

THE PREVENTION OF URBAN CRIMES

‘THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SULTANATE OF OMAN’

Introduction

For so many years, policy-makers, criminologists, researchers and practitioners have been studying the causes of crime, its genesis in the community, the social, economic and other factors that could lead a person to commit a crime. Along with this, the appropriate means to prevent crime was a major target towards happiness and security of the community. International conferences have been held, exchange of visits between officials in different countries have been undertaken, the result was that a number of policies, theories, and ideas have been formulated and discussed to face the problem and yet nothing is peremptory hitherto.

The main purpose of this report is to discuss the main theme of the 129th International Senior Seminar, entitled “Crime Prevention in the 21st Century – Effective Prevention of Crime associated with Urbanisation based upon Community Involvement and Prevention of Youth Crime and Juvenile Delinquency”. Thus, it could be deduced from the above theme, that the relevant ways to prevent and reduce crime in the community, would be the main discussion in this report.

It is important to note, at the outset, that what might work in one country is not necessarily to have the same effect in the other. Moreover, what may work in one community may not have the same effect in another community within the same country. Things may become more complicated in countries comprise with different ethnic groups, where you end-up by having main cultures and sub-cultures. That is because; each culture has its own characteristic mindset.

Strengthening community institutes maybe one of the best means of reducing crime. Some criminologists, explain the meaning of ‘institutions’ by indicating that it covers the whole range of groupings and organisations, families, friendship network, associations of various kinds, means of employment, market, public and private services, administrative structures, which bring individuals together and which serve to transmit norms and values to guide and shape behaviour.

Criminal situation in Oman

Background

Until recent years, it could be said that, Oman has been leading a conservative style in its administration of the state. This was clearly felt in the way it laid its policies and regulations governing the movement of entrance in to the country. Primarily, this was to protect and preserve traditions, costumes, values, and norms inherited from their ancestors. However, with the emergence of the Oman modern state that came into being in July 1970, such situation could not sustain long. Needless to say, the change have not occur at one go, but rather in a piecemeal. The pike of this change was noted by the end of 1990s, when tourists from a number of nations, categorised as ‘safe nations’, became able to obtain tourist’s visa from port of arrival. Thus, new patterns of crime started to appear, namely, usage of falsified credit cards, falsified travelers cheques, drug trafficking, prostitution, begging, etc. This situation was coupled by the rapid growth in the use of advanced technology, which facilitated the import of organized crimes into the country (to be illustrated subsequently). The role of satellite television-channels in spreading violence and new patterns of crime should not be undermined. Cyber crimes are still in its infancy.

In spit of the change in the life-style of the general public, motion is still leading towards living in extended families rather than nuclear ones. To be more precise, a

modern version of extended families have emerged, which could be better described by referring it to 'half way between extended and nuclear'. In this new life-style of living, each family would prefer to live on its own; however, they would also prefer to live within the same neighborhood with their parents, uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters, and other members of extended family. Thus, families are still more close to tribal grouping than any other socio-political structures, such as State or religion. This is to say that, the cohesion of the social fabric is very strong. From this point of view, and due to the profound feeling of the necessity for containing offences, and resolve them internally, rather than before the general public; parties of the offence, especially the offender and his family, would do their best to find an arbitrator within the family, who is well respected by the victim's family, and seek the pardon of the victim and his family. In this vein, it could be said that, this situation brought about what may be addressed as alternative justice system, especially with petty offences. Thus, the question of hidden crimes arises, as considerable number of crimes is not reported. Hence, one would anticipate that with such culture, domestic violence, and violence against women and children remain unclear.

Urban crimes in Oman

It seems to many observers that, social change can affect crime and criminality in particular areas. It also seems that, crime is integral and linked to social development. However, criminologists believe that caution is needed before reaching such conclusion. It certainly appears to be almost universally the case that, in any given country, urban crime rates are higher than those in rural areas.

Though there are number of studies suggest a correlation or simple temporal link between urbanisation and crime; these conclusions can never be generalised, and hence be taken for granted. Having said this, a country like Japan, which, in spite of

the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, has nevertheless experienced a less rapid growth in crime than have most other advanced economies (see Government of Japan, 1996).

The situation in the modern State of Oman may be still premature to conclude any given results. This could be attributed mainly to the infancy of the State (34 years old), hence, absence of comparative benchmark, and lack of related researches in this field. However, there are some patterns of crime which could be, to some extent, attributed to urbanisation. To illustrate this, let's consider two of the largest regions in Oman namely; Muscat which is the Capital of Oman with (631,031 inhab.), and Al-Battinah, which is larger in population with (652,667 inhab.) and comparatively less urbanised region. In the following sections, I shall demonstrate the relationship between the urbanisation and crime levels using the situation in the above two regions.

Firstly, Crimes against property

Statistics suggest that, urban crimes are dominated by crimes against property (mainly theft and burglary); it also suggests that these two types of offences have seen rapid growth within the past five years (1999-2003). It is astonishing to note that, prior to this period, when the general rate of increase in crime dropped in 1998 to 13 per cent, from 45 per cent in 1997, crimes against property had contributed up to 63 per cent of the total increase of the 13 per cent (*i.e.* it had attained the highest increase amongst other crimes).

During 2003, total of (11936) crimes were reported, as per the most recent statistics, out of which (5711) cases were crimes against property (*i.e.* 47.8 per cent). Unlike the general norm, it is interesting to note that 59 per cent of these crimes were committed during daytime. The spatial distribution of these crimes confirms the

correlation between urbanisation and crime. It could be observed that, although Muscat region is occupied by lesser inhabitants, it reported higher number of thefts, by approximately 113 per cent, than the Al-Battinah region (2762 vs. 1298). The said correlation is also confirmed even by comparing the figures of the overall recorded crimes, including thefts, within the two regions (4918 vs. 2851) during the same year 2003, and this has been the case since 1993.

Secondly, drugs-related crimes

Number of studies, undertaken by Royal Oman Police, suggest that, Oman, as well as the other neighbouring Arabian Gulf countries, have been used during the last decade, or more, as transit land for drugs (mainly cannabis), from producing countries, such as India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Iran; to consumers in the Middle East and Western European countries. The said studies, also suggest that the demand for and use of drugs, increased gradually in these transit countries; and hence, threatens their general stability (Al-Ghailani, 1998 *in* Al-Jabri, 1999).

Statistics confirm the rapid growth of drug-related crimes. The following table demonstrates this situation:

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
No. of cases	72	83	107	134	212	252	318

It is important to note that the chain of increase in figures dropped in the year 2002 to 247 reported cases, and this may be due to some legislative measures, namely, the promulgation of the new Anti-Drugs Law, which brought about very severe punishments, reaching to a degree of capital punishment. The 2002 figure, however, went slightly up again in the subsequent year, 2003, to 251 reported cases. In this sphere, *nota bene* the situation in the early years of the 1970s shows that, the recorded crimes of the same were as follows:

Type of crime	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975
Drug use	4	1	11	9	9	20
D. trafficking	0	0	0	0	7	0

Because Oman went during the past thirty-four-years into a great deal of social development, laymen may correlate the growth level of drug-related crimes to such developments, industrialisation, travelling abroad, and other sorts of urban life. This statement could be very true; however it cannot be generalised on one hand, and difficult to prove it empirically on the other hand. Hence, I must say that caution is strongly needed before concluding so. Nonetheless, social change, *inter alia*, can in deed constitute the aforesaid correlation. The duty of criminologists, researchers, police officers, and policymakers, is to pinpoint other factors that affect crime and criminality.

Anti-drug squad explains the reason for sharp increase rate in drug-related crimes, within the 1990s, by pointing to the fact that, by that time, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have amended their anti-drug Act, by introducing death penalty for drug trafficking; whereas legislation in Oman, by that time, hadn't have sufficient provisions for combating such criminal act. Hence, drug traffickers, redirected their root, by choosing Oman as an alternative entrance to the Gulf of Arabia, leading to their end destinations. Hitherto, it could be said that the increase rate of drug-related crimes wasn't related to urbanisation, *per se*, but rather to lack of legislative measures to a substantial level (telephone interview with M. al-Ghailani, anti-drugs squad officer).

Important to note that, traffickers are usually using people infected with HIV. and tuberculosis to smuggle drugs in their stomachs, due to their belief that the authorities are more likely to deport them as soon as they discover their health condition.

Let's now look at the two comparative regions, Muscat and Al-Batinah, as a means of comparing rates of crimes between urban and rural areas. Again, Muscat has recorded higher rate in 2003 than Al-Batinah region (182 vs. 45) reported cases in drug-related crimes. Finally, it is interesting to note that the most recent statistics have ranked drug-related crimes in the sixth position, after (offences against property, offences against persons, drunkenness offences, violation of labour and immigration Act, offences against public administration).

Thirdly, Computer related crimes

At the outset of this section, it's worth to note that, Oman, a land of 319,000 km², has a general population of 2,331,391 inhabitants, according to the census of the year 2003. Amongst these, just over (90,000) ninety thousand are internet users, (*i.e.*, less than four per cent of the population). The figure could be distributed into three categories (70,000) are post paid users (with contracts), (20,000) are the pre-paid users, and number of users (not identified) having their access through (90) ninety cyber cafés. Needless to say, hence, that the number of computer-related crimes would be negligible. Nonetheless, it isn't proper to neglect this sophisticated medium (computer network), as it creates good opportunity to commit various crimes.

Pursuant to the diffusion of credit cards, and computer system, new patterns of crime have appeared, such as gaining illicit money through the abuse of computer system at banking institutions, or unlawful use of credit cards.

Statistics show that computer-related crimes during 2000-2004, have recorded merely four cases of hacking other's computers and get hold on data contained therein. Whereas, counterfeit credit / debit cards were only seven cases.

As it generally happens, laws and regulations take ages to change, whereas social life (computer network in this sphere), change rapidly. Hence, some behaviors related to this technology, have turned out to be unpunishable by the provisions of the conventional penal code. Therefore, in order to cope with such new forms of criminality, the penal code was amended in the year 2001, by adding a section which is comprised of five articles, entitled 'Cyber Crimes'; and thus, different types of fraud by the use of computer, using counterfeit credit / debit cards, and using someone else's card, had become a criminal behavior, punishable by the act of law.

The most recent case, in this field, was the attempt to replicate debit cards, which was tried at the criminal court during November 2004, and its details are as follows:

- A gang of six tourists was arrested, whereas, the seventh member who is said to be the gang leader managed to escape;
- The gang's scope was to retrieve the details of the personal data of the banks' customers (*i.e.* bank account numbers and pin numbers), as they use their Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) cards. This is by attaching special devices, a tiny video camera, and a card reader to ATM machines;
- The captured details are then downloaded into their laptops from a receiver, and reconciled with images taken by the video camera at different times to ensure that the pin numbers are matched with their respective account numbers. The gang admitted for being able to get hold and match details of over a hundred customers;
- Subsequently, sending the reconciled data to their country for the purpose of issuing counterfeit cards, and getting them to Oman via Dubai.

- The members of the public played a key role in arresting the gang, without whose cooperation, it would have been very difficult even to detect the crime. The gang was reported by a passerby who noticed suspicious acts from a group of foreigners at an ATM machine.
- It is worth noting, here, that this gang is wanted by the UAE authorities where they actually perpetrated the abovementioned plot, and managed to withdraw millions of Dirhams from a number of bank accounts. Therefore, after serving their sentence in Oman they will be handed-over to the authorities in the UAE.
- Although the maximum punishment for such an offence is five years imprisonment, the gang members were convicted, and sentenced to just two years each. Nonetheless, they have filed an appeal, which would be heard in the near future.

Another type of cyber crimes is the usage of counterfeit credit cards. So far, only six cases were recorded, and because their circumstances were very similar, we strongly believe that the perpetrators were merely tools, manipulated and being led by organised criminal gang abroad. Perpetrators would normally have in their possession not less than ten credit cards of different kinds (Visa card, American exp., *etc.*), and destroy each card after a couple of purchases, to eliminate any material evidence against them. Most recent case, which is still in the investigation stage, is a case perpetrated by a young expatriate lady aged twenty-five years old, who came into the country as a tourist. Her story appeared to be very similar to that of the others involved in the five preceding cases. The story says that the lady was indebted to her boss, and because she failed to clear her debts, she claims to be forced by the boss to use the counterfeit credit cards.

Noteworthy, the recorded crimes related to counterfeit cards were all perpetrated in Muscat, not in any of the rural areas.

Fourthly, counterfeit banknote

Statistics show that counterfeit banknote cases have been increasing since 1997, with a little bit of slowdown in 2000 and 2001, and then it went up again. The recorded figures from 1997 to 2003 are as follows: (7, 18, 31, 23, 18, 53, and 73). Most recent one (in prosecuting stage) whereby an expatriate man (three months visit visa) was arrested in one of the biggest shopping centres in Muscat and was found in his possession with a number of twenty Omani Rials notes, and others of Five hundred UAE. Dirhams. As a means to legalise the counterfeit notes, the perpetrator chose to buy goods of very trivial values against each single counterfeit note, subsequently, he managed to receive change of clean and legal money.

Interesting to note that, in none of the captured cases, sophisticated instruments were involved; but rather, high quality of ordinary coloured photocopy machines.

Effective measures

As far back as 1987, it became illegal for any studio or commercial stores, to provide coloured photocopying services to their clients, or rather, to merely have such machines in their stores without being permitted by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). This policy was triggered, by some cases of counterfeit banknotes, and forgery of some official documents that occurred, at the time, and it appeared to the investigators that coloured photocopy machine was the tool to the execution of the crime. Furthermore, being permitted by the CID does not mean that you can copy whatever type of documents, but rather, a certain number of documents are strictly prohibited to be reproduced, example of which are, banknotes, shares owners' certificates, and post/revenue stamps.

I cannot suggest here that such countermeasure has proven to be not sufficient, just because counterfeit banknote cases still exist. The continuance of such crime

could be attributed to various factors, example of which are the fact that crimes can never be eliminated, but rather can be reduced; the import of such material into the country. CID is almost certain that those counterfeit banknotes are smuggled from abroad, either by foreigner or even locals. Moreover, it should be noted that, the aforementioned measure was not setup just for combating banknote forgery, but forgery of other documents as well. Criminologically, it is well established that, if we want to change criminal behaviour, we must first change the environment. This could be by looking into the situation where crime occurred and try to alter it. This is exactly what happened in the case of counterfeit banknotes. Because coloured photocopy machine created a good opportunity for committing forgery offences, and since this situation was well determined by the police; manipulating such opportunity was vital for the interest of crime prevention. The manipulation of such circumstances is known in criminology as ‘situational crime prevention theory’. This theory and its application in Oman will be discussed subsequently.

Situational crime prevention as a theory

It is well established that if you want to prevent crime, then you should look into the situation where crime occurs, and establish the best way to alter that situation. For instance, it is a well-known fact that property left without relevant protection would become a target for theft. A proverb in Arabic says: *“unprotected property teaches theft”*. Thus, situational crime prevention is a commonsense rather than a theory. Commonsense and caution are always the best crime prevention.

Situational crime prevention as application

The implementation of the theory in the Sultanate of Oman, can be seen in number of example, some of them are to be illustrated hereunder:

Example 1: Mobile telephone

Theft of mobile telephones was very common in 1997. In addition to determining the situation where this sort of crime occurs, the concerned authority introduced as a matter of a policy that in order to register a mobile telephone, the applicant must submit along with his application the purchasing receipt.

Example 2: Public telephones

It was realised that public telephones installed in places where they get natural surveillance such as patrol stations, markets, and public offices suffer almost no vandalism in comparison with those that do not get that type of surveillance such as highways. Thus more public telephones have been installed in the former case.

Example 3: Parking meters

In introducing car park meters, few years ago, it seems that the authority concerned in my country (The sultanate of Oman) have well considered the meaning of the situational crime prevention. This could be deduced from the fact that the meters have been programmed to accept 50 Baizas coin (local) as well as a neighbouring country currency of 50 Fils (United Arab Emirates). Anything other than these two coins would result in the blockage of the meter.

Example 4: Electricity meters

Cheating electricity authority by tempering with the electricity meters was very common in the Sultanate in 1970s and early 1980s. It was determined then that the situation where this particular crime was made possible to be committed was due to the fact that it was possible for the consumers to open the meters in use at the time. To alter this situation, the authority concerned introduced sealed meters, which could not be opened by the consumers.

Example 5: Road humps

There is no doubt that constructing road humps in a residential area is the most successful measure to control speeding.

Interesting to note, in this context, that one of the most common criticism of situational crime prevention measures, ‘the reduction of opportunities’ that it results in crime being displaced elsewhere. Nonetheless, in the case of Oman, this result has not showed up.

Fifthly, Electronic ‘Phishing’

Electronic ‘Phishing’ is relatively new method of fraud that entered our houses in the Sultanate, through the medium of internet that started in 1997. Hence, its perpetrators are not in the country, but overseas. Most recent case was that of a local man how had received a message on his e-mail, telling him that he has won a sum of five million US. Dollars, from a lottery, and he was, therefore, requested to transfer a sum of five thousand dollars for the purpose of opening an account for him in the country where the lottery said to have taken place. The money was sent to the specified address, and some additional funds amounted to approximately US\$314,000 was sent later-on through four bank transfers in different times, for very convincing reasons. One of the convincing points was receiving e-mails from allegedly reliable sources like the European Central Bank, and some of the Spanish banks. After abnormal delays in receiving the prize and persistence requests for additional transfers, the victim suspected the whole issue and reported to the CID. Fortunately, with the assistance of the CID and the victims bankers at the HSBC Muscat managed to freeze and retrieve US\$200,000. Thus, the unidentified perpetrator(s) managed to get hold of the balance, *viz.* US\$114,000.

It could be seen that, such new pattern of crime, creates a great deal of challenge to the police, who has no control over IT intrusion, rather than spreading awareness amongst the public. This is exactly what police does in collaboration with the Central Bank. They have organised a number of conferences and seminars on the matter, also warned the general public in news papers.

Sixthly, bounced cheques

Pursuant to the economic growth of Oman, bounced cheques have become a problematic area, and have reached unprecedented level in 2001, and have diverted considerable police personnel attention from other tasks. Statistics show that recorded cases are as follows:

Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
No. of cases	1621	2041	2694	2454	2971

Seventhly, tourism-related crimes

Crimes caused by tourism, are certainly worth mentioning. Important to note that the above mentioned cases, and others, relating to counterfeit cards, with no exception, were all committed by foreigners, who came into the country either by tourist visa, or visiting visa. Prostitution is not to be neglected, as easy entry, set up by new policies, facilitated the diffusion of depravity, which normally lead to other type of offences. Reality tells us that a number of prostitutes (mainly from, China, Russia, and Morocco) are pouring into the country under the cover of tourism. The same is applicable with drug-related crimes as well as begging.

Eighthly, Begging

Again, this maybe addressed as one of the consequences of tourism. However, this is not to suggest that such behavior did not exist in the past, rather than

pinpointing to a situation whereby the behavior became very irritating, not to the public, but to officials.

A Beggar will normally work on drawing sympathy of the public, either by a medical report (color-photocopied one), or a court order for his incarceration if not paying his debts; or architectural plan for the establishment of mosque or Islamic schools in some poor counties.

Legislative measure

Begging is an offence by virtue of law. It is classified as a ‘petty offence’, which is punishable with imprisonment of up to ten days, and/or a maximum fine of five Rials.

Administrative measures

To avoid any kind of fraud in this matter, collection of any funds, must be approved by the competent authority.

Police measures

Any foreigner found guilty of a criminal offence, if not prosecuted, will certainly be deported at once, and blacklisted, whereby he cannot enter the country again. If his visa was a sponsored one, then the sponsor will be discredited, by the immigration department, and subsequently, get less of its services.

Finally, it is important to note that violence in sports stadiums (football hooligans) is almost next to zero. There are only four violence and vandalism cases recorded since 2000.

Effective measures in reducing crimes

A number of effective measures were adopted by the concerned authority, example of which could be illustrated hereunder:

Measures taken by the police

Police has adopted a number of strategies, tactics and practices for reducing crime.

Some of these are to be illustrated hereunder:

Informal contact with children: the objective of this is to shed some light on the evilness of crimes and its consequences. This indirectly dissuades young adults and children from even thinking to commit a crime. These informal contacts could take one or all of the following forms:

- Regular visits to schools;
- Talks to children during police day;
- Invitations to school children for visiting police stations. This provides them with chances to practically see how police functions; and,
- Police television and radio programs.

Police, also, appreciates the necessity for growing awareness and caution against crime in children from their early ages. In this context, endeavours are put in place to find effective ways for building strong friendly relationship with children at this young age. For instance, for the past one year, police has been publishing a quarterly magazine called ‘The Young Policeman’.

Contact with the community in general: police experience indicates that, the greater quantity and better quality of contact between police and citizens results in lesser crime.

Increase the use of the police power to arrest: beside the case whereby arrest warrant is available, police was not empowered to arrest a person unless was caught red-handed. However, a new provision which was enacted in 1999 enabled the

police to arrest a person if strongly believed to have committed an offence which is punishable with at least three months imprisonment.

Random patrol: the more random patrol a city receives, a more perceived ‘omnipresence’ of the police will deter crime in public places

Prompt response to reports

For the benefit of quick and proper response to reports from the general public, Royal Oman Police have introduced, since 1980, an emergency telephone number, whereby, public could call a free toll number (999), and there are number of officers assigned to work in ‘control room’ in each regional police headquarters, for a quick response. The system will automatically display the caller’s telephone number. Moreover, because this is not sufficient from security point of view; high level of negotiations is undergoing now to enable the system to identify the exact location of the caller. Needless to say that such identification will certainly help the police to arrest suspects at the scene of the crime. It is worth noting that the average response time for the police to reach to the calling point, is approximately fifteen minutes. The emergency number is serving both criminal and traffic cases.

Private security

Oman has introduced private security in 1993. Its core tasks are in threefold. Managing and maintaining security devises that are mounted in subscribers’ premises; providing security guard for banks while transporting banknotes, gold, and other valuable items; and providing security guards to public and private sectors, or to individuals. The creation of such private security, liberated more time for the police to concentrate and focus on its core objectives, such as the maintenance of order, and catching perpetrators, on one hand; and have widened the security umbrella in the entire country on the other hand. The manpower of

this organisation amounts to 2350 qualified security officer. Noteworthy, these officers are trained at the police academy.

It is Important to note that individuals have access to private security services without any restrictions. Though charges for such services cost only (RO. 285 = USD. 740) per one security officer per month, the frequency of people to having private security to guard their houses is almost nil. This is the case even with high level officials, like ministers, senior police officers, etc. So, unlike the situation in some countries, whereby inhabitants of poor settlements are deemed to be good target for crime than those living in rich settlements; merely because they cannot afford protection devices, and have no access to private security services. The situation in Sultanate of Oman, as we have seen, is totally different. Peace and safety dominate the whole country; hence, security devices, and the need for private security is very limited; leaving no room for such proposition. Living alone in a house, or walking alone late at night in remote or deserted areas, may sometimes constitute a very small degree of risk for being burgled or attacked, even if you are foreigner.

Community Involvement

Police realised that crime prevention cannot be achieved without the support of the community. It therefore actively worked on widely promoting this message and emphasised on the magnitude of the role that could be played by the public in combating crime on one hand, and on re-building security on the other hand. Furthermore, it worked on changing peoples' mindsets to appreciate their commitment in the aforementioned meanings.

In this respect, a number of tools have been used by the Police, example of which are; a free-toll number (1444) which was set to act as a "hotline" for extending help to those who are involved in drug related problems in any of its different forms *e.g.* drugs addiction, drugs abuse, or even physical abuses/ violence by the addicted persons. The help took different

pictures from answering questions related to various areas of drugs, receiving calls reporting on drugs' offences, and advices on the treatment without being prosecuted and information on rehabilitation centres. Although this number was originally set for combating drug related crimes, it, however, served other areas of criminal acts, and facilitated the arrest of a number of criminals.

Another tool for combating crimes is the police appealing, on daily newspapers, for the support of public on combating drugs by reporting on any drugs' cases through the above toll-free number. As a means for encouraging people to report on various types of criminal acts, prizes are awarded to them in public (via Television, newspapers, etc.). Some civil services could be even offered as a reward in some cases.

To some extent, it could be said that, Oman has inherited a culture of co-operation between people living in the same neighbourhood. This, however, is not in big cities anymore as will be seen hereunder. Because most burglaries are committed by opportunist thieves, who break into a house they are definite, by certain signs, that the householders are not available; householders would normally inform their neighbours before leaving their houses for a week-end or so; they might leave the house key to them for the purposes of switching some lights on at night and turning them off at daytime; collecting newspapers in the morning; and maybe watering their garden; and generally, to make the house look lived in. Hence, neighbours would call the police or even intervene physically for any suspicious act for the interest of crime prevention. In this respect and due to the strong social fabric of such cities, one would anticipate that the need for security devices is very limited.

Moreover, the fact that a modern version of extended families have emerged (half way between extended and nuclear), as mentioned in the outset of this report, a mixture of strong family bonds, and some inherited social doctrines that cannot be breached, have acted as social control against committing crime. That is to say, that families (mostly related to each others) living in the same neighborhood, would look

to an offence committed by a member of their neighborhood as a shame to all of them; hence, when youngsters are found with a wrong-doing in the street, they would be directed by any of the elders within the neighborhood, and not merely by their parents. This gives a good example of community involvement in the field of crime prevention.

Nonetheless, the situation in big cities, especially Muscat, the capital, is not the same. This may be due to the nature of the demographic structure in such cities which comprises of people from various parts of the country, hence from different cultural backgrounds. This led to the weakening of the social fabric coherence and the strong neighbourhood bonds that used to be common before the expansion of the cities.

Are there any racial problems?

Unlike the situation in some countries, whereby ethnic minorities are being persecuted, Oman is very much influenced by Islamic teachings, which strongly call for equality amongst people. The holly Qur'an, explicitly explains that the most honourable, is not determined neither by the colour of the skin, nor the level of the wealth; but rather, the purity and the spiritual closeness that one could be to God "Allah". The Omani community, with its multi racial groups reflects this conception. These groups live together in harmony, in the same neighbourhood, to certain extent, intermarry, hence leave no room for any sort of discrimination, let alone persecution. Hence, problems of racial conflict have not often arisen.

Legislative measures

In Oman, various legislative measures have been taken in the field of criminal law, to prevent and combat criminal acts, and to enforce effective sanctions properly. Example of which could be found hereunder:

Anti-drug law

This law was enacted in 1999. It was designed to rectify a number of loopholes in the drug-related section within the Penal Code promulgated in 1974. As mentioned earlier, this law brought about the capital punishment for a number of offences, example of which could be seen in drug smuggling, and using a minor to smuggle. Beside a number of harsh punishments, this law brought about, for the first time, the issue of money laundering. Hence the transfer of any sum of money is a criminal act, whenever it is proven that the transferor knew, or it was his/her duty to know that the money was obtained from illegal deal of drugs. Also, banks are obliged to report to the competent authority and the Central Bank for any suspicious transactions. Interesting to note here that, Money Laundry Law was promulgated later in year 2001.

Anti-drug law granted courts the option of imposing treatment order, to addicts, instead of custodial sentence.

The introduction of cyber offences in the Penal Code

Penal Code was amended in 2001, whereby a number of behaviors, related to computer, that were not deemed to be against the law, have become criminal acts, punishable by virtue of the law. Example of which are: unauthorised log into others computers; breach of other's privacy; destroy or alter or delete of data or information; the forgery of credit/debit/charge cards; the usage of such cards; and the usage of other's cards. The punishment could go up to five years imprisonment, and a fine of one thousand Rials (USD. 3200).

Measures taken by Public Prosecution

Public Prosecution has realised the fact that imprisonment, or merely taking the decision to prosecute is not always necessarily the right decision for the interest of crime prevention. Thus, not only cases that are not corroborated with sufficient

evidence are discontinued; but rather, even those corroborated with *prima facie* evidence of guilt, if believed that prosecution is not in the public interest, or the offence is trivial. Moreover, a policy was recently laid by the Attorney-General, allowing prosecutors to decide to discontinue cases even if the offence is significant or classified as a ‘felony’ since the offender managed to reconcile with the victim, and subsequently, the latter decided to waive the case against the former. However, the decision of the discontinuance, in such circumstances, must be endorsed by the Attorney-General. Thus, the opportunity system is adopted rather than the legality one. Needless to say that, in many cases, the opportunity system acts as a vanguard against re-offending, on one hand; and as rehabilitation and corrective measures on the other hand.

Measures taken by courts

In the same vein, courts in passing sentences, are seeking to control future events rather than simply to pass judgment on past events. It therefore takes into account the following measures:

- Deter potential offenders from being drawn into crime;
- Deter the offender from committing crimes in the future;
- Maintain public confidence in the CJS.; and,
- Protect the general public from the risk of re-offending imposed by offender.

Based on the above measures, court may decide to impose sustained custodial penalty, or just to reprimand minors, and hand them over to their parents, instead of imposing a rehabilitation order. Furthermore, especially in petty offences, judge may seek for the reconciliation between the offender and the victim; subsequently, impose a very lenient custodial punishment (just enough for a deterrent purpose), or just a sustained one.

Conclusion

Hitherto, I must say that there is a broad consensus amongst criminologist that, human organs are constructed to receive signals or messages from the environment and to respond to these signals via behaviour. This conclusion leads us to a result explaining that, if we want to change criminal behaviour, we must first change the environment. This could be by looking at the situation where crimes occur and try to alter it. Although some criminologists criticise this 'theory' by saying that: doing so is 'altering the situation' you are doing no more than 'replacement of crime'; however, the method proved successful in Oman.

Crime is a very complex event to analyse. Hence, the high rate of crime in urban areas in comparison to those in rural ones cannot be always attributed to urbanisation, since a mixture of various elements is the result of the increase of crime. Similarly, the general increase of a particular crime, through the entire country, cannot be attributed only to urbanisation or tourism; as it could be even due to inadequate legislative measures.

There is no general theory in the sphere of crime prevention. Moreover, what may work in one country may not necessarily suit the situation in another country.