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SOLUTIONS TO THE MURDER PROBLEM: A STRATEGIC PLAN BASED ON EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

High crime and violence rates present a paramount challenge to the development of a country as they directly affect human welfare in the short-term and economic growth in the long-term (Dunham & Alpert, 2001). Unfortunately, the rise in violent crime remains one of the top issues facing The Bahamas today. Law abiding citizens are least likely to become murder victims. Nevertheless, the fear of crime remains the most important issue on the minds of Bahamians, surpassing the recent global economic recession. Moreover, the direct effect that crime and violence have on victims is widespread.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, murder rates in the Caribbean that average 30 per 100,000 are higher than any other region of the world (Hanna, 2005). The Caribbean is especially vulnerable to crime for two main reasons. First, it suffers from the disadvantage of being situated between the world's source of cocaine (South America) and the primary consumer market (United States). Second, the widespread availability of guns, primarily due to the drug trade, has caused significant criminal justice resources to be diverted from preventative programmes to interdiction efforts. However, sound policy making at the national and regional levels can make a difference in changing the regional culture of violence.

Murder figures are considered to be the most reliable indicator of the violent crime situation in a country as most murders come to the attention of the police (Goldstein, 1979). As a result, sociologists use a country's murder rate as a social barometer. Murder incidents, however, should not be seen as solitary incidents but as fundamental indicators of social and economic conditions including race, poverty and social isolation. There has been an over-reliance on the criminal justice system's approach to crime reduction to the detriment of other complementary approaches which can be effective in reducing certain types of crime and violence. Murder research has focused on how macro-level changes in demographics, the economy, drug distribution and criminal justice policies are connected to changes in murder rates at specific time periods. Indeed, the incidence of murder is merely a symptom of deep rooted social problems that are manifested through the trafficking of guns, the drug trade and the back-log of criminal cases.

These and other factors have contributed, by a large extent, to the increasing level of violent crime. Thus, any strategy aimed at reducing violence must address these factors in order to be successful. The Bahamas is not the only nation to experience

a murder problem and probably will not be the last. Fortunately, crime and violence are not immutable as punishments that are swift, certain and severe can have an effective deterrent effect. Other jurisdictions continue to use research to assist in the development and evaluation of crime prevention policies (Puckett & Lundman, 2003). Amidst claims of widespread success, criminal justice scholars have spent time carefully evaluating these initiatives to ensure that findings did not occur by chance.

Reducing murders requires different approaches and innovative tactics in order to produce tangible results. Successful interventions must be evidence-based, grounded on a clear diagnostic about types of violence and risk factors and carefully evaluated to inform future actions (Puckett & Lundman, 2003). Interventions that are void of such capacities merely address the symptoms of a crime problem rather than its root causes. It is acknowledged that all of the recommendations may not be readily accepted as some require bold shifts in local criminal justice policies while others necessitate constitutional amendments. Nevertheless, the recommendations are intended to cause policy makers and police executives to think 'out of the box' and consider pioneering efforts toward crime reduction. While it may be easy to find reasons why new approaches cannot work, progressive organizations focus on finding ways in which they can.

This study presents a Murder Reduction Strategy based on an empirical examination of murders that occurred in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas between 2010-2015. This study had three main objectives. Firstly, Chapters 1 through 6 present a descriptive analysis of murder incidents that occurred within The Bahamas between 2010 and 2015. This time frame is referred to as the study period. A host of variables including incidents, victims, suspects, motives, detection and conviction were collected and analyzed from case files and criminal justice databases. Although specifically focused on the study period, data for earlier years and time periods were also discussed and duly indicated.

Secondly, Chapters 7 and 8 present a comprehensive review of literature on the issue of homicide prevention and ways by which detection rates may be improved. Best practices and innovative preventative programmes devised and/or adopted by law enforcement agencies throughout the world were also shared and examined. Careful attention was given to the results of scholarly evaluations of such programmes to determine the extent of their effectiveness.

Thirdly, Chapter 9 presents a Murder Reduction Strategy for The Bahamas based on the findings of the study. This strategic plan proposes the introduction of several police initiatives, policy adjustments, legislative amendments and community-based programmes to reduce murder and other violent crimes. The strategy aims to add value to the decision-making process of law enforcement administrators and executives.

Some of the key findings were that The Bahamas' murder rate ranks 13th out of a survey of 142 nations. Most murders occurred on weekends between 4pm and 12am in inner cities where annual incomes fall below the national average. Most murders stemmed from arguments and revenge killings stemming from feuds between rivals. Firearms were used in nearly 80% of the incidents. Persons involved in criminal activity are more likely to be murdered than persons who are not involved in criminal activity. Nearly 40% of the murder suspects were already on bail for a prior criminal offence. Out of 351 murder cases, only 134 have been completed. In order to reduce

murder we must: 1. Punish the most violent offenders; 2. Stop illegal guns entering The Bahamas; 3. Establish a DNA forensic laboratory; 4. Dismantle criminal gangs; 5. Dissuade youths from using drugs; 6. Increase economic opportunities for at-risk youth; and 7. Increase educational achievement.

The study recommends that to reduce murders, a Referendum on Crime must take place where amendments to the Constitution that address mandatory minimum sentences for persons convicted of gun and drug possession as well as the death penalty are addressed. Major changes to our educational system including the introduction of 'special schools for special students' and an enhancement of vocational subjects would also be in order.

Keywords: *Murder, homicide, reduction, prevention, strategy*

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Dr. Chaswell A. Hanna is a serving Police Superintendent in the Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF), having enlisted in 2002. He won the coveted Baton of Honor for the best overall police recruit. He received an Associate of Arts Degree in Law & Criminal Justice Studies from the College of The Bahamas (now University of The Bahamas) in 1997; a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice & Military Science from Northern Michigan University in 1999; a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice & Law Enforcement from the University of South Carolina in 2002; and a Doctor of Education Degree in Organizational Leadership & Conflict Resolution from Nova Southeastern University in 2011.

Dr. Hanna spent his initial years on the Force attached to the Central Detective Unit where he worked in the Armed Robbery and Commercial Crime Squads. He spent most of his time at CDU as a homicide detective in the Homicide Squad. Between 2007 and 2009, he was appointed as the Officer-in-Charge of the Force's Research & Planning Unit. Dr. Hanna also worked at various uniformed divisions including the Northeastern Division and the Southwestern Division.

After a short stint as the Officer-in-Charge of the Nassau Street Police Station in 2014, Dr. Hanna was attached to the Ministry of National Security as the Director of the National Anti-Drug Secretariat (NADS). As Director of NADS, Dr. Hanna is responsible for coordinating all national drug demand and supply reduction activities. He conducts drug-related research studies used to inform policy decisions at the national level. He also serves as the Ministry of National Security's representative for the National Development Plan.

Dr. Hanna completed a 2-month attachment with the Atlanta Police Department in Atlanta, Georgia, USA during the summer of 2016. During the attachment, he understudied various police chiefs and law enforcement leaders at the federal, state and local levels. Dr. Hanna is an Adjunct Lecturer at University of The Bahamas and Nova Southeastern University, lecturing in Criminal Justice, Sociology and Leadership. He has authored several books including *Homicide in The Bahamas, 1991-2003*; *Reducing Murders in The Bahamas*; *School Policing, Did it Work?*; and *The Story of the Royal Bahamas Police Force*.