she is unfaithful. 92% believe it is necessary to physically punish children, while 97% say they were physically disciplined as children.

What are some of the Costs of Crime and Violence?

- The cost of crime for Barbados is estimated at 1.86% of GDP (lower bound) and 2.71% (upper bound) annually. This is the lowest of the four Caribbean countries analyzed and amongst the lowest of 17 Latin American and Caribbean countries for which the calculation could be made.
- Only 12% of private firms experienced losses due to crime (below average for 13 Caribbean countries and below the international average 19%). However, 67% of firms paid for private security (compared to the world average of 56%)\(^4\).
- Other social costs include lower life satisfaction and higher intentions to emigrate among victims of crime. When compared to non-victims, those that were victims of a crime twice or more in 12 years are likely to have significantly lower life satisfaction and higher intentions to emigrate.

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\(^4\) Caribbean data are calculated based on the 2013/2014 ProteQUIN Survey. The world average is based on the World Bank Enterprise Surveys (latest available year for each country).
months, were nearly twice as likely to report being dissatisfied with life (11% versus 21%) and intending to emigrate in the next three years (20% versus 43%).

The response to the problem and how the IDB can help

- **Police** – Barbados has a relatively high police-to population ratio (504 per 100,000 compared to the world average of 366). Barbadians reported having higher satisfaction with police performance in controlling crime than most other countries in the Americas (including 22 Latin American Countries, the US and Canada). Only 1% reported paying a bribe to the police (the 2nd lowest in the Americas after Chile) and only 5.6% thought police harassment was a big problem. This is a solid basis for good police-community relations. However, no data on objective measures of police performance, such as crime detections rates by type of crime, could be found for Barbados.

- **Judicial** – In many Caribbean countries long case backlogs and relatively high levels of mistrial have contributed to high levels of pre-trial detainees and little confidence in the rule of law. In Barbados, the Office of the Attorney General has also long been constrained in its ability to quickly and effectively conclude cases, leading to what some have referred to as a 20-year court backlog (consisting of more than 3,000 cases in 2012). In 2013, the Chief Justice proposed restarting the Backlog Reduction Project, with steps taken to have dead cases removed and live cases put back on track. No evaluation of this initiative has been published. Another example of a promising initiative is the Caribbean is the *Swift Justice Initiative* of the Office of the Attorney General in The Bahamas, supported by the IDB. This has involved a case management system being put in place and other issues associated with the backlog being targeted for improvement, including changes to the Court Reporting Unit and a universal case scheduling system to avoid overlaps with the same attorneys. In Jamaica, the IDB is supporting the expansion of alternative dispute resolution using evidence-based models (such as Restorative Justice) and alternative sentences for low-level offenders, to help reduce the volume of cases tried in the courts and divert low-level juvenile offenses away from the prison system. This expansion of services is being targeted specifically at certain communities with high levels of violence.

- **Corrections** – The prison in Barbados operates with a population close to 70% official capacity and with 42% of the population still awaiting trial. A Reintegration Unit was created in 2011 to reduce recidivism of offenders released from prison. Within the unit there are programs aimed at drug rehabilitation, behavioural management, and job opportunity. However, no formal evaluations have been conducted on the effectiveness of this initiative in reducing recidivism. In other Caribbean countries such as The Bahamas and Guyana, the IDB has recently supported implementation of a needs assessments of the prison systems and surveys of inmates to better understand how to address problems and improve potential for rehabilitation and re-entry of former offenders.

- **Prevention** – Some prevention programs that have evidence of success internationally include a range of early childhood interventions, parenting, cognitive behavioral therapy, and employment programs. Many of the existing programs in Caribbean region, including Barbados, are promising but have not been adequately monitored and evaluated in order to make adjustments and determine what works. Under the Government Citizen Security Programmes, supported by the IDB in several Caribbean countries, these programmes are being tailor made for the local context, more focused on the highest risk individuals and communities and more rigorously evaluated to understand what works and what does not.