

Crime and Punishment

by **Janet Jagan**

Crime, prevention and the punishment of crime are problems which governments and experts of all kinds are seeking to solve. In Guyana, there are persons and particularly members of the media who seem to believe that only in Guyana is crime surging forward as a major problem, unsolved and ignored. But, of course, this is an extreme and unhealthy view. The fact is that every country in today's world is grappling with the problem which has increased in volume, intensity and horror in the past decade or two.

In Canada, a controversy is growing over proposals for new measures to deal with the growing crime in respect to punishment. There is a strong view against stronger forms of punishment, for example, Canada's Tackling Violent Crime Act and new drug laws which increase jail sentences. The public response has been the questioning of tougher laws for incarcerating criminals that is not necessarily the answer and reference is made to the USA which is spending vast sums

on the jailing process, which fills jails to overflowing, but does not, in the final analysis, reduce criminal activity.

Canadians are worried about the rise in crime. The Toronto Star in an article by John Moice on July 27, 2008 noted that assault

the Toronto Star last week, a lengthy 2-page analysis of crime entitled "Solving Crime? Tackle the root cause first," the newspaper offered several proposals to solve the crime problem, other than putting more criminals in jail. The main proposal is

fordable

**** Increase access to health care and rehabilitation programmes**

**** Reduce incarceration rates, partly through alternatives to jail and direct savings to neighbourhoods with a high**

In our criminal justice system, incarceration should be limited to the serious crimes related to drugs, rape, assaults and murder. It might be wise to end incarceration for minor criminal offences that fill our prison system, and provide other means of punishment — for example, community tasks for a stated period or restriction of movement and regular reporting to the police.

causing bodily harm and assault with weapons increased by 32% since 1998 and aggravated assault up to 18% over the same period. There were some 60,000 such acts reported to police last year.

Said the columnist: "Crack dealers with guns... car jacking... home invasion... drive by shootings. This is Canada's new vocabulary of crime. Crimes that were unheard of just 30 years ago."

In another article in

to spend more money on the social problems that lead to crime rather than "using more money jailing the number of criminals struggling with social ills."

The Toronto Star article says there is consensus among experts on the reform needed for safer communities. These include:

**** Reduce poverty and school drop-out rates**

**** Invest in comprehensive childhood development initiatives**

**** Make housing af-**

number of offenders.

The article gives interesting statistics which we can examine in relationship to Guyana's crime problems.

**** More than 70% of those who enter prisons have not completed high school**

**** 70% offenders have unstable job histories**

**** Four out of every five who go to prison have serious substance abuse problems**

**** 12% of men and 20% of women who go to prison suffer serious mental**



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health problems

**** A Toronto study of 300 homeless adults found that 73% of men had been arrested and 49% had been incarcerated at least once**

**** Two out of three in the youth justice system have two or more diagnosed mental health disorders**

These reports and studies about crime and prevention in Canada can provide us with ideas on how to tackle the pressing problems here. In many respects, the PPP/C government is on the right path already. We are and have reduced poverty considerably and we must continue in that direction. Our education system has to crack down harder on the number of drop-outs from school systems. Even greater attention should be paid to seeing that all children have

access to primary and secondary education and attend school regularly. This requires increased vigilance.

Our health care and housing systems are constantly improving and we can be proud that education, housing and health care are so advanced. Maybe more attention should be focused on mental health care.

In our criminal justice system, incarceration should be limited to the serious crimes related to drugs, rape, assaults and murder. It might be wise to end incarceration for minor criminal offences that fill our prison system, and provide other means of punishment — for example, community tasks for a stated period or restriction of movement and regular reporting to the police.

Most important is the training of criminals in skills that will allow them to earn a living on release from prison and to prevent their returning.

What is needed is a national approach to the reduction of crime and finding ways and means of prevention. We are not alone in this problem and can learn from others on the best ways of dealing with this worldwide problem.