

Crime Central – Worry, Fear and Dissatisfaction

by

Clarence Jagroopsingh, Research Analyst, Caribbean Development Strategies

Worry about crime, fear of being attacked, dissatisfaction with the Government's approach to crime and a lack of confidence in the Police Service where some of the major findings of a recently concluded Crime Risk Assessment Survey conducted by Caribbean Development Strategies Limited (cds).

In the period 13th to 15th February 2007, cds conducted the crime risk assessment in Chaguanas. This survey, which had a sample frame of 167 business places, sought to capture the business community's viewpoint on crime and how it has directly affected them. The businesses sampled were randomly selected via face-to-face interviews conducted in areas including Chaguanas, Montrose, Charlieville and Enterprise.

According to the Central Statistical Office (CSO) 2004 Pocket Digest, there were 1,370 registered business establishments in the Borough of Chaguanas. Our sample of 167 represents a significant 12 percent of this figure. Cds believes that through the analysis of this commercial microcosm, we can have an unbiased appreciation of the perception of crime by certain sectors of the national business community.

Survey Demographics

Of the persons interviewed in the various business places, 46 percent were owners, 34 percent were managers and 20 percent were senior employees. Many of the Chaguanas businesses had women in either ownership or a senior position as overall the respondents were 58 percent female and 42 percent male.

In terms of employment, 72 percent employed between 1 and 5 persons, 19 percent employed between 6 and 10 persons and the remaining 9 percent had more than 10 employees. Many of the businesses have been established for a significant period of time as 46 percent have been open for over 10 years, 21 percent between 5 and 10 years, 21 percent between 2 and 5 years with the remainder existing for 2 years or less.

This demographic information facilitates examination principles such as trend analysis, and allows for formation of conclusions based on the responses.

The Effect of Crime

When asked about how worried they were about crime, an overwhelming 94 percent were 'very worried' while the remaining 6 percent stated that they were 'not very worried'. This statistic confirms the reality of the crime situation in Chaguanas. In terms of being negatively affected by crime, 68 percent indicated that they were 'very affected', 24 percent said they were 'slightly affected' and 7 percent were 'not at all affected'.

An alarming 49 percent of the sample stated that their business place had been directly attacked by criminals. With one in every two businesses interviewed having been attacked, those most at risk were supermarkets, pharmacies, jewellers, small food outlets,

vegetable/fruit stalls and pet stores. For these businesses, low security and cash-in-hand are the common criminal temptations.

Regarding the direct effects of crime on the business place, 71 percent stated that they were forced to operate under reduced business hours, 70 percent indicated that they had experienced a loss in sales and 66 percent had incurred increased security costs. However, it must be noted that 68 percent indicated that they had not experienced a loss in staff due to the effects of crime.

How Long Now?

Cds then sought to determine the time frame of the perceived growth of crime. Overall, 53 percent of the interviewees responded that crime became a major concern between the last 2 to 5 years. A significant 37 percent indicated that crime as a national concern has existed for over 5 years now.

The reported time frame for the apparent growth in crime parallels the 15 percent increase in the number of businesses in Chaguanas between 2002 and 2004. This points to a 'mobility' aspect of crime and implies that criminals move to areas where crime is more 'profitable'. This relationship could explain why most respondents believe that crime has escalated between the last 2 to 5 years.

The Conceivable Contraction of Chaguanas

The growth of Chaguanas has been documented in a number of publications including the March 2001 UdeCOTT Chaguanas Local Area Plan (available at www.nalis.gov.tt/ExecutiveSummary_ChaguanasLocalAreaPlan-.html) and a July 2004 article by Afra Raymond (available at <http://www.raymondandpierre.com/articles/article23.htm>).

The Chaguanas Local Area Plan highlighted the dynamic expansion including a forecasted population increase from 91,000 in 2000 to 126,000 by 2020 and an increase in employment from 35,000 jobs in 2000 to 55,000 jobs over the same period. From the article by Afra Raymond it can be seen that the price of real estate generally doubled from 2000 to 2004. Between 2002 and 2004, the CSO Business Survey Establishment Register recorded the number of business establishments in Chaguanas as follows:

2002	2003	2004
1,200	1,272	1,370

Despite these trends, the current results of the cds crime risk assessment point to a possible socio-economic contraction of Chaguanas as a direct result of crime. When asked if they would be investing in expanding their businesses over the next 12 to 18 months, a considerable 71 percent said 'no', 12 percent said 'yes' and 17 percent chose not to respond.

When questioned as to their most likely option were crime to continue at its present rate, 37 percent said that they would 'operate as normal', 31 percent said that they would 'close operations', 11 percent would opt to 'sell the business', 8 percent would 'keep the

business but migrate’, 1 percent said they would ‘move the business from Chaguanas’ with the remainder choosing not to respond.

From these results, it is clear that if the current trend of crime goes unchecked, the positive growth expected for Chaguanas might not be realised. This is significant to the social and economic health of the area and crime must be reduced if the area is to achieve its stated potential.

The Fear of Crime

Apart from the economic effects of crime, there is also a tangible psychological effect that is equally consequential. In attempting to measure the degree of fear manifest in the Chaguanas business community, respondents was asked about how fearful they were of they or someone they know being a victim of crime. As can be seen from the following results, most of the surveys respondents were ‘very fearful’ with regard to the threats listed.

Threat	Very Fearful	A Little Fearful	Not At All Fearful
Attacked at home	87	10	4
Attacked at work	86	8	5
Kidnapped	85	9	6

Stemming from this fear, and given the current perceived crime situation, the likely reaction by the business community was gauged. In responding to what they would most likely do, 40 percent indicated that they would consider leaving the country and 4 percent indicated that they had already begun the process of emigration. An optimistic outlook pervades however, as 55 percent have decided to stay and wait for the situation to improve.

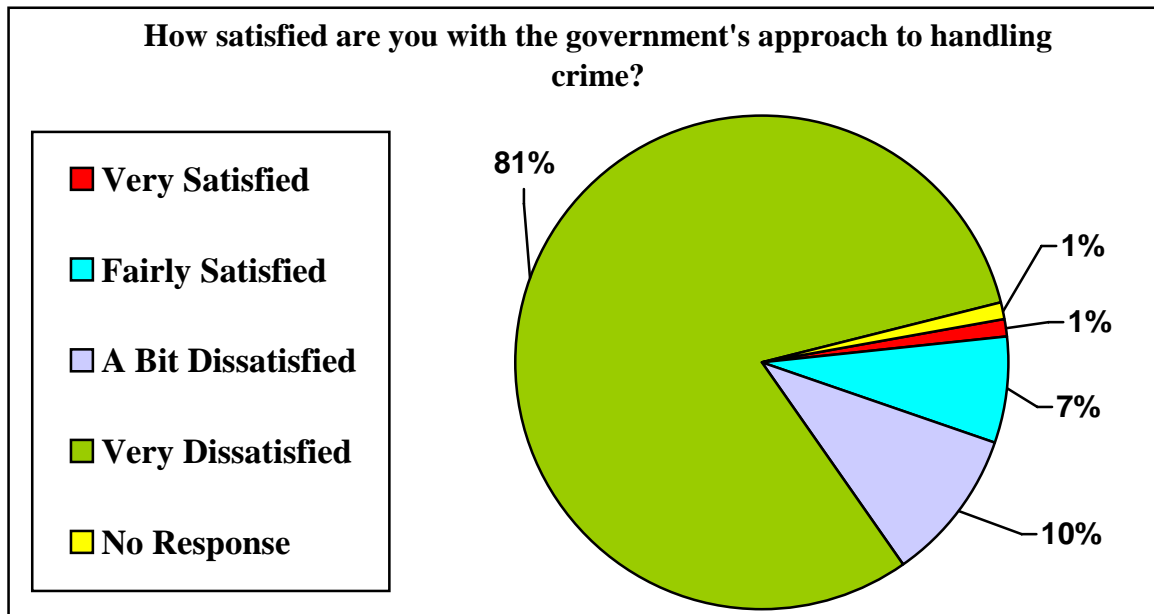
It must be noted that during some of the face-to-face interviews, there was a tangible emotion surrounding crime that could not be quantified. One business owner and resident of Chaguanas tearfully related an incident where her young child was held at gunpoint while the family was being robbed. Another young man indicated that he was closing his business the very next day because of the threats to his life stemming from crime in the area.

The fear of crime in Chaguanas is having a psychological effect where the quality of life for many business persons has been reduced. In addition, crime and the resulting fear are threatening the economy with the possibility of capital flight and losing the benefits of entrepreneurship.

The Role of the Government and Police

The populace expects the elected government to provide key essential services and a range of support services. Apart from health, education and other necessities, the government is expected to uphold law and order and maintain control over crime. The police service is regarded as the conduit via which this control is exercised by the government.

Cds sought to determine the satisfaction rating with regard to the government's approach to handling crime. As can be seen from the chart, 91 percent of the respondents expressed some level of dissatisfaction with the government's performance in handling the crime situation in Chaguanas.



The survey questioned the business community as to their belief that the crime situation was solvable by government action. 56 percent indicated that they believed that it could be solved by government action while 42 percent disagreed. Many of those who did not believe that the solution of crime was solely dependent on government action alluded to a more holistic approach where the government empowers private sector and community groups involved in crime prevention and community protection.

In ascertaining a confidence rating of the business community with regard to the police service, 57 percent were 'not at all confident', 25 percent were 'not very confident' 17 percent were 'fairly confident' and none of the respondents indicated that they were 'very confident'. Overall, it is obvious that both the government and the police service lack the satisfaction and confidence of the Chaguanas business community in handling the current crime situation.

In remedying this situation, the respondents were asked if they agreed or not to certain suggestions. 98 percent stated that they wanted to see a 'greater police presence in the community' and 93 percent supported an 'anti-crime coalition by all stakeholders in Chaguanas'. A significant percentage also indicated that they wanted both the Mayor and Member of Parliament of Chaguanas to take a more active role.

Fighting Back

The call for a national shutdown by social activist Inshan Ishmael was seen as a positive move in the fight against crime by 74 percent of the business persons interviewed. In fact, 97 percent of those who supported the initial national shutdown said that they would support a similar action in the future.

Within recent weeks public personalities and certain politicians have publicly advocated the right for law-abiding citizens to bear arms. Of the business persons interviewed, 59 percent agreed with the call for law-abiding citizens to have the right to bear arms and 84 percent said ‘yes’ to the question, “Should the law be amended such that the criminal use of guns becomes subject to the application of the death penalty?”

When asked about the significance of the recent Parliamentary Legislation, the DNA Act and the Witness Protection Act, in the fight against crime, both pieces of legislation received a favorable response of 95 percent and 86 percent respectively.

The Major Causes

Caribbean Development Strategies asked the participants to affirm or negate suggestions for the major causes of crime today. These causes are presented with the accompanying percentages of agreement and disagreement.

Cause of Crime	Yes	No	NR
Drugs	99	1	0
Breakdown of Family Values	99	1	0
Poor Government Policy	99	1	0
Inefficient Police	97	2	1
Lack of Discipline from Parents	96	2	2
Too Lenient Sentencing	92	7	1
Racial Tension	91	7	2
Unemployment	89	11	0
Violence in Entertainment (<i>TV, movies etc</i>)	89	10	1
The Education System	82	17	1
Poverty	78	22	0

What I Would Do

The survey then derived the perspectives of the business community with regard to what measures they saw as being important in the fight against crime. The measures, all of which were deemed important, are represented as follows:

Measure Against Crime	Yes	No	NR
Punishing Criminals	99	0	1
Fighting Drug Abuse	98	2	0
Fighting Domestic Abuse	98	1	1
Re-introducing a Value System	98	1	1
Reform of the Police Service	97	1	2
Generating Employment	93	4	3

The final aspect of the survey involved asking the respondents to put forward their main suggestion with regard to dealing with crime. 34 percent zeroed in on the police

with a substantial call for police reform and a request for greater police presence. Another 22 percent of those interviewed pointed to stiffer penalties and half of these pointed to the use of the death penalty as a deterrent to crime.

A myriad of other suggestions were proposed and included a change of government, business people arming themselves, ending corruption, strengthening morals and values, a call for national unity and prayer.

Conclusion

Beneath the media generated publicity and public forum discussions, there exist a real and pervasive feelings of hopelessness, fear and dissatisfaction with regard to the current crime situation.

As with any microcosm, the Chaguanas business community is a representative system having parallels to the larger system. Following the analysis of the data, the country is facing a significant obstacle in crime, an obstacle which could threaten to undermine the benefits of the current pace of development.

The opinions of the business community in the cds Crime Risk Assessment for Chaguanas support the fact that crime is a substantial socio-economic threat that must be dealt with before it becomes insurmountable.

Caribbean Development Strategies is one of the Caribbean's leading Market Research and Consultancy Firms. To purchase a copy of the full report based on this survey or for any information please contact us at (868) 665 9984 or info@cdsonline.biz. You can also visit us online at www.cdsonline.biz.