

A comparative study of adolescent gangs in the U.S. and Trinidad & Tobago

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Gangs and violence in the Caribbean

- Little research has examined gangs and/or violence in the Caribbean.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that these problems have grown significantly.
- No research has examined the relationship between community coviates and their relationship with gangs and/or violence.
- The Caribbean has little infrastructure to understand their gang and/or violence problems.

The present study

Examines similarities and differences among gang members in Trinidad and Tobago and one jurisdiction in the United States (Arizona) to understand the prevalence, nature, and seriousness of the gang problem in one developing and one developed nation.

1. The proportion of school youth involved in gangs,
2. The age individuals join a gang and the reasons they join a gang,
3. Differences between gang and non-gang members in terms of their experiences with delinquency, drug use, and victimization.
4. Difference in risk and protective factors for joining a gang.

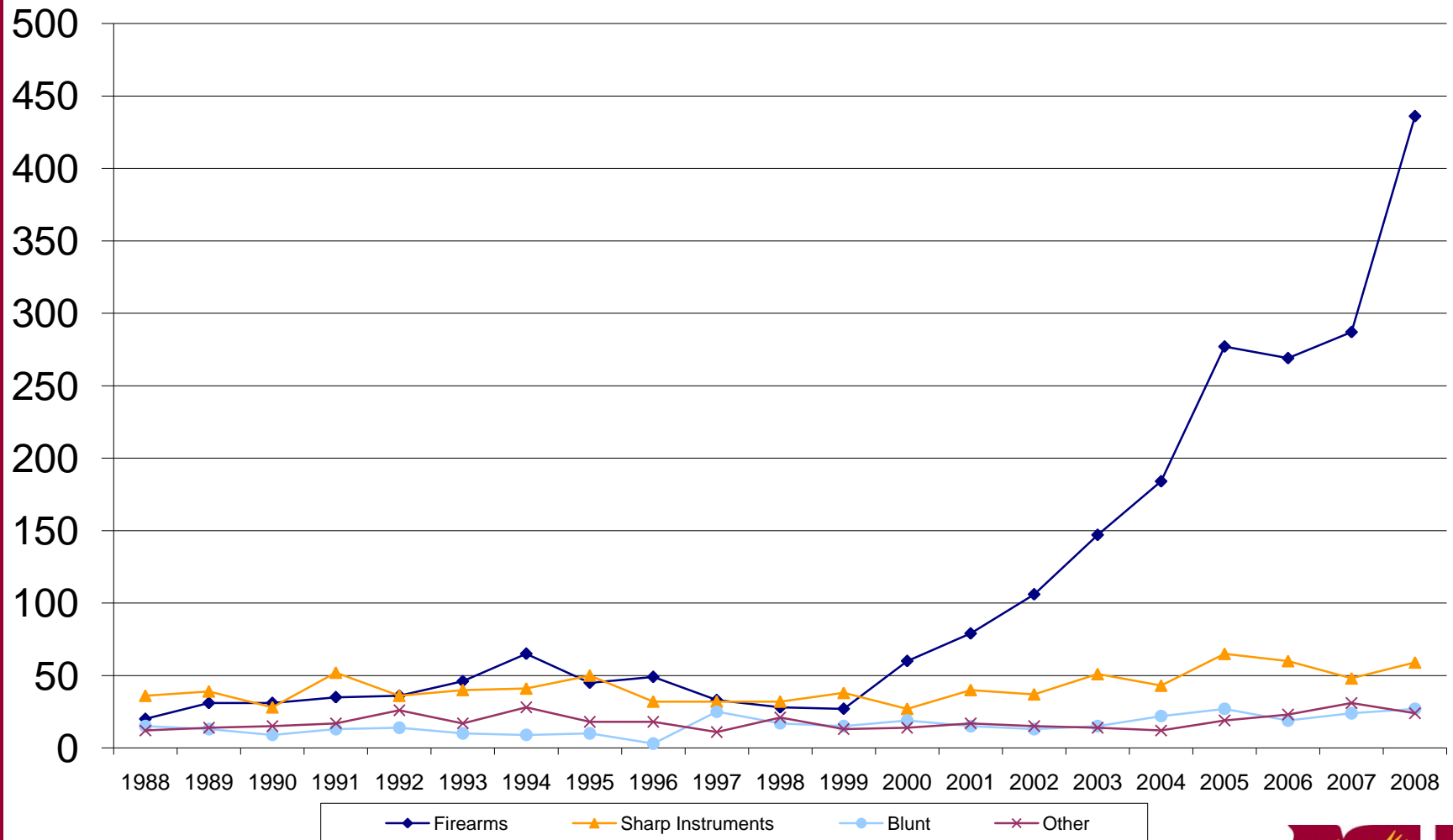
About T&T...

- Population 1.3 million
- East Indian 40.0%, African 37.5%, Afro-Indian 20.5%
- Roman Catholic 26.0%; Hindu 22.5%; Protestant 24.6%; Islam 5.8%; Shouter Baptist 5.4%; other Christian 10.7%
- Parliamentary democracy with two major political parties (PNM and UNC)
- Granted independence on August 31, 1962
- Major industry is petroleum (40% of GDP)

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Homicides by Weapon Type: 1988-2008



Data

1. Trinidad & Tobago Youth Survey
 - Adapted from the Social Development Research Group, Communities that Care and the Arizona Youth Survey
 - Surveyed approximately 2,300 students, Forms 4 thru 6.
 - 22 of 27 urban schools participated.
2. Arizona Youth Survey
 - Adapted from the Social Development Research Group & Communities that Care.
 - Administered to 8th, 10th, and 12 graders (we restricted sample to 8th and 10th grades)
 - Randomly selected within each county by school size, & school type. We restricted to urban schools.
 - Final sample includes 136 schools and 21,317 students.

Some of the complexities of cross-national research

- Common instrument 
- Common sampling frame 
- Common instrument administration 
- Common data cleaning and entry  / 
- Common analysis 

Demographic characteristics

USA

- 7.6% members
- About 40% of gang members are female.
- Gm's are more likely to be:
 - Black
 - Hispanic
 - Other

Trinidad & Tobago

- 12.5% members
- About 40% of gang members are female
- Gm's are older than non-gang members.
- Gm's in TT are older than USA
- No sig. difference between ethnic groups

Gang characteristics and reasons for joining

USA

- 90% have a name
- Gm's in US have more gm friends
- More likely to join for:
 - Protection
 - Other reasons

Trinidad & Tobago

- Two-thirds have a name
- Gm's in TT become involved in a gang later in life (about 6 months later)
- More likely to join for friendship

Self-reported delinquency and victimization

- Gm's in both nation's more likely to be involved in delinquency, drug use, & victimization
- Levels of violence similar across nations
- More involvement in property crime overall among US sample, but gang/non-gang-ratio is similar to TT
- More involvement in drug sales overall among US sample, but gang/non-gang-ratio is greater in TT
- Ratio for arrest is greater in the USA

Self-reported delinquency and victimization, Cont.

- More alcohol use overall among TT sample, but gang/non-gang-ratio is greater in USA
- More marijuana use overall among USA sample, but gang/non-gang-ratio is greater in TT
- Level of victimization similar across USA and TT

Risk factors associated with gang joining

- Community disorganization (USA)
- Perceived availability of handguns (TT)
- Academic failure (USA)
- Intention to use drugs (TT)
- Perceived risk of drug use (TT)
- Anti-social peers (USA)
- Sensation seeking (TT)

Protective factors for gang joining

- Social skills (TT)

Accumulation of risk and protective factors

- In both nations, the greater the # of risk factors the greater the likelihood of gang joining.
 - However, even those who report being at risk for 17 or more factors are not always reporting gang membership (less than 40% in both nations)
- In both nations, the greater the # of protective factors the less likely the respondent reports joining a gang.
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Conclusions

There are many similarities between nations:

- Female membership
- Gm's are more involved in delinquency and drug use
- Magnitude of difference between gm's and non-gm's did not vary for violence & victimization
- Risk & protective factors for gang membership

There are some differences between nations:

- Prevalence of gang membership
- Magnitude of difference between gm's and non-gm's did vary for property crime, drug use, etc.
- Reasons for joining
- Gang characteristics and age of involvement