
Editorial: International Research Collaborations in the Caribbean

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Abstract

The volume of criminological research in the Caribbean has exploded over the past decade. Scholars from numerous disciplines have carried out this research using a variety of methods. Moreover, this research has examined various topics across the criminological spectrum. Some of the criminological research in the region has been carried out by teams of scholars from different nations. These International Research Collaborations have resulted in many valuable insights about crime and its causes, as well as societal responses to crime. For that reason, we chose International Research Collaborations as the theme of this special issue. We view this special issue as an opportunity to highlight these international partnerships and the insights and other benefits that can result from them.

Keywords: Caribbean; criminology; criminal justice; international partnerships; International Research Collaborations.

The volume of criminological research in the Caribbean has exploded over the past decade. Scholars from numerous disciplines have carried out this research using various methods. Moreover, this research has examined a wide range of topics across the criminological spectrum. Some of the criminological research in the region has been carried out by scholars from different nations. These International Research Collaborations (IRCs) have resulted in a variety of valuable insights about crime and its causes (e.g. Harriott and Katz 2015), as well as societal responses to crime (e.g. Katz, Harriott and Hedberg 2020; Maguire and Gordon 2015).

IRCs emerged as a method for enhancing knowledge production in the late 1950s (Chen, Zhang, and Fu 2019). Early on, IRCs offered partners

several benefits, including increased research opportunities and increased educational opportunities for students, but were also known to be highly challenging because of the time and cost of travel and problems associated with verbal and written communication among other factors (Harder, Wingenbach, and Rosser 2007). By the mid-2000s IRCs, and the study of IRCs, began to "take off" (Chen et al. 2019: 219), especially in smaller countries (Thorsteinsdottir 2000). The reasons for the growth of IRCs have become more common for a variety of reasons, including insufficient access to local colleagues with similar research interests (Thorsteinsdottir 2000) and improvements in communication technologies (Wagner, Brahmakulam, Jackson, Wong, and Toda 2001). There have also been increases in the adoption of policies by wealthier countries to promote IRCs as a mechanism for addressing structural inequalities (which necessarily negatively impact knowledge production) experienced by less wealthy countries (Zingerli 2010). IRCs have increased perhaps the most among those working in interdisciplinary fields of research (such as criminology), where basic and applied fields have converged (Coccia and Bozeman 2016) and in places where researchers with recognized and needed expertise can collaborate to build capacity to address pressing problems of mutual interest regardless of location (Wagner, Brahmakulam, Jackson, Wong, and Toda 2001).

The issues mentioned above are particularly salient among Small Island Developing States (SIDS), such as those in the Caribbean. Many Caribbean nations experience high violence and crime rates, invest a disproportionate share of national resources in responding to crime, yet have less well-funded institutions dedicated to advancing criminological knowledge and associated solutions. For example, the Criminology Unit, housed in the Department of Behavioral Sciences at the University of the West Indies - St. Augustine Campus, employs only three academic staff¹ and is responsible for training the region's undergraduate and graduate students and engaging in research and evaluation in a region comprising more than two dozen nations and dependencies. IRCs enable local and foreign researchers to better understand crime and responses to crime that might not be otherwise understandable or solvable given limited capacity.

Needless to say, there is immense value in international collaborative work, which is why we chose *International Research Collaborations* as the theme of this special issue. While we recognize that research collaborations come in different forms (i.e. research collaborations between

¹<https://sta.uwi.edu/fss/behaviouralsciences/%C2%A0criminology-and-criminal-justice>

nations, universities, departments), we focus here on the simplest collaborations – between individuals. We view this issue as an opportunity to highlight these international partnerships and the insights that can result from them. Below we summarize the articles in this issue, indicating the nation of origin for each author in parentheses. After that, we reflect on some of the cross-cutting themes that emerge from this collection of articles.

Summary of Contributions

In the first article, Kristy Warren (Bermuda/UK), Kelly Moss (UK), Dylan Kerrigan (Trinidad and Tobago/UK), Clare Anderson (UK), Tammy Ayers (UK) and Queenella Cameron (Guyana) report findings from their historical analysis of changes in youth offending and responses to youth offending in Guyana from the 1930s to the present. They note that Guyana's juvenile justice system still contains vestiges of its colonial and oppressive past, including various forms of exploitation, victimization and discrimination. According to these authors, the system is more oriented towards a desire for social order rather than social justice and does not meet the developmental needs of the children in its midst.

In the second article, Aleem Mahabir (Trinidad and Tobago) and Robert Kinlocke (Jamaica) discuss the importation and implementation of Compstat by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS). Compstat is a performance management system developed by the New York City Police Department in the 1990s, and police agencies worldwide have since adopted it (O'Connell 2001; Willis, Mastrofski, and Weisburd 2007). Mahabir and Kinlocke highlight some of the issues that arise when law enforcement agencies in the Global South import reforms from the North.² They show how resource constraints and difficulties in collecting, processing and sharing data limited the implementation of Compstat in Trinidad and Tobago. They close by highlighting the importance of adapting innovations borrowed from elsewhere to local contexts.

In the third article, Ericka Adams (Trinidad and Tobago), Patrice Morris (Jamaica) and Edward Maguire (USA) discuss qualitative findings from their evaluation of a community-based violence reduction initiative in Trinidad and Tobago known as *Project REASON*. This initiative

²The phrase "Global South" refers to politically, economically or culturally marginalized peoples in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania. According to Dados and Connell (2012, 13), the concept of the Global South references the history "of colonialism, neo-imperialism, and differential economic and social change through which large inequalities in living standards, life expectancy, and access to resources are maintained".

represented a local adaptation of Cure Violence, a public health approach to gun violence reduction first established in Chicago (Ransford and Slutkin 2017). Using an analysis of semi-structured and focus group interviews conducted with Project REASON employees, they examine the strategies these employees used to intervene in gang violence, as well as the situational dynamics that enabled them to intervene successfully in potentially violent situations.

In the fourth article, Charles M. Katz (USA), John Walcott (Barbados), Kayla Freemon (USA) and Paolo delMistro (Canada) discuss CariSECURE, a project implemented by UNDP and funded by USAID that seeks "to reduce youth involvement in violence and crime in the Eastern and Southern Caribbean".³ The authors reflect on lessons learned from CariSECURE's efforts to improve the institutional capacity for evidence-based decision-making about crime and violence in participating nations by bolstering their data collection and analysis capacities. The authors describe these nations' capacities for data-driven decision-making prior to CariSECURE. Then they discuss the policies and procedures deployed through CariSECURE to strengthen evidence-based decision-making for citizen security in the Caribbean.

Finally, Regan Reid (Jamaica) provides a book review of *Recidivism in the Caribbean* by Dacia Leslie. Reid refers to the book as "a compelling and thought-provoking book that gives the readers an inside look at the complexities of imprisonment, recidivism, rehabilitation, and reintegration of ex-prisoners into the receiving Jamaican society".

Emergent Themes

The articles presented in this issue volume raise interesting and provocative questions about a variety of issues. One theme that emerges across the articles is the extent to which criminological theories and practices from the developed world are necessary, appropriate or valid in the Caribbean. This issue is reminiscent of a long-standing debate over the future of Caribbean criminology, some of which was featured in previous renditions of this journal. For instance, Pryce's (1976, 3) classic essay noted that the unique characteristics of the Caribbean region warranted "the scientific study of crime and deviant behavior in the Caribbean as an independent field of inquiry in its own right". Cain (1996, ii) echoed this theme, cautioning scholars against having "a deferential relationship with

³<https://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/en/home/democratic-governance-and-peacebuilding/regional-projects-carisecure.html>

western theory which assumes it to be right even when it does not fit local experiences, which presents it as received wisdom even when it has no relevance". Birkbeck (1999) noted that existing theories could be modified to incorporate unique characteristics of the Caribbean, such as creolisation and its effects on crime and criminal justice.

This question about the universality or applicability of theories and practices from developed nations arises either directly or indirectly in all of the papers appearing in this issue. For example, issues of colonialism and the extent to which it continues to "haunt" Guyana's juvenile justice system are prominent in the analysis by Warren and her colleagues. They argue that criminal justice systems in the Caribbean continue to reproduce colonial institutions and legacies that were "created to contain and control people conceptualized as "barbaric" and "uncivilised," such as the indigenous, enslaved, indentured, immigrant, poorly, and mentally ill". Colonial legacies continue to exert an indelible influence on many sectors of Caribbean life, including agriculture, law, sports and tourism (Barry, Gahman, Greenidge, and Mohamed 2020; Malcolm 2001; Stirton and Lodge 2020; Wong 2015). The wide-ranging influence of colonialism on Caribbean people and institutions raises important questions about the extent to which contemporary theories of crime and justice must account for colonial dynamics when applied to the Caribbean. Another possibility, as suggested by Pryce (1976) more than four decades ago, is that the unique characteristics of Caribbean societies may require original theories that can account for the effects of these phenomena.

Mahabir and Kinlocke's analysis of Compstat in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service directly takes on these issues. These authors draw heavily from the political science research on "policy transfer" in discussing how developing nations import innovations from developed nations, often finding these imports a poor fit (see Jones and Newburn 2007). This work adds to an emerging body of research on policy transfer within criminal justice agencies in the Caribbean (Bissessar 2000; Maguire and King 2013). Mahabir and Kinlocke note that a "faulty information pipeline" is partially responsible for limiting the capacity of Compstat to achieve its stated objectives in Trinidad and Tobago. Handwritten crime reports, difficulties in obtaining accurate geographic coordinates for crime locations and delays in processing crime data led to officers not having accurate and timely information on the locations of emerging hot spots for various offense types. Compstat is premised on the availability of timely and accurate information on the location of crimes. However, police agencies in developing countries may lack

the technological infrastructure to produce the types of data that are needed for the successful application of the Compstat process. Mahabir and Kinlocke argue that reforms cannot simply be copied from one setting and transplanted in another without making appropriate accommodations for the unique context in which the reform is being "pasted".

Adams and her colleagues examine Project REASON, a violence reduction intervention implemented in Trinidad based on the Cure Violence model developed in Chicago (Ransford and Slutkin 2017). A separate quasi-experimental impact evaluation found that the intervention was associated with "a significant and substantial drop in violence" in the communities where it was implemented (Maguire, Oakley, and Corsaro 2018, p. 36). Adams and her colleagues examine qualitative data from interviews with Project REASON stakeholders to determine what specific activities project staff undertook to reduce violence. Their findings reveal that violence interveners drew upon a suite of informal methods for preventing violence, including direct intervention with potential offenders and victims and their loved ones.

Adams and her colleagues speculate that "community-based intervention efforts may be especially suitable policy options in developing nations". They note that public trust and confidence in the police are low in many developing nations, due to incompetence, unfairness, corruption, brutality or some combination of these issues (Goldsmith 2005; Haugen and Boutros 2014). These legitimacy deficits make it more difficult for police to control violence and solicit the types of cooperation from the public that enable them to prevent crime and solve cases (Clancy, Brookman, and Maguire 2019). For this reason, properly implemented community-based violence reduction efforts may be an especially potent option in developing nations. Much of the discussion of policy transfer from North to South argues that Northern policies fare worse in the South. This is an intriguing case where a Northern policy may fare *better* in the South, though more research is necessary to test this hypothesis.

Katz and his colleagues find that even in a relatively well-funded project such as CariSECURE, introducing organizational change is fraught with challenging implementation issues. After four years of programme implementation, only two of the eight participating nations had implemented the new electronic crime recording practices nationwide. Moreover, a data audit by the authors revealed problems related to the validity of the officially recorded crime data in one of those two

nations. To be clear, the findings by Katz and his colleagues show that CariSECURE stimulated a variety of valuable benefits for participating nations. However, the findings also reinforce an issue raised in Mahabir and Kinlocke's study of the implementation of Compstat in Trinidad and Tobago: that policy transfer is complicated, particularly policy transfers from the North to the South. Ambitious efforts such as CariSECURE raise various structural, cultural and technological issues that must be navigated when seeking to implement reform. The hope is that international development programmes such as CariSECURE can begin planting the seeds of reform and nurturing those efforts over time until they become sustainable.

Conclusion

Taken together, the papers in this special issue reinforce the importance of international research partnerships for generating knowledge about crime and justice issues in the Caribbean. These partnerships result in a diversity of perspectives that can benefit the growth and development of research in the region. These partnerships are also useful for the growth and development of the partners carrying out the research. Research partners from within and outside of the Caribbean can learn from one another's unique experiences and see these issues from new perspectives. We ourselves have benefited from ongoing partnerships with our colleagues from the Caribbean and other nations, and we are grateful for those enriching and informative experiences.

We offer our heartfelt thanks to Anthony Harriott and Tarik Weekes at the University of the West Indies for making this special issue possible. We view Anthony Harriott as a monumental figure in Caribbean criminology, and we are delighted to see his continuing contributions since retiring from the University of the West Indies at Mona in 2020. We also thank the authors whose insightful work appears in this special issue and the external reviewers whose constructive feedback helped improve our work. We hope readers find the articles in this issue enlightening.

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