

# City's image tarnished by series of unrelated violent incidents

By Éibhir Mulqueen

THE latest series of attacks in Limerick has again put advocates of the city as a safe and progressive place on the defensive.

While the crime statistics show it to be as safe as Dublin, Cork or Galway, it has been unlucky at times in experiencing spates of often unrelated violent incidents. These are often associated with feuds which have led to a constant trickle of shootings at houses, assaults and, in the worst cases, murders.

The Limerick East TD, Mr Willie O'Dea (FF), said the four murders and two serious assaults of the past three weeks were extremely regrettable for the victims, their families and the city's image. But over the past five years, the city's statistics show Limerick to be near the bottom of the State's "felony league table". "We have never argued that we have never had a problem with serious crime.

"The fact of the matter is we do not necessarily have a worse problem than anybody else."

The murders of the past month

appear to bear no relation to any of the city's feuds and rather are the result of spontaneous violence, Chief Supt Gerry Kelly said yesterday.

The most sinister of the Limerick feuds is between two drug-dealing families on the city's north side. The most violent manifestation of this feud in recent memory was the murder of Eddie Ryan in the Moose Bar, Cathedral Place, on November 12th, last year. A 24-year-old man has been charged with the murder.

One of the families in this feud is based in the Lee Estate, off Island Road, the scene of yesterday's stabbing. The other family is based in St Mary's Park, a short distance away, close to the scene of yesterday's savage assault on a young man with an iron bar.

The location of the attacks has led to speculation that they are related to this feud. But Chief Supt Kelly said that with the knowledge Garda has gathered so far, he was satisfied they were non-feud related. It is likely, however, the two attacks are themselves related.

The two victims were known to each other and a sufficient time lag exists between the two attacks for a revenge motive to be considered.

However, Supt Tony Kennelly, of Henry Street Garda Station, said independent investigations were being carried out. "We are conscious of the possibility of an overlap between the two incidents."

The city's other feuds are centred on the city's southside housing estates, in the Roxboro Garda Station district. Five families, some allied in an uneasy alliances, are involved in three different feuds which are sometimes punctuated by short lived truces.

That a city of 80,000 people should have such high profile criminal activities is possibly a legacy of its working class nature.

Limerick's mercantile past gave way to inter-generational unemployment for much of the last century for large numbers of its population concentrated in local authority housing estates built between the fifties and the nineties.

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