

# **The Barbados Crime Survey 2002**

## **VIEWS AND BELIEFS ABOUT CRIME AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

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# BARBADOS CRIME SURVEY 2002

## VIEWS AND BELIEFS ABOUT CRIME AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Barbados Crime Survey (BarCS) was conducted in January and February 2002, and a nationally representative sample of 8000 people was chosen at random to be interviewed about their experiences of crime in 2001. The aims of the survey were to discover the true level of crime experienced by households and individuals, the extent to which crime is reported, effects of crime on victims, and attitudes to crime and the criminal justice system.

This report, the third published using BarCS data, examines in detail the views and beliefs of Barbadians about crime in Barbados and aspects of the criminal justice system.

The results from the survey show that a majority of Barbadians:

- believe that crime has risen a lot
- over-estimate the increase in homicide rates
- believe that more crime involves violence than the statistics show
- believe that courts are too lenient in their sentencing

The survey also found that the more information that people have about a particular case or part of the criminal justice system, the more closely their views and beliefs conform to reality.

Respondents were also asked about their views on how to combat crime. In order of popularity, Barbadians believed that the answers relate to:

- better parenting
- reduction in unemployment and poverty

- tougher sentencing
- better education
- better policing

Interestingly, most persons see the answers to crime coming from elsewhere, outside of the criminal justice system.

Respondents were also asked about their views on the police and their effectiveness. Almost 75% of the respondents 'agreed fully' or 'agreed somewhat' that the police do everything they can to help or be of service. A similar percentage, 75%, believe that the police are doing a 'very good' or 'fairly good' job in controlling crime.

Several analyses were conducted to determine the effects of age, gender, education level, and other variables on views and beliefs. Even though there were some variations due to the variables mentioned before, it was found that views across the sample of persons were largely homogeneous.

The beliefs and views of Barbadians about crime and the criminal justice system do not always conform to reality, and there needs to be more attention paid to public education in order to combat misinformation where it exists.

## BACKGROUND

The BarCS is a survey of approximately 8000 people, aged 16 and over, chosen at random across Barbados. It was carried out with the objective of finding out how many of them were victims of crime in 2001. The purpose of the survey is to:

- estimate the true level of crime against households in Barbados,
- find out what the effects of crime were on victims,
- find out whether victims reported these crimes to the police and if not why not,
- discover whether victims were satisfied with their treatment by the police,
- find out how safe people feel in their neighbourhood and their home,
- find out what people think of elements of the criminal justice system,
- discover what the public knows about crime and justice,
- find out who is most at risk of being a victim of crime,
- show how resources can be targeted most effectively to reduce crime.

The first report, which was published in February 2003 compared crime in Barbados with crime in 34 other industrialised and developing countries. It showed Barbados had a comparatively low crime rate.

The second report, published in December 2003, looked at crime in Barbados in detail, showing among other things that 44% of household and personal crime was not reported to the police, that risk of victimisation varied for

different groups of people and that there were approximately 30,000 offences against households and individuals in 2001.

The purpose of this report is to describe some of the findings of the survey about Barbadians' beliefs and views about crime and criminal justice. The questions it considers are divided into those about 'facts' (i.e. there was a correct answer) and those looking for opinions (where, of course, there is no correct answer). The answers to the questions about 'facts' tell us about the beliefs or knowledge of the respondent about the state of crime and criminal justice, while the answers to the questions looking for opinions tell us their views.

The total sample that was interviewed was 7962 (the sampling method is described in Report 2) and all of the respondents were asked the attitudinal questions. We therefore have an extremely accurate record of the beliefs and attitudes of Barbadians to crime and justice.

We also collected a great deal of demographic data from the sample and we are able to relate this to the answers we received.

## **BELIEFS**

The questions about facts related to crime and criminal justice were:

- “Firstly I would like to ask whether you think that the crime rate for the country as a whole has changed over the past five years?”
- “Roughly out of 100 crimes recorded by the police, including property crime, violent crime, drug crime, criminal damage and others, how many do you think involve violence of the threat of violence?”

<< *If don't know, please just guess*>>”

- “What do you think has happened to the murder rate in Barbados over the last 5 years?”
- “Out of every 100 men, aged 21 or over who are convicted (found guilty) of house burglary, how many do you think are sent to prison?”

They were included in the survey to:

- find out how well informed Barbadians are about crime and criminal justice,
- find out if being informed or not informed was systematically related to attitudes,
- try to discover how people became informed or uninformed.

### **Changes in the crime rate over the 5 years prior to the survey.**

The first question – about whether the crime rate had changed over the five years prior to the survey showed that people were largely uninformed on the subject.

The possible answers to choose from were:

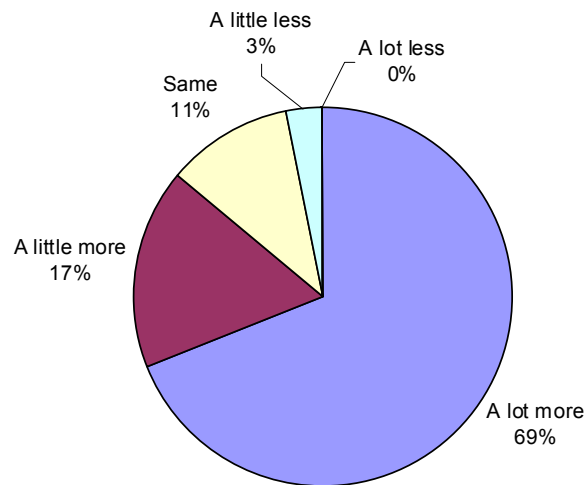
- It has risen a lot,
- It has risen a little,
- It has been stable,
- It has fallen a little,
- It has fallen a lot.



Between 1997 and 2002 the total number of recorded crimes and offences went from 10203 to 11871 – an average rise of 334 a year. We judge that this means that crime has risen a little over those 5 years.

The answers given show that Barbadians in general believe crime levels rose a lot.

### Beliefs about crime changes in the last 5 years.



As can be seen from the Chart almost 70% of people believed there was a lot more crime.

There is, however, a relationship between education and beliefs about changes in the crime rate. People who had been to University were somewhat more likely to get the correct answer – 26% as opposed to 17% overall.

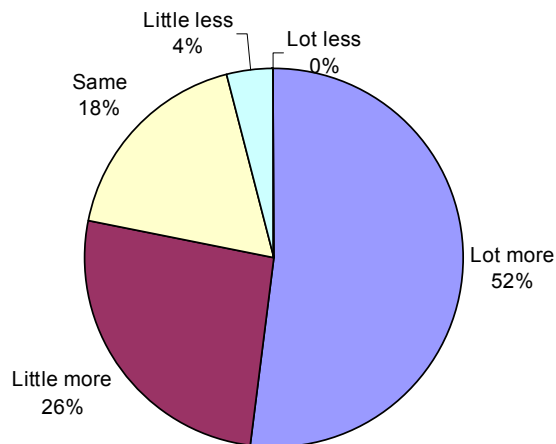
Other variables which were examined, such as age and level of income, were not related to the accuracy of beliefs about changes in the crime rate.

### Changes in the murder rate over the last 5 years

The second factual question we asked was related to changes in the murder rate over the previous five years. The numbers of murders have been relatively stable since 1998 – varying between 20 and 26 a year and showing a slight upward trend.

Here again Barbadians over-estimate the increase in crime.

**Beliefs about change in the murder rate**



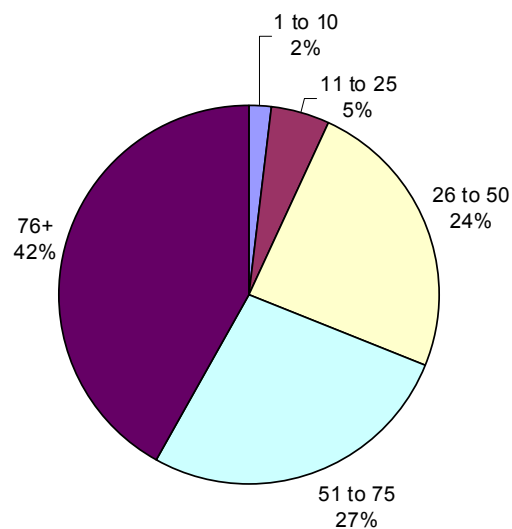
53% of the population believed there had been a great increase in the murder rate. 26% gave the correct answer – that there had been a small increase.

### Proportion of crimes recorded by the police which involve violence

The third factual question related to the proportion of crime that was violent. The question was “Roughly out of 100 crimes recorded by the police, including property crimes, violent crime, drug crime, criminal damage and other, how many do you think involve violence or the threat of violence”?

In 2002 the correct answer was 20% – that is the proportion of recorded crime that was homicide, robbery, woundings and assaults, aggravated burglaries and sexual assaults. Barbadians, however, believe the proportion is much greater than that.

### Proportion of crime believed to involve violence



The chart above shows that over 40% of people believed that over 75% of crime involves violence or the threat of violence and 69% believed that it is over 50%.

As can be seen the question was carefully phrased to remind people of the range of recorded crime but nevertheless the beliefs were wildly wrong. If we only look at crimes against individuals and households (thus excluding drug crimes, most frauds and property crimes against businesses) the proportion of crime which involves violence or threats is approximately 40% – but that is still far short of the proportion it is believed to be by most people.

It is interesting to note, in addition, that knowledge of the proportion of crime that is violent is only marginally related to level of education. 10% of university educated people compared with 5% overall knew the correct proportion and somewhat fewer were wildly wrong (34% saying it was over 75% compared with 42% overall) but the differences were not substantial and other factors, such as age and income, were not related to the accuracy of estimations.

Why are people so ill informed about violent crime? The answer probably lies in the media. The great majority of crime reported in the newspapers is violent and people must think that this reflects crime as a whole. It certainly means that Barbadians believe they are living in a much more violent society than they really are.

## Use of imprisonment for burglary

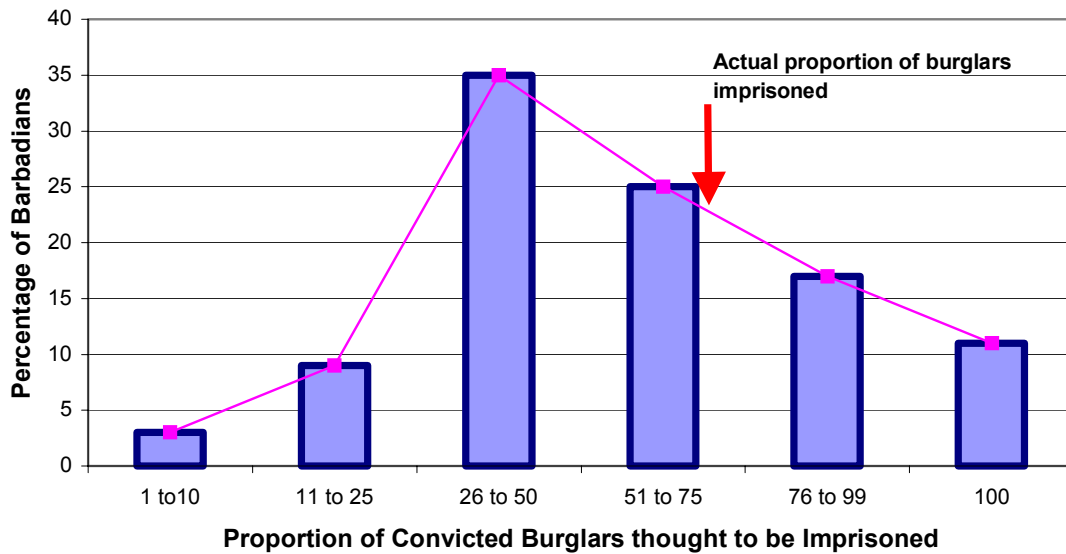
The final factual question involves beliefs about the use of imprisonment for burglary. The question was: “Out of every 100 men aged 21 or over who are convicted (i.e. found guilty) of house burglary, how many do you think are sent to prison”?

We asked this question to make the BarCS questions comparable with other crime surveys. At the moment we do not know exactly the proportion of adult domestic burglars sent to prison. We can, however, make a reliable minimum estimate.

In the period 1999 – 2001, 64% of convicted burglars were sent to prison. This number, however, includes people under 21 (who have a lower imprisonment rate) and non-domestic burglars (who also have lower imprisonment rate). We can safely estimate, therefore that the minimum proportion of adult domestic burglars sentenced to prison is 70%.

Barbadians, however, underestimate this proportion.

## Estimate by Barbadians of the proportion of burglars imprisoned



The chart above shows that a large majority of Barbadians underestimate the imprisonment rate of burglars. Persons to the left of the red arrow underestimate the proportion and persons to the right over-estimate it. We are not expecting people to be exactly right but if we say a correct answer is plus or minus 15% from 70% then a significant majority still underestimate the figure and few over-estimate it.

### Conclusions

The data shows that a majority of Barbadians

- over-estimate the increase in general crime
- over-estimate the increase in homicide rates
- believe a great deal more crime is violent than it is; and
- underestimate the severity of the courts

We believe this is a cause for concern. Such beliefs increase the fear of crime and damage people's quality of life. This also means that policy makers could feel constrained about suggesting methods of penal treatment that might be judged as 'soft' by the public. We know that long prison sentences do not deter crime and we know that community penalties are more effective than imprisonment in reducing re-offending but while the public feels more threatened and alarmed by crime than actual levels justify, there will be little support for shorter sentences or greater use of alternatives to prison.

## **VIEWS ABOUT CRIME AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

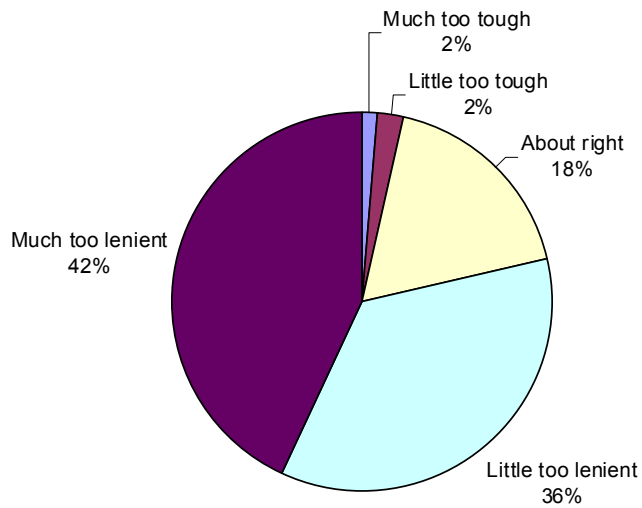
The effects of the misconceptions discussed in the previous sections can be seen when we examine the attitudes of Barbadians to crime and justice.

### **Sentencing**

The survey asked: "In general would you say that sentences handed down by both the High Court and the Magistrates Courts are much too tough, a little too tough, about right, a little too lenient, much too lenient"?

The replies are shown below.

## Views on sentencing in the courts



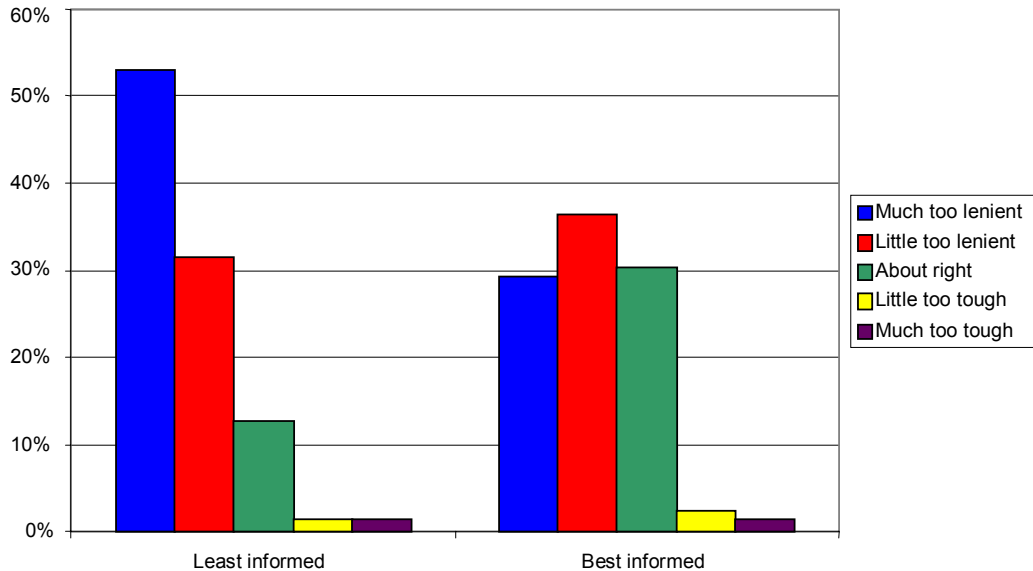
It is absolutely clear that Barbadians think the courts are too lenient.

Interestingly, however, closer examination of the data shows that the real situation is more complex than that statement suggests and that belief that the courts are too lenient is related to knowledge about crime.

In the chart below we show the attitudes to sentencing by two sub-groups of the sample. The first sub-group has been called “the least informed” because the people in it got 3 of the questions of fact described above wrong (change in crime rate, change in murder rate and proportion of crime that is violent); the second has been called “the best informed” because they got the answers right. 32% of the sample fell into the first group while only 13% were in the second.



## Opinions about sentences

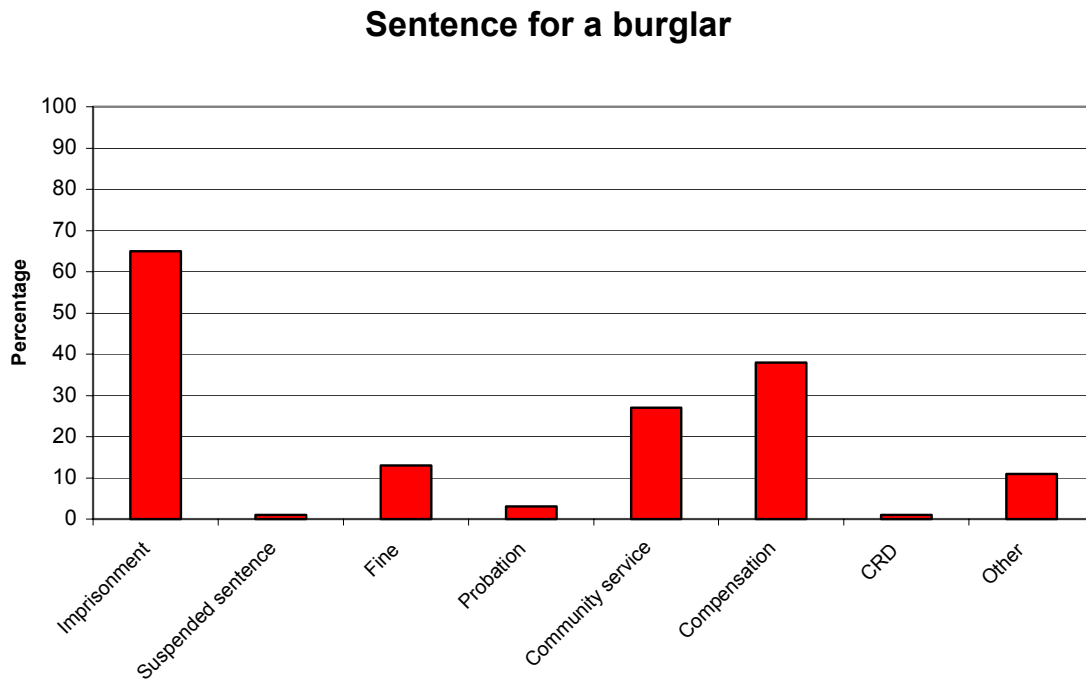


As can be seen the people who knew less about the state of crime in Barbados were much more likely than those who knew more to think that sentencing was much too lenient (53% against 29%) and much less likely to think it was 'about right' (13% compared with 30%). This is a very similar to the results quoted in the British Crime Survey of 1997. It demonstrates that attitudes are related to knowledge and that if people have more information then they may well be less punitive. (In the United Kingdom an experiment was carried out to see if giving people the correct information about crime and justice resulted in an attitude change – it did, very significantly).

The second attitude question related to the correct sentence for a burglar. The question asked was related to the description of an actual burglary case: "A man aged 23 pleaded guilty to the burglary of a house belonging to an elderly man whilst he was out during the day. The offender, who had previous convictions for burglary, took a video worth \$500 and a television,

which he left damaged near the scene of the crime”. Multiple answers were allowed in the answer so as to allow respondents to combine sentences if they wished.

The answers received are in the chart below.



As can be seen 65% of the respondents thought the burglar should be imprisoned, 27% thought he should receive a community service order and 3% wanted probation. In addition 38% thought the burglar should pay compensation.

We looked to see if gender made a difference to the answers. It did not. 64.5% of males said the burglar should be imprisoned compared with 65% of females. Males were slightly more likely to mention compensation than

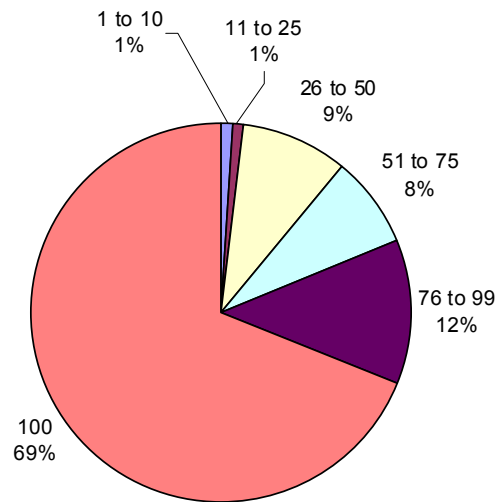
females (39.9% compared with 37%) but the difference was not statistically significant.

However when we examined the results by our 'best' and 'least' informed breakdown we found a significant difference. 68.3% of the least informed group wanted prison for the burglar compared with 59.7% of the best-informed group. It is quite clear that if more information is available then there is more support for penalties which do not involve incarceration.

There were also significant differences when we examined the views of people who had been a victim of crime and those who had not. 71% of victims thought the burglar should be imprisoned compared with 64% of non-victims. 38% of both groups thought that the burglar should pay compensation.

We asked another question about the use or imprisonment for burglary. Besides asking what the sentence should be in the specific case cited above, we also asked what proportion of burglars overall ought to be imprisoned.

### Proportion of burglars who should be imprisoned



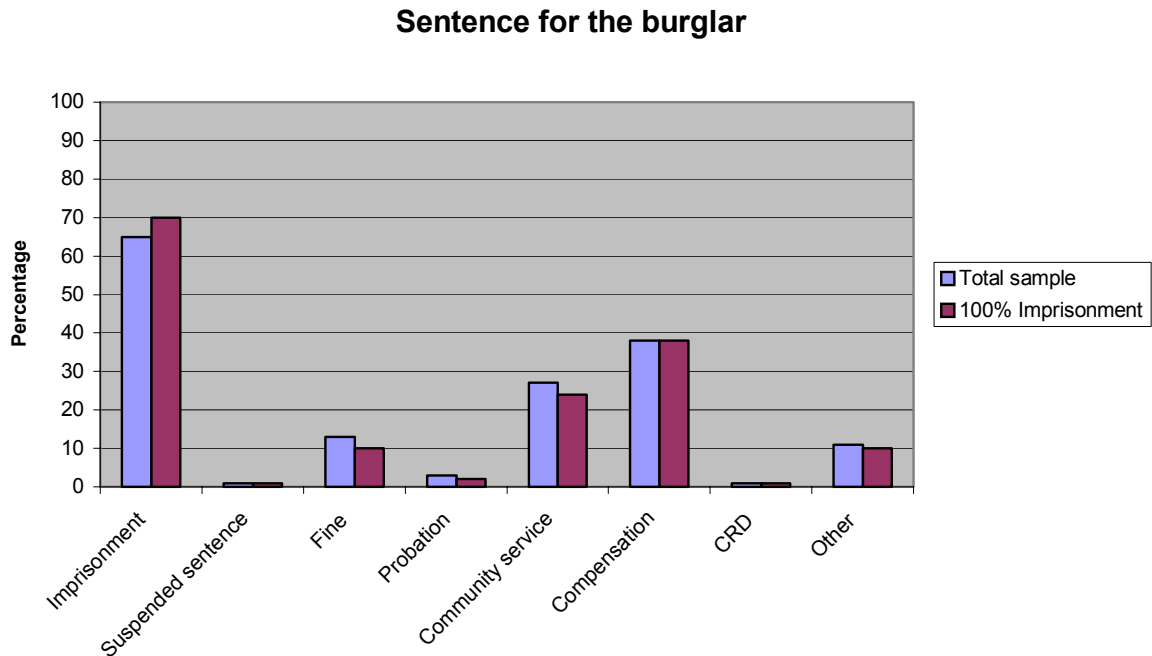
As can be seen 69% of the population believes all burglars should be imprisoned. Another 12% believes that between 76% and 99% of burglars should be imprisoned and only 11% believes it should be less than 50%.

The age of the respondent does not appear to affect their view of the use of imprisonment, but income level seems to have a slight effect. Persons in families which earn more than \$4,000 a month are 10 percentage points less likely than the very poor to say that all burglars ought to be imprisoned (59.7% compared to 69.7%) and 11 percentage points more likely to say 51–99% (24.7% compared to 13.3%). This difference may reflect the difference in the education levels in these households as discussed below.

Education level does seem to be related to views on the use of imprisonment. Of university educated respondents 57% thought that 100% of burglars should go to prison and 31% thought that 50–99% should be imprisoned. For those whose education finished after primary school the proportions were 72% and 17%.

However once again these results must not be taken at face value. In all studies of this kind it has been shown that some people who say all burglars (or any other type of offender) should go to prison will modify their view if faced with a real case. And the BarCS has shown that this is as true in Barbados as everywhere else.

We examined the answers to the question of what to do with the 23-year-old burglar in the scenario described above given by those who said 100% of burglars should be sent to prison.



We found that the 100% group was hardly any more likely than average to say the burglar should be imprisoned. Instead of the 100% answer we might have expected, in fact 70% said he should be imprisoned. 24% said he should be given community service and 2% said he should be put on probation.

What this illustrates is that information – in this instance, even the scanty details of a real case – can change the attitudes of people significantly.

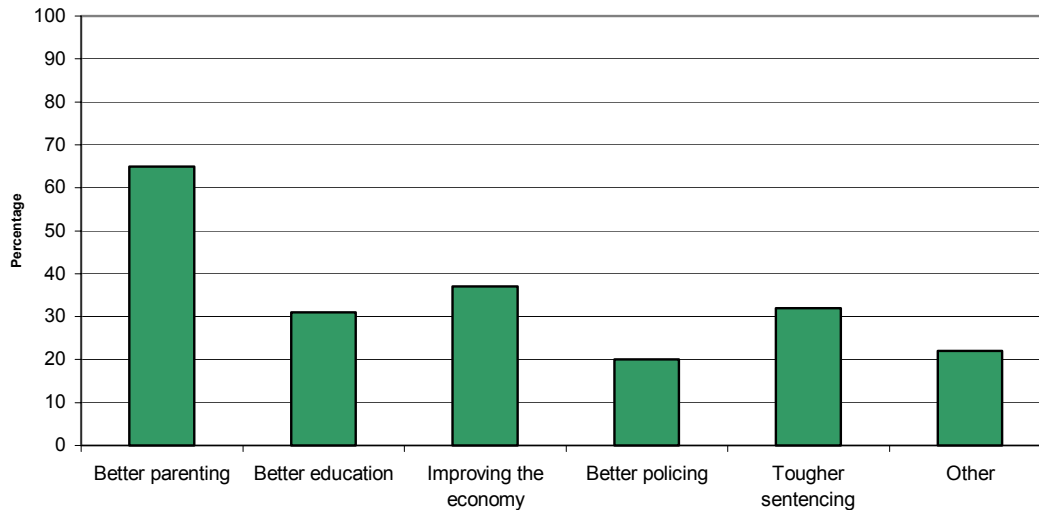
### **How to reduce crime**

We also asked Barbadians for their views on how to combat crime. “There is much concern about crime committed by young people. Would you like to say what you think would be the most effective way of reducing crime by young people? You can give up to three ways if you wish”.

We classified the answers in six categories:

- better discipline by parents/family upbringing to give better respect for the law,
- more discipline in school/better education,
- reducing poverty/increasing employment,
- better policing/more policing,
- increasing sentences for crime/making sentences tougher,
- other answers.

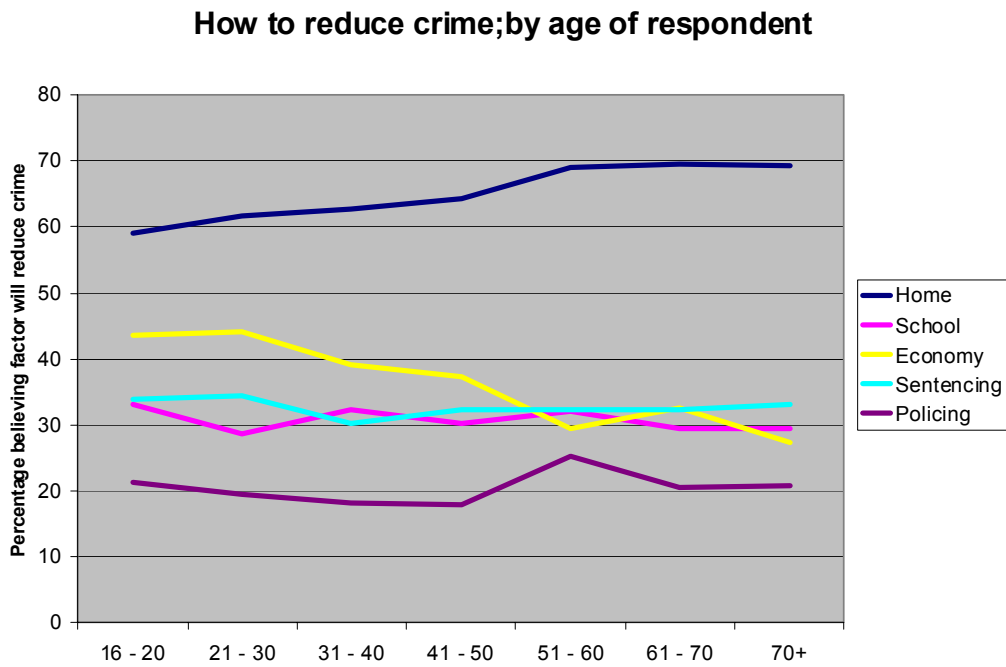
### How to reduce crime among young people



As can be seen from the chart almost two thirds of the respondents believed the answer was in the home, almost a third thought better schooling was the answer and 37% thought it was to be tackled by reducing poverty and increasing employment. One third of the population thought it would come through tougher sentences and 1 in 5 from better policing.

What is interesting about these answers is that only a minority of people see the criminal justice system as having the answer to crime. A significant majority see the answer in the home, in school and through the economy. It is always interesting that much of the rhetoric about crime deals with police, courts and prisons, while the majority of citizens actually believe the answer is elsewhere. It is no surprise that money spent on criminal justice is grudgingly given.

Family income does not appear to be related to beliefs about how to reduce crime among young people but age and level of education do seem to effect attitudes a little.

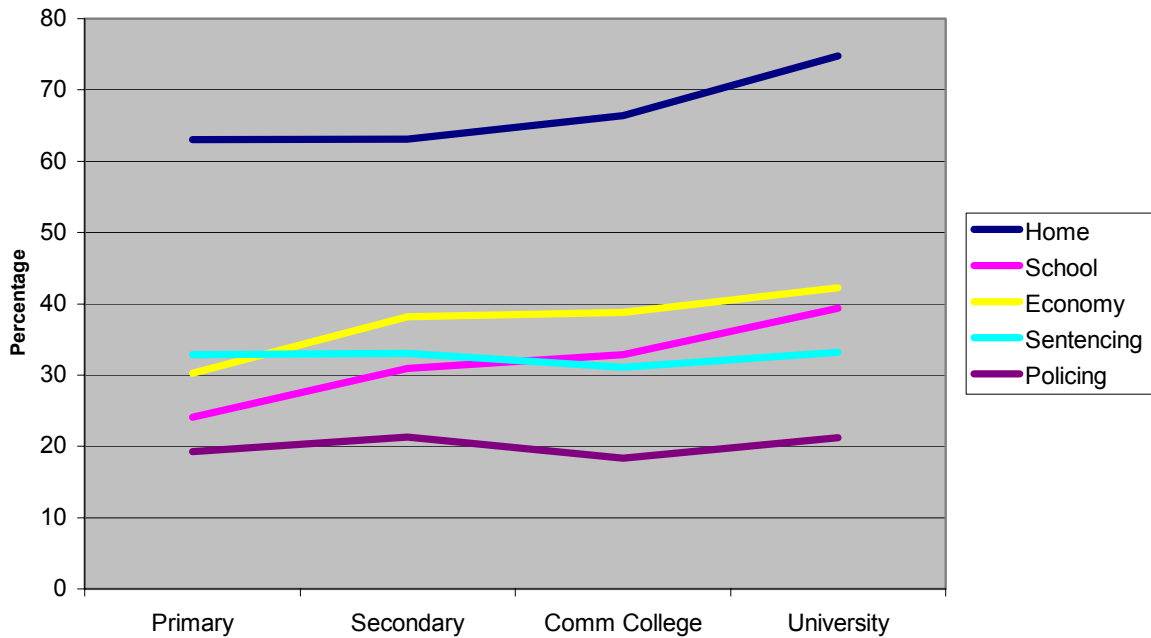


As can be seen from the chart the older you are the more likely you are to think that better parenting is the answer and less likely to think that improving the economy will help. However all age groups have a similar view on the efficacy of better education, better policing and tougher sentencing.

Level of education also affects attitudes.



## How to reduce crime;by education level of respondent



As can be seen, as the level of education rises so does the belief that better parenting will help to reduce crime. For example 63% of those who finished after primary school thinks better parenting will help compared with 75% of the university educated.

Unsurprisingly belief in better education as the answer rises with level of education, as does belief in less poverty and less unemployment.

Belief in the efficacy of the courts or police does not appear to be affected by education level.

However one should not over-stress these differences. What is particularly notable is that attitudes and beliefs are very similar whatever the age and background of the respondent. It may well be a clue to the political stability of Barbados that the vast majority of the population have similar views about crime and criminal justice.

### Views on the Police

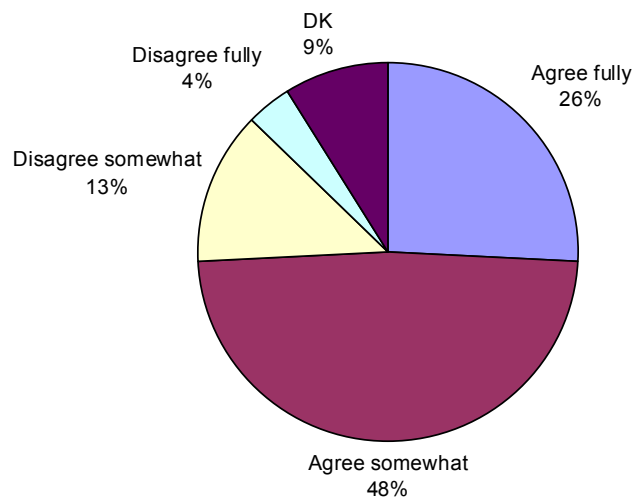
Finally we asked people their views of the police. One question was: “How far would you agree that the police do everything they can to help people and be of service?”

The other was: “Taking everything into account how good do you think the police in your area are in controlling crime?”

### Police helpfulness

The chart below shows the proportion of people agreeing or disagreeing with the statement that the police do everything they can to help or be of service.

**Proportion agreeing the police are helpful**

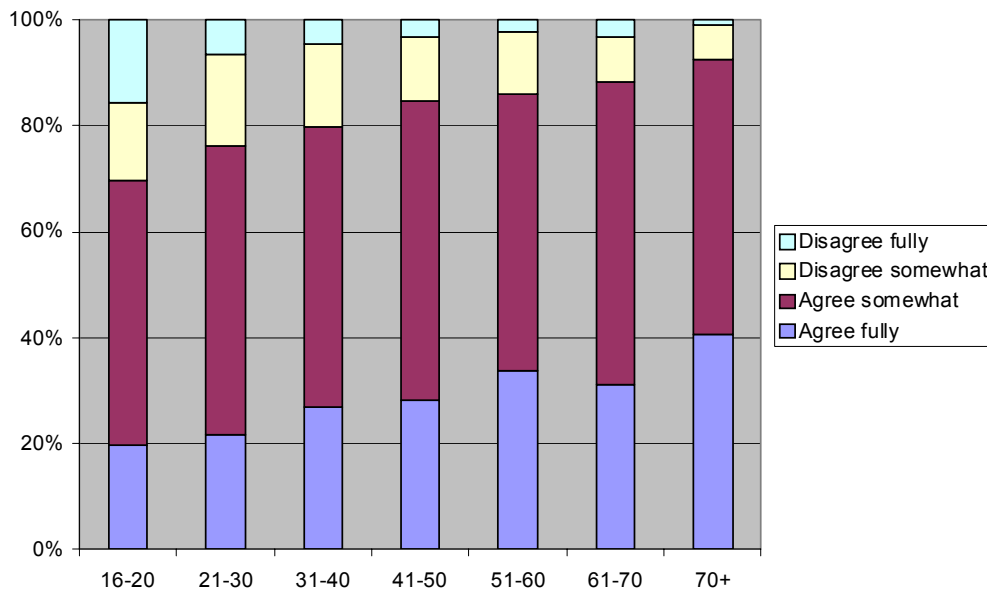


A quarter of people agreed fully and nearly 50% agreed somewhat with the statement. This was very high on the world scale as was pointed out in the previous BarCS report on International Comparisons. There was no difference at all between the opinion of men and women on the subject (26% of both sexes agreed fully and 49% agreed somewhat).

There was, however, a difference in view between those who had been victims of some type of crime and those who had not. 20% of those who had been a victim agreed fully that the police were helpful compared with 27% of those who had not.

There were some differences of view depending on the age of the respondent.

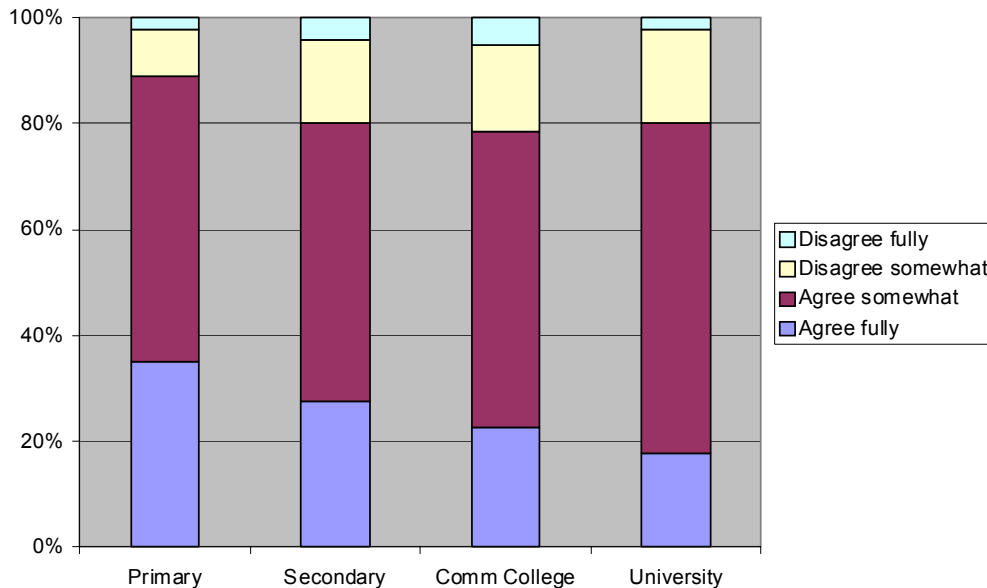
**Proportion agreeing that the police are helpful; by age**



As can be seen people aged 70 or more were twice as likely as those 16 to 20 to agree fully that the police were helpful and that there was a steady decline in the proportion disagreeing that the police were helpful as age increased. Over 30% of the 16-20s thought that the police were not helpful compared with 9% of those 70 or over.

Level of education also seems to be related to attitudes to the police.

**Proportion agreeing the police are helpful; by education**



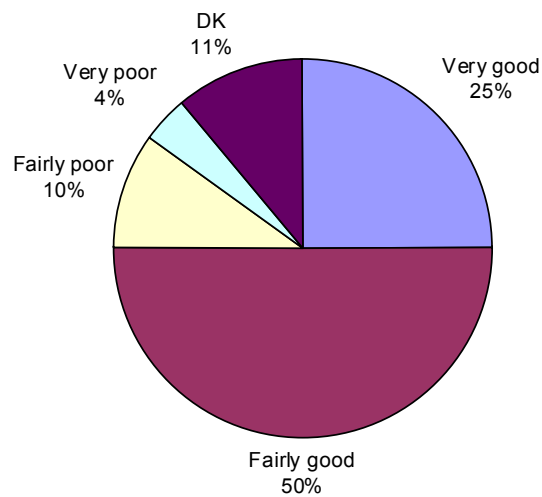
The chart shows that the higher the level of education the less likely people are to agree fully that the police are always helpful. However except for those with primary education (only 10% disagreed with the statement) there was no difference in the proportion disagreeing somewhat or fully with the statement (it was about 20%) as education level went up.

There was an interesting finding on race. 25% of people of African origin agreed fully with the statement about police helpfulness (17% disagreed) compared with 36% of people of European origin (9% disagreed).

### Controlling Crime

Finally we looked at views on how effective people thought the police were in controlling crime. Once again the results were very favourable.

#### **Views held on type of job police do in controlling crime**



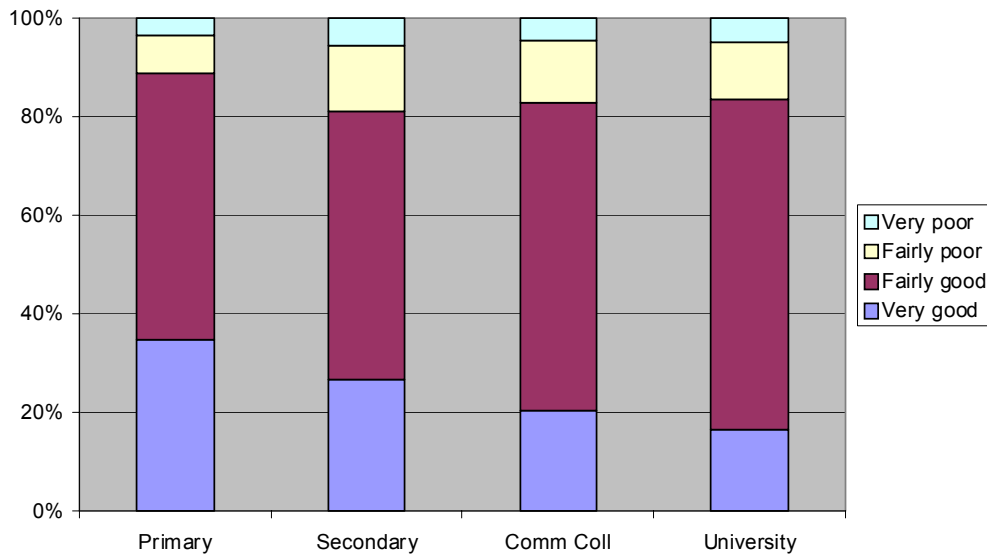
75% of Barbadians think the police are doing either a 'very good' or 'fairly good' job in controlling crime. 14% think they are doing a poor job.

Males have a slightly more favourable view of police effectiveness than females but the difference is very small (76% of men and 73% of women think they are doing a good job controlling crime).

Once again people who have been a victim of crime do not have such a rosy view as those who have not (66% of victims think the police are doing a good job compared with 76% of non-victims and 17% of victims think the police are doing a poor job compared with 12% of non-victims).

Level of education also has an effect on attitude.

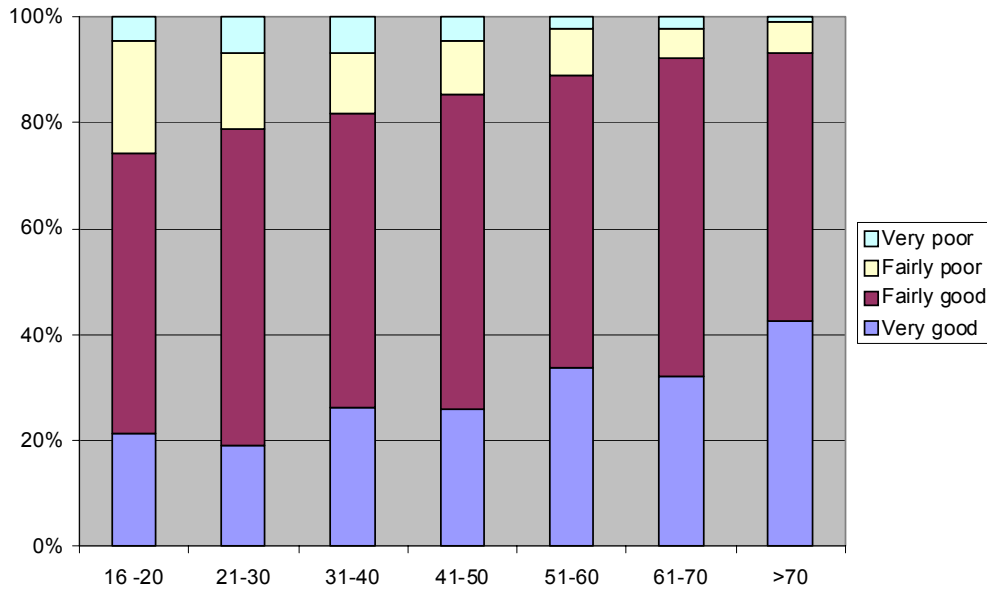
**Views on job done by police in controlling crime; by education level**



People with only a primary education have a more favourable view than others. But, although not as many university-educated people think the police are doing a very good job there is almost no difference between the proportions of those educated above primary level thinking the police do a good job or a poor job.

Age seems to have an interesting effect.

### Views on police control of crime; by age



It seems that the under 30s basically share attitudes (a fairly low proportion thinking the police do a very good job); that those 30–50 have similar views and that those over 50 share views. And these views are the most favourable. The over 70s in particular have very favourable views with over 40% thinking the police do a very good job.

People of European origins have the most favourable view of police effectiveness with 82% thinking the police do a good job and 8% a poor job. 74% of people of African origin think the police are doing a good job compared with 15% thinking they do a poor job.

## CONCLUSION

Four main conclusions seem to come from this analysis

- that many people are misinformed about crime and criminal justice,
- that information can change views and attitudes,
- that views and beliefs do not vary a great deal whatever the background and circumstances,
- that if the authorities wish to see greater use made of the alternative sentencing provisions in the Penal Reform Act 1998 then there will have to be a very significant public education campaign.

### **Misinformation**

Many people are not just uninformed about crime and justice – they are misinformed. The level of misinformation is very similar to that found in other crime surveys – notably the British Crime Survey – so it is not surprising but it does have a deleterious effect on fear of crime and on the ability of the executive to plan effective crime control measures. Locking more offenders up, for longer, is not the way to reduce crime but the rigid response to crime demanded by the misinformed militates against progress.

- Barbados has one of the lowest crime rates in the world,
- the homicide rate has not changed for the last 30 years,
- crimes against visitors are falling,
- violent crime makes up only a small minority of crime and
- sentences handed out by the courts are tougher than many people believe.



But these facts are not widely understood. It is true that property crime has been rising over the last 40 years but that is largely a result of increasing prosperity. It would be astounding if Barbadians would agree to go back to the living standards of 40 years ago in order to go back to property crime rate of 40 years ago.

Sad as it may be, development and crime often go hand in hand because of increased opportunities for crime – just as more road deaths go with more traffic. Something can be done about both but knowledge and evidence are needed and a misinformed population is not the base to build on.

### Information and attitudes

Information can affect attitudes and we have shown here how the two are related. However research from elsewhere shows that correct information will change views and as it is very unlikely that the media will stop printing crime reports which stress violence or opinions which depend on outrage and hurt. It falls to the justice system and the executive to publish facts and get them over to people in an interesting and persuasive manner.

### Homogeneity

The survey has shown how homogeneous views and beliefs are in Barbados. Given the limited number of media outlets and the size of the island this should not be surprising. What has emerged from this research is that views and beliefs vary somewhat depending on sex, age, education, wealth and race, but it is the similarities – not the differences – which are noteworthy. No great rifts exist between young and old, men and women, educated and less educated, rich and poor, black and white. This means that the country is

not torn apart by ideology and probably means that proper information will affect most people in a similar fashion.

### Public Education

The Government owes it to people to reduce their levels of fear and anxiety and, even more, it owes it to them to reduce crime to the extent it can. It can do neither if people continue to think they live in a violent, crime dominated society because there is no confidence in the justice system and the judiciary feels it has to pass the type of sentences we know will not control crime.

Public education must, therefore, be a top priority if Barbadians are to have the quality of life they deserve.

## References

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