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# Understanding and Preventing Gang Membership in Trinidad and Tobago

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ANALYSIS THAT MATTERS.

The opinions and recommendations expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the Ministry of National Security or the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS). The authors appreciate the cooperation of several units and departments within the TTPS, including the Homicide Bureau of Investigations, the Repeat Offenders Programme, the Criminal Investigations Department, and the Executive Secretariat. The authors are also grateful to the Department of Public Prosecutions and the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago for providing information useful to this report.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rising concern about gangs and their criminal activity in Trinidad and Tobago led to the country's official request for an examination of its emerging gang problem. This report draws upon data collected from school youth and adult arrestees from Trinidad and Tobago and the United States. By examining the similarities and differences between these two countries, we can better understand the prevalence, nature, and seriousness of the gang problem in Trinidad and Tobago. Below we present the major findings of our report.

## TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO'S GANGS

- › 12.5 percent of Trinidad and Tobago youth reported gang membership, compared to just 7.6 percent of US youth.
- › Among adult arrestees, 3.2 percent of the US sample reported gang membership, compared to 5.1 percent of the Trinidadian sample.
- › About one-third of both US and Trinidadian youth reported protection or safety as the reason they joined their gang (33.5 percent of US youth and 29.4 percent of Trinidadian youth).
- › Friendship was a significantly more important reason for joining a gang for Trinidadian youth (42.0 percent) than for US youth (28.4 percent).
- › Trinidadian gang youth were 6.5 times more likely than non-gang youth to be involved in violent offenses, 10.8 times more likely to be involved in drug sales, and 5.4 times more likely to have used marijuana. US gang youth were similar to Trinidadian gang youth in violent offenses (6.7) but significantly less likely than Trinidadian gang youth to be involved in drug sales (7.7) and to have used marijuana (3.2) when compared to non-gang youth.
- › Trinidadian adult arrestees were significantly more likely to have been arrested for a violent offense (37.1 percent) than US arrestees (19.2 percent), while US arrestees were arrested for

Trinidadian gang youth were 6.5 times more likely than non-gang youth to be involved in violent offenses, 10.8 times more likely to be involved in drug sales, and 5.4 times more likely to have used marijuana.

drug-related (24.3 percent) and property (21.2 percent) crimes more often than Trinidadians (16.3 percent and 13.8 percent, respectively).

- › Trinidadian youth who reported early initiation of antisocial behaviors, perceived availability of handguns, and an intention to use drugs were at significantly greater risk for gang membership.

## TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO'S CAPACITY TO PREVENT GANG PROBLEMS

Interviews with key stakeholders indicated that Trinidad and Tobago does not have any national primary gang prevention programming and that among some ministries, there is resistance to implementing it. None of the stakeholders could identify a primary prevention program aimed at reducing gangs and gang involvement in their respective ministry or were aware of any available in any other ministry.

Trinidadian youth who reported early initiation of antisocial behaviors, perceived availability of handguns, and an intention to use drugs were at significantly greater risk for gang membership.

Individual stakeholders frequently suggested such primary gang prevention programming was not within the purview of their ministry, and if such programming were to be suggested, the leadership within their ministry would not be supportive. Leaders interviewed confirmed these perceptions, stating such programming belonged in another ministry or questioning the effectiveness of such programming.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings suggest the gang problem in Trinidad and Tobago is substantial, particularly when compared to the gang problem in the United States (and Europe and Canada), and warrants a substantial investment in primary and secondary gang prevention programming. Specifically, we recommend that the Ministry of National Security move to implement the following six objectives:

(1) Establish a National Gang Prevention Steering Committee, (2) Allocate substantial funding to gang prevention programming; (3) Hire experienced gang prevention managers and specialists; (4) Train policymakers on gang prevention practices; (5) Implement the Communities that Care (CTC) model and the Gang Resistance and Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program; and (6) Implement a secondary gang prevention program to be determined by the steering committee.

## BACKGROUND

Over the last six years, Trinidad and Tobago has asked us to conduct in-depth, rigorous analysis to better understand its gang problem in order to design a national response to gangs. Our early efforts were conducted to determine where to expend resources to suppress gangs, gang members, and gang violence. While the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) has implemented gang suppression strategies with varying degrees of success, to our knowledge, it has not considered alternative responses to its gang problem. Prior research indicates that delinquency and crime precede gang joining (Esbensen, 2000), and individuals' involvement in delinquency and crime increases after they join a gang (Katz, Webb, & Decker, 2005). As a consequence, policymakers in many nations have invested heavily in primary and secondary prevention programming. Primary prevention programs are aimed at the general population, while secondary prevention programs target those at risk of becoming a gang member or of becoming involved in delinquency or crime.

This report's goal is to understand and contextualize Trinidad and Tobago's gang problem and detail current resources available to prevent individuals from joining gangs. A comparative approach was used to contextualize Trinidad and Tobago's gang problem against a nation known to have a long-standing, chronic gang problem. Thus, it draws on data from school youth and adult arrestees in both Trinidad and Tobago and the United States. The report's first section focuses on the scope and nature of the gang problem. Specifically, it addresses five major issues: 1) the proportion of youth/arrestees who are involved in gangs and the socio-demographic characteristics of

Prior research indicates that delinquency and crime precede gang joining, and individuals' involvement in delinquency and crime increases after they join a gang.

gang members, 2) when and why youth/adult arrestees join gangs, 3) differences in experiences with delinquency, drug use, crime, and victimization between non-gang and gang youth/adult arrestees, 4) the risks and the protective factors associated with gang membership, and 5) the organizational characteristics of Trinidadian gangs. The second part evaluates Trinidad and Tobago's capacity to prevent youth from joining a gang. Specifically, we conducted a national resource inventory of gang prevention programming to determine the nation's current gang prevention strategy. Finally, we summarize our findings about Trinidad and Tobago's gang problem, including an assessment of the nation's capacity to prevent gang membership, and our recommendations for the future.

## METHODOLOGY

### 1. Surveys of School Youth

Data from Trinidad and Tobago were collected from 2006 as part of the Trinidad and Tobago Youth Survey (TTYS). The target population for the TTYS was defined as third and fifth form students who attended urban public schools. Urban was defined as any school located within five urban school districts. Of the sixty-seven public schools eligible for inclusion in the study, twenty-seven schools were selected, of which twenty-two (81.5 percent) agreed to participate in data collection efforts. The data from the United States were collected through the 2006 Arizona Youth Survey (AYS) project. Of the 1,142 schools eligible for inclusion in the AYS study, four hundred were approached to participate in the study. If a school refused to participate in the study, another school from the same county and school category was randomly selected to participate. Of the four hundred schools approached, 362 agreed, for a school-level response rate of 90.5 percent.

The survey instruments used in both studies were originally developed by the Social Development Research Group at the University of Washington and subsequently adopted by the TTYS and AYS projects. The instrument was chosen because it would allow for the cross-national comparison of identically measured constructs. The instrument, however, was slightly modified for use by Trinidad and Tobago youth. Specifically, the instrument was provided to key stakeholders employed by the Ministry of Education to seek their advice on altering the instrument so that it reflected regional language and culture (e.g., monetary units, social activities, and organizations).

## 2. Surveys of Adult Arrestees

We also relied on data collected from independent samples of recently booked adult arrestees in Trinidad and Tobago and the United States. The sample from Trinidad and Tobago includes 421 recently booked arrestees from Port of Spain who participated in the Trinidad and Tobago Arrestee Project Survey (TTAPS). The sample from the United States includes 2,285 recently booked arrestees participating in the Arizona Arrestee Reporting Information Network (AARIN) in Maricopa County, Arizona. Both studies used a similar instrument with similar questions, but the instrument used in Trinidad and Tobago contained substantially fewer questions and was significantly shorter. Regardless, the instrument used in both studies generated self-reported data on a variety of socio-demographic and behavior variables. At the beginning of the survey, respondents reported their ages, race/ethnicity, and educational backgrounds; the interviewer recorded gender. Respondents then answered a series of questions about their drug use histories, experience with victimization, and involvement with guns and gangs, and then they reported on a number of issues related to their participation in crime, including their arrest history. Respondents involved in a gang were asked a series of questions about the age at which they first joined their gang, what they had to do to join their gang, and the organizational characteristics of their gang.

## 3. Interviews with Key Stakeholders

From January 2010 through June 2010, the project team interviewed nineteen individuals from twelve organizations from across the nation. We interviewed administrative leaders and managers from such organizations as the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Social Development, and the Catholic Church. We also interviewed individuals from several units located within the TTAPS, such as the Inter Agency Task Force (IATF), the Criminal Investigations Division (CID), the Organized Crime Narcotics and Firearms Branch (OCNFB), the Crime and Problem Analysis Branch (CAPA), the Repeat Offenders Programme (ROP), and the Citizen Security Programme (CSP). The interviews focused on a broad set of issues associated with the current state of primary gang prevention. While we prepared a number of questions related to programming and clients served, we did not ask these questions since Trinidad and Tobago does not provide any primary prevention programming.



## SECTION 1: SCOPE AND NATURE OF TRINIDADIAN GANG PROBLEM

### 1. What proportion of youth/arrestees is involved in a gang, and what are the socio-demographic differences between those who join a gang and those who do not?

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Table 1 displays the sample characteristics of school youth from the United States (n = 21,317) and Trinidad and Tobago (n = 2,292). Youth in Trinidad and Tobago were more likely to report having ever been a member of a gang (12.5 percent compared to 7.6 percent). In both countries, the samples were more female than male: that is, 52.8 percent of the US sample and 60 percent of the Trinidad and Tobago sample were female. However, gang-involved youth were more likely to be male in both countries, with 57.4 percent in the United States and 59.1 percent in Trinidad and Tobago. Gang-involved youth in Trinidad and Tobago were significantly older than non-gang youth (15.6 compared to 15.3). In the United States, gang and non-gang youth were significantly

In the United States, gang and non-gang youth were significantly different in terms of race and ethnicity; gang and non-gang youth in Trinidad and Tobago, however, did not differ significantly.

different in terms of race and ethnicity, with gang-involved youth less likely to be white (22.7 percent compared to 53.3 percent) and more likely to be black (5.8 percent compared to 4.7 percent), Hispanic (54.6 percent compared to 30.8 percent), or Other (16.8 percent compared to 11.2 percent). Gang and non-gang youth in Trinidad and Tobago, however, did not differ significantly, with 41.5 percent African, 23.3 percent East Indian, 14.9 percent Afro/Indian, and 20.3 percent reporting some other race or ethnicity.

Table 1.

### Demographic Characteristics of Non-gang and Gang School Youth in the United States and Trinidad and Tobago

	United States			Trinidad and Tobago		
	Non-Gang	Gang	Total	Non-Gang	Gang	Total
<b>Gender (%)<sup>a,b</sup></b>						
Female	53.7	42.6	52.8	62.8	40.9	60.0
Male	46.3	57.4	47.2	37.2	59.1	40.0
<b>Age (%)<sup>a,b,c</sup></b>						
13 or younger	28.1	23.7	27.8	1.0	0.6	0.9
14 years old	32.8	43.7	33.6	20.9	12.2	19.9
15 years old	18.8	16.0	18.5	38.6	38.8	38.7
16 years old	19.4	14.4	19.0	26.8	31.1	27.4
17 or older	1.0	2.1	1.1	12.6	17.1	13.2
<b>Mean age (SD)<sup>b,c</sup></b>	14.3 (1.1)	14.3 (1.1)	14.3 (1.1)	15.3 (1.0)	15.6 (1.1)	15.4 (1.1)
<b>Race/ethnicity (%)<sup>a</sup></b>						
White, non-Hispanic	53.3	22.7	50.9			
Black	4.7	5.8	4.8			
Hispanic	30.8	54.6	32.6			
Other	11.2	16.8	11.7			
African				42.0	38.1	41.5
East Indian				23.5	21.3	23.3
Afro Indian				14.5	17.5	14.9
Other				19.9	23.1	20.3
<b>N<sup>c</sup></b>	19,689 (92.4%)	1,628 (7.6%)	21,317 (100%)	2,006 (87.5%)	286 (12.5%)	2,292 (100%)

<sup>a</sup> Significant differences at  $p < .05$  within US between gang/non-gang

<sup>b</sup> Significant differences at  $p < .05$  within T&T between gang/non-gang

<sup>c</sup> Significant differences at  $p < .05$  between countries' gang members

Table 2 shows the proportion of each adult arrestee sample classified as gang and non-gang members and their demographic characteristics. The analysis indicated that 3.2 percent of the US adult arrestees and 5.1 percent of the Trinidadian adult arrestees self-reported gang membership. Non-gang members were significantly older than gang members across nations, but gang members in the United States were significantly older than gang members in Trinidad and Tobago. The majority of the arrestees in the United States (76.6 percent) and Trinidad and Tobago (91.7

Arrestees in the United States were more likely to have resided in a jail, hospital, or other residence compared to arrestees in Trinidad and Tobago.

percent) were male. While none of the gang members in Trinidad and Tobago were female, about 15 percent of US gang members were female. Gang and non-gang members in the United States were significantly different in terms of their ethnicity, but there was no significant difference in ethnicity between gang and non-gang members in Trinidad and Tobago. In the United States, gang members were more likely to self-report being African American or Hispanic and less likely to report being Caucasian or from another

ethnic group. Educational attainment was significantly lower for US gang members than their non-gang counterparts, with 37.8 percent of gang members completing high school compared to 64.8 percent of non-gang members. There was no difference within the Trinidadian sample, with 61.9 percent of gang members and 64.2 percent of non-gang members completing high school. There were no significant differences in housing between gang members and non-gang members in either nation, but our analysis did show that arrestees in the United States were more likely to have resided in a private home and less likely to have resided in a jail, hospital, or other residence compared to arrestees in Trinidad and Tobago.

Table 2.

### Demographic Characteristics of Adult Arrestees in the United States and Trinidad and Tobago

	United States			Trinidad and Tobago		
	Non-Gang	Gang	Total	Non-Gang	Gang	Total
<i>n</i> =	2,210	74	2,284	391	21	412
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Gang Status</b>	96.8	3.2	100.0	94.9	5.1	100.0
<b>Age<sup>a,b,c</sup></b>						
Mean <sup>†</sup>	32.25	24.45	32.00	28.23	25.38	28.08
SD	11.03	7.21	11.01	10.74	3.91	10.52
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	76.3	85.1	76.6	91.3	100.0	91.7
Female	23.7	14.9	23.4	8.7	0.0	8.3
<b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>a</sup></b>						
Caucasian	38.0	21.6	37.5			
African American	13.1	23.0	13.4			
Hispanic	35.5	44.6	35.8			
Other	13.4	10.8	13.3			
African				68.5	76.2	68.9
East Indian				8.4	4.8	8.3
Afro-Indian				22.8	19.0	22.6
Other				0.3	0.0	0.2
<b>Education<sup>a</sup></b>						
Completed Secondary/ H.S.	64.8	37.8	63.9	64.2	61.9	64.1
<b>Housing (past 30 days)</b>						
No fixed residence	6.5	5.4	6.4	8.7	4.8	8.5
Jail, hospital, public, or other	3.0	4.1	3.0	16.4	19.0	16.5
Private home	90.5	90.5	90.5	74.9	76.2	75.0

<sup>a</sup> Significant differences at  $p < .05$  within US between gang/non-gang

<sup>b</sup> Significant differences at  $p < .05$  within T&T between gang/non-gang

<sup>c</sup> Significant differences at  $p < .05$  between US and T&T gang members

<sup>†</sup> Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney tests for significance with means; chi-square (or Fisher's Exact Test where appropriate) for all other measures

Table 2 con't.

### Employment and Sources of Income among Adult Arrestees in the United States and Trinidad and Tobago

	United States			Trinidad and Tobago		
	Non-Gang	Gang	Total	Non-Gang	Gang	Total
<i>n</i> =	2,210	74	2,284	391	21	412
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Employment<sup>a,b</sup></b>						
No income/unemployed	6.8	6.9	6.8	10.5	9.5	10.5
Working full time	32.9	18.1	32.4	38.6	14.3	37.3
Working part time	23.0	11.1	22.6	22.6	9.5	22.0
Public assistance	9.1	11.1	9.2	6.2	9.5	22.0
Other legal sources	20.8	20.8	20.8	18.3	42.9	19.5
Illegal sources	7.3	31.9	8.1	3.9	14.3	4.4
<b>Source of Income<sup>a,b,c</sup></b>						
No income	7.5	8.2	7.5	13.3	19.0	13.6
Legal only	81.7	46.6	80.6	77.7	38.1	75.7
Illegal only	5.9	26.0	6.6	3.6	4.8	3.6
Both legal and illegal	4.9	19.2	5.4	5.4	38.1	7.0

<sup>a</sup> Significant differences at  $p < .05$  within US between gang/non-gang

<sup>b</sup> Significant differences at  $p < .05$  within T&T between gang/non-gang

<sup>c</sup> Significant differences at  $p < .05$  between US and T&T gang members

## 2. When and why do youth/adult arrestees join a gang?

Understanding why individuals join gangs can help us establish and maintain programming that is most relevant to individuals' needs. As shown in Table 3, youth in the United States reported being significantly younger (12.3 years old) at their age of first gang involvement than youth in Trinidad and Tobago (12.9 years old).

Reasons for joining a gang varied significantly between the two countries. Gang-involved youth in the United States were most likely to join for protection or safety (33.5 percent),

while gang-involved youth in Trinidad and Tobago were most likely to join their gang for friendship (42.0 percent). About 6 percent of youth in both countries joined because a family member was in a gang. About 11 percent of gang-involved youth in the United States and 8 percent in Trinidad and Tobago joined their gang to make money, while 20.3 percent of gang members in the United States and 14.7 percent of gang members in Trinidad and Tobago joined for some other reason.

Gang members in the United States started hanging out and joined a gang at a younger age than gang members from Trinidad and Tobago.

Table 3.

### When and Why Do School Youth Join a Gang?

	United States	Trinidad and Tobago
Age of first involvement* - Mean (SD)	12.33 (1.60)	12.95 (1.82)
Reason for joining gang (%)*		
Protection/safety	33.5	29.4
Friendship	28.4	42.0
Parent(s) in a gang	2.0	2.1
Sibling(s) in a gang	4.8	3.8
Make money	10.9	8.0
Other	20.3	14.7

\*  $p < .05$ 

Table 4 presents findings on the characteristics associated with gang joining in the United States and Trinidad and Tobago. The analyses indicated significant differences between the two samples. Gang members in the United States started hanging out (mean age = 11.8) and joined a gang (mean age = 14.36) at a younger age than gang members from Trinidad and Tobago (16.3 and 17.4, respectively). When compared to gang members in Trinidad and Tobago, US gang members were significantly more likely to state that when they joined their gang they were jumped in (54.1 percent versus 0.0 percent) but were significantly less likely to state that when they joined their

gang they committed a crime (2.7 percent versus 21.1 percent). When responding to what they did to join their gang, there were no significant differences for fighting, getting sexed in, or being born into the gang. In the United States, gang members noted the most common means of joining a gang was being jumped in (54.1 percent) followed by nothing (24.3 percent) and being born into the gang (12.2 percent). On the other hand, 50 percent of gang members in Trinidad and Tobago stated that they did not have to do anything to join their gang, followed by committing a crime (21.1 percent) and being in a fight (15 percent).

Table 4.

### When and Why Do Adult Arrestees Join a Gang?

	United States	Trinidad and Tobago	Total
<i>n</i> =	74	21	95
Age first started “hanging out”*			
Mean <sup>†</sup>	11.82	16.29	12.84
SD	5.76	4.68	5.82
Age joined*			
Mean <sup>†</sup>	14.36	17.43	15.80
SD	5.80	4.81	5.71
	%	%	%
What did you do to join?			
Jumped in*	54.1	0.0	42.6
Fight	10.8	15.0	11.7
Committed a crime*	2.7	21.1	6.5
Sexed in	2.7	0.0	2.1
Born into	12.2	10.0	11.7
Nothing	24.3	50.0	29.8

\* Significant differences at  $p < .05$  between US and T&T gang members

<sup>†</sup> Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney tests for significance with means; chi-square (or Fisher’s Exact Test where appropriate) for all other measures

### 3. How do gang and non-gang youth/adult arrestees differ in their experiences with delinquency, crime, drug use, and victimization?

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Table 5 displays the magnitude of the difference in delinquency and victimization across school youth in Trinidad and Tobago and the United States. Gang-involved youth were significantly more

While in the United States, gang youth were arrested almost eight times as often as non-gang youth, Trinidadian gang youth were arrested about three times as often as non-gang youth.

likely to self-report all types of delinquency, drug and alcohol use, and victimization (as indicated by a ratio of greater than 1) in both countries. For some outcome measures, the magnitude between gang and non-gang youth was surprisingly similar between the two countries. For instance, gang-involved youth in the United States and Trinidad and Tobago reported about 6.5 times more violent behavior, four times more property crime, two times more lifetime alcohol use, and 2.5 times more thirty-day alcohol use than non-gang youth.

For drug-related offenses, the magnitude of the differences between gang members and non-gang members was somewhat higher among Trinidadian youth. For instance, while US gang youth were about eight times more likely than non-gang youth to sell drugs, Trinidadian gang youth were about eleven times more likely to sell drugs than non-gang youth. US gang-involved youth were 3.2 times more likely than non-gang youth to have ever used marijuana and 4.1 times more likely to have used marijuana in the past thirty days. Trinidadian gang-involved youth were about five times more likely than non-gang youth to have ever used marijuana and about eight times more likely to have used marijuana in the past thirty days.

While in the United States, gang youth were arrested almost eight times as often as non-gang youth, Trinidadian gang youth were arrested about three times as often as non-gang youth. Gang youth were 4.3 times more likely to be victimized in the United States and 3.5 times more likely in Trinidad and Tobago. Gang members in the United States also self-reported significantly higher levels of property crime, drug sales, and marijuana use when compared to gang members in Trinidad and Tobago. For instance, US gang members reported 2.5 times the property crime, two times the drug sales, and about two times the marijuana use (ever and thirty-day use) as



gang members from Trinidad and Tobago. On the other hand, Trinidadian gang members were 50 percent more likely to have been arrested and used 20 percent more alcohol in their lifetime than US gang members. There were no significant differences between gang members in the United States and Trinidad and Tobago with respect to violence, thirty-day alcohol use, and victimization.

Table 5.

### Self-Reported Delinquency and Victimization among Gang and Non-gang School Youth

	United States			Trinidad and Tobago		
	Gang to Non-gang Ratio	Non-gang	Gang	Gang to Non-gang Ratio	Non-gang	Gang
Violence <sup>a, b</sup>	6.69	0.50	3.32	6.52	0.53	3.48
Property <sup>a, b, c</sup>	4.39	0.92	4.04	4.63	0.34	1.58
Drug sales <sup>a, b, c</sup>	7.67	0.12	0.92	10.75	0.04	0.43
Arrest <sup>a, b, c</sup>	7.75	0.08	0.62	3.13	0.30	0.93
Lifetime alcohol use <sup>a, b, c</sup>	1.88	1.56	2.94	1.65	2.16	3.57
30-day alcohol use <sup>a, b</sup>	2.69	0.52	1.40	2.39	0.61	1.46
Lifetime marijuana use <sup>a, b, c</sup>	3.20	0.69	2.21	5.44	0.19	1.01
30-day marijuana use <sup>a, b, c</sup>	4.08	0.24	0.98	7.77	0.06	0.48
Victimization <sup>a, b</sup>	4.28	0.25	1.08	3.46	0.35	1.20

<sup>a</sup> Significant differences at  $p < .05$  within US between gang/non-gang

<sup>b</sup> Significant differences at  $p < .05$  within T&T between gang/non-gang

<sup>c</sup> Significant differences at  $p < .05$  between countries' gang members

Table 6 shows the behavioral characteristics of the arrestees. Our findings indicated that US gang members were significantly more likely to have reported ever using alcohol (98.6 percent versus 81 percent), ever using marijuana (100.0 percent versus 90.5 percent), ever using an “other” drug (71.6 percent versus 23.8 percent), and using an “other” drug in the past twelve months (55.4 percent versus 23.8 percent). Gang members in the United States were also significantly

more likely to have ever possessed a rifle or shotgun compared to gang members in Trinidad and Tobago (56.8 percent versus 28.6 percent). With respect to most serious charge at arrest, gang members from Trinidad and Tobago were more likely to have been arrested for a violent crime (52.4 percent versus 23.0 percent) but were less likely to be arrested for a drug-related crime (9.5 percent versus 18.9 percent) or a property crime (4.8 percent versus 24.3 percent).

With respect to within-country differences, US gang members were significantly more likely to report having ever used marijuana or an “other” drug and were significantly more likely to report having used alcohol, marijuana, and an “other” drug in the past twelve months when compared to non-gang members. Conversely, in Trinidad and Tobago, gang membership was unrelated to ever having used alcohol, marijuana, and an “other” drug and was unrelated to having used alcohol in the past twelve months. However, when compared to non-gang members, gang members in Trinidad and Tobago were significantly more likely to have used marijuana (47.8 percent versus 81.0 percent) and an “other” drug (9.2 percent versus 23.8 percent) in the past twelve months. In both the United States and Trinidad and Tobago, arrestees who were gang members were significantly more likely to have ever possessed a handgun, rifle, semi-automatic firearm, or fully automatic firearm. However, while gang members in the United States were roughly two to four times more likely than non-gang members in the United States to have ever possessed a firearm, gang members in Trinidad and Tobago were roughly seven to nine times more likely than gang members to have ever possessed a firearm. Similarly, gang members were arrested significantly more often compared to non-gang arrestees in both countries. US gang members averaged about two prior arrests in the past twelve months, compared to 0.62 arrests for non-gang members, and gang members in Trinidad and Tobago averaged 1.53 prior arrests, compared to 0.86 for non-gang members.

For US respondents, the odds of being a gang member increased for those who reported a family history of antisocial behavior, parental attitudes favorable to drug use, and parental attitudes favorable toward antisocial behavior.

Table 6.

### Behavior Characteristics of Adult Arrestees in the United States and Trinidad and Tobago

	United States			Trinidad and Tobago		
	Non-Gang	Gang	Total	Non-Gang	Gang	Total
<i>n</i> =	2,210	74	2,284	391	21	412
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Ever used						
Alcohol <sup>c</sup>	96.2	98.6	96.3	80.3	81.0	80.3
Marijuana <sup>a,b,c</sup>	82.4	100.0	83.0	56.8	90.5	58.5
Other <sup>a,c</sup>	61.2	71.6	61.5	10.7	23.8	11.4
Used in past 12 months						
Alcohol <sup>a</sup>	77.0	86.5	77.3	67.0	81.0	67.7
Marijuana <sup>a,b</sup>	48.3	83.8	49.5	47.8	81.0	49.5
Other <sup>a,b,c</sup>	36.9	55.4	37.5	9.2	23.8	10.0
Firearm possession (ever)						
Handgun <sup>a,b</sup>	29.6	67.6	30.8	11.8	81.0	15.3
Rifle or shotgun <sup>a,b,c</sup>	27.1	56.8	28.0	4.1	28.6	5.4
Semi-automatic <sup>a,b</sup>	17.9	41.9	18.7	7.7	61.9	10.5
Fully automatic <sup>a,b</sup>	7.3	28.4	8.0	4.9	42.9	6.8
Most serious arrest charge <sup>c</sup>						
Violent	19.1	23.0	19.2	36.3	52.4	37.1
Drug-related	24.5	18.9	24.3	16.6	9.5	16.3
Property	21.1	24.3	21.2	14.3	4.8	13.8
Miscellaneous	35.3	33.8	35.2	32.7	33.3	32.8
Arrests in past 12 months <sup>a,b</sup>						
Mean <sup>†</sup>	0.62	1.95	0.69	0.86	1.53	0.88
SD	1.53	1.88	1.58	1.76	1.78	1.76

<sup>a</sup> Significant differences at  $p < .05$  within US between gang/non-gang

<sup>b</sup> Significant differences at  $p < .05$  within T&T between gang/non-gang

<sup>c</sup> Significant differences at  $p < .05$  between US and T&T gang members

#### 4. What are the risk and protective factors associated with gang membership?

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We also conducted statistical analyses to explore the risk and protective factors for gang membership. These multivariate regression analyses are complex, so we do not present these details in this report. Anyone interested in the details of the analysis should contact the lead author.

##### *Youth in the United States*

Analyses of data from US respondents indicated that within the community domain, three risk factors and one protective factor were associated with gang involvement. Respondents who reported low neighborhood attachment were less likely to be gang members. Additionally, respondents who reported an elevated risk of community disorganization and residential mobility were more likely to be gang involved. We also found that respondents who reported opportunities for prosocial involvement in their community were less likely to be involved in a gang.

In the school domain, both risk factors and neither of the protective factors were significantly related to gang involvement. Gang-involved youth were more likely to report academic failure and less likely to report low commitment to school. Within the family domain, four risk factors and one protective factor were associated with gang involvement. The odds of being a gang member increased for those who reported a family history of antisocial behavior, parental attitudes favorable toward drug use, and parental attitudes favorable toward antisocial behavior. The odds of being gang involved decreased, however, for those who reported parental attitudes favorable toward alcohol use. Respondents who reported receiving rewards for prosocial involvement from their family were less likely to be involved in a gang.

In the peer-individual domain, eight risk and two protective factors were significantly associated with gang involvement. Respondents who reported rebelliousness were more likely to be gang involved. Additionally, those who reported early initiation of antisocial behavior, drug use, and alcohol use were more likely to be gang involved. Interestingly, those who reported attitudes favorable to drug use were less likely to be gang involved. Respondents who reported an intention to use drugs in the future, who had antisocial peers, and who were at risk for depression were more likely to be gang involved. While respondents who reported belief in the moral order were significantly less likely to be gang involved, those who reported rewards for prosocial involvement from one's peers increased the likelihood that a youth would be gang involved.

### *Youth in Trinidad and Tobago*

Analyses of data from respondents in Trinidad and Tobago indicated that two risk factors and no protective factors in the community domain were significantly related to gang involvement. Respondents who reported residential mobility and those who reported an elevated risk of perceived availability of handguns in their communities were more likely to be gang involved. No risk or protective factors in either the community or family domains reached statistical significance. In the peer-individual domain, two risk factors and two protective factors were significantly associated with gang involvement. Those who reported early initiation of antisocial behavior and those who were at risk for the intention to use drugs were more likely to be gang involved. Additionally, those youth who reported elevated levels of social skills and interaction with prosocial peers were significantly less likely to be involved in a gang.

While it is important to examine the risk and protective factors related to gang involvement in each country individually, one of the current study's goals is to compare risk and protective factors across nations. We conducted additional analyses to test whether each risk and protective factor predicted gang involvement similarly in both countries.

We found that seven risk factors and one protective factor were more significantly associated with one country than the other. For instance, while high community disorganization was more strongly associated with gang involvement in the United States, perceived availability of drugs was more strongly associated with gang involvement in Trinidad and Tobago. In the school domain, academic failure was a significantly stronger predictor of gang involvement in the United States. In the peer-individual domain, three risk factors were more strongly associated with gang involvement in Trinidad and Tobago, while one risk factor was more strongly associated with the United States. Intention to use drugs, perceived risk of drug use, and sensation seeking were all more strongly associated with gang involvement in Trinidad and Tobago. The presence of antisocial peers, on the other hand, was more strongly associated with gang involvement in the United States. One protective factor, having social skills, resulted in significantly more protection from gang involvement in Trinidad and Tobago than in Arizona.

## 5. What are the organizational characteristics of Trinidadian gangs?

We also found significant differences between the two samples in terms of the organizational characteristics of gangs. Table 7 reveals significant differences between the two samples with respect to having a gang name, meetings, or distinguishing colors, signs, symbols, or clothing. All of the US gang members reported that their gang had a name, compared to two-thirds (63.2 percent) of Trinidadian gang members. Gang members in Trinidad and Tobago, on the other hand, were significantly more likely to report that their gang held meetings (81 percent) compared to gang members in the United States (50 percent). Over 86 percent of US gang members stated that their gang had particular colors, signs, symbols, or clothes to identify itself or its members, compared to 47.6 percent of Trinidadian gang members.

Table 7.

### Organizational Characteristics of Gangs in an Adult Arrestee Sample

	United States	Trinidad and Tobago	Total
<i>n</i> =	74	21	95
	%	%	%
Name*	100.0	63.2	91.3
Territory/turf	81.1	90.5	83.2
Leader	35.1	61.9	41.1
Meetings*	50.0	81.0	56.8
Rules	81.1	90.5	83.2
Punishments	77.0	76.2	76.8
Colors, signs, symbols, clothes*	86.5	47.6	77.9
Members give money to gang	2.7	0.0	2.1
Sell drugs	64.9	81.0	68.4

\* Significant differences at  $p < .05$  between US and T&T gang members

## SECTION 2: THE CURRENT STATE OF PRIMARY GANG PREVENTION IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Our interviews with almost twenty key stakeholders indicated that Trinidad and Tobago has given almost no attention to primary gang prevention programming and that there is strong resistance to its implementation within some ministries.

- › **There Is Currently No Primary Gang Prevention Programming in the Nation.** Interviews indicated that the nation, despite its substantial gang problem, has not implemented any primary gang prevention program. Those interviewed indicated their unit or ministry did not offer primary gang prevention programming, nor were they aware of any other organization conducting such work.
- › **There Is a Lack of Culture and Support for Primary Gang Prevention Programming.** Some individuals did not know what primary gang prevention activities might include. After some explanation and the provision of some examples such as the G.R.E.A.T. program, some individuals had heard of “the program.” Officials either argued it was some other ministry or unit’s problem to address or stated the leadership within their ministry would not support such programming. These individuals’ perceptions were somewhat confirmed through interviews with leaders within some of the ministries. The government leaders interviewed as part of this project explained that prevention activity had no place in their ministry, and they explained that they had little faith in its effectiveness.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our findings should not come as a surprise. It is well known that gangs and gang-related violence are at epidemic proportions in Trinidad and Tobago. Official data gathered from the TTPS indicates at least ninety-five gangs and 1,269 gang members are known to the police (Katz & Choate, 2006). These gang members are responsible for more than 60 percent of the nation’s homicides and engage in at least two times the violence, property crime, and drug crime as non-gang

members (Katz & Choate, 2006). Unfortunately, the criminal justice system in Trinidad and Tobago has had a limited impact on reducing gang crime. One reason is that Trinidadians are reluctant to rely on the police for help. In one study, 86 percent of residents reported hearing gunshots in their neighborhood at least once in the past thirty days; however, only 7 percent of the residents who heard these gunshots reported them to the police (Johnson, 2007). Two

explanations have been proposed for why residents do not call the police for help. One is that residents fear gang members. For instance, a survey in one community indicated that about three-quarters of residents “strongly agree” that people who report crimes committed by gang members to the police are likely to experience retaliation from gang members (Johnson, 2007). Another possible reason is that they recognize that the police will have a limited impact on the problem. An examination of gang homicides in the Besson street station district confirmed this explanation. Of fifty-three gang homicides that took place over a thirteen-month period, only three resulted in an arrest, and none of them resulted in a conviction (Katz and Maguire, 2006).

This report is unique in that it employed a research design that relied on common survey instruments and used common measures to better contextualize the gang problem in Trinidad and Tobago and to better understand those factors associated with gang membership. Our findings indicate that both youth and adults in Trinidad and Tobago, when compared to the United States, are substantially more likely to be involved in gangs. For example, about 8 percent of our youth sample from the United States reported ever being in a gang compared to approximately 13 percent of our Trinidadian sample. When placed into the larger international body of literature, our findings also suggest that youth in Trinidad and Tobago are perhaps more likely to be involved in gangs when compared to some other nations. For example, Esbensen and Weerman (2005) reported that the prevalence of gang membership among school youth in the United States was at about 8 percent compared to 6 percent of school youth in the Netherlands. However, other non-comparative studies suggest that the prevalence of gang membership varies greatly between communities, regardless of nation, and that it is very difficult to determine the magnitude of Trinidad and Tobago’s gang problem in the international context (Bradshaw, 2005; Gatti, Tremblay, & Vitaro,

Our findings indicate that both youth and adults in Trinidad and Tobago, when compared to the United States, are substantially more likely to be involved in gangs.



2005; Huizinga & Schumann, 2001). Regardless, these findings suggest that at a minimum, a meaningful proportion of youth in Trinidad and Tobago are involved in gangs and that youth gang prevention programming should be implemented as soon as possible.

In addition, our findings indicated a substantial proportion of the gang members joined their gang for reasons associated with friendship, protection, and safety. Instead of focusing on responding to gangs, national policy decisions should focus on the development and implementation of programs relating to neighborhood and school social life and safety. Improvements centered on these issues might reduce the number of youth joining gangs. Conversely, policies focused on youth gang members' involvement in gangs for reasons of making money or because of familial ties will be less promising.

Findings from our samples of school youth and adult arrestees showed that gang members in Trinidad and Tobago, like those in the United States, were significantly more likely to be involved in serious crime and drug use and were significantly more likely to be the victim of a crime. For example, gang youth in Trinidad and Tobago reported about five to eleven times the amount of delinquency and drug use when compared to non-gang members. Interestingly, while Trinidadian youth gang members reported significantly higher levels of property crime and drug sales than US gang members, Trinidadian gang members (both adults and juveniles) were significantly less likely to have been arrested than US gang members. Together, these findings suggest the Ministry of National Security should increase its suppression efforts focused on gang members. Strategies that employ deterrence and incapacitation of gang members who engage in delinquency and crime may reduce levels of crime in schools and neighborhoods overall, which might prevent

individuals from feeling the need to join a gang for safety.

Our findings of high rates of gang joining and of crime and delinquency among juveniles and adults, when compared to both non-gang members and gang members in the United States, suggest that gang prevention programming could have a major impact on the nation's violence problem. Our analyses indicated that while some risk and protective factors

Instead of focusing on responding to gangs, national policy decisions should focus on the development and implementation of programs relating to neighborhood and school social life and safety.

have a similar impact on gang joining across nations, there were some differences. These differences must be accounted for when prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies are being developed. For instance, our analysis indicated four risk factors were significantly associated with gang joining in Trinidad and Tobago. Those who reported community mobility, more guns in their community, early initiation into antisocial behavior, and the intention to use drugs were significantly more likely to report being in a gang. Additionally, we found that those who reported more risk factors were more likely to join a gang.

If Trinidad and Tobago does not develop its capacity to prevent individuals from joining gangs, it will experience an ever-increasing number of gang members and gang-related problems.

In response to these findings, we conducted a resource inventory to assess the state of gang prevention programming. We found that no gang prevention programming has been implemented and that little support exists for such programming. This problem is analogous to an individual having cancer, but not having access to physicians or facilities with the capacity to treat cancer. If the nation does not develop its capacity to prevent individuals from joining gangs, it will experience an ever-increasing number of gang members and gang-related problems.

# THE PROPOSED SOLUTION

## **Objective 1: Establish a National Gang Prevention Steering Committee.**

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The first objective is creating the Trinidad and Tobago Gang Steering Committee comprised of the ministers of 1) National Security, 2) Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, 3) Education, 4) Local Government, 5) Social Development, and 6) Sport and Youth Affairs as well as the 7) Attorney General. The Minister of National Security would chair the committee. The committee would be responsible for developing and implementing a nationwide gang prevention program, establishing program goals, and structuring programs involving all seven ministries that will prevent gang membership and gang activity. The steering committee would work collaboratively with advisors who would facilitate the development of the strategic plan, provide research services and training, identify services and key partners, and facilitate the implementation of the prevention programs. These advisors should be persons who are intimately familiar with managing gang prevention programming and who have previously implemented the programs called for below. Three field advisors and an administrative assistant would need to be hired to manage and support the committee's decisions.

## **Objective 2: Allocate Substantial Funding to Gang Prevention Programming.**

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Gang prevention programming is often very costly. For example, in 2008, Los Angeles, California began the Gang Reduction and Youth Development Project. The city implemented the project in twelve neighborhoods, each about 5.6 square kilometers in size. The project costs the city roughly \$26 million (US dollars) a year. We fully understand that budget decisions requiring this amount of funding are difficult. However, that Trinidad and Tobago allocates no funding toward gang prevention efforts suggests it has a long way to go before it invests the amount of money necessary to adequately address the nation's gang problem.

### **Objective 3: Hire Experienced Gang Prevention Managers and Specialists.**

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You will need a management team responsible for managing the overall implementation of these projects. At least some of the staff should be comprised of individuals who have implemented gang prevention programming elsewhere and have a strong understanding of its principles. The management team should provide regular technical assistance to the field advisors as well as to the larger steering committee and each team. They also need to ensure the integrity of each prevention model and provide feedback on the successes and failures of implementation to the committee. This will ensure that gaps and failures in the implementation of the programs are addressed immediately with limited politicization of the issue(s).

### **Objective 4: Train Policymakers on Gang Prevention Practices.**

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Another necessary ingredient to successfully implementing prevention programming in Trinidad and Tobago is training various policymakers, gang prevention managers, and specialists. Interviews revealed that many individuals do not understand basic tenets of gang prevention programming and consequently place little value on it. Training would need to focus on best practices. For example, it would be necessary to conduct training sessions on such topics as gang prevention through targeted outreach, community connection and collaboration, team-based gang prevention practices, employment practices for gang-involved youth, and outreach to gang members and their families. This training would allow all members to communicate effectively and to understand common goals and objectives.

### **Objective 5: Implement a Primary Gang Prevention Program.**

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Unfortunately, no evidence-based primary prevention programs are known to reduce gang membership and gang-related crime. However, preliminary findings from the evaluation of the revamped G.R.E.A.T. are very positive. In 2003, G.R.E.A.T. was reintroduced with a revised curriculum and format. Currently, the G.R.E.A.T. program “has three primary goals: (1) teach[ing] youths to avoid gang membership; (2) prevent[ing] violence and criminal activity; and (3) assist[ing]

youths in developing positive relationships with law enforcement” (National Gang Center, 2010, p. 1). The program is based on a curriculum that emphasizes changes in attitudes and behavior through “behavior rehearsal, cooperative and interactive learning techniques, and extended teacher activities” (National Gang Center, 2010, p. 1). The program involves about thirteen one-hour lessons taught by a trained professional. Preliminary analysis indicates that those youth who received the program, compared to those who have not, were more positive about the police, less positive about gangs, less likely to join a gang, less likely to self-report crime, and more able to resist peer pressure (National Gang Center, 2010, p. 1). Based on these preliminary findings and the magnitude of the growing gang problem, we highly recommend that Trinidad and Tobago implement the G.R.E.A.T. program.

We also strongly recommend that policymakers consider implementing the CTC model at the national level. The CTC model is a coalition-based primary prevention program designed to prevent a wide variety of problem behaviors such as violence, delinquency, and drug use. It was created to help policymakers make data-driven decisions based on risk and protective factors associated with family, school, community, and individuals/peers. A large number of communities around the world have implemented this model, and a number of free resources have been developed to help communities implement it.

### **Objective 6: Implement a Secondary Gang Prevention Program.**

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A secondary gang prevention program should be implemented immediately. The secondary gang prevention program should: 1) focus on those youth at high risk for gang involvement and 2) target a relatively small number (e.g., six or fewer) of communities with very high levels of gang membership and gang violence. The gang prevention programming should be based on the specific needs of the selected community and those who are at risk for gang membership. Determining those communities and individuals should be empirically driven based on needs assessments and individual-level screening instruments. This program would be developed and monitored by the above-mentioned monitoring team.

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