INTRODUCTION

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Special Issue on Criminal Justice: Research in Trinidad and Tobago

This special issue features six original papers, each one reporting the results from empirical studies of crime and justice in Trinidad and Tobago. Three things are remarkable about this collection of papers. First, each study was carried out in Trinidad and Tobago, a small-island developing state in the southeastern Caribbean. Small states, particularly in the developing world, often do not contribute much empirical research to the growing knowledge base in criminology and criminal justice. Trinidad and Tobago is a rare exception. Second, each study has implications for policy and practice in crime and justice. These studies do not represent knowledge for the sake of knowledge – they all strive to be relevant. Third, each study is based on one or more original data sets assembled using a variety of rigorous social science research methods.

These papers represent the first wave of findings from ongoing research that is expected to result in many other publications. We view it as fitting that this first wave of research should be published in the region's primary outlet for scholarship in criminology and criminal justice: the *Caribbean Journal of Criminology and Public Safety*.

Why Trinidad and Tobago?

Trinidad and Tobago is the southernmost nation in the chain of Caribbean islands. Trinidad is located seven miles northeast of the coast of Venezuela, while Tobago is located 21 miles northeast of Trinidad. Trinidad is the larger island, measuring 1,864 square miles, and is home to nearly 96% of the nation's population of approximately 1.26 million people.[1] It is the heart of government and the home of commerce, including a prosperous oil and natural gas industry. It is the birthplace of the steelpan, calypso and soca music, and has been home to two Nobel Laureates in literature.[2] Tobago is the smaller of the two islands, with a population of just over 54,000 and a land mass of about 116 square miles. It is a more stereotypical Caribbean island – with beautiful beaches, water sports, and a relaxed lifestyle – whose principal industry is tourism. Trinidad and Tobago is one of the wealthiest nations in the region, thanks largely to its reserves of oil and natural gas.

Since 2000, Trinidad and Tobago has experienced a serious outbreak of violent crime. Figure 1 shows the number of homicides in Trinidad and Tobago from 1988 to 2008. Homicides remained fairly stable from 1988 to 1999, but increased 485% from 1999 to 2008.

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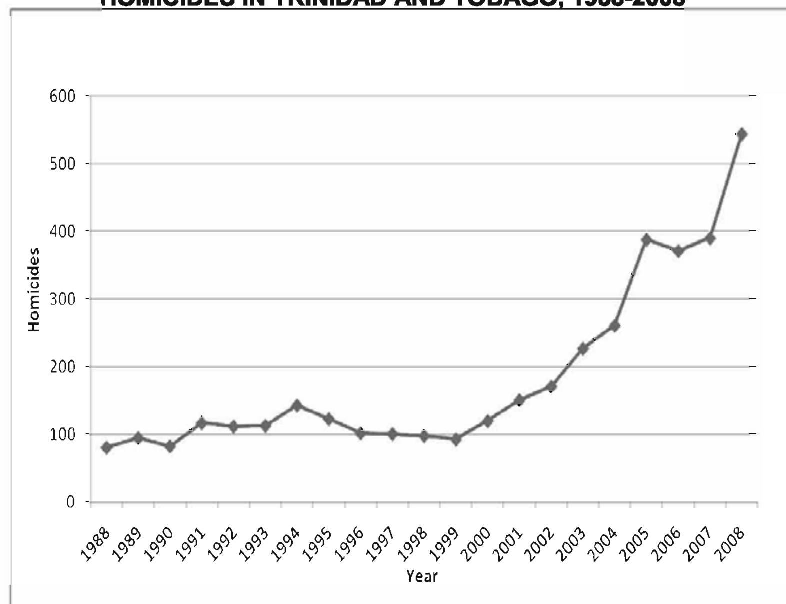
[1] The Central Statistical Office of Trinidad and Tobago lists the nation's population as 1,262,366 as of the 2000 census, with 1,208,282 people in Trinidad, and 54,084 in Tobago [http://www.cso.gov.tt].

[2] V.S. Naipaul, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2001, was born in Trinidad and now lives in England. Derek Walcott, who won the Prize in 1992, was born in St. Lucia, but lives in Trinidad.

The vast majority of the increase was due to homicides committed using firearms. Research has shown that the number of homicides committed using blunt instruments, sharp instruments, and "other" weapon types remained fairly stable during this period (Maguire, et al., 2009). Increases in the volume and severity of crime in Trinidad and Tobago had a predictable effect on residents.

FIGURE 1
HOMICIDES IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, 1988-2008



A 2003 poll of Trinidad and Tobago residents found that 74% of respondents considered crime to be "the single most important issue" facing the country, with 92% viewing it as "one of the most important issues" (MORI International, 2003, p. 20). That same survey found that only 35% of respondents trust the police to

tell the truth (compared with 64% in Britain). According to the authors of the report, "the Police Service in Trinidad and Tobago has a very poor image" (p. 26). Three in five (60%) survey respondents agreed that "the Police Service is too much in league with criminal elements in our society" (p. 7).

As the first decade of the new millennium proceeded, citizens were clearly concerned about crime and policing in the nation and the media applied intense daily pressure on the police and politicians to *"do something"* about the crime problem. Our interviews with criminal justice officials at all levels revealed a nearly universal belief that citizens had lost faith in the very institutions – the police, the courts, and the government more generally – responsible for addressing the crime problem.

These officials told us that a lack of trust in police and courts, coupled with fear of retribution by offenders, had led to a reduction in citizen cooperation with police. Citizens became reluctant to call the police in the first place or to serve as witnesses against suspected offenders. Similarly, in their role as jurors, citizens became less willing to trust police testimony. As these relationships between citizens and public authorities worsened, detection rates and conviction rates decreased, and crime continued to increase (Maguire, et al., 2009). Because it is a cyclic process, not only did crime and fear of crime increase but the

nation's ability to combat it was significantly curtailed.

In the midst of this "spiral of decay" (Skogan, 1990), the government of Trinidad and Tobago turned to experts from the United States and Great Britain for help, hiring teams of current and former police officials as well as academic criminologists to diagnose the crime problem and recommend solutions. This investment in external consultants is probably the largest single investment in criminological research in the history of the Caribbean. Some of the articles appearing in this issue represent the first products to emerge from this research portfolio.

Trinidad and Tobago's investment in criminological research was essential for diagnosing the unique nature of its crime problem. Moreover, it revealed the existence of criminal justice practices that in some cases failed to address the crime problem adequately or in other cases probably made the problem worse. Criminology, as a social science, is meant to be relevant; it is meant to inform policy.[3] Trinidad and Tobago's investment in criminological research has generated many policy-relevant findings that policymakers and practitioners can use to make evidence-based decisions.

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[3] This is not to say that theory-testing or "pure" research that has no immediate implications for policy is not valuable as well. A healthy balance between pure and applied research is vital to the health of the discipline (Sherman, 2005).

Evidence-Based Policy Making in Criminal Justice

The past decade has seen the emergence of "evidence-based" movements in several policy domains, including medicine, education, social work, and government and policy making more generally (Davies, Nutley, and Smith, 2006; Roberts and Yeager, 2006; Sackett and Rosenberg, 1995; Thomas and Pring, 2003). The evidence-based movement is beginning to take root in criminal justice policy as well, with calls for evidence-based policing and crime prevention now discussed widely by professionals, policy makers, and scholars (Sherman, 1998; Sherman, et al., 2006; Tilley and Laycock, 2006).

The essential premise of the evidence-based approach in criminal justice is the simple notion that crime can be prevented and reduced through a careful analysis and diagnosis of the problem followed by a focused deployment of strategies and resources that are consistent with the findings of the analysis. Taking diagnosis seriously means rejecting ineffective one-size-fits-all solutions for dealing with crime and violence in favor of more thoughtful, more tailored, and more effective approaches.

The methods used for analyzing crime problems and crafting an effective suite of strategies for dealing with them are derived from the social scientific study of crime and criminal justice. Thanks to decades of investment in criminology and criminal justice research in nations like Australia, Canada, Great

Britain, and the United States, there is now a large and growing body of research evidence about how to prevent and reduce crime and sustain or enhance justice. The existence of this research base means there is often no need for police and other government officials to start from scratch when developing strategies for preventing and reducing crime and improving the operations of justice agencies. It also means that there are now fewer excuses for repeating the mistakes that others have already made.

One of the central tenets of evidence-based criminal justice policy is the idea that our instincts, our knee-jerk reactions, and our gut impressions about how to fight crime are often misguided. Rigorous experimental research has shown many times that programs thought to be effective in reducing or preventing crime had little or no effect. Moreover, sometimes our gut impressions are not only wrong, they are counterproductive.

Many crime prevention programs that were implemented by people having the best of intentions were later shown to increase crime. For instance, *Scared Straight*, a program that exposes juvenile offenders to the realities of life in prison through visits with hardened offenders, has actually been shown to *increase* offending among participants (Petrosino, Turpin, and Buehler, 2003). Similarly, evaluation research has shown that a number of

programs that bring juvenile delinquents together in camps, detention facilities, counseling sessions, or recreational programs tend to increase delinquency and antisocial behavior among participants (Dishion, McCord, and Poulin, 1999; Poulin, Dishion, and Burraston, 2001). There are many other examples of crime prevention programs that increase crime or recidivism (see also, Chalmers, 2003; Grabosky, 1996; Marx, 1981; McCord, 2003).

Thanks to the growth of criminology and crime science, however, there is now a body of research evidence that can serve as a foundation for crafting effective crime prevention measures. This evidence, if policy makers pay careful attention to it, can help them avoid making mistakes that many others have already made. Unfortunately, criminologists face a number of constraints in getting their ideas implemented in legislation, in crime policy, and in practice within organizations likely to have an impact on crime.

While most non-experts are unlikely to argue with a chemist, a physicist, or a biologist about the solutions to scientific problems, everybody seems to have strong opinions about how to prevent or reduce crime. These opinions are firmly rooted in individual experiences, morals, values, and belief systems. Typically absent is theory-based research results about what works and what does not work. This general lack of awareness about research evidence

does not only apply to the general public but is also evident within police agencies and other organizations having a significant role in crime and justice. The failure to take advantage of existing scientific evidence is a major roadblock to implementing effective reform in criminal justice.

Toward a Caribbean Criminology

Although the evidence-based movements are making valuable contributions to policy-making in many nations, there are several reasons to wonder how much impact they can have in the Caribbean.

First, little is known about how well theories, models, and innovations from the developed world are suitable for developing nations. The field of evidence-based medicine, an older and more mature field than the evidence-based movement in criminal justice, continues to struggle with this question (Chinnock, Siegfried, and Clarke, 2005; Siddiqi, Newell, and Robinson, 2005).

Second, even if these theories, models, and innovations are applicable in the developing world, are they applicable to the small-island states or "micro-states" that make up much of the Caribbean region? Research has shown that micro-states are not just miniature versions of larger nations. There are significant differences in culture, history, and tradition and these differences exert a powerful effect on public administration and policymaking (Raynor,

2007; Sutton, 2007).

Finally, these evidence-based movements are based on the assumption that scientific evidence about what works is available. This may be true in many developed nations, but there is little empirical evidence about what works and what does not work in crime and criminal justice in the Caribbean. There is a nascent criminological infrastructure in the Caribbean that is not yet sufficient in size or scope to serve as the foundation for the widespread regional adoption of evidence-based criminal justice policy. Peer-reviewed scholarship is the bedrock of academic research in most disciplines, yet there is not enough peer-reviewed empirical research in criminology and criminal justice from the Caribbean.

On the bright side, four meetings of the International Conference on Crime and Justice in the Caribbean have brought both Caribbean researchers and others from outside the region whose research focuses upon the Caribbean together to discuss topics, methodologies, and the policy implication of the research. These meetings were first held in Barbados, then twice in Jamaica, and finally in Trinidad and Tobago in 2006. In each case, they were hosted by the criminology faculty and campuses of The University of the West Indies (UWI) in those three nations. The UWI St. Augustine Campus is again planning to host a crime conference in spring (2009) whose theme will be *Developing a Caribbean Criminology*. It has been

encouraging to see young graduate students presenting their well-conceived and well-executed empirical research at past meetings. Their presence and their work demonstrate that a new generation of well-trained individuals is beginning to expand the literature and knowledge of crime and justice in their home region. Such activity is vital for enabling the region to implement informed crime and justice policy, and hopefully to begin effectively responding, both actively and pro-actively, to the current surges in crime being faced by several Caribbean nations.

Trinidad and Tobago is home to one established Criminology program at the St. Augustine Campus of UWI. It offers graduate degrees (M.Sc., M.Phil. and Ph.D.) in Criminology but not an undergraduate degree. Another Criminology program is under development at The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT).

The UWI also has two new Criminology-related centers on its Mona Campus in Jamaica: Professor Anthony Harriott, one of the region's most prolific criminologists, directs the Institute of Criminal Justice and Security, and Professor Barry Chevannes directs the Centre for Public Safety and Justice. Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, arguably the two Caribbean nations most affected by crime and violence, are also the hub of its emerging criminology infrastructure.

The leaders of these academic programs, their

colleagues, and their students have been the major contributors to the region's scientific body of knowledge concerning crime.

Professor Ramesh Deosaran from Trinidad and Tobago (formerly of the UWI and Centre for Criminology and Criminal Justice, St. Augustine Campus and currently at The University of Trinidad and Tobago) has been a long-time contributor to our knowledge of crime in the region. His latest book, *Crime, Delinquency and Justice: A Caribbean Reader* (2007) is one of the most comprehensive collections of current knowledge about crime and justice in the region. Professor Harriott's book, *Understanding Crime in Jamaica: New Challenges for Public Policy* (2003), contains a wealth of information and policy directives concerning crime and justice in Jamaica that also have relevance to other nations in the region.

These scholars and the young researchers they are training are building a scientific body of knowledge and have done so by following the pioneering lead of earlier Caribbean researchers such as Kenneth Pryce, author of the now classic article "Toward a Caribbean Criminology" (1976). In addition, other scholars have paved the way for Caribbean Criminology, including Hyacinthe Ellis, author of *Identifying Crime Correlates in a Developing Society* (1991); Bernard Headley, author of *The Jamaican Crime Scene: A Perspective* (1994); and Klaus de Albuquerque, who, prior to his untimely death, researched and published on many

criminological topics in the Caribbean.

The Papers in the Volume

The papers in this volume focus on a wide range of topics in crime and justice using a variety of data sources. Two examine crime itself, two explore citizens' perspectives on crime and justice, and two focus on the attitudes and opinions of police officers. Together these studies illustrate the breadth of the field and the challenges of building the capacity for a truly relevant criminology.

In "Spatial Concentrations of Violence in Trinidad and Tobago," Edward Maguire and his colleagues examine whether homicides in Trinidad are concentrated spatially. They review three popular theories often used to account for spatial concentrations (sometimes called "hot spots") of violence. They then examine various forms of data from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Using a variety of methods, including spatial analysis, they find that homicides are concentrated geographically at all levels, whether looking at the nation as a whole, or looking in a more focused way at police station districts. They find that homicides are even concentrated within the most violent station districts. Their evidence suggests that existing criminological theories can only account partially for these spatial concentrations because they ignore the group dynamics and social contagion effects of the

gang violence that is responsible for the vast majority of homicides. Their evidence also points to a number of potentially effective practices aimed at preventing violence in the hot spots where it is most prevalent.

In "Lodging Security and Crimes against Tourists in a Developing Nation," Joseph Kuhns and his colleagues report on findings from a survey of hotels and other lodging establishments in Tobago. Their examination focuses on security measures at these establishments as well as the perceptions of the managers about crimes against tourists. The authors report that many of the establishments provide little or no security for their guests. They also suggest that while crimes against tourists are a problem in Tobago more generally, guests in some establishments are more likely to be victimized than others.

Tourists often represent attractive and low-risk targets because they engage in risky behaviors, are easily taken advantage of by friendly local residents seeking to victimize them, and often choose not to pursue criminal action against their attackers because they just want to return home and put the incident behind them. Kuhns and his colleagues recommend a number of strategies for addressing the problem of crimes against tourists, some focused on police and court reform and others focused on third parties like those who own or manage lodging establishments.

In "Perceived Risk, Fear of Gang Crime, and

Resulting Behavioral Precautions in Trinidad," Jodi Lane and Derek Chadee present results from a telephone survey with a random sample of Trinidad residents. Respondents from high crime areas reported significantly greater concerns about community problems than those from lower crime areas. However, the majority of respondents reported that gangs did not affect their communities. Perceived risk and fear of crime were also low for the sample as a whole as well as the high crime area sub-samples. Trinidadians of Indian descent reported greater levels of fear and took more precautions than those of African descent, though they were less likely to live in high crime areas. Lane and Chadee's findings that perceptions of risk and fear are low in Trinidad are at odds with findings from other recent studies of residents living in high-crime neighborhoods (Johnson, 2008). Further research is clearly needed to understand patterns in fear of crime and gangs in Trinidad and Tobago.

In "Youth Perceptions of the Police in Trinidad and Tobago," Devon Johnson and her colleagues focus on the extent to which the nation's youth are satisfied with the services offered by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. Their study is based on a long line of research from multiple social surveys on citizen and client satisfaction with government and service providers. Based on their survey of more than 2,500 public school students, they find that Trinidad's youth "have a relatively negative view of the police,

regardless of whether they are asked about service quality, fairness of treatment, or police misconduct."

Unlike much of the research from other nations, Johnson and her colleagues report that race does not have a stable and consistent effect on youth attitudes toward the police. At the same time, youth from more socially disorganized communities report lower levels of satisfaction with police and view the police as less fair and responsive. Like the others in this volume, this study raises important questions about the extent to which context matters in criminal justice research. Their findings, consistent with other recent research, confirm that the Trinidad and Tobago Police are facing a serious image problem even among the nation's youth.

In "Policing People with Mental Illness in Trinidad and Tobago," Melissa Morabito and Richard Bennett present findings from a survey of police officers on attitudes toward dealing with the mentally ill. Morabito and Bennett test whether Muir's (1977) theory of police behavior accounts for officer perspectives on referring the mentally ill to health services. They fail to find support for the theoretical model. The only variable in the model that affected attitudes toward the mentally ill was the socio-economic status of the officer. Morabito and Bennett speculate that officers raised in households with higher socio-economic status may be more informed about mental illness issues. They present a number of

possibilities about why their model has low explanatory power.

Morabito and Bennett suggest that officers may be less willing to refer people with mental illness for treatment or assistance if the officers view the available mental health services as weak or ineffective. Another possibility is that officers may be unclear about their responsibilities when interacting with the mentally ill. If this is the case, a brief training program to teach officers about how to deal with the mentally ill could be very useful. Clearly more research is needed to uncover the network of relationships between police, the mentally ill and mental health services in Trinidad and Tobago.

In "Excessive Use of Force in Trinidad and Tobago: Investigating Its Determinants across Time," Deborah Pfaff and Richard Bennett present findings from surveys and interviews with Trinidad and Tobago Police Service constables and their supervisors in 1994 and 2007. They test a theoretical model in which four factors – situational, individual, organizational, and contextual – explain perceptions of excessive force. They find little support for the model as a whole, though one variable – tolerance of deviance by fellow constables – emerges as a statistically significant predictor in both waves of research. The authors speculate that this finding may be consistent with a subcultural explanation. They suggest that if this interpretation of the findings is valid, then

interventions designed to reduce excessive force would need to recognize the informal subcultural dynamics within the Police Service. As in several of the articles in this special issue, Pfaff and Bennett question the extent to which theories derived from developed nations are applicable to developing nations like Trinidad and Tobago.

The Future of Criminology and Criminal Justice Research in the Caribbean

> *"The FBI lacked the ability to know what it knew..."*
> -The 9/11 Commission Report

With this quote, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (2004, p. 77) succinctly summarized the plight of the FBI prior to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Though the FBI was awash in data, it lacked the capacity to process and analyze the data systematically to discover meaningful patterns that might have been useful in averting the terrorist attacks. This quote reminds us that some (though certainly not all) of the data necessary for understanding problems in criminal justice and criminology already exist. The challenge is having the infrastructure in place to process the data, carry out meaningful analyses, extract useful patterns from the data, and then to enact policies or practices based on those patterns.

We might think about the FBI and its state of

readiness for terrorism on 9/11 as a loose analogy for the Caribbean and its current state of readiness to deal with the many crime problems in its midst. If crime patterns in a Caribbean nation change suddenly, are there mechanisms in place to detect, analyze, understand, and address those changes?

As crime patterns emerge in one part of the region, are there mechanisms in place to ensure that other parts of the region will know about and understand them? As policymakers implement policies in one sector (such as education or housing) that might influence crime, are there mechanisms in place to alert authorities to the changes in crime that might result? For example, the relationships among public housing, crime, and gangs are well-known, yet nations throughout the Caribbean continue to build the same types of government-funded housing complexes that will concentrate their poorest and most vulnerable citizens in small spaces which will certainly become a breeding ground for the next generation of gangs. Is there a mechanism for delivering these kinds of messages to policymakers in the Caribbean?

Analytical capacity in criminal justice can vary in scope and focus. Beyond a certain size threshold, most criminal justice agencies could benefit from having an in-house unit whose job is to store, process, analyze, and interpret data. These types of units can serve as a built-in source of reflection or introspection

for the agency, placing its practices and its workload under a microscope to determine whether current policies and practices are sufficient and to recommend new approaches. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, for example, established a Crime and Problem Analysis (CAPA) Unit for this purpose. One police executive described CAPA as "the engine room that will drive the TTPS." Putting these types of units in place represents one way to enhance analytical capacity in Caribbean criminal justice. Universities can contribute to this capacity-building process by developing degree or certification programs that provide students with theoretical knowledge, opportunities for internships, and entry-level research skills to perform basic analyses for the region's criminal justice agencies.

These types of in-house analytical units represent one important part of a movement toward improving critical thinking and implementing evidence-based practice in criminal justice. These units are typically staffed by technicians, often with a Bachelor's or Master's degree, with skills in database management, basic statistics, and descriptive forms of spatial analysis (like making maps of hot spots). Their role is to use their training to answer applied questions in criminal justice like where and when crimes are occurring or whether (or why) there are changes in offending or victimization patterns. The people in these units are not typically trained to carry out original research of the sort that would satisfy the

peer-review process in academic criminology journals, nor should they be expected to do so. Specifying high-quality research designs, making statistical inferences, investigating causal relationships, and evaluating the effectiveness of programs or policies using rigorous social science research methods are all jobs within the purview of an academic criminologist who is fully trained in the use of the scientific method.

As we think through what it means for a nation (or a region) to improve its capacity for analyzing problems in crime and criminal justice, it is useful to think about establishing (at least) two levels of expertise. At the lower-level, justice organizations could establish in-house analytical units that track agency statistics, carry out limited forms of analysis, and make recommendations to agency leaders based on the results of their analyses. The employees staffing these units would be trained in local academic programs that provide a solid foundation consisting of criminological theory, some elements of organizational change and public administration theory and communications, and technical skills like database management, statistics, spatial analysis, and making effective presentations about analytical findings.

At a higher level, university criminology and criminal justice programs in the region would expand and attract scholars trained in the scientific method who

carry out high-quality empirical research worthy of publication in the field's major academic journals both inside and outside the region. These scholars would be given sufficient time and autonomy within the university environment to establish relationships with criminal justice agencies, treatment facilities, NGOs, or other entities that play a role in crime and criminal justice. These scholars would strive to achieve the ideal of a "public scholar" whose scholarship is of sufficient quality to withstand the scrutiny of their peers during the peer review process. At the same time, their scholarship would be relevant in the real world of criminal justice. Achieving this ideal should be a principal goal in the development of Caribbean Criminology.

Universities cannot do it alone. Forward thinking governments and NGOs will need to fund this regional upgrade in capacity and infrastructure. Moreover, criminal justice agencies and universities will need to build and continue to nurture mutually beneficial relationships with one another.

Of course, building up the region's analytical capacity in criminal justice and criminology and making available research evidence about what works is not sufficient to improve the operations of criminal justice systems. These improvements must be coupled with a will to change and the ability to implement change. But improving analytical capacity would be a profound first step in the development of a

theoretically rich, analytically sophisticated, and highly relevant Caribbean Criminology.

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