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# A Quantitative Evaluation of Serious and Violent Crimes in Jamaica for 2022 and 2023

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#### **Abstract**

**Introduction:** During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was evidence that major crimes were committed in Jamaica, particularly intentional homicides, which explains the need for and the establishment of the JCF. Since that time, intentional homicides and other major crimes such as assault, rapes, shootings, and robberies have become an epidemic without its rightful public health classification in Jamaica.

**Objective:** This study aims to examine arrests for various Crime Categories; specifically Category One Crimes for the period 2023/2022. It is hoped that the information gleaned will further inform policy-making and policy implementation relating to crime-fighting strategies/initiatives, as well as add to the existing body of literature on the topic.

**Methods and materials:** This study employs a descriptive research design using secondary data. The Statistics and Information Management Unit (SIMU) of the JCF provided the data for this research.

**Findings:** The findings also revealed that 43.0% of the six serious and violent crimes committed in 2023 were cleared up compared to 39.5% in 2022. In 2023, the cleared-up rate for rape was 79.8% and aggravated assault was 73.6%, which were the only two crimes with at least a 50 per cent cleared-up rate. For the other serious and violent crimes – murder, shooting, robbery and break-in the cleared-up rates were 47.6%, 35.9%, 24.9% and 31.9% respectively.

**Conclusion:** The JCF is charged with the responsibility to solve the crime problem by implementing measures that may lead to faster apprehension of offenders to deter future crimes.

**Keywords:** Crime, major crime, murder, rape, robbery, serious crime, shooting.

# Introduction

The Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) was established in 1867 as a paramilitary organisation to deal with the Morant Bay Rebellion led by Paul Bogle in 1865 (JCF, 2017, nd). The JCF is one

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of the oldest national institutions, and it is the sole law enforcement entity in Jamaica (JCF, 2017). According to the Constabulary Force Act (1935) the duties of the police "shall be to keep watch by day and by night, to preserve the peace, to detect crime, apprehend or summon before a justice, persons found committing any offence or...reasonably suspected to have committed any offence". One of the core duties and responsibilities of members of the JCF is to detect, analyse, apprehend, address, and monitor crimes committed in Jamaica.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was evidence that major crimes were committed in Jamaica, particularly intentional homicides (Beckford, 1972; Heuman, 1994; Hutton, 1995; Simmonds, 2004; National Library of Australia, 1867), which explains the need for and the establishment of the JCF. Since that time (Jamaica Information Service (JIS), 2020), intentional homicides and other major crimes such as assault, rapes, shootings, and robberies have become an epidemic without its rightful public health classificationin Jamaica (Bourne, et al., *2023a, 2023b*). In Jamaica, major crimes, particularly intentional homicide have reached an epidemic stage, whichis similar across the Caribbean (Ellis, 1991, 2001; Harriott, 2000, 2002; Harriott, et al., 2003, 2004; Headley, 1994; United Nations, 2007). During the 1980s to 1990s, the crime problem in the Caribbeanhad reached a high prevalence and the World Bank funded a study (Levy, 2001) as well as a conference held in Barbados to understand this phenomenon (Harriott, 2004).

The major crime problems in the Caribbean have continued to increase since the 1970s (Bourne, et al., 2012, 2015: Harriott, 2004; Sutton, et al., 2017; United Nations (UN) and World Bank, 2007) despite all the implementation programmes and empirical inquiries. Over the past decade, Jamaica has been plagued with an upsurge in crime and violence (Bourne, et al., 2023). Crime and violence including gun-related crimes and especially murders in Jamaica have been occurring at an elevated level for a prolonged period. Jamaica has less than three million residents, yet it's listed as one of the top ten countries globally with murders per 100,000 citizens (Harriot & Jones, 2016). The fear of crime by citizens as well as a disregard of law and order mostly perpetuated by criminal gangs is at an all-time high and to gain some level of control, the government has enacted several States of Emergencies (SOEs) in several communities in multiple parishes.

The JCF is the only police force in Jamaica and its primary functions are maintaining law and order, preventing and detecting crime and preserving the peace. The JCF is required to organize and deploy its resources throughout the island to effectively address all activities related to law enforcement. The consensus is the JCF requires modernisation and reform. This fact is now accepted and currently, a new JCF Act is being debated in the country's parliament. Research has highlighted successful policing is highly dependent on the reform of the structure policies and strategic management in law enforcement organizations (Smith, 2015). A question that must be addressed in 2024 is 'Have major crimes in Jamaica decreased in 2023 over 2022, with all the efforts of the JCF?' This study aims to examine arrests for various Crime Categories; specifically Category One Crimes for the period 2023/2022. It is hoped that the information gleaned will further inform policy-making and policy implementation relating to crime-fighting strategies/initiatives, as well as add to the existing body of literature on the topic.

# **Literature Review**

According to the Cambridge Online Dictionary, crime is defined as "any illegal act" or "illegal activities" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). Moreover, the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary states that crime "implies a serious offence punishable by the law of the state" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2024). Crime is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. It can be seen as a huge and complex problem in Latin America and the Caribbean and a "binding constraint" for social and economic development (Cafferata, 2018; Hausmann, Rodrick, and Velasco, 2008).

The World Population Review defines violent crime as "a crime in which an offender or perpetrator uses or threatens to use harmful force upon a victim" (World Population Review, 2024). They noted that this may vary from country to country; violent crimes can include murder, assault, battery, sexual assault, rape, kidnapping, homicide, manslaughter, robbery, and other crimes associated with the use of force (arson, harassment, negligence). Violent crime encompasses not only crimes in which the violent act is the main objective, such as in cases of murder or rape but also crimes in which violence is the means to an end, such as robbery or extortion (World Population Review, 2024).

Of note, crime and violence levels have been on the rise since the 1970s. Data indicate an overall upward trend in criminal activity in most countries of the region, a few exceptions being Argentina, Chile and Costa Rica (Fajnzylber, Lederman, and Loayza, 1998). The highest rates of increase were recorded in the English Caribbean, where homicide rates jumped by more than 67% and in the Andean region, where rates more than doubled. In Brazil and Central America (including the Hispanic Caribbean), rates increased by 29.7% and 20.6%, respectively, whereas increases in the Southern Cone and Mexico were 14.8% and 7.1%. For the region as a whole, the non-population-weighted rate of increase was 40.7% between 1984 and 1994, or approximately 3.4% per year (Morrison, Buvinic, and Shifter, 2003). One of the most dramatic increases occurred in Jamaica: between 1977 and 2000, the rate of violent crime increased from 254.6 incidents per 100,000 to 633.4 per 100,000 and the murder rate jumped from 19.2 per 100,000 to 39 per 100,000 (Harriott, Brathwaite, and Wortley, 2004).

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's 2019 Global Study on Homicide, 464,000 people died from violent crimes in 2017. The report states that countries with high firearm rates have higher intentional homicide rates (UNODC, 2019). In Latin America, it was found that violence disproportionately affects the poor, eroding their assets and livelihoods. The abnormally high levels of crime and violence create an obstacle to the development of the region. The cost associated with these levels of crime and violence is estimated to be 14.2% of the regional GDP (Londoño and Guerrero, 2000).

Part of the anti-crime policy implemented by the government is to employ police as its primary tool. Police officers constitute the government's main mechanism for crime suppression (Cafferata, 2018). As such, this study examines whether employing police officers in Jamaica has been an effective tool in reducing major crimes. The approach of policing in Jamaica has been to 'Get tough on crime', which justifies employing Cesare Beccaria's Deterrence Theory as the theoretical framework.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Traditionally, law enforcement was required to employ a paramilitary style to policing the society. A paramilitary style was believed to be the ideal approach for crime reduction and solution. Currently, there is evidence that 'Get tough on crime policies' are somewhat ineffective as they do not work in practice. Criminals react more to proximal rather than distal relations and may react less to changes in the length of punishment that are delayed rather than the certainty of detection (Abramovaite et al., 2023). This then implies that immediate apprehension is important to hinder the commission of future crimes. The classical deterrence theory developed through the works of Bentham (1789) and Beccaria (1872) postulates that to discourage the commission of crimes, punishment must be swift, certain and severe (Anderson et al., 2004).

The theoretical framework on which this study is built is Cesare Beccaria's Deterrence Theory which postulates that crime deterrence measures will only be effective if the punishment is certain and swift and if the punishment matches the crime committed.

#### Methods and materials

This study employs a descriptive research design by using secondary data. The Statistics and Information Management Unit (SIMU) of the JCF provided the data for this research. The quantitative approach allows for the numerical assessment of findings and the determination of the prevalence of issues in this study (Babbie, 2004; Salkind, 2003). As the major law enforcement agency within the island, the JCF is responsible for collecting and reporting crimes as well as arrests made in connection with these crimes.

The data was entered and stored in Microsoft Excel and the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows, Version 29.0. Descriptive statistics and per cents were computed on data, and the results were displayed in tables. The search team also performed bivariate analyses in the form of chi-square and analysis of variance, which were also presented in tabular forms.

#### **Definition of Terms**

Murder/Intentional Homicide - Murder or intentional homicide in Jamaican law is defined as the unlawful killing of a person with intent or malice aforethought. This means that the perpetrator had the specific intent to cause the victim's death or acted with reckless disregard for human life.

Robbery - Robbery in Jamaican law is the unlawful taking of property from another person by force or threat of force.

Shooting - Shooting in Jamaican law is the act of discharging a firearm with the intent to harm another person or property. Shooting may be charged as an offence under various Jamaican statutes such as the Firearms Act or the Offences Against the Person Act.

Violent/Major Crime - Violent/major crime in Jamaican law refers to criminal offences that involve physical harm or threat of harm to a person or property. This includes offences such as

murder, robbery, rape, assault, and battery. These crimes are considered serious offences in Jamaica and carry significant penalties.

Clear-up rate – according to collinsdictionary.com clear-up rate is the percentage of a category of crimes that are solved. That is, charges have been preferred on a suspect(s) living or deceased.

# **Findings and Analysis**

For this study, six of the serious and violent crimes (aggravated assault, break-in, murder, rape, robbery, and shooting) are studied. Table 1 presents the analysis of the six serious and violent crimes committed and arrests made for 2022 and 2023. The statistics revealed that 10,303 serious and violent crimes were reported in 2022 and 2023, with 47.37% committed in 2023 and 52.63% in 2022. The serious and violent crimes reported for this study indicate a 10.0% reduction for 2023 compared to 2022, with rape having the largest decline (16.6%) followed by robbery (15.1%), break-in (12.9%), murder (7.5%), shooting (5.9%), and aggravated assault (2.9%).

The findings also revealed that 43.0% of the six serious and violent crimes committed in 2023 were clear up compared to 39.5% in 2022. In 2023, the clear-up rate for rape was 79.8% and aggravated assault was 73.6%, which were the only two crimes with at least a 50 per cent clear-up rate. For the other serious and violent crimes – murder, shooting, robbery and break-in the clear-up rates were 47.6%, 35.9%, 24.9% and 31.9% respectively. Even though, the clear-up rates are relatively low except those for rape and aggravated assault, the clear-up rates for all increased, with the highest being those for rapes at 15.1 per cent and the lowest being murders and robberies at 0.1 per cent.

Comparatively, the clear-up rates were relatively the same for both years. It can be deduced from the findings that only one in every two committed murders was solved in Jamaica for 2022 as well as for 2023. Additionally, in 2023, the majority of the break-ins (68%) and robberies (75%) were unsolved and for 2022, the figures were 74% and 75% respectively. This demonstrates that the majority of offenders are not certain to be caught much less punished. Katz and Maguire (2015) in a study on gang violence within the Caribbean noted that gangs have been flourishing within the region due to poor leadership, lack of financial resources and just an unwillingness of political leaders to tackle the issue. The study also highlighted the need for swiftness and certainty of punishment over severity as a means to deter criminal acts, noting that the police force normally bears the burden for the failure of the criminal justice system, particularly the crime laboratories and the courts.

Table 1: Serious and violent crimes reported and cleared up in Jamaica for 2022 and 2023, N = 10,303

Type of Crime	Reported		ClearUp					
	2023	2022	% Change	2023	Rate	2022	Rate	Rate Change
Murder	1392	1505	-7.5	663	47.6	715	47.5	0.1
Shooting	1098	1167	-5.9	394	35.9	393	33.7	2.2
Rape	411	493	-16.6	328	79.8	319	64.7	15.1
Aggravated Assault	333	343	-2.9	245	73.6	225	65.6	8
Robbery	779	918	-15.1	194	24.9	228	24.8	0.1

Break-In	868	996	-12.9	277	31.9	258	25.9	6
Total	4881	5422	-10.0	2101	43.0	2138	39.5	3.5

Table 2presents the descriptive statistics for six serious and violent crimes committed in Jamaica for 2022 and 2023. For 2023, on average 814±403 major crimes were committed in Jamaica compared to 904±430 in 2022, which is a 10.0% reduction.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for the Six Major Crimes Committed in Jamaica for 2022 and 2023

Measures of Central Tendency					
	2023	2022			
Mean	813.5	903.7			
Mode	-	-			
Median	823.5	957			
Skewness	0.185909	-0.03409			
Measures of Dispersion					
Variance	162529.9	184534.3			
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	403.15	429.5745			

Table 3 presents a disaggregation of six serious and violent crimes in Jamaica for 2022 and 2023. Of all the serious and violent crimes reported in Jamaica for 2023 (12, 515), 11.12% were murders, 8.8% were shootings, 6.9% were break-ins, 6.2% were robberies, 3.2% were rape, and 2.7% were aggravated assaults. This means that of all the serious and violent crimes in Jamaica for 2023 (12,515), 39.0% (4,881) were for aggravated assault, break-in, murder, rape, robbery, and shooting compared to 45.2% (5,422) in 2022. Such findings mean that there is a change in the characteristics of serious and violent crimes in Jamaica.

Table 3: Serious and violent crimes reported in Jamaica for 2022 and 2023, N = 10,303

Type of Crime	2023	2022	2023	2022
			(% of total)	(% of total
Murder	1392	1505	11.12	12.54
Shooting	1098	1167	8.77	9.72
Rape	411	493	3.28	4.11
Aggravated Assault	333	343	2.66	2.86
Robbery	779	918	6.22	7.65
Break-In	868	996	6.94	8.30
Total (All serious and violent crimes)	12 515	12 003	100.00	100.00

Table 4 presents six serious and violent crimes reported, and arrests and charges made in Jamaica for 2022 and 2023. The findings revealed that most of the cases reported in murder, robbery, and shooting in Jamaica were unsolved at the time committed/reported.

Table 4: Six Serious and violent crimes were reported, and arrests and charges were made in Jamaica for 2022 and 2023

Type of	2023			2022		
Crime	Reported	Arrests &	%	Reported	Arrests &	%
		Charges			Charges	
Murder	1392	688	49.43	1505	745	49.50
Shooting	1098	462	42.08	1167	496	42.50
Rape	411	349	84.91	493	332	67.34
Aggravated	333	266	79.88	343	243	70.85
Assault						
Robbery	779	263	33.76	918	298	32.46
Break-In	868	334	38.48	996	320	32.13
Total (All	12515			12003		
serious and						
violent						
crimes)						

Table 5 presents frequencies of the other categories of crimes to which officers in the JCF made arrests for 2022 and 2023. Based on the findings, it can be deduced that 77.8% of all arrests made by members of the JCF were for other crimes such as breach of the Firearms Act, and other crimes.

Of the 'Other Category of Crimes' listed, the highest number of arrests made were for offensive weapons which had a significant increase of 68%, followed by Breaches of the Firearms Act which recorded an increase of 24% when compared to the previous year. On the other hand, breaches of the Dangerous Drugs Act, assaults and sexual offences recorded a reduction in the number of arrests made by 14%, 7% and a 1% reduction, respectively. Overall, there was a 6% increase in the number of arrests made in 2023 compared to the previous year (Table 5).

Table 1: Arrests for Other Category of Crimes Committed in Jamaica for 2022 and 2023

Type of Crime	<b>Number of Arrests</b>		
	2023	2022	Change
Assault	1655	1787	-7%
Sexual Offence	779	787	-1%
Br. Firearms Act	2262	1822	24%
Br. Dangerous Drugs	671	777	-14%
Br./Law Reform Fraudulent Transaction Act	318	302	5%
Offensive Weapon	682	407	68%
Others	3364	3278	3%
Total	9731	9160	6%
Total (All serious and violent crimes arrests	12 515	12 003	
made)			

Table 6 presents the number of implements used to commit selected serious and violent crimes in Jamaica for 2022 and 2023. The findings revealed that murders were most likely to be committed by guns (2023, 85.1%; 2022, 83.7%), rapes by other implements (2023, 92.7%; 2022, 86.6%), and robberies by guns (2023, 79.1%; 2022, 78.9%).

Table 6: Implements used to commit serious and violent crimes in Jamaica for 2022 and 2023

Details	Implements used i			
	Guns	Knife	Other	Total
Year				
2023	1185 (85.1%)	87 (6.3%)	120 (8.6%)	1392
2022	1261 (83.7%)	105 (7.0%)	139 (9.3%)	1506
Details	Implements used in	rape	•	
	Guns	Knife	Other	Total
Year				
2023	15 (3.65%)	15 (3.65%)	381 (92.7)	411
2022	47 (9.5%)	19 (3.9%)	427 (86.6%)	493
Details	Implements used in	robbery		
	Guns	Knife	Other	Total
Year				
2023	616 (79.1%)	77 (9.9%)	86 (11.0%)	779
2022	724 (78.9%)	90 (9.8%)	104 (11.3%)	918

In 2023, there were 96 fewer firearms seized from 794 in 2022 to 698 in 2023. During the period 2020 - 2023, the pistol accounted for the highest number of firearms seized within each year, followed by the revolver and rifle. There were 34 fewer pistols seized in 2023 when compared to 2022. The number of revolvers seized in 2023 was the same as that of 2021 which is 1 more than 2022 and 5 less than 2020. On the other hand, the number of rifles seized in 2023 was 34 less than in 2022 (**Figures 1(a)**& **1(b)**).

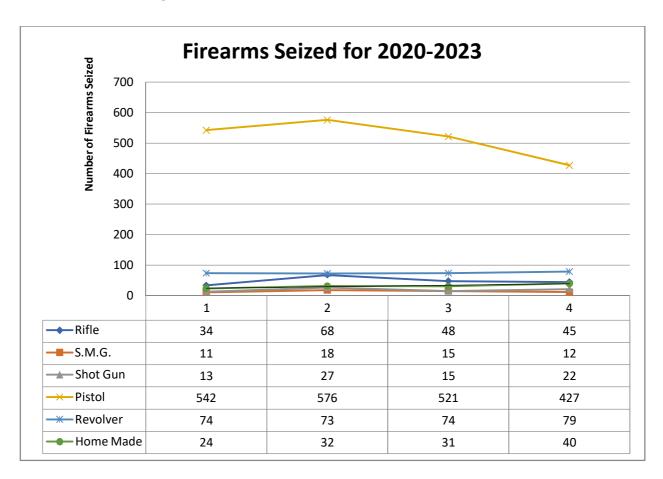


Figure 1(a): Number of firearms Seized, 2020-2023

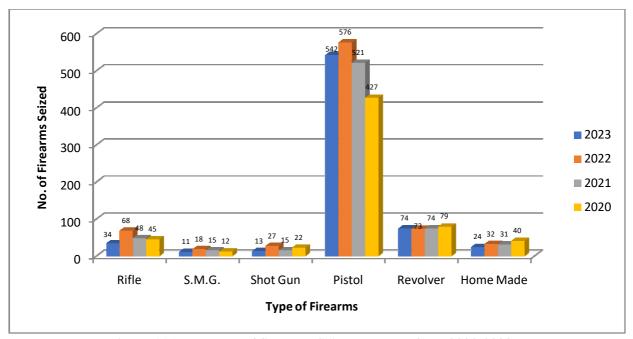


Figure 1(b): Number of firearms Seized by Year from 2020-2023

Over the period 2019–2023, the highest number of ammunition seizures was 15,706 recorded in 2022, followed by 14,259 seizures in 2019. In 2023, the number of ammunition seized decreased by 32.7% (5137) over the previous year (**Figure 2**).

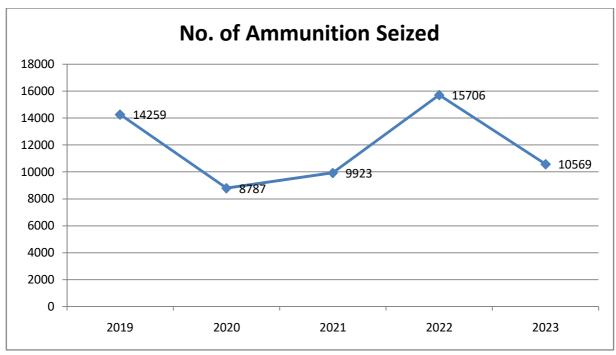


Figure 2: Number of Ammunitions Seized by Year from 2019-2023

Figure 3 depicts the number of reported victims of murders by age cohort and year committed in Jamaica. The findings revealed that most murders are committed against young adults in Jamaica (2023, 53.3% (742); 2022, 52.3% (787). Additionally, in 2023, 69% (960) of all reported murders were committed against those less than 45 years old compared to 69.2% (1041) in 2022.

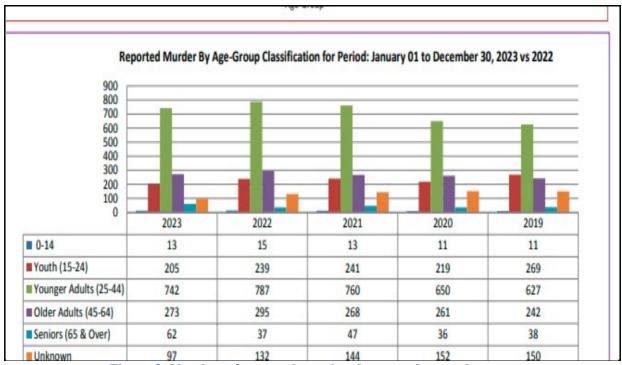


Figure 3: Number of reported murders by age cohort and year

Figure 4 shows the number of reported cases of those shot and injured by age cohort and year committed in Jamaica. The findings revealed that most of the people shot and injured in Jamaica are against young adults in Jamaica (2023, 518; 2022, 573). Additionally, in 2023, 80.7% (741) of those shot and injured in Jamaica were those less than 45 years old compared to 76.0% (820) in 2022.

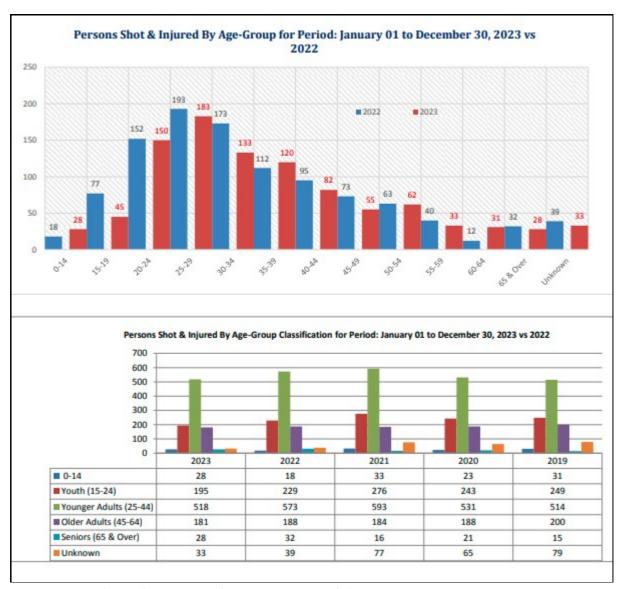


Figure 4: Number of persons shot and injured by age cohort and year

# **Discussion and Conclusion**

Simmonds (2004) presented that from 1800 to 1831, there were 23 cases of intentional homicides in Kingston, Jamaica, which was 1.95% of all court sentences. Since the 19th century, the number of murders has exponentially increased and Bourne et al. (2015) reported that this stood at 152 in 1970 and 1200 in 2013. Despite the myriad of measures implemented by the Jamaican government and efforts by the World Bank as well as Caribbean scholars including Bourne, Brooks, and Quarrie (2023a), Ellis (1991, 2001), Harriott (2002, 2003) and Headley (1994), in 2023, there were 1392 murders. Although the number of intentional homicides has declined by 7.6% in 2023 over 2022 (in 2023, there were 1392 cases; in 2022, there were 1506 cases), the

figure for 2023 is 9.2 times more than the number of cases in 1970. Members of the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) have continued to implement various strategies to include the modernization of the organisation; yet, the crime problem continues to rise yearly seemingly with no end in sight.

Ariel et al. (2017) posited that individuals would shy away from committing criminal acts when there is a perceived risk of being caught and punishment is certain. This is affirmed through a study on police forces within England and Wales conducted by Abramovaite et al. (2023) which found that even though criminal acts may be rational, criminals tend to react more to the perceived immediacy (proximal) of being caught rather than future punishment (distal). Certainty of punishment has been the most explored area and there is now a relatively strong consensus that increasing the likelihood of apprehension reduces crime based on most empirical studies (Bailey et al., 1974; Bandyopadhyay et al., 2015; Han et al., 2013; Killias et al., 2009; Machin and Meghir, 2004; Saridakis and Spengler, 2012; Von Hirsch et al., 1999; Witt et al., 1999) as cited in Abramoviate et al., 2023). This study has shown that the propensity of being caught for murders, robberies, and shootings in Jamaica is very low and does explain Ariel et al.'s (2017) perspective on what obtains in society.

Cesare Beccaria's Deterrence Theory suggests that discouraging others or the said individual (general and specific deterrence respectively) from committing criminal acts is dependent on the swiftness of apprehension, certainty of punishment, and the severity of punishment. However, studies have highlighted the importance of swiftness and certainty of punishment over the severity of punishment as a tool to deter offenders as well as potential offenders (Abramoviate et al., 2023). The clear-up rate for serious and violent crimes within Jamaica is 43 per cent. This then suggests that more than 50 per cent of offenders are not caught nor charges laid. It is understood that the criminal justice system has other arms than the police force, but as the studies have highlighted, swiftness of apprehension is a critical aspect of deterring the commission of future crimes. The JCF is charged with this responsibility to solve the crime problem by implementing measures that may lead to faster apprehension of offenders to deter future crimes.

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