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# **WORK MATTERS**

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# A Deeper Reflection into Crime Causality in Trinidad & Tobago

Very few citizens in Trinidad and Tobago will contest the claim that the crime situation has reached a disturbing state of societal discomfort. Emanating from this realization the public continues to search for answers as to why such a small twin-island state has become so engulfed in this criminogenic dilemma. This article attempts to decipher, with some kind of specificity, the causes of criminality covering the geographic space of our republic state.

Indeed, the first area of concern has to be the wanton availability of illegal guns and ammunition coupling with an apparently out of control importation of illegal drugs. Irrespective of how daunting this task may be, decision makers must understand that failure to confront this societally destructive menace will inevitably cripple the operational limbs of the entire body of society.

The endemic presence of an ineffective criminal justice system also adds to the causes of crime in Trinidad and Tobago. As a society, we often hear the perpetual cry of law enforcement bemoaning the fact that when drug and gun offenders are brought before the court, they are given speedy access to bail. While this writer will not endorse unjustifiable bail denial, it is incumbent upon the decision makers of the State to examine the claim of law enforcement on this issue to avoid placing the public in a highly vulnerable position. The legislators must embrace the realization that there comes a time when the paramountcy of the political party must be subordinated to the protection of the lives of the citizenry.

Another urgent area of focus on local crime and justice relates to the remand issue in our criminal justice system. In no language can there be a justification for denying the hearing of a case involving a remanded inmate within periods ranging from five to fifteen years, as this sends a signal of gross disorganization and deficiency within the judicial arm of the State. An urgent remedial intervention is needed.

Perhaps one of the most instructive causes of crime and

criminality in our nation is the erosion of our social control systems. Regardless of how one may view the role of the State, it is inescapable that a significant portion of the population will have to be cushioned against the repercussions of high inflation in any society. As a people we must embrace the view that the more indigent the citizen, the higher the temptation to engage in criminal behaviour as a relief valve, and as such, the issue of the social safety net is critical. To facilitate this, proper scientific and data-driven activities are critical.

All analytical discussions on crime control or crime reduction must include parental responsibilities. While it is not reasonable to advocate that parents must be held responsible for the criminal behaviour of their offspring, however, if they knowingly uphold such acts culpability should be placed squarely on their shoulders

Perhaps the most intrusive cause of criminality has to do with the ubiquitous presence of normative corruption. Here is where the society accepts as routine the expectation of State officials engaging in white collar crime. This reality extends to the poisonous belief that the criminal act only becomes wrong if you are caught. This brings into focus what Emmanuel Kant called “deontological corruption”. Any society must accept that when a criminal act is performed it becomes unacceptable not so much because of its revelation but essentially because of its prevalence.

The final area of focus relates to the errant behaviours of many law enforcement officers. Whether police customs, licensing or immigration, these corruptly inclined officials of the State must understand that their jobs are designed to safeguard the State from image contamination. The few law enforcement officers who engage in illicit activities are literally empowering the members of the society who might possess a potential for law breaking, whether at the white collar or blue collar level. White collar criminality is undoubtedly the most invasive and destructive element in any society because of its cascading potency. No decision makers in so-

ciety can neutralize criminality within its geographic confines unless the scourge of white collar criminality is aggressively addressed. This is the major challenge confronting Trinidad and Tobago and it must be pursued.

While the above cited causes cannot be viewed as exhaustive, yet they address the penetrative and cancerous presence of criminality which is indeed eating away the very fabric of our beloved twin-island State.

Dennis Brown,  
Lecturer  
CCLCS