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Diagnosing Gang Violence in the Caribbean

CHARLES M. KATZ AND EDWARD R. MAGUIRE

Gang violence has become a serious problem in many Caribbean islands. A recent report from the United Nations Development Programme highlights the corrosive effects of gangs and gang violence in the region (UNDP 2012). More than half of homicides in some Caribbean nations are now thought to be gang-related (Hill 2012; Katz and Choate 2006). In a recent survey of citizens in seven Caribbean nations, 29 per cent of respondents reported that their neighbourhoods have experienced some level of gang violence. This finding ranged from a low of 18.3 per cent in Barbados to a high of 43.1 per cent in St Lucia (UNDP 2011). Many Caribbean islands have been shaken by specific incidents of gang violence, often newsworthy due to the innocence of the victim or the sheer audacity of the offence. For instance, in January 2007 masked gang members stormed the home of a female police constable in Trinidad and murdered her, along with her husband, her daughter and a family friend (Seelal 2007). In July 2010, a 14-year-old tourist was killed in the US Virgin Islands when she was caught in the crossfire between warring gangs (Sloan 2010).

Unfortunately, gang violence has only recently been acknowledged as a major problem in many Caribbean islands (UNDP 2012; Seepersad 2013). Policymakers and criminal justice officials have been slow to address gangs and gang violence in the region, and often neglect to take these issues seriously until pressured to do so by the media and the public (Harriott 1996; Katz and

Choate 2006; Katz 2008; Moncrieffe 1998). With gangs contributing to soaring violent crime rates in several Caribbean nations and territories it is becoming increasingly difficult for public officials, community members and academics to ignore the problem. Yet the region still grapples with the question of how best to address gang violence.

Because gangs have instilled a general sense of alarm in residents, many Caribbean nations and international development organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme, the Organization of American States and the various development banks, have launched discussions (or in some cases, pilot projects) focused on how to address the gang problem in the Caribbean. Many of these discussions focus on large-scale social issues associated with human development in the Caribbean, including unemployment, concentrated disadvantage, poor education and family-related problems. Often referred to as “root causes”, these factors are the “usual suspects” that are often used to explain the growth and diffusion of gangs and gang violence in the Caribbean (Katz and Fox 2010; Katz, Maguire and Choate 2011; Maguire et al. 2008; Robotham 2003; UNDP 2012). While thinking broadly about the root causes of gangs, crime and violence is certainly important, there is often an underlying sense of pessimism or hopelessness in these discussions. A commonly heard refrain at international meetings is that it will take a generation to address gang violence in the Caribbean. When examining the sources of the gang problem in the Caribbean from a root cause perspective, it is tempting to conclude that it will take at least a generation to solve these issues because changing deeply ingrained social and economic issues is ambitious, difficult and time-consuming work.

However, there is a simple, practical and evidence-based alternative way to view these issues. This point of view is routinely ignored in most discussions about how to reduce gang violence in the Caribbean. Instead of focusing solely on root causes, criminologists also focus heavily on “proximate causes” of violence. Proximate causes are those factors that influence violence but are closer or more proximate to the violent event than root causes. Proximate causes can often be identified by thinking about the motive and the means for the offence. For instance, in homicides carried out by rival gangs using firearms, both the firearm and the gang conflict can be thought of as proximate causes. If we think in terms of proximate causes instead of root causes, the scope of the problem – and the complexity of potential solutions – becomes smaller and more manageable. Continuing on with the previous example, shifting focus to these two proximate causes might result in the design of a set of interventions capable of reducing the gang conflict and addressing the use of illegal guns to carry out acts of violence.

There has been relatively little thoughtful discussion on launching effective short-term and intermediate-term measures to address gang violence in the Caribbean (Maguire 2012; for exceptions, see Harriott 2009; Deosaran 2004, 104–28).

With few exceptions, the response to gangs thus far in the Caribbean has been characterized by poor leadership, weak financial support, stale thinking and an absence of urgency. Jurisdictions often adopt ill-advised programmes and policies. For instance, gang scholars have argued for many years that overly aggressive street suppression strategies have the unintended consequence of increasing cohesion and rebellion among gang members and those who are loyal or sympathetic to them (Klein 1995a). Similarly, the use of gang truces or peace treaties between gangs is endemic throughout the Caribbean, despite existing evidence suggesting that these approaches typically generate a short-term reduction in violence followed by a long-term increase (Klein 1995b; Kodluboy and Evenrud 1993; NGCRC 1995; Ordog et al. 1995). Truces and treaties are often negotiated by politicians. Yet, close relationships between political officials and gang leaders serve to legitimize gangs in the eyes of the populace, including aspiring gang members, and to elevate gang leaders to the status of community leaders (UNDP 2012). There is little scientific evidence to support many of the approaches that are used instinctively throughout the region. Some of these practices, like extrajudicial killings of gang members by police, undermine the rule of law and probably do more to worsen the gang problem than to help solve it (Manwaring 2007; UNDP 2012). Finally, well-intentioned but uninformed NGOs often contribute to the chaotic landscape of gang violence programming in the region by ignoring interventions with a strong record of success and recommending or funding generic interventions that are neither evidence-based nor sufficiently focused.

As noted in earlier chapters, gang experts often classify strategies to address gangs and gang violence into three categories: prevention, intervention and suppression. Prevention attempts to keep youth out of gangs. Intervention focuses on dealing with youth once they are already in gangs by encouraging them to leave the gang, providing them with new skills that provide alternatives to gang life, or encouraging them to moderate their behaviour if they decide to stay in the gang. Suppression involves making use of the formal criminal justice system to arrest, prosecute and otherwise control gangs. As a general principle, comprehensive efforts to address gangs and gang violence consist of a balance between prevention, intervention and suppression.

As with much of the world, the most common and instinctive approach to dealing with gangs in the Caribbean is suppression (UNDP 2012). The intellectual support for suppression strategies comes from deterrence theory, which

holds that punishments or sanctions are most effective when they are severe, swift and administered with certainty. A *specific deterrent* effect occurs when a sanction (such as imprisonment) discourages the offender from offending again or reduces the severity of their future offences. A *general deterrent* effect occurs when a sanction imposed on some people leads others not to commit crime (Klein 1995a). In the developed world, suppression strategies typically focus criminal justice resources on gang members through the use of such practices as targeted and specialized police patrols, intelligence databases, aggressive prosecution strategies and enhanced sentences for those who are convicted (Katz 1997, 2001, 2003; Katz and Webb 2003, 2006; Webb and Katz 2003). Suppression is a vital component for addressing gang violence, provided that it is used in a strategic, focused and just manner and constitutes just one part of a more comprehensive approach.

For suppression strategies to work well, they need to effectively deter and incapacitate gangs. Unfortunately, deterrence and incapacitation do not function well in the Caribbean. Punishments may be severe in some instances, but they are neither swift nor certain. This is why “tough on crime” political rhetoric about corporal and capital punishment in the Caribbean is often just a distraction from the more important reforms that need to be instituted in the region. The real problem is that the likelihood of offenders actually receiving these tough sanctions is too low to substantially deter or incapacitate those weighing the costs and benefits of committing a crime. If politicians aim to reduce crime and violence, they need to focus on methods that will improve swiftness and certainty, not severity. The police in some Caribbean nations face numerous challenges in building effective cases against violent offenders. Some of these challenges are the result of deficiencies in the police agencies themselves, and indeed the police are often blamed for failures of the justice system. Some of these challenges, however, result instead from deficiencies in other parts of the justice system, especially crime laboratories and the courts. Due to these systemic problems – together with the well-known tendency of gangs to intimidate and kill witnesses against them – police face an often insurmountable set of obstacles in trying to build criminal cases against gang members. As a result, gang suppression efforts in the Caribbean often amount to little more than aggressive harassment policing.

Most Caribbean nations lack the basic institutional capacity to respond effectively to gangs. They do not have the *analytical capacity* to systematically track the identities of gangs and gang members; the overall number of gangs, gang members and gang-related offences; the nature of conflicts and alliances

between gangs; and the criminal behaviour carried out by gangs (Katz and Choate 2006; Maguire and Bennett 2008; UNDP 2012). Despite recent advances by some police agencies, most still lack the analytical capacity to engage in intelligence-led or predictive policing, in which police use crime analysis to predict when and where certain offences (like retaliatory shootings) are going to happen and then mobilize rapidly to prevent these incidents (Beck and McCue 2009; Maguire and Bennett 2008). Furthermore, as evidenced by the region's low clearance rates, many also lack the *operational capacity* to identify offenders, arrest them and build successful criminal cases against them, particularly for cases involving gang members (Maguire et al. 2010).

Developing these analytical and operational capacities throughout the Caribbean is vital for at least three related reasons. First, it will help nations focus scarce resources in a way that is most likely to generate efficient and effective results. Criminologists have discovered that a small number of offenders, victims, groups and places are responsible for a disproportionate share of crime and violence. Communities and agencies that have the capacity to identify these outliers can focus resources where they are needed most which will generate the greatest impact.

Second, enhancing these capacities will help police find legal ways to hold offenders accountable, thus firmly establishing the rule of law and sustaining their own legitimacy. When the public loses faith in the government's ability to control serious crime, the police lose legitimacy and citizens begin to rely on them less. Citizens may choose not to report a crime committed against them or choose not to cooperate with an investigation as a victim or as a witness. In this way, police illegitimacy can undermine deterrence and weaken the rule of law (see, for example, Adams 2012; Maguire, Bennett and Harriott 2014; Reisig and Lloyd 2009). If people don't cooperate with police, fewer crimes get solved, clearance rates drop and offenders become emboldened. Enhancing the analytical and operational capacities of police will increase their legitimacy, which in turn, will help to slow and eventually reverse this downward spiral.

Third, when police are ineffective in controlling gangs and violence, residents may begin to work around the police and rely instead on informal illicit means of social control. In some of the most troubled Caribbean neighbourhoods, residents do not call the police to discipline their children or teens; instead they call the neighbourhood gang leader or the don. Serious deficits in police legitimacy create a vacuum that enables gang leaders to step into the social control role ordinarily reserved for police (Clarke 2006; Deosaran 2004). Gang leaders in Trinidad bragged to us that there were no rapes in their

neighbourhoods because they had forbidden them. They also told us that they administered harsh beatings to people who carried out unsanctioned robberies or kidnappings. One gang leader explained how he rescued a victim kidnapped by one of his own gang members because the member did not have permission to carry out the offence. They claimed to regulate who could commit crime, which victims could be targeted and where the offences could be carried out.

As the gang's informal social control function begins to take root, gang leaders may establish a basic set of rules to be followed within the community and use violence to punish those who violate these rules (Arias and Rodrigues 2006). These systems of informal social control can become sophisticated, with the establishment of community courts led by gang leaders and attended by local elected officials (Charles 2012; Harriott 1996, 2003, 2008, 2009; Katz and Chocate 2006; Leslie 2010; Sives 2002). Gang leaders, community residents, political officials and police all told us that gang leaders provided food, jobs, money and other resources to the downtrodden. As evidenced most dramatically by the massive outpourings of people and emotion at funerals for slain gang leaders, in some Caribbean communities these leaders have developed Robin Hood personas. Although no data exists concerning the extent of these phenomena in the region, a recent survey of citizens in seven nations provides some insights (UNDP 2011). Overall, 14.5 per cent of respondents agreed that dons should be used as agents of crime control to reduce the crime rate. This figure ranged from a low of 7.9 per cent in Barbados to a high of 23.9 per cent in Suriname. In some communities, half the respondents thought dons should be enlisted to help reduce crime. While these dynamics are not the norm in all Caribbean communities, there is evidence that these imbalances are found in some of the region's most troubled communities.

All of these complex issues point to the need for Caribbean nations to take stock of their gang problems. This means carrying out structured diagnoses, not only of the gang problem itself, but also of their own capacity to address the gang problem. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the basic steps involved in carrying out a systematic diagnosis of the gang problem in a specific jurisdiction. This diagnosis involves two parts, one external and one internal. The external component calls for an attempt to understand the nature of the gang problem itself, particularly with regard to gang violence. The internal component involves assessing the analytical and operational capacity of the state and its partners to address the gang problem. In order to contextualize these issues, we provide a framework for thinking about how to improve a jurisdiction's capacity to address gang violence over the short, intermediate and long term.

We illustrate these principles and ideas by describing a project we carried out in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to diagnose the nature and causes of a serious outbreak of gang violence and to propose potential solutions.

Diagnosing an Outbreak of Violence in Trinidad and Tobago

In 2004, we began teaching a course in Trinidad on strategic crime control to a group of middle managers in the police service. What started as a university course, eventually led to an ambitious and wide-ranging project, the bulk of which occurred between 2005 and 2010. The project involved carrying out a comprehensive diagnosis of the outbreak of violence in Trinidad and Tobago, recommending potential solutions and evaluating the agencies' responses to those recommendations. Edward Maguire established a multidisciplinary team of scholars and practitioners to execute the project; Charles Katz served as the team's lead on gang-related issues. The project was large and involved many facets, but for our purposes here we will focus on just two parts: (a) diagnosing the causes of the nation's outbreak of violence and (b) diagnosing the capacity of the criminal justice system and other entities to address the violence.

Figure 6.1 illustrates the annual number of homicides in Trinidad and Tobago from 1988 to 2008. After many years of relative stability in homicides, the outbreak of violence began around 2000. Although policymakers and police leaders understood that homicides were increasing, most of them were unaware of vital details associated with the outbreak in violence.¹ Our analysis of TTTPS data indicated that the escalation in the homicide rate was sudden and dramatic and represented something very different from the minor fluctuations in violence that had occurred in prior years. Root cause explanations for crime are often more appropriate for explaining changes that unfold more slowly than those in figure 6.1. Proximate cause explanations are typically more suitable for explaining rapid changes in crime because the causes themselves sometimes evolve rapidly. As we began to familiarize ourselves with the nature of crime and gangs in Trinidad and Tobago, we learned that the rapid increase in violence had much more to do with changes occurring among gangs than with sudden changes in poverty, education, employment or other major social issues. It is evident that certain key events among street gangs led to increased conflict between gangs, and each new violent incident prompted a series of others as a cycle of retaliation set in.

Although government and police leaders knew that homicides were increasing, this awareness did not result in any major changes in criminal justice policies

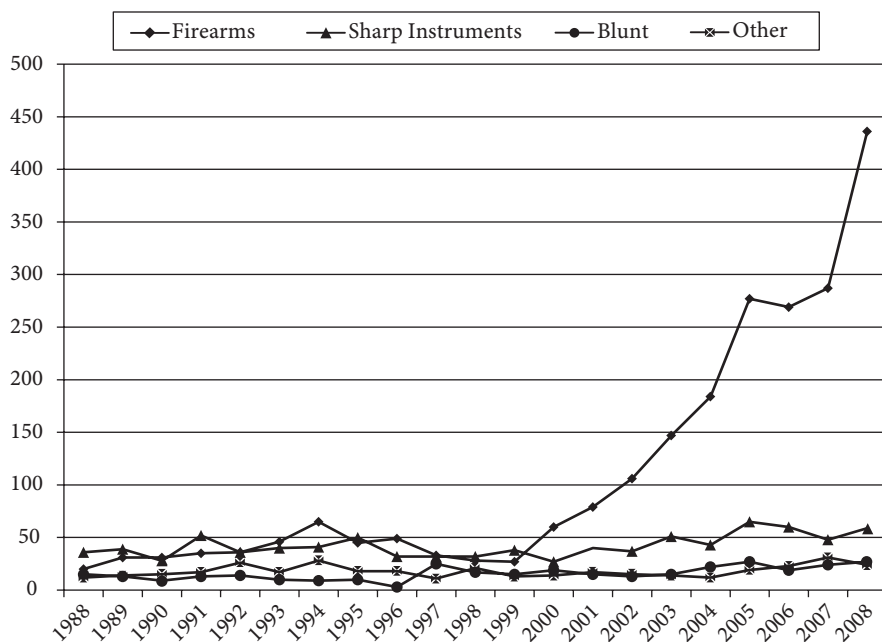


Figure 6.1. Homicides by weapon type, 1988–2008

or practices. At the time we began our diagnosis in 2005, the police were still relying on the same tools they had used throughout the first five years of the homicide increase. Moreover, the police were still hampered by serious deficiencies in other parts of the criminal justice system, particularly the nation's crime lab and courts. It quickly became clear to us that the system was broken because it was incapable of generating a sufficient baseline of deterrence to steer people – especially those involved in street gangs – away from crime and violence. These observations highlighted the need for a thorough diagnosis of the nation's "network of capacity" to control gangs and violence (Moore 2002, 338). Our diagnostic process included an examination of the violence problem itself and the nation's capacity to address it.

Our diagnosis of the nation's outbreak of violence contained many components, some directly related to gangs and others only indirectly related. In this section, we discuss the three aspects of our diagnostic process most directly related to gang violence: violent places, violent gangs and violent gang members. Due to space limitations, we do not address other aspects of our diagnosis, including those focused on firearms and drugs (see, for example, Kuhns and Maguire 2012; Wells, Katz and Kim 2010).

The Role of Violent Places

Our initial analysis of 2005 homicide data revealed substantial variation in homicides by geographic area (Katz and Maguire 2006). While the national homicide rate was 34.5 per 100,000 persons², seven of the nation's sixty-six police station districts had substantially higher homicide rates. As seen in table 6.1, the most extreme was the Besson Street Station District which covers the Laventille area; this district had a homicide rate of 249 per 100,000 persons, about seven times the national average. About 62 per cent of the nation's homicides in 2005 occurred in only seven station districts. About 25 per cent of the homicides took place in the Besson Street station district alone, followed by about 8 per cent in Morvant, 7.8 per cent in West End, 6 per cent in Belmont and Arima, 4.7 per cent in St James, and 4.4 per cent in Carenage (2006).

We further examined violent places using a gang expert survey. In January 2006, we provided a batch of surveys to each district commander in the TTPS and asked them to forward a survey to the most senior criminal investigations department officer in each station district, or to the officer whom they believed had the most knowledge about gangs in each district.³ Our gang expert survey was modelled after the Eurogang Expert Survey which was created to collect data on the scope and nature of gang problems from police officers and other individuals with gang expertise in Europe (Van Gemert 2005).

Table 6.1. Homicides and homicide rates by station districts in 2005

Station district	Homicides (Number)	Population	Homicide rate per 100,000 persons
Besson Street	96	38,513	249
Morvant	31	28,233	110
West End	30	31,588	95
Belmont	23	22,624	102
Arima	22	38,521	57
St James	18	16,729	108
Carenage	17	9,096	187
National	385	1,114,772	34.5

Source: Katz and Maguire 2006.

Our findings indicated that in 2006, Trinidad and Tobago had about ninety-five gangs and 1,269 gang members. The police experts noted that the majority of the gangs (74.2 per cent) were formed in 2000 or later. (Note that 2000 was the same year that the homicide outbreak began.) We also found that the vast majority of police districts (86.5 per cent) reported zero, one or two gangs and either no or few gang members. This study indicates that the nation's gangs and gang members were largely concentrated in the Port of Spain area in communities with higher-than-average homicide rates. The Besson Street station district reported the largest number of gangs and gang members and also had a homicide rate three times greater than the next most violent police station district. As shown in table 6.2, five station districts, all with high levels of violence, were home to 50 per cent of the nation's gangs and about 70 per cent of the nation's gang members.

Criminologists have shown that spatial concentrations of violence occur at multiple levels of aggregation, from larger units like metropolitan areas or cities to much smaller units like street corders or blocks (Maguire et al. 2008; St Jean

Table 6.2. Districts with the greatest number of gangs and gang members

	Gangs (Number)	Gang Members (Number)
Five station districts with most gangs		
Besson Street	19	385
San Juan	8	130
Sangre Grande	8	90
St Joseph	7	55
Belmont	6	165
Five station districts with most gang members		
Besson Street	19	385
Belmont	6	165
San Juan	8	130
Carenege	4	100
Sangre Grande	8	90

Source: Katz and Choate 2006.

2007; Weisburd et al. 2004). Understanding these localized ecologies of violence is crucial for clarifying the nature of a violence problem and designing targeted solutions (Katz and Schnebly 2011). In this case, we first identified station districts that had experienced a disproportionate share of violence or had a substantial presence of gangs and gang members. Within those station districts, as illustrated in figure 6.2 below, we identified gang territories and spatial concentrations in homicides. Identifying these kinds of spatial patterns provides practical information that can be used to optimize the deployment of prevention, intervention and suppression strategies that are a good match for the location (Maguire et al. 2008).

The Role of Violent Gangs

Following our analysis of the spatial distribution of homicides and its relation to gangs and gang members, we began to look more closely at the role of gangs,

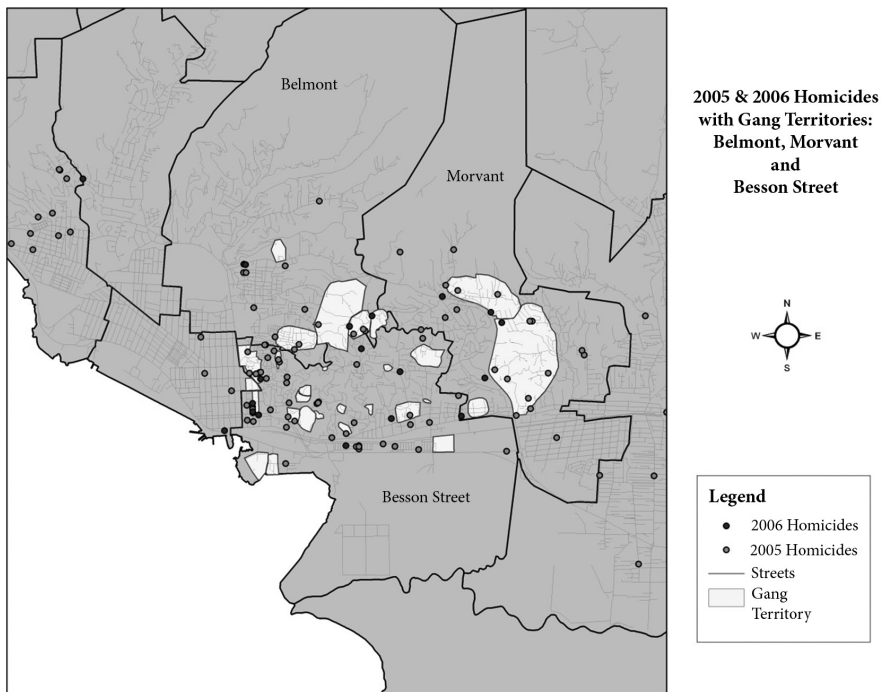


Figure 6.2. Gang territories and homicides, Belmont, Morvant and Besson Street

particularly in the Besson Street station district (Katz and Maguire 2006). Informal interviews with Besson Street officers revealed that most of the homicides in the community were committed by violent gangs. Besson Street's Criminal Investigation Division (CID) officers gave us access to intelligence files on the individuals they suspected were heavily contributing to violence within the community. The intelligence was recorded on forms that are similar to field contact cards used by police officers in the United States. These files provided us with basic information such as date of birth, ethnicity, gender, address, aliases and gang affiliation for suspects in the Besson Street station district. We used these files to identify the gang affiliations of suspects and victims involved in homicides.⁴

Ninety-six homicides were recorded in the Besson Street district between 1 January 2005 and 26 January 2006. Table 6.3 shows the gang affiliation for suspects and victims in these cases. We found that about 33 per cent of homicide victims and 59 per cent of the homicide suspects were gang members. Taken together, about 63 per cent of homicides involved either a victim or suspect who was a known gang member.

Next, we identified all of the gangs that were linked to each particular homicide as either suspects or victims in each case. Figure 6.3 contains the results from a basic social network analysis showing which gangs were involved in homicides. Gangs are denoted by capital letters and the arrows depict suspect and victim affiliation. For example, the bottom left corner shows that gang G was suspected in six homicides: one in which the victim was a police or prison officer, two in which the victims were members of rival gangs (gangs C and P) and three in which the victims' gang affiliations were unknown. The analysis showed that

Table 6.3. Victim and suspect gang affiliation for homicides in the Besson Street Station District, 1 January 2005–26 January 2006

	Victim		Suspect		Victim or suspect	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Not affiliated with a gang	43	44.8	30	31.2	30	31.2
Gang member	32	33.3	57	59.4	60	62.5
Unknown	21	21.9	9	9.4	6	6.3
Total	96		96		96	

Source: Katz and Maguire 2006.

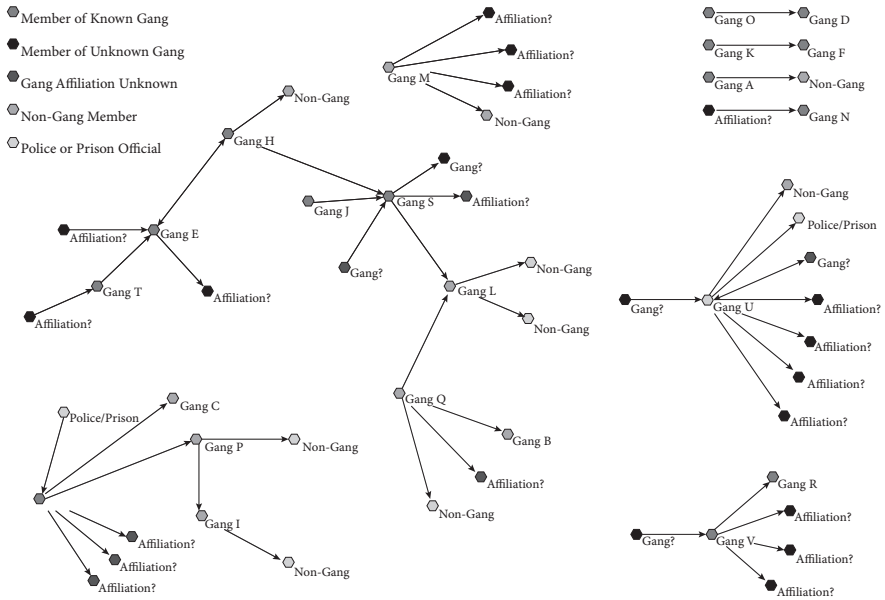


Figure 6.3. Network of homicides involving known gang member, 2005–2006

some gangs were substantially more involved in violence than others. Some gangs participated primarily in violence associated with localized feuds with another gang (that is, gangs F and K); while others participated in more robust violent networks involving a number of gangs (that is, gang S versus gangs J, H and L). We identified twenty-eight gangs active in or around the Besson Street station district, twenty-two of which were involved in at least one homicide during the period of our data collection.

Table 6.4 shows that seven gangs were disproportionately involved in homicides in the Besson Street Station District. These seven gangs were either involved as suspects or victims in about 63 per cent of the homicides in the district. A vital step in any thorough diagnosis of crime is to identify these types of patterns, which we refer to as *concentrations* of violence. Identifying concentrations of violence can provide a form of actionable intelligence enabling policymakers and practitioners to make informed decisions about where and how to allocate their resources.

Earlier, we discussed the differences between solutions that emerge from root cause thinking and those that emerge from proximate cause thinking. The finding that some gangs are more involved in violence than others serves as a useful example of those differences. Root cause theorists set their aims high in

Table 6.4. Gang-involved homicides in the Besson Street Station District by victim and suspect affiliation, 1 January 2005–26 January 2006

Gang	Homicide Suspects (Number)	Homicide Victimizations (Number)	Total (Number)	%
E	2	8	10	12
V	6	3	9	11
U	7	1	8	10
H	6	1	7	9
S	3	3	6	7
T	4	2	6	7
G	6	0	6	7

Source: Katz and Maguire 2006.

the name of crime prevention with goals such as eliminating gangs, reducing poverty and improving access to education. These are laudable and ambitious goals. A proximate cause theorist might focus first on the gangs that are involved in the greatest share of violence with the understanding that addressing those gangs will generate the largest and quickest return on investment. This is akin to a triage strategy in emergency medicine: First stop the bleeding and then address those issues that require a longer-term follow-up. To be clear, this is not an either-or proposition. A comprehensive strategy for reducing gang violence will address *both* root causes and proximate causes over the short, intermediate and long term.

The Role of Violent Gang Members

We also sought to examine whether there were chronic offenders in the Besson Street district who were disproportionately responsible for acts of crime and violence. For this analysis we relied again on the Besson Street intelligence dataset that we described earlier, which identified individuals as gang or non-gang involved, and we matched the police intelligence with criminal history record information obtained from the TTPS Criminal Records Office.⁵

Our analysis first revealed that there were major differences in criminality between gang and non-gang members. For example, as seen in table 6.5, while

Table 6.5. Per cent ever arrested by gang status

	Non-gang member (N = 878)		Gang member (N = 368)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Ever arrested	177	20.2	189	51.4
Ever arrested by crime type				
Violent offence	91	10.4	116	31.5
Firearms related	76	8.7	95	25.8
Drug sales	28	3.2	56	15.2
Drug use/possession	70	8.0	86	23.4
Property offence	67	7.6	51	13.9
Sex crime	16	1.8	10	2.7
Other	50	5.7	46	12.5

Source: Katz and Choate 2006.

about 20 per cent of non-gang members had ever been arrested, about 51 per cent of identified gang members had ever been arrested for at least one offence. When compared with non-gang members, gang members were about five times more likely to have ever been arrested for drug sales; three times more likely to have ever been arrested for a violent crime, firearms-related crime, and drug use or possession; and approximately twice as likely to have ever been arrested for a property offence, sex crime or other crime.

Further analysis also revealed that a small but substantial number of gang members were chronically involved in criminal activity. As seen in table 6.6, just over 6 per cent (n=24) of gang members had been arrested eight or more times. Likewise, 7.3 per cent (n=27) of gang members had been arrested four or more times for a violent crime, 2.4 per cent (n=9) of gang members had been arrested three or more times for drug trafficking, and about 5 per cent (n=18) of gang members had been arrested three or more times for possession of a gun or ammunition.

We further examined the impact of chronic offenders on crime in the Beson Street station district by comparing the proportion of chronic offenders in different categories to the proportion of arrests they generated. Across each category, a small proportion of chronic offenders was responsible for generating a

Table 6.6. Frequency of arrest among gang members by offence type (N = 372)

All offence types	Number	%
0 times	183	49.2
1 time	57	15.3
2 to 7 times	108	29.0
8+ times (chronic)	24	6.5
Violent crime		
0 times	256	68.8
1 time	42	11.3
2 times	34	9.1
3 times	13	3.5
4+ times (chronic)	27	7.3
Drug trafficking		
0 times	316	84.9
1 time	36	9.7
2 times	11	3.0
3+ times (chronic)	9	2.4
Possession of gun or ammunition		
0 times	278	74.7
1 time	52	14.0
2 times	24	6.5
3+ times (chronic)	18	4.8

Source: Katz and Maguire 2006.

much larger proportion of arrests when compared to gang members who were not chronic offenders (see table 6.7). For instance, 6 per cent (n=24) of gang members were responsible for generating almost 40 per cent of all arrests among the sample. This pattern was most striking for chronic violent offenders. Just over 7 per cent (n=27) of gang members were responsible for 50 per cent of all arrests for violent offences in the sample. Likewise, 2.4 per cent (n=9) of gang members were responsible for 33 per cent of arrests for drug trafficking and

Table 6.7. Chronic offenders and their contribution to crime (N = 372)

	Gang Members (#)	Gang Members (%)	Total Arrests (#)	Total Arrests (%)
Chronic offenders	24	6.4	298	38.7
Other offenders	348	93.6	472	61.3
Chronic violent offenders	27	7.2	149	50.0
Other offenders	345	92.3	149	50.0
Chronic drug traffickers	9	2.4	29	33.3
Other offenders	363	97.6	58	66.7
Chronic gun/ammo possession offenders	18	4.8	62	38.3
Other offenders	354	95.2	100	61.7

Source: Katz and Maguire 2006.

about 5 per cent (n=18) of gang members were responsible for about 40 per cent of all arrests for possession of a gun or ammunition.

Summary

In summary, the initial phase of our diagnostic process revealed that violence in Trinidad and Tobago was concentrated in a small number of places, groups and people. About two-thirds of the nation's homicides took place in just seven of the nation's sixty-six station districts we examined. Additional analyses not reported here identified much smaller concentrations of violence at the block or street level within these districts (Maguire et al. 2008). Within the most violent police station district (Besson Street), 63 per cent of the homicides involved a known gang member. Moreover, these homicides were not spread evenly or randomly across all the gangs in the district. Only seven gangs were responsible for about two-thirds of all homicides in the community. A similar pattern was observed for gang members. About 7 per cent of gang members were responsible for about 50 per cent of violent crime in the district. The idea that violence is concentrated is something of a criminological axiom, and these patterns are typical for communities experiencing outbreaks of violence. These concentrations

of violence provide a clear point of departure for launching effective prevention, intervention and suppression efforts.

These findings suggest that targeted strategies focused on the right places, groups and people can generate a disproportionate impact on violence. For instance, research shows that when police focus their efforts on crime “hot spots”, they can achieve sizeable reductions in violence (see, for example, Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau 2012; Sherman 1995; Sherman and Weisburd 1995).⁶ Similarly, repeat offender programmes that target chronic offenders have been found effective (Abrahamse et al. 1991; Martin and Sherman 1986). For instance, one study showed that when police focused their efforts on seizing guns from chronic offenders, every gun removed from the street reduced the number of subsequent gun crimes by three (Sherman and Rogan 1995). More recently, evaluations of focused deterrence strategies have shown that increasing the threat (both actual and perceived) of formal sanctions against high-risk violent offenders and violent groups is effective in reducing violence (Braga and Weisburd 2012; Kennedy 2009; McGarrell, Chermak, and Wilson 2006). All of these effective interventions rely heavily on crime analysis and gang intelligence to help police and other officials identify and focus their efforts on the right places, groups and people. Research demonstrates clearly that focused strategies can generate rapid impacts on crime and violence.

Long-range efforts that seek to address the root causes of crime and violence are important and can play a useful role in comprehensive strategies to address gangs and violence. However, there appears to be a prevailing mind-set among many people in the region that these are the *only* meaningful approaches. The implicit critique seems to be that dealing with proximate causes represents a “Band-Aid” solution that only addresses the symptoms of a larger problem with deeper roots. We have no inherent objection to strategies that seek to ameliorate root causes, as long as these efforts are evidence based (when possible) and are otherwise well conceived. But we object to the notion that addressing root causes is the only effective way to address violence. Thus we urge policymakers to take proximate causes seriously as well. Addressing proximate causes means identifying concentrations of violence, such as those we have identified here, and implementing targeted solutions intended to address them.

Some crime control strategies in the region, such as the state of emergency implemented in Trinidad and Tobago in August 2011, ignore these concentrations, relying instead on unfocused and generic approaches. Generic solutions that ignore concentrations of violence are typically less effective and more expensive than those that are more focused on the places, groups and people

most responsible for the problem. Moreover, depending on the manner in which they are carried out, generic solutions can also alienate the public and diminish the perceived legitimacy of police agencies (Kochel 2009; Sherman 1993). As we will show in the next section, when police agencies do not take deficits in their perceived legitimacy seriously, they not only alienate the public, but they further reduce their own crime control effectiveness.

Diagnosing the Capacity to Address Violence

Knowing the nature and causes of a community's violence problem is only one part of the equation. Having the organizational and inter-organizational capacity to use that information properly and administer appropriate and effective solutions is also vital. Thus, we examined not only the gang and violence problems in Trinidad and Tobago, but also the nation's capacity to address these issues. We audited existing gang violence prevention, intervention and suppression strategies and gauged their potential for effectiveness. In general, we found that little attention was paid to implementing evidence based gang prevention and intervention programming (Katz, Choate, and Fox 2010). Instead, the nation's strategies for addressing gang violence were heavily oriented toward a narrow range of suppression activities. Using a variety of qualitative and quantitative data sources, we examined the capacity of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) and other agencies to address gangs and gang violence. We summarize our findings in three sections: (a) structures and strategies for addressing violent crime, (b) methods for holding violent offenders accountable, and (c) public perceptions of state capacity to address violent crime.

Structures and Strategies for Addressing Violent Crime

A central element of our diagnosis involved determining whether the TTPS had the appropriate structures, operational strategies, internal management practices and external partnerships to prevent and deter violent crime. This involved an assessment of the agency's capacity to perform basic policing functions (patrol, investigations, emergency response and so on) as well as its capacity to adopt innovative evidence-based strategies. This portion of our diagnosis was complex and we do not have the space to discuss it fully here. Instead we provide three examples that focus on the capacity of the TTPS to (a) investigate

homicides, (b) process physical evidence, and (c) collect, maintain and disseminate gang intelligence.

Investigating Homicides

It was clear from the beginning that the TTPS did not have sufficient structures or processes in place to investigate homicides or other forms of violent crime successfully. We interviewed people throughout the police service and associated agencies about the low detection rates and tried to understand the processes that the TTPS uses when investigating homicides and the decision process used to determine who leads the case. We learned that the TTPS did not have clear lines of accountability or responsibility for homicide investigations. Station house Criminal Investigative Division (CID) investigators assigned to police stations were often responsible for conducting homicide investigations, with investigators from the homicide unit playing an auxiliary role and assisting with homicide investigations when asked. If a CID officer was not available, either an officer from within the station district or an officer from the homicide unit took the lead in the investigation. We found that CID investigators were overburdened with large caseloads for many different types of offences; they reported to us that it was difficult for them to focus on homicide cases. These inconsistent structures and processes created significant obstacles for the successful investigation of homicides in Trinidad and Tobago. We discuss two examples below.

First, we found that many investigators in both CID and the Homicide Bureau lacked the proper training to conduct a homicide investigation. Similarly, the unsystematic methods used to assign cases to investigators resulted in inexperienced officers leading many homicide investigations without structured opportunities to learn from their more experienced colleagues. As seen in figure 4, the typical homicide was investigated by an officer who had almost no homicide investigation experience, and there were very few seasoned homicide investigators in the TTPS Homicide Bureau (Katz and Maguire 2005). Figure 6.4 shows that of 462 homicides, 48.5 per cent ($n=224$) were investigated by an officer who had never investigated a homicide before. More than 75 per cent of homicides were investigated by officers who had conducted two or fewer homicide investigations in the past. Given the investigators lacked prior training and experience, it was not surprising that as the homicide problem worsened, detection rates dropped.

Second, there was little accountability in the investigation of homicides in the TTPS. No single person or organizational unit within TTPS was held

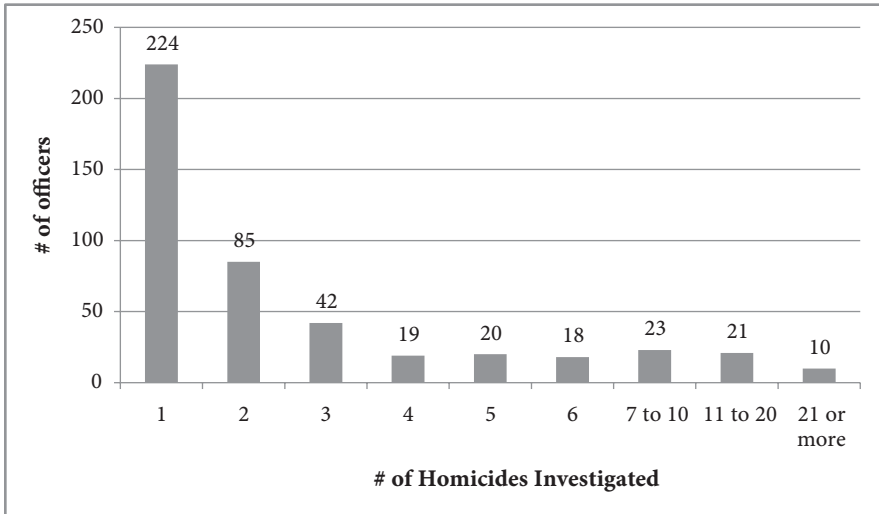


Figure 6.4. Investigator experience investigating homicides

accountable for homicide investigations. This resulted partially from a lack of clear understanding about who was actually responsible for homicide investigations. CID investigators argued that station district commanders and the homicide unit had ultimate responsibility for homicide investigations. Station district commanders argued that station district investigators and homicide unit investigators, neither of which fell under the command of station district commanders, had ultimate responsibility for homicide investigations. Administrators and investigators from the Homicide Bureau claimed that they were an auxiliary unit that assisted with homicide investigations when asked, and that station house commanders and CID investigators were ultimately responsible for homicide investigations. In short, none of the key stakeholder groups took clear responsibility for the investigation of homicides in Trinidad and Tobago. Homicides were investigated collaboratively by the CID and the homicide unit, and there was no clear lines of responsibility or accountability that could be used to improve sagging performance.

Limited Capacity to Process Physical Evidence

We also found that it was difficult for police officers to investigate homicides because the TTPS and the Forensic Science Centre (FSC) had limited capacity to process physical evidence. Police agencies with a well-developed capacity to address violent crime have structures and policies in place that enable them

to locate, collect, transport, analyse and store physical evidence for use by the police and courts. We found that as the homicide problem in Trinidad worsened, the FSC's organizational capacity to process evidence was unable to persist at the same pace. There was no system in place to prioritize the processing of evidence and as a result, evidence was processed in the order that it was received. Little attention was paid to the severity of the crime, its potential for solvability or its relevance to a case. For example, firearms-related violence had escalated rapidly by 2005 and the FSC had developed a backlog of 2,058 firearms cases. At the time, our analysis determined that the FSC was able to process just over two hundred firearms cases per year, which meant that at its current pace it would take the FSC ten years to process the current backlog of firearms cases. This did not include any new firearms-related evidence that would need to be processed (Maguire and King 2011; Maguire et al. 2010, 391–92).

We also found other serious and fundamental problems associated with the evidence-processing capacity of the TTPS. Observations of homicide scenes showed that crime scenes were routinely unsecured; citizens and nonessential police personnel were permitted to enter and walk through them. On occasion, evidence that was collected at crime scenes was packaged in whatever containers might be found nearby, including used bags from fast food restaurants. We also observed that sometimes, the individual who collected the evidence neglected to submit it to the FSC. Likewise, evidence collected by the police was often not properly catalogued or stored in a secured setting. For instance, evidence was often stored in locations that were exposed to the elements (such as flooding, heat, dirt, debris). Conversely, results from evidence processed appropriately often did not make it back to the investigating officer. For example, we found that only 31 per cent of IBIS ballistic imaging reports were routed to the correct detective (King and Wells 2008; Maguire and King 2011).

Gang Intelligence

Finally, we found that the TTPS did not have a well-developed capacity to understand and respond to its gang problem. Many police agencies have specialized gang units or similar structures that are responsible for coordinating and directing the agency's gang control efforts through the use of gang intelligence (Katz et al. 2012; Katz, Maguire and Roncek 2002). In the TTPS, there was no formal entity responsible for gang-related issues. The CID maintained profiles of gangs and gang members, but the quality of this information varied widely by station district. For instance, one district executed methods for collecting and

maintaining gang intelligence by photographing gang members and consolidating that information in thousands of Microsoft Word files. This information was crude in the sense that it was difficult to search and analyse, but the CID officers who put this information together had managed to amass considerable expertise and intelligence on gangs in their district. We visited another district known for its intense level of gang violence and CID officers there informed us that there were no gangs. This information conflicted with everything we had heard about the gang problem in this district from a number of credible sources. Consequently, because they argued there were no gangs, there was no gang intelligence.

In short, there was no formal or centralized structure to gather, analyse and disseminate gang intelligence. Certain individuals and units within the TTPS had developed localized pockets of expertise on gangs, but this expertise seemed to emerge as a result of individual initiative, not as a result of any concerted strategic effort on the part of the TTPS. The agency did not have any established mechanisms by which its personnel could develop highly technical skills and sophisticated intelligence through training and experience. This lack of training was detrimental to the larger police organization and rendered them incapable of developing a sound plan for addressing gangs and gang violence. The agency lacked sufficient policies and protocols for collecting, maintaining and disseminating gang-related intelligence that would allow the agency to implement intelligence-led policing practices and allocate resources appropriately.

Gang intelligence is important for other more basic reasons as well. Many of the same factors that are associated with violent gang conflict also inhibit the ability of the police to intervene successfully using traditional investigative methods. Gang members do not typically contact the police to resolve a conflict because doing so could result in loss of status and expose them to the risk that police will discover their illegal activities (Katz et al. 2011). Citizens in neighbourhoods with gang problems are also reluctant to call the police out of fear of gang reprisals or because they have a poor perception of the police (Adams 2012; Johnson 2006; UNDP 2012). As a consequence, the most typical police approach to gang violence in Trinidad and Tobago was a reactive response to specific incidents that had already occurred, rather than a proactive response such as intervening in disputes between gangs to prevent impending violence. The TTPS simply did not have the intelligence networks required to intervene effectively in gang conflicts until after these conflicts had generated significant levels of violence.

Police officials and researchers have identified gang intelligence as one of the most powerful tools in the fight against gang violence (Bureau of Justice

Assistance 1997; Jackson and McBride 1996; Katz 2003; Katz, Webb, and Schaefer 2000). For instance, in January 2013 the chief of the Washington, DC Metropolitan Police Department attributed part of that city's dramatic reduction in homicides (to levels not seen since 1963) to the use of gang intelligence to prevent retaliatory shootings (Simon 2013). Likewise, police-based gang intelligence systems serve as the cornerstone for some of the most innovative and effective violence reduction strategies. Absent a structured and strategic approach to dealing with gangs – including a coordinated and well-trained cadre of gang experts and a defensible gang intelligence system – the TTPS struggled to keep up with the sudden increases in violence. They were constantly playing catch-up, relying primarily on reactive approaches rather than thoughtful, proactive and focused approaches to those places, gangs and gang members that were disproportionately responsible for the nation's outbreak of violence.

Methods for Holding Violent Offenders Accountable

The proportion of homicides solved by a police agency (usually referred to as its clearance rate or detection rate) is often considered a bellwether for measuring its overall performance. There are two reasons for this. First, taking a human life is typically thought of as the most serious type of offence. Second, homicide statistics tend to be recorded more accurately than other offence types. Police agencies with high homicide detection rates are more likely to realize three criminological benefits: (a) incapacitating offenders, thereby reducing the probability that they will commit another homicide, (b) creating a culture of general deterrence, whereby citizens know that if they were to commit a homicide they would be apprehended, and (c) promoting a feeling among the population of “just desserts”, or the sense that justice is being done, which establishes confidence in the police and the justice system. High homicide detection rates are a vital ingredient for ensuring that the police are viewed as legitimate in the eyes of the public. All three of these criminological benefits, through different causal mechanisms, are likely to reduce the overall level of homicide. Agencies with low homicide detection rates are often viewed as ineffective because they are unable to perform one of the most vital functions of the police – holding offenders accountable for taking human life.

As seen in figure 6.5, homicide detection rates in Trinidad and Tobago declined dramatically from 1999 to 2008. In 1999, homicide detection rates were above 70 per cent. By 2008, they had fallen to about 15 per cent. This precipitous



Figure 6.5. Homicide detection rates in Trinidad and Tobago, 1988–2008

drop clearly signalled the mounting problems in the management of homicide investigations in the TTPS. For the general public, this pattern revealed itself through the relentless drumbeat of media coverage that expressed concerns about the TTPS and the government ministry that oversees it, the Ministry of National Security. For the offender community, particularly within gangs, this pattern revealed itself every time a murderer walked free. The drop in homicide detections sent a clear message that the state was no longer able to hold violent offenders accountable for taking human life.

While homicide detection rates were low for homicides in general, detectives told us that gang-related homicides were particularly difficult to solve. We looked into this issue by examining the outcomes of the thirty-two homicides involving a gang member victim in the Besson Street station district over a thirteen-month period. Of the thirty-two homicides, only three resulted in an arrest and none resulted in a conviction. Gang homicide cases are difficult to investigate, particularly in an environment where the public no longer trusts the police. Detectives told us they often knew the identity of the suspect, but witnesses were rarely willing to assist the police because they feared retaliation. As Adams (2012, 283) notes, “With witnesses ‘out of the way’, offenders face negligible odds of conviction even if they are arrested and tried for their

crimes.” Capacity issues in the TTPS and the FSC were compounded by further issues in the courts, which together led to negligible conviction rates. According to Adams (2012), only five of the 1,247 murders that occurred in Trinidad and Tobago from 2003 to 2006 resulted in a conviction, for a conviction rate of 0.4 per cent. The inability of the criminal justice system to arrest and convict most homicide offenders reinforced the public’s distrust in the government’s capacity to protect them. This worked to embolden offenders who learned that in spite of political rhetoric to the contrary, they could get away with murder.

Public Perceptions of State Capacity to Address Violent Crime

Based on the surveys of residents and interviews with key community stakeholders, we further examined the capacity of the police and other parts of the criminal justice system to control gangs and violence. Survey data revealed that residents had serious doubts concerning the capacity of the police and courts to handle these issues. In 2006, we launched three waves of face-to-face interviews with approximately six hundred randomly selected residents in Belmont, located in East Port of Spain. In Gonzales, a troubled Belmont community, we found that about 85 per cent of residents reported hearing gunshots in their neighbourhood at least once in the past thirty days, but only about 7 per cent of those who heard gunshots reported it to the police (Johnson 2006). When asked why, more than 70 per cent strongly agreed that people who report crimes committed by gang members to the police are likely to suffer retaliation. Similarly, almost 80 per cent of respondents stated that the police did not respond quickly when people ask them for help. These findings resonate strongly with those reported by Adams (2012), whose research on a different Trinidadian neighbourhood found that residents felt like “prey.”

A recent citizen survey conducted by the United Nations Development Programme revealed similar findings (UNDP 2011). Only about 10 per cent of survey respondents in Trinidad and Tobago were confident in the ability of the police to control gang violence. This figure was the lowest of the seven countries included in the survey; the average for the other six nations was 26.7 per cent. Confidence levels for Trinidadian respondents living in neighbourhoods with gangs were even lower (4.5 per cent). Perhaps even more troublesome were residents’ perceptions about corruption in Trinidad and Tobago’s judicial system. About 63 per cent of residents in neighbourhoods with gangs believed that judges in the nation were corrupt, 76.6 per cent believed that the judicial system

was corrupt, and 56 per cent believed that powerful criminals would go free (UNDP 2011).

Interviews with key community stakeholders in Belmont provided further insights. They explained that the institutions of formal social control (such as the police and prosecutors) with ensuring their safety. Instead, residents living in gang-controlled communities were relying instead on the local gang leader to provide social control. For example, one stakeholder told us: "Gangs bring down crime. They instituted a community court that meets weekly where young males are punished and given strokes . . . One to two local councillors have gone to the courts to observe their practice." Another explained, "Gangs are the first ones to respond to crime, the police are incompetent; they take too long and never finish the work. If you go to the gang leader you know they will take care of you." Still another said, "If you live in a community where there is gang cohesion you are more safe because they [protect you.] . . . Gangs provide safety, create jobs . . . give people food, give mothers milk for their babies" (Katz 2007).

Police sometimes view public attitudes toward police as dispensable and somehow unrelated to their ability to control crime. A wide-ranging body of research dispels this notion, including recent research in Trinidad and Tobago. For instance, based on interviews with residents in a troubled Trinidadian neighbourhood, Adams (2012, 278) notes that police are viewed as "incompetent, brutal, and a 'waste of time'". As a result, residents no longer trust the police, and therefore are no longer willing to call the police or to serve as witnesses in criminal proceedings. Similarly, a comprehensive study of seventy-three neighbourhoods in thirteen TTPS station districts found that police behaviour had "important consequences for neighbourhoods" (Kochel 2009, 197). The study found that neighbourhoods with higher quality police services also report higher levels of collective efficacy and less crime and disorder. Conversely, when neighbourhoods experience (or perceive that they experience) higher levels of police misconduct, this is associated with lower legitimacy for legal institutions, less collective efficacy, and increased crime and disorder in the neighbourhood.

Finally, based on a national youth survey in Trinidad, Johnson and her colleagues (Johnson et al. 2008, 244) reported that only 34.6 per cent of respondents viewed police as respectful, only 36.1 per cent believed police were fair and neutral, and more than half (56.8 per cent) believed police accepted payments from criminals. As expected, youth from disorganized communities view police in a more negative light than youth from other communities. The authors concluded that as these youth aged, the TTPS would continue to have difficulty developing the positive police-community partnerships that are necessary for

effective policing. The research evidence is clear: The police must have the trust and cooperation of the public to be effective in controlling crime and violence.

Summary

In conclusion, we found that police and other parts of the criminal justice system in Trinidad and Tobago lacked the capacity to control gangs and violence. The police rarely made arrests in gang homicides, and when they did make an arrest, prosecutors were seldom successful in securing a conviction. Homicide investigators had little training and experience in investigating homicides, let alone more complex gang homicides. Capacity problems in the TTPS were compounded by similar capacity issues in the nation's crime lab and the courts. The crime lab was unable to keep up with the increase in firearms and ballistic evidence submitted by the police and structural issues in the courts wasted police officers' time and allowed proceedings to drag on endlessly. We also found that the general public had little confidence in the police and the courts to protect them and expressed serious concerns about police misbehaviour and the general lack of police responsiveness. Residents in some high-crime communities instead placed their faith in gang leaders to maintain social control, a phenomenon that has led some observers to argue that gangs in the Caribbean threaten the basic sovereignty of the state (Manwaring 2007). As police legitimacy declines, people are less willing to report crime to the police, cooperate with police investigations and serve as witnesses in court, thus perpetuating a downward spiral in the ability of police to control crime.

Conclusion

Violence ebbs and flows over place and time. Criminologists spend considerable effort generating, testing and modifying theories to account for these natural variations in crime and violence. Rapid increases in violence like the outbreak experienced in Trinidad and Tobago, however, are well outside the range of what is ordinarily considered natural variation. These outbreaks of violence cannot usually be understood based solely on explanatory variables featured prominently in most theories of crime. Social factors like age, sex, race, education or the economy often move too slowly to explain sudden or rapid increases (and decreases) in violence. Thus, in order to understand outbreaks of violence,

it is necessary to look beyond the root causes of crime. A proper diagnosis of a violence outbreak means looking carefully at those places, times, groups and individuals that generate the greatest share of violence. This process involves the use of crime analysis to identify concentrations or patterns of violence. These patterns are vital for designing effective prevention, intervention and suppression strategies for reducing violence.

Our diagnosis revealed that the problem in Trinidad and Tobago was concentrated in a number of specific ways. The homicide outbreak primarily involved male offenders and victims, most of them young men of African descent, who were either members or affiliates of criminal street gangs. Their weapon of choice was guns (Wells, Katz, and Kim 2010; also see St Bernard 2009), unlike the cutlasses, razors or sticks used by earlier generations of Trinidad's gangs (Meeks 1999). These homicides were spatially concentrated at multiple levels within certain station districts, neighbourhoods, blocks and street corners (Maguire et al. 2008). Even within the universe of gangs, certain gangs appeared to commit violence or to be violently victimized more often than others. These intense concentrations of violence in Trinidad and Tobago serve as a useful point of departure for developing targeted solutions. Because these solutions are focused intently on the places and people most responsible for the violence, they are likely to be more efficient and more effective than generic or unfocused solutions.

Our diagnosis also revealed that Trinidad and Tobago was struggling with serious organizational and inter-organizational issues that limited its capacity to address violent crime in general and gang violence specifically. Five years after the outbreak of violence emerged, the nation continued to rely on the same structures and strategies that had already proven ineffective in reducing gang violence. Prevention and intervention efforts directed specifically at gangs were sporadic and unsystematic, and did not rely on evidence-based practice. Police rarely made arrests in gang-related homicides and shootings, though even when they did, offenders were rarely convicted. The TTPS had weak accountability mechanisms in place for homicide investigations, and officers lacked the training and experience needed to investigate homicide cases, especially those involving gangs. The nation's evidence-processing capacity was quickly swamped by the outbreak of violence leaving investigators with even fewer resources at their disposal to investigate cases, particularly those involving guns. The nation also lacked the appropriate structures and strategies for collecting, analysing and distributing gang intelligence to aid in its suppression and intervention efforts. Without reliable gang intelligence, the TTPS was unable to engage in proactive policing practices, relying instead on less effective reactive approaches.

After completing the initial phase of our diagnosis, we made a number of recommendations intended to improve the effectiveness of Trinidad and Tobago's criminal justice system in preventing and controlling violence, especially gang-related violence. The full details of all of our recommendations are beyond the scope of this chapter but we will mention some of them briefly. Some of our recommendations were warmly embraced and were implemented to varying degrees, while others were ignored or were implemented only on the surface while the agency continued engaging in traditional practices. For instance, all of the approaches we've discussed in this chapter require police agencies to develop a sophisticated analytical capacity that enables them to develop a deep understanding of crime patterns and the agency's effectiveness in addressing those patterns. Thus, we recommended the creation of the Crime and Problem Analysis (CAPA) Branch. Today CAPA is the largest and most well-trained crime analysis unit in the region. We also recommended the creation of a full-service homicide unit with appropriate training and accountability structures, a gang unit with both an intelligence and operational function, reforms in forensic evidence processing by the FSC and the TTPS, a series of strategic problem-solving initiatives, and the launch of an award-winning community policing demonstration project. These recommendations were intended to increase the capacity of the TTPS and its partner agencies to address violence (with a particular emphasis on gang violence) while simultaneously improving the fractured relationship between the TTPS and communities.

Although only some of our recommendations were implemented, the government of Trinidad and Tobago deserves credit for investing in a comprehensive diagnosis of its outbreak of violence and financing its own capacity to address that outbreak. It is rare for governments to open themselves up to such intensive external scrutiny. Our diagnosis resulted in a clear understanding of the nature of violence in Trinidad and Tobago, the reasons why it increased so rapidly, where it was being carried out and by whom, and what to do about it. Unfortunately, knowing what to do about violence is only one piece of a complex puzzle. Crime is an issue about which everyone has an opinion. In Trinidad and Tobago, we encountered a contentious political atmosphere in which citizens, the media and people in positions of authority disagreed vehemently with one another about the way forward. Moreover, extensive turnover in leadership, both within the TTPS and other agencies and in the government more generally, made it difficult to implement change based on the results of our diagnosis. Our experience in Trinidad and Tobago highlights the complexity of the reform process.

Gangs and violence are among the most pressing issues in the Caribbean. Research suggests that “one size fits all” solutions do not work particularly well for addressing these issues. Three ingredients are vital for successfully addressing violent crime in the Caribbean. The first is carrying out a proper diagnosis of the nature and causes of violence, as well the capacity of the jurisdiction to address these issues. The second is designing a set of focused initiatives based on the results of the diagnosis; these initiatives should include prevention, intervention, and suppression components. The third, and perhaps most challenging is marshalling the political, fiscal and civic commitment to carry out these initiatives.

Notes

- 1 The TTPS had the seeds for developing better knowledge systems about gangs and gang violence in the sense that specific individuals in the TTPS were well versed in these issues. For instance, we very quickly discovered a police sergeant in a high-crime community who was a virtual walking database of gang-related issues. We also found analysts who were able to successfully track gang members and gang offences. However, these were isolated individuals who did not have sufficient rank or authority to influence agency policy, so they toiled away quietly in their own corners of the agency. As a result of a general lack of capacity, during the time of our research, the TTPS could never *reliably* provide basic and vital information such as the share of homicides that were gang-related or gang-motivated.
- 2 Several population estimates for Trinidad and Tobago are available. The national homicide rate varies according to which population estimate is selected as the denominator. The population estimates we use in this paper are derived from the individual-level census data file provided to us by the Central Statistical Office.
- 3 The first round of data collection yielded thirty-nine returned instruments. Due to the lower than desired response rate, senior TTPS officials recommended that we hold in-person meetings with all selected respondents to increase the response rate. These meetings were held over a one-week period in May 2006 until a respondent from each station district had completed the survey instrument. This strategy resulted in a response rate of 100 per cent (n=66).
- 4 We reviewed these data during regularly scheduled meetings with Besson Street CID officers. At these meetings, we provided CID officers with printouts containing basic descriptive information on homicides that occurred within the district from 1 January 2005 through 26 January 2006. For each homicide, the printouts contained the case ID number, the victim's name, the date of the homicide and a short narrative describing the circumstances of the homicide. When we met with the officers, we

discussed each homicide incident and determined whether the suspect or victim was a gang member and, if so, the nature of their gang affiliation.

- 5 At the time, the TTPS had not established a formal method for documenting persons as gang members; however, Besson Street intelligence officers were using a number of processes based on local custom and knowledge to identify and document gang members. The first step involved in identifying an individual as a gang member is observing his or her affiliations and activities with known gang members or gang leaders. Observed affiliation can take place in a number of different ways. For example, the individual could be (a) an employee working on a job site run by a known gang leader, (b) a neighbourhood cab driver regularly used by gang members, (c) a roommate of a known gang member, (d) a spouse, girlfriend or partner of a known gang member, (e) a close family member of a known gang member, (f) a person who regularly associates with a gang member or leader, (g) a person who arrives at the station on behalf of any gang member who has been arrested, (h) a person who arrives at the station at the instruction of the court for the purpose of having his "whereabouts" book signed by an officer, or (i) a person who shows up in court to support any gang member. Following the observation of an individual affiliating with a gang member or leader, Besson Street gang intelligence officers determine where the individual lives or routinely spends time. If the individual lives or spends a substantial amount of time in the same area that their associate claims as its territory, the intelligence officer interviews the individual to make a final determination of gang membership. During the interview, intelligence officers question the individual about their friendship networks and gang affiliation to make a final assessment of whether or not the individual is a gang member. Note that at the time of our work, gang members in Trinidad and Tobago did not tend to be secretive or deceptive about their gang affiliation.
- 6 Our time in the Caribbean suggests that although the term "hot spots" is used widely, that usage is not consistent with the way criminologists use the term. In the Caribbean, the term is often used to refer to entire communities, cities or police jurisdictions. Sherman (1995, 36) defines hot spots as "small places in which the occurrence of crime is so frequent that it is highly predictable, at least over a 1-year period." Hot spots can vary in size from an individual address or street corner to a street block or a whole neighbourhood, but in general hot spots are small.

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