

# **CRIME AND JUSTICE BULLETIN 1**

**Recorded Crime in Barbados 1980-1999**

**NATIONAL TASK FORCE ON CRIME PREVENTION  
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL**

## **Foreword**

This is the first in a new series of publications designed to make information about crime and justice easily available to the people of Barbados.

The Task Force is very grateful to the Royal Barbados Police Force for providing the basic data and for its cooperation in preparing this bulletin.

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Consultant

**NATIONAL TASK FORCE ON CRIME PREVENTION**

## **RECORDED CRIME IN BARBADOS 1980-1999**

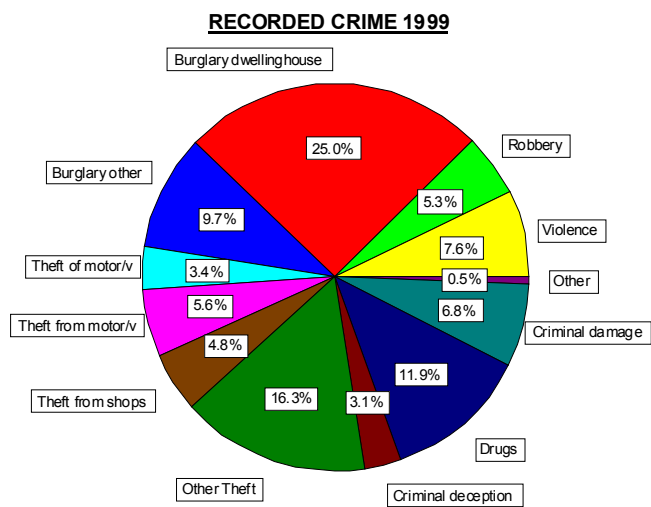
1. This Bulletin discusses crime recorded in Barbados from 1980 to 1999. The first section of the paper looks at specific categories of offence (homicide, rape, burglary etc). The second section examines what general messages can be drawn about violent and acquisitive crime and the overall recorded crime rate and the final section examines crimes against visitors.

2. Care should be taken in interpreting the findings because they only deal with crimes which come to the attention of the police. Many crimes - including serious ones - are not reported to the police and the proportion of crimes reported to the police changes over time. There are proposals to carry out a Crime Survey in Barbados and this will give a more accurate count of the true numbers of crimes experienced by households. But for now we deal with police recorded crime, an internationally accepted method for measuring crime.

### **Section 1: Specific Offences**

3. Figure 1 shows the distribution of recorded crimes for 1999 (this does not include the less serious "offences" recorded by the police).

***Figure 1***

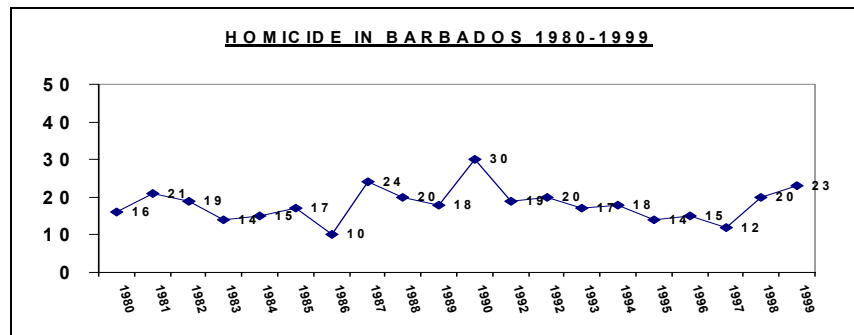


4. As can be seen:
- X The most common crime recorded by the police was burglary of a dwelling house. These make up one quarter of all recorded crimes.
  - X Theft other than of cars, or from cars or shops makes up a further 16% of recorded crime.
  - X Drug offences were 12% of crimes.
    - Violence against the person (including murder (0.3%) and sex offences) makes up almost 8% of recorded crime.
    - Theft from motor vehicles is 5½% and robbery about 5% of recorded crime.

We will compare this distribution with that for 1990 later in the paper.

### Homicide (Murder and Manslaughter)

**Figure 2.**

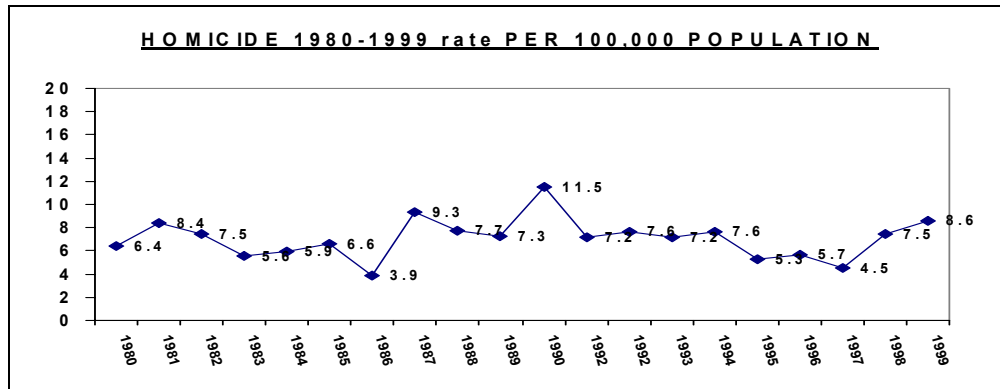


5. In 1999 there were 23 homicides - a rate of 8.6 per 100,000 people. Because Barbados has a relatively small population the number of homicides each year shows some variation but there has been no discernable trend over the last twenty years. The range has been from 10 to 30 in any one year. However in twelve of the twenty years the number has been between 12 and 19. Rates per 100,000 population vary between 3.9 and 11.5 (figure 3) with a mean of 7.1. (it is between 5.3 and 7.7 in fourteen of the twenty years).

6. This rate is similar to that of the United States.

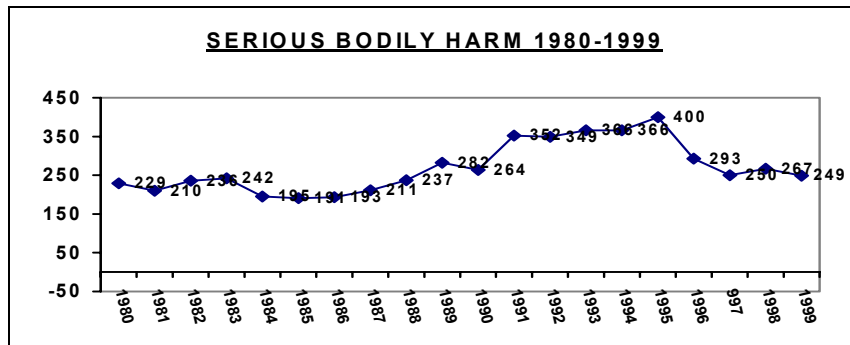
7. In 1995 the homicide rate in Jamaica was approximately 30 per 100,000 and in Trinidad about 9.

**Figure 3.**



**Serious Bodily Harm**

**Figure 4.**

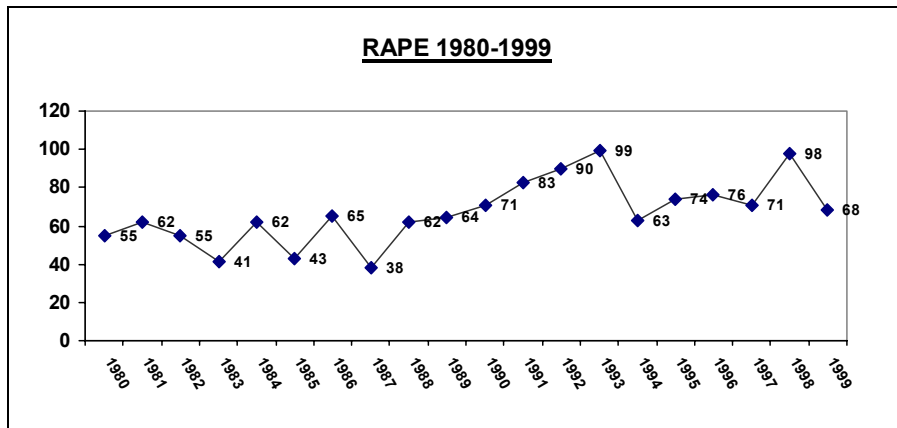


8. Over the last 20 years the number of recorded offences of serious bodily harm has varied between 191 and 400. In 1999 it was 249.

9. From 1985 to 1999 there was a steady increase (from 191 to 400) but since 1995 the numbers have fallen significantly. In 1999 the Serious Bodily Harm rate was 93 per 100,000

people.

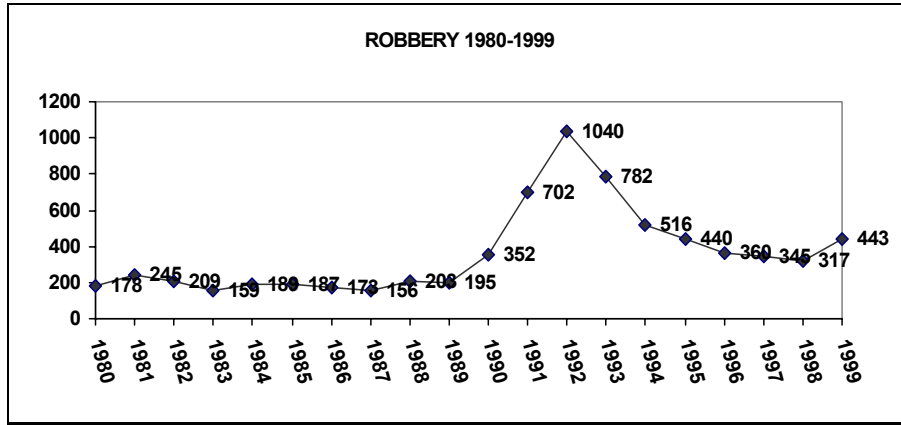
**Rape**  
**Figure 5.**



- X Since 1980 the number of recorded rapes has varied between 38 to 99.
- X In 1999 it was 68.
- X Between 1980 and 1990 the average number per year was 56 and between 1991 and 1999 it was 80.
- X In 1999 the rape rate was 25 per 100,000 population.

However this apparent rise must be treated with caution. In many countries over the last decade women have become more willing to report rape and this apparent increase may be more the result of increased reporting rather than a real increase.

**Robbery**  
**Figure 6**

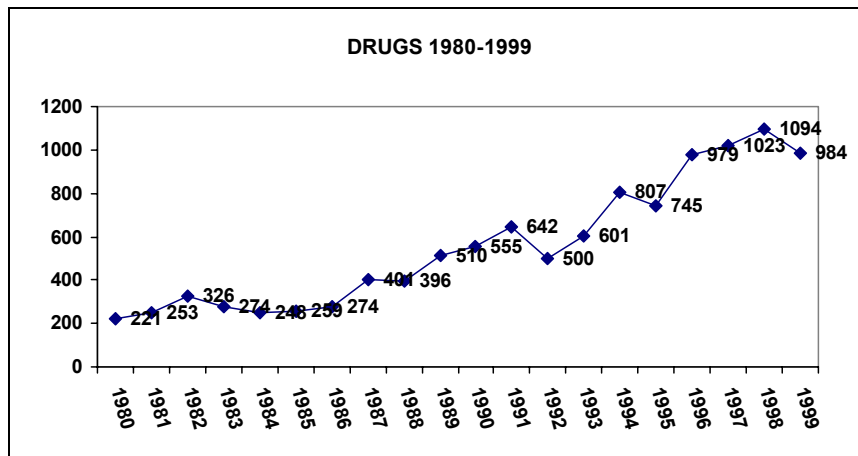


11. In 1999 there were 443 recorded robberies compared with 317 in 1998 but the pattern of recorded robbery is very strange with a huge peak in 1991, 1992 and 1993. For those 3 years the average was 841 per year (a suggested reason for this peak is discussed in paras 26-29, below). Since 1994 the average has been less than half that figure at 403. There is not enough data available to say whether robbery is on the increase again although the average for the last six years was higher than the average for the period 1980-1989.

12. In 1996 the robbery rate was 136 per 100,000 people. In England that year the rate was 143, in Ireland it was 183 and in France 136.

## Drugs

Figure 7

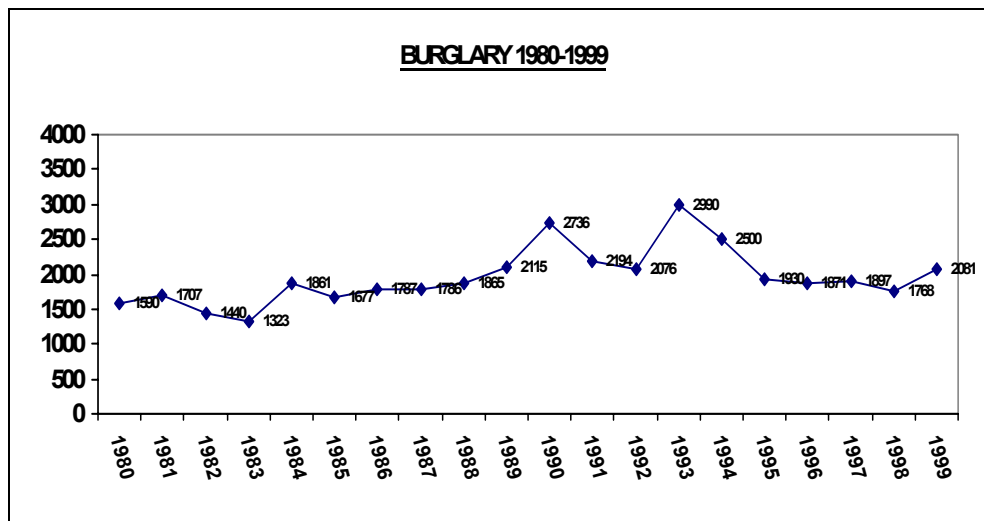


13. In 1999 there were 984 recorded drug offences. There appears to have been a steady increase in the number of drug offences over the period - from 221 in 1980 to 1094 in 1998. However because in a sense drug offences are victimless crimes they can only be recorded when the police make an arrest. Therefore some of the increase may be more the result of increased police activity rather than a real increase. It is likely, however, that there was a real significant increase in these offences.

14. Given the differences in the way drug offences are recorded internationally no meaningful comparisons can be made with other countries.

**Domestic Burglary**

**Figure 8**



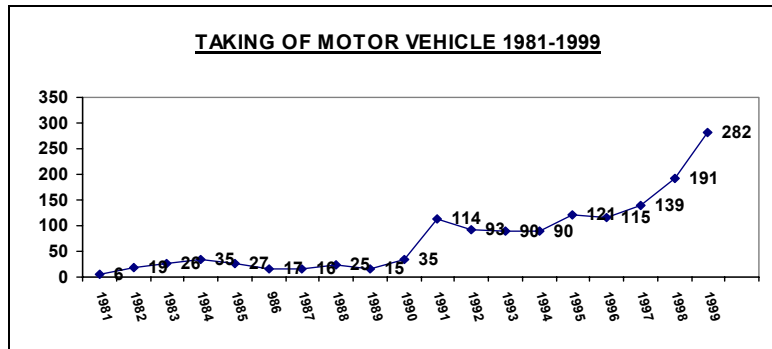
- X Domestic Burglary has been the most recorded crime over the last 20 years.
- X In 1999 there were 2081 but the number has varied between 1323 in 1983 and 2990 in 1993.

15. There appear to have been two distinct trends. The first between 1980 and 1993, when the numbers were rising, and the second between 1993 and 1998, when the numbers were falling. It remains to be seen whether the 1999 rise is part of a new trend.

16. Domestic Burglary is a crime whose reporting is very susceptible to change. If there

has been an increase in the number of people taking out house insurance then the higher numbers in the nineties might have more to do with increased reporting rather than a real increase.

17. The rate of domestic burglary in Barbados (varying between 661 and 778 per 100,000



population in the late 1990's) is much lower than in England and Wales, where it was 1160 per 100,000 in 1996.

**The Theft of motor vehicles**

**Figure 9**

18. Here there is clear evidence of Barbados becoming richer over the last 20 years. The theft of cars has risen steadily from an average of 20 a year in the 1980s to 282 in 1999.

19. This shows the impact of increased opportunities for crime resulting from the increased number of motor vehicles (there were 42,157 registered in 1984, 54,215 in 1994 and 72,805 in 1999, of which 57,513 were private cars).

20. Two different factors are possibly at work. The first is that people who are stealing for transport can now take a car rather than a bicycle and, second, as the number of cars goes

up then the number of cars stolen for parts will go up. In Britain, for example, cars which are 6-10 years old are the most common targets because that is the age at which cars begin to need a significant number of replacement parts.

21. On an international level, however, vehicle theft in Barbados is low. The rate here is 109 per 100,000 population. This compares with 951 in England, 760 in France and 559 in Italy. No West European country has such a low rate.

### Other Theft

Figure 10

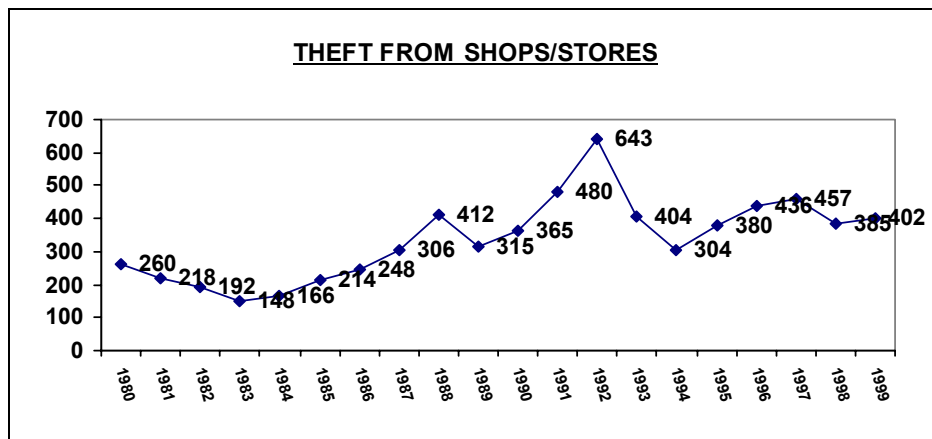
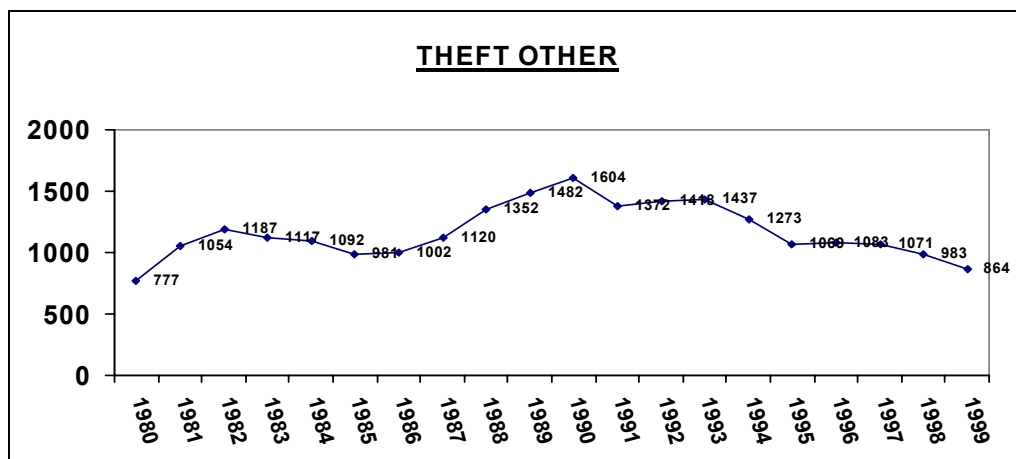
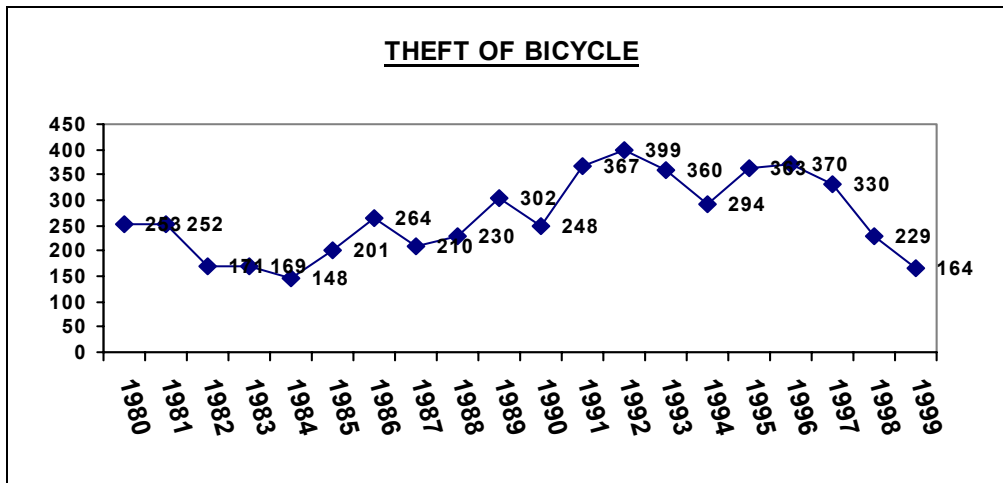


Figure 11



22. Other forms of theft, however, show a different pattern. They rose during the 1980's, peaked in the early 90's and then fell. For example there were 402 thefts for shops in 1999 compared with 643 in 1992 (Figure 10), 864 "other" larcenies compared with 1604 in 1990 (Figure 11) and 399 bicycle thefts in 1992 compared with 164 in 1999 (Figure 12). (We will discuss the trend patterns of acquisitive crimes later).

**Figure 12**



23. Bicycle theft rates show remarkable differences from Europe. In 1996 there were 138 per 100,000 people in Barbados compared with 942 in the Netherlands, 1304 in Sweden and 1857 in Denmark!

**Section 2: Overall trends in violent and acquisitive crime**

This section looks at what general messages can be drawn from the trends in specific offences over the last 20 years.

**Trends in Violent Crime 1980-1999**

24. Over the whole period from 1980 to 1999 recorded serious assaults and rapes have increased somewhat - although both have fallen since the early nineties. There has been no significant change to the homicide rate.

25. However, as pointed out above the homicide, serious assault and rape rates are comparatively high and have been for 20 years. What this seems to mean is that there is a serious problem that has to be tackled but that it is not getting worse at the present time.

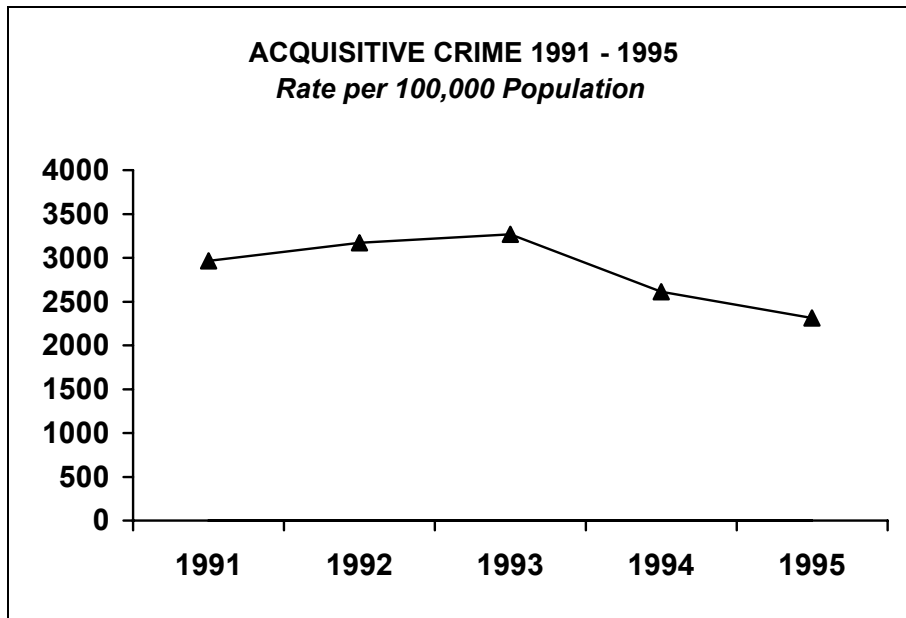
### **Trends in acquisitive Crime 1980-1999**

26. Acquisitive crimes are those carried out for gain (i.e. burglary, theft, fraud, robbery). What is interesting to note from the description above is how similar the trend patterns are for almost all the acquisitive crimes. Broadly they increased during the 1980s, peaked in the early 1990s and then fell and stabilised in the late 1990s.

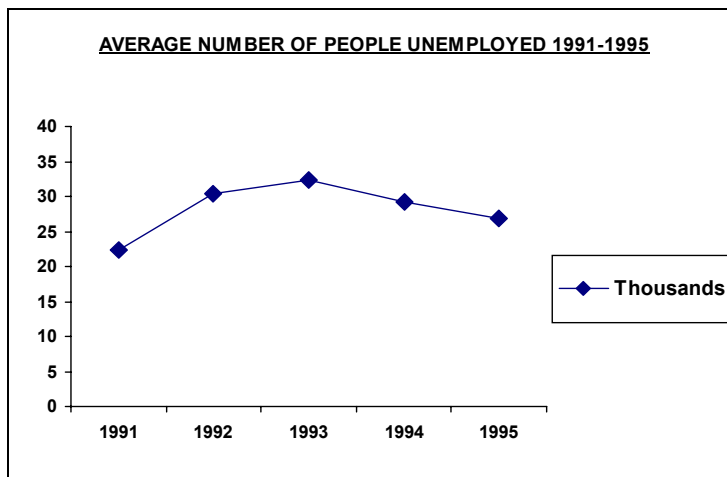
27. It is known that in United States of America and United Kingdom there is a strong relationship between the state of the economy and acquisitive crime rates. Such crimes go up when the economy is in difficulties and go down in good times.

28. It appears from a first look at available economic indicators that this might well hold for Barbados as well. Below are charts showing the rates of acquisitive crime and the number of people unemployed from 1991 to 1995. The similarity of the shapes of the graphs is striking.

### **Figure 13**



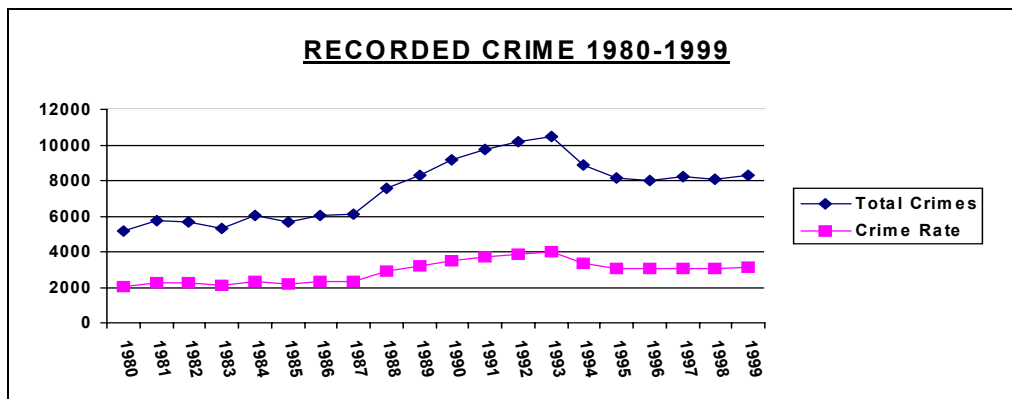
***Figure 14***



29. Clearly more econometric work would have to be done to examine the relationship properly but it does look as if we might have a real clue as to the driver of acquisitive crime trends in the 1990s.

## Overall Trends in Crime

**Figure 15**

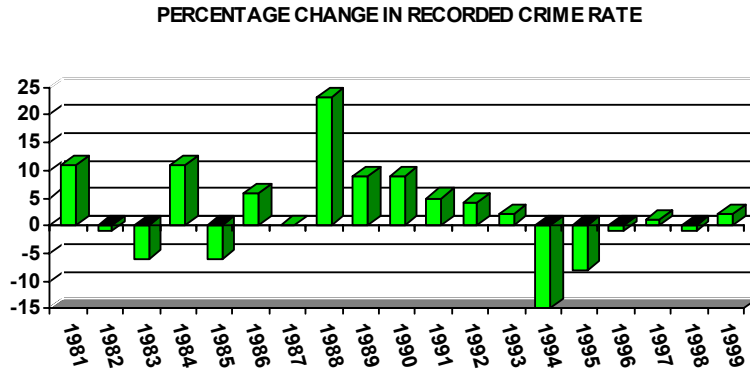


30. Putting together all the specific crimes we can produce the overall trends in crime. Figure 15 shows the trends in two ways. The upper line shows the actual number of recorded crimes while the lower line shows the rate per 100000 population. The lower line thus takes account of population changes over the period 1980-1999.

31. As can be seen the crime rate was roughly stable until the late 1980s. It then rose quickly to a peak in the early nineties. 1993 was the peak year and the recorded crime rate has been stable for the last five years.

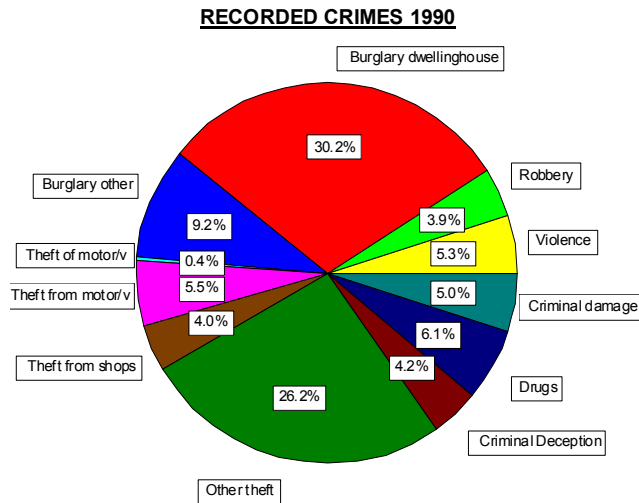
32. Figure (16) shows this in a different way. This chart shows the percentage change of the crime rate over the previous year. Thus the crime rate was 23% higher in 1988 than 1987 and nearly 10% higher in 1989 than 1988. In 1994 it was 15% lower than 1993 and since 1996 has only varied by 1-2% a year. Recorded crime was lower in 1999 than in 1990. This is a significant achievement although as we have seen earlier in the paper some of the crimes which worry Barbadians the most (robbery and drug crimes) do appear to have risen over the decade; and the level of violent crime remains unacceptably high.

**Figure 16**



33. This leads to the final chart in this general section. Figure 17 shows the distribution of recorded crimes in 1990 and should be compared with the first chart in the paper. The reader will notice that burglary and theft made up a greater proportion of recorded crime in 1990 than in 1999 while drug offences, theft of motor vehicles and violent offences make up a greater proportion of recorded crime in 1999.

***Figure 17***



34. During the 1990s the total number of recorded crimes and offences has fallen because

the total number of property crimes has fallen. By 1999 the total crime rate was 3111 crimes per 100,000 population. This is much lower than the United Kingdom or United States of America but the violence rate (serious crimes against the person and robbery) was nearly 400 per 100,000. This is high by international standards.

### **Summary**

35. This analysis of this part of the report has shown:
- X that the overall crime rate has been virtually static for the last five years
  - X that compared with North America and Europe, Barbados has a low overall crime rate
  - X that property offences in particular are less common here than in Europe
  - X that the homicide rate has not changed significantly for 20 years but
  - X that the homicide rate and robbery rates are higher than in most European and North American countries
  - ~~X~~ that the serious bodily harm rate was higher in the 1990s than the 1980s but that it is now lower than at its peak in 1993
  - X that car theft and drug offences have grown significantly over the last twenty years
  - X that changes in the number of acquisitive crimes appear to be related to the state of the economy.
36. The analysis suggests that whereas Barbadians are less likely to be victims of property crime than Europeans and that property crime, serious assault, and homicide rates are not increasing, the absolute level of violent crime (including rape) is comparatively high and has been for the last 20 years. Therefore targeted and measured responses, aimed at preventing violent crime in particular, based on "what works" principles could make Barbados safer.

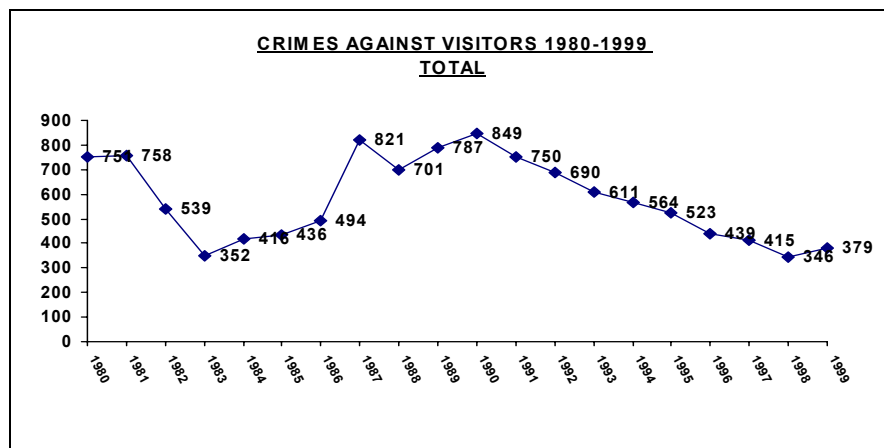
### Section 3: Crime Against Visitors

37. Because tourism is a vital part of the Barbados economy we are including in this report a section on recorded crime against visitors. The police maintain separate records on crimes reported by visitors, although they also include them in the general crime figures which were analysed in the first part of this report.

#### **Overall Trends**

38. Figure 18 shows the total number of crimes reported to the police by visitors between 1980 and 1999. 1990 was the peak year and between 1990 and 1998 the number of crimes fell steadily. It rose slightly in 1999.

Figure 18

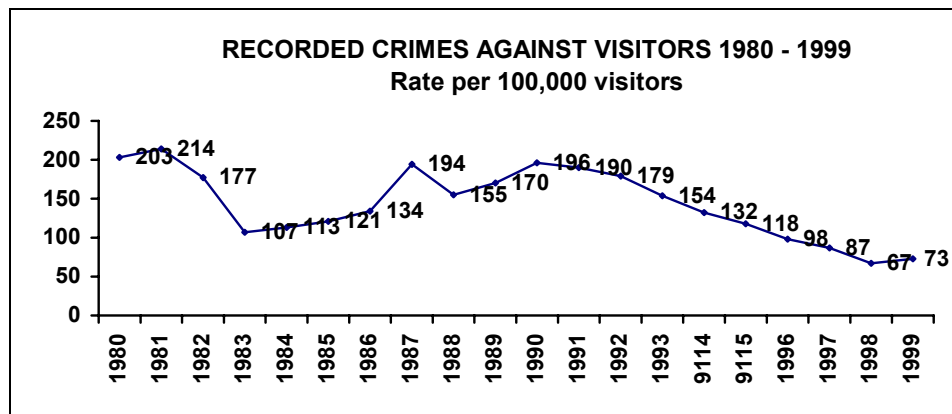


39. However this does not accurately describe how the risk to visitors of being a victim of crime has changed (in this section this means people who stayed on the island for at least a night and therefore excludes cruise ship passengers). This is because the number of visitors has risen significantly since 1980. In 1980 there were 369,915 visitors compared with 517,870 in 1999.

40. The rate of crime per 100,000 visitors gives a more accurate picture (Figure 19).

41. In 1981 the rate was over 200. It fell rapidly to just over 100 in 1983, rose again early 200 in 1990 and then fell to 73 in 1999.

**Figure 19**



### **Specific Offences**

42. Looking at overall figures however gives only a part of the picture. We also need to look at specific offences.

### **Homicide and Serious Wounding**

43. Homicide is extremely rare. Only 2 people have been victims since 1980 and both these deaths were in the 1980s. During the same period there have been over 8,200,000 visitors.

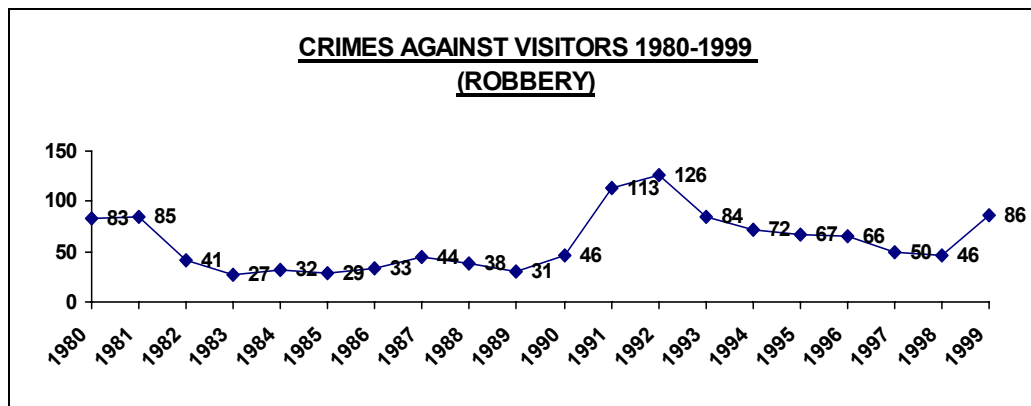
44. There has also only been a total of 62 cases of serious wounding over the last 20 years.

45. These figures mean that visitors to Barbados are less likely to be victims of serious

violence here than in their own countries. For example if the murder rate of visitors to Barbados was even as high as the murder rate in United Kingdom (which is 5½ times lower than in Barbados and the U.S.A.) then we would have expected 4-5 murders in the last 20 years. In fact it was 2.

## Robbery

**Figure 20**



46. Robbery, however, is somewhat different. On average, about 5% of the people in Barbados are visitors. However visitors are about 15-20% of all robbery victims and on any one day a visitor is three to four times more likely to be a victim of a robbery than a local resident.

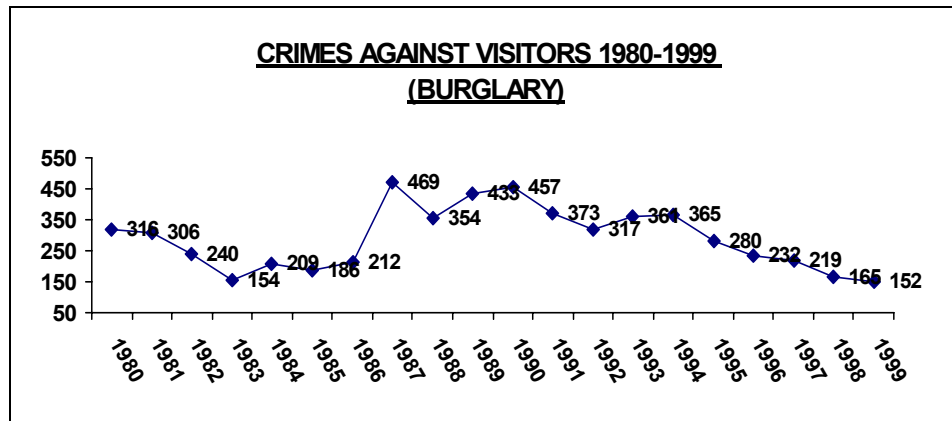
47. The reason for this high rate is that visitors are often thought to be rich, they are easy to identify, tend to be young and spend a lot of time out at night on the street and in relatively risky locations such as bars and nightclubs. As individuals, however, their risk of being a robbery victim is low because they do not spend a long time here. In 1999 17 out of every 100,000 visitors reported being robbery victims compared with 133 per 100,000 locals. (If we add in cruise ship passengers then the robbery rate for individuals drops to about 8 per 100,000. Put another way - for each day a holiday-maker stays in Barbados their chance of being a robbery victim is about 1 in 70,000)

48. Figure 20, shows the actual number of robbery victims between 1980 and 1999. As

can be seen the shape of the graph is very similar to that in Figure 6. The peak in robberies came in 1992. It fell steadily to 1998. It is too early to say whether the increase in 1999 was the start of a new trend.

## Burglary

Figure 21



49. As with robbery visitors as a group are more at risk than locals. They make up 10-15% of burglary victims.

50. There has, however, been a marked reduction in the burglary rate in the nineties and the number in 1999 was the lowest of the whole 20 year period. In 1980 the burglary rate was nearly three times the rate of 1999. It is possible that reporting rates have fallen - but it is unlikely.

Reporting rates tend to be governed by insurance considerations and it is unlikely that fewer people now are insured than in 1990. It is much more likely that security in hotels has improved.

## **Finally**

51. The implications of this analysis seem to be that targeted crime prevention could reduce crime against visitors even further. It is clear that visitors are not the victims of random violence but are seen by some as a source of easy income. There has clearly been success in reducing burglary involving visitors. The current priority would appear to be robbery prevention.

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