



COAV

Children in Organised Armed Violence

Corner and Area Gangs of inner-city Jamaica

This report is part of an international research project on children and youth in organised armed violence (COAV) coordinated by Viva Rio, ISER (Instituto de Estudos da Religião) and IANSA (International Action Network on Small Arms). The study presents contextual comparisons of organised armed groups, and the involvement of children and youth within them, in ten countries across four continents. The history, structure and functioning of the groups themselves are discussed, as are the motivations, desires and day-to-day realities of their child and youth members, as well as the common threads in public policy used to deal with the problem. In so doing, the study is a starting point for the much needed discussion of a situation that is too often addressed by state force and repression.

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This chapter focuses on community-based territorial groups in poor areas of Kingston and Spanish Town, known as area gangs, which have their roots in the political patronage and political violence that characterised Jamaican electoral politics in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, but which have increasingly become involved in criminal activity. Child and youth involvement in corner gangs, less organised and smaller armed groupings often involved in street crime, is also investigated. The report is divided into three parts. Part One gives a contextualised summary of these groups. Part Two takes a closer look at the human face of this phenomenon, with profiles of individuals involved. Part Three examines possible solutions to the problem, with an evaluation of relevant social programmes and policies.

Introduction

The history of organised armed violence in Jamaica is linked to the violent political conflict that has taken place periodically on the island since the late 1960s. However, the roots of organised violence in Jamaica can be traced back to the heated electoral disputes of the late 1940s between politicians Norman Manley (founder of the People's National Party) and Alexander Bustamante (founder of the Jamaica Labour Party). "There is a clear sense in which the violence of the late 1960s flourished so rapidly because there was a history of inter-party violence."¹

The division of inner-city neighbourhoods according to political allegiance occurred in the 1940s and 1950s, with party supporters choosing to live together in certain sections (yards) and rival party supporters forced out of others. This segregation of certain areas occurred some twenty years before the creation of politically controlled housing schemes². The growth of these divided, garrison communities in Kingston, such as Craig Town, Tivoli Gardens and others, has been one of the key factors in the development of organised violence in Jamaica and has "fostered the escalation of political violence and nurtured the growth of gun and drug crime."³

In Jamaica violence has taken on different forms: political violence, drug-related violence and domestic violence. As Harriott points out, the problem of violent crime has been a major issue in Jamaica since the mid-1960s, as reflected in the tough-on-crime policies of the 1970s. Between 1960 and 1976, illegal possession of guns rose from 8 per 100,000 to 90 per 100,000 inhabitants⁴.

Area	'60	'61	'62	'63	'64	'65	'66	'67	'68	'69	'70	'71	'72	'73	'74	'75	'76
Urban	8	10	9	9	6	6	17	16	16	17	25	39	34	30	30	42	90
Rural	1	2	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	7	10	6	6	4	7	27

Source: Lang, 1991

¹ Harriott, A (2003) Understanding Crime in Jamaica: New Challenges for Public Policy. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Lang, P (1991) Identifying Crime Correlates in a Developing Society: A Study of Socio-Economic Demographic Contributions to Crime in Jamaica, 1950 – 1984. New York: Publishing Inc.

Table 2. Annual Increases in Shooting with Intent & Age Cohort 14 – 24 (% of pop)		
Years	Shooting with Intent	Age cohort 14 – 24 (% of pop)
1966	3	19
1967	11	19.4
1968	14	19.5
1969	11	19.4
1970	27	18.8
1972	35	18.4
1973	31	19.3
1974	35	19.2
1975	47	20
1976	55	21
1977	81	21.9
1978	41	25.5
1979	105	23
1980	63	23.6
1981	63	24.1
1982	43	22.2
1983	49	25.7
1984	58	28.3

Source: Lang, 1991

By 1977, Jamaica had departed from the traditional pattern of crime of preceding years, with violent crime overtaking property crime. Thereafter, a rapid escalation in political and ordinary criminal violence occurred,⁵ culminating in a homicide rate of 41 per 100,000 in 1980. In response to the escalating violence, a state of emergency was declared, the powers of the police were extended and the military took on a policing role.⁶

In the late 1960s and through the 1980s, many politicians and enforcers or *area dons*⁷ in Central and West Kingston were mutually dependent on one another. Enforcers and *area dons* ensured party loyalty in inner-city areas and politicians depended on them to deliver key votes. *Area dons* in return depended on the politicians for patronage, such as jobs via public works programmes and public housing. This relationship has been well documented. “The weapons of the political violence of the 1970s and 1980s were guns. The guns were being issued in 1980 by none other than the politicians.”⁸

While political patronage does still exist, most gang-related violence is not *primarily* political. Although politics continue to play an important role in community identity and local conflicts,⁹ there has been a growth in organised crime tied to the drug trade and activities such as protection and extortion, frequent gang warfare and “new social power and enhanced political influence of some of the major crime networks.”¹⁰

⁵ Harriott, A (1996) “The Changing Social Organization of Crime and Criminals in Jamaica”, *Caribbean Quarterly* 42, nos. 2-3

⁶ Harriott, A (2003) *Understanding Crime in Jamaica: New Challenges for Public Policy*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press

⁷ *Area dons* are gang and/or neighborhood leaders. See ‘Command Structure’ below for more information regarding *area dons*.

⁸ Horace, L (1996) *They Cry ‘Respect!’: Urban Violence and Poverty in Jamaica*. Kingston: University of the West Indies.

⁹ In Craig Town, interviewed young men said they would beat any resident other than senior citizens found to be voting for the JLP.

¹⁰ Harriott, A (2003) *Understanding Crime in Jamaica: New Challenges for Public Policy*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press

The shift in the nature of violence may explain the relatively peaceful 2002 parliamentary elections, which were followed by a sudden increase in homicides. As Horace Levy of the University of the West Indies, Mona, explained in interview: "Overt political violence has gone down since 2002. It is not motivated by politics as much as before, and there is not as much egging on by the politicians, such as in 1997 when a politician was caught handing out guns."

The role of the don has also changed. In the past dons were community leaders who reported to the local political directorate and who controlled a body of soldiers; today the central command structure linking dons and politicians has largely broken down.¹¹ Dr. Kingsley-Stewart of the University of the West Indies explains this change: "In the past gangs were at the beck and call of politicians. The change came as gangs analysed what politicians did to get control. Gangs set up a mechanism that allows them to be independent and no longer totally dependent on the power structure."

There has been a proliferation of *corner* gangs, *corner* dons¹¹ and community gangs that are not as subservient to the political system as they once were. "One reason for the *area* dons loss of influence is that he is no longer the sole source of guns. The easy availability and the large number of guns in the inner-city seems to be an important factor in the upsurge of gangs and dons and the appearance of a quite different climate of violence."¹²

Politically-related violence is considered to have decreased since 2002. The homicide rate peaked at 43 per 100,000 in 2001 when there were 124 murders island-wide in the month of September. Harriott has pointed out that the 2001 homicide rate was largely due to non-political violence.¹³ However, many inner-city residents believe that today's violence can be traced to the political violence of the 70s and 80s. By the beginning of February 2004, 92 murders had already been recorded in Jamaica.¹⁴

Methodology

Targeted interviews and group discussions were carried out in the communities of Craig Town (part of the larger community of Jones Town), August Town and at the Hilltop Correctional Centre. Interviews and discussions were conducted on the street or in public areas as well as in private. Due to the complex nature of research and the limited time involved, it was not possible to reach as many youth and community members as had been hoped. A serious limitation to the research was the unfamiliarity on the part of the primary researcher with Jamaican Patois.

August Town focused interviews were held with two adults who were involved in gangs as children and adolescents, a community/*area* gang leader from the Hermitage section of August Town, a female leader of the Jungle Trails gang from August Town, a 22 year-old *corner* gang member and a 22 year-old community resident. Four juveniles 15 to 18 years old who were involved in gangs and detained at the Hilltop Juvenile Correctional Centre were also interviewed.

In addition, interviews were conducted with four academics and/or graduate students from the University of the West Indies, Mona, who have worked with children and youth involved in organised armed violence (results were also discussed with experts as the research took place), one police officer in August Town, and with three community leaders and activists from Craig Town, August Town and Spanish Town. Several attempts were made to interview children and youth in Spanish Town, but due to the ongoing violence there, it was not possible.

¹¹ Horace, L (1996) *They Cry 'Respect'!: Urban Violence and Poverty in Jamaica*. Kingston: University of the West Indies.

¹² See 'Involved Actors' for an explanation of the difference between *area* gang and dons and *corner* gangs and dons.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Harriott, A (2003) *Understanding Crime in Jamaica: New Challenges for Public Policy*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press.

I. CONTEXTUALISED SUMMARY OF COAV

Actors Involved

When discussing gangs and violence in Jamaica it is important to distinguish between *area* gangs (and *area* dons) and *corner* gangs (and *corner* dons). *Area* gangs include those gangs that dominate entire communities or neighbourhoods. Many are well-established and have their roots in the political patronage and political violence that characterised Jamaican electoral politics in the 1960s, 70s and 80s.

As political patronage has decreased or ceased these gangs are increasingly less subservient to political leaders and more involved in forms of organised crime including extortion, protection and the drug trade. "What happens out in Spanish Town is about the turf, collecting the extortion from the taxi men" (Spanish Town high school principal interviewed in the newspaper *The Gleaner*).¹⁵

Gang violence in Jamaica has always been tied to disputes over territory and resources. Party allegiance was a key factor in gaining access to those resources, and recent violence in communities such as Spanish Town suggests that while it is now less important, it continues to influence violence. According to Horace Levy, "After the Jamaica Labour Party swept local elections island-wide, gangs and communities with ties to the JLP feel that they should be getting a bigger piece of the pie. One Order [a Spanish Town *area* gang tied to the JLP] is trying to carve out control of extortion."

Corner gangs and *corner* dons are more informal gangs that may not be connected to political patronage and violence. *Corner* gangs and dons may exist in communities that are dominated by *area* gangs and dons. Although *corner* gangs or dons may never have participated in the forms of political patronage seen in the 1970s and 1980s, as inner-city community residents they are likely to identify with and defend the party dominant in the community. *Corner* gangs or *corner* dons that do engage in criminal activity should not be confused with crews or peer groups, which may consist of young boys and men who hang out on corners or in specific areas who are not involved in criminal activity (other than "ganja"¹⁶ smoking or dealing).

It is important to note the somewhat fluid relationship between gangs and other forms of organised violence in the community. In interviews conducted in Craig Town, residents and community leaders distinguished between "politics-war" (election time violence) and "turf-war" (inter community disputes). While "politics-war" always involved rival communities each supporting different parties, "turf-war" could involve two communities that support the same party.

Interviewees stated that at times of political or turf conflict, the community as a whole was involved in the violence, as either perpetrators or victims. At these times, several young men who did not identify with a particular *area* or *corner* gang, and who said that they did not take part in violence at other times, said that they had used and would use violence to defend their community and that guns were widely available at such times.

Gangs active in West Kingston include the Shower Posse, Spanglas, Fatherless Crew (made up of fatherless youth) and "lock di city." Gangs active in Spanish Town include One Order and Klans. Jungle Trails is a *corner* gang active in August Town. A community worker in Craig Town has suggested that there may be as many as 6,000 – 10,000 active gang members in the Kingston metro area.

¹⁵ *The Gleaner*, February 5, 2004: "35 days, 92 killed."

¹⁶ Taxi men refers to cab companies and/or cab drivers.

Command Structure

Dons: Key to the history of organised armed violence in Jamaica is the role of the “don.” Dons may refer both to strongmen who exercise control over a community and/or the *area* gang as well as *corner* dons, who lead *corner* gangs.

The mutually beneficial relationship that developed during the latter half of the last century between some *area* dons or community strongmen and some politicians has already been described above. “Each set of men, or ‘military crop,’ was charged with the defence of its own area and answered to a single leader, or to a use a later term, ‘don,’ who reported to the political directorate. The don exercised a firm discipline over his soldiers; and this extended not only to matters bearing directly on the conflict with a rival community, but also, as a natural consequence, to disputes and acts of indiscipline internal to his area.”¹⁷

The don, as community and/or gang leader, is ultimately responsible for enforcing discipline within the community, as residents turn to the don or gang for justice. When crimes are carried out within one’s own community, “dons...enforc[e] a discipline which includ[e] beating or execution, as considered to be warranted by the crime.”¹⁸ However, residents in both Craig Town and in August Town said that the type of disciplinary action to be carried out was not always decided on by the don/leader. Community residents would meet and decide on punishment. “If there is a problem then we take care of it. We’ll only go to [the community ‘leader’] with big problems.”

The difference between ‘dons’ and ‘community leaders’ is at times nebulous. In Craig Town, the man identified as the community leader was not called a don and does not consider himself to be a don. He clearly exercised control over the community and made key decisions, has legitimate business enterprises and has run for a PNP seat in an area other than the community he heads. Residents and community leaders claim that he is not involved in illegal activities such as extortion or the drug trade. A community activist said that his relationship with community gunmen “depends on the circumstances.”

In August Town, the don/community leader for Hermitage has contributed to the truce negotiated with other areas in August Town and can now walk freely through the broader community. During research for this report, he stopped and chatted with a well-known female member of the Jungle Trails *corner* gang (which supports the PNP) in a PNP neighbourhood. He is active in peace and conflict resolution activities held by the Sports and Community Development Foundation. He claimed that no extortion occurs in his area.

Soldiers: At various times in the research participants spoke of “soldiers” or “gunmen.” However, the role of soldiers is not always clear. In some cases, soldiers in political and/or turf violence may be “gang” members who are otherwise active in criminal activities, members of the community who are “gunnin” as well as older boys and young and older men from the community who are not otherwise involved in gang/criminal activity on a regular basis, but consider it their duty to defend the community at times of conflict. One young man said that he had first shot off a gun at age 19 in a war, in self-defense. He did not consider himself to be a soldier or a gang member.

¹⁷ Ganja is slang for marijuana

¹⁸ Horace, L (1996) *They Cry ‘Respect!’: Urban Violence and Poverty in Jamaica*. Kingston: University of the West Indies.

In one community, armed lookouts or “soldiers” were observed (they would not agree to an interview). According to one young man interviewed, “if you wanna be a soldier you can be a soldier. You adopt dem ting. People just grow in da system. You know your turf and you grow up a soldier.”

The age at which youth may become soldiers varies. Claudette Richardson-Pious of the NGO Children First said, “I remember a discussion with one don saying that 17 is a big man now. At 16 or 17 they are involved. Youth interviewed said that there are cases of boys as young as 14 being involved, but most said that would not be the norm.” Richardson-Pious went on to say that she is now seeing 14 year-olds involved, as gun carriers or look-outs.

According to one group of young residents, soldiers do not normally receive a regular salary for involvement, but access to “spoils.”

Relations with the Community

Relations of the actors involved in organised armed violence with the community vary according to the community and the type of armed group found within the community. It should be pointed out that in the course of the study, the “community” and the “organisation” or “local gang” were sometimes referred to inter-changeably.

The following is an excerpt from the research findings of the World Bank/UWI study on urban poverty and violence: “Whatever the acts of terror against the rival community, or the illegal acts against outside businesses or individuals, the rule was not to terrorise the people of your own community...Often as a result, the dons and other lesser Robin Hood gunmen...were protected by the community from the strict arm of the law.”¹⁹

The don and the *area* gang may be responsible for maintaining order within the community and enforcing rules, as pointed out by residents and community leaders. While certain types of criminal activity may be allowed outside of the community, those criminal acts might not be tolerated within the community, and could meet with severe punishment. A community leader from Craig Town said that “criminal activity happens outside. Like any community, there are certain things that are taboo, the pressure against them happening outside is less...If someone from the community is involved, the consequences are severe if it is inside the community.”

During a group interview with young men in Craig Town, they drew a circle representing the neighbourhood, saying that it is PNP. Here “you must follow the rules, not disrespect the community.” They then drew a line for the main road separating the community from rival JLP areas, calling it the “free place” where certain acts would be tolerated.

In August Town, residents and community leaders spoke of community justice or “kangaroo court justice.” “Residents don’t have much faith in the justice system” and turn to the gangs or dons for justice. One young man said that “people gettin’ beatings for rape [and] thievery from gangsters, *corner* gangs [and] guys who are runnin’ the place. They don’t want a thief or rapist in the community.” A group of youth from August Town said punishments for such offences could include beatings and torture by electric shock.

Richardson-Pious of Children First in Spanish Town said on her organisation’s relationship with dons, “You have to negotiate with the dons, so that they don’t use the children. We have said to the gangs, ‘ease off the children.’ The day before gun violence we were warned, told to close and send the children home.” However, the organisation’s relationship with *corner* gangs and dons might be more difficult: “We should have moved to a new location in Duncan’s Pen, but there are too many corners and dons in that area...you are not sure who to talk to.”

¹⁹ Ibid

Relations with the community may be affected by “turf war” (as opposed to “politics war”). “Turf war is over extortion. Turf war is dangerous. Politics war is not dangerous, you know where to go” said one young man. This is backed up by interviews published in the World Bank/UWI study, “This violence is worse than 1980...then there was only one enemy.”²⁰

Based on discussions and observations, overall relations between community members and community leaders or dons in Craig Town and in August Town seemed positive. In the case of August Town this could be the result of the relative peace that has been negotiated since 1997 and the work of community organisations such as the August Town Sports and Community Development Foundation, and efforts such as the Peace Management Initiative (a government conflict resolution initiative). In the case of Craig Town, this could be the result of the presence of a benefactor who is seen to provide for the community. However, tensions may arise if the benefactor is felt to have ignored the community.

In communities where violence is ongoing, and where there are *area* gangs and *corner* gangs more openly involved in armed violence and organised crime, relations with the community may be more overtly governed by fear and repression. Said Richardson-Pious, “You must keep in mind that there is a taboo on talking. To be an informer is the end of you.” In Craig Town and August Town, residents also said that “informers” would not be tolerated.

Role of the State

The role of the state in past political violence has already been touched on. In 1975, an estimated 20-25,000 persons turned out for the funeral of “political gunman” Burrey Boy. Commenting on this turnout, Jamaican academic Obika Gray said the numbers demonstrated “the unmistakable social power that members of the political underworld had come to exercise in national politics.”²¹

As stated by journalist Ian Boyne in *The Gleaner*, “The deadly alliance formed between politicians from the two major political parties and criminals has destabilised the country to the extent that politicians are now powerless in the dangerous game they foisted on society...As the Jamaican economy comes under pressure, so too does the contents of the ‘pork barrel’ resulting in fierce battles for the political spoils.”

Jamaica’s two political parties and their leaders have officially stated that they seek to end political tribalism, with both parties signing the report of the National Committee on Crime and Violence which stated that “strengthening the moral authority of the country’s elected officials to demonstrate the political will in leading the fight against crime and violence are central to the overall recommendations of the Committee.”²²

Despite the commitment by leading politicians to reform, the partisan distribution of work and other ‘scare benefits’ continues to some degree, as exemplified by the political murders over job distribution in Temple Hall in 2002. The recent violent events in Spanish Town have also been identified by academics and activists (such as Horace Levy during an interview for this study) as conflict over “spoils” following the gains by the JLP in island-wide regional elections. An adolescent detainee at the Hilltop Juvenile Correctional Centre pointed out that although it is the politician who distributes work in the community, it is the don who decides who gets the work.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Ian Boyne in *The Gleaner*, February 8, 2004: “De-linking Politics and Crime”

The relations with state security forces vary according to community. In Craig Town, police and soldiers were observed driving through the community and although there is a police station at an entrance to the neighbourhood, police were not seen patrolling on foot during field-work. A community activist said that “the police are seen as key partners;” recently, the relationship had been less strong, however. In certain cases, the community asks the police to go into the community to resolve problems. In interviews and discussions with local youth, they spoke out against police harassment. One gang involved youth at Hilltop said, “some police wi frame yu and plant tings pon yu when dem ketch yu because dem know seh yu a bad man, mi si dat fi mi self.”²³

In Spanish Town, Richardson-Pious of Children First said that when she first began work in the community, reports of police abuse against children were rife. However, said Pious, “we have done a lot of work with the police and improved community relations.”

A key component of the peace negotiations and conflict resolution efforts that have occurred in August Town has been improved community-police relations. Inspector Budhoo of the August Town Constabulary said, “when I came here in 1998 the relationship between the police and the public was terrible. The public resented me, the police not reaching out to the people – the citizens were viewed as gunmen...This is proactive policing where we try and get to know everyone in the community.”

Police have, said the inspector, divided August Town into four zones with the objective of knowing each citizen and each potential gunman. “When a gunman know you know everybody, the likelihood of committing a crime decreases...the bottom line is that they are not going to give up their guns. But we are trying to educate them not to use them, to use other means such as dialogue...[however] there are people in the corporation that are resistant. The police are a major obstacle for community policing as [some] elements have not bought into it.”

Despite positive community policing in areas such as August Town, “kangaroo court justice” is prevalent in gang dominated inner-city areas. One female gang leader said, “We have our own justice, the state does not provide justice. That is one of the things that gives rise to gangs – inadequate justice.”

Illegal and Legal Commerce Activity

As has been pointed out, *area* gangs have traditionally benefited from their relationship with local politicians, in terms of control over resources such as jobs and housing. More and more, according to those interviewed and literature cited, *area* gangs are also involved in conflict over control over resources that come from other criminal activities: the drug trade (in areas such as Tivoli, Greenwich Farms), extortion and the protection racket.

According to Inspector Budhoo of the August Town Constabulary, “Jamaica is a transshipment point for drugs, not a drug producer or user” [note that ganja or marijuana is not generally referred to as a drug]. In interview, Levy said that “hard drugs are not widespread. A lot of young people tried them out and rejected them. Ganja is not considered a drug, but something that binds them...[it is] generally thought that Tivoli is a base for hard drugs, or the police seem to think that.”

In Craig Town, community residents said that very few residents used crack or cocaine and that its trade would not be allowed. According to one young man, 65% of youths are in “‘robbin’ line, gun man, knife man” (rob, or use a gun or knife for some kind of economic gain). In Craig Town, there are a few corner shops and bars and a recording studio owned by the community leader, who is a promoter for a major dancehall artist.

²³ The Gleaner, February 8, 2004: “Partisan Politics and Job Allocation.”

In August Town, a member of the Jungle Trails *corner* gang said that extortion is not a problem in the community. A community activist said that in August Town, “coke and crack are not an issue.”

Claudette Richardson-Pious commented on the emphasis amongst gang members on making money and gaining respect: “It is about money. Being in charge. Once you have a gun you are a big man.” Interviewees consistently pointed out that a lack of opportunity and unemployment is key to young people’s involvement in gangs. “The chief problems for the people of the communities studied, by their own account, are the violence and crime combination, and unemployment.”²⁴ Said Richardson-Pious: “they [local youth] tell us that what is important...is to ‘be somebody.’ They say that, ‘what else can they do?’ They see their out as being a DJ or a criminal.”

Evidence of the importance of extortion and the continuity of patronage involving dons and *area* gangs is the fact that “the homicide rate in Kingston has fallen by 23%, and homicides are down in West Kingston due to a truce between Dudus, the Tivoli don (JLP) and Zekes from Matthews Lane (PNP). Between them they have divided up downtown Kingston and the extortion racket. The truce came about through their both being granted a contract to provide security at Kingston Public Hospital” (interview with Horace Levy).

Armed Confrontation

Political violence is normally between two or more rival communities, each supporting either the PNP or the JLP, and occurs during the run up to, during, or directly after elections. Turf wars are conflicts between two or more communities that may come about over territorial or leadership disputes (the desire to establish oneself as a don in a particular community) and disputes over extortion or control of other illegal activities. There are also conflicts that arise over perceived offences made by one community to another. Youths interviewed said that this may include retaliation for rape, robbery and so on.

Some killings may be accepted as retaliatory acts. “Recently, lower Trench Town people killed two or three from Denham Town (a Tivoli ally) but there was no retaliation. Tivoli people said that the killings were accepted as retaliation for the killings of youth [from Trench Town] during the 1992 elections that had not yet been avenged” (interview with Horace Levy).

Confrontations may occur with the police or the army during ‘politics’ or ‘turf’ war or when police officers are seen as being too heavy-handed (as may have been the case in Denham Town following the shooting of a young boy.²⁵ Sergeant David White, Police Federation chairman, told the newspaper *The Gleaner* that zinc fence communities²⁶ are “too dangerous for the police...These places depict where persons are at war. We were trained as peacemakers, we are not soldiers.”²⁷

With the new sources of income, often earned abroad or sent from relatives abroad, and with the drug trade, guns became more widely available on the island. “But it was the politicians who first issued guns on a wide scale, particularly in and around 1980. And many link the decline in discipline specifically to the introduction of the gun and therefore to politics, its initial source.”²⁸

²⁴ Some police will frame you by planting illegal substances on you because they know that you are a criminal. I have seen that with my own eyes.

²⁵ Horace, L (1996) *They Cry ‘Respect’!: Urban Violence and Poverty in Jamaica*. Kingston: University of the West Indies.

²⁶ *Daily Observer* February 14, 2004: “Denham Town Explodes.”

²⁷ So-called due to the use of zinc as fencing in inner-city areas.

²⁸ *The Gleaner* February 4, 2004: “Move to end ‘zinc fence patrols.’”

In interviews and discussions with youths in the communities and with a police inspector, they were able to name the following types of guns (or gun manufacturers) as available: Taurus, AK-47, Glocks, Browning, M9s. According to the inspector, it was not possible for a gang member to openly carry an AK-47 in the community of August Town. Guns are not out in the open, but are readily available when need be. During one group interview a man lifted up his shirt and showed off his gun. In discussions, boys as young as 16 quickly identified types of guns shown in photographs of youth in the drug trade in Rio de Janeiro, although they said that they had not used a gun.

Child and Youth Involvement

Residents, activists, community leaders/dons and academics all agreed that younger children and youths are becoming involved in organised armed violence in Jamaica. Most spoke of an earlier time, perhaps in the 70s and 80s, when violence was carried out by “bad men” and “big men” who tended to not involve children and youth. However, there was not consistent agreement at what age child and youth involvement may occur and what might be considered an “acceptable” age by some actors for children/youth to become involved. “Guns are easily available today and are present in large numbers in the hands of youth in their teens, who use them with abandon and recognise no leader but a sub-area or a *corner* don or gang.”²⁹

At the same time, in two of the communities studied, there are clear indications that early child/adolescent involvement in gang violence is not tolerated by the community or the *area* leaders/dons/gangs. However, those children may be involved in *corner* or hang-out gangs where they exist. Children are partially socialised to become involved through growing up in a gang environment and early exposure to gangs and guns. “People just grow in da system. You live what you learn, generation after generation.” A police inspector interviewed refers to a ghetto culture that encourages child and youth involvement and that “you grow up in a community and you follow.”

In discussions with children and youth in both Craig Town and August Town, the book *Children of the Drug Trade: A Case Study of Children in Organised Armed Violence in Rio de Janeiro*³⁰ was passed around. The reactions to the photos of youth as young as 12 or 13 holding guns is one of awe and fascination, and it is clear that involvement at such an early age is not typical in the community. Older youths said that they would not want a 12 year old involved and that they would prevent their involvement. Several said that 14 is “man nuff.”

An August Town community activist mentioned “a shift in age, you see more early teens involved in gangs through the corners, just hanging-out. They exert their manhood through certain types of behaviour. First through how you articulate yourself, through dancehall and the need to command respect, the number of girls, kids fathered and guns owned.”

During interview, Dr. Kingsley Stewart of the University of the West Indies commented that organised extortion and drug trafficking “need[s] man power [...and] organised crime needs soldiers...and the children see their chance for upward mobility.” He estimates that children as young as 12 years old may be used to carry weapons and that adolescents are using guns by 14 or 15 years. “There is increased access to guns. In the 70s older people would never allow a 12 or 13 year-old to be armed.” Said Richardson-Pious, “we are now seeing 14 year-olds that are involved. Sometimes they are recruited to transport or be look-outs, it is from this early involvement that they are recruited.”

²⁹ Horace, L (1996) *They Cry ‘Respect’!: Urban Violence and Poverty in Jamaica*. Kingston: University of the West Indies.

³⁰ Dowdney, L. T., “*Children of the Drug Trade: A Case Study of Organised Armed Violence in Rio de Janeiro*”, Viva Rio / ISER, 7 Letras, Rio de Janeiro, 2003.

The following data shows a strong correlation between what interviewees assert: that children, adolescents and young men are actively involved in armed violence, and shifts in crime statistics, which show an increase in homicide rates related to gang activity and control over politically motivated homicides.

	1997	1993	1988	1983
Domestic	1.24 (31)	1.17 (29)	1.27 (30)	1.20 (27)*
Other inter-personal	0.95 (24)	4.49 (111)	3.22 (76)	4.30 (96)
Total individualised conflicts	2.19	5.66	4.49	5.50
Political	0.20 (4)	0.57 (14)	0.51 (12)	1.42 (32)
Gang rivalry/control	14.10 (340)	7.04 (174)	3.61 (85)	3.12 (70)
'Undetermined'**	10.90 (273)	6.35 (157)	3.43 (81)	3.75 (84)
Total inner-group conflict	25.2	14.00	6.55	8.29
Pursuant of other crimes	5.10 (129)	4.00 (99)	2.90 (69)	3.40 (78)
Other	8.61	2.64	3.66	1.51
Total population	41.1	26.3	17.6	18.7

Source: Harriott, A (2003) *Understanding Crime in Jamaica: New Challenges for Public Policy*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press.

* The first figure is rate: the number of incidents per 100,000 citizens. The second figure, in parentheses, represents the number of incidents.

** According to Harriott, these are mainly victims of organised crime-type assassinations, community border control, and internal garrison control and community justice.

As Table 2 clearly demonstrates, amongst all categories presented, murders caused by 'gang/rivalry control' and 'undetermined causes' (that according to Harriott are mostly linked to crime and organised violence) increased most substantially between 1983 and 1997.

A total of 2,892 persons were arrested for major offences in 2000. For all the offences listed as major crimes, the age group 20 – 25 accounted for the highest number (36.0 percent) of arrests, followed by the 26-30 age group (20.0 percent). The age group 16 – 19 followed with 19.5% of arrests.

A total of 649 major crimes were committed by youths 17 years and under in 2000. In 2000, 173 males and 30 females aged 10 – 19 were treated for gunshot wounds in Jamaican public hospitals, compared to 432 males and 49 females aged 20 – 29 (out of a total of 1,229 persons treated for gunshot wounds).³¹

³¹ Planning Institute of Jamaica, using data from the Ministry of Health.

I. COAV PROFILES

Personal Histories

A 27 year-old August Town former gang member was born in the community where he still lives with his family (mother and siblings) whom he considers poor. The family has what he describes as a cordial relationship. He completed secondary school. Another former gang member from August Town is 31 years old, and was also born in the community, where he still lives with his mother and siblings. He graduated from secondary school and is currently employed by a lighting and staging company.

One juvenile detained at the Hilltop Juvenile Correctional Centre from a Kingston inner-city community said that he and his mother witnessed his father killed by police. His father was a gunman and most of his brothers, one of whom is in prison, and his cousins are involved in criminal activity. He said that his father had as many as 20 children, two of whom were with his mother. Another juvenile detainee and gang member from the Portmore *area* near Kingston lived with his father and stepmother. His mother lives overseas. His friends at school are not involved in gang activity, and he said his role model is his older brother who “nuh watch nuh face” [doesn’t care about anyone or anything].

A 17 year-old juvenile detained at Hilltop from an inner-city Kingston neighbourhood lived with his mother and half brothers and sisters before detention. His father has emigrated and sends money home. He said that he rarely attended class and carried a gun to school, from which he was eventually expelled.

Involvement

An August Town former gang member joined a gang when he was 13 years old, and said that he was influenced by a friend. The group did not start out as a gang, but developed into a *corner* gang over time. He did not have a specific role, saying that, “I did not have any main function. We all angle guns, we all look out for each other’s security. We used to sell drugs but did not last long as we eat out the profit...I did not have any one function in the gang. I was not given any orders by anyone. Our gang was different. We were all bad man so no one give or take any order. Mi no tek no talk from no one. I was paid by what I earned. Every man for himself.”

Another former gang member from August Town joined a *corner* gang when he was 11 years old. “I joined a gang with bredren I grew up with and so we formed ourselves into a gang.” On his role, he said that “when guns were introduced into the gang I was in charge of ‘locking’ the guns, locking the gun in Jamaican terms means that I was responsible for the safe keeping of the guns...this function came with the introduction of the guns in the gang. The gang did not pay me, but when we go on a robbery we share up what was gained.”

An adolescent detained at Hilltop said that his father was a gunman and that his brothers and cousins also used guns. Another claimed that he found himself in bad company, getting involved in a gang that carried out robberies. He was eventually charged with illegal possession of a firearm and sent to Hilltop. A female gang leader said that she rose up in the ranks of the gang because of her leadership skills and her family connections within the gang. She also claimed that membership provided her with security; when she left the community she went with armed protection, as due to her political affiliations (PNP). She believed that other-party supporters were a potential threat to her safety.

Armed Violence

A gang-involved adolescent detained at Hilltop was detained after attempting to kill a young man over a perceived slight. He had previously tried to kill his stepfather with a homemade shot gun. A 17 year-old at Hilltop said that he and his friends would carry knives and ice picks to school in case they had to defend themselves or if they were involved in “war.” He noted that “wi mostly have gang war and dem ting deh mi never a tink, everything was negative, as somebody seh something mi did wan’ war, mi did ignorant and dark.”³²

In a discussion with a group of 14 to 16 year-olds, none said that they had handled a gun, although all had seen them and were able to identify guns in photos. In August Town, according to a 22 year-old man who said that he has friends who are involved in gangs, 14 year-olds would not be allowed to take part. “Won’t give a 14 year-old a gun – too risky [...] A 16 year-old, that depends. No one really is gonna ask your age. There are 16 year-olds involved, but not down this section.”

A former gang member from August Town said, “I used a gun. It belonged to my friend. It was a handgun, but sometimes we borrowed a sub-machine gun or rifle. I was 15-16 years old. I buy my own bullets and went in the bushes and set up targets and train myself. I also used it when defending my corner...No, I don’t remember shooting anybody...but I was arrested by the police and charged with possession of a firearm. Gun is nice, gun is protection. When you have it no guy can disrespect you.”

A former *corner* gang member was 17 when he first used a gun. “Yes, I used guns in the gang, [it] belonged to the leader of the gang. We had a 9mm handgun...I used guns such as [a] pump rifle and Mack 11 sub-machine guns.” Asked about his reasons for using a gun, he said it was “to defend our corner and to get girls” and he used guns “when we go on robbery, when we are defending our corner we also defend our party...we are PNP supporters.” He went on to say, “I have never been shot, but I have been shot at a number of times during the elections and when we are defending our corner...I have seen one of my friends shot and killed by the police. We were in a shoot out with some other guys and the police got involved and he was shot and killed.” On his attitude to guns now, he said that “I like guns is nice, it make me feel so powerful.”

The female gang leader interviewed said that, “Survival means that sometimes you have to kill somebody.” She had never killed anyone and had never used a gun, but had been involved in violence and said that she knew of one female gang member who owns an AK-47. Not long after this study was conducted, she was shot and killed by a member of the Jamaica Defence Force who was patrolling August Town after Hurricane Ivan had caused widespread damage on the island. The circumstances around the death are not entirely clear, but reports are that the victim was unarmed.

Future Perspectives

A one-time August Town gang member said that he left his gang “for a number of reasons. One, the gang can’t give me what I wanted. I get in too many troubles. Based on my expectations, [future perspectives] is not good.”

A member of the Jungle 12 *corner* gang said that the key problems in the community are, “hunger, vengeance/retaliation, conflict and unemployment/low economic status.” She goes on to say that, “to change, have to change social conditions of inner-cities. Better housing, plumbing, schools, economic conditions. Livin’ in one room, gotta take up a gun. There’s no other way. Persons hungry! You change the social conditions you affect people’s thinking, behaviour.”

³² In those times I wasn’t thinking, everything was negative, as someone attempted to talk to me I wanted to fight, I was ignorant and backward.

A juvenile detained at Hilltop and involved in a gang said that he wanted to put his past behind him and get into the Jamaican German Automobile School. Another Hilltop detainee and gang member from Kingston said that he planned to go to work and back to school but if “nutten nah gwaan” [if nothing happens] he will go back to crime. A similar statement was made by another Hilltop adolescent involved in gang activity, who said that he will “take up the gun again” if he is unable to study or work upon release.

I I. SOCIAL PROGRAMMES TARGETING COAV

While there are several important initiatives that seek to address the involvement of children and youth in organised armed violence in Jamaica, including the UWI government-supported Peace Management Initiative, three organisations stand out for their community-based work: the August Town Sports and Community Development Foundation, Children First of Spanish Town and the Craig Town Youth Organisation.

August Town Sports and Community Development Foundation

The August Town Sports and Community Development Foundation uses football to provide young people aged eight to 20 with the skills to avoid becoming involved in, or the means to leave behind, violence. Young boys and men participate in two football teams, as well as conflict resolution classes, human rights education and life skills building. The Foundation has helped to send young leaders, both men and women, to university and groups of community members for conflict resolution training in the US. Foundation leader Kenneth Wilson has been instrumental in the calling of a truce between rival areas and gangs in what was one of the city’s more violent communities as well as instituting community policing in the area.

The results of these efforts in August Town are encouraging. There has been a 50% decrease in murders and a 56% decrease in crime in the area since community policing began. While violence returned in 2001, escalating into ten political murders in 2002, the truce has since held, with no deaths recorded during recent local elections.

Children First

Formerly operated as the Save the Children (UK) Spanish Town Marginalised Youth Programme, Children First was transformed into an independent NGO and officially launched on June 17, 1997. The programme works with over 700 street children and potential street children aged three to 18 in the city of Spanish Town. Children First is an inclusive initiative that seeks to improve the lives of not only at-risk children but also their families; for example, parents have received help in how to supplement family income. Children benefit from skills training, life skills education including sexual and environmental education, and educational assistance including help with fees and other initiatives.

In the face of the recent problems involving armed violence in Spanish Town, Children First plans to focus on the connections between violence and boys and young men. “One of the things we are positioning ourselves to do this year is to do a major piece of work looking at violence and young men” said director Claudette Richardson-Pious. “In Spanish Town, violence has taken on a new dimension. We should look at how we socialise our men in the community.”

Craig Town Youth Organisation

The Craig Town Youth Organisation, established in 1989, has developed and utilised an integrated approach to community development and crime prevention in a community that has had one of the highest homicide rates in Jamaica. Programmes developed by the organisation include the Community Adult Remedial Education (CARE) Programme, a remedial education initiative benefiting mostly young men between the ages of 15 and 35 who are or were involved in criminal activities. The Craig Town Youth Organisation designed the programme with the support of the University of the West Indies, Mona, and delivers classes in Maths, English and Philosophy.

Recommendations

In interviews and group discussions, adolescents and youths involved in organised armed violence, community members and leaders listed the following causes for gang membership and youth involvement in violence in Jamaica: lack of money and employment opportunities; few educational opportunities; idleness (nothing to do); lack of community support and counselling; attraction of 'gangster lifestyle' and the influence of a popular culture glorifying violence; the need to prove one's 'manhood'; peer influence and pressure; and the desire to make one's mark as a 'bad man.'

The two organisations described above seek to provide the skills for children, adolescents and youth, particularly boys and men, to avoid becoming involved, or to end their involvement in, organised violence. At the same time, it is the responsibility of the Jamaican government to ensure that the effort to end organised armed violence in the country, and the involvement of the country's youth in it, and not be reduced to law enforcement and repressive policing measures. Efforts to institute community policing, as evidenced in August Town, must be supported, in addition to multi-sector initiatives that recognise the complexity of the issue by seeking to provide solutions that include employment and income generation, offer educational opportunities and teach the skills that enable young people to avoid violence. It is also up to the state to fully end the partisan distribution of work and other benefits—which reinforces the ties between some politicians and gang leaders—to eliminate the involvement of the state forces in human rights abuses that frequently target adolescents and youth from inner-city communities, and to ensure that justice is available for all.

*This chapter is dedicated to the memory of research participant and University of the West Indies social work student Sandra Sewell, shot and killed by the Jamaican army on September 19, 2004.