



A Primer on Street Gangs in the Eastern and Southern Caribbean

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1 Introduction

The Caribbean region collectively has one of the world's highest crime and violence rates (Harriott & Katz, 2015). These problems have partly been attributed to increasing and high levels of gang violence (Maguire et al., 2010). Research in the Caribbean and around the world demonstrates the negative impact of gang activity on individuals, families, and communities. Gang members contribute disproportionately to crime and violence (Katz et al., 2012). For instance, researchers estimate that about 20% to 25% of homicides in Trinidad and Tobago are gang-related, although other evidence suggests this figure may be much higher (Katz & Maguire, 2006). As such, governments and international organizations invest considerable attention and resources in combatting gangs and gang violence to improve citizens' security.

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The ability to diagnose and adequately respond to delinquency, crime, and gang problems requires current and reliable data (Katz & Maguire, 2015; Katz et al., 2012). Without this, stakeholders cannot determine whether policies and programs to reduce gang membership and violence function as intended. The body of research on Caribbean gangs, gang members, and gang violence has grown in the past two decades, with more recent research focusing on Trinidad and Tobago and comparative studies conducted across the Eastern and Southern Caribbean. Despite the strengths of previous research, estimates on the prevalence of gangs and gang members are dated; the most extensive cross-national datasets were collected more than eight years ago (see, for example, Katz et al., 2023; LAPOP, 2017).

The Caribbean comprises 16 nations and several territories. This chapter primarily focuses on English-speaking Caribbean nations in the Eastern and Southern Caribbean. These nations vary in population, from about 46,000 residents in St. Kitts and Nevis to 1.3 million in Trinidad and Tobago (United Nations, 2019). Most of these nations are ethnically comprised of people of Afro-Caribbean or mixed-race descent—except for Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago, which are more racially and ethnically diverse. Racial and ethnic diversity in the region is primarily a result of these nations' colonial past. Initially populated by native tribes (Amerindians), Afro-Caribbean individuals were brought to the region as enslaved people through the mid-1800s. The reliance on slave labor was followed by the indentured servitude of individuals mainly from India and later China and Indonesia, most often to Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Historical, racial, and ethnic divisions, and social and political challenges exist across the region. Governments largely lack the institutional capacity to respond to crime problems, citizens do not trust their government or the police, and financial capital and resources do not exist to target problems. For instance, only about half of crimes are reported to police across the region (Sutton & Ruprah, 2017). Further, while the region is frequently discussed collectively, there is variation among nations in their laws, delinquency, and how data on delinquency are collected, stored, disseminated, and addressed (Katz et al., 2021).

This chapter is intended to serve as a primer on street gangs, gang members, and gang crime in the Eastern and Southern Caribbean. It provides readers with information on the most fundamental issues that must be understood prior to the formation of theory and policymaking on matters related to the prevention, intervention, and suppression of gangs and gang-related problems in the region. We begin the chapter with a discussion on defining street gangs and gang membership. We then discuss the prevalence of street

gang involvement and the characteristics of gang members. Next, we discuss the risk and protective factors associated with gang membership, the organizational structure of gangs, and gang crime and delinquency. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the regional response to gangs.

2 Defining Gangs and Gang Membership

How gangs and gang membership are defined lacks consensus among researchers and policymakers. Differing operationalizations of these terms limit the ability to identify the scope of the problem, compare the prevalence and characteristics of gangs across time and place, and develop targeted interventions to reduce gang involvement. Street gangs can sometimes be confused with organized crime. For this review, street gangs are defined as:

any durable street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of their group identity. ‘Durability’ means several months or more and refers to the group, which continues despite turnover of participants. ‘Street-oriented’ means spending a lot of group time outside home, work and school – often on streets, in shopping areas, in parks, in cars, and so on. ‘Youth’ refers to average ages in the teens or early twenties or so. ‘Illegal activity’ generally means delinquent or criminal behavior, not just bothersome activity. ‘Identity’ refers to the group, not individual self-image. (van Gemert, 2005, p. 148)

In contrast, organized crime groups are often focused on providing illegal goods and services through actual or threatened violence and corruption. These groups are typically more organized with structured leadership and commit more economically motivated crimes than street gangs (Katz, 2015).

Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers measure gang status in several ways, and it often depends on the source of data, whether official administrative data or self-reported data. For instance, an individual may be flagged as a gang member by police or prison officials based on specific organizational criteria. However, the individual may not self-identify as a gang member. In research, gang status is most commonly measured using self-report data (Katz et al., 2005). At the broadest level, gang status is often determined by asking individuals if they have ever belonged to a gang. Other approaches have included asking respondents about their peers’ participation in gangs, if they are currently part of a gang, or are former gang members. Prior research suggests that self-report data collected from gang members is valid and reliable (Webb et al., 2006).

These measures assume that the term ‘gang’ is universally recognized. In reality, the term ‘gang’ does not always translate to locations where youth may refer to similar groups as ‘cliques’ or ‘posses’—terms utilized by some youth in the Caribbean. This limitation has been the focus of the Eurogang Working Group—a collection of more than 100 gang scholars primarily from Western Europe and the United States. The group has developed an instrument to measure street gang involvement without using the term ‘gang.’

The Eurogang measure of gang membership relies on a funnel approach, where respondents must answer affirmatively to a series of questions. If respondents answer ‘yes’ to each of the following indicators, they meet the criteria for Eurogang membership. First, they must indicate that they spend time with an informal group of friends. Second, this group of friends must be between 12 and 25 years old. Third, the group needs to spend time together in public places. Fourth, the group needs to have existed for at least three or more months. Fifth, the group has to have three or more members. Sixth, the respondent has to indicate that crime is accepted by the group. Finally, the respondent has to indicate that group members engage in illegal activities together.

Variation in definitions of gang membership is also evident in criminal legal codes. Before 2011, gangs and gang membership were not legally defined in any English-speaking Caribbean nation nor in Suriname. Increasing gang violence in these nations spurred political action and anti-gang legislation in many nations. However, most nations in the Eastern and Southern Caribbean still do not have specific legislation defining a gang or gang membership. Table 1 briefly reviews the relevant laws and definitions for gang and gang membership as of November 2022.

3 Prevalence of Gang Involvement in the Caribbean

Gang research in the Caribbean historically focused on Jamaica (Harriott, 2008). However, more recently, it shifted focus to Trinidad and Tobago and attempted to fill the gap in knowledge by examining smaller island nations (e.g., Blum & Ireland, 2004) and cross-national comparative work (Katz & Nuño, 2016). Gang membership has primarily been measured through surveys of school-attending youth (Blum & Ireland, 2004; Katz et al., 2023). Recent research efforts also included official police data, surveys of police experts, and surveys of incarcerated youth (Freemon et al., 2020;

Table 1 The legal definition of gangs in the Eastern and Southern Caribbean

Nation	Law	Definition
Antigua & Barbuda	Not defined	
Barbados	Not defined	
Dominica	Not defined	
Grenada	Not defined	
Guyana	Not defined	
St. Kitts & Nevis	Gang (Prohibition and Prevention) Act (No. 24 of 2011)	<p>"gang" means a combination of two or more persons, whether formally or informally organized, which, through its membership or through an agent, engages in any gang-related activity</p> <p>"member of a gang" means a person who—(a) belongs to a gang; (b) knowingly acts in the capacity of an agent for a gang-related activity, whether in a preparatory, executory or concealment phase of any such activity; (c) is an accessory to a gang-related activity, whether in a preparatory, executory or concealment phase of any such activity; (d) is legally accountable for or voluntarily associates himself or herself with any gang-related activity, whether in a preparatory, executor or concealment phase of any such activity; (e) who knowingly performs, aids, or abets any gang-related activity</p>

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Nation	Law	Definition
St. Lucia	Anti-Gang Act (No. 4 of 2014)	<p>"gang" means a group, however organized, that—(a) is composed of three or more persons in or outside of Saint Lucia; and (b) has as one of its main purposes or main activities the facilitation of a criminal offense or the commission of a criminal offense</p> <p>"gang member" means one of the persons who constitutes a gang and includes a person who knowingly—(a) participates in, aids or abets, or associates with, one or more gang-related activities, whether by an act or omission; (b) acts as an agent for, or as an accessory to, a gang; or (c) participates in or associates with a gang</p>
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	Not defined	

Nation	Law	Definition
<p>Suriname Trinidad & Tobago</p>	<p>Not defined Anti-Gang Act (No. 10 of 2011)</p>	<p>“gang” means a combination of two or more persons, whether formally or informally organized, that, through its membership or through an agent, engages in any gang-related activity</p> <p>“gang member” means a person who belongs to a gang, or a person who knowingly acts in the capacity of an agent for or an accessory to, or voluntarily associates himself with any gang-related activity, whether in a preparatory, executory or concealment phase of any such activity, or a person who knowingly performs, aids, or abets any such activity</p>

Source Definitions draw from legal codes in each nation identified by the authors

Katz et al., 2023). Findings across studies suggest that gangs pose a significant problem to citizen security, with variability in the prevalence of gang involvement across nations.

A 2010 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) survey found that gangs pose a significant public safety problem in the Caribbean (Katz, 2012). Across the region, 13% of respondents indicated there are criminal gangs in their neighborhood, and, of these individuals, 32% stated that criminal gangs are a big problem in their neighborhood. Again, there is variation by nation. Approximately 18% of respondents in St. Lucia indicated that there are criminal gangs in their neighborhood, which compares to 14% in Trinidad and Tobago, 13% in Guyana, 12% in Antigua and Barbuda, 11% in Jamaica, 10% in Suriname, and 9% in Barbados.

About 41% of Jamaican respondents viewed criminal gangs as a big problem in their neighborhood. Similarly, 40% and 38% of respondents in St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago viewed these groups as a big problem. In Suriname, Guyana, Antigua and Barbuda, and Barbados, 31%, 30%, 26%, and 13% of respondents, respectively, viewed criminal gangs as a big problem. Across the Caribbean, 8% of respondents in this survey responded that they believe gangs make their neighborhoods safer. This figure was higher in Barbados (14%) and Jamaica (15%) and lower in St. Lucia (3%), Suriname (6%), and Trinidad and Tobago (4%) (Katz, 2012).

Ohene et al. (2005) conducted the first sizeable regional study of gang involvement. The authors examined delinquency and gang membership among 16- to 18-year-olds in eight Caribbean nations (Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, and St. Lucia) and the British Virgin Islands. They found that about a quarter (24%) of males and 12% of females reported ever belonging to a gang, including past and present self-reported gang membership. Gang membership by nation was not presented in the study.

A more recent large-scale survey effort to measure the prevalence of gang membership in the Caribbean explored gang membership across nine nations (Katz et al., 2023). The researchers surveyed approximately 18,000 Form 5 students (10th grade in the United States) between 2014 and 2015, attending 306 schools in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. They found variability in self-reported gang membership among school-attending youth in the Caribbean, as shown in Table 2. One in five school-attending youth in Dominica identified as a gang member. This compared to 18% of school-attending youth in Guyana and St. Lucia, 15% in Barbados, and 14% in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Table 2 Self-reported current gang membership among Form 5 school-attending youth by nation

	Total	Current gang members (%)	Confidence interval (%)
Antigua & Barbuda	738	6	4–8
Barbados	2232	15	13–17
Dominica	767	20	17–23
Grenada	1067	9	7–11
Guyana	3701	18	16–19
St. Kitts & Nevis	466	7	5–10
St. Lucia	1932	18	16–20
St Vincent & the Grenadines	1101	14	12–16
Trinidad & Tobago	5601	8	8–9

Source Katz et al. (2023)

Lower percentages were reported in Grenada (9%), Trinidad and Tobago (8%), St. Kitts and Nevis (7%), and Antigua and Barbuda (6%). Despite variation in the past estimates of gang involvement among youth in the Caribbean, overall, the proportion of youth involved in gangs is high, particularly in comparison to similar school-based samples in the United States and Europe (Esbensen & Weerman, 2005; Nuño & Katz, 2018).

Looking more broadly at the prevalence of gangs in these nations rather than gang members, a 2020 figure from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service's gang intelligence unit estimated the presence of 180 gangs in the nation. This compares to 95 in 2006 and 97 in 2015. However, the number of gang members was estimated as less in 2020 compared to previous years. This figure stood at 1014 in 2020, 1623 in 2015, and 1269 in 2006 (Katz et al., 2022). A gang assessment conducted by the Organization of American States (OAS) estimated the number of gangs in Antigua and Barbuda at 15, with 264 to 570 gang members (Katz, 2008). In Jamaica, authorities in 2010 reported 268 gangs with 3900 gang members (Hall, 2010).

4 Characteristics of Gang Members

Only a handful of studies have examined the characteristics of Caribbean gang members to determine their age, gender, ethnicity, and other characteristics. These studies have been methodologically limited, so it is difficult to determine the generalizability of the findings. Based on this research, it appears that youth join gangs at an early age in the Caribbean. The average age of a youth who joins a gang ranges from 9.3 in St. Kitts and Nevis to

13.4 in Guyana. Self-report data indicate that they join for several reasons including making friends, family member connections, meeting the opposite sex, and protection. They rarely join for instrumental reasons, like making money from drug sales and crime (Katz & Nuño, 2016). Similar patterns were obtained in a study of adult arrestees. Katz et al. (2011) compared adult arrestees in Trinidad and Tobago and the United States to investigate individual gang members' involvement in crime and delinquency. Detained gang-involved adults in Trinidad and Tobago started 'hanging out' with the gang and joined the gang at significantly older ages than in the United States. Surveys of police experts across the English-speaking Caribbean note that most gang members, as identified by the police, are typically between 16 and 25 years old (Katz et al., 2022).

In terms of gender, like outside the region, initial research suggests that males are more likely to be gang involved (Katz et al., 2023; Ohene et al., 2005; Wallace, 2020). Across nine study nations, Katz et al. (2023) found that males are generally almost twice as likely to be in a gang compared to females. Katz et al. (2022) also examined the characteristics of gang members through police expert survey data in the same nine English-speaking Caribbean nations. He reported the majority of gangs are comprised of all males or mostly males. However, in Antigua and Barbuda and St. Lucia, police noted that one gang in each nation was mostly comprised of females; in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, two gangs were mostly comprised of females, and in Dominica and St. Lucia, there was one gang in each country that was comprised of all females. Some past work suggests females assist male members in perpetuating gang violence and serve as accessories in transporting illegal drugs, acting as lookouts for which they draw less attention or suspicion because of their gender (Wallace, 2020).

Findings are even less clear for race and gang membership, depending partially on the racial composition of nations and study samples. Self-report data collected from school-attending youth in Guyana indicate that Afro-Caribbean and East Indian youth are more likely to be involved in gangs than mixed-race youth. In Saint Lucia, 'other' racial groups (i.e., White, European, Asian, and Amerindian) are more involved in gangs than Afro-Caribbeans. Finally, in Trinidad and Tobago, East Indian and 'other' race youth are more likely to report gang membership compared to Afro-Caribbean and mixed-race youth (Katz et al., 2023).

5 Risk and Protective Factors

Identifying risk and protective factors for gang involvement helps stakeholders explain, predict, and address potentially problematic behavior. In this case, risk factors increase the likelihood of a youth being involved in a gang, while protective factors decrease the odds of this involvement. Risk and protective factors are often assessed at the individual, peer, family, school, and community levels (Nuño & Katz, 2018). Few studies have quantitatively examined risk and protective factors for gang membership in the Caribbean.

In one of the first studies to address this gap, Katz and Fox (2010) used self-report data from third and fifth-form students at 22 high-risk schools in Trinidad and Tobago. They found that current gang membership was associated with increased availability of handguns, early initiation into anti-social behavior, intention to use drugs, anti-social peers, and peers who use drugs. Protective factors associated with a decreased likelihood of gang membership included more opportunities for prosocial development, social skills, and belief in moral order. Maguire et al. (2011), examining similar data, reported that Trinidadian gang members were significantly more likely to report being at risk for living in a community with high community disorganization, perceived themselves being at high risk of apprehension by the police in their community, and perceived wide availability of drugs and firearms in their community.

More recently, Cheon et al. (2023) found that self-reported current gang involvement among Form 5 school-attending youth positively correlated with impulsivity, risk-seeking, having anti-social peers, and moral attitudes/disengagement. Gang membership negatively correlated with parental/family attachment, parental monitoring, and school commitment (Cheon et al., 2023). Further, using the same data, Freemon et al. (2024) reported that migration status was infrequently associated with self-report gang membership, except for foreign-born youth in Trinidad and Tobago, who reported higher levels of gang membership than their native counterparts.

Community-level social structural factors, which can serve as risk and protective factors, have also been found to be related to gangs and violence (Katz & Schnebly, 2011). Gangs in the Caribbean, like outside the region, are geographically concentrated. Katz et al. (2022) surveyed police gang experts in 240 police station districts across nine English-speaking Caribbean nations. He reported that a small number of communities in each nation accounted for a disproportionate number of each nation's gang problem. For instance, in Guyana, about 93% of the nation's gang members and 88% of its gangs are located in just 4% of police station districts. In Dominica,

about 81% of its gang members and 60% of its gangs are located in 13% of its police station districts. However, to date, little is known about the community-level social structural factors associated with gang formation in the Caribbean.

6 Organizational Structure

There have been only a small number of studies examining the organizational structure of Caribbean gangs. Some of the research has suggested that gangs in the Caribbean might be more organized than gangs in Europe, but less so than gangs in the United States and Central America in terms of structural characteristics (e.g., established leaders, rules and codes, regular meetings, claims to turf and territory), cohesion, social identity, and instrumental activity (i.e., crime to achieve a collective goal) (Katz et al., 2022; Pyrooz et al., 2012). Gang structure likely differs across nations and may be influenced by group structure and hierarchy. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago, gangs are typically headed by a group leader, who makes day-to-day, discipline, and financial decisions, and a second-in-command lieutenant. Below these individuals are local leaders who lead rank-and-file gang members, gang affiliates, gang member wannabes, and community supporters (Wallace, 2020).

Pyrooz et al. (2012) examined how gangs' organizational structure relates to delinquency and victimization. They found that more than half of self-reported gang members in Trinidad and Tobago stated their gangs have regular meetings (56%) and rules (52%). Less have a leader (45%) or insignia (45%). None of the four indicators of organization—having a leader, regular meetings, having rules, and insignia—were significantly related to delinquency. However, as gang organization increased, there was a higher likelihood of delinquent offending by gang members. In contrast, gang members' odds of victimization tripled when a gang had rules while having an insignia was related to reduced odds of victimization. Surprisingly, victimization did not increase as overall gang organization increased. For further discussion on the relationship between gangs, delinquency, and victimization, see Katz and Fox (2015).

With the above said, some research suggests that gangs are more sophisticated than these traits suggest. Gangs in the Caribbean have been tied to political activity, particularly in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. In Jamaica, these ties emerged out of garrison communities and 'dons.' Dons often serve

as community leaders, with political sway through garnering votes for political groups. They often provide public services that the government may not attend to in some communities, such as food distribution or garbage collection. In Trinidad and Tobago, some have speculated that the nation's Unemployment Relief Program (URP) has resulted in a relationship between the government and gang leaders (Katz et al., 2011). In both cases, such activities build community support for gang leaders.

The relationship between gangs and politicians might be more widespread than just Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. According to self-reported data from gang members, many youths across the English-speaking Caribbean believe that gangs promote or support a political issue. For example, in Dominica, about 12% of youth believed this, followed by 19% in St. Lucia, Barbados, and Grenada, 24% in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 28% in Trinidad and Tobago, 34% in Guyana, and 38% in St. Kitts and Nevis (Katz & Nuño, 2016). The police reported somewhat similar results across the region. For example, police surveys across these nations indicated that half of gangs in Antigua and Barbuda promoted or supported a particular issue, compared to 29% in Trinidad and Tobago, 24% in St. Lucia, 19% in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 11% in Guyana, 6% in Barbados, and none in Dominica and St. Kitts and Nevis (Katz et al., 2022).

7 Crime and Delinquency

Elsewhere, youths who are gang members are involved in higher levels of violence and problem behavior than youths who are not in gangs (Katz et al., 2000; Pyrooz et al., 2012). The same has also been consistently found in the Caribbean. For instance, about a quarter of homicides were estimated to be gang related in Trinidad and Tobago in 2006 and 2020 (Katz et al., 2022). Broadly, while gang-related homicides indicate a gang problem, the true extent of gang homicides may be undercounted due to the lack of gang intelligence in the region (Katz & Maguire, 2015). Katz and Maguire (2006) examined homicides in one Trinidad and Tobago police district. While police classified about 25% of homicides as gang related, further examination revealed that 63% should have been in this category.

Gang violence has detrimental impacts on communities. Approximately 12% of respondents in the 2010 UNDP Survey indicated that their neighborhood had experienced gang violence in the previous year. This figure ranged in the surveyed nations from 6% in Barbados to 20% in St. Lucia (Katz, 2012). Katz et al. (2019) examined how the number of gangs and gang

members was related to homicide in communities in Trinidad and Tobago. Gang estimates and official homicide data from 2006 were supplemented with census data to control for population and housing factors. The authors found that an increase by one gang was associated with a 9% increase in homicides in communities. An increase of five gangs in a community saw a 55% increase in homicides. Similarly, for individual gang members, an increase in one gang member in a community was associated with a 0.4% increase in homicides. For an increase of 100 gang members in a community, there was an increase of 49% in homicides.

Chronic violence is higher among gang members than non-gang members in the Caribbean. Katz et al. (2022) reported that 19% of gang members in the region have attacked someone with a weapon more than ten times in the past month compared to 4% of non-gang members. This similarly applies to repeated drug selling. In Antigua and Barbuda and Dominica, approximately a quarter of gang members had sold drugs more than ten times in the past 12 months compared to 2% and 7% of non-gang members, respectively (Katz et al., 2022).

Katz et al. (2011) compared people arrested in Trinidad and Tobago and the United States to investigate individual gang members' involvement in crime and delinquency. The results showed that gang members in Trinidad and Tobago reported more violence than in the United States. About 52% of gang members in Trinidad and Tobago had been arrested for a violent offense compared to 23% of U.S. arrestees. Gang members in Trinidad were also more likely to have been shot, threatened with a gun, injured with a weapon other than a gun, or robbed than U.S. gang members. Similarly, Wells et al. (2010) examined firearm possession among arrestees in a Trinidad and Tobago detention facility from December 2005 to April 2006. Among individuals who participated in the survey, 14% were gang involved. Gang involvement significantly increased the likelihood that an individual possessed a gun, which the authors suggest is not surprising given the high gun usage in gang conflicts in the country.

8 Regional Response to Gangs

Historically, the Caribbean relied on reactive suppression strategies to respond to gangs and gang members (Katz, 2015). This primarily involves incident-specific arrests, prosecutions, and sanctions. Limitations have existed in translating police policy on gangs into action. This is compounded by unreliable gang intelligence to guide responses. Trinidad and Tobago was one of the

first Caribbean nations with a specialized police unit to respond to gangs—although the unit has since been disbanded. The Gang/Repeat Offender Task Force was established in 2006 and was responsible for gang intelligence collection, apprehending wanted persons, and patrolling areas with gang problems. However, only 22% of individuals arrested by the task force were ultimately charged with an offense. In Jamaica, gang suppression attempts in 2009 and 2010, executed with the primary goal of capturing drug lord Christopher Coke in Tivoli Gardens, led to a large number of civilians being killed by the police (Katz, 2012).

Given the relative ineffectiveness of suppressive strategies in the past, it is not surprising that the majority of citizens in Caribbean countries express little support for such approaches. For example, the 2010 UNDP Survey revealed that only about a quarter of individuals in the Caribbean have confidence in the ability of the police to control gang violence. In Antigua, this figure was 24%, Barbados 39%, Guyana and Jamaica 23%, St. Lucia 19%, and Suriname 30%. This dropped to only 10% in Trinidad and Tobago (Johnson et al., 2008; Katz, 2012).

Other interventions beginning to receive more policy and research attention focus on prevention efforts. Using a randomized control trial design, Walker et al. (2021) reviewed the impact of an early childhood stimulation trial on gang membership 31 years post-intervention in Jamaica. This included nutritional supplementation and psychosocial stimulation for children with stunted growth at ages 9–24 months. There were no significant differences in gang membership between treatment and control groups. When assessed at an earlier point (age 22), participants who received only the psychosocial stimulation reported lower levels of gang membership (Walker et al., 2011).

Further responses focus on intervention efforts. For example, Katz et al. (2022) measured the influence of a gang truce in Greater August Town. The truce, led by the Jamaica Peace Management Initiative (PMI), sought to reduce gang retaliatory violence through mediation. Using a quasi-experimental design, Katz et al. (2022) found a significant reduction in homicides with bivariate analyses; however, significant differences did not hold for the trend analyses. The reduction was attributed to a nationwide reduction in violence and possible displacement of homicides in other areas.

Another recent intervention effort was examined by Maguire et al. (2018). The authors used quasi-experimental methods to evaluate the effectiveness of a locally translated Cure Violence program in Trinidad and Tobago (i.e., Project REASON). The program employed outreach workers and ‘violence interrupters’ to intervene directly and mediate conflicts in the

selected communities. Despite taking place in communities with poor police-community relations, Maguire et al. (2018) reported that Project REASON built a strong partnership with the police. The intervention resulted in a 38% reduction in violent crimes in target communities, compared to a 16% increase in the rest of Trinidad and Tobago. They also reported reductions in gunshot wound admissions at a nearby hospital compared to a similar hospital located further away.

9 Conclusion

Over the past 10 to 20 years, research indicates that the Caribbean has a street gang problem, including among youth, that varies in magnitude by nation. Many English-speaking Caribbean nations have not defined gangs or gang membership through legislation, and for those that have, there is wide variation in how gang membership is defined. The body of literature examining gangs and gang-associated problems is emerging. However, much additional research is needed to understand the prevalence of gangs, gang members, and gang crime, the characteristics of gang members, risk and protective factors associated with gang joining, and gang organization in the region, among other issues. Data collection on gang problems has not been consistent over time, location, and sample population, which limits policymakers' and researchers' ability to track the problem and use data in decision-making. Likewise, very little research has examined the effectiveness of responses to gangs in the region. Future research should build on the work presented here and expand on it to increase our understanding of street gangs in the region including whether and how much this knowledge is generalizable to other regions and how Caribbean gangs might contribute to a new way of thinking about street gangs.

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