COMMUNITY SAFETY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN CRIME ACROSS THE CARICOM

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Abstract

In the Caribbean countries, the number of youths engaged in criminal activities has been steadily increasing. The sale of illegal weapons, the international drug trade, money laundering, transnational organized crime, corruption, and cybercrime are all linked with high levels of crime and violence. The purpose of this study is to assess the extent of community protection in selected CARICOM countries, specifically Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, the Bahamas, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, as well as its effect on youth criminal activity. The study will employ a qualitative design and evidence from the 2012 United Nations Caribbean Human Development Report. Several surveys have shown that youth are the main victims and perpetrators of violence and crime in the Caribbean region. In 2012, young people aged 17 to 29 committed eighty percent of all prosecuted offences. Similarly, teenagers between the ages of 18 and 30 were the most common victims of violent crime. Evidence also shows a correlation between community safety and perceived vulnerability to youth violence and crime. Finally, despite its environment and distinguishing characteristics, community safety influences exposure to crime, social support, perceptions, and mental health, as well as the well-being of young people.

Keywords: Community safety, Crime and violence, Delinquency.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, Caribbean countries have witnessed growing incidences of violence and crime associated with gender issues, transnational organized crime and illicit drug trade (Knight, 2019). Corruption, money laundering, cybercrime, and human trafficking, especially in children and women, have all been defined as causes for the increase in violence and crime among Caribbean youths. Another major security threat that Caribbean countries face is terrorism, which encourages the trade of narcotics and arms. Other social factors, such as the rise of cartels, deportation, and trans-border problems, contribute to these rising security challenges. (Knight, 2019) Major studies have stated unequivocally that the criminality and violence seen in the Caribbean must be deemed a growth concern, and that a concerted attempt must be taken to resolve the security risks.
2. Reports


The report titled ‘Crime, Violence, and Development: Trends, Costs and Policy Options in the Caribbean’ highlighted the high incidences of violence and crime in the region. The report identified narcotics and illicit drug trafficking as the primary cause which should be controlled to end the growth of crime and violence in the region (Goldberg et al., 2014). The report also acknowledged shortcomings in coping with crime and violence. According to the report, states place too much reliance on the criminal justice system while ignoring possible and more efficient preventative interventions. Some of the main recommendations included resolving problems that drove teenagers to crime and violence, implementing evidence-based services from other countries, such as mentoring programs and early childhood learning, to improve school retention, and engaging youth in appealing experiences in their spare time (Goldberg et al., 2014).

2.2. Human Development and Shift to Better Citizen Security Report

The Human Development and Shift to Better Citizen Security Report (HDR 2012) launched in Trinidad and Tobago presented data on the changing landscape of crime and security concerns in the Caribbean (Baird, 2012). With more than sixty percent of the population under the age of 30, the study highlighted the increased role of youth in crime and violence. As a result, it acknowledged the negative effects of crime, both directly and indirectly on the fiscal, political, and social costs borne by CARICOM governments. The report also revealed trends in the rising rate of youth participation in crime.

First, the youth involvement had a gender dimension (Baird, 2012). Young males, according to Baird, were the primary perpetrators of crime and violence, while females were the primary victims, especially of sexual assault and domestic abuse. Second, crime and aggression among prepubescent males increased. Third, there was an increase in school crime. Fourth, aggression was used in response to potential risk or in response to fear. Fifth, neighborhood violence had a huge impact on juvenile violence. Finally, youth victimization, especially by adults and peers, fueled more abuse. The report also revealed gaps in human rights, human security, and citizen welfare that were results of interdependence. The study recommended that changes to a more comprehensive criminal justice system must be made to resolve the Caribbean’s crime and violence issues. The emphasis should be on improving the lives of those who are marginalized and oppressed as a result of poverty, institutional, political, cultural, and social practices. It was also recommended that the protection of human life and the institutions in charge of enforcing these rights should be prioritized.

2.3. Report on Youth and Development 2010

Entitled ‘Eye on the Future: Investing in Youth now for tomorrow’s Community,’ the report focused on reinforcing youths’ voice regarding crime and violence in the Caribbean Community. Bustillo & Velloso, (2016) opined that, adolescents and youths’ involvement in crime was associated with social inequalities, politics, unemployment and poverty. Youth and teenage vulnerability to crime and violence resulted in a feeling of loss, elevated levels of grief and tension, mental blunting, little interest in group events, and a sense of insecurity. This made Caribbean youths and teenagers concerned about the quality
of life in their countries.

2.4. The Paramaribo Declaration 2010

The 2010 Summit on Youth Development organized in Paramaribo by the CARICOM Commission on Youth Development (CCYD) considered crime a primary concern affecting youths in the community. The heads of CARICOM governments recognized the corrosive effects of crime and violence, marginalization, social inequalities and poverty on youth’s wellbeing, health, attitudes, and traditional values (Griffith, 2010). The report acknowledged the impacts on youths’ aspirations, dreams, vulnerabilities and risks.

2.5. Violence Against Children in the Caribbean UN Report

The UN report on Violence Against the Caribbean Children 2006, documented findings on crime and violence from sixteen Caribbean countries. The report looked at violence in homes, businesses, against households, organizations and schools, neighborhoods, and on the streets. According to the report, a significant number of children in the Caribbean witnessed violence, contributing to crime and violence in the community and schools (Heinemann & Verner, 2006). Children who were exposed to violence during childhood were negatively impacted both psychologically and emotionally. To counter violence against children, the study proposed a variety of approaches, including laws, interventions, tactics, and policy mechanisms.

3. INTERVENTIONS

Despite the Caribbean's crime and violence challenges, efforts were made and measures developed to resolve the region's security risks. The CPSD Action Plan and the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative were among the initiatives.

3.1. CPSD Action Plan

The initiative was created in 2008 to resolve the apparent dichotomy between the crime prevention and criminal justice approaches, with the goal of achieving synergy between the two. The CPSD Action Plan sought to deter and reduce violence and crime in member states by multidisciplinary and cross-sectional approaches to vulnerable groups and institutional responses (Jaitman et al., 2010). The action plan was built on five main pillars: security of environmental and economic resources, supporting the vulnerable and victims, facilitating reintegration, encouraging social inclusion, and avoiding and mitigating violence.

3.2. Caribbean Basin Security Initiative

The Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) was formed in 2010 and saw the establishment of a partnership between the Dominican Republic, CARICOM member states and the United States. The objectives of the initiative were to combat illegal trafficking, foster social justice, and improve public safety and security. Gender-based abuse, school violence, violence against children, and other aspects of violence and crime were among the initiatives’ primary focus (Jaitman et al., 2015). The reports established security vulnerabilities that must be addressed in order to combat crime and conflict in the Caribbean. The issues identified included alternatives to incarcerations, reforms on legislations, juvenile systems, and the role of schools in addressing all forms of violence against youth.
4. RESULTS

4.1. The 2012 UN Caribbean Human Development Report

Human Development Measures are mainly reliant on the Human Development Index (HDI) which measures various parameters for evaluation and assessment of progress on three core tenets of human development and they include long and healthy life, access to information and knowledge, and the quality of life. The HDI report measured trends in the Caribbean region within seven states for the period of 2010-2011 (Chant, 2012). For the seven projected countries, it was noted that the HDI for countries like Barbados was estimated at 0.793, which is in the human development category. However, it was noted that most of the countries in the region's HDI ranged between 0.764 and 0.723, which positioned them highly in terms of human development measures. The emerging trends from the three basic tenets of HDI measurements were considered and it was inferred that between 1980 to 2011, there was an increase in life expectancy (Chant, 2012).

Out of the countries considered in this category, French Guyana registered the lowest life expectancy rates at 69.9 whereas Barbados had the longest life expectancy of approximately 76.8 years. Regarding education, the mean schooling years averaged at 7.2 in countries such as Suriname whereas Barbados and Jamaica both had 9.3 years in terms of education (Baird, 2012). The report also factored the Inequality-adjusted HDI that considered inequality across all the spectrums. The IHDI showed the quality of human development that might have been a result of the level of inequality witnessed in the country. However, it is noted that the research was only conducted in Trinidad and Tobago, which showed a 0.644 plus an average loss of 16.3% while Guyana had an HDI of 0.492 recorded an IHDI of 22.3%. This showed that the average loss that was witnessed in these countries was slightly lower than those that were recorded in the Latin American Territories (Chant, 2012).

Another measurement was based on the Gender Inequality Index (GII), which measured the disadvantage that women continued to experience within three dimensions such as health, empowerment, and economic activities. The GII index showed that a majority of the selected countries indicated that there was a shortage of human development with regard to the achievements of both men and women across the three GII spectrum. The 2011 score for this measurement showed that Trinidad and Tobago had 0.3231, Barbados recorded 0.364, Jamaica had 0.450 and Guyana registered 0.551 (Baird, 2012).

The results revealed that the loss in achievement across all the three dimensions was ascribed to gender inequality that was higher in Jamaica and Guyana, higher than the average loss in the Latin American Countries (LAC). The police report indicates that the loss could have been necessitated by poor economies and onerous debts. The poverty rates for these countries were recorded to average at 14.5% for Jamaica, 15.9% for Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago recorded poverty rates of about 16.7% whereas Antigua and Barbados recorded poverty rates of 18.4. Countries such as Saint Kitts, Saint Lucia, and Grenada recorded poverty rates that were over 20% on average (Chant, 2012).

4.2. Youth Violence: Reducing Risk and Enhancing Resilience

Youth crime is rampant in Caribbean countries, and it is closely attributed to a shortage of work prospects for the youth. The majority of today's youngsters are still uneducated. In Caribbean countries, youth feel excluded from decision-making processes (Goldberg et al., 2014). The combination of these factors has resulted in elevated levels of violence as teenagers seek solace in illegal activity to fill the divide. However, the results
revealed that the problem of youth conflict is not only a concern in Caribbean countries, but also a global security concern.

The studies in this category were mostly based on the age group of youths aged 15 to 24. The youngsters who were targeted were sampled and polled. However, youngsters under the age of 18 were not polled, so the figures were limited to those aged 18 to 24. The data collected revealed the association between youth violence and Caribbean human development. Approximately sixty-four percent of the total population in the Caribbean countries was youth between 0-30 years. Thirty percent of youth within this age bracket fell within 18 to 30 years (Jaitman & Guerrero Compeán, 2015).

To break down the presented statistics on youth population, it should be noted that Guyana had 21 percent of its population as youths, Jamaica had 18 percent of its population as youths, and Trinidad and Tobago had 20.9 percent of its total population as youths. Furthermore, the results found that in Jamaica, 52 percent of female youths had been imprisoned, while only 24.3 percent of their male counterparts had appeared in court over the same time frame. For the remaining Caribbean nations, the figures were almost identical (Chant, 2012).

Furthermore, the results identified potential types of violence, such as violent crimes with guns, violent crimes without weapons, and property crimes, as well as links to marijuana and other drug use as potential causes of crime. It was discovered that the outcomes of the aforementioned triggers differed depending on the country. For example, when it came to violent crimes involving firearms, Barbados had the highest rate. These findings revealed that many weapons were in the possession of youth in these countries. Guyana, on the other hand, had the highest rate of violence without crime, at 4.2 percent, as compared to other Caribbean countries. Other drugs used as an excuse for violence, on the other hand, were negligible (Baird, 2012). It was also clear from the results that males were more vulnerable to violent crimes than their female counterparts. This meant that men continued to use available arms to defend themselves from imminent threat. Women, on the other hand, were more likely to be targeted by their partners (Jaitman & Guerrero Compeán, 2015). Domestic abuse affected 14 percent of women, compared to 7.5 percent of men who suffered gender-based violence.

The findings also showed a strong link between violence in the community and youth violence. Of the youths surveyed, seven percent reported regularly witnessing violence around their communities and that this has had a substantial impact on their development and growth. In the Caribbean countries the research found that crimes such as rape, robbery, drugs, and police abuse were rampant in the communities and therefore many youths grew up in a crime environment (Chant, 2012).

There were also signs of apprehension and concern over crime events. Murder had a 48.7 percent prevalence rate among the crimes that occurred in the neighborhoods, domestic violence had a 44.8 percent prevalence rate, and other forms of crimes included a case in which cousins murdered each other at 24.5 percent. However, on a more optimistic note, more than 80 percent of the surveyed youths expressed an intention to stop participating in illegal activity (Jaitman & Guerrero Compeán, 2015).

The collected data from the youths who were surveyed is significant; more than 70 percent of the respondents were still satisfied with their neighborhoods, compared to 30 percent who were not. Another 20 percent of the surveyed youths claimed that they did not trust their peers, including friends and neighbors. Another segment of the youth polled was those who were concerned with domestic abuse (Knight, 2019). A point of interest was raised when the youths were asked if they were certain that people around them would
intervene in the event of a crime in this category; 20 percent responded positively and agreed that their community would intervene.

5. CONCLUSION

It is indeed true that the Caribbean countries are faced with major security concerns. The prevalence of crime is a result of day-to-day interaction with criminals in their neighborhoods. The results show that crime evolves from the households to the communities and then to the wider society or nations. According to the evidence collected, youths who are forced into violent and criminal activity are not limited to a specific age group or gender, and share the commonality of being forced into violence and criminal activities by fundamental economic and social conditions such as a lack of schooling, a lack of employment, and a lack of youth participation in decision-making processes. Other factors, such as the environment or the community in which one grows up, may have a positive or negative effect on an individual's character. The forms of crime differ by country, as do the factors that lead to crime. However, it can also be argued that if these issues are resolved in all countries, the incidences of youth participation in crime would be minimized. The correspondents did admit being involved in criminal activities, and the majority of the respondents acknowledge that they grew up seeing violence in their homes, which impacted their lives growing up in the community.

6. REFERENCES

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