Recent Gang Activity in Jamaican High Schools

by

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Abstract
This is a qualitative descriptive study to garner firsthand knowledge about whether students and school personnel perceive an increase in violence, gangs, and gang-related activities on high school campuses in the Jamaican parishes of Kingston, St. Andrew and St. Catherine. There were interviews of 46 high school personnel, 10 school resource officers and 12 focus groups with 10 to 12 students each in 27 schools. Participants were asked about any perceived influence of community gangs on school gangs and about their school's response to perceived school-based gang activity. The data were carefully analyzed both manually and with the aid of Atlas-ti. The findings reveal that significant changes have occurred in the corporate area high schools represented; however, the school gangs were apparently not formally related to the community gangs. Efforts to respond to school gang problems appear promising.

INTRODUCTION

School-related violence and gang activities are issues of immense concern in Jamaica. The country's Ministry of Education and Youth (MOEY) (2004) reported that between January and August 2004 there were 15 reported incidents of violence involving students. In 2006, 12 students were murdered on school campuses (Virtue, 2007). More recently, news stories have continued about gang activity in the island's cities. For example, there has been a much publicized ongoing feud between some St. George's College High School and Kingston College High School students whereby some have been stabbed (Francis, 2008). These incidents of violence and gang-related activities have contributed to the feeling that schools are no longer safe. In response the island's government has a renewed focus to develop solutions. Yet, there has been limited scientific research on the magnitude and type of gang-related violence in Jamaican high schools; much of what is known comes from the writings of journalists. Findings from this study should prove useful to the island's government in its crime fighting efforts which have profound economic implications given the island's dependence on foreign tourism.

This study examined the connection between males who are involved in school gangs and the level of violence on select high school campuses in three Jamaican parishes – Kingston, St. Andrew and St. Catherine given media reports of school gangs in these areas. The researchers further investigated whether there is

indeed a connection between school gangs and community gangs as the media suggest. Herein, gangs are conceptualized as a group of individuals working to unlawful or antisocial outcomes who identify themselves as a group, are identified by others as a group and who are of concern to both law enforcement and the communities in which they exist.

Jamaica is the largest English-speaking Caribbean island-nation. It is 150 miles (240 kilometers) long and 50 miles (85 kilometers) wide with Cuba as its closest neighbor, 90 miles to the north. Jamaica's population as of June 2007 was estimated to be 2,780,132 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007). The island has 14 parishes, with Kingston, the island's smallest parish geographically, as the capital parish. Sections of St. Andrew and St. Catherine are urban; most other parts are rural. The high schools that were the focus of this study were selected from across these three parishes.

Current Trends in School-related Gang Behaviors in Jamaica

In the past, violence in schools involved things such as "ragging", a sort of rite of passage (or mild hazing) of new students, or rival teams. Today, these benign acts have become sinister ("JTA says school," 2003). Crime data from 2003 to 2006 in Jamaica clearly show a consistent increase in all forms of reported school violence (Douglas, 2006). Media reports have found similarly (Brown, 2008). Such activities have included homicide, rape, assault on teachers and students, weapons confiscations, and other related incidents, burglaries, vandalism of school property (Henry, 2005) and the extortion of fellow students (Douglas, 2006). Indubitably, school violence appears substantially worse than decades ago, mirroring a surge in violence in the wider community.

Francis (2005) and Henry (2005) reported that a security survey that was conducted in schools as a part of the Safe Schools Program, during September and December of 2004, revealed that four illegal firearms and 465 offensive weapons, including knives, scissors, ice picks and half-machetes were found on students. These guns included two nine-millimeter pistols, one-38 revolver and one homemade gun. Heywood reported that more guns had been seized since then, but the police were still tallying the figures (Francis, 2005). Allegedly, these weapon-toting students were promoting the view that some students were at war and the schoolroom was the battlefield. More recently, anthropologist Herbert Gayle concluded from his study of 53 boys at one Jamaican school that school gangs are connected to political parties because they flaunt their colors – orange and green (Dunkley, 2008).

The Jamaican school gang problem reportedly includes juveniles from more wealthy areas (although the boys involved might not be wealthy themselves). More recent media reports described the emergence of an uptown schoolboy gang, known as the Lawless Crew. According to an article, entitled "Deadly uptown school gang: Cops hunt Lawless Crew from prominent institution" published by the *Jamaica Star* newspaper (2006), school gangs have created havoc in a number of urban communities in Jamaica. They "party, spend, and shoot to kill." Furthermore media personnel have reported that some Lawless Crew gang members are 16 to 19 years old and students at a reputable Kingston and St. Andrew high school ("Deadly uptown," 2006). Reports are that these trends have worsened. At least one student body has called on the government for improved security and there have been numerous community demands for safer schools.

In the late 1980s, Jamaica's gangs were more violent than ever and continued to spread to new locations on the island (McKinney, 1988). Although fairly isolated, gang activity in select schools and communities seemed to peak in the mid-1990s then decline by the late 1990s. The general literature on school gangs reports that some schools not only suffer from gang-related violence "spilling over" from the streets, but might themselves become centers of gang activities, in particular, recruitment and socializing (Arthur & Erickson, 1992; Bodinger-de Uriarte, 1993). Thereafter, gangs can spread from school to school as students transfer from gang-impacted schools to gang-free schools. How much this might have happened in Jamaican schools is unclear.

The perception of gangs as omnipotent has frequently led school administrators, either to react harshly with overly punitive and restrictive actions or to be so intimidated that they refrain from taking action (Ingersoll, 1982, Miller, 1982, 1992). Ingersoll argued that in an effort to protect the image of their schools, some school personnel fail to report gang activities on their campuses. Nevertheless, there are data on the nature and scope of youth violence, but the extent to which youth gang behavior directly affects violence in schools is not quite evident in either the United States or Jamaica.

The Origin of Gangs in Jamaica

Recorded history of gangs in Jamaica dates back to the Buccaneers in the 17th century. Much later, following Jamaica's independence from Britain in 1962, the inner city areas in Kingston and St. Andrew gave birth to a number of modern day gangs. Jamaican sociologist Carl Stone described early gang members post-1962 as petty criminals fighting over turf (Ehrenreich, 1999). Eventually, street gangs aligned themselves with the island's two main political parties, the Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) and the Peoples' National Party (PNP) and attempted to craft political strongholds for their party. Increasingly in the 1980s they participated in illicit drug trafficking (Bohning, 1992). According to Laurie Gunst (1995) by the late 1980s, the gangs formally separated from the political parties but continued to manage resources in some communities. Many community gang members later immigrated to the United States and with unprecedented violence captured illicit drug markets in places like Miami, New York, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles. Some of these famous gangs were the Banton Posse, Brown Posse, Bushmouth Posse, Jungle Posse, Montego Bay Posse, Shower Posse, and Spanglers. Originally, such groups trafficked in marijuana in the 1970s, later extending to crack-cocaine by the mid-1980s. Back in Jamaica, local "dons" (community gang leaders) controlled several impoverished urban communities. There were occasional community gang wars which coincided with increases in youth offending.

Jamaican Schools and Gang Involvement

Although gang behavior may potentially lead to the most violent activities in school, it may not be the most prevalent or instigative. In Jamaica there is also little empirical support for a causal relationship between school violence and gang-related behavior. Nevertheless, the problem of gangs in schools appears to be a subset of the larger Jamaican youth violence problem. Donald Rodd, the former Minister of State in the Ministry of Education, and Youth, reported that 5% of students aged 10 - 18 years carried a weapon to school, 14% of boys had been

stabbed or shot in a fight, 15% of girls had been stabbed or shot in a fight, and one in six adolescents belonged to a gang at some point in their youth ("Staggering statistics," 2005).

Globally, different reasons are posited for youths' affiliation with gangs, *such as,* the socio-economic background of the youths, a sense of power, excitement, belonging, recognition and prestige associated with gangs (Shelden, Tracy, & Brown, 2004). A deteriorating economy, as indicated by significant declines in the value of the Jamaican dollar over the past two decades has meant that daily life in the island is a challenging exercise in subsistence for many. As has been the case with youth gang development in other parts of the world, gangs have emerged in Jamaica when a low income segment of society experienced a significant increase in their marginalization from mainstream life.

Scholarly works on Jamaican gangs such as Gibson and Wilson's (2003) article on Jamaican posses (gangs); and Laurie Gunst's (1995) book *Born Fi 'Dead: A Journey through the Jamaican Posse Underworld*, and a few others have focused on adult gangs. To date, the literature on youth gangs in Jamaica is extremely limited and published research on gangs in Jamaican schools are apparently non-existent. Thus, this scientific study which focuses on gangs in schools adds a new dimension to the literature on Jamaican gangs. Hence, the research questions:

1. What has contributed to the increase in violence, gangs and gang-related activities on high school campuses in the parishes of Kingston, & St. Andrew and St. Catherine?

2. What influence do members of community gangs have on members of school gangs in the parishes of Kingston, & St. Andrew and St. Catherine?

3. How have school administrators, (that is, principals, deans of discipline and guidance counselors) attempted to address the increase in violence and gangs on high school campuses in Kingston, St Andrew and St. Catherine?

4. How have school resource officers with the government's Safe School Program to combat violence and gangs in schools experienced the program's implementation?

METHODS

The study focused on male gang members because school personnel indicated that males constitute most of the problem. The study utilized the qualitative techniques of individual interviews with administrators (principals, deans of discipline, and guidance counselors), then interviews with school resource officers and focus groups with students whom school personnel identified as *disruptive.* It was expected that school administrators, school resource officers and students would have varying degrees of knowledge. Both the individual interviews of administrators and school resource officers and the focus groups with students queried their knowledge of the magnitude and impact of school violence, the presence and involvement of male students in gangs on high school campuses, the possibility of a connection to community gangs, and the school's response.

Data collection was carried out by the principal investigator, the first author of this article, a Jamaican native from May to July in 2006. The 27 schools involved were either single-sex or co-educational institutions and represent all the public high schools in the three parishes that granted permission for the study. The principal investigator's access was facilitated given that she is a Jamaican female, a former Jamaican social worker and school teacher. She approached this study with

a constructivist paradigm, making every effort to withhold judgment in an effort to understand how the participants perceived their circumstances.

The interview protocol for the administrators consisted of 17 open-ended questions with face validity. The respondents were interviewed in their respective schools individually.   During the interviews, some respondents (especially principals) were emphatic about the sensitivity of their responses. The researcher assured them that identifying information would be confidential. Of the 25 principals, 20 deans of discipline and 25 guidance counselors invited to participate, a total of 21 principals, 10 deans of discipline and 15 guidance counselors agreed and kept their interview appointments. Indubitably, the interviews gave voice to those persons (principals, deans of discipline, guidance counselors, school resource officers and students) who are at the center of the discourse on violence and gangs in schools. The interviews with the 10 school resource officers were unstructured. They were asked about their experiences as a part of the implementation of the government's Safe School Program in troubled schools and about the program's effectiveness.

Twelve focus group discussions, that is, four in each of the three parishes, with 10 to 12 students in each session, were conducted at a total of 27 schools. The students were randomly selected from lists of disruptive students provided by school administrators. A total of 11 questions were carefully designed to stimulate discussion. The group discussions were held in environments that were non-threatening (e.g. the school library), where participants could feel free to express themselves. The groups were facilitated by the principal investigator as information was recorded by an assistant. Each session lasted approximately one and a half hours. The researcher observed that the dynamics and synergy created by the group interactions encouraged the expression of the students as they queried each other about the details of their responses. Such free expression tended to follow dialogue in which the researcher had to dissuade the concerns of some that she might have been a police informant.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data began with the very first interview in that it, and those that followed were transcribed verbatim, and read numerous times to reveal patterns and themes in the data. To this end, an initial list of codes was developed based on the literature and new codes were added as novel information emerged from the data. Miles and Huberman (1994*)* described analysis as comprising of three components: namely *data reduction, data display* and *conclusion drawing or verification*. Herein, the data reduction involved color coding on hard copies of the transcribed text and a more detailed coding of patterns and themes facilitated by Atlas-ti 4.2. Initial summaries were written about each interview and focus group session and data reduction summary sheets utilized to isolate responses to the four research questions. Basic questions on each sheet included: Who was involved in the discussion? What were the issues covered in the discussion? Was the information received relevant to the questions?

The data displays included tables and diagrams. Tables allowed the researchers to more readily see patterns in the data and made apparent relationships between concepts less difficult to recognize. The drawing conclusions or verification involved memoing (whereby a researcher writes memos to herself about ideas evolving from the data next to the transcribed text) and repeated systematic examination of the data for patterns, themes and metaphoric language. These tasks

were facilitated with the qualitative data management and analysis software program ATLAS-ti version 4.2.

FINDINGS

The first research question was: *What has contributed to the increase in violence, gangs and gang related activities on high school campuses in the parishes of Kingston, St. Andrew and St. Catherine?* Overall, the administrators perceived an increase in school violence. Twelve principals reported an increase in violence on their school campuses for the academic years (September 2002 to July 2003, September 2003 to July 2004 and, September 2004 to July 2005). A common comment was that violence in schools reflected violence in society. According to these respondents, students were displaying what they saw in their homes, in their communities and in the media. One principal said it this way:

> The incidents of violence in our schools are frightening and totally unacceptable. Some students are from homes and communities where violence is the norm. Therefore, they do not see the ills of violence. The issue of violence in the wider society must first be dealt with because what is happening in the school is only a spill over of what is happening in the wider society.

Ten deans of discipline and 15 guidance counselors agreed to be interviewed. They, like the principals, reported that there had been an increase in violence on school campuses. As might be expected given their more intimate role with students and their families, these individuals were more detailed in their responses than the principals. They attributed the school violence largely to poor parenting and the absence of positive role models in the home, a result of absentee fathers); an increase in violence in the wider society; and the influence of the media (particularly violent programming). Respondents were far less committed about whether the increase in school violence was indicative of an increase in school gangs.

Regarding the presence of gang and gang-related activity in schools eight principals reported that there were gangs in their schools, while 10 responded that there were delinquent boys who often formed themselves into groups, but they would not call them *gangs*. One principal put it this way:

> I don't know if I would really call them "gangs". There is a group of delinquent boys who are harassing the students and are embarrassing the school family, but the moment they are brought to the office the school policy is administered.

Perhaps less politically inclined than the principals to render what might be a socially desirable response, a majority of the deans of discipline (8) and guidance counselors (13) agreed that gangs were in operation on their school campus. However, some deans and guidance counselors supported the principals assessment that they would not call these groups of boys *gangs*, but rather *want-to-be* gangs. One dean of discipline responded that on different occasions when a certain group of boys were brought to his office they claimed that "they are not really gang, but that they spar together" ("spar"- meaning the boys frequently socialize together).

When asked: "How much gang activity is there now compared to three years ago?" A number of school administrators said that in the past, students were delinquent, nevertheless, there has been a new wave of delinquent activities that can be classified as gang-related, for example, one principal commented "I use[d] to

hear about extortion taking place by community gangs, but never dream[ed] I would see it or hear about it in schools." He noted that it is alleged that, on a regular basis, these community gangs demand money from commercial business[es] in their communities as protection money. Similarly, some students extort money whereby students have to pay in order to use the bathroom. It was mentioned that in the past there was the illegal gambling, the selling of drugs and other contraband activities, but these illegal activities were not gang-related. They were being done by individual students. The data revealed that there are three schools in particular where frequent gang wars occur with those from one school fighting those from another. However, it was suggested that oftentimes these fights were among the students themselves over matters of machismo and were not community-influenced.

Some principals added that a number of the students were deprived of their parents due to the poor economic situation of the country such that their parents had migrated overseas in the hopes of making a better life for their children. These "barrel" children are left behind to be raised by grandparents, other relatives, or even non-relatives such as friends and neighbors. They are called *barrel children* in the literature because they are left on the island to receive barrels of merchandise from their parents overseas. Some of these barrel children often become involved in delinquent behavior because their new guardians are unable to effectively monitor and supervise them.

Responses from deans of discipline and guidance counselors were similar to those from the principals. A majority of them thought that students joined gangs because of a lack of family support. They stated that if support was lacking in the family, students would seek it from others who they see as likely to provide them with the love, affection and financial support that was lacking in their lives. However, others thought that some of these students were simply "outright bad and follow[ing] their friends" because some gang-involved students were from homes where their parents were trying their best to care for them. Such a classification is contradictory on its face in that if the students were indeed *outright bad* then it would seem logical to assume that they were not merely *following their friends*. Consider for example, the case of non-gang involved, but Jamaican born US sniper, 15 year old Lee Boyd Malvo, a barrel child who has been portrayed as arguably *not outright bad* but *a follower* of a very deviant adult mentor.

On the other hand, might the Jamaican school personnel be correct in suggesting that those minors who turn to delinquency are already inclined somehow to break the law and are thus, more susceptible to the deviant influence of others who do? Perhaps, since it appears that most barrel children in Jamaica do not end up in the island's juvenile justice system. Another possibility could be that those children who do not resort to deviance have more persons available to them in their immediate social network to offer them adequate support, while those who resort to delinquency are in communities with more negative influences. Thus, whether *good* or *bad*, the juvenile's behavior merely mirrors the caliber of his social network. Although Jamaica, as a largely Judeo-Christian nation emphasizes that an individual exercises *free choice* in his or her actions. Jamaicans have long perceived minors as *tabula rasa* or susceptible *blank slates* subject to the influence of others (Ghosh & Basu, 2002). Thus, the school administrators were also asked: At what grades are students more likely to get involved in gang activities? And, what are the average ages of students who are involved in these gangs?

Principals, deans of discipline and guidance counselors alike indicated that most of the students were ages (14 to 15), or in grade nine when believed to be involved in gang activities. They noted that there had been a few grade seven and eight, (ages 12 to 14), students who "hang out" with the older suspected students – hence, they were perceived to be involved in similar activities. The principals, deans of discipline and guidance counselors also perceived that community gang influence might exist because certain students are from the same communities where adult community gang members are viewed as "dons". A *don* is a person who has substantial illegitimate influence over community resources. So, the *don* is seen as capable of providing financial support and security; resources that might be missing in the juvenile's home.

The school personnel were then asked "Are you able to identify the geographical areas/ communities from which gang members come?" Their responses to this question indicated that the students' geographical location could be identified based on the address in their school files. However, three principals pointed out that some of the students gave a false home address because they lived in squatter settlements (for example, on a gully bank). Hence, they may have used the address of a relative or friend in another community. It was also noted by the guidance counselors that some students relocated to other addresses without notifying the school of the change of address. Principals in Kingston and St. Andrew mentioned that a majority of the students who were involved in gang activities were from inner-city areas known as volatile places. However, principals in St. Catherine differed slightly saying that their gang-related students were from some of the newly established government housing subdivisions outside of the inner-city areas. Nonetheless, many of these same students had relatives in gang-riddled communities.

Some of the gang communities mentioned were Spanish Town and Portmore (in St. Catherine), the western and central areas of Kingston, and August Town and Papine (in St. Andrew). They further noted that to their knowledge school gang activity was not limited to their inner-city schools but that students from "uptown communities" (middle and upper class areas) of St. Andrew were also involved in the same types of behaviors. The researcher, while interviewing at a boys' high school, noticed that the dean of discipline had three metal detectors in his office which he claimed was necessary to keep weapons off of the campus. The supposed gang activity that was most frequently mentioned by the administrators was "taxing" (extortion), followed by fighting, gambling and drug ("ganja"/ aka marijuana) possession. Significantly, however, they said that there had been no specific threat directed at teachers.

In the focus group discussions, students consistently reported that there was the presence of violence on their school campus. Some students even admitted that they were involved in the violence. Their rationale included:

-   "when a man dis yu, yu have fi show him who a de boss"- meaning when he is disrespected by another, he felt compelled to show that other that he is in charge.
-   " from me de a primary school me a chuck badness"- meaning from he was in primary/elementary school he has been involved in undesirable behavior.
-   "if the bigger youths du yu somethin' yu have fi defend yu self" – meaning if the older students interfered with him he would have to defend himself. Some students went on to describe carrying an array of weapons to school,

which included- "half a lass" (a small version of a machete), ice-picks, razor blades, and knives. They claimed that these weapons were carried for protection, not for provocation. Some students reported that they either lived in violence prone areas or that they attended schools in unsafe neighborhoods where they were sometimes attacked by youths on the street. Students also reported that having their lunch money and bus fare taken away was not uncommon in some inner city communities. One student, who admitted that he
was accustomed to carrying his knife to school, said that he knew of others who carried "ice pick long enough to go through [a] cow" to school. He disclosed his weapon hiding place – the school restroom.

A number of students mentioned that their peers who were involved in violence in their communities would bring this same behavior to their schools. It was further mentioned that some of them who were violent were from homes where violence was displayed by family members. For example, one student said "mi na tell no lie, mi mada and mi step fada fight all de time. " This patios translates that – his mother and step-father fought often. Surprisingly, these disruptive students thought that violence was giving their schools a "bad name". One student gave an example of a recent media story where a picture of his school was highlighted, with teachers protesting the increase in incidents of violence on the campus.

Research question number two was *what influence do members of community gangs have on members of school gangs in the parishes of Kingston, St. Andrew and St. Catherine?*" In response, both students and teachers reported that they had been fearful when there were student conflicts where known gang members in the community became involved. Three principals noted that they were aware of students using cellular phones to call known gang members from the community on to the campus when certain students had a dispute with their peers. These principals characterized such incidents as "invasions" that required police assistance. It was further noted that at times community gang members would wait at the school gate until school dismissed to intervene. A number of the principals also reported that they perceived that some students were somehow socialized into gang behavior, for example, if family members were involved with gangs or if the students grew up in communities, where gangs are a way of life. Another common comment was that gang involved students are from dysfunctional families or no families at all.

Most of the students in the focus groups acknowledged the presence of gangs on their school campus. Some students even acknowledged that they were a part of a gang in their school, as well as, in their community. Some students mentioned that they were from communities in which gang activities were rampant and some were being intimidated by community gang members to join the community gangs. However, a majority noted that they were not a part of these community gangs, even when they had relatives and friends who were involved.

One student told a heart wrenching story of how he became involved with a gang. He stated that: His uncle, who is now deceased (due to gang-membership), was the leader of a gang in the school that he currently attends as well as a gang in his community. He was one of the "foot soldiers" for his uncle so he decided to take up where his uncle left off when the uncle died. He took over the leadership of the school gang, but because the gang was constantly harassed by teachers, he and a number of the members decided to "give school a walk" (discontinue their schooling). Thereafter, he became very active in a community gang, but when his

father and one of his cousins died and his stepmother got "shot up" due to internal gang disputes, "he dumped his guns into the sea" and decided to go back to school and start a new life. He had been out of school for an entire year.

The students also mentioned a number of illegal activities in which they had been involved. One of the most common was "taxing" (extortion). Items commonly extorted were brand name sneakers, school bags, jewelry, and lunch money. If items were not handed over to the student extortionist, victims would be beaten. Known places that these activities took place regularly were in the school bathrooms, on the playground, behind buildings and in isolated corridors. Students suggested that some of the gangs operated a network. For example, One Hundred Man Gang, Mini-Clan, and Mini-Order were in a number of schools. Examples of other gangs that were identified are Gully Rat, Seven Star General, Color Squad, Fire Flames, G-Unit, General Crew, Mad Squad, Gerba Kids and Lawless Crew. Later, in interviews with school resource officers the officers mentioned two other school gangs the Junior One Order and the Junior Clansman which they said were present in some schools in the parish of St. Catherine. Yet, are these really gangs or just groups of disruptive students seeking attention?

Students in one particular focus group suggested that it is believed that their "group" or (gang) is affiliated with the "big gang" in the community because their names are similar (Little Clans or Mini Clans), but according to these students, they were not affiliated. However, most of the students in the school group or "gang" were from the communities in which these adult community gangs (Clansman Gang and the One Order Gang) operated.

The researcher noticed that for the schools that were experiencing gang problems, the issues of gang and gang activities were discussed at length in the focus groups. Students mentioned that since the school resource officers (that is, the police personnel attached to schools under the Safe Schools Program) were assigned to some of their schools, some gangs were "cooling it"- meaning that they had become less active. It was further mentioned that girls were involved in some of the gangs on school campuses because their boyfriends were a part of these gangs.

The students were also asked: What influence do parents and other family members, who are involved in community gangs have on their children? In response, some students mentioned that they were being influenced indirectly. Their parents did not tell them to participate in antisocial behavior or illegal activities, but they did not object to some of the activities in which their children were involved. For those whose relatives were involved in gang activities, the gang behavior was normal for them and reflective of life in their communities. Quite a few students mentioned that they had siblings, usually brothers who were involved in community gangs. Other relatives mentioned were cousins and uncles but parents were rarely acknowledged as involved. For the few who acknowledged that parents were involved, it was their fathers or stepfathers. A couple of students expressed the need for a father or steady male in their home as opposed to their mother's "visiting" relationships. One student mentioned that he did not know his father because the father was sentenced to prison for 15 years while his mother was pregnant with him. Thereafter, his mother treated him badly because he resembled his father. This was his rationalization for "sparing" (socializing) with the other boys who were known as *disruptive*. A couple of students stated that their parents "don't hav' no time fi waste, so that is why de no com wen de sen cal dem"- meaning that parents could not spare the time to visit the school when they are summoned by the administrators.

Research question number three was *How have school administrators, (that is, principals, deans of discipline and guidance counselors) attempted to address the increase in violence and gangs on high school campuses in Kingston, St Andrew and St. Catherine?* The administrators were asked whether their school had a disciplinary policy that addressed violence and gang activities. If so, they were asked to describe these measures and to say whether their efforts had received general parental support. First the respondents noted that all schools have disciplinary policies. However, there was no clear difference in the policies for violence and for gang activities. Students who broke the school policy were disciplined depending on the type of acts, their severity, and whether the behaviors were gang-related. According to the respondents, these policies ranged from appearance before the school's disciplinary committee to expulsion. Expulsion, which usually required school board approval, was the least used response.

Implementation of punishment was done through a specified procedure. Typically, a teacher would report a disruptive student to the guidance counselor and to the deans of discipline, who would then investigate in the hope of bringing closure to the situation. A problem that could not be dealt with by these individuals would be referred to the principal or vice principal. If the problem merited, parents were referred to a discipline committee where the student might appear before the committee, with or without a parent present. Depending on the seriousness of the problem the student might be suspended or given detention. Some principals noted that when a problem is clearly criminal, for example, gang activities such as extortion, the police are called. One principal went further to mention that if a student is caught extorting items from other students he or she could be cited for robbery and extortion. Additionally, if students are found on campus with knives and/or other weapons by the police the student could be arrested and charged under the Offensive Weapons Act. While visiting a particular boys' high school to conduct interviews, the researcher observed an incident where the police were called to remove a student who was on the school campus extorting lunch money. He had been suspended previously.

Some of the administrators thought it was obvious that the children who grew up around violence were the ones who were themselves violent to other students. A male guidance counselor lamented that "to some students, for example, fighting is a regular thing and some students, you can't really talk to them. For some of them, bringing positive things to them makes no sense." The administrators also noted that some parents are very supportive of disciplinary policies, especially when their child is the victim; however, the same could not be said of parents when their child is the perpetrator. Also, calling the police onto the campus tended to infuriate some parents who believe that school problems should be addressed internally.

When asked "What are some of the measures that can be taken to stop gang formation in schools?" The common response from administrators was that once they had knowledge of a gang presence, they would try to mentor the students involved and to engage them in counseling that included onsite peer counseling. A majority of the parents did not attend Parent Teachers' Association (PTA) meetings regularly, or participate in PTA activities. Thus, another common response was encouraging parents to attend meetings to discuss concerns about their children. Reasons suggested for the lack of parental involvement included a breakdown of the family structure, students living in a stretched foster care setting and neglect. Some administrators mentioned that even the parents who did attend the PTA seemed less

committed to the well-being of their children than parents in the past as indicated by their attitude that such meetings were relatively unimportant. Oftentimes, it was guardians who attended PTAs because biological parents may have died, been incarcerated, or migrated.

When asked, "What is the Ministry of Education doing to combat the gang problem?" The administrators reported that the Ministry introduced what is known as the Safe School Program in those schools that have been badly affected by an upsurge of violence. This is a program where police officers, who serve as school resource officers are placed in the schools to assist with disciplinary problems. The students reported that they were also aware of the joint effort by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Security to assign school resource officers to schools known to have a gang problem. They noted that prior to the arrival of school resource officers, many schools had security guards and they were ineffective. They believed that school security personnel should be armed and should have the authority to search all persons entering and leaving the campus, including students. To them, this would help to reduce the entry of illegal weapons and drugs onto the campus.

The principal investigator further conducted some unstructured individual interviews with 10 school resource officers (police officers) who were assigned to some of these schools experiencing an upsurge of violence and gangs. The school resource officers were largely in accord that: a) there was limited administrative support for the Safe School Program, b) there had been a reduction in school violence c) some school gang members had connections with adult community gang members d) girls were involved in gang-related activities e) their effectiveness in schools was being hampered by a lack of resources and, f) there was a need for adequate training to work with indisciplined students.

(a) *There was limited administrative support for the Safe School Program*

The school resource officers complained that some principals and teachers left the discipline of the students for the smallest of problems to them. Teachers often directed students to their office thus, their office was often filled with students. They thought that many student problems should be dealt with by form (that is, homeroom) teachers or guidance counselors. One school resource officer commented that when on the campus "we are seen as police on regular duty."

(b) *There had been a reduction in school violence*

Several school resource officers reported there was less violence on the school campuses since they arrived. According to some of the officers, the key element was having a consistent, daily presence. Others noted that their mere presence, created deterrence. One officer stated that " because the students have witnessed other students [being] taken to the police station and [who] are charged for illegal activities they have begun to 'cool themselves'." A part of this success was an overall improved monitoring of the campus. For example, they would visit the restrooms, especially the boys' restrooms to make sure that students were not gambling or extorting other students. Officers also described regular stop checks as an opportunity to ensure that students did not have weapons on their person. There were also reports of fewer student altercations following the arrival of the officers.

Three of the officers interviewed had even started cadet units (junior arms of the Jamaica Defense Force [military]) in their assigned school in an effort to have some of the *bad boys* refocus their lives. This seemed to be a replacement for the use

of corporal punishment in schools which, a couple of officers noted could no longer be administered since the year 2000.

Yet, the Safe School Program was not without problems. According to the officers these were: 1) a lack of administrative support 2) the asocial behavior of some teachers toward the school resource officers 3) conflict between teachers and school officers regarding strategies used in disciplining students and, 4) the under utilization of resource officers on some school campuses. In the opinion of some of the officers, they should be more proactive instead of reactive, an integral part of the school system, and given the opportunity to conduct "pep talks" (inspirational talks) with the students on issues related to indiscipline and its consequences.

(c) *Some school gang members had connections with adult community gang members*

School resource officers, especially in the parish of St .Catherine, noted that many school boys belonged to gangs in the community. These officers reported that oftentimes when a police raid is carried out in various communities school boys are taken into custody. They added that adult gang members used school boys to carry weapons for them sometimes even out of the community for safe keeping.

The location of schools was also of concern to some of the officers who stated that troubled schools are sometimes in troubled communities. These communities had *dons* as "permanent fixtures". As a result, students from outside the communities did not want to attend these schools. Therefore, the greater percentage of students in these schools were from the same communities. To them this lack of diversity in student origin had negative implications for discipline.

(d) *Girls were involved in gang-related activities*

It was reported that girls were involved in some of the illegal activities along with the boys. For example, school resource officers reported that girls might conceal the weapons and the drugs for the boys given that it was less likely that police would search them.

(e) *Their effectiveness in schools was being hampered by a lack of resources*

The officers reported that due to under-staffing at the police station to which they were assigned, they also had a number of non-school related duties. This reduced the time that they could spend working with the schools. It was not uncommon for other public safety issues to take priority.

(f) *There was a need for adequate training to work with indisciplined students.*

Officers indicated that their training was inadequate for their tasks in the schools. One officer suggested that regular seminars should be conducted for them to better prepare them for schools. In addition, they would have liked to see written guidelines addressing how they should undertake their assignments.

CONCLUSION

The students who said there was an increase in violence noted the following forms of violence: weapons law violation, assault, robbery, and homicide. These findings support the media literature which maintains that violence has been increasingly common on school campuses, where students are involved in dangerous acts ("JTA says school," 2003). There is also evidence to suggest that,

at a minimum, there has been an increase of gangs and gang activities over the three academic years on high school campuses in the three parishes identified. Despite similar names, there was largely no real connection between the school gangs and the adult community gangs; rather the former were largely attempting to imitate the latter. Any connections between the two seem to be on an individual as opposed to an organizational level. Local school administrators and the government's Safe School Program seem to be making strides in responding to school violence and school gangs but the implementation of these responses apparently needs refining and wider support to be truly deemed "successful".

The limitations of this research include that some principals, deans of disciplines, guidance counselors and students refused to participate in the study. Thus, there is a certain amount of self-selection bias in who the respondents were. Possibly, those with more to tell, refused to participate. Another possible limitation is that some of the participants may have been less than forthcoming in their responses given the sensitive nature of the topic. However, the researcher did not sense this to be the case. In lieu, some respondents simply refused to answer certain questions.

There was also some difficulty accessing some schools and the study is limited to three out of the island's 14 parishes. Hence, the findings are not generalizeable and are limited to the three parishes studied. There was also very limited literature on which to build because gangs in Jamaican high schools have apparently not been examined scientifically. The research design is also one that is susceptible to errors in recall. The participants might not have remembered the details of specific situations accurately. A significant counterpoint is that although the details from the student focus groups were largely anecdotal, they were consistent with the reports of school administrators and school resource officers.

As was posited by Lal, Lal and Achilles in 1993, the present study supports the idea that administrators must believe that nothing is more important than providing a safe environment for students and staff and should be willing to take the necessary steps to accomplish this. Given that this study reveals that the school, the family and the community are intimately connected to the presence of gangs and to an increase in violence in schools, the appropriate response will likely involve taking a multi-systemic approach in working with the school, the family and the community. The elements of such programs should include a range of school-based violence reduction and prevention programs. These could involve having a special counseling unit in all high schools, in-school peer mediation programs, mentorship, special training for teachers regarding interacting judiciously with hostile students, gang awareness programs and the deployment of school resource officers to work as liaison officers between the police department and the school with proper training and resources to succeed. Acting as liaison officers, they would be able to gather information outside the school campus on the involvement of students in gangs. Of course, information sharing and networking between all high schools, relevant community, and law enforcement agencies would be important in minimizing the reach of gangs into schools.

Relatedly, violence, gangs, and gang activities on Caribbean school campuses is fertile ground for further investigation. Recommendations for future research include an examination of girl gang members and auxiliaries on school campuses; a comparison of gangs on rural high school campuses with those on urban high school campuses; also, the effectiveness of school administrators' efforts to

resolve violence and gang problems on their school campuses. The problem of youth and gangs is universally accepted as having both macro and micro origins although regionally the social context details may differ. This being the case, it is clear that for the Jamaican context more research is necessary so that the island's policies and practices regarding school gangs will evidence the modern day standards of being empirically informed. After all, problems are best addressed when they are first understood.

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