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Police legitimacy in Trinidad and Tobago: resident perceptions in a high-crime community

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Police legitimacy in Trinidad and Tobago: Resident perceptions in a high crime community

Violent crime in Trinidad and Tobago has increased over the last two decades, yet the police have been largely unsuccessful in reducing violence. Between 1999 and 2016, the murder rate increased by 475 percent. Despite the fact that the murder rate has increased, approximately 76 homicides are cleared each year, resulting in a low homicide clearance rate. Using 40 semi-structured interviews with community members from a high crime, low-income community in Trinidad and Tobago, this study examines residents' experiences with police officers, and respondents' willingness to work with the police to clear criminal cases. The results indicate that due to a lack of institutional trust, citizens are unwilling to trust and work collaboratively with most police officers. Policy implications from this research will be discussed.

Key words: Trinidad and Tobago; police legitimacy; crime; corruption

Introduction

"The police and them involved with the racket with half the youth them. You don't get involved trust me" (Rachel, Afro-Trinidadian female, Pre-School Teacher, mid-20s). This quote represents the lack of trust in police held by many residents in Socaville, a working-class community tucked in the hilly slopes of North West Trinidad. Due to limited trust in the police, residents in this neighborhood are less likely to report crimes and work collaboratively with police officers in an effort to help reduce crime. This all stems from the fact that locals presume that many police officers represent a threat to their personal well-being as opposed to a source of protection.

Crime in Trinidad and Tobago has escalated over the last two decades, yet the police have been unable to make meaningful reductions to crime and delinquency. At the turn of the 21st century, Trinidad and Tobago experienced a surge in crime (Johnson, King, Katz, Fox, & Goulette, 2008; Maguire, King, Johnson, & Katz, 2010). In 1999, the murder rate was 7.35 per 100,000 (Inter-American Development Bank, 2016). By 2016, the murder rate was 37.8 per 100,000, down from its record high of 42.3 per 100,000 in 2008 (CIA World Factbook, 2017; Nicolas, 2009; Pino, 2009; United States Department of State, 2017). According to Johnson, King, Katz, Fox, and Goulette (2008), cooperation between the police and citizens is instrumental to effective policing within democracies. However, in Trinidad and Tobago, citizens often refrain from reporting witnessed violence, or relying on police officers for help, out of fear that local officers are corrupt and the offenders will retaliate (Adams, 2012; Katz, Maguire, & Choate, 2011). Overall, this article explores the attitudes and perceptions of the police among Trinidad and Tobago locals and their level of willingness to work with officers in a high crime area. Specifically, the article argues that due to a lack of perceived legitimacy, citizens are unwilling to trust most police officers. This gaping divide between the police and locals puts the community at risk as crimes go underreported, officers are unable to gather relevant crime evidence from uncooperative community members, and, as a result, criminals are able to continue to live in the community instead of becoming incarcerated.

In understanding police legitimacy in Trinidad and Tobago, it is important to note distinct differences between the twin island republic and the developed nations (e.g., the United States of America and countries in Western Europe) with highly evolved law enforcement systems and established trust between the police and many communities. In comparison to more developed nations, Trinidad and Tobago is small in size, has a brutal history of colonialism, remains a developing nation, has limited financial resources to improve law enforcement and the criminal justice system, and urgently needs to develop sound strategies to combat drug trafficking (Bennett and Lynch, 1996; Birkbeck, 1999; Maguire, et al., 2010; Pino, 2009; Wilson, Parks, & Mastrofski, 2011).

The majority of research on policing in Trinidad and Tobago focuses on Port of Spain, which is characterized by the highest national homicide rate. While this research is instructive on policing in the nation's capital, it may not be transferable to other high crime districts with lower homicide rates. For example, of the seven most violent police station districts in Trinidad and Tobago between 2001 and 2007, the percentage of national homicides occurring in West End (5%) was close to the percentage of homicides in Arima (5.5%), Belmont (4.6%), and St. Joseph (4.6%) (Maguire, et al., 2008). Besson Street, located in Port-of-Spain, had a murder rate of 249 per 100,000 in 2005 and accounted for 20.4 percent of the national homicides between 2001 and 2007 (Maguire, et al., 2008). By focusing on Socaville, a community located in the police district with the fourth highest national homicide rate (Maguire, et al., 2008), this study expands the knowledge on the state of policing in Trinidad and Tobago and may be applicable to other parts of the country suffering from similar homicide rates.

Review of Relevant Literature

Policing Trinidad and Tobago

One of the most important measures of effective policing is clearance rates, often defined as whether or not an arrest is associated with a criminal offense. As the murder rate in Trinidad and Tobago increased from 9.5 per 100,000 in 2000 to 42.3 per 100,000 in 2008 (Pino, 2009; Inter-American Development Bank, 2016), police officers cleared 76 murders each year (Maguire, et al., 2010). The elevated murder rate, coupled with the unchanging number of homicides cleared annually, resulted in a significant

decline in the homicide clearance rate. Citizens are more likely to rely on police officers for assistance in dealing with community problems when they view officers as effective at decreasing crime (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). However, since more murders were being committed, and officers were unable to make arrests in most cases, citizens were more likely to perceive officers as ineffective (Johnson, et al., 2008).

The unrelenting low clearance rate

In Trinidad and Tobago, several factors may have impacted low clearance rates. First, there has been an increase in the use of firearms to carry out homicides; murders involving firearms are generally more difficult to solve (Maguire, et al., 2010; Inter-American Development Bank, 2016). Second, since many streets do not have official names, and homes may not be numbered, locating the exact location of a crime is difficult and conducting investigations are challenging for the police (Maguire, et al., 2008). Third, no single organization was responsible for investigating homicides and the police officers tasked with working these cases had limited training (Maguire, et al., 2010). Fourth, the TTPS and the Forensic Science Centre (FSC) did not have the needed infrastructure to collect evidence at crime scenes; secure, transport, and store evidence; and analyze the evidence collected in a timely manner (Maguire, et al., 2010; Maguire & King, 2013). Although officers had little control over some of these factors, their inability to arrest crime suspects and decrease crime greatly impacted their public image (Johnson, et al., 2008).

Perceptions of police officers

Over several decades, reports of citizen dissatisfaction with the TTPS have surfaced, with some citizens viewing officers as aggressive, corrupt, and ineffective (Adams, 2012; Mastrofski and Lum, 2008; Maguire, et al., 2010; Mori International, 2003; 2009; Pino, 2009). Citizens claimed that officers stopped people unjustifiably, employed abusive language, exercised excessive force, blackmailed citizens in exchange for not arresting them, and even participated in shootings and rapes (Kochel, 2009, p. 114; Kuhns, Johnson, & King, 2011; Maguire, et al., 2010; Pino, 2009). Equally troubling was national and international concern of civilian deaths during police apprehension and custody (Kuhns et

al., 2011; Mastrofski & Lum, 2008). Stories of police misconduct were so prevalent that homicide suspects began alleging that their confession was beaten out of them, a tactic that resulted in acquittals on numerous occasions (Maguire, et al., 2010). Due to the criminal justice system's limited success in securing criminal convictions in serious crimes, citizens in North West Trinidad were convinced that the extra judicial death of crime suspects was a strategy some police officers utilized to reduce recidivism (Adams, 2012).

Impact of citizens' perception of police on crime fighting

Police officers rely heavily on information from victims and witnesses in order to solve crimes and apprehend offenders (Skogan and Antunes, 1979). Conversely, police effectiveness decreases when citizens are unwilling to report crimes (Johnson, et al., 2008). Unfortunately, due to limited trust in the police and fear of reprisals from suspected offenders, citizens in Trinidad and Tobago are often unwilling to cooperate with police investigations (Adams, 2012; Johnson, et al., 2008; Maguire & Bennett, 2008; Maguire, King, Johnson, & Katz, 2010). This problem appears to be circular: as the homicide clearance rate decreased, citizens' reported apprehension to helping with police investigations; however, by not reporting information to the police, citizens inadvertently contribute to the maintenance of a low homicide clearance rate. At issue is the fact that witnesses are not duty bound to report crimes to the police. When citizens underreport witnessed crimes due to fear of reprisals, one can understand their choice of safety over justice. Nonetheless, this decision makes police officer's ability to solve crimes that more difficult.

Police Legitimacy

Legitimacy of a legal institution speaks to people's willingness, not mere obligation, to follow the law and legal authorities. Specifically, when institutions are seen as legitimate, people follow the rules of that institution and socialize others to do the same (Kochel, 2009). Tom Tyler (2004) argues that in a legitimate system, individuals become instrumental to crime control. Specifically, "the police are entitled to call upon the public to follow the law and to help combat crime and that members of the public have an obligation to engage in cooperative behaviors" (pp. 86-87). Police legitimacy is a

central component of the relationship between the police and the public (Sunshine &Tyler, 2003). To be effective, the police need citizens to accept their decisions and to obey the law (Hawdon, Ryan, & Griffin, 2003; Tyler, 2004). Voluntary compliance is necessary since the police can neither be omnipresent (Tyler, 2004), nor submit people to obey the law through force. It is the citizens' perception of the police as respectful, trustworthy, and fair public servants that influence their desire to cooperate with police officers (Hawdon et al., 2003; Johnson, et al., 2008; Paternoster, Brame, Bachman, & Sherman, 1997; Stoutland, 2001; Tyler, 2004). In treating citizens fairly, officers certify their dignity, worth, and full membership in the social order (Paternoster et al., 1997).

Trust and respect are key to police legitimacy. However, conceptualizations of trust differ among scholars. Adapting the 'four trust question' developed by Ronald Ferguson and colleagues, Stoutland (2001) argues that there are four aspects of trust in relation to the police: priorities, competence, dependability, and respectfulness. More specifically, the aspects of trust are (1) do police officers share the community's priorities: do they care about the community's concerns? (2) Are police officers competent: do they have the knowledge and skill to do their jobs? (3) Are police officers dependable: do they have the resources to fulfill their responsibilities? (4) Are officers respectful: will police officers be fair and courteous as they interact with citizens (Stoutland, 2001). Priorities of police officers are important in terms of building trust with community members. When officers show they share the same priorities of the community, such as involvement of youth sports, important connections may be formed. These positive interactions increase residents' trust in the police (Stoutland, 2001).

Alternatively, Johnson, Maguire, and Kuhns (2014) identify conceptual overlap between trust and legitimacy. They view legitimacy as being comprised of three factors: institutional trust, obligation to obey, and cynicism about the law. Here, institutional trust refers to citizens' confidence in the police and their view that officers are trustworthy, act within the law, and do their job well. Obligation to obey the law speaks to the notion that people should follow the law and police directives even if they do not agree with them. Finally, cynicism about the law centers on whether people believe powerful people or the state use the law against them and their interests (Johnson, et al., 2014). The present study focuses

on institutional trust as discussed by Johnson and colleagues.

Methodology

This paper flows out of a larger project focused on understanding community members'[1] experiences with street violence and their perceptions of the state in North West Trinidad. The guiding research question for this part of the study was, "what role do citizens perceive police officers play in combatting crime and increasing community members' sense of safety?"

Research Strategy

Forty semi-structured interviews were conducted with community members obtained through availability and snowball sampling (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). This qualitative technique was selected because it enabled a thorough exploration of respondents' nuanced perspectives and the population parameters of the area under investigation were unavailable (Bogart & Perce, 2003; Davidson & Layder, 1994; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Lofland et al., 2006). Interviews were conducted between 2009 and 2016 with four respondents being interviewed twice to ascertain changes in residents' perceptions over time.

Research Location

Trinidad and Tobago was selected for this study because the homicide rate is high (Johnso, et al., 2008; Maguire, et al., 2010; United States Department of State, 2017) and law enforcement's attempts to reduce crime have been largely unsuccessful (Johnson, et al., 2008; Maguire, et al., 2010; Maguire and King, 2013; Mastrofski & Lum, 2008; Pino, 2009). Socaville was selected for this study because of its notoriety as a dangerous community. Socaville is located in the police district with the forth-highest homicide rate (Maguire, et al., 2008; Townsend, 2009) and is known by citizens as a place to avoid. Additionally, the author has extensive experience in the community, holding insider/outsider status, which provides a dynamic vantage point to analyze community members' experiences and represent their voices (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002; Pelias, 2011).

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[1] Community members include the neighborhoods' residents, frequent visitors, business owners, employees, religious leaders, etc.

Access to the Community

Access to Socaville, a central component to the success of this study, was negotiated throughout the investigation. The author successfully negotiated and renegotiated access through a key respondent (Aliah) and several longtime acquaintances that reside in the community (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Janesick, 2000; Lofland et al., 2006; Zinn, 1979). In addition to working with a key respondent, the author spent time hanging out with her acquaintances, walking around the community and visiting local shops. Immersing herself in the community enabled her to document a rich description of community members' experiences and understand the conflicted lens through which community members view the police (Tremblay, 1957).

Sample and Interview Procedure

Of the 36 people interviewed, 21 were male and 15 were female. All respondents were over the age of 18 and provided informed consent to participate in this study. Interviews were audio-recorded to ensure the collection of all pertinent information while allowing the interaction to flow like a conversation (Lofland, et al., 2006). Interviews ranged in length with the average interview lasting 30 minutes. An interview guide was used to guide discussions. Some of the questions analyzed for this paper include: (1) Are there problems in this community? What do you consider to be a problem in the community? (2) Is there any violence in this community? What do you describe as violence in this community? (3) How do/would you react if you witnessed the problems or violence we have been discussing? (4) If you had to go to someone for help about these problems/this violence, who would you go to? Probe: would you speak to the police, family members, neighbors, etc.?

Analysis Strategy

Initial coding began during data collection and continued into the transcription phase of this project (Charmaz, 1983; Lofland et al., 2006; O'Brien, 2001). Focused coding, through ATLAS.ti, began following the transcription process. This involved the author reading the text of the transcripts line-by-line and making note of codes that continued to emerge. The author ran analyses in ATLAS.ti and developed word clouds to identify patterns in the data. The text relating to important patterns and codes

were grouped together in a Microsoft Word document and reread to identify overlapping themes. Analytic memos were written to develop the connections emerging from these themes (Charmaz, 1983; Lofland et al., 2006). Focused coding continued as the paper was written and literature was incorporated to deepen the meaning of the themes (Charmaz, 1983).

Results

A general sense of wariness abounds among residents based on their personal and vicarious experiences with police officers in North West Trinidad. Residents believe their communities suffer from a high incidence of violence but think officers are not doing enough to address crime. Furthermore, when respondents do report incidents of victimization to the police, at times, they walk away dissatisfied with how their complaints are handled.

Policing Socaville

"Beefed up" patrols needed

An inherent contradiction appears within the interviewee comments. There is a consensus among respondents that, in general, police officers are untrustworthy; this is consistent with research on perceptions of the police in Trinidad and Tobago (Adams, 2012; Johnson, et al., 2008; Maguire & Bennett, 2008; Maguire et al., 2010; Mori International, 2003). However, despite not trusting the police, a majority of respondents still desired a greater police presence in their community to deter and address crime.

In Socaville, respondents complain of consistent threats of violence but explain that police visibility remains low. During the time the author spent in Socaville, police vehicles were rarely seen in the community. Omar, an Indo-Trinidadian man residing in Socaville remarks on the dire need for increased police visibility:

> The policing in the area, … I think they need to beef up the police. When the Trinidad and Tobago regiment [armed forces] moved in, they curbed the crime. There was talk that that should not have been done except if there is a case of emergency called and that kind of thing. But they did reduce crime. People were held at house arrest in their homes because of the gang activity that was taking place. But it [the presence of the armed forces] really cause the area to feel lighter. Having [the regiment] gone now, I think we have to do something with the police service and the effectiveness of policing in the North West Trinidad area (Pastor, mid 40s).

Residents, employees, and shoppers reference decreased violence in Scoaville's neighboring community following the temporary installment of an army camp. The army camp was established in response to high crime rates and, specifically, an attack on a law enforcement officer. Army occupation, a type of Martial Law, lasted several weeks and lowered crime in the community. When the occupation ended, crime rates increased once again. This fluctuation in crime led citizens to wonder why heavy police saturation had not been deployed as a preventive mechanism after the removal of the army camp. Agreeing with Omar's perspective, Sherlon (Afro-Trinidadian man, Graphic Artist, late 50s) stated: "I does wonder if the government don't know in the night what does happen. … I don't see a police presence the way that I should, the way Trinidad unsafe." And, Mitchell (Afro-Trinidadian man, Farmer, mid 50s) said: "A lot of policing, a lot of army men in the area, that could shut down crime." Although some studies show crime decreases with substantial police deployment, there is much debate about the deterrent effect of policing (Sherman &Weisburd, 1995; Sorg, Haberman, Ratcliffe, & Groff, 2013). However, with a high-perceived risk of crime, low police visibility gives residents the impression that the TTPS is unaware, or worse unresponsive, to the violence in their communities. This negatively impacts some residents' perception of the police.

In some parts of Trinidad, particularly the highest crime area of the nation's capital, Aliah (Afro-Trinidadian, Research Analyst, early, 30s) noted there is visible police presence:

> I don't think there's enough of them [police patrol]. Okay. I know that at night, they try to patrol certain areas. So, on the Beetham, which is said to be an area that has a lot of crime, there's always police, no matter what. You always see a police car there, or two. On a rare occasion, I see them on my street. So I think that they're trying. Sometimes they will patrol certain areas, and that kind of thing. I don't know if there's anything very in-place, any initiatives to try and keep people safer, you know. I don't think so.

Efforts of the TTPS to conduct patrols in the highest crime communities in the nation are acknowledged and appreciated by respondents. Residents see that the police are indeed 'trying.' These attempts do not however overshadow residents' desire to have policing activities 'beefed up' to more adequately address crime and safety in North West Trinidad.

In addition to perceiving a low police presence in communities, many respondents believe officers do little to decrease violence in the region.

> A guy had 30 cases and he was boasting that "I [will] win my case, I win all my rest of case and half of them is murder" and I could not understand how he accomplish this feat. [He] threaten one man and he hush he mouth, threaten another man and he hush he mouth, … because the police not doing any investigative work to say that they finding some sort of evidence (Derek, Afro-Trinidadian man, Prison Officer, late 20s).

Based on his conversations with detainees held on remand awaiting trial, Derek earnestly believes police officers do little to investigate crimes. Further, when citizens call the police for assistance, Aliah complained they may not have vehicles to respond to the call: "You call the police, and they don't have vehicles to come to you." Through these comments we see that officers may not have the resources to fulfil their responsibilities thus, their dependability (Stoutland, 2001) may be questioned.

The police as unresponsive public servants

'Ineffective' and 'unresponsive' are descriptors respondents commonly used in reference to the police force serving North West Trinidad. Viewing most police officers as corrupt, and not wanting to risk retaliation from offenders by reporting witnessed crimes to the police, the majority of offenses residents reported involved minor victimizations that occurred to themselves and their family members. However, in reporting these victimizations to the police, many respondents felt frustrated due to officers' seemingly nonchalant attitude upon hearing their complaints.

Leanne, an Afro-Trinidadian retiree, was in her early 60s at the time of our interview. Sitting in her upstairs verandah on a muggy day she relays the story of when she was robbed one night while operating a taxi. Two young men got into her car on her last trip from Port-of-Spain to North West Trinidad. One young man sat in the front passenger seat and the other in the back of the car alongside two female passengers. The two female passengers seated in the rear of the car arrived at their intended destination, and exited the taxi. As the young men neared their destination, one said: "we'll take it right here." Leanne slows her car to allow them to exit while keeping in mind they had yet to pay their fare. As the man seated in the back exists the car, he reaches his hand into the open driver's window and grabs the wad of cash Leanne has secured in the door. Leanne goes to a police booth and a police

station and relays her story five times to five different officers before an incident report is written. In

the time it took to write the incident report, Leanne's nephew tracks down the perpetrators and retrieves

most of the stolen cash. After learning of this development, the following interaction ensues:

> So I tell the police "look they find the guys" and they [the police] asked if he is going to bring
> him to the station. I said "how he bringing him?" I say: "how will he bring him? You're not
> even saying that allyuh [all of you] going to go." He must bring him to the station [An officer
> said], "But if you know you had people to go out and find the person for you why you come
> here?" I say: "so that is how it is then? Okay, thanks." I say: "okay, thank you."

Leanne is beyond frustrated by the officers' apparent nonchalant approach to handling her situation.

First, she visited a police booth only to be informed that the officer on duty is unable to take the

incident report. Then, at the police station the first officer she speaks with calls a second officer to hear

the story, the second calls a third, and the third calls a fourth, all before anyone suggests writing an

incident report. Leanne wonders why the officers were not quicker in recording the details of the

incident, or going to the scene of the crime with her to see if the assailants were still in the vicinity.

Granted, citizens may have limited knowledge of the procedures involved in police work. It may not be

police protocol to go searching for accused robbers right after a report is filed since investigations

require planning and approval. However, the lack of presumed respect Leanne experienced in reporting

her victimization prompted low satisfaction with the police (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Even if police

officers are unable to immediately leave the station in search of the robbers, their slow response in

taking the report, and one officer's questioning Leanne's presence in the police station, failed to

validate her victimization.

Sheryl, an Afro-Trinidadian woman in her early 60s, contacted the police when items were

stolen from her enclosed yard. Although the officers came to her house and recorded the details of the

incident, they never returned to follow up. This, Sheryl surmised, is because the officers thought the

offense is petty. Moreover, since the officers did not know her personally, they were unconcerned with

her victimization.

> [Sheryl] Some young guys start stealing because they came in by me and they steal my two gas
> tanks. They steal my granddaughter's bicycle. They stole all the zaboca [avocado] off my tree.
> They came through the back of the yard through the fence.

>[XXXX]Did you ever report it?
>
>[Sheryl] Yes, the police came and they look around and ask the estimated cost but they didn't come back after that. They would not bother with us, two ole [elderly] people. And that is one thing with most of the police, unless you are their personal friend, they don't really take an interest in what going on around here. Unless it's fatal. It's fatal, then cameras, action, wooow. They consider that something petty and so they aint bother. Nobody was hurt.

After living in Socaville for over 50 years, Sheryl is hurt by this incident. She feels the burglars took advantage of her age and her husband's recent immobility due to leg amputations. Community residents know her family and know they are not in a position to defend their property. They are perceived as easy prey (Adams, 2012). Sheryl's pain from this incident centers on feelings of hopelessness and helplessness that come with old age in a high crime community. Sheryl and her husband could not defend their property and she feels the police are unable to help. Maybe the officers did not see Sheryl's pain and instead strictly focused on the loss of the items. However, not doing more to acknowledge her loss, even by being more empathetic, signifies the differing priorities held by Sheryl and the officers. Stoutland (2001) notes police legitimacy is inhibited when police officers and community members have different priorities.

During our interview, Ruth (an Afro-Trinidadian woman, Domestic/ Maid, late 40s) explained that she was recently the victim of a burglary which she did report to the police because she was unaware of the assailants' identity: "See how they come into my house, I go and report it to the police because I don't know who." Thus, in striving for justice, and helping police achieve such, citizens felt comfortable reporting crimes when they did not possess information that could lead to an arrest. Here we see that reporting crimes to the police is acceptable when one does not have anything to report. Police officers' inability to respond to residents' victimization was noted in other research contexts in Trinidad and Tobago. Victims of domestic violence reported receiving little attention from the police when they attempted to report offenses committed against them (Lazarus-Black, 2007). And, the Opinion Leader's Panel 2003 reported that 31 percent of respondents considered the police unresponsive (Mori International, 2003).

We see from this research that victims who report crimes, at times, end up walking away frustrated, feeling that the police are not serious about investigating the matter. Residents do not trust police officers and only feel comfortable reporting minor offenses where they were personally victimized and the offender is unknown. In not taking the complaints seriously, and failing to follow up with the victims, respondents feel some police officers are unconcerned about their experiences. These trends accentuate the already tenuous relationship between the officers and community members. It is possible that minor offenses are not a priority of the police; these offenses may be too minor to matter. However, regardless of whether this may be true, community members prioritize them and entrust them to the police. Differing priorities and lack of respect, two aspects of Ferguson's trust questions, may affect the level of trust community members have in the police, which may in turn impact police legitimacy (Stoutland, 2001). As a starting point, acknowledging citizens' victimization in minor offenses could be a way of bridging the gap between residents and the police force.

Police Legitimacy

Officers' involvement in the street economy

One of residents' major complaints of the police force, was police officers' presumed corruption. Aliah noted "some people don't trust the police because they figure that some of them are involved in criminal activities." Barry, an Afro-Trinidadian construction employee in his early 20s, was one of these citizens, convinced of police officers' involvement in the underground economy. He said:

> It have some of the police and them who does also have drug blocks. Like if they go on a drug bust they will take the same marijuana and put it back in the street. It have some of them who does tip off; it have road blocks here, it don't have any road blocks here.

The perception that police officers control drug blocks was not an isolated phenomenon among the respondents. Michael, an Afro-Trinidadian man in his mid 20s, corroborated this perception: "The police … supporting crime, because them and all have block too [drug blocks]." When asked to expand on his beliefs, Michael commented "They [police] have somebody else [drug dealers] working for them, selling drugs for them on the side." Barry and Michael believed some police officers were committed to supporting the street economy. Instead of turning seized drugs over to the police

department, or after drugs were taken to the police department, officers cycled them back into the community for sale. Redistributing seized drugs and tipping off drug dealers of the times and locations of roadblocks would help people involved in the street economy avoid detection, protect their merchandise, and assist in the institutionalization of the drug economy.

Curtis is a young entrepreneur (early 20s) with a growing business in the entertainment field. Being well known within his community, he prides himself on his ability to give back by providing free entertainment services for neighborhood events. Although he is not involved in the street economy, many of his acquaintances are involved in this line of work. Having knowledge of the operations in his community, Curtis's comments support the connection between some police officers and young men involved in the street economy.

> Yeah. Most of the guns is guns they [police officers] take from other hoods or other gang members and they bring it and sell it the same time up here for little $2,000, $3,000 [TT[2]]. So when they might confiscate a gun from Chenet Drive[3], before they go in the station and they give it who ever they have to give it to, they will bring it up Pomerac Road[4] and make a money off it fast. That's how guns does really get sold in Trinidad.

Curtis's assertion of police officers making guns available to people involved in the street economy was corroborated by Townsend (2009) who found that one avenue for accessing guns in Trinidad and Tobago was to rent them from the police. Research indicates that a significant portion of Trinidad and Tobago's population held similar beliefs about police officers' corruption (Mastrofski & Lum, 2008; Wilson, et al., 2011). In 2007, police superintendent Chandrabhhan Maharaj noted corruption was present at all levels of the police force (Townsend, 2009). By the end of 2009, of the 6,500 persons employed by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, 29 were suspended and 249 were facing criminal charges (Mori International, 2003; Townsend 2009).

Cooperation between law enforcement and persons involved in the street economy protects criminal offenders rather than law-abiding citizens. This behavior was often viewed as antithetical to

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[2] The exchange rate between TT and the US is 6.75 to 1. As such, Curtis claimed guns were being sold by officers for between $296 and $444 US.
[3] Chenet Drive is a working-class community approximately 1.75 miles from Socaville.
[4] Pomerac Road is a working-class community approximately 1 mile from Socaville.

the function of the police force, supporting the very activity the police are supposed to defend the public against. It sustains and even prolongs criminal careers by potentially elevating persons involved in crimes to an untouchable status. If citizens suspect that law enforcement officials are colluding with criminal offenders, they will not report crimes to the police out of fear of retaliation (Adams, 2012).

Lack of witness cooperation

In situations where residents had information that could identify persons who engaged in crime, many did not trust the police enough to report this information since they viewed them as potentially corrupt. Based on the speed between crime reporting and identification of witnesses by criminally involved persons, respondents became confident that reporting violence to the police placed their lives in jeopardy.

> Well as far as the police is concerned, a lot of people don't tell the police [about witnessed violence] because sometimes the police report it back to the people who do the crime and they are connected. So I don't think I will tell the police [if I witness a crime] (John, Afro-Trinidadian man, Pastor/ Carpenter, mid 40s).

> It done have the corruption going on between the police and the bad boys already. Because sometimes the police does tip off the bad boys to let them know X, Y, and Z take place. An individual like myself, I would think twice about doing it [reporting witnessed violence] because I don't want to put myself in jeopardy (Barry).

> If you report something is like, [the officers will say] "Curtis, the boy up on the hill, he telling people this about allyuh [all of you]" (Curtis).

This is a microcosm of the deep-seated apprehension among citizens about reporting witnessed violence. Moreover, it is an example of the lack of trust in police to be diligent in protecting witnesses' identity. On the contrary, citizens expect police officers to pass along the information reported and reveal their identity to suspected offenders.

The level of trust citizens have in police officers, a key component of police legitimacy (Tyler, 2004), influences their willingness (or unwillingness) to report crime. Where police legitimacy is low, citizens prioritize their safety over the well-being of the community. Ann (Afro-Trinidadian woman, Security Company Manager, mid 50s), makes this point in responding to a question about whom she would tell about any violence she witnessed:

> [Ann:] My family yes, my kids definitely.
> [XXXX:] What about the authorities?
> [Ann:] I don't know. I don't think so. Because they are going to tell them [persons who committed the crime] and then the next thing you know somebody is going to come and blow down your house or blow down your children's house because they found out. How they find out that you tell the police I don't know. So I wouldn't. I guess you would really want to because you would want to see justice but on the other hand you have to think about your life and your family's life so I would not.

A close examination of Ann's comments reveals thoughts of 'public good' being sidetracked because of limited trust in the police.

From this study, we see essential elements of institutional trust, with regards to the police, are absent. Respondents do not trust the police or believe that they act within the law. As such, respondents are unwilling to cooperate with the police. Persistent perceptions of police officers leaking the identity of the witnesses to the people suspected of committing those crimes override any duty respondents might feel to report witnessed offenses. Given citizens' unwillingness to report crimes, the effectiveness of the police in clearing cases may be impacted. This becomes problematic since law enforcement officials are reliant on eye witness testimony to secure criminal convictions (Maguire & Bennett, 2008).

The trustworthy few

It is a common perspective among some respondents that although the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is comprised of both good and bad officers, the corrupt officers on the force give upstanding officers a 'bad name.' In speaking about her level of trust in the police Glenda said:

> I will not say that I don't trust them [police officers]. I would trust some of them. Because I know some of them does do their work. Because I worked in the barracks for ten years. Right. Just around the police, so I know some of them does do their work. Sometimes you does hear people talking and saying well the police this and the police that, it have some of them on stupidness as usual and some of them doing their work, and some of them are just like the civilians out there (Afro-Trinidadian woman, Retired, mid-60s).

In her duties as a custodian in the police barracks, Glenda had years to get to know various officers, their personalities, reputations, and work ethic. Her summation at the end of a decade is that some officers are not upstanding, as indicated by her statement: "some of them on stupidness," but she rebuffs the idea that this is indicative of all officers. Agreeing with this perception, Mark, an Afro-

Trinidadian mechanic in his late 20s, notes, a select group of officers give the other officers on the

force a bad name.

> Is not that the police unjust you know, it have some officers in the force that does give the force a bad name. Because I come across a few officers in my time, and trust me, you can't find better officers than that. You understand. So if anybody tell you is only bad police on the force they lie. I might say the majority of them corrupt. I will say that, but not all [are bad].

Mark's comments epitomize the notion that there are a few good officers on the force. In Mark, we see

a respondent aware of the overwhelmingly negative reputation facing the TTPS "the majority of them

corrupt," but very cognizant of the need to avoid generalizations. From these comments, there is hope

that even though many officers are considered untrustworthy, some citizens accept that good officers

exist. This acceptance may be the first step to citizens' willingness to get to know police officers.

The familial bond Travis shares with a police officer, his aunt, provides a foundational

relationship through which trust develops. He believes citizens develop trust for police officers based

on the relationship they have with individual officers. He said:

> Certain people are trusting of the police. If you know a police officer ... My aunt is a police officer; I trust my aunt. It all boils down to who you know and who knows you. In the broad aspect of it, I don't see the population really trust the police in how the police deal with you as a whole (Afro-Trinidadian man, Entrepreneur, mid 20s).

Travis sincerely believes that community members' trust in police officers is shaped by the personal

relationships they developed with select officers and the general treatment they receive from police

officers as a group. The treatment citizens receive from the police as a group is not ideal and so their

trust in the TTPS is low. However, if citizens have the chance to get to know officers, there is the

potential to cultivate trust. This is consistent with research on police legitimacy. When citizens

experience fair and respectful treatment from police officers, they are more likely to differ to their

authority and trust them with discretionary power (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003).

Community members frequenting the high crime neighborhood of Socaville are wary of

strangers (Adams, 2012) and from this research we see that includes police officers. A simple equation

guided their level of trust in other citizens and officers alike: "if I don't know you, I don't trust you."

As such, citizens are able to build and nurture trust in the police through informal contact. When

respondents get to know officers outside their regular duties, they find themselves moving past general perceptions of police corruption/untrustworthiness to learn about each officer on a personal basis. It must be noted, however, that although personal, non-policing contact with the police increases some respondents' trust in them, this trust is limited to the officers with whom these relationships are formed. Respondents operate through what Simpson (1996) calls a cautious framework; select officers are marked as safe, and all others remain unmarked and thus potentially dangerous.

Citizens in Socaville exist in this ambivalent space of wanting to pull police officers closer for additional safety but needing to push them away if their observations can lead to the arrest of persons engaged in crime. However, expecting police officers to be completely responsible for controlling crime in a community is unrealistic and potentially unachievable (Skogan & Antunes, 1979). The size of the police force, relative to the population, is too small for police officers to be ever-present in communities keeping a watchful eye over citizens and potential law violators. Instead, shared responsibility between the community and the police for crime control might be a more effective endeavor (Skogan & Antunes, 1979). Hawdon et al. (2003) found that citizens were more likely to trust police officers when police visibility in their community was high. Thus, creating opportunities for positive police community interactions may both satisfy community residents' desire for a 'beefed up' police presence while simultaneously providing a forum for more courteous relationships.

Discussion

The purpose of this article has been to explore residents' perceptions of the police and their willingness to work with officers to address crime in a high crime, low income, community in North West Trinidad. Research from various settings have shown that when the police are seen as respectful and trustworthy public servants, who do their jobs well, citizens are more likely to view them as legitimate. Findings from this study reveal low levels of institutional trust among residents of the community under investigation. Respondents, generally, view the police as corrupt, untrustworthy, and believe officers do little to address crime within their communities. Since residents refuse to report witnessed crimes to the police, due to their limited trust in officers, they advocate for increased police presence to

offset the effects of crime. Interestingly, when respondents develop relationships with police officers, outside officers' official duties, they reported increased trust in those officers. This has implications for conceptualizing strategies for enhancing police legitimacy.

In explaining the reasons they viewed the police as untrustworthy, many respondents told stories of officers' involvement in the street economy. Many of these stories however, were vicarious in nature; the stories relayed the experiences of people the respondents' knew, incidents respondents heard in the local news, and even segments of stories respondents' family members and acquaintances shared with them. Although these stories were several degrees removed from respondents' first hand experiences, they influenced their perceptions of officers and affected both their level of trust in officers and willingness to work with the police to solve crimes. According to Giddens (1984), human social activities are recursive; they are recreated by social actors when they express themselves as actors. Stones (2005), writing on structuration theory notes, structures guide people's (agents') actions by providing (through memory traces) methods that should be used while engaging in social practices. By engaging in this process, agents reproduce the structure with which they are interacting. In other words, to know how to interact with a situation, people draw on what they know about the situation, and by interacting with the situation based on this knowledge, people reproduce the situation (Stones, 2005). Change occurs when agents interact with situations in unconventional manners. Applying structuration theory to the research findings may help with the conceptualization of strategies to increase institutional trust in Socaville. When residents used their knowledge of officers, based on personal and vicarious interactions, to structure their perceptions of and willingness to work with officers, they were unlikely to trust officers or report information that could lead to arrests. Since their memory traces of officers were predominantly negative, this is understandable. When respondents did get to know police officers outside the officers' official duties, they were able to begin trusting those officers. In other words, when respondents' memory traces included their non-policing related interactions with officers, they were able to develop a new perception of select officers. It is here trusting relationships began to emerge.

Based on these findings, developing strategies for community members to get to know police officers, such as community policing initiatives, could lead residents to begin trusting police officers. "Community-oriented policing (COP) is a philosophy of policing that emphasizes community in crime prevention efforts" (Gill, Weisburd, Telep, Vitter, & Bennett, 2014, p. 400). Research shows that community policing increases citizen satisfaction with the police and perceptions of police legitimacy (Gill, et al., 2014). In recent years, the TTPS have implemented community policing initiatives in select communities. The Gonzales Community Policing Project was a problem-solving community policing initiative launched in 2006, in a high crime community, in the foot-hills of Port-of-Spain. This project focused on improving police-community relations while simultaneously reducing crime, victimization, disorder, and fear of crime (Maguire, Johnson, Kuhns, & Apostolos, 2017). Police officers established a regular presence in the community during segments of the project and implemented various problem oriented policing (POP) projects to deal with the community's self-reported needs. For instance, officers addressed the theft of pension checks and organized the removal of large piles of garbage and two dozen abandoned/derelict vehicles that were used by gang members to hide drugs and weapons (Maguire, et al., 2017). Through the Gonzales Project, officers were able to directly respond to concerns held by community members. This enabled officers to show that they shared the community's priorities, thereby fulfilling one of Stoutland's four aspects of trust in relation to the police.

A second community policing initiative, Hearts and Minds, was developed by the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) to increase residents' trust in the police and to bridge the gap between the police department and residents in Laventille (Wallace, 2014). Framed as a social developmental approach to crime prevention, Hearts and Minds aimed to decrease crime by increasing community efficacy (Wallace, 2014). Through this program, officers hosted various activities for Laventille's residents including, but not limited to, summer camps, sports and family days, medical treatment through the use of missionary doctors, distributing food hampers, and parenting programs. After the inception of Hearts and Minds, 50 percent of respondents felt more accepting of the police and 31.2 percent felt increased

trust in the police. Here, trust, a key component of police legitimacy, reportedly increased among respondents after the implementation of Hearts and Minds. The implementation of community policing initiatives, similar to the Gonzales Community Policing Project and Hearts and Minds, could be beneficial to populations who report limited trust in officers since they provide citizens with a forum to get to know officers in a nonthreatening manner. Additionally, officers' presence in high crime communities could increase residents' perception that the police force is actively working to address crime. This would hopefully increase citizens' confidence in the police, an important ingredient of police legitimacy.

Based on the results from this study, additional research is needed to determine in what contexts trusting relationships between community members and officers are most likely to develop. For instance, (1) are residents more likely to trust officers when they get to know then through community policing initiatives or through avenues outside the officer's official duties? (2) When residents get to know officers outside their official duties, to what extent do officers' profession, or the context within which become acquainted, structure their interactions and the levels of trust that emerge? (3) In what settings are people most likely to develop trusting relationships with police officers? (4) And, how could the settings in which people develop the most trusting relationships with officers be replicated in a community policing context?

Like most investigative techniques, there are limitations to this study. One component of police legitimacy that is beyond the scope of this project is civilians' willingness to follow the law. More specifically, do respondents' lack of trust in the police and their perceptions of police corruption impact their willingness to follow the law? Similarly, Stoutland's forth aspect of trust in relation to the police is whether citizens viewed police officers as competent. Police competency was not evaluated in this study. Additional research should be conducted on citizens' willingness to follow the law, their perceptions of police competency, and to what extent Stoutland's four aspects of trust in relation to the police are present in similarly situated communities. Finally, the small sample size and the focus on one high crime community do not allow the findings of this study to be generalized. Although

generalizability is not the purpose of qualitative research (Bachman & Schutt, 2003), partial

generalizability could be achieved by comparing these findings to future research on similar

populations (Myers, 2000).

   Despite a few limitations, this article makes an important contribution to the literature. The

findings highlight the push and pull residents in a high crime community in Trinidad and Tobago feel

in relation to the police. In one aspect, residents of Socaville do not trust the police and, therefore, push

them away by refusing to report witnessed violence. The second aspect, conversely, has citizens pulling

more police officers into the community, through their desire for increased policing, in order to combat

crime and violence. This tug of war between desiring space from the police but 'needing' them close

results from high crime and residents' limited agency in decreasing crime. To effectively decrease

crime, citizen cooperation with the police is necessary. Significant investment in both citizens and the

police—specifically through the creation of opportunities to build trust—is essential to increasing

police legitimacy.

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