

The fear of crime in jamaica criminology essay



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The fear of crime has been a major factor within Jamaica's society as it affects the country's resource and peoples both, restriction of lifestyle, poor quality of life, low/ lack confidence, disempowerment, increasing financial costs and lack of education. All of these factors have an impact on fear levels. This has contributed to a lot of crimes that has not solve as well as people fearing for there lives. Many people in today's society express anxiety and fear about crime, and about being victimized. There is not much security or confidence in the police as they themselves help to contribute to most of the crime committed. People react to fear in different ways. Some people try to avoid crime, others try to protect themselves, and still others try to prevent victimization by not possessing anything for which they can be victimized.

Both the government and the police have launched attempts to reduce the public's fear of crime. Police services have created numerous programs including education of victimization risks and of protective behaviours, Neighbourhood Watch, Crime Prevention through Environmental Design such as (police youth clubs), and foot patrol. The government has implemented new legislation, such as amendments to the administration of youth justice. The media play a substantial role in determining the amount of fear of crime that people hold. This comes from the fact that the media extensively and disproportionately cover crime stories. This leads people to believe that there is more crime than there actually is, and believing that a great amount of crime exists in society leads people to fear.

The Impact of Fear of Crime

Crime and fear of crime are significant matters of concern to communities across Jamaica. The most important factor when examining the impact of fear of crime is to determine whether or not the fear is proportionate to the actual incidence of crime. Yes we fear crime; as a result we are afraid to go to the police because of what we fear. So we live with the consequences that the law does not do its job, yet we the citizens have important information that can help ourselves will not do so.

The Positive Effects

When the fear of crime is impartial to reality, people are aware of the risks linked with various personal violence offences. This level of fear or concern can promote good personal safety habits and improved home and property security, thereby minimizing the risks of becoming a victim.

The Negative Effects

When the fear of crime becomes disproportionate to the reality, the positive effects may swiftly be replaced with a string of devastating effects on a person's lifestyle and quality of life. These effects can include:

some people may be afraid of particular types of crime but not of others

some individuals may be afraid of crime in the home but not in public places

there is a wide range of perceptions of crime, which differ across sections of society, for example, women, older Jamaicans and young children

many factors contribute to fear of crime, including personal victimization, anecdotal evidence and the reporting of incidents in the media

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the perception of the extent of criminal activity is not supported by the evidence of crimes committed.

All these factors affect each of us differently as we may consider that we are not a part of this. The rate at which fear of crime has increased in Jamaica, as significant implementation on our youths as they are the ones that are being influenced the most.

What affect crime today in Jamaica?

Restriction of Lifestyle – fear of crime often causes people to avoid situations and curtail movements, sometimes to the extent that they become reluctant to leave their own home or to talk to the police for fear of their lives.

Poor Quality of Life – not only as a result of restricting their movements, but many people either avoid previously enjoyed activities in an attempt to ensure personal safety, or undertake the activities without enjoyment due to an overwhelming fear. This cause great strain on the person as they may become depress and do not try to change their status of living as it make no sense to.

Low/ lack Confidence – fear of crime often decreases a person's confidence in their surroundings. This lack of confidence is portrayed in their body language which conveys the appearance of an easy victim to offenders, who target vulnerability. Not only does the lack of confidence thereby increase the risk of becoming a victim of personal violence, it also reduces a person's ability to effectively deal with an attack, as they often lack faith in their ability to stop the attack or escape.

Disempowerment – by constantly feeling at risk of personal violence, a disempowering ‘victim mentality’ is often adopted. This may further decrease a person’s confidence and appearance of vulnerability, increasing their risk of becoming a victim.

Increasing Financial Costs – not only can this cost be evidenced by the community generally, but also on an individual basis by those people whose fear of crime leads them to turning their home into a fortress or flee from the area where there is a lot of violence.

Lack of Education – not only are they educated enough to know what they are doing is wrong. It is easy to see how we characterized problems with drugs, crime, teen pregnancy, unemployment, idle youth, abandoned houses, and unresponsive police can be stressful. Still to be conceptualized are the mechanisms through which neighborhood disorder may shape the behaviour practices of its residents.

Contributing Factors to Fear of Crime

There are a number of factors which may significantly increase the fear of crime in the community, including:

Media Sensationalism – “Bad News Sells”.

Incidents of crime often make a good story. Subsequently, the media is quick to report on negative incidents that occur whilst ignoring positive ones. Thus a perception is often generated that there is a higher risk of encountering crime than what there really is. This is perhaps best highlighted in incidents involving older people and young children, which seem to attract a dramatically disproportionate amount of media coverage to reality of

occurrences, thereby significantly increasing the fear of crime of this group and young children. This poses a negative impact on the country and the government as this vandalized the character of the country on an international level and the Human Rights bodies are wondering if we really can combat crime. This dampens the country's resource to earn foreign exchange through tourism and other sectors as people fear of crime won't let them be a victim of these said crime.

Music/ Entertainment

This influence our youths in major ways as the jargon of music they listen to influence their behaviour to be a part of gangs or fear being victim of crime by gangs. This has to do with the type of behaviours shown in our school by both gender as a result this impact on them psychologically and physically. Their adaptation to these types of music influences their level of thinking and behaviours whether positive or negative and thus will impact on society greatly.

Continuum of Minor Harassment

Frequent exposure to incidents of minor harassment, e. g. inappropriate comments and unwanted sexual touching, can have a significant effect of people's perceptions of risk and their levels of fear as this may affect both gender. This may affect them psychologically and therefore affects them to function productive in today's society. Sometime our boys may be victims of sexual harassment but because society sees men as tough, enough emphasis has not been place on their well being. This type of stigma affects them deeply as they may want to kill the person that has done this to them and eventually become killers.

Perceptions of Vulnerability

A number of factors may contribute to personal perceptions of vulnerability such as age, gender, perceived physical strength, fear of sexual assault, previous victimization, etc. This make them weak with fear of a crime will be committed against them.

Perceived Loss of Control

In his 1995 book *Fear of Crime: Interpreting Victimization*, Ferraro established from a literature review that incivility encompassed both physical and social environments.

Physical incivility refers to disorderly surroundings such as litter, abandoned buildings/cars, graffiti, broken/barricaded windows, etc. Whereas social incivility includes disruptive behaviour such as rowdy youths, homeless people, beggars, drunks and inconsiderate neighbours.

These incivilities may, either separately or combined, indirectly heighten fear of crime through giving the impression of a loss of control of the environment and a lack of caring.

Anticipation of Serious Consequences

For both women and men, the seriousness of rape is often perceived as equal in consequence to murder. But if a man is rape by a woman it may not be taken seriously if reported to the police as a woman, so subsequently their anticipation of the serious consequences of this type of crime is extremely high.

Likewise some people, especially those who are older, suffering ill-health, physically incapacitated or financially limited, may have high levels of fear generated through their perceived lack of ability to physically and financially recover from a crime incident perpetrated against them.

Extent of Fear of Crime

Whilst the most consistent finding in Jamaica on fear of crime is that women are more fearful than men, it remains that the effects of fear of crime are wide reaching and cross both gender and age boundaries some of the major findings include:

All respondents of the survey (young and old, male and female) saw young people in particular as a source of threat in public places;

Young women feared sexual assault and young men saw

themselves as potential targets for assaults and robberies by gangs;

Most people have a general fear about ‘unpredictable strangers’ especially in public places at night;

Age is an important indicator of perceived risk and worry about crime.

Middle-aged respondents perceive themselves at most risk of property crime and worry most about it. While young people see themselves as at greater risk of crimes against them and have a higher level of worry;

Older people may feel more vulnerable but they tend not to place themselves in risky situations.

Of the twenty persons that did the questionnaire I found that 75% of women surveyed felt unsafe in public places at night and that found that 55% of women felt unsafe waiting for public transport alone after dark especially in the Kingston area.

Strategies to Address a Disproportionate Fear of Crime

A disproportionate fear of crime can severely detract from a person's health and well-being. It is therefore essential to identify a number of strategies that may reduce this fear, including:

Community Education

This is important to address the underlying reasons behind people's fear of crime and educate them of the common trends, actual risks and effective personal safety strategies to minimise their chances of becoming a victim. This way the first steps will be taken to ensuring all people enjoy a healthy and positive lifestyle unfettered by unnecessary constraints.

This education could take place through presentations delivered to any community group or forum, including Neighbourhood Watch, Kiwanis, Rotary, sporting groups, etc.

Media Coverage

Media coverage of success stories coupled with the realistic portrayal of personal violence risks will significantly contribute to the reduction of fear. People can support this strategy by advising the media (particularly local papers) of success stories they are aware of, or by making complaints in relation to the unrealistic portrayal of personal violence resulting from particular stories shown on the television.

Assertive Behaviour

Encouraging community members, friends and family to be assertive and confident will assist in reducing their fear of crime, as well as their risk of becoming a victim of personal violence.

Reinforcement of Personal Strengths

People who experience fear are generally not confident in maintaining their personal safety. By encouraging people to be committed to their personal safety, and reinforcing their personal strengths, such as negotiation skills, physical strength and/or self defense skills, you can assist to increase their confidence and commitment to their safety, and reduce their fear of crime.

Home and Property Security Education

Providing community members with crime prevention information on topics such as home and property security, may alleviate their fear of crime by being aware of, and taking action to address their fear whilst in the home or of having property stolen.

The Police and Government reaction

Police and politicians alike hoped that by providing the fearful with accurate and true information on victimization risks, crime rates, crime in their neighbourhoods, and proper ways to protect themselves, people would have no reason to fear, and fear would be reduced. Educating people about crime is a simple and inexpensive method of reducing fear compared to other methods such as increasing the number of police officers or changing legislation. This method though does not guarantee decreased levels of fear.

Conclusion

Fear of crime is real and it affects people's quality of life. Fear has not been reduced and people do not feel safer. As long as fear persists, the public will continue to call for more of the same harsh measures. It is time that politicians and leaders stop merely reacting to fear by proposing simplistic, short-term solutions to the complex problems of crime. Years of research have shown that the correctional practices we now have in place are not effective in creating safe communities and simply delay the problem, thereby not reducing fear in the long-term.

The public looks to others for help in reducing the fear of crime, but the people the public looks to for guidance cannot always be of help. When the public sees that the police, the government and the law are unable to assist them with their concerns, individuals will often take charge of the situation for themselves with this type of mentality can lead to vigilantism.