

# Belize City Community Gang Assessment

**Institutions for  
Development Sector**

**Innovation in Citizen  
Services Division**

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Prepared for the Inter-American Development  
Bank by:

Michelle Young

Edited by:

Dana Michael King



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# List of Abbreviations

BPD	Belize Police Department
CRD	Community Rehabilitation Department
CYDP	Conscious Youth Development Program
DGH	Dangerous/grievous harm
GED	General Educational Development
GSU	Gang Suppression Unit
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
MHDSTPA	Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation, and Poverty Alleviation
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
OJJDP	Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VPO	Violent person offenses



# Abstract

In 2018, with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank, the Government of Belize used the Gang Model Assessment Guide<sup>1</sup> to assess gang activity in Belize City. This report presents four key findings and related recommendations arising from that exercise.

**Key Finding 1:** The intersection between gangs and guns has created an epidemic of violence in Belize City, which compromises residents' quality of life, exposes youth and children to trauma, and kills or injures hundreds of people annually.

**Recommendation:** Policymakers in Belize City should implement Cure Violence, an evidence-based model that has significantly reduced violence in communities around the world.

**Key Finding 2:** A significant percentage of children and youth in Belize City are at high risk for joining a gang because they are exposed to risk factors for gang involvement in almost every domain of their lives. This provides local gangs a consistent pool from which to recruit vulnerable youth.

**Recommendation:** Agencies in Belize City should implement intensive, risk-focused, wrap-around programming focused on the specific needs of the most vulnerable youth.

**Key Finding 3:** The inability of many youth to access secondary, higher, and vocational education makes Belize City youth more vulnerable to joining a gang

and represses their long-term economic prospects. Lack of opportunities for legitimate employment keep youth and adults trapped in gangs and contribute to the city's overall cycle of poverty and violence.

**Recommendation:** The Government of Belize should increase access to alternative educational programming and employment opportunities to improve the success of existing programs and future activities.

**Key Finding 4:** While efforts have been made to respond to local gang problems, the lack of a sustained response has resulted in loss of life and damage to the community. Further, the lack of transparency by programs and agencies connected to this problem has contributed to high levels of dissatisfaction among all groups surveyed.

**Recommendation:** Key agencies and civil society need to coordinate efforts to provide social services to youth to guarantee well-designed, transparent, sustainable programs that effectively reduce violence in Belize City and restore public confidence. Such programs must be envisioned within the framework of an agreed national strategy to eradicate youth violence.

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<sup>1</sup> The guide is a product of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.



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This study was also guided by an assessment advisory committee composed of the following individuals:

- Judith Alpuche, Chief Executive Officer, Human Development, Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation (MHDSTPA)
- Starla Bradley, Director, Community Rehabilitation Department
- Marnette Faux-Westby, Director, Conscious Youth Development Programme (CYDP)
- Mark Antrobus, Social Planner, MHDSTPA
- Elvis Requena, Program Manager, MHDSTPA
- Adele Catzim, Chief Executive Officer, Youth, Sports and Culture, Ministry of Education
- Mary Vasquez, Director, RESTORE Belize
- Allison McKenzie, Director, Department of Youth Services
- Kirk Augustus, Deputy Director, Department of Youth Services
- Luwani Cayetano, Child Protection Officer, UNICEF
- Corporal Jane Usher, Crime Analysis Unit, Belize Police Department

The assessment team provided guidance and input to adapt the assessment format and process to local needs in Belize. The assessment team also accessed data from local agencies, provided input into survey questions and administration, and reviewed draft versions of the report for accuracy.

A team from One Struggle conducted face-to-face community resident and youth surveys. One Struggle is an organization for parents who have lost children and family members to gang violence in Belize City. The costs for surveying were underwritten by UNICEF.

Community and youth survey team members included:

- Marcia Argalles
- Sandra Hyde
- Glenis Barrow
- Grace Flowers
- Marie Garbutt
- Edith Wright
- Tyrios Palacio
- Roberto Lalin
- Shamika Jones

Focus groups and interviews with youth, parents, agency personnel, school personnel, and community leaders were organized by personnel from the CYDP, the Community Rehabilitation Department, the Youth Services Department, RESTORE Belize, and the MHDSTPA.

Gang member interviews were arranged by personnel from the CYDP and Belize Central Prison and conducted by:

- David Johnson, Tytos Consulting
- Errika Fearbry Jones, Tytos Consulting
- Mikayla Arciaga, Tytos Consulting
- Michelle Young, Tytos Consulting

Law enforcement data collection and analysis assistance was provided by the following members of the Belize Police Department:

- Corporal Owen Lucas, Joint Intelligence Coordinating Center
- Corporal Leonard Augustine, Crime Analysis, Gang Suppression Unit
- Corporal Jane Usher, Crime Analysis Unit
- Constable Reina Mendoza, Crime Analysis Unit

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# Executive Summary

**B**elize City's 2017 intentional homicide rate of 99.1 per 100,000 residents places it among the top 10 cities in the world for homicides. Homicides are highly concentrated in the City's South Side. In 2017, over three-quarters of the homicides were classified as gang-related by the Belize Police Department, Gang Suppression Unit. Interviews conducted with gang-involved individuals indicate that there is a high level of gang involvement in other violent crimes, such as aggravated assaults and robberies, and that gang-involved individuals have easy access to firearms, which are frequently used in the commission of these crimes.

There are an estimated 900–1,400 gang members in Belize City. Approximately one in five youth surveyed for this study reported current or prior involvement in gangs. An additional 10 percent of youth in the city are considered at high risk for gang involvement due to their exposure to accumulated risk factors in multiple areas of their lives, including family, peer group, school, and community. Surveyed youth exhibited the highest rate of risk factor exposure related to family disruption, poor parenting practices, negative peer influences, low school attachment and completion rates, and daily exposure to gang activity and violence in their community. Many youth in Belize City, particularly on the South Side where violent crime is highest, may also experience mental health and developmental issues due to exposure to complex trauma, including witnessing extreme violence firsthand. Of the over 50 youth who participated in focus groups for this study, every single one reported losing a friend or family member to gang violence and the majority reported having personally witnessed gang violence.

Over 80 percent of the gang-involved individuals interviewed for this study reported having family members in gangs. The average age of gang induction reported by gang-involved respondents was 14.5 years of age and the majority reported joining gangs between ages 13 and 16. The top three reasons reported for joining a gang were for protection or to feel safe, to make money, and to get revenge for violence committed against a friend or family member.

Gang-involved individuals reported high rates of school suspension and expulsion, and high dropout rates, with 76 percent of gang-involved individuals reporting that they dropped out of school at least once. The most common year to drop out was Standard 6, the final year of primary school. The majority (82 percent) were unemployed at the time they were interviewed. They also reported easy access to weapons, with 90 percent saying that it would be very easy or somewhat easy to get a gun. Of gang-involved respondents, approximately 75 percent reported selling drugs in the past year and over 50 percent reported they had shot someone or participated in a shooting.

Community residents, community leaders, agency personnel, and school personnel all reported that gang activity had gotten worse in Belize City in the previous three years. They described living in a community where they must constantly consider potential exposure to violence, which forced them to limit their daily activities. Respondents expressed a high degree of dissatisfaction with the current response to gangs, indicating that efforts to address gangs in Belize City have historically been fragmented, disorganized, and

insufficient to prevent violence. They further noted that failure on the part of government leaders to report program outcomes in a transparent manner and to sustain effective programs has led to a lack of trust in government leaders and programs.

## Recommendations

The factors that simultaneously push and pull youth into gangs are complex and interrelated, touching many areas of their lives. Addressing Belize City's substantial gang violence problem will require a sustained, non-partisan, broad-based effort by a diverse cross-section of organizations and individuals that touch the lives of families, children, and youth, including local, district, and national government agencies; non-governmental organizations (NGOs); churches; businesses; and residents. There are no easy solutions and any strategies implemented will require enhanced coordination and collaboration across sectors at every level in order to accomplish the goal of reducing local gang violence. Similarly, if organizations and agencies fail to work collectively toward shared goals, the ongoing epidemic of violence in Belize City will continue, with dire human and economic consequences.

The following are specific recommendations based on the findings of this study:

- Implement Cure Violence (<http://cureviolence.org/>) in South Side Belize City. Cure Violence is an intensive neighborhood-based gang violence model that uses a public health approach to reduce and prevent homicides, woundings, and shootings. This approach has led to significant reductions in violence in other Caribbean and Central American countries in the past five years. Given its history and mandate, the Conscious Youth Development Programme (CYDP) should implement this model and should be refocused geographically to serve South Side Belize City. Geographic targeting and staffing should be driven by regular analysis of violent crime data. Program personnel should be working in the community during the days and times when gang violence is most prevalent in order to mediate conflicts and prevent shootings.
- Implement the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Comprehensive Gang Model, a coordinated and targeted gang intervention. This model is evidence-based and has been shown to effectively increase agency collaboration around the needs of gang-involved individuals.
- Expand access to alternative education to increase access for gang-involved individuals, including during evenings and weekends. Apprenticeship and employment opportunities are also needed to assist this population with transitioning away from involvement in violent crime and drug trafficking. These services are necessary to support the activities of Cure Violence and the Comprehensive Gang Model.
- At the point of intake, administer the Community Rehabilitation Department (CRD) and CYDP risk/needs assessment to all youth who are served with government funds. In turn, this data should be reported annually to the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation, and Poverty Alleviation (MHDSTPA) in order to project service needs for this population annually.
- Set aside funding annually based on aggregated risk/needs assessment scores to purchase needed services for the highest-risk youth. The funds should be allocated based on the number of youth projected to need each service type, and apportioned by the assessed types of risk and projected costs for each service type. Agencies that serve youth, including CYDP, CRD, and NGOs, and receive government funds should begin using the FAMCare system developed by MHDSTPA to report youth service delivery and outcomes on an individual and aggregate basis.



# Introduction and Study Methodology

1

This report presents the key findings, recommendations, data, and analysis of a six-month assessment of gang activity in Belize City in 2018. The study was commissioned by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in conjunction with the *Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation, and Poverty Alleviation (MHDSTPA)*. The goal of the study was to collect and assess data related to gang involvement and activity. The assessment and this report are intended to guide future strategies to prevent and reduce gang violence in Belize City.

The assessment provided Belize City's leaders and residents with current information about the level and types of violent gang activity in Belize City, its impact on all sectors of the community, locally relevant factors that create vulnerability to gang recruitment for local children and youth, and gaps in services and/or barriers that keep gang-involved individuals trapped in the gang lifestyle. This report presents the assessment's methodology, the data used to derive the findings, and a summary of the key findings and recommendations.

This study followed a protocol recommended by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) in *The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model: A Guide to Assessing Your Community's Youth Gang Problem* (OJJDP, 2009). This guide was developed to provide local communities with templates to collect and use qualitative and quantitative data to measure the level and extent of local gang problems, understand community conditions that give rise to gangs, and identify future strategies and actions to reduce gang activity and gang violence.

Conducting a community gang assessment is the first step recommended by the OJJDP prior to implementing a range of community-level gang prevention and intervention activities and strategies. Numerous types of data, both qualitative and quantitative, touching all sectors of the community, were collected and analyzed in order to identify the key findings for this report. The methodology for collecting the data is described below.

## Demographic Data

Demographic data available for Belize City differs considerably from the types of neighborhood-level data available in the United States. However, data available from the 2010 Census conducted by the Statistical Institute of Belize, along with the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 2016 were used for this report.

## Gang Crime Data

Belize Police Department incident reports for the years of 2015–2017 were provided by Corporal Owen Lucas, crime analyst for the Joint Intelligence Coordination Center. Offense categories selected for this study were:

- Homicide/murder
- Aggravated assault
- Attempted murder
- Dangerous harm

- Grievous harm
- Robbery
- Aggravated burglary

The analysis examined when violent crimes were committed in Belize City (time of day, day of week, month of year), characteristics of the people arrested for these crimes (demographic characteristics and gang affiliation, where available), and characteristics of the victims (demographic profile and gang affiliation, where available). This data was collected to help agencies in Belize City target activities and programming during the days and times when gang violence is most prevalent and direct these activities toward those individuals, groups, and populations most involved in and affected by gang violence.

Data on gang involvement in violent crime in Belize City is sparse. However, information on victims' gang affiliation, the gang affiliation of people arrested for homicides, and homicides designated as gang-related was provided by Corporal Leonard Augustine from the Gang Suppression Unit (GSU) of the Belize Police Department (BPD). Demographics and gang affiliations were analyzed to identify patterns. This data was supplemented with interviews with gang-involved individuals, who reported a high degree of personal involvement in violent crime.

## Surveys, Interviews, and Focus Groups

Survey and interview instruments were drawn from templates in *The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model* (OJJDP, 2009). Questions from those templates were adapted for use in Belize City based on feedback from representatives from the MHDSTPA; the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture; RESTORE Belize; UNICEF; the BPD; and the IDB.

As detailed below, different surveys were applied to different demographic and social groups. Focus groups and interviews with youth, parents, agency personnel, school personnel, and community leaders were organized by personnel from the Conscious

Youth Development Programme (CYDP), the CRD, the Department of Youth Services, RESTORE Belize, and the MHDSTPA.

### Gang Member Interviews

A total of 45 interviews were conducted with gang-affiliated individuals ranging from 16 to 41 years old who were associated with 14 different gangs in Belize City. Personnel from the CYDP in Belize City and the Kolbe Foundation at Belize Central Prison and Wagner's Youth Facility selected gang-involved individuals for the interviews and arranged interview dates and times.

Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were conducted face-to-face in a one-to-one setting. Care was taken to ensure the respondents' confidentiality. To that end, data herein is reported in aggregate to ensure the responses of individual respondents are not identifiable. The information in this section of the report is primarily anecdotal, self-reported data based on the experiences and perceptions of the individuals that were interviewed.

### Youth Experiences and Perceptions

The perceptions of youth were gathered using a survey and focus groups. The survey questions were drawn from *The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model* (OJJDP, 2009) and adapted based on feedback from representatives of the Advisory Committee that was created to guide and validate this study and its findings.

The youth survey was conducted in three ways:

1. Face-to-face in the community by a team from One Struggle, a support group for parents who have lost children to gang violence in Belize City.
2. Online by youth working with local youth-serving agencies. The agencies provided respondents access to a computer.
3. Online by a broader community of youth. The survey was publicized by media appearances to gain youth participation more widely from the community.

This data was not truly randomized; however, there was good coverage of almost all parts of Belize City.

The target population was youth 12 to 22 years of age who resided in Belize City. The entire youth population of Belize City was invited to participate.

Of the 316 youth who participated in either the paper or online version of the survey, 88 percent resided in Belize District (278) and 72 percent (229) resided specifically in Belize City at the time of the survey. Of the 316 youth that began the survey, 78 percent fully completed it. The number of times that youth were contacted to participate in the survey was not tracked. Because of the challenges of obtaining a randomized sample of youth in the community, the research team focused on disseminating the survey as widely as possible through several different means to allow as many youth as possible to participate. While the findings cannot be generalized, they provide a snapshot of youth opinions and experiences at a point in time for a large number of youth from diverse backgrounds in Belize City.<sup>2</sup> The largest percentage of youth from Belize City participating in the survey were between 14 and 18 years of age (54 percent). Only the responses of youth residing in Belize City between 12 and 22 years of age (159 total) are included in this report.

Survey respondents were asked to provide the two streets closest to their home. Not all respondents provided a nearby street, but 66 percent provided at least one street and 58 percent provided two streets. These streets were mapped to show geographic distribution.

### Community Resident Survey

Approximately 567 Belize City residents participated in the community resident survey. To collect a wide range of opinions, the survey was conducted in two ways:

1. Face-to-face surveys were conducted with 303 community residents by a trained team from One Struggle. The face-to-face survey was conducted at homes randomly selected by the Statistical Institute of Belize to ensure representation in the most gang-affected areas of the city based on data from police incident reports.
2. Online surveys were completed by 264 community residents. The survey that was publicized through

### EXHIBIT 1. MAP OF NEAREST TWO STREETS TO YOUTH SURVEY RESPONDENTS' RESIDENCE



Source: Author's elaboration.

media appearances and by local agencies. The online survey had a higher level of coverage of North Side Belize City, including the Belama area.

Respondents were asked to provide the two streets nearest their home. These streets are mapped in Exhibit 2 to show survey coverage.

There were substantial demographic differences between the community residents who responded face-to-face and those that answered the online survey. For that reason, the two groups of community residents were analyzed and reported on separately.

Community residents who responded to the survey face-to-face were largely Creole, whereas community residents who responded online were ethnically more

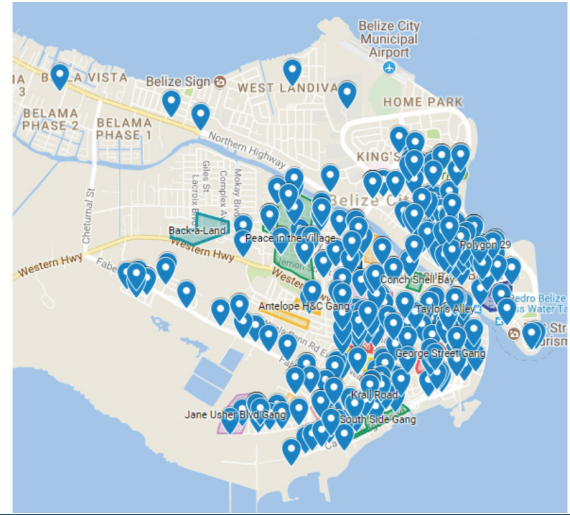
<sup>2</sup> The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model Assessment Manual recommends students be surveyed in the school setting, which allows for a more controlled and randomized sample. Due to financial, time, and logistical constraints, this was not possible in Belize City. UNICEF was able to provide a small amount of funding to survey youth and community members, so this work was completed as an add-on to the assessment. It was not designed to be a scientifically randomized survey.

## EXHIBIT 2. DISTRIBUTION MAPS FOR COMMUNITY RESIDENT SURVEY

ONLINE SURVEY DISTRIBUTION MAP



FACE-TO-FACE SURVEY DISTRIBUTION MAP



Source: Author's elaboration.

**TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY RESIDENT SURVEY RESPONDENTS, FACE-TO-FACE VERSUS ONLINE**

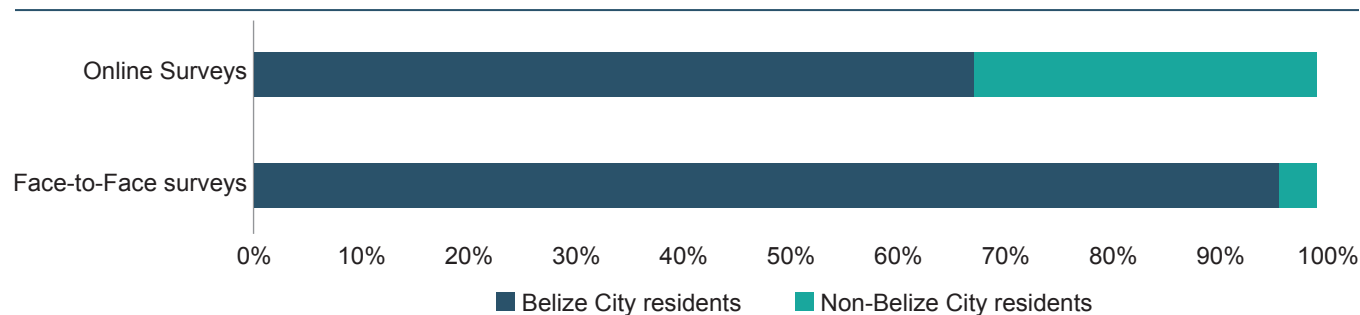
Age	(n=293)	(n=179)
Under 18	—	0.6%
18–24	21.9%	12.3%
25–34	27.6%	45.8%
35–44	24.9%	26.2%
45–54	12.6%	10.6%
55–64	8.2%	2.8%
65–74	2.7%	0.6%
75–84	1.0%	—
85–90	1.0%	—
Gender	(n=285)	(n=178)
Male	48.8%	34.3%
Female	51.2%	65.7%
Race/Ethnicity	(n=287)	(n=178)
Creole	78.8%	51.4%
Garifuna	11.9%	3.4%
Mestizo/Hispanic	4.5%	30.7%
Mayan	2.1%	1.1%
East Indian	1.1%	1.7%
Latino	0.4%	2.8%
Other	1.4%	8.9%

Source: Authors' elaboration.

diverse (only 51 percent of online respondents were Creole). As available demographic data is not disaggregated to the level of Belize City or specific areas of the city, it was not possible to determine whether this was representative of the areas surveyed.<sup>3</sup> However, anecdotally, the research team sensed that this was the case. While 567 surveys were completed, only 472 of these surveys were completed by Belize City residents. The responses of individuals who did not reside in the city are not included in the analysis for this report. Demographic characteristics of face-to-face and online community resident survey respondents are provided in Table 1.

The research team also led a focus group for parents from One Struggle. The group examined their experiences and the needs of parents with gang-involved children.

<sup>3</sup> Census demographic information, including race and ethnicity, is reported by district rather than at the city level. Belize District includes Belize City but is much wider area than just the city. UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey report presented demographic data for South Side Belize City specifically and the rest Belize District but not for North Side Belize City or Belize City overall.

**FIGURE 1. COMMUNITY RESIDENT SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY HOME LOCATION**

Source: Author's elaboration.

### Community Leaders, and School and Agency Personnel

Responses from school and agency personnel were pursued using both paper and online survey formats. Responses were kept confidential. Table 2 lists the dates and individuals or agencies that performed the focus groups and face-to-face interviews.

Face-to-face surveys using paper survey forms were conducted with 40 personnel from the following agencies:

- CRD
- RESTORE Belize

- Department of Youth Services
- Gateway Youth Center
- CYDP

A total of 58 school personnel from 11 schools<sup>4</sup> participated in paper or online surveys.

<sup>4</sup> The participating schools were: Canaan SDA High School, Gwen Lizarraga High School, Queen Square Anglican School, Central Christian School, Maud Williams High School, Queen Street Baptist Primary School, Friends Boys School, Muslim Community Primary School, Sadie Vernon Technical High School, Grace Primary School, and Palloti High School.

**TABLE 2. DATES AND AGENCIES/INDIVIDUALS WHO PERFORMED INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS**

April 23, 2018	Interview	Assistant Commissioner Edward Broaster, Belize Police Department
April 24, 2018	Interview	Mary Vasquez, Director, RESTORE Belize
April 24, 2018	Focus group	RESTORE Belize personnel
April 24, 2018	Focus group	Department of Youth Services personnel
April 24, 2018	Interview	Assistant Commissioner Edward Broaster, Belize Police Department
April 25, 2018	Interview	Assistant Commissioner Chester Williams, Belize Police Department
April 25, 2018	Focus group	Gang Suppression Unit personnel, Belize Police Department
April 26, 2018	Interview	Chief Magistrate
May 2, 2018	Interview	Starla Bradley, Director, Community Rehabilitation Department
May 2, 2018	Interview	Allison McKenzie, Director, Department of Youth Services
May 2, 2018	Interview	Howell Gillette, Southside Division, Belize Police Department
May 3, 2018	Focus Group	Conscious Youth Development Program personnel
May 3, 2018	Focus Group	Gateway Youth Center personnel
July 26, 2018	Focus Group	Grassroots community leaders (via phone)

Source: Author's elaboration.



## Key Findings and Recommendations

The factors that simultaneously push and pull youth into gangs are complex and interrelated. For that reason, addressing Belize City's substantial gang violence problem will require a sustained, non-partisan, and broad-based effort by a diverse cross-section of organizations and individuals that touch the lives of families, children, and youth, including local, district, and national government agencies<sup>5</sup>; non-governmental organizations (NGOs); churches; businesses; and residents. There are no easy solutions and any strategies implemented will require enhanced coordination and collaboration across sectors at every level in order to accomplish the goal of reducing local gang violence. Similarly, if organizations and agencies fail to work collectively toward shared goals, the ongoing epidemic of violence in Belize City will continue, with dire human and economic consequences.

Based on the data collected and analyzed for this study, four key findings were identified. Based on those

findings, corresponding recommendations have been made to reduce gang-related violence in Belize City.

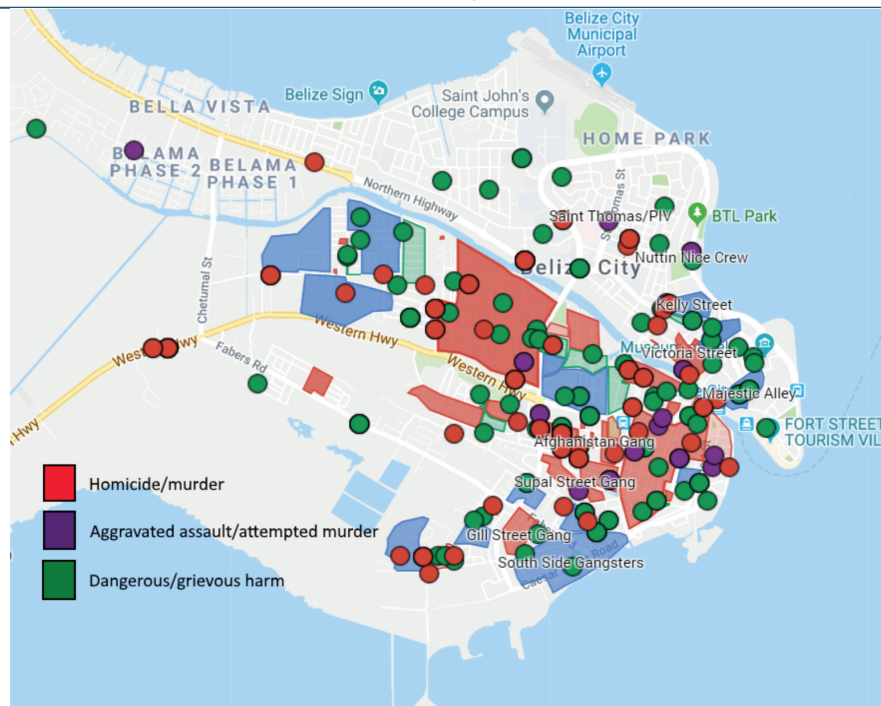
### Key Finding 1

The intersection between gangs and guns has created an epidemic of violence in Belize City that compromises residents' quality of life, exposes youth and children to trauma, and kills or injures hundreds of people annually.

With a population of approximately 62,562 people as of mid-2017, Belize City represents the largest urban area in the country of Belize. In the years 2015 through 2017, 1 percent of the total population of Belize City (approximately 677 people) were seriously injured and 145 people were killed. In 2017, Belize City's intentional

<sup>5</sup> The country of Belize is composed of six districts, of which Belize District is one. Belize District is composed of 13 Constituencies and its capital is Belize City. Note that Belize City is not the capital of the country of Belize.

### EXHIBIT 3. VIOLENT PERSON OFFENSES IN BELIZE CITY, 2017



Source: Author's elaboration.

homicide rate of 99.1 per 100,000 population placed it among the top 10 cities in the world for homicides (Security, Justice, and Peace, 2018).<sup>6</sup>

Much of the violence in Belize City, and indeed the whole nation of Belize, occurs in South Side Belize City<sup>7</sup> in the neighborhoods of Collet, Lake Independence, and Mesopatamia. The violence largely involves individuals from eight gangs. In September 2018, while this assessment was being finalized, authorities declared a state of emergency in the Mayflower and George Street neighborhoods of South Side Belize City, areas known for a heavy prevalence of gang-related violence (AmbergrisToday.com, 2018).

Further, a high percentage of homicides in Belize City involve gang members as suspects, victims, or both. Over the four years 2014 through 2017, 82 percent of homicides in Belize City were classified as gang-related by the BPD GSU. While only homicides are classified by the GSU as gang-related, interviews with gang-involved individuals revealed high levels of involvement by gangs in all types of crime in Belize City:

- 56 percent reported participating in a shooting
- 51 percent reported shooting someone
- 47 percent reported injuring or killing someone
- 69 percent reported holding or selling weapons (includes guns)

Violent crimes in Belize City are more lethal because of the easy access to firearms by youth and gang-involved individuals. During 2017, 37 percent of serious assaults and 83 percent of homicides involved a firearm. When asked how easy it would be to get a gun, 38 percent of youth and 71 percent of gang-involved youth surveyed stated that it would be very easy or somewhat easy. During interviews conducted with gang-involved individuals, almost all respondents (93 percent) reported that it would be somewhat or very easy for them to get a gun.

Gang violence causes residents in Belize City to live in fear and limits their daily activities. Residents described how they modify their lives to avoid being victimized:

- They stay inside their homes and stay off the streets after dark.
- They avoid going into or through certain neighborhoods.
- They do not allow their children to play outside and they install extra security measures at their homes.
- They stay quiet when crimes are committed in the neighborhood for fear of becoming a target.

One parent noted, “People are fearful of going out, leaving their homes, or having their children go anywhere to any activity due to safety concerns. You feel like a prisoner in your own home.”

Respondents across every surveyed group expressed concerns for not only their safety, but also for the safety of their children. Of the community residents surveyed face-to-face or online:

- 84 percent of face-to-face respondents believed their child could be injured by gang violence
- 37 percent of face-to-face respondents stated that one of their top three concerns in their neighborhood was shootings
- 44 percent of face-to-face respondents expressed that they felt unsafe or very unsafe in their neighborhood
- 41 percent of online respondents expressed that increased fear for personal safety was one of the top three problems caused by gangs in Belize City

Community leaders also expressed concerns about the level of gang violence in Belize City. Almost all community leaders (90 percent) reported that gang violence had increased in the previous three years. When community leaders were asked to identify the top three problems caused by gangs:

<sup>6</sup> The Citizen Council for Public Security and Criminal Justice (Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y la Justicia Penal S.A.) prepares an annual list of 50 cities with the highest murder rates worldwide that are not at war and have populations of at least 300,000 people. Though Belize City does not have a population size that allows it to be considered, its murder rate is higher than the sixth ranked city.

<sup>7</sup> Belize City is divided into the South Side and the North Side by Haulover Creek, which opens into the Caribbean Sea.

- 91 percent identified an increase in violent crimes
- 52 percent reported an increase in weapons crimes
- 52 percent reported increased fear for personal safety

Of the youth surveyed, 43 percent (74 percent of gang-involved) reported that they believed they or a friend were likely to be injured in gang violence. Further, almost all the youth who participated in focus groups knew or were related to someone killed or injured in gang violence. Many young people who participated in focus groups also shared how their lives were constrained by the need to continually think about gang violence.

This fear for personal safety drives young people to join gangs. During interviews with gang-involved individuals, the most common reason provided for joining a gang was for protection or to feel safe. Gang-involved individuals also reported high levels of violence in their neighborhoods, with 49 percent reporting that a person gets shot in their neighborhood daily.

Parents and agency personnel described the long-term effects of children's direct exposure to violence in the community, particularly when it affects their family. A staff member at a youth-serving agency in Belize noted:

*"Youth grow up in a community that is full of violence and have many traumatic experiences. Mental health services such as grief and loss support and PTSD treatment are lacking. Youth with exposure to violence walk around angry. They witness a death in their family, are not given any support or coping strategies, and feel that they need to retaliate. When we fail to address these issues, we are creating new shooters and new victims."*

### Recommendation 1

Policymakers in Belize City should implement Cure Violence, an evidence-based model that has significantly reduced violence in communities around the world.

Cure Violence ([cureviolence.org](http://cureviolence.org)) is an intensive violence reduction program. It should be implemented in South Side Belize City in the Collet, Lake Independence, and Mesopotamia neighborhoods, which are the most affected by violence. The program should serve the individuals most involved in violence. Cure Violence uses a public health methodology to prevent and reduce homicides and shootings and concentrates intensive services in small sections of communities with the highest levels of violence. Trusted members of the community who have influence with local gangs serve as violence interrupters to stop retaliatory shootings and prevent conflicts from becoming violent. Recent implementations of Cure Violence in Central American and Caribbean cities with comparable levels of violence have shown impressive results. Table 3 provides examples of outcomes of the Cure Violence model in various cities.

While other evidence-based gang intervention programs were considered—including the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model and Boston Gun Project's Operation Ceasefire—the assessment team determined that Cure Violence was the most appropriate for the specific situation that the government was seeking to address: homicide reduction in a concentrated geographic area in a short period of time. Further, Cure Violence is the only program that has been implemented and shown positive results in several Caribbean and Central American countries with similar sociocultural, political, and legal contexts as Belize.

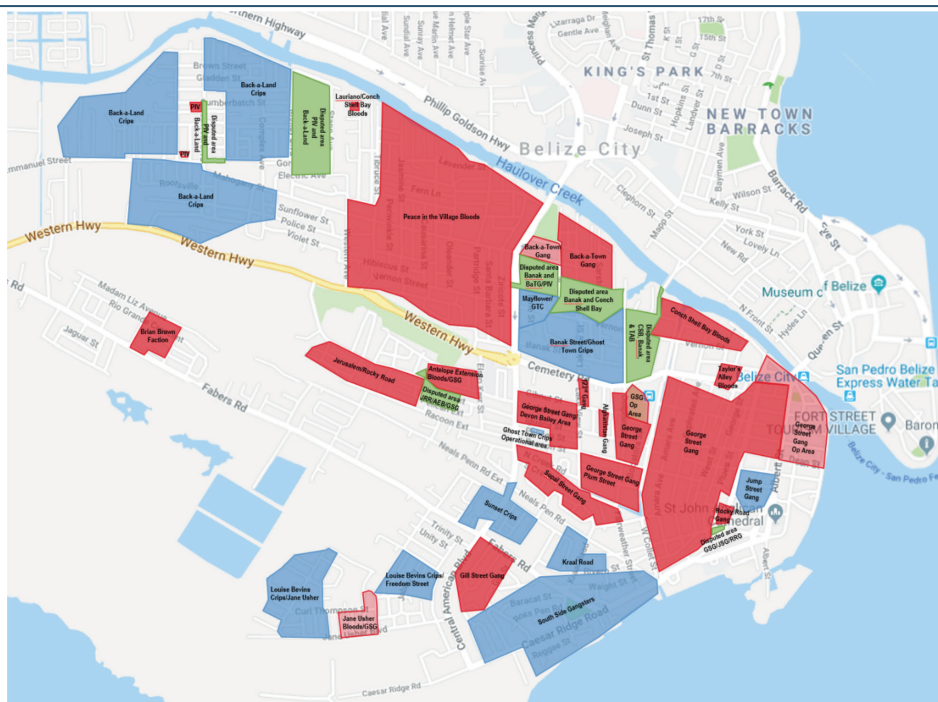
**TABLE 3. REDUCTIONS IN VIOLENCE FOLLOWING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CURE VIOLENCE MODEL**

City, Country	Outcomes
Juarez, Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 50% reduction in killings in most areas in 2016</li> </ul>
Loiza, Puerto Rico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 53% reduction in killings</li> </ul>
Port of Spain, Trinidad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 45% decrease in violent crime</li> <li>• 38% decrease in gunshot wounds</li> </ul>
San Pedro Sula, Honduras	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 88% reduction in shootings and killings</li> <li>• One site went 17 months without a killing</li> </ul>

Source: CureViolence.org, n.d.



#### EXHIBIT 4. ACTIVE GANGS IN SOUTH SIDE BELIZE CITY, 2018



Source: Author's elaboration.

Implementation of Cure Violence in Belize City should focus on males aged 18 to 30 from eight specific gangs.<sup>8</sup>

Activities should be conducted during the times when violence is most likely to occur and schedules routinely adjusted using ongoing analysis of police incident reports for aggravated assaults, homicides, and dangerous/grievous harm.

CYDP, Belize's only specialized gang intervention program, has provided conflict mediation and psychosocial support services to gang-involved youth and their families for over a decade. Given its mission and strong relationships in the community, CYDP would be an optimal choice to carry out Cure Violence. To do so, CYDP would need to reorient its intervention methodology, reduce and focus its geographic coverage, and increase its staff assignment to concentrate more intensive violence prevention response in South Side Belize City.<sup>9</sup> These changes could result in significant reductions in gang-related violence in the most

affected sections of Belize City, and overall reductions in violent crime for the entire nation of Belize.

## Key Finding 2

A significant percentage of children and youth in Belize City are at high risk for joining a gang because they are exposed to risk factors for gang involvement in almost every domain of their lives. This provides local gangs a consistent pool from which to recruit vulnerable youth.

<sup>8</sup> The specific gangs to be targeted with Cure Violence are: Peace in the Valley Bloods, George Street/Gaza, Banak/Ghost Town Crips, Conch Shell Bay, Louise Bevans Crips, Antelope Crew/Crenshaw Bloods, Supal Street Bloods, and South Side Gang.

<sup>9</sup> CYDP has never been formally evaluated. At present, CYDP does not track detailed service delivery data, which would pose a problem for evaluation. As such, the findings on the program presented in this report are primarily anecdotal, gathered from staff and beneficiaries, and by experts in gang and violence reduction observing the program's field activities. These experts.

The estimated total gang population in Belize City is between 900 and 1,400 members, spread across 36 gangs, some of which may also have internal or external splinter groups. Gang activity and gang membership is primarily concentrated in South Side Belize City. A significant percentage of the youth surveyed in Belize City reported exposure to key risk factors correlated with joining a gang, and 20 percent of reported current or prior involvement in gangs. Further, survey responses indicated that an additional 10 percent of youths in Belize City were at high risk for future involvement in gangs as they were exposed to an accumulation of risk factors for joining a gang in multiple domains of their lives. Risk factors are described below.

**Problem Behaviors:** Of the youth surveyed, 29 percent reported engaging in risky or impulsive behavior as frequently as two or three times per month. Of gang-involved youth, 58 percent reported engaging in such behavior two or three times per month (i.e., they were almost twice as likely as other youth) and 55 percent reported engaging in such behavior once or more per week.

**Negative Life Events and Family Disruption:** Of youth surveyed in Belize City, 71 percent reported living in a single parent home or apart from their biological parents. Of gang-involved youth, 89 percent lived in homes with family disruption. Youth from single parent homes were also likely to report greater exposure to other risk factors.

**Low Parental Supervision and Monitoring:** Of the youth surveyed, 25 percent provided neutral or negative responses to questions about parental supervision and monitoring, and this percentage was higher for youth outside of a two-parent structure. Of those with gang involvement, 58 percent expressed neutral or negative responses.

**Attitudes toward Delinquent Behavior:** Youth in Belize City reported the lowest levels of risk related to this factor compared to all other factors examined, with only 17 percent responding that it is a little bit wrong or not wrong at all to lie to parents. For skipping school, 21 percent reported it is only a little bit wrong or not

wrong at all. Gang-involved youth are more likely than other youth to believe it is okay to skip school, steal a small item, or take a handgun to school.

**Low School Performance:** Almost half of gang-involved respondents (45 percent) were not currently attending school and dropped out before completing high school. Of the gang-involved individuals interviewed for this report, 76 percent had dropped out of school at least once. Gang member interviews also established a correlation between dropping out of school and joining a gang. The most common age for gang-involved individuals to report joining a gang was between 12 and 15 years of age, which were also the most common years for youth to drop out of school.

**Low School Attachment:** Of all youth surveyed, 34 percent gave neutral or negative responses to whether there are adults at school that they could talk to, 37 percent to whether they feel safe at school, and 32 percent to whether they belong and feel important at school. Gang-involved youth reported higher rates of neutral or negative attachment to school.

At present, CYDP is the only agency in Belize City that provides services specifically to gang-involved individuals. These services are delivered by a staff of six in a city that experienced 46 gang-related murders during 2017. Similarly, MHDSTPA's Community Rehabilitation Department is the sole agency to provide services specifically to court-involved youth.

Program personnel, youth, gang-involved individuals, parents, and community leaders all described a lack of resources for gang-involved youths and young adults, including:

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who have worked with two dozen other sites within in the United States over the past 20 years on behalf of the Department of Justice, observed the existing relationships between CYDP and gang- and violence-involved individuals in the community. They found that CYDP appears to have a broad base of support with gang-involved individuals, to be well-respected by those individuals, and to be successful at persuading high-ranking gang members to participate in highly personal interviews with external experts. That is a significant measure of success, even though it cannot be quantified.

- Lack of educational programs and settings appropriate to the needs of high-risk youth and young adults
- Lack of mental health services and grief counseling for trauma-exposed youth
- Lack of employment opportunities for high-risk and gang-involved youth and young adults, particularly for formerly incarcerated individuals
- Lack of literacy programming
- Lack of enrichment or recreational programming
- Lack of family programming for youth with serious family risk factors
- Lack of transitional housing and independent living programs for youth and young adults transitioning out of foster care, the youth hostel, Wagner's youth facility, or the Central Prison

## Recommendation 2

Agencies in Belize City should implement intensive, risk-focused, wrap-around programming focused on the specific needs of the most vulnerable youth.

Most youth in Belize City cannot be categorized as high risk. In fact, many of those who responded to the youth survey could accurately be categorized as low to very low risk. This suggests that families, communities, the faith community, and existing programs are doing an adequate job of protecting most youth from gang involvement.

However, up to 20 percent of youth in Belize City may already demonstrate characteristics that predict a high level of risk for involvement in community-level violence:

- Youth who had already entered the juvenile justice system for more than minor offenses
- Youth and young adults who were involved in a gang
- Youth and young adults who were re-entering the community from placement or incarceration
- Youth who were family members of recent victims of violent crime or were themselves victims of violent crime

An additional 10 percent may be at high risk for gang involvement due to exposure to multiple risk factors. These are youth 12 to 15 years old who meet three or more of the following characteristics:

- Single parent home or living with other relatives or adults
- Dropped out of or was suspended or expelled from school for behavioral issues
- Close friends or family members who are involved in gangs
- Expresses antisocial beliefs
- Regularly engages in risky or dangerous behavior

To meet the needs of the highest-risk youth, the following strategies should be implemented.

### 1. Implement intensive, wrap-around services for the highest-risk youth using the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model

For those youth who are already involved in a gang and at high risk of future involvement in community-level violence, the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model provides a structural framework to implement a coordinated and collaborative response to gangs. Elements of this model include:

- A steering committee comprising policymakers who ensure access to services and oversee the collective response to gangs in the city.
- A multi-disciplinary intervention team composed of a gang-focused street outreach and case management (CYDP), probation (CRD), the Department of Youth Services, education representatives, mental health services, employment assistance programs, and the BPD. The role of this intervention team is to provide coordinated case management for a targeted group of high-risk, gang-involved young people.

This model should be led by an agency with enough influence to bring all parties to the table to collaborate on these strategies but should not be based in an agency connected with criminal justice. Implementation of the gang model would meet the needs of youth and young

adults who are already involved in a gang and would also improve coordination between local agencies.

If policymakers decide to implement this model, they should contract with a technical assistance provider for ongoing training and coaching with this process for a minimum of two years.

## **2. Ensure access to needed services for the highest-risk population**

An individual level risk assessment is currently conducted by CRD personnel at client intake and provides a way to identify the types of programming and resources that are needed for court-involved clients. A needs assessment should be added to that risk assessment to identify services needed by individual youth, such as educational support, educational placement, job placement, mental health services, and grief counseling.

This risk and needs assessment should be administered by CRD and CYDP personnel at client intake. The risk and need scores for clients in both programs should be used annually to project service needs.

Data collected for this study suggests a need for moderate- and high-risk intervention programming focused on:

- Developing effective parenting skills and family support for high-risk families
- Creating school support and alternative educational programs
- Providing employment programming
- Implementing cognitive behavioral groups to address antisocial thinking patterns and high-risk behavior

Funding should be set aside annually to purchase needed services for the highest-risk youth and should be allocated based on the number of youth projected to need each service type, apportioned by the assessed types of risk and projected costs for each service type.

For more than a decade, this structure has been used successfully in the United States by both the North Carolina Department of Public Safety and the City

of Los Angeles Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development and has resulted in systematic reductions in youth entering the adult court system, juvenile crime, and gang-related violence.

## **3. Fit existing programs into a risk-focused continuum of care**

While RESTORE Belize and other government entities have conducted inventories of existing services, these inventories are not sufficiently descriptive to match at-risk young people with needed services. Existing programs need to be re-examined and categorized by risk factor(s) addressed to create a risk-focused continuum of services extending from ages 0 to 25 (at a minimum) and including:

- Primary prevention services (many programs currently exist)
- Secondary prevention services (many programs currently exist)
- Moderate intervention services (some programs exist)
- High-risk intervention services (two programs exist)
- Reentry services (almost none exist)

Implementing Cure Violence and the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model would help fill the existing gaps in high-risk intervention and reentry services. Other services needed by these populations are addressed in Recommendation 3.

A strategic planning tool developed by the National Gang Center was designed to help local communities and agencies match program models to specific risk factors that are identified in the local community as significant to gang affiliation. This tool, which can be accessed at <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/spt/>, provides a matrix type of template that can be replicated to report on existing programs in Belize City in a way that facilitates youth being directed to the most appropriate programs and services and can be used to identify gaps in services.

Further, both government agencies and NGOs should be encouraged to use the CRD risk assessment to measure and report the risk levels of clients they serve.



### Key Finding 3

The inability of many youth to access secondary, higher, and vocational education makes Belize City youth more vulnerable to joining a gang and represses their long-term economic prospects. Lack of opportunities for legitimate employment keep youth and adults trapped in gangs and contribute to the city's overall cycle of poverty and violence.

In Belize City, failure to complete school appears to be correlated with joining a gang. Further, lack of educational and employment opportunities for gang and court-involved youth and adults compromises the effectiveness of existing programs and would hinder the effectiveness of programs described in Recommendations 1 and 2.

Of the gang-involved individuals that were interviewed, 38 percent dropped out in Standard 6, the final year of primary school, or earlier, and 75 percent had dropped out by Form 2, the second year of secondary school.<sup>10</sup>

As a result, many of these youth and young adults lack the literacy and skills to obtain a decent job and may even struggle in alternative education or vocational programs. For those individuals who turn to street crime to earn an income, their odds of long-term unemployment increase since a criminal history can make them virtually unemployable.

Only 10 percent of the gang-involved individuals who were interviewed for this report were employed (excluding individuals who were currently incarcerated). When asked what resources might help them leave the gang, 42 percent reported that a job would be the most important factor in their decision. Every group who participated in this study emphasized the importance of accessible educational programming and employment opportunities for high-risk youth and young adults.

### Recommendation 3

The Government of Belize should increase access to alternative educational programming and employment opportunities to improve the success of existing programs and future activities.

Providing this population access to educational and employment opportunities is of considerable importance to future responses to gangs in Belize City. Policymakers should consider the following options for expanding services:

- Expand the Youth Apprenticeship Program in Belize City to serve a special cohort of these high-risk individuals.
- Create accessible alternative education programming at the neighborhood level. For example, provide literacy tutoring or high school equivalency programs in locations such as local churches, Department of Youth Services drop-in centers, and existing community agencies or youth centers. Such programs could be relatively inexpensive and would increase educational access for gang-involved individuals in Belize City.
- Leverage partnerships with NGOs and the Ministry of Education to provide night school classes at local educational facilities.
- Work with existing vocational programs to expand access in order to meet the specific needs of high-risk individuals.

Just providing short-term jobs is insufficient to help youth and young adults transition out of gangs. Best practices identified in gang intervention programming in the United States (Arciaga and Gonzalez, 2013) suggest that gang-involved individuals need long-term intervention and support to help them:

- avoid the threat of violence from the gang,
- change their self-image and reinvent themselves as productive members of society,

<sup>10</sup> The Belizean public education system is composed of primary and secondary schools. Primary school receives children from the age of 5, when they enter the Infant I class; the Infant II class is designed for children that are 6 years old. Standard 1 through Standard 6 classes are designed for children from 7 to 12 years of age. Secondary school, which starts with Form 1 and ends with Form 4, is designed for children from 13 to 16 years of age. Education is free of charge and compulsory in Belize through Standard 6. Tuition and school fees are charged in secondary school.

- navigate educational systems and the job market,
- quickly find sources of income from legitimate employment, and
- create a long-term plan for economic success.

Implementing Cure Violence and the Comprehensive Gang Model would provide a support system to address these needs. As described in Recommendation 2, creating a systematized method to fund education and employment services for gang- and court-involved clients is recommended for the high-risk populations served by these two models. Further, without consistent, sustained implementation of employment programs and access to education, the recommended strategies will have limited success.

#### Key Finding 4

While efforts have been made to respond to local gang problems, the lack of a sustained response has resulted in loss of life and damage to the community. Further, the lack of transparency by programs and agencies connected to this problem has contributed to high levels of dissatisfaction among all groups surveyed.

A high percentage of all groups surveyed expressed that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the current response to gangs in Belize City:

- 85 percent of community residents in face-to-face surveys
- 77 percent of community residents in online surveys

- 71 percent of community leaders
- 78 percent of agency personnel
- 59 percent of youth

All the groups who participated in this study commented that sustaining programs and providing transparent outcomes are a challenge in Belize City. Several participants in agency focus groups and community leader interviews noted that when programs are implemented, frequently no data is collected on service delivery, no evaluation is completed, and no outcomes are reported. Some participants stated that programs are put in place for brief periods but seem to be politically motivated and are not sustained.

When effective programs are implemented, respondents noted that they are also not sustained. This lack of consistency creates public distrust of government programs. It also makes providing direct services to gang-involved individuals more difficult. Participants were also sharply critical of the perceived failure of the government to implement a comprehensive, long-term approach to gang prevention and intervention in Belize City. One participant said, “In Belize, we move from crisis to crisis. We never implement a long-term plan. We are reactionary, but we cannot seem to sustain any momentum to address this problem in the long run.”

Respondents at all organizational levels, from front line personnel to directors, stated that conflicts between agencies have led to a general failure to coordinate service delivery and communicate effectively across agency boundaries

**TABLE 4. RESPONDENTS’ LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH THE CURRENT RESPONSE TO GANGS**

Level of Satisfaction	Community Residents (Face-to-Face)	Community Residents (Online)	Community Leaders	Agency Personnel	Youth
Very satisfied	1.1%	1.5%	0%	0%	7.8%
Satisfied	7.8%	3.9%	4.8%	2.5%	11.7%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	6.4%	17.7%	23.8%	20.0%	21.9%
Dissatisfied	67.5%	33.1%	33.3%	42.5%	35.9%
Very dissatisfied	17.3%	43.9%	38.1%	35.0%	22.7%
<b>Total dissatisfied</b>	<b>84.8%</b>	<b>77.0%</b>	<b>71.4%</b>	<b>77.5%</b>	<b>58.6%</b>

Source: Author’s elaboration.

#### Recommendation 4

Key agencies and civil society need to coordinate efforts to provide social services to youth to guarantee well-designed, transparent, sustainable programs that effectively reduce violence in Belize City and restore the confidence of the community. Such programs must be envisioned within the framework of an agreed national strategy to eradicate youth violence.

Youth-serving agencies in Belize City need to begin collecting data on individual client characteristics and tangible services provided to clients. The MHDSTPA has built a data collection system (FAMCare) that is used by its divisions, including the CRD, to track individual client services. Data presently collected in the FAMCare system by CRD needs to be expanded to plan service needs and report outcomes to policymakers and the public.

Further, reporting in the FAMCare system should be expanded to include all youth-serving government agencies, as well as NGOs that receive government funding to provide youth services, so that data collection is consistent across agencies. At a minimum, youth-serving government agencies and NGOs receiving government funding should collect individual client and program outcome data in standardized ways in the FAMCare system.

The programs and strategies described in Recommendations 1 and 2 all rely on a steady flow of information about gangs and gang involvement in crimes. While the BPD has several mechanisms to capture crime data, there is a lack of gang-specific intelligence and crime data. The BPD should collect intelligence on gangs in an organized fashion and should also track gang involvement in crime categories such as aggravated assault, attempted murder, dangerous harm, grievous harm, robbery, and aggravated burglary.





# Assessment Data and Findings

## 2

This section presents the data that was collected and analyzed for the assessment, as well as the general findings, which support the key findings presented in the previous section.

### Violent Crime and Gangs in Belize City: Analysis of Data from Police Incident Reports and Gang Intelligence

#### Summary Analysis

To substantially reduce gang-related violence in Belize City, emphasis should be placed on preventing retaliatory shootings between gangs in the Lake Independence, Collett, and Mesopotamia neighborhoods. The primary focus for efforts to reduce violence should be gang-involved males, aged 18–30, residing in South Side Belize City and connected to following gangs:

- Peace in the Valley Bloods
- George Street/Gaza
- Banak/Ghost Town Crips
- Conch Shell Bay
- Louise Bevans Crips
- Antelope Crew/Crenshaw Bloods
- Supal Street Bloods
- South Side Gang

The Cure Violence model uses a violence prevention and reduction methodology that seems appropriate for Belize City given the type and concentration of violent crime to be addressed. The Cure Violence model

recommends deploying violence interrupters in accordance with data about the places where and the times when homicides, woundings, and shootings are most likely to occur. As such, violence interrupters should initially be deployed between noon and midnight from Thursday through Monday. Quarterly analysis should be conducted to determine whether schedules and target areas should be adjusted to accommodate changing trends in violent crime.

The assessment examined serious violent crimes in Belize City by crime category, as determined in police incident reports, to establish a baseline level of violence in Belize City over the three years prior to the assessment (2015–2017). The crime categories examined were:

#### Violent person offenses (VPOs):

- Homicide/murder
- Attempted murder
- Aggravated assault
- Grievous harm
- Dangerous harm

#### Other violent offenses:

- Aggravated burglary
- Robbery

For this analysis, crimes that had a very small number of incidences were grouped into categories with similar crimes by motive. Crimes designated as VPOs are primarily motivated by the intent to cause harm or

injury to another person and differ only in regard to the severity of the injuries sustained by the victim. In contrast, the primary motive for robbery and aggravated burglary is financial gain. There are often substantive differences between how, when, and where these two groups of crimes are committed.

Further, incidents involving domestic violence were segregated because the characteristics of these crimes can be quite different from other violent crimes (e.g., suspect/victim demographics, weapons used, time of day, and day of week). Also, infliction of dangerous harm and infliction of grievous harm were merged into a single category, dangerous/grievous harm (DGH).

The analysis was designed to provide policymakers and agency personnel with information about when and where violent crimes occur in Belize City and who the likely suspects and victims are. This analysis was developed to ensure that gang strategies that are implemented in Belize City are data driven.

Based on analysis of police incident report data provided by the Joint Intelligence Coordination Center, murders in Belize City increased by 51 percent between 2015 and 2017. Indeed, the intentional homicide rate increased to 99.1 per 100,000 people in 2017 from 67.3 per 100,000 people in 2015, placing Belize City in the top 10 most violent cities in the world on a per capita basis.

However, the number of overall VPOs—which includes aggravated assault, attempted murder, DGH, and murder—declined slightly to 258 in 2017 from 276

in 2015. The number of robberies increased slightly, to 121 in 2017 from 106 in 2015, or 14 percent. Though no data was provided for aggravated burglaries in 2015, they declined by 17 percent between 2016 and 2017. The overall rate of serious violent crime declined substantially to 313.2 per 100,000 in 2017 from 385.5 per 100,000 population in 2015. It is possible that the decline in serious violent crime would have been shown to be greater if aggravated burglary incidents had been reported in 2015.

Much of the decrease in VPOs between 2015 and 2017 was due to marked decreases in attempted murders (57 percent) and in aggravated assaults related to domestic violence (70 percent). However, we note that the annual numbers for these types of crimes are relatively small, which can lead to large percentage changes year-to-year. During 2015, 24 percent of VPOs were related to domestic violence, but that percentage declined to 9 percent in 2017. When offenses related to domestic violence are excluded from this analysis and murder is included, the rate of VPOs increased by 10 percent between 2015 and 2017.

### When Do Violent Crimes Occur?

An hour/day/month analysis was conducted to assist policymakers with targeting activities and strategies during the time periods when violence crime is most likely to happen.

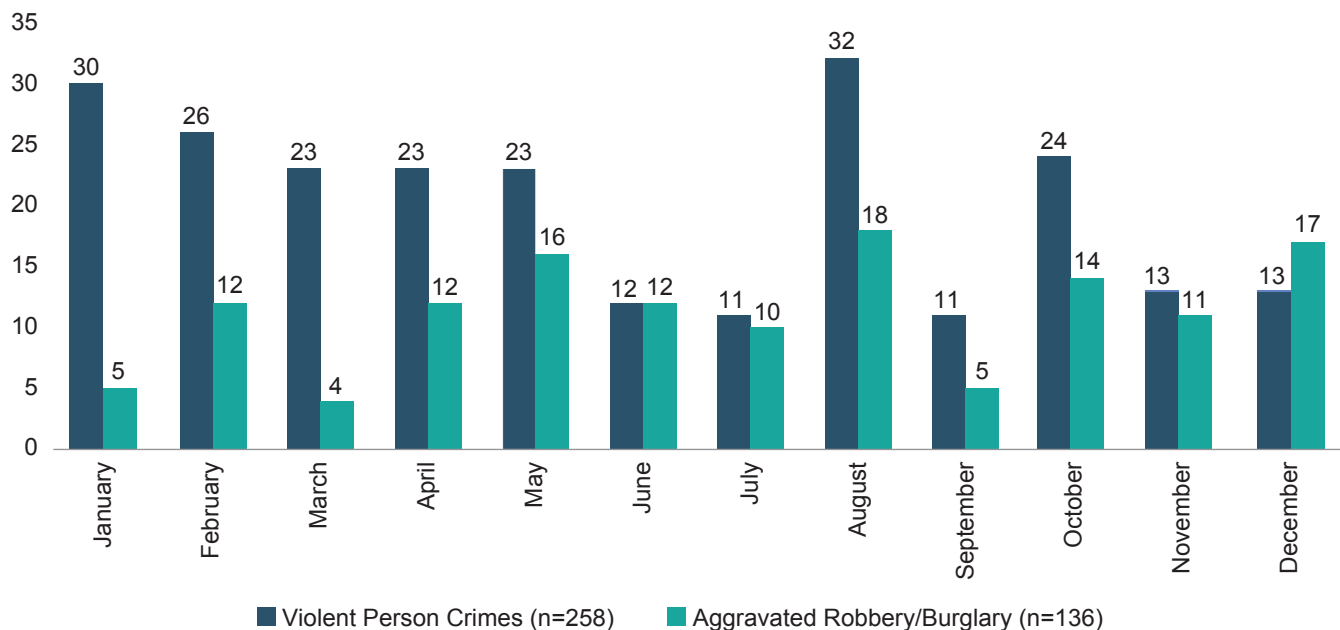
The most common time of day for all VPOs—murder and robbery/aggravated burglary specifically—was between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. Domestic violence was more likely to occur between midnight and 3 a.m.

**TABLE 5. VIOLENT OFFENSES BY CATEGORY AND YEAR**

Year	Aggravated Assault	Attempted Murder	DGH	Murder	Total	% Change from Previous Year	Robbery	Aggravated Burglary	Total
2015	170	52	13	41	276	0%	106	n/a	106
2016	183	47	16	42	288	+4.3%	118	18	136
2017	147	22	27	62	258	-10.4%	121	15	136

Source: Joint Intelligence Coordinating Center, 2018.

Note: Data for aggravated burglary was not provided for 2015.

**FIGURE 2. 2017 VIOLENT PERSON OFFENSES (INCLUDING MURDER) BY MONTH**

Source: Joint Intelligence Coordinating Center, analysis by author.

In 2017,<sup>11</sup> VPOs were committed most commonly on Sundays (19 percent) and Fridays (17 percent) and least commonly on Tuesdays (11 percent).

In 2017, VPOs (excluding domestic violence) peaked during January, August, and October, whereas robbery and aggravated burglary were most common in May, August, and December.

### Where Do Violent Offenses Occur?

Crimes were analyzed by constituency in Belize District to identify the specific areas where violent crimes were most likely to occur. During 2017, almost half of all VPOs occurred in the Collet, Lake Independence, and Mesopotamia constituencies. Over twice as many homicides occurred in Lake Independence during 2017 as occurred in the next highest constituency (Collet). Further, between the beginning of 2015 and the end of 2017, homicides in Lake Independence increased by 250 percent, to 21 from 6.

### Active Gangs in Belize City

Data on gang involvement in Belize City is limited. At least 36 different gangs are active, with the estimated

**TABLE 6. PERCENTAGE OF VIOLENT OFFENSES COMMITTED DURING 24-HOUR PERIOD, BY THREE-HOUR TIME SEGMENT, 2017**

Time of day	VPO	Domestic Violence	Murder	Robbery/Aggravated Burglary
0:00–03:00	7%	29%	10%	6%
03:01–06:00	5%	6%	7%	7%
06:01–09:00	10%	12%	3%	7%
09:01–12:00	8%	0%	10%	13%
12:01–15:00	15%	6%	10%	18%
15:01–18:00	12%	18%	10%	13%
18:01–21:00	28%	18%	29%	28%
21:01–24:00	15%	12%	18%	8%

Source: Joint Intelligence Coordinating Center; analysis by author.

<sup>11</sup> As crime trends can shift over time, data in this section is reported only for 2017, which was the most recent year of crime data. The goal for reporting data in this section is to identify the most pressing issues at the current time, rather than the trends over three years. Going forward, we recommend that, when implementing a gang response strategy, the government collect, analyze, and report crime data on a quarterly basis.

**TABLE 7. PERCENTAGE OF OFFENSES BY OFFENSE CATEGORY AND CONSTITUENCY, 2017**

Constituency	VPO	%	Murder	%	Robbery/ Aggravated Burglary	%
Albert	15	8%	5	8%	11	8%
Caribbean Shores	18	9%	3	5%	15	11%
Collet	34	18%	10	17%	21	16%
Fort George	16	8%	3	5%	12	9%
Freetown	6	3%	2	3%	6	4%
Lake Independence	30	16%	21	35%	26	19%
Mesopotamia	32	17%	4	7%	17	13%
Pickstock	7	4%	1	2%	13	10%
Port Loyola	18	9%	7	12%	7	5%
Queen Square	16	8%	4	7%	6	4%
Belize Rural South	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%
Cayo South	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%
Belize Rural Central	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Joint Intelligence Coordinating Center; analysis by author.

number of gang members ranging from 938 to 1,365. The average age of the youngest members is 13.6 and the oldest is 37.5. The largest gangs by estimated number of members are the Peace in the Valley Bloods, South Side Gang (Crips), and Gaza New Generation Bloods.

The gangs with the greatest longevity (based on the estimated age of members) are the George Street Bloods, Majestic Alley Crips, Ghost Town/Banak Crips, Back-a-Town Bloods, Back-a-Land Crips, and Jerusalem Crips. The gangs with the youngest members on average are the 103 New Road Bloods, Riverside Boys, and Gaza New Generation Bloods. It is likely that these are most recently created gangs. Average age of membership ranges from the George Street Bloods (32) to the Gaza New Generation Bloods (15). The leaders of the older, more long-standing gangs tend to be in their 30s and 40s, whereas the leaders of the newest gangs may be in their late teens.

### Gang Territories

By nature, gangs in Belize City are territorial and most gangs claim territory in South Side neighborhoods.

Exhibits 5 and 6 show gang territories as of October 2018 along with some areas that are disputed between rival gangs.

### Gang Involvement in Violent Crime

Data on the gang affiliation of victims and the people arrested in homicides as well as the designation of homicides as gang-related were provided by Corporal Leonard Augustine from the GSU. A large percentage of homicides in Belize between 2014 and 2017 were classified as gang-related, ranging from a high of 91 percent in 2016 to a low of 72 percent in 2017. As of the writing of this report, homicides are the only crime classified as gang-related by the GSU.

During 2017, there were 64 victims of 62 incidents of homicide. Of these incidents, 72 percent were classified as gang-related. On average, victims of gang-related homicides were 12 years younger than victims of non-gang-related homicides. In fact, 67 percent of gang-related homicide victims were between 15 and 35 years. By comparison, homicide victims in non-gang-related crimes skew much older, with 18 percent being over the age of 60.

**TABLE 8. ACTIVE GANGS IN BELIZE CITY BY AGE AND MEMBERSHIP**

Gang Name	Age			Membership	
	Youngest	Oldest	Average	Low	High
Peace in the Valley Bloods	12	40	26	100	200
South Side Gang (Crips)	12	40	26	90	100
Gaza New Generation Bloods	11	19	15	70	90
Ghost Town/Banak Crips	11	45	28	60	70
George Street Bloods	18	45	31.5	40	50
Majestic Ally Crip	12	45	28.5	25	50
Jane Usher Bloods	12	40	26	35	45
Supal Street Bloods	12	40	26	30	40
Jungle Bloods	12	40	26	20	40
West-Molan (Taylors Alley) Bloods	12	35	23.5	30	40
Louise Bevans Crips	14	35	24.5	30	40
Antelope Street Bloods	14	40	27	20	35
Victoria Street Bloods	12	40	26	18	35
Jump Street Crips	14	40	27	15	35
Lacroix Blvd Bloods	12	39	25.5	20	35
Back-a-Town Bloods	14	45	29.5	20	30
Back-a-Lands Crips	14	45	29.5	20	30
Kelly Street Crips	12	40	26	20	30
Kraal Road Crips	13	40	26.5	20	30
Police Street Crips	14	38	26	30	30
Conch Shell Bloods	14	35	24.5	25	30
Gill Street Bloods	13	35	24	20	30
Plum Tree Bloods	14	35	24.5	20	25
Amara Street Bloods	14	35	24.5	20	25
Kings Park Crips	18	40	29	15	20
Rocky Road Crips	17	35	26	15	20
103 New Road Bloods	12	30	21	15	20
Riverside Boys	12	20	16	15	20
Jerusalem Crips	12	45	28.5	10	15
Afghanistan Bloods	14	35	24.5	10	15
102 (Parham) Crips	18	35	26.5	10	15
Belama (Riverside Bloods)	15	35	25	10	15
Simon Lamb Street Crips	20	35	27.5	10	15
Neals Penn Road (Gaza) Bloods	15	35	25	10	15
Sunset Crips	14	35	24.5	10	15
Horse and Carriage Blood	12	35	23.5	10	15
<b>Average</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>37.4</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>938</b>	<b>1,365</b>

Source: Conscious Youth Development Programme.

### EXHIBIT 5. ACTIVE GANGS IN SOUTH SIDE BELIZE CITY, 2018



Source: Map created by the author in partnership with representatives of the BPD Crime Analysis Unit, BPD Gang Suppression Unit, CYDP, RESTORE Belize, Department of Youth Services, and the MHDSTPA.

### EXHIBIT 6. ACTIVE GANGS IN NORTH SIDE BELIZE CITY, 2018



*Source:* Map created by the author in partnership with representatives of the BPD Crime Analysis Unit, BPD Gang Suppression Unit, CYDP, RESTORE Belize, Department of Youth Services, and the MHDSTPA.

**TABLE 9. PERCENTAGE OF GANG-RELATED HOMICIDES IN BELIZE CITY**

Year	# of Homicide Victims	# Incidents Identified as Gang-Related	Percent Gang-Related
2014	60	52	86.7%
2015	45	37	82.2%
2016	46	42	91.3%
2017	64	46	71.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>82.3%</b>

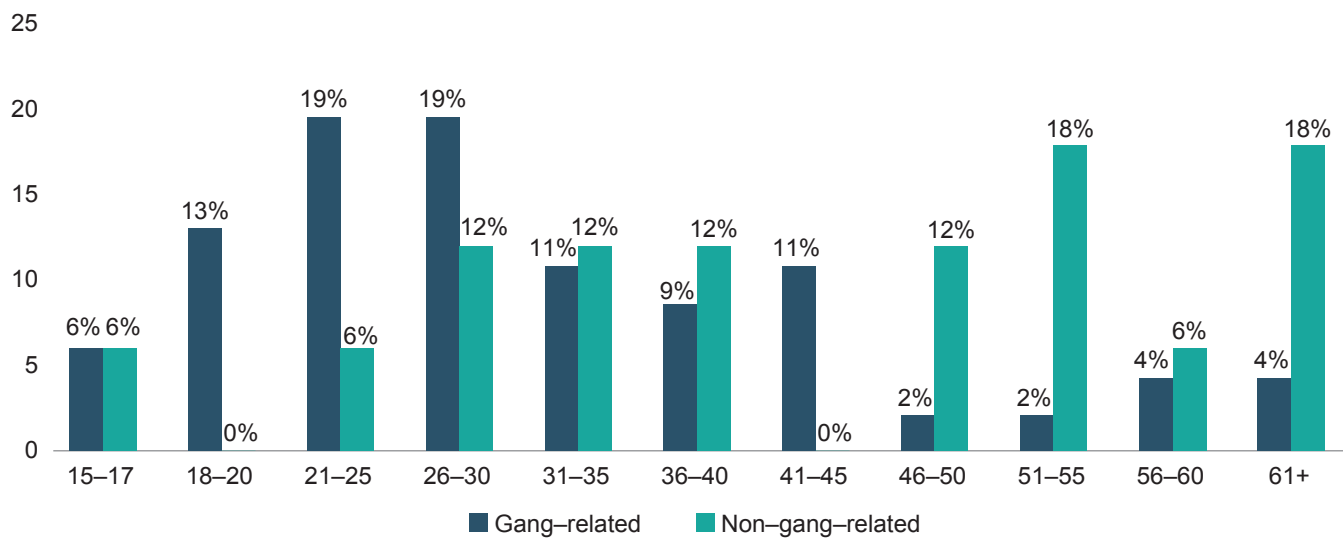
Source: BPD Gang Suppression Unit; analysis by author.

**TABLE 10. AGE OF GANG-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS ARRESTED FOR HOMICIDE**

Age	Number	Percentage
15–17	5	11.6%
18–20	12	27.9%
21–25	11	25.6%
26–30	14	32.6%
31–35	1	2.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	

Source: BPD Gang Suppression Unit; analysis by author



**FIGURE 3. AGE OF HOMICIDE VICTIMS, GANG-RELATED VERSUS NON-GANG-RELATED, 2017**

Source: BPD Gang Suppression Unit; analysis by author.

Men are disproportionately affected by homicides in Belize City and particularly in gang-related homicides. During 2017, 17 percent of victims in non-gang-related homicides were female, but 100 percent of victims in gang-related homicides were male.

Over the 2014–2017 period, on average 53 percent of homicide victims were gang-involved, while on average 80 percent of the people arrested as suspects were gang-involved, with a high of 100 percent in 2016 and a low of 69 percent in 2014.

The demographics and gang affiliations of 43 suspects arrested for homicides committed during 2014–2017

**TABLE 11. HOMICIDE VICTIMS AND SUSPECTS BY GANG INVOLVEMENT**

Year	Victims			People Arrested		
	Total	Gang-Involved	%	Total	Gang-Involved	%
2014	57	26	46%	13	9	69%
2015	42	27	64%	15	11	73%
2016	41	29	71%	21	21	100%
2017	64	25	39%	17	12	71%
Total	204	107	53%	66	53	80%

Source: BPD Gang Suppression Unit; analysis by author.

**TABLE 12. AFFILIATIONS OF GANG-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS ARRESTED FOR HOMICIDE, 2014–2017**

Gang Affiliation	Number	Percentage
George Street Gang	6	14%
South Side Gang	5	12%
Back-a-Land Crips	4	9%
Majestic Alley Crips	4	9%
Taylor's Alley Blood	4	9%
103 New Road Crips	3	7%
Peace in the Valley Bloods	3	7%
Banak Street Crew	2	5%
Gill Street Gang	2	5%
Rocky Road Bloods	2	5%
Victoria Street Bloods Gang	2	5%
All other gangs	6	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	

Source: BPD Gang Suppression Unit; analysis by author.

were analyzed. The individuals were similar. They were 15 to 32 years old, Belizean, and male (except for one female suspect).

Some gangs were disproportionately represented as victims and suspects in homicides. In 2017, the

gang with the most homicide **victims** was the Peace in the Valley Bloods (6), followed by the Conch Shell Bay Bloods (3), and the Louise Blevins Crips (3). The gangs with the most homicide **suspects** were the George Street Gang (4) and Taylor's Alley Bloods (2). Other gang affiliations of arrested homicide suspects included the Brian Brown Crew, the Majestic Alley Crips, the Peace in the Valley Bloods, the South Side Gang, and the Supal Street Bloods.

The largest number of gang-involved individuals arrested for homicide during 2014–2017 were from five gangs:

- George Street (6)
- South Side Gang (5)
- Back-a-Land Crips (4)
- Taylor's Alley Bloods (4)
- Majestic Alley Crips (4)

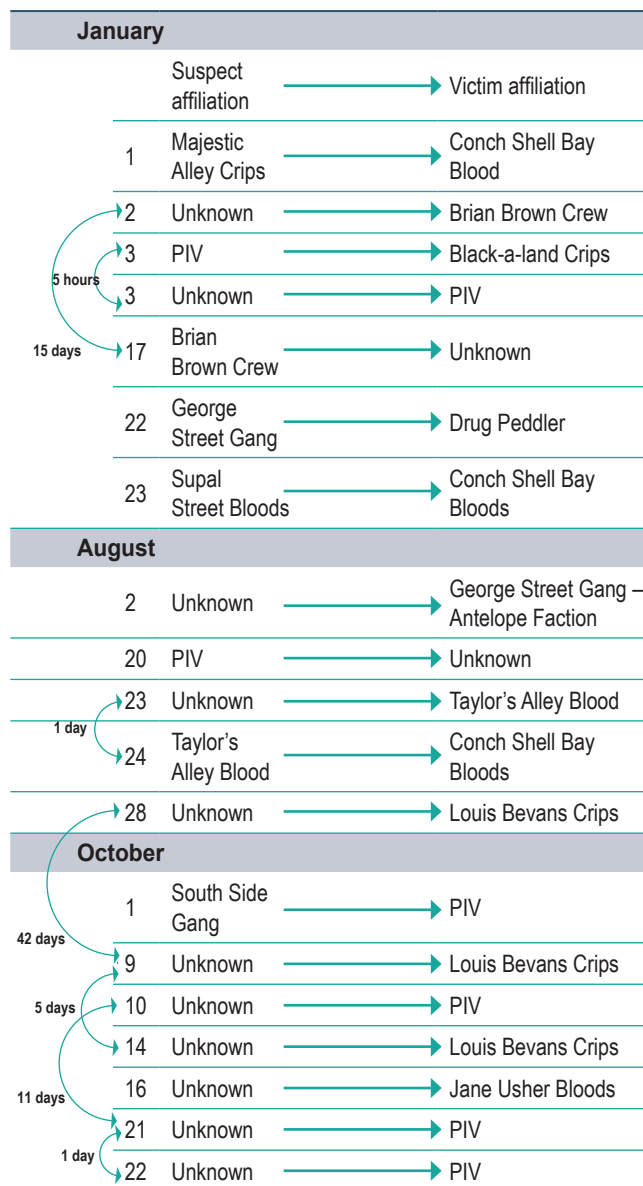
One factor that clearly drives Belize City's homicide rate is gang retaliation. Exhibit 7 tracks homicides during three peak months in 2017. During most months that year, there were three or fewer homicides; however, during January, August, and October, Belize City experienced a total of 19 gang-related homicides (40 percent of the annual total). An examination of the groups involved shows the back and forth nature of violence between rival gangs in Belize City.

To further identify areas of the community where gang and violence intervention activities should be targeted, we mapped the addresses of the people arrested for homicide during 2017 (Exhibit 8).

These mappings suggest that individuals from specific South Side gang neighborhoods are disproportionately arrested for homicides in Belize City. This is not a definitive indicator that the people arrested are gang-involved, but it is a subject that warrants further study. Also, the mappings suggest that these neighborhoods should be the focus of violence prevention activities.

To get further information about the involvement of local gangs in other violent crimes, the addresses of people 30 and under who were arrested for participating in

## EXHIBIT 7. ROLE OF RETALIATION AND ONGOING GANG CONFLICTS IN BELIZE CITY

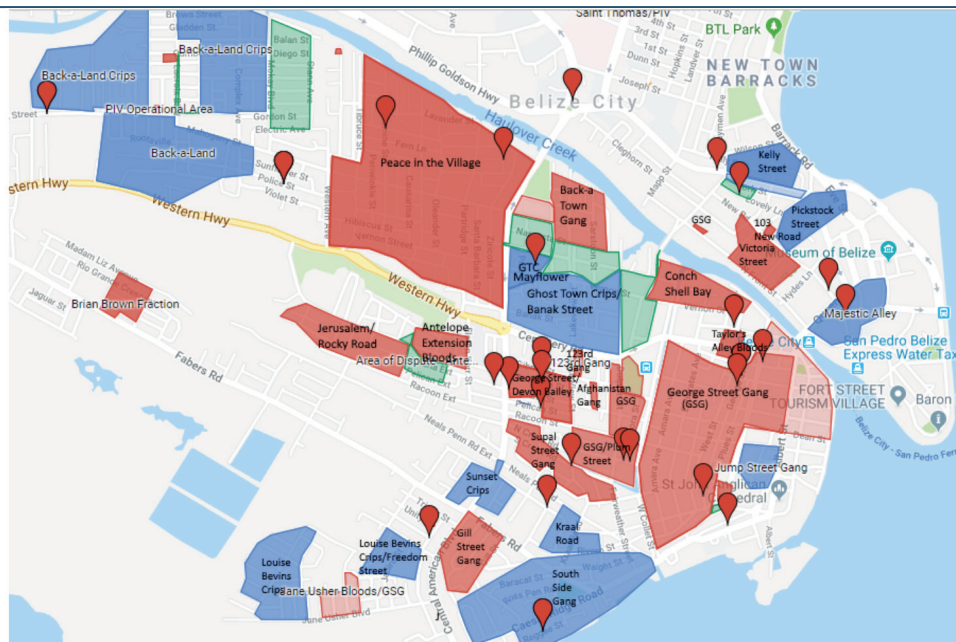


Source: BPD Gang Suppression Unit; analysis by author.

violent crimes in 2017 were mapped. Again, this is not a definitive indicator of gang involvement, but it shows that commission of specific violent crimes is not spread equally throughout all neighborhoods in either North Side or South Side Belize City. Instead, individuals who engage in these crimes tend to reside or cluster in specific areas and thus these areas should be the target of violence reduction efforts. The maps also show that individuals residing in different neighborhoods seem to be involved in different types

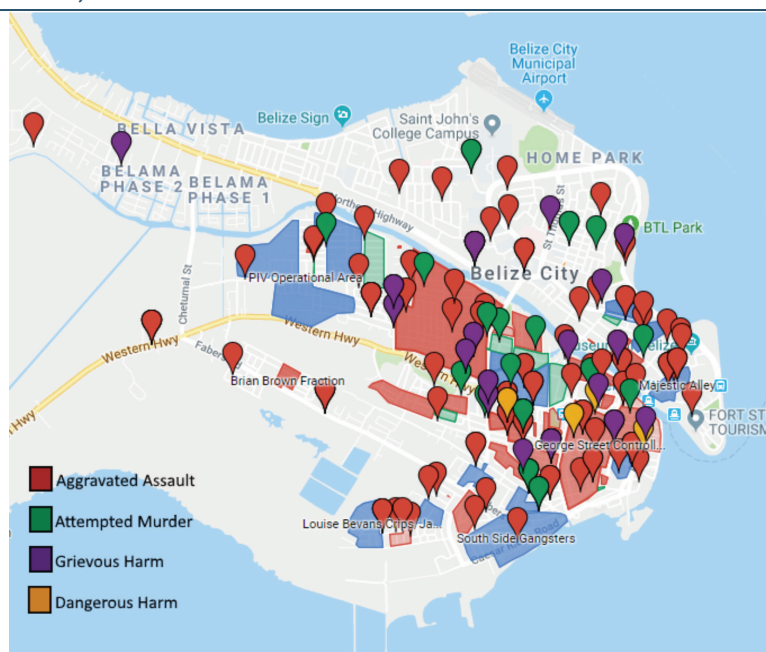


### EXHIBIT 8. HOMICIDES BY ADDRESSES OF ARRESTED PERSONS AND PROXIMITY TO KNOWN GANG TERRITORIES, 2016–2017



Source: Joint Intelligence Coordinating Center; mapping by author.

### EXHIBIT 9. VIOLENT PERSON OFFENSES BY ADDRESSES OF ARRESTED PERSONS AND PROXIMITY TO KNOWN GANG TERRITORIES, 2017



Source: Joint Intelligence Coordinating Center; mapping by author.

of crime. Unfortunately, arrests were made in only a relatively small percentage of incidents in each of the three crime categories (homicide/murder, VPOs, and other violent offenses). So, while this data can be extrapolated to show to some degree the involvement of gangs in violent crime, it still only provides a portion of the picture due to missing or unavailable data.

Based on the demographics of the people arrested for all the serious violent crime categories examined for this report, the primary ages for committing violent offenses seem to vary by offense. The peak years for involvement in robbery appear to be 15–30; aggravated assault, 21–30; and murder, 18–30.

## Experiences of Respondents: Analysis of Data from Focus Groups, Interviews, and Surveys

### Summary Analysis

Gang involvement in Belize City appears to begin in the early teen years and, for many individuals, extends well into their 30s and 40s. Individuals who become involved in gangs in Belize City are affected by multiple risk factors, including disrupted family structures, family gang involvement, school suspension or expulsion, school dropout, lack of school attachment, association with negative peer groups, and high levels of neighborhood crime and violence. Individuals frequently seek out gang involvement to provide emotional support and economic access.

Lack of educational and employment opportunities, as well as stigmatization for prior criminal involvement, keeps many young men trapped in a cycle of gang-related violence and other crimes. Most gang members interviewed reported high levels of personal involvement in selling drugs and violent crimes, including shootings and robberies. Gang-involved individuals identified assistance with obtaining employment and support for positive life changes as important in helping them leave the gang. In some cases, gang-involved individuals may need to leave the area in order to cut ties with gangs.

### Analysis of Data from Gang Member Interviews: Experiences of Gang Members

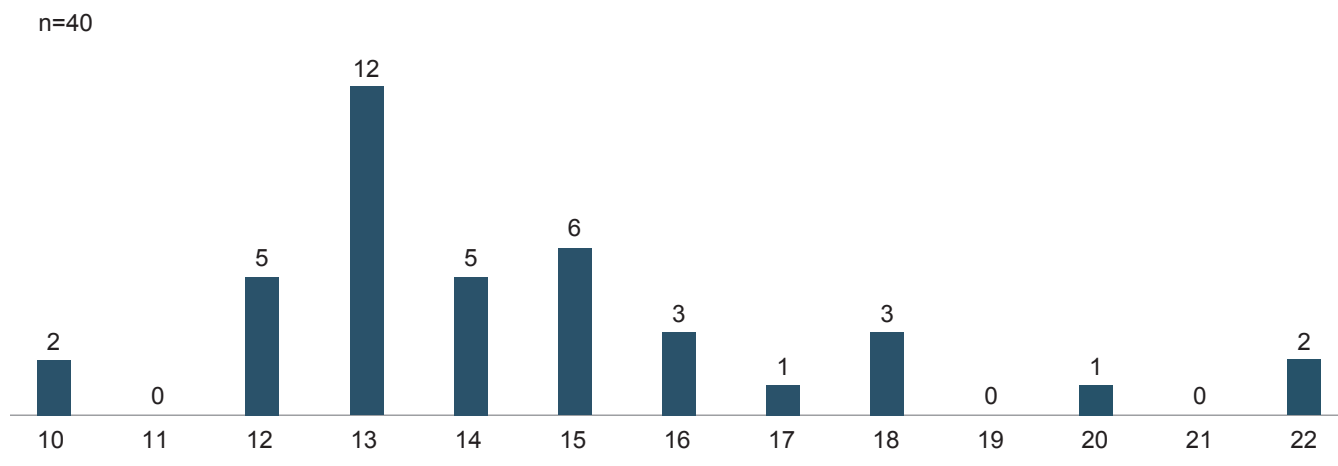
A total of 45 interviews were conducted with individuals ranging in age from 16 to 41 and associated with 14 different gangs in Belize City. The interviews used a standardized set of questions and assessed exposure to risk factors, life experiences, and opinions about gangs in Belize City. The individuals who agreed to be interviewed were predominantly male and Creole. Almost all were born in Belize (98 percent), and of these, most were born in Belize District (95 percent).

The average age of interview participants was 24.2 years. Most individuals interviewed had never been married (93 percent). The most common union status was a visiting partner relationship (47 percent), followed by common law (27 percent) and not in a union (22 percent). Approximately half of all individuals interviewed reported that they had biological children (49 percent) and the average number of children was 1.6.

**TABLE 13. GANG RANKS IN BELIZE CITY**

Leader	One or more individuals who have full control over the entire gang, make decisions, and are consulted when major actions are going to be undertaken. The leader(s) typically control access to firearms and financial assets by members of their gang, as well as exercising control over drug trafficking, extortion, robberies, and other types of crimes.
Shot Caller	Second in command to the leader, with some crossover into leader status. Shot callers are highly influential in determining the actions of the gang. Shot callers often control the actions of a specific faction of the gang but still answer to the leader(s).
Shooter	Individuals within the gang who are allowed access to a firearm and are directed to commit acts of violence on behalf of the gang.
Soldier	Lowest ranking members of the gang. These individuals serve as messengers, lookouts, run-men, drug peddlers, and other petty jobs performed within the gang.
Followers (Associates)	Align themselves with and regularly associate with a gang (often in their neighborhood) and sometimes contribute to the overall operation of the gang.

Source: Author's elaboration.

**FIGURE 4. AGE WHEN JOINED GANG**

Source: Author's elaboration.

Of the individuals interviewed, 76 percent stated that they were current gang members and 80 percent reported active gang involvement within the six months prior to the interview. The respondents were split somewhat evenly in rank, with 27 percent stating that they were leaders, 24 percent stating they were shot callers, and 24 percent stating they were shooters or soldiers. No respondents stated that they were followers and 24 percent chose not to respond to this question. The following definitions were developed for these ranks by personnel from BPD, GSU, MHDSTPA, CYDP, and the Department of Youth Services.

Of the 40 individuals who responded to this question, the average age at which they joined a gang was 14.5, with a median of 16. The ages at which individuals stated that they joined a gang ranged from 10 (youngest) to 22 (oldest). The most common age at which individuals indicated that they joined a gang was 13 and 70 percent of the individuals interviewed were between 12 and 15.

The individuals interviewed who were age 21 or older had, on average, spent half their lives involved in gangs. Those who were between ages 36 and 40 had, on average, spent over two decades involved in gangs. The longevity of gang involvement in the individuals interviewed was likely attributable to both their rank and level of involvement in the gang.

The top three reasons interview participants selected for why they joined a gang were:

- For protection/to feel safe
- To make money
- To get revenge because someone I care about was hurt

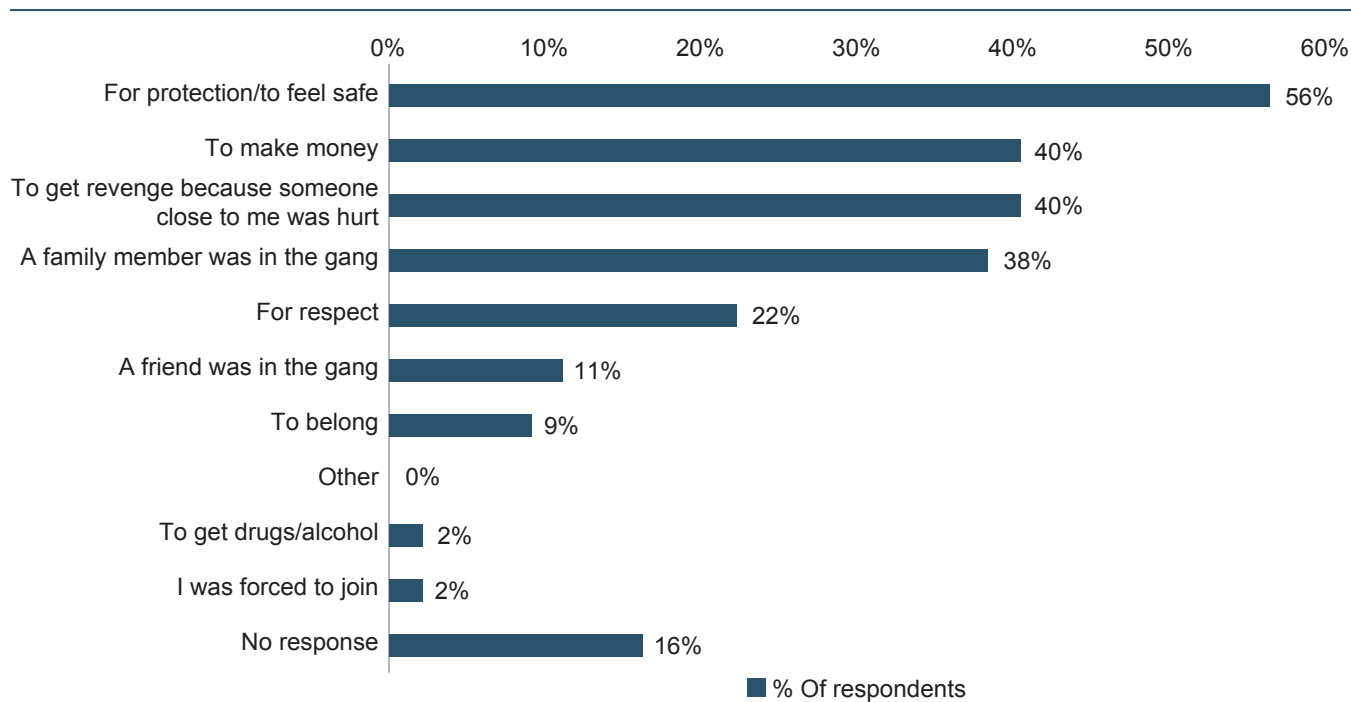
### Family

For respondents, family involvement in gangs was common, with 80 percent stating that they had family members in gangs.

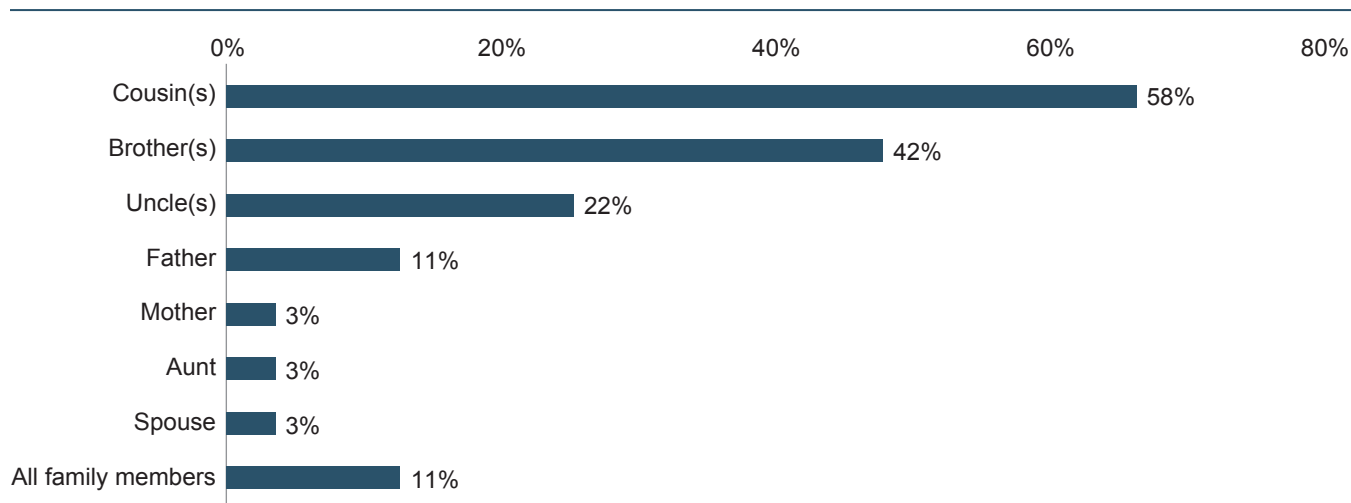
Of the 36 individuals with family members involved in gangs:

- 28 percent had one family member involved
- 31 percent had two to four family members involved
- 11 percent had five to nine family members involved
- 22 percent had 10 or more family members involved. For respondents with 10+ family members in gangs, half reported that *all* of their family members were or had been involved in gangs.

Interview participants were most likely to report having cousins, brothers, or uncles involved in gangs. It is significant that such a large percentage of respondents have family members in gangs, including 13 percent who have a parent or spouse in a gang.

**FIGURE 5. TOP 3 REASONS FOR JOINING A GANG**

Source: Author's elaboration.

**FIGURE 6. PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WITH FAMILY MEMBERS INVOLVED IN GANGS**

Source: Author's elaboration.

This suggests that at least some gangs in Belize City are multigenerational.

### School

Respondents reported a mix of positive and negative experiences at school:

- 74 percent agreed or strongly agreed that, if they had a problem, there was a staff member they could talk to
- 74 percent agreed or strongly agreed that teachers respected them

- 73 percent agreed or strongly agreed that teachers were fair in disciplining them
- 55 percent reported that they often felt that no one at school cared about them
- 40 percent reported that they often felt lonely at school
- 33 percent reported being put down by other students
- 31 percent reported receiving mostly good grades (between 80 and 100 percent)
- 51 percent reported receiving average marks (between 70 and 79 percent)
- 47 percent had been suspended from school
- 41 percent had been expelled from school

The most common reason for suspension or expulsion was fighting. Respondents reported suspensions beginning in Standard 3 and continuing through Form 4, but the most common years for suspensions and expulsions were Form 1 (38 percent) followed by Standard 6 and Form 2 (20 percent).

Most individuals interviewed (76 percent) dropped out of school at least once. The most common grade for respondents to drop out was Standard 6 (25 percent). Of the 11 school-aged respondents (ages 16–18), only 40 percent reported that they were currently attending

school and all four were incarcerated at Wagner Youth Facility at the time of the interview. Interview participants were asked about their reasons for dropping out of school. Many described a combination of factors, including the family's inability to pay school fees, the need to earn an income and contribute financially to their family, and death of a parent or other family problems that added to these pressures.

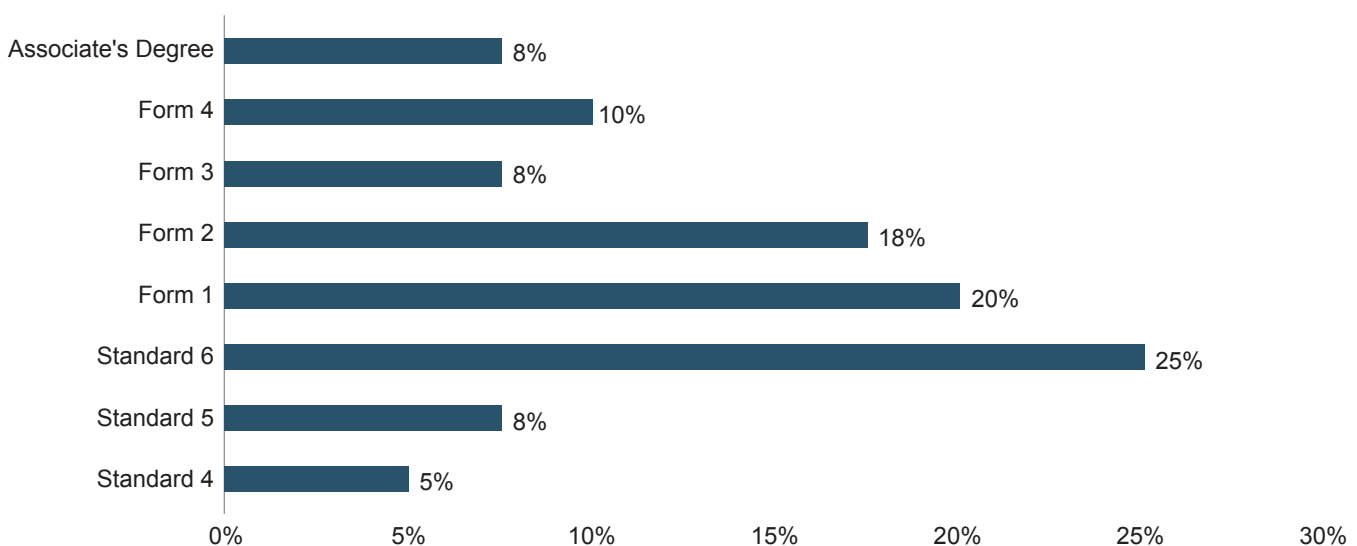
Of the respondents, 29 percent also stated that their own behavioral issues, leading to suspension or expulsion, or a physical inability to attend school (i.e., incarceration or an active warrant in a criminal matter) was the primary factor in leaving school. Several stated that they chose to participate in gang activity rather than attend school. One respondent indicated that he was labeled by school personnel as a gang member and chose to stop attending.

This data suggests that youth who are suspended or expelled, particularly in Standard 6 to Form 2, are unlikely to return to school and may be highly vulnerable to gangs.

### Employment

Of the respondents, 78 percent reported that they had held a job at one time, but 82 percent reported they

**FIGURE 7. HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED BY RESPONDENTS**



Source: Author's elaboration.

were unemployed at the time of the interview. Of those who stated that they were currently employed, half were incarcerated and working inside the prison environment and 13 percent reported working full-time hours.

### Neighborhood Conditions

Respondents reported high levels of crime in their neighborhoods. Note that these responses covered the perceptions and experiences of respondents, not the crimes reported to law enforcement.

- 89 percent reported daily drug dealing by gang members
- 51 percent reported daily fights between members of rival gangs
- 51 percent reported daily intimidation of neighborhood residents by gang members
- 62 percent reported daily gang recruiting
- 47 percent reported robberies occurring daily
- 49 percent reported a person being shot daily
- 29 percent reported homicides occurring daily

Most respondents reported that crimes, particularly violent crimes, occur in their neighborhood on a daily to weekly basis. This perception of high levels of violent crime in the neighborhood is likely connected to the top reason for respondents joining a gang (protection). Respondents also reported a high degree of adult involvement in high-risk behaviors during the past year. Respondents reported the following high-risk behaviors by the adults they knew:

- many or almost all were involved in a gang (80 percent)
- many or almost all had done something that could get them in trouble with the police (80 percent)
- many or almost all had carried a weapon in the past (64 percent)
- many or almost all had used cocaine, crack, or heroine (36 percent)

### Criminal Involvement

The gang members interviewed reported varying levels of involvement in criminal activity during the past year. Currently incarcerated individuals were asked to report on their experiences in the community prior to

incarceration. Participants were much more likely to report involvement in violent crimes versus property crimes or theft, with 44 percent reporting they had robbed someone, 51 percent saying they had shot someone, 56 percent saying that had participated in a shooting, and 47 percent reporting they had injured or killed someone.

Respondents reported a high level of access to weapons and drugs, with 93 percent stating that it would be very easy or somewhat easy to get a gun. Respondents reported slightly less ease of access to drugs such as cocaine, crack, or heroine, with 68 percent reporting it would be very or somewhat easy to get these drugs. Regarding selling drugs, 71 percent reported selling drugs in the past year, with 73 percent stating that money earned from selling drugs went to cover their own personal expenses. Other uses for the money earned included helping friends or family (55 percent) and benefiting the gang (18 percent).

Involvement in crime was analyzed by gang rank. Regardless of their rank in the gang, respondents reported high levels of involvement in crime, but how they were involved differed by rank. Individuals who identified as leaders had the highest self-reported involvement in holding weapons, shootings, and injuring or killing someone. Shooters and soldiers were the most likely to be involved in a robbery or assault. Although more than half of the shooters and soldiers reported being involved in shootings, this was still significantly lower than the rate for self-identified gang leaders. Two-thirds of shot callers reported holding or selling weapons or a gun, but their rates of participation in shootings were the lowest.

Interview participants reported high levels of injury and victimization, with 38 percent saying they had been beaten or assaulted in the past year and 60 percent having been shot or stabbed. Some participants described being shot or stabbed on more than one occasion.

### Experiences of Gang Life

Individuals involved in a gang experience both positive and negative life outcomes as a result. The perceived positives of gang life initially attract young people and



may serve to keep individuals connected to the gang. During the interviews, individuals were asked to rate their experience with the perceived positive aspects of gangs such as safety, loyalty, access to money, and emotional support. Most respondents either strongly or somewhat agreed with the following statements:

- My gang makes me feel respected (73 percent)
- My gang is like family to me (67 percent)
- Members of my gang provide support and loyalty to each other (62 percent)
- Being in a gang is a good way to make money (53 percent)

However, only 40 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed being a gang member. Although 56 percent of respondents stated that they joined a gang for protection and to feel safe, only 47 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that their gang made them feel safe and 20 percent strongly disagreed with this statement.

### Leaving the Gang

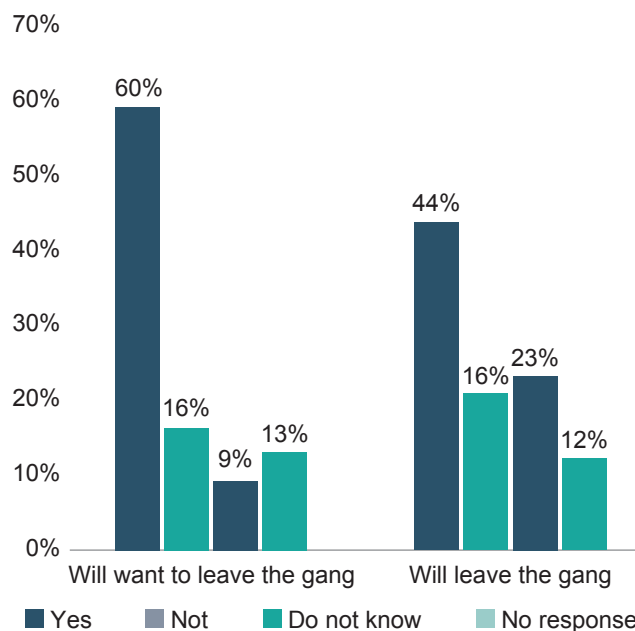
Respondents were asked if they thought that they would ever leave their gang and what types of interventions and support might assist them in this process. Less than half (44 percent) stated that they would leave their gang, with 21 percent saying that they would not leave and 23 percent saying they did not know if they would leave. When asked if they thought they would ever **want** to leave the gang, 60 percent said yes. This suggests that many youth and adults who are involved in gangs in Belize City would like to leave the gang but either do not know how or do not feel it will be possible.

Respondents were asked what might make them think of leaving the gang. The most popular responses were:

- Getting a job (33 percent)
- Fulfilling family responsibilities (27 percent)
- Becoming a parent (24 percent)
- Moving out of the neighborhood (22 percent)

The least popular responses were for recreational or sports programs (9 percent), based on advice or

**FIGURE 8. RESPONDENTS VIEWS ON LEAVING THE GANG**



Source: Author's elaboration.

pressure from someone outside of their family (9 percent), and going to jail or prison (9 percent).

Respondents were also asked what types of assistance might help them leave gangs:

- 45 percent stated assistance with finding employment
- 14 percent stated support or positive influences
- 10 percent reported getting back in school, an educational program, or relocating

Multiple respondents noted that it would be impossible for them to leave their gang without moving to another area.

### Youth Experiences and Risk Exposure: Analysis of Data from Youth Surveys Summary Analysis

One in five youth surveyed reported current or prior gang involvement. An additional 10 percent of youth were highly at risk due to exposure to the following risk factors:

- Problem behaviors (reactivity, impulsivity, and aggressiveness)
- Negative life events (including family disruption)
- Low parental supervision and monitoring
- Delinquent peer networks and negative peer influences
- Low school attachment
- Low school commitment

These risk factors are correlated with gang membership. Youth with current or prior gang involvement reported the highest level of risk exposure, but youth overall reported high levels of exposure to community-level violence. In fact, every youth who participated in a focus group (55 total) reported losing a family member or friend to gang-related violence, and many reported witnessing violent acts firsthand. Youth reported high levels of access to firearms and drugs, as well as a considerable amount of adult involvement in criminal behavior in their neighborhoods.

### Analysis of Youth Surveys

The survey was administered both online and in paper format. Of the 316 youth who participated, 88 percent resided in Belize District (278) and 72 percent (229) resided in Belize City at the time of the survey. The largest percentage of the youth from Belize City were between 14 and 18 years of age (54 percent). Only the responses of youth residing in Belize City who were between 12 and 22 years of age (159) are included in this report.

The youth survey was designed to connect local youth responses with longitudinal and cross-sectional research on factors that contribute to youth joining gangs. Research suggests that joining a gang is

a complex decision that involves multiple negative conditions that “push” youth into gangs, as well as perceived positive opportunities that “pull” youth into gangs (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). These pushes and pulls are called risk factors, which are the characteristics, traits, or behaviors of an individual that make it more likely that they will join a gang.

Because dozens of studies over the past 30 years have been conducted on youth risk factors, resulting in many possible options, some with greater and/or lesser applicability, this report relies on the findings of a meta-analysis conducted by Klein and Maxson (2006) that reviewed the available risk factor research and selected 20 studies based on methodology and applicability. This meta-analysis identified a set of risk factors that are consistently and strongly correlated to joining a gang.

It is important to recognize that risk factors have a cumulative effect, particularly when found in multiple domains of a youth’s life. Most youth in Belize City will never join a gang. Many youth may experience some degree of exposure to risk factors but have enough individual resilience and external protective factors to overcome that risk and live a productive life. In one large-scale study, youth who experienced risk factors across all domains were 40 times more likely to join a gang than those with risk in just one domain (Howell, 2010). For this reason, the youth survey sought to assess risk and protective factors in each domain of youths’ lives.

### Gang Involvement

Youth participating in the survey were asked if they had ever been involved in a gang; 121 youth responded to

**TABLE 14. EIGHT RISK FACTORS IDENTIFIED AS PREDICTIVE OF GANG MEMBERSHIP, BY DOMAIN**

Individual Domain	Family Domain	Peer Domain	School Domain <sup>a</sup>	Community Domain
Problem behaviors (reactivity, impulsivity, and aggressiveness)	Low parental supervision and monitoring	Delinquent peer network	School commitment School attachment	None <sup>b</sup>
Negative life events (death, absent parent, school suspension, illness)		Negative peer influences		
Attitudes toward delinquent behavior				

Source: Klein and Maxson, 2006.

<sup>a</sup> There is mixed evidence for these two risk factors.

<sup>b</sup> No community risk factors were found to be clearly and consistently correlated to gang membership.



this question. Of these respondents, 49 percent said they were not involved in a gang and neither were any of their friends, while 31 percent stated that they were not involved in a gang but had friends who were gang members. Many of these youth could be accurately viewed as at risk for future gang involvement. On the other hand, 12 percent stated that they were active gang members at the time of the survey and 7 percent stated that they were former gang members.

The moderately high rate of respondents with prior or current gang involvement (20 percent) may be because one of the youth-serving agencies where youth completed the surveys was CRD, which serves court-involved youth.

### Family Domain Risk and Protective Factors

Several studies have identified family disruption as a possible risk factor for gang involvement in the family domain (Howell and Egley, 2005). Disrupted families are most appropriately paired with negative life experiences, which was identified in the individual domain of risk by Klein and Maxson's (2006) meta-analysis. It is also important to remember that family disruptions can contribute to adverse family conditions like poverty, family conflict, and low family attachment. Family disruption may also result in poor parental supervision and monitoring, which was identified by Klein and Maxson as the most significant family risk factor for gangs.

Youth were asked to think about their home and who lived there most of the time. About one in three youth (30 percent) reported living with both parents:

- 70 percent lived in disrupted family structures
- 48 percent lived with their mother only
- 4 percent lived with their father only
- 7 percent lived with one or both grandparents
- 4 percent lived with an aunt and/or uncle
- 7 percent lived in another family structure, such as living with a friend, living alone, or living with a boyfriend or girlfriend

Of the youth with current or prior gang involvement, 88 percent lived in a disrupted family structure:

- 58 percent with only one parent
  - 50 percent with mother only
  - 8 percent with father only
- 25 percent resided with other relatives

Youth were asked to respond to four statements describing different aspects of their home environment and parental relationships.

#### **Statement 1: When I am not at home, my parents know where I am and who I am with.**

*Risk factors assessed:* Poor supervision and monitoring (Klein and Maxson, 2006); lack of adult supervision (Howell, 1998); poor monitoring and supervision of children (CDC, 2017).

*Protective factors assessed:* Family provides structure, limits, rules, monitoring, and predictability (youth.gov, 2009); family boundaries (Search Institute, 2011).

#### **Statement 2: My family has clear rules about alcohol and drug use.**

*Risk factors assessed (indirect):* Poor supervision and monitoring (Klein and Maxson, 2006); lack of adult supervision and substance use by parents (youth.gov, 2009); harsh, lax, or inconsistent disciplinary practices (CDC, 2017).

*Protective factors assessed:* Family provides structure, limits, rules, monitoring, and predictability, as well as clear expectations for behavior and values (youth.gov, 2009); family boundaries (Search Institute, 2011).

#### **Statement 3: I often share my thoughts and feelings with my mom or dad.**

*Risk factors assessed:* Poor attachment with parents (youth.gov, 2009), low emotional attachment to parents (CDC, 2017), poor attachment with parents as a risk factor for criminal involvement (Hoeve, Stams, Van Der Put, et al., 2012).

*Protective factors assessed:* Supportive relationships with family members (youth.gov, 2009); positive family

**TABLE 15. YOUTH RESPONSES TO FAMILY RISK FACTOR QUESTIONS**

	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	% Neutral or Disagree
When I am not at home, my parents know where I am and who I am with				
All youth	75%	13%	11%	24%
Current/former gang members	42%	25%	33%	58%
My family has clear rules about alcohol and drug use				
All youth	76%	14%	9%	23%
Current/former gang members	48%	9%	44%	53%
I often share my thoughts and feelings with my mom or dad				
All youth	52%	14%	34%	48%
Current/former gang members	38%	12%	50%	62%
My parent(s) believe it is important for me to complete my education				
All youth	89%	9%	2%	11%
Current/former gang members	78%	17%	9%	26%

Source: Author's elaboration.

communication (Search Institute, 2011); connectedness to family and ability to discuss problems with parents (CDC, 2017).

**Statement 4: My parent(s) believe it is important for me to complete my education.**

*Risk factor assessed:* Low commitment to school (Klein and Maxson, 2006).

*Protective factors assessed:* Parent involvement in schooling (Search Institute, 2011); high perceived parental expectations about school performance (CDC, 2017)

Responses from current and former gang members were analyzed separately to identify areas where they differentiated from all youth. About one in four youth in Belize City provided a negative or neutral response to the questions regarding parental supervision and monitoring and clear rules for behavior, while almost twice as many current and former gang members recorded negative or neutral responses. About half of all youth entered negative or neutral responses to questions about sharing their thoughts and feelings with parents compared to almost two-thirds of current or former gang members. One in four current and

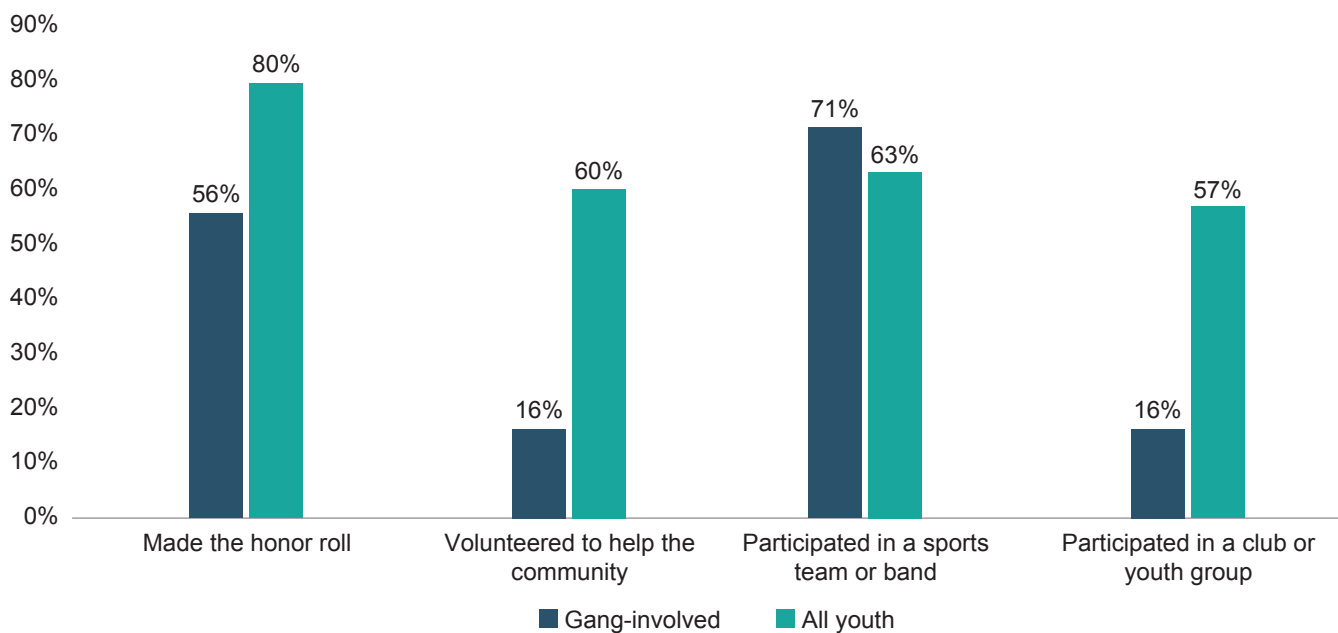
former gang members reported a negative or neutral response regarding parent(s) views of the importance of completing an education.

The rate of youth experiencing protection or risk varied by type of risk and protection factor and by family structure. The strongest area of protection overall was in high educational expectations from parents, except for youth residing outside the biological family structure. Almost half of all youth participating in the survey experienced lack of protection based on communication with and attachment to parents. About one-fourth also experienced elevated levels of risk in supervision and monitoring and clear and consistent rules, which are related. Exposure to risk in the family domain was most pronounced for respondents who were current or former gang members. All the statements in this section measured parenting activities and behaviors that are learned behaviors, suggesting that parenting support and education might be beneficial in reducing family-based risk factors for some youth.

**Peer Domain Risk and Protective Factors**

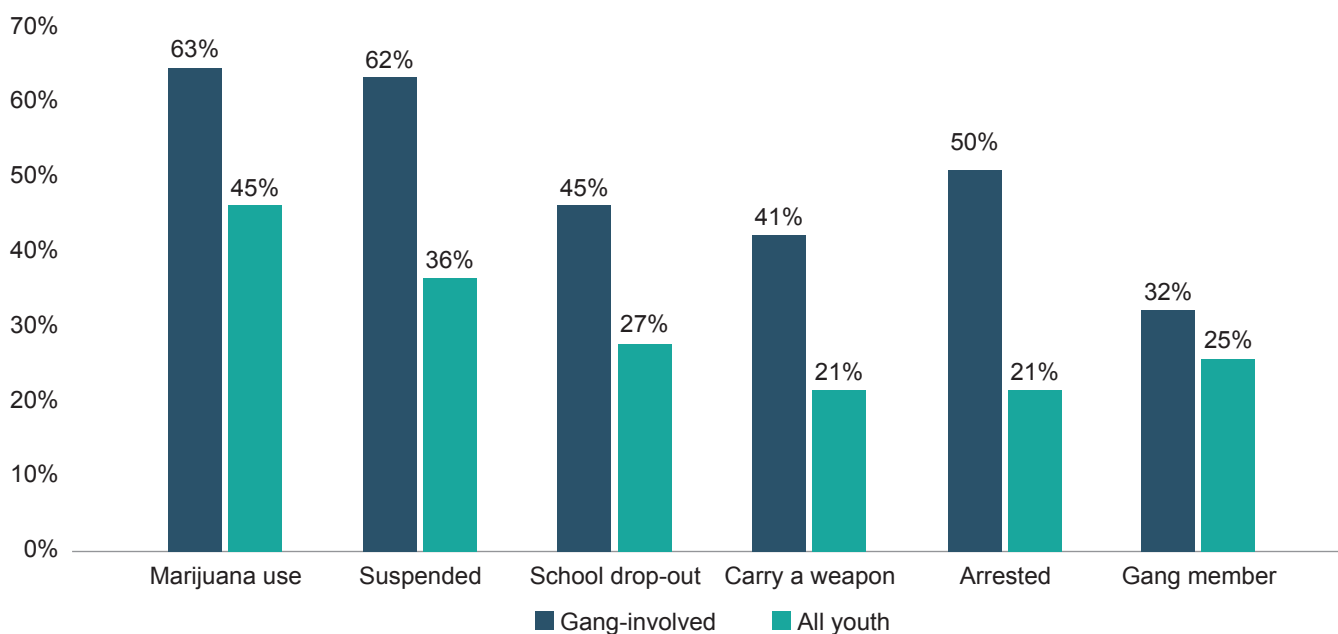
*Risk factors assessed:* Negative peer networks and negative peer associations (Klein and Maxson, 2006).

**FIGURE 9. RESPONDENTS WITH TWO OR MORE FRIENDS ENGAGED IN PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR, GANG-INVOLVED VERSUS ALL YOUTH**



Source: Author's elaboration.

**FIGURE 10. RESPONDENTS WITH TWO OR MORE FRIENDS ENGAGED IN ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR, GANG-INVOLVED VERSUS ALL YOUTH**



Source: Author's elaboration.

These are two of the most significant risk factors for joining a gang (Klein and Maxson, 2006). To assess prosocial and antisocial peer networks and associations, youth were asked to identify how many of their four closest friends had engaged in positive and negative activities during the past year.

At least half of all youth surveyed reported having at least two friends engaging in prosocial activities. Current or former gang members reported smaller numbers of friends who participated in prosocial activities, apart from participating in sports teams or a band.

Youth were also asked about the antisocial behaviors of their four closest friends in the past year. One in four of all youth noted that two or more of their closest friends were in a gang, and one in five of all youth noted that two or more of their close friends had been arrested or carried a weapon in the past year. Gang-involved respondents were significantly more likely to report having two or more friends engaged in problematic behavior, with half stating that two or more of their closest friends had been arrested in the past year. Further, they were twice

as likely as all youth to have two or more friends who had carried a weapon in the past year.

This suggests that a significant number of youths in Belize City are experiencing risk in the peer domain.

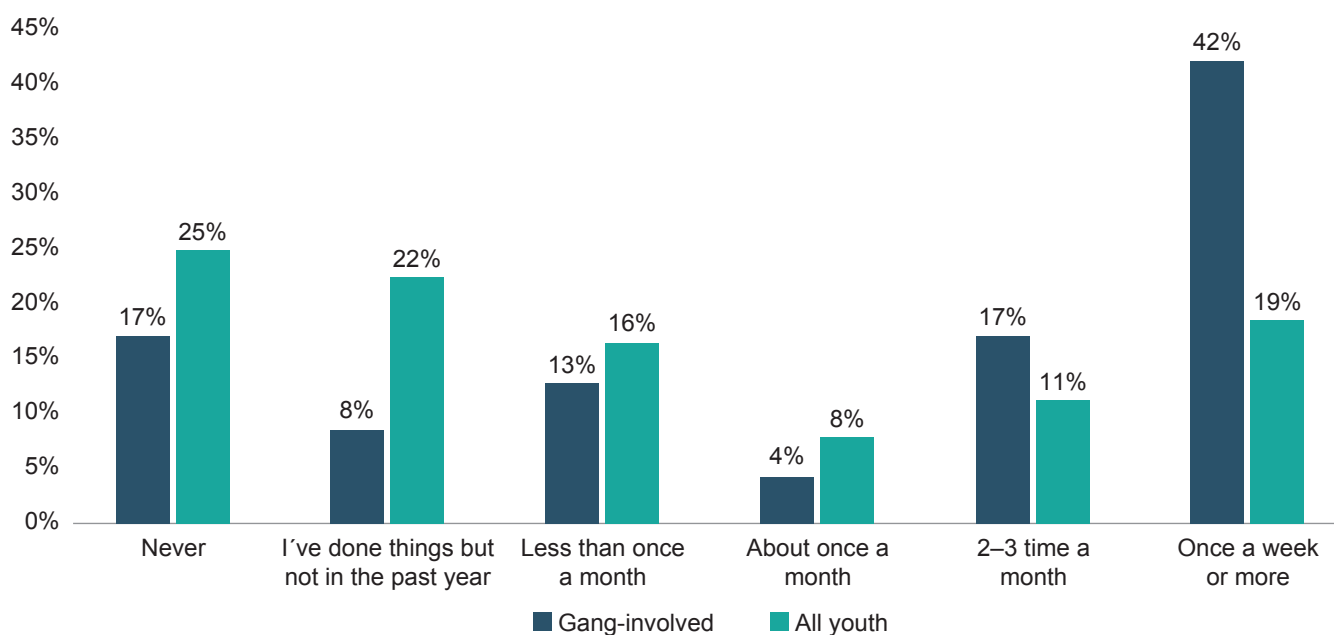
### Individual Domain Risk and Protective Factors

Klein and Maxson's (2006) meta-analysis found that individual risk factors were some of the most numerous and influential in predicting whether youth would join a gang. Individual risk factors found to be significant in the meta-analysis were:

- Problem behaviors (reactivity, aggressiveness, and impulsivity)
- Experience of negative life events (death of a parent, dissolution of a family, absent parent, incarceration of a parent, school suspension, and illness)
- Attitudes toward delinquent behavior

Several questions on the youth survey were designed to assess youth involvement in problem behaviors,

**FIGURE 11. FREQUENCY OF INVOLVEMENT IN RISKY BEHAVIOR, GANG-INVOLVED VERSUS ALL YOUTH**



Source: Author's elaboration.

attitudes toward delinquent behavior, and beliefs about accessibility of drugs and weapons.

### Risk Factor: Problem Behaviors

To measure reactivity and impulsivity, youth were asked: “How often have you done crazy things, even if they are a little dangerous?”

- 25 percent said never
- 63 percent said rarely (less than once a month)
- 37 percent said once a month or more
- 19 percent said once a week or more

There was a clear distinction between the responses of youth and gang-involved youth. Most youth had either never engaged in crazy and/or possibly dangerous behavior or had done so infrequently. Gang-involved youth were over twice as likely to have engaged in impulsive or risky behaviors once a week or more than all youth. This finding indicates that a higher frequency of engaging in impulsive and/or risky behavior may be

a significant predictor and/or effect of gang membership in Belize City.

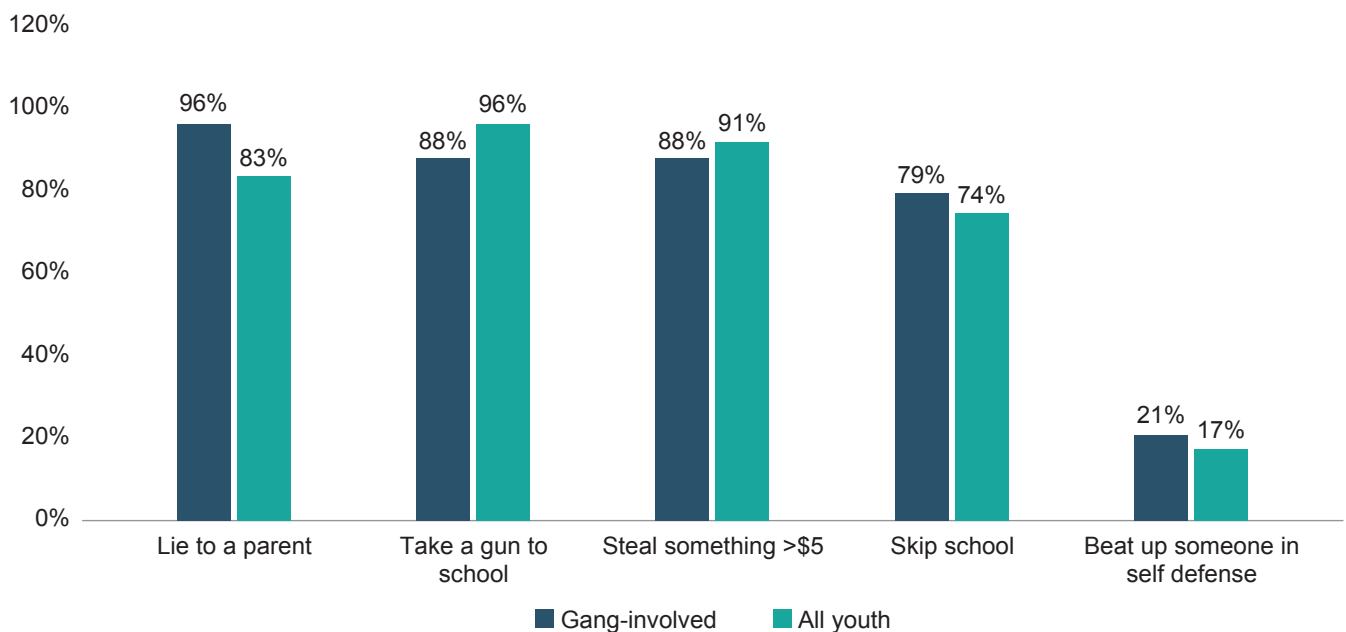
### Risk Factor: Attitudes toward Delinquent Behavior

Klein and Maxson (2006) found that this risk factor was a significant predictor of gang membership.

To measure this risk factor, youth were asked: “How wrong do you think it is to do the following things?” The question was to evaluate antisocial behavior ranging from low level (lying to parents) to serious (taking a handgun to school).

There were some differences in beliefs between all youth and gang-involved youth. The gang-involved respondents were more likely to believe that it is wrong or very wrong to lie to parents. However, they were less likely to believe that taking a gun to school, stealing something worth more than \$5, or skipping school was wrong or very wrong.

**FIGURE 12. PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH RESPONSES RATING ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIORS AS WRONG OR VERY WRONG, GANG-INVOLVED VERSUS ALL YOUTH**



Source: Author's elaboration.

### Risk Factor: Perceived Availability of Drugs and Firearms

While this was not a risk factor found by Klein and Maxson (2006) to be predictive of gang membership, it was explored because it is indirectly correlated to two significant risk factors:

- Delinquent peer network (Peer Domain): connection to peers and adults who can obtain illegal items.
- Attitudes toward delinquent behavior (Individual Domain): the belief or knowledge that these items are normal and can be easily obtained.

To measure this area of risk, youth were asked how easy it would be to obtain specific drugs and/or a firearm. Gang-involved youth were almost 20 percent more likely to report it would be somewhat or very easy to obtain marijuana or alcohol, and 120 percent more likely to report that it would be somewhat or very easy to obtain cocaine, crack, or heroin. Gang-involved youth were 128 percent more likely than all youth to report that it would be somewhat or very easy to obtain a firearm.

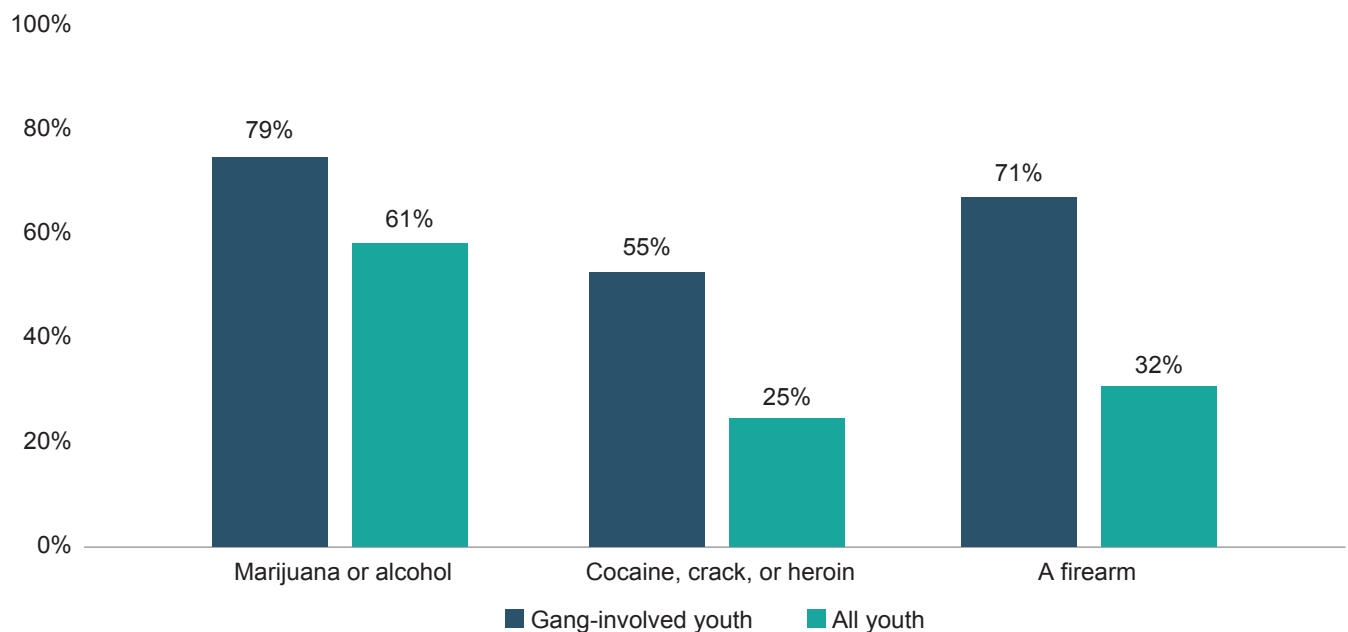
Gang-involved youth's perceived access to these items was greatly much higher than that of all youth. One concern is that 71 percent of gang-involved youth believed that it would be very easy or somewhat easy to obtain a firearm. Most of all youth (including gang-involved) believed that a firearm would be easier to obtain than cocaine, crack, or heroin.

### School Domain Risk Factors

In the meta-analysis conducted by Klein and Maxson (2006), school risk factors were found to have mixed effects and were not the most significant predictors of gang membership. However, school plays a major role in the lives of young people and in their long-term economic prospects. For those reasons, youth respondents were asked several questions about their school experiences and the climate in their school.

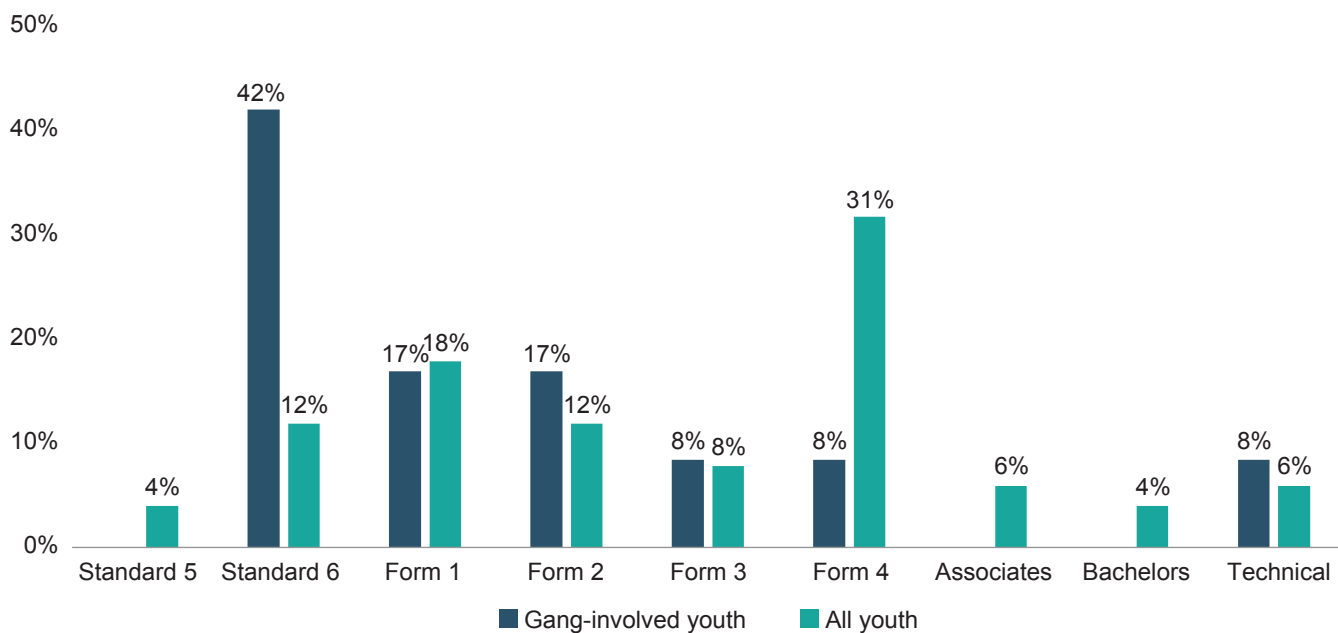
*Risk factors assessed:* School commitment and school attachment (Klein and Maxson, 2006); negative conditions in difficult schools, school climate, and connectedness to school (Howell, 2010).

**FIGURE 13. YOUTH REPORTING IT WOULD BE SOMEWHAT OR VERY EASY TO OBTAIN SPECIFIC DRUGS OR A FIREARM, GANG-INVOLVED VERSUS ALL YOUTH**



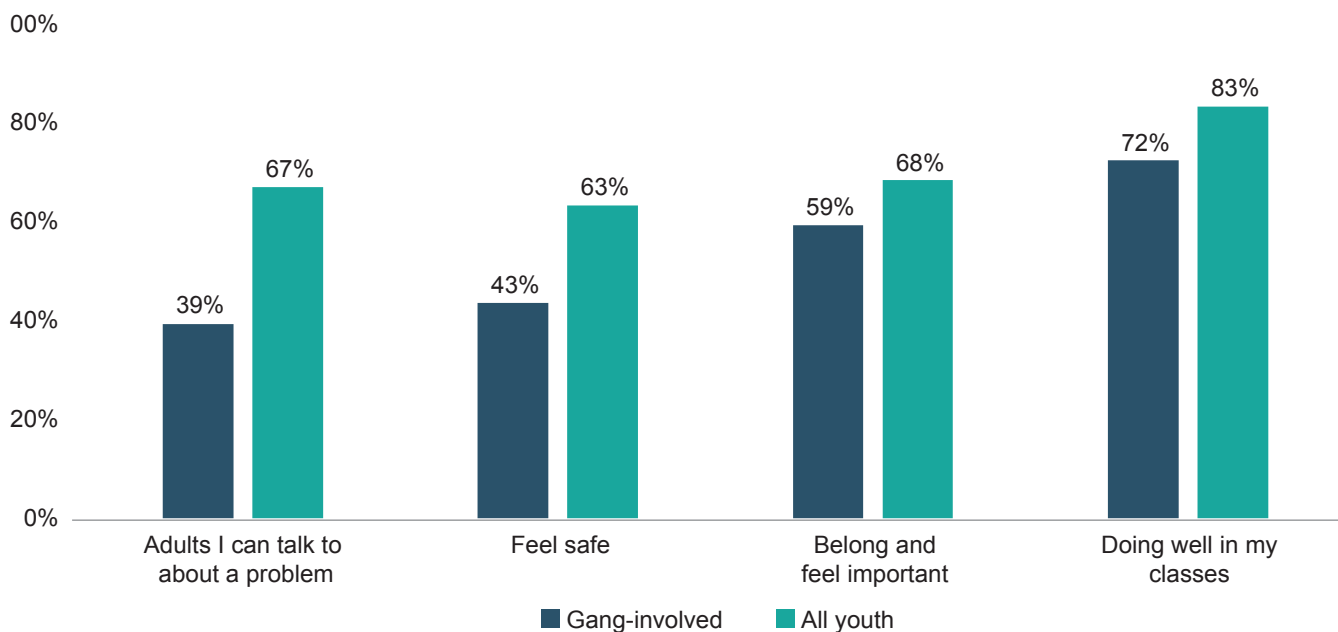
Source: Author's elaboration.

**FIGURE 14. HIGHEST CLASS COMPLETED BY RESPONDENTS NOT CURRENTLY ATTENDING SCHOOL, GANG-INVOLVED VERSUS ALL YOUTH**



Source: Author's elaboration.

**FIGURE 15. PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS REPORTING THAT THEY AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE THAT BONDING FACTORS ARE PRESENT IN THEIR SCHOOL, GANG-INVOLVED VERSUS ALL YOUTH**



Source: Author's elaboration.



- 54% of all youth respondents dropped out of school before completing Form 4 (age 16)
- 43 percent of gang-involved respondents dropped out before completing Form 4 (age 16)
- Of the gang-involved youth who dropped out of school, 42 percent dropped out by Standard 6 (age 12), compared to 16 percent of all youth.

To assess respondents' school commitment and attachment, they were asked to rate their perceptions of their own attachment and bonding to the most recent school they had attended, as well as their belief in their own academic success. Gang-involved students were significantly less likely to report that they had adults at school they could talk to about a problem or that they felt safe at school. They were somewhat less likely than all youth to report that they belonged or felt important, or were doing well in classes.

### Community Domain Risk Factors

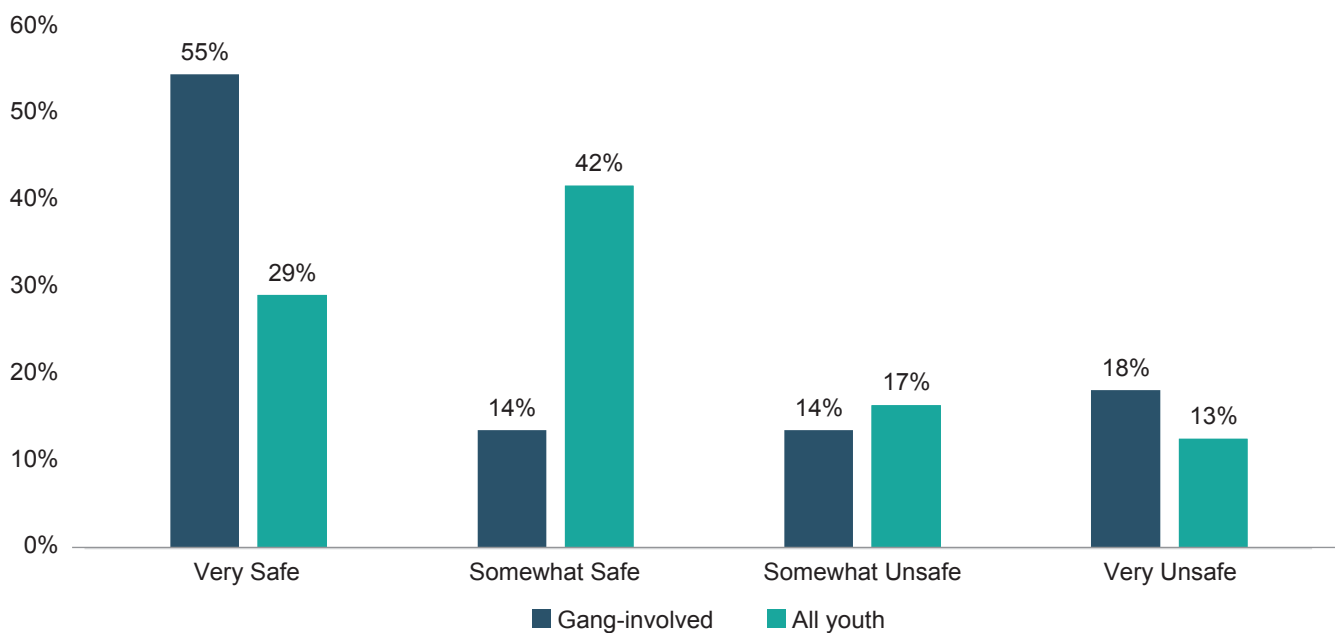
While community risk factors were not found to be significantly predictive of individual gang membership (Klein and Maxson, 2006), numerous studies

in the United States have found that gangs tend to cluster in areas of economic deprivation and social disorganization, where the community's ability to come together and regulate behavior has broken down (Howell, 2010). Examining social conditions in the communities where Belize City youth reside is an important way of understanding the community conditions that may cause youth to be vulnerable to gang recruitment.

**Perceptions of Neighborhood Safety:** To measure youth perceptions of personal safety in their neighborhood, youth were asked, "How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?" Gang-involved youth were significantly more likely to feel very safe in their neighborhood.

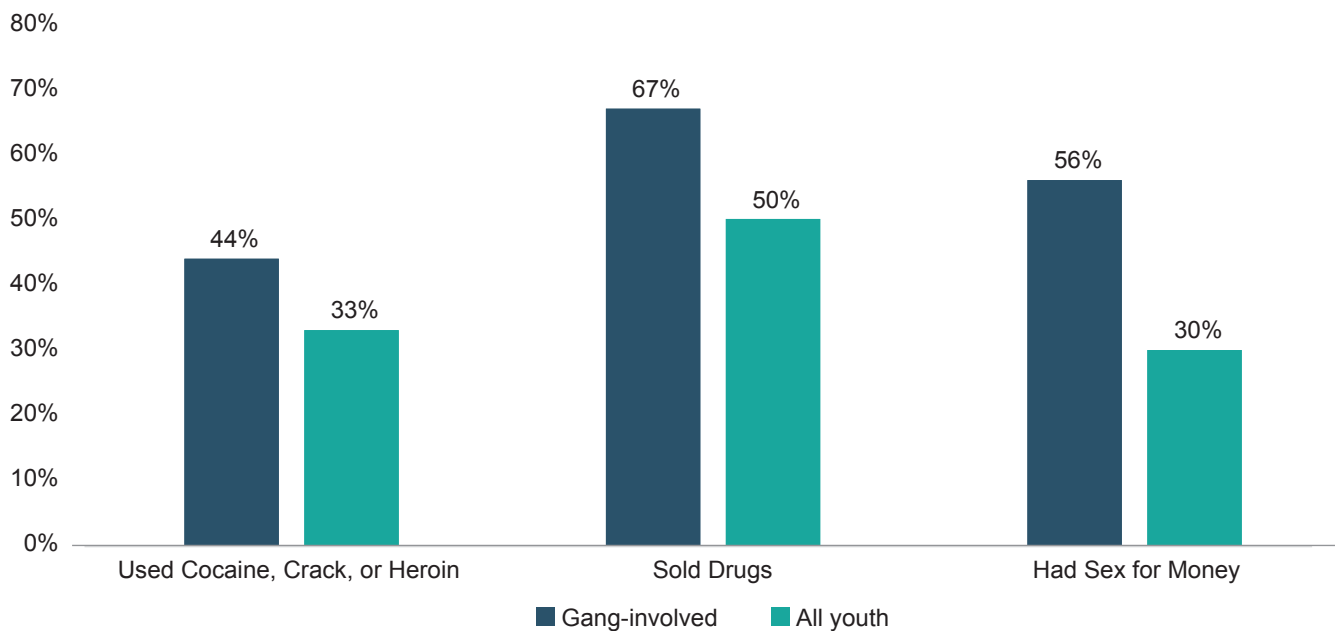
**Adult Prosocial and Antisocial Behavior:** To measure youth perceptions of and exposure to adult prosocial and antisocial behavior, respondents were asked to rate how often they observed adult engagement in positive and negative behaviors in their neighborhood. One in three of all youth reported that adults frequently

**FIGURE 16. RESPONSES TO: "HOW SAFE DO YOU FEEL IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?" GANG-INVOLVED VERSUS ALL YOUTH**



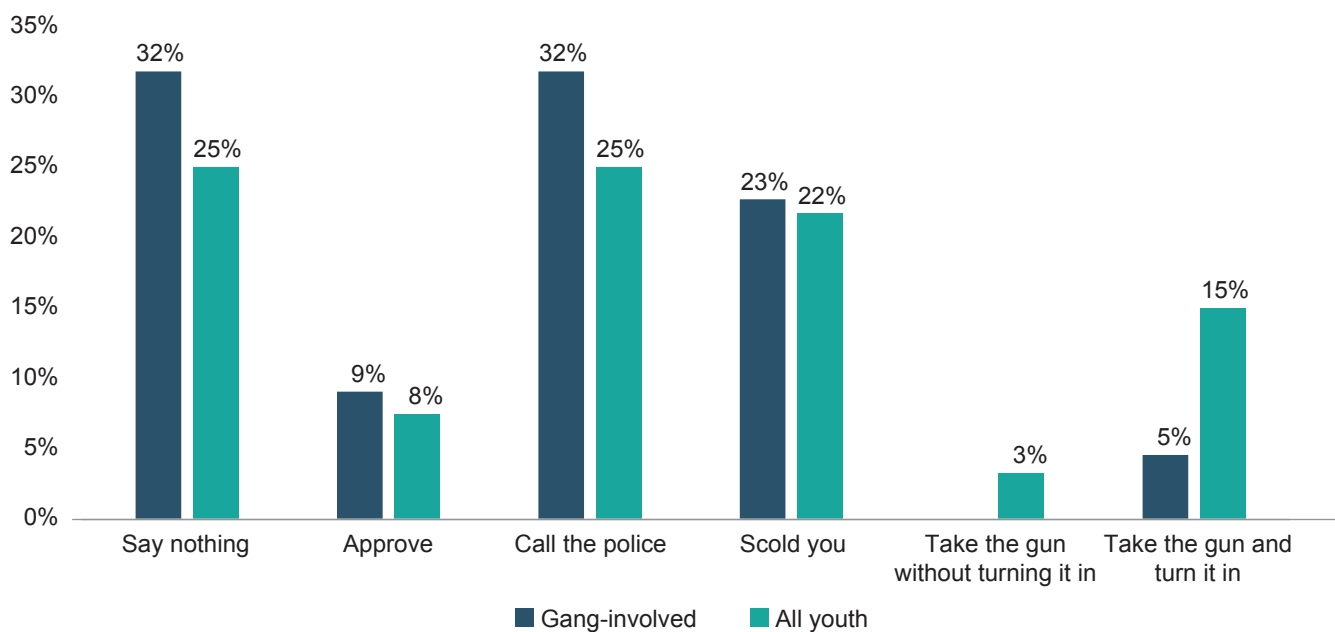
Source: Author's elaboration.

**FIGURE 17. PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH REPORTING THAT ADULTS IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD VERY OFTEN OR OFTEN ENGAGED IN ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR DURING THE PAST MONTH, GANG-INVOLVED VERSUS ALL YOUTH**



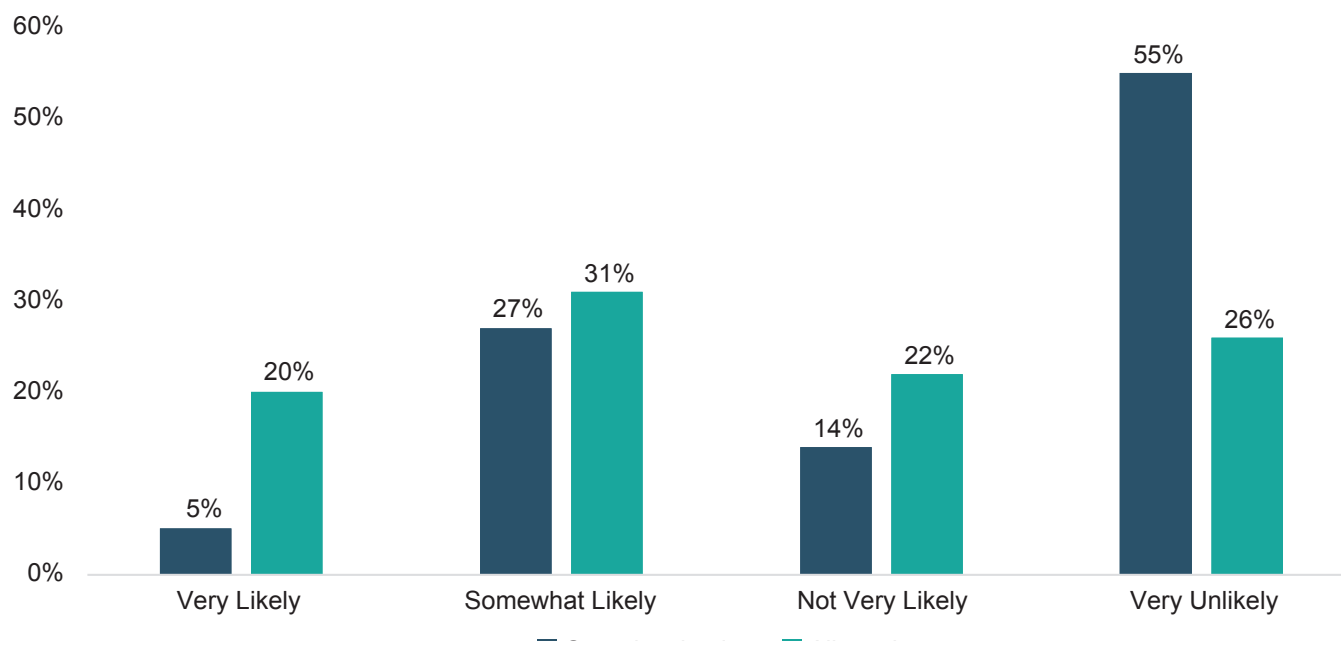
Source: Author's elaboration.

**FIGURE 18. RESPONSES TO: "WHAT WOULD ADULTS DO IF THEY FOUND OUT YOU WERE CARRYING A GUN?" GANG-INVOLVED VERSUS ALL YOUTH**



Source: Author's elaboration.

**FIGURE 19. RESPONSES TO: “IF A KID IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD CARRIED A GUN, HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT HE/SHE WOULD BE CAUGHT BY POLICE?” GANG-INVOLVED VERSUS ALL YOUTH**



Source: Author's elaboration.

used drugs, and more than half reported that adults frequently sold drugs in their neighborhoods, and these percentages were higher for gang-involved youth. When youth perceive that many or most adults are engaged in antisocial or criminal behavior, this perception helps to form the youth's beliefs about delinquent and antisocial attitudes, exposing these youth to more risk for future gang membership.

To assess youth perceptions of collective efficacy in their neighborhood, they were asked to respond to two questions related to firearm possession. In the first question, youth were asked: “How would adults in your neighborhood respond to you carrying a gun?” Gang-involved youth were significantly less likely to report that adults in their neighborhood would directly engage a youth who was suspected of carrying a gun (27 percent) compared to all youth (40 percent).

Youth were also asked, “If a kid in your neighborhood carried a gun, how likely is it that he/she would be caught by the police?” Of all youth, 48 percent felt it was not very likely or very unlikely that a kid with a gun

would be caught by police compared with 68 percent of gang-involved youth.

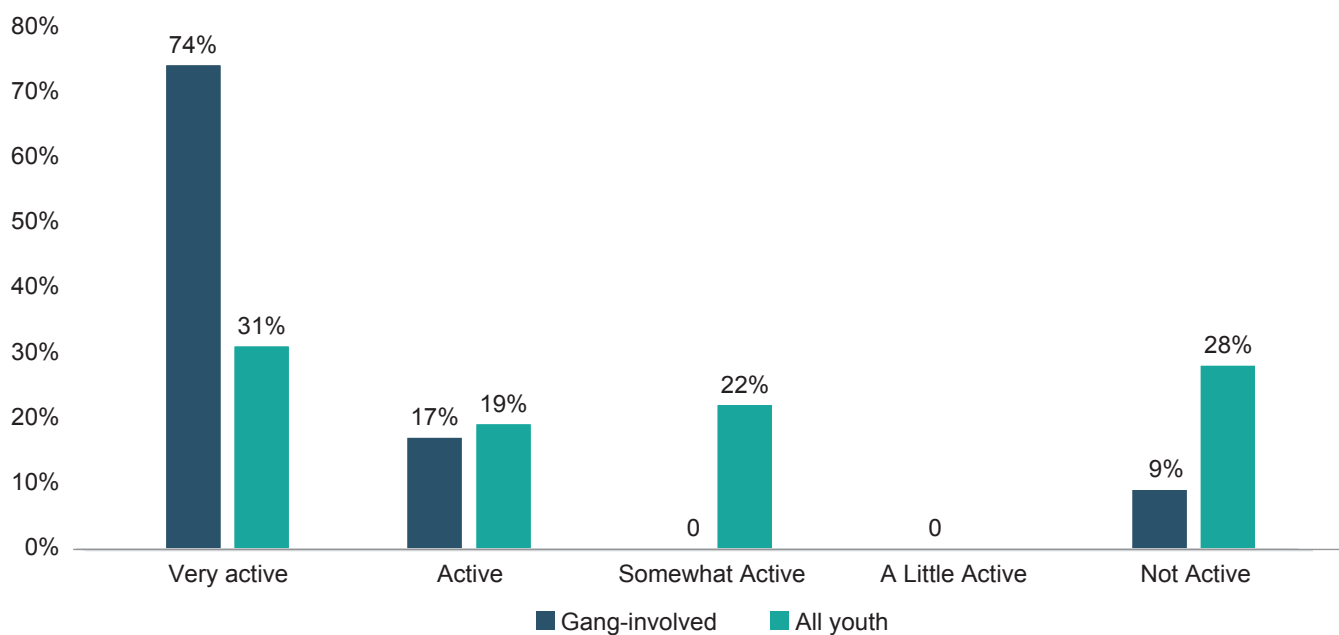
Responses to both questions suggest youth perceive a low level of collective efficacy on the part of adults in the community, both residents and police, to respond to serious crime issues such as firearm possession by youth.

#### **Youth Exposure to Gangs in the Neighborhood:**

Youth were also asked to describe the level of gang activity in their neighborhood and their perceived risk of involvement in gang violence. Gang-involved youth were over twice as likely as all youth to report that gangs were very active in their neighborhood. When asked if they believed that they or a friend were likely to be injured in gang violence, 43 percent of all youth said yes compared to 74 percent of gang-involved youth.

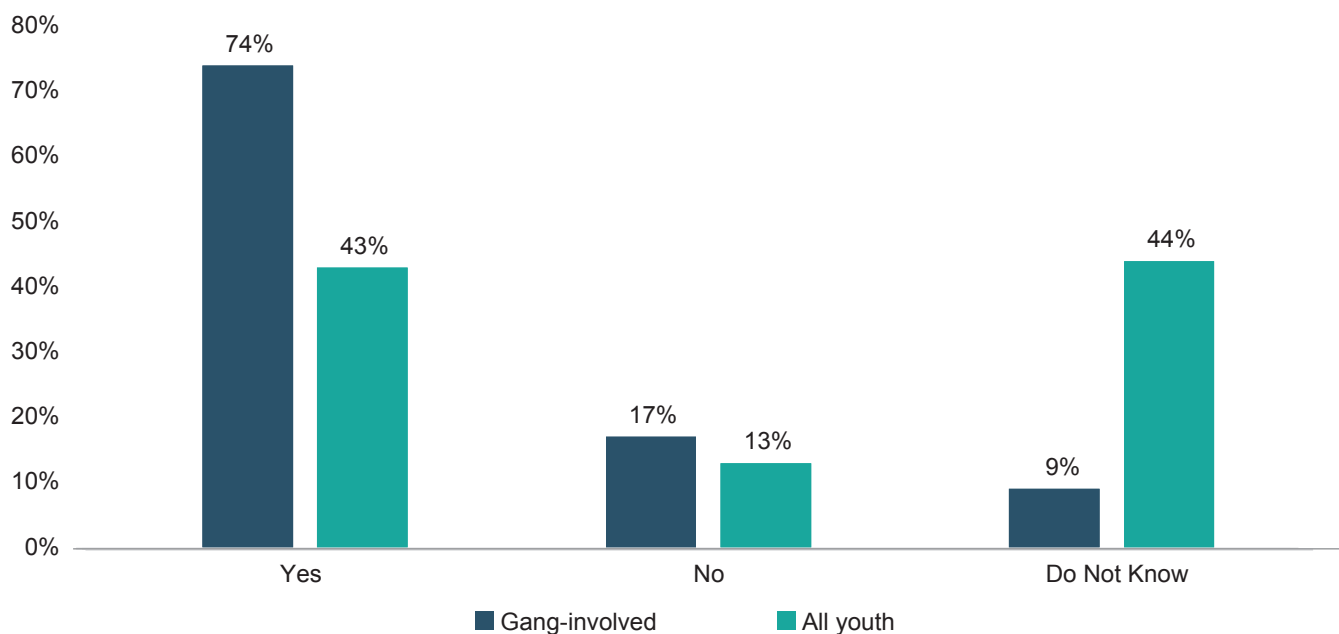
Youth who reported that they lived in a neighborhood where gangs were very active were also likely to report increased safety risks and antisocial behavior by adults. Responses indicate that up to half of survey

**FIGURE 20. RESPONSES TO: “HOW ACTIVE ARE GANGS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?” GANG-INVOLVED VERSUS ALL YOUTH**



Source: Author's elaboration.

**FIGURE 21. RESPONSES TO: “DO YOU THINK THAT YOU OR A FRIEND ARE LIKELY TO BE INJURED IN GANG VIOLENCE?” GANG-INVOLVED VERSUS ALL YOUTH**



Source: Author's elaboration.

respondents lived in neighborhoods in Belize City where they were exposed to perceived safety risks, negative role-modeling, gang activity, and where they perceived that adults and agencies lacked the collective efficacy to respond to local concerns. Gang-involved youth were more likely to report exposure to these issues and deficits of protective factors in their neighborhood. It is very telling that 43 percent of all respondents stated it was likely that they or one of their friends would be injured in gang violence

### Summary

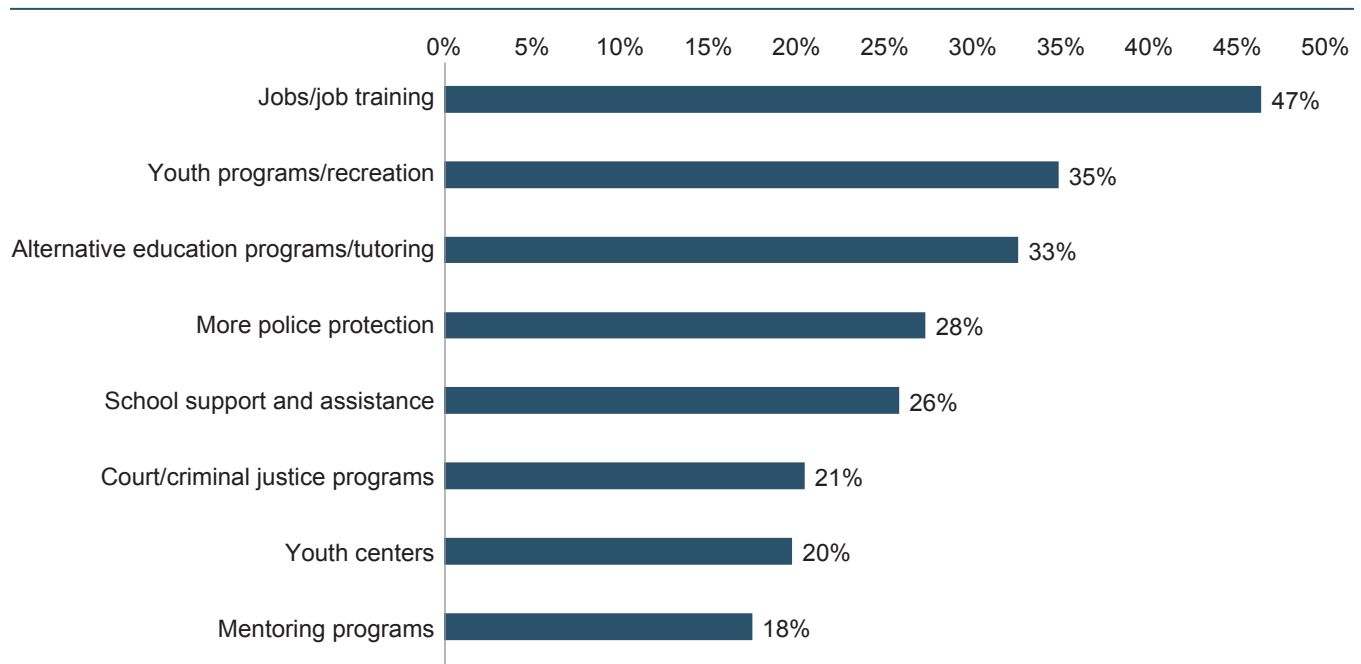
While risk and protective factors are grouped into five different domains (individual, family, peer, school, and community), the responses of Belize City youth to this survey show the interconnected nature of risk across the different areas of a young person's life. In each domain of risk examined in this section, a significant percentage of youth reported experiencing deficits and risk factors. The accumulation of these deficits over the course of a young person's life weakens their natural resilience and makes them more vulnerable to joining a gang.

One youth who participated in one of the focus groups quite articulately described the attraction of the gang to youth experiencing these deficits in their lives.

*"These gang leaders in the neighborhood, you don't see them as a monster or someone to be scared of. They are some guys you might get a dollar from or you might get something to eat from. You know them. They are comfortable in that neighborhood and you are comfortable around them; they are some of the first adults you might meet and have conversations with. They might ask how you did at school that day. Sometimes when you go home, there is no one at home paying attention to what you are doing or helping you with your homework. So, these guys, they fill that void.*

*Then you might not have a community center in your neighborhood, so there is no place to go or play. It's difficult to go to a community center in another neighborhood because you might be bullied or abused, or they might even steal your*

**FIGURE 22. RESPONSES TO: "PICK THE TOP THREE THINGS YOU BELIEVE SHOULD BE DONE ABOUT GANGS AND GANG ACTIVITY IN BELIZE CITY"**



Source: Author's elaboration.

*shoes or bicycle. You feel very vulnerable going outside your home neighborhood, so then these older guys become even more important because you spend all your time around them.*

*If you don't have that father figure, you are going to look up to those older guys in the neighborhood."*

The youth survey also asked respondents to provide feedback about the activities and strategies that youth would like to see implemented. They were asked to select the top three things that they believed should be done about gangs and gang activity in Belize City. The top response was jobs and job training, followed by youth programs and recreation, and alternative education programs and tutoring.

### Community Perceptions: Analysis of Data from Community Resident, Community Leader, School Personnel and Youth-Serving Agency Personnel Surveys

#### Summary Analysis

Community residents, community leaders, agency personnel, and school personnel all reported that they believed gang activity in Belize City had worsened over the previous three years, causing them to feel less safe in the community. Key problems residents identified in their neighborhood included shootings, poverty, theft and burglary, and gang activity. Over 80 percent of community residents who responded to

the survey reported that they believed their child(ren) could be injured due to gang activity in Belize City.

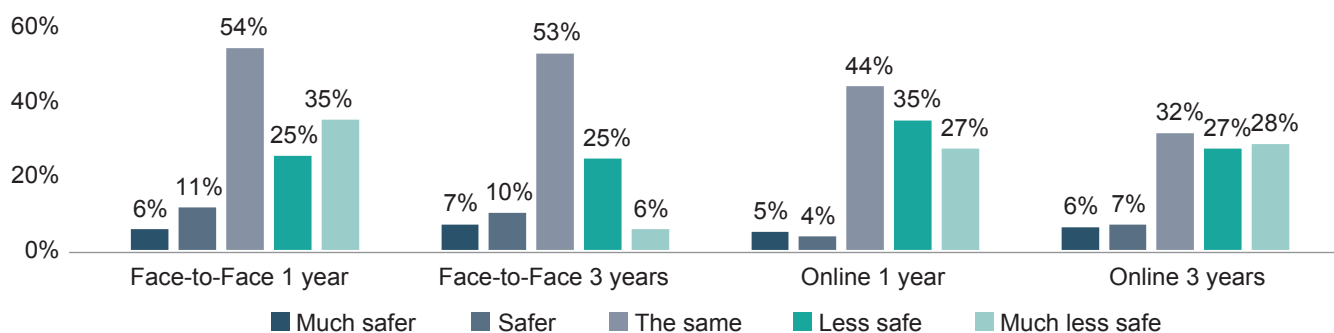
Causal factors identified by these survey respondents included poverty, lack of jobs, and family gang involvement. Each of these survey groups reported a high level of dissatisfaction with the current response to gang activity and violence in Belize City, citing a failure of programs to work together, insufficient response, and a failure of government leaders to sustain programs that are effective. Future actions recommended by most groups surveyed included jobs and job training programs, alternative education programs, and youth recreation programs.

This section discusses the perceptions and experiences of people who live and work in Belize City. A combination of strategies, including focus groups, online surveys, and face-to-face surveys were used to gather feedback from youth, community residents, parents of gang-involved young people, community leaders, youth-serving agency personnel, educators, and gang-involved individuals. Data from all focus groups and surveys are reported in this section.

#### Neighborhood Safety

Residents were asked a series of questions about their neighborhood to measure feelings of safety and security as well as problems affecting their neighborhood. Of the online respondents, 28 percent reported feeling much less safe than they did three years ago

**FIGURE 23. RESPONSES TO: "DO YOU FEEL SAFER IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD THAN YOU DID ONE YEAR AGO AND THREE YEARS AGO?" FACE-TO-FACE VERSUS ONLINE RESPONDENTS**



Source: Author's elaboration.

**TABLE 16. RESPONSES TO: “WHAT ARE YOUR TOP THREE CONCERNS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?”  
FACE-TO-FACE VERSUS ONLINE RESPONDENTS**

Face-to-Face Respondents		Online Respondents	
Response	Percent	Response	Percent
Shooting	37.8%	Theft/burglary	30.6%
Poverty	35.5%	Gang activity	28.2%
Drug dealing	26.0%	Poverty	19.4%
Unemployment	25.0%	Drug dealing	18.8%
Difficulty keeping kids in school	23.7%	Unemployment	18.2%
Abandoned/vacant lots	23.0%	Robbery	17.1%
Gang activity	21.0%	Abandoned/vacant lots	16.5%
Robbery	15.2%	Poor parenting	15.9%
Homicide/murder	14.2%	Shooting	14.7%
Poor parenting	11.8%	Homicide/murder	12.9%
Access to weapons	9.5%	Access to weapons	10.6%
Lack of police activity	8.5%	Lack of street lighting	10.0%
Lack of access to medical care	7.4%	Loud music	9.4%
Hunger	7.1%	State of road repairs	9.4%
Theft/burglary	6.8%	Lack of police activity	8.8%
Domestic violence	5.7%	Difficulty keeping kids in school	8.8%
Loud music	3.4%	Drug use	7.7%
Lack of street lighting	2.7%	Other	7.1%
State of road repairs	2.0%	Domestic violence	3.5%
Drug use	1.7%	Lack of healthy food	2.4%
Graffiti	1.0%	Lack of access to medical care	1.2%
Other	0.3%	Truancy	1.2%
Lack of healthy food	0%	Hunger	0.6%
Truancy	0%	Graffiti	0%

Source: Author's elaboration.

compared to 6 percent of face-to-face respondents. Some respondents reported feeling safer or much safer, but the percentages were smaller: face-to-face respondents, 17 percent for both a year ago and three years ago; online respondents, 8 percent for a year ago and 13 percent for three years ago. Notably, the highest percentage of all respondents felt they were just as safe currently as one and three years previously.

Face-to-face survey respondents were much more likely to be long-term residents of their neighborhood (91 percent) than online survey respondents (65 percent).

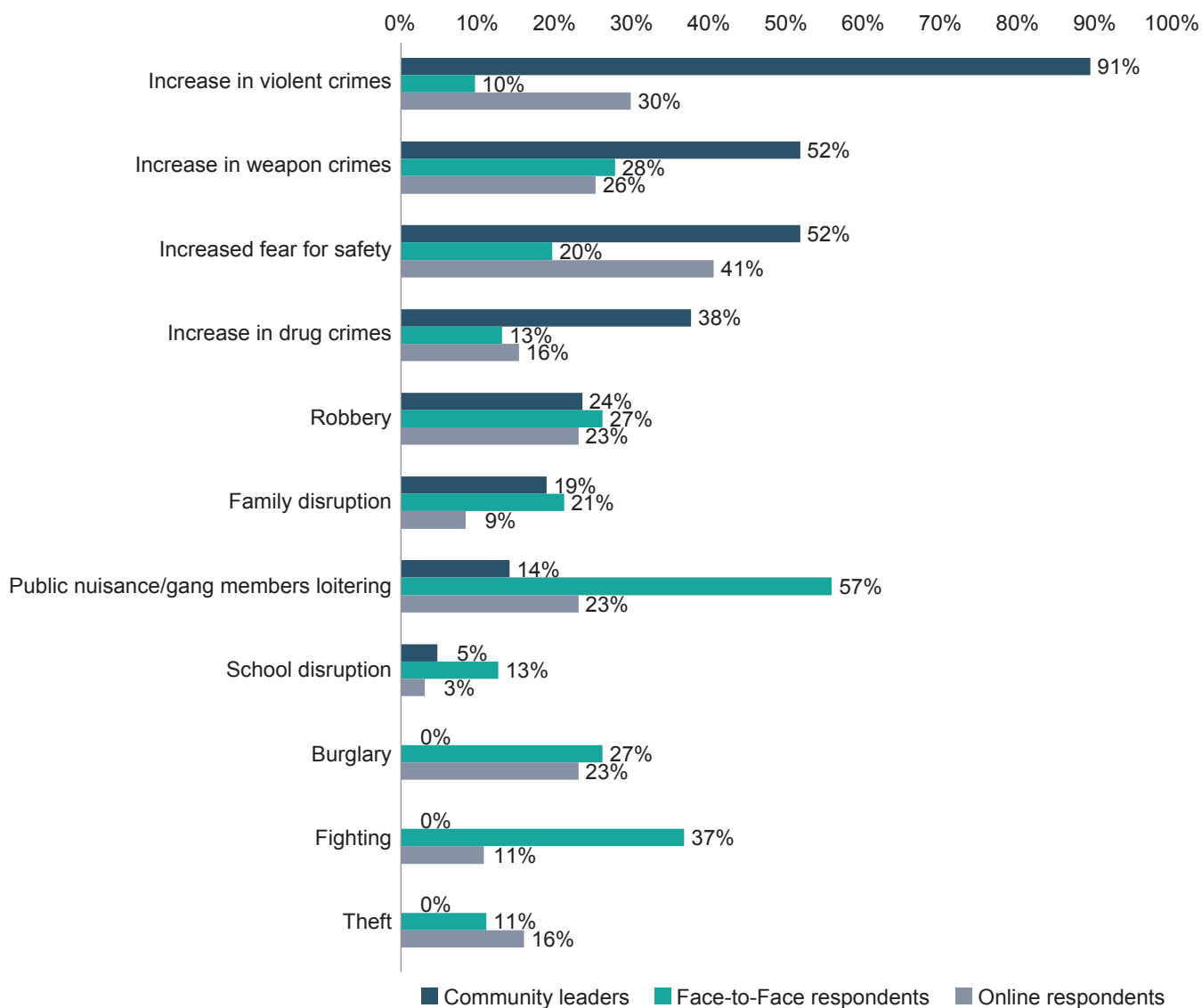
Community residents were asked to identify their top three concerns in their neighborhood. Asking for a limited number of choices requires respondents to think about and prioritize their concerns. Possible choices ranged from serious and violent crimes to quality of life and social issues. The top response for face-to-face respondents was shooting, while the top response for online respondents was theft and burglary.

### Gang Issues

Community leaders and residents were asked to identify the top three problems caused by gangs in the community. Face-to-face survey respondents



**FIGURE 24. TOP 3 PROBLEMS CAUSED BY GANGS, COMMUNITY LEADERS, AND FACE-TO-FACE AND ONLINE RESPONDENTS**



Source: Author's elaboration.

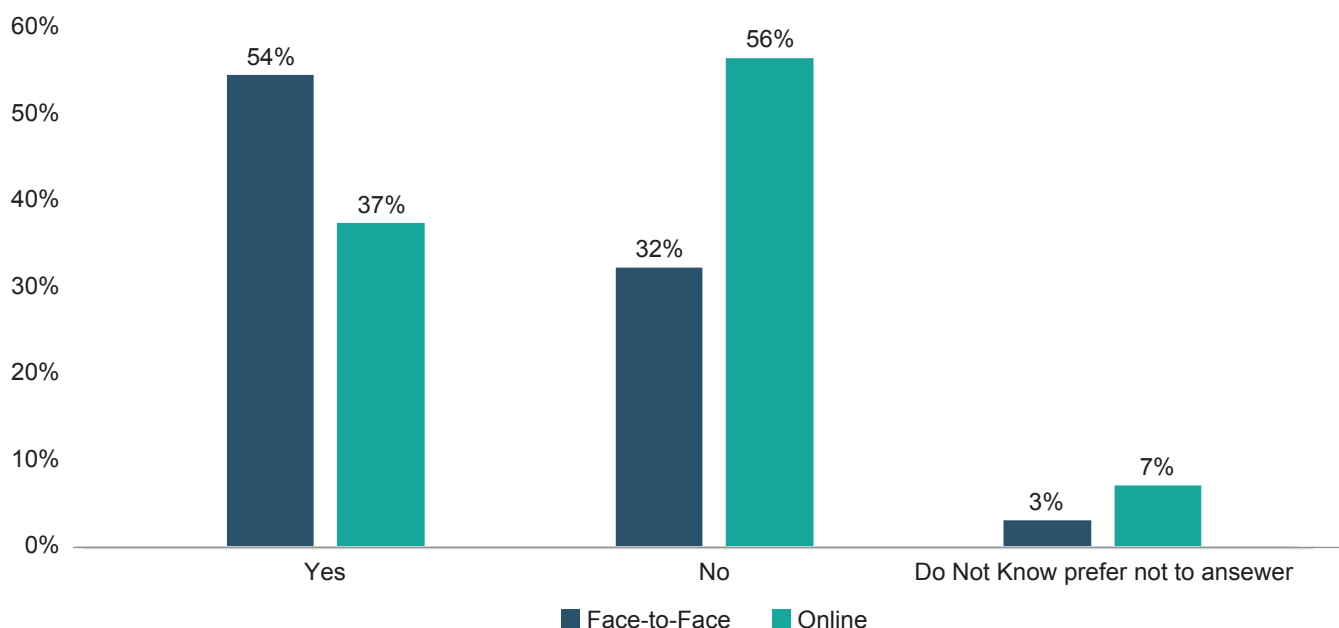
identified gang members loitering in the neighborhood as the top problem; online survey respondents reported that increased fear for safety and an increase in violent and weapons crimes were their top concerns. Community leaders were most likely to identify an increase in violent crimes and weapons crimes, along with increased fear for personal safety.

Of community leaders surveyed, 90 percent reported that gang violence had increased in Belize City during the previous three years.

Residents were asked about the likelihood that their children were at risk of joining a gang or being injured in gang-related violence. A little more than half of face-to-face respondents and over one-third of online respondents believed their children were at risk of joining a gang.

A very high percentage of community residents believed their child(ren) could be injured because of gang activity:

**FIGURE 25. RESPONSES TO: “DO YOU THINK YOUR CHILDREN ARE AT RISK OF JOINING A GANG?”  
FACE-TO-FACE VERSUS ONLINE RESPONDENTS**



Source: Author's elaboration.

- 84 percent of face-to-face respondents
- 81 percent of online respondents

Youth-serving agency personnel were asked if their agency serves court- and gang-involved individuals:

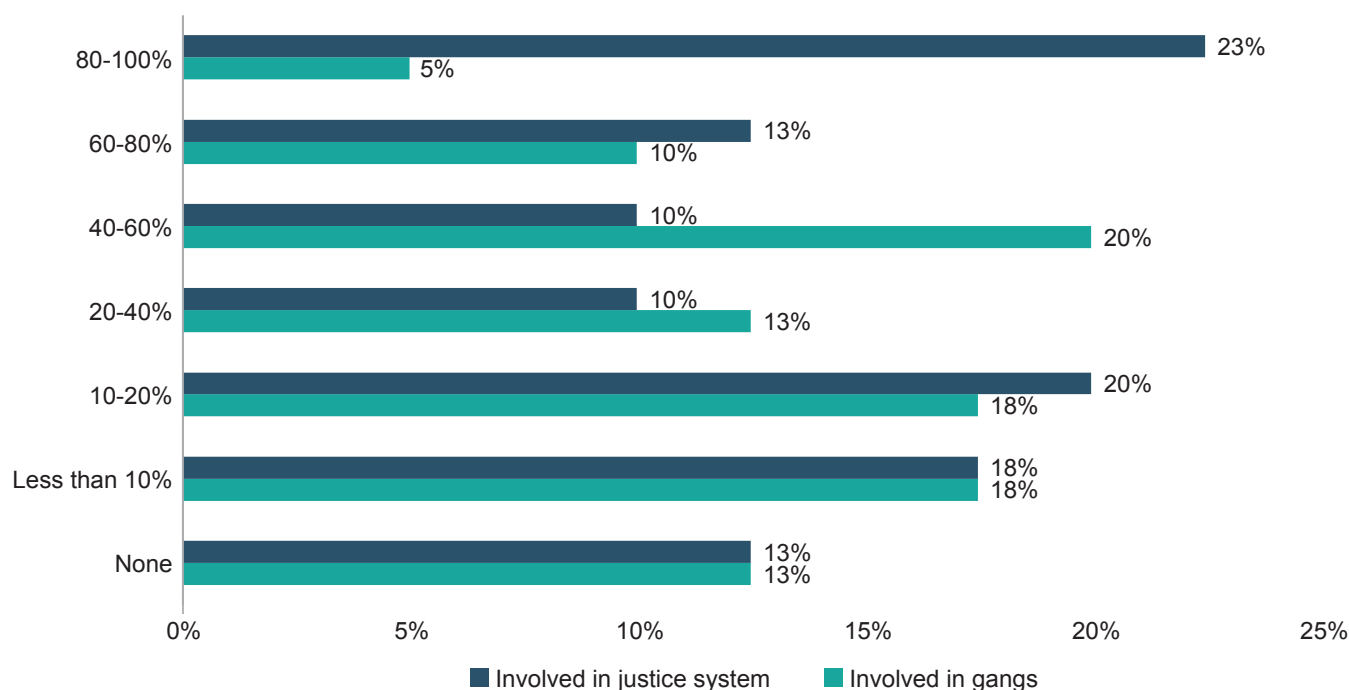
- 65 percent reported that they serve youth who are involved in gangs, but that gang-involved youth are not their target population
- 20 percent reported that gang-involved youth are the agency's target population
- 15 percent reported that they do not serve gang members

Roughly 50 percent of youth-serving agency personnel reported that 20 percent or less of the youth that they served were involved in gangs. One-third of respondents reported that 40 percent or more of the youth that they served were involved in gangs. A little less than half reported that 40 percent or more of the youth that they served were involved in the criminal or juvenile justice system. This suggests that many gang-involved youths were likely to be involved with

only a few youth-serving agencies, if they were receiving services at all. About 23 percent of respondents reported that 80 to 100 percent of the youth that they served were involved in the criminal/juvenile justice system. These responses were largely attributable to personnel from the Community Rehabilitation Department and CYDP.

Most youth-serving agency personnel (86 percent) reported that gang activity was increasing among the youth that they served compared to three years previously. A much smaller percentage (11 percent) stated that gang activity was the same. One respondent replied that they did not know and 10 percent skipped this question, possibly because they do not serve gang-involved individuals.

While most school personnel reported that gang members attended their school, 55 percent reported that they did not know if gang members recruit youth at their school, 28 percent reported that gang recruitment did occur, and 18 percent reported that no gang recruitment occurred in their school. Regarding

**FIGURE 26. PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH SERVED WHO ARE INVOLVED IN GANGS OR WITH THE JUSTICE SYSTEM**

Source: Author's elaboration.

the level of gang activity at school, 43 percent of school personnel reported that it had increased and 26 percent reported that it had stayed the same. Survey respondents were asked what percentage of students at their school were involved in gangs. A significant portion of school personnel (36 percent) stated that less than 10 percent of students at their school were involved in gangs, suggesting that gangs are not dispersed evenly across the school system or that educators do not recognize gang activity when they see it

### Causal Factors

Residents, community leaders, agency personnel, and gang-involved individuals were asked to list the top three reasons that they believed that gangs existed in Belize City. All four groups identified poverty as one of the top three reasons, and poverty, lack of jobs, and family/friends in the gang were identified as the top three reasons across the four groups.

Youth-serving agency personnel were asked about the exposure to risk factors they had observed among

**TABLE 17. TOP THREE REASONS GANGS EXIST**

	Community Residents (Face-to-Face)	Community Residents (Online)	Community Leaders	Agency Personnel	Gang-Involved Individuals	School Personnel
1	Lack of jobs (60.2%)	Poverty (62.9%)	Poverty (52.4%)	Lack of jobs (65.0%)	Poverty (60.0%)	Poverty (91.4%)
2	Poverty (41.3%)	Lack of jobs (58.4%)	Power and respect (42.9%)	Family problems (57.5%)	Lack of jobs (44.4%)	Family/friends in the gang (58.6%)
3	Boredom/nothing else to do (40.3%)	Family/friends involved in the gang (33.9%)	Family/friends involved in the gang (38.1%)	Poverty (52.5%)	Family/friends in the gang (35.6%)	To feel loved/sense of belonging (50.0%) Family problems (50.0%)

Source: Author's elaboration.

the youth that they served. Note that the percentages for these responses relate to the program personnel who had observed risk factors in the total population of youth that they served, not the percentage of youth experiencing them.

The most common risk, reported by 95 percent of all agency personnel, was exposure to violence in the community. Respondents were also highly likely to report youth exposure to:

- Parents who were too lenient (93 percent)
- Drug use (83 percent)
- School behavior problems (83 percent)
- Parent being absent, addicted, or unable to care for children (80 percent)
- Dropping out of school (80 percent)
- Alcohol use (73 percent)
- Unprotected or risky sexual behavior (65 percent)

School personnel were asked about risk factors affecting the youth that they served. Of these respondents, 88 percent selected exposure to violence in the community as a risk factor. They also reported exposure to the following risks:

- Violence at home (74 percent)
- Parents who were absent, addicted to substances, or otherwise unable to assist the youth (66 percent)
- School behavior problems (57 percent)
- Parents who were too lenient (55 percent)
- Drug use (55 percent)

Residents, community leaders, agency personnel, youth, and school personnel were asked to identify what should be done about gangs. All of the groups except school personnel selected jobs and job training as the top response. Youth programs and recreation was among the top three actions for four of the five groups, while alternative education and GED was among the top three for three of the groups.

To understand this issue from the perspective of gang-involved individuals, they were asked what would make them think about leaving the gang and what types of support would assist them with this process.

The top response to both questions was getting a job. Support and positive influences was also identified by gang-involved individuals as something that would be critical to helping them leave the gang.

**TABLE 18. WHAT SHOULD BE DONE ABOUT GANGS**

	Community Residents (Face-to-Face)	Community Residents (Online)	Community Leaders	Agency Personnel	Youth	School Personnel
1	Jobs/job training (79.7%)	Jobs and job training (58.4%)	Jobs/job training (61.9%)	Jobs/job training (75.5%)	Jobs/job training (46.6%)	Youth programs/recreation (72.4%)
2	Youth programs/recreation (53.9%)	Mentoring programs (39.6%)	Alternative education/GED (52.4%)	Alternative education/GED (45.0%)	Youth programs/recreation (35.1%)	Mentoring programs (55.2%)
3	Youth centers (38.3%)	Alternative education programs/tutoring (39.0%)	Court/criminal justice programs (47.6%)	Youth programs/recreation (32.5%)	Alternative education/GED (32.8%)	School support/assistance (44.8%)

Source: Author's elaboration.

**TABLE 19. FACTORS FOR LEAVING THE GANG**

	What would make you think about leaving the gang?	What support would help you leave the gang life?
1	Getting a job (33.0%)	Getting a job (47.5%)
2	Family responsibilities (26.7%)	Support/positive influences (15.0%)
3	Becoming a parent (26.7%)	Leaving the country (12.5%)

Source: Author's elaboration.

**TABLE 20. RESPONSES TO: “HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE CURRENT RESPONSE TO GANGS?”**

Level of Satisfaction	Community Residents (Face-to-Face)	Community Residents (Online)	Community Leaders	Agency Personnel	School Personnel	Youth
Very satisfied	1.1%	1.5%	0%	0%	0%	7.8%
Satisfied	7.8%	3.9%	4.8%	2.5%	2%	11.7%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	6.4%	17.7%	23.8%	20.0%	26%	21.9%
Dissatisfied	67.5%	33.1%	33.3%	42.5%	42%	35.9%
Very dissatisfied	17.3%	43.9%	38.1%	35.0%	31%	22.7%
Total dissatisfied	84.8%	1.5%	71.4%	77.5%	73%	58.6%

Source: Author's elaboration.

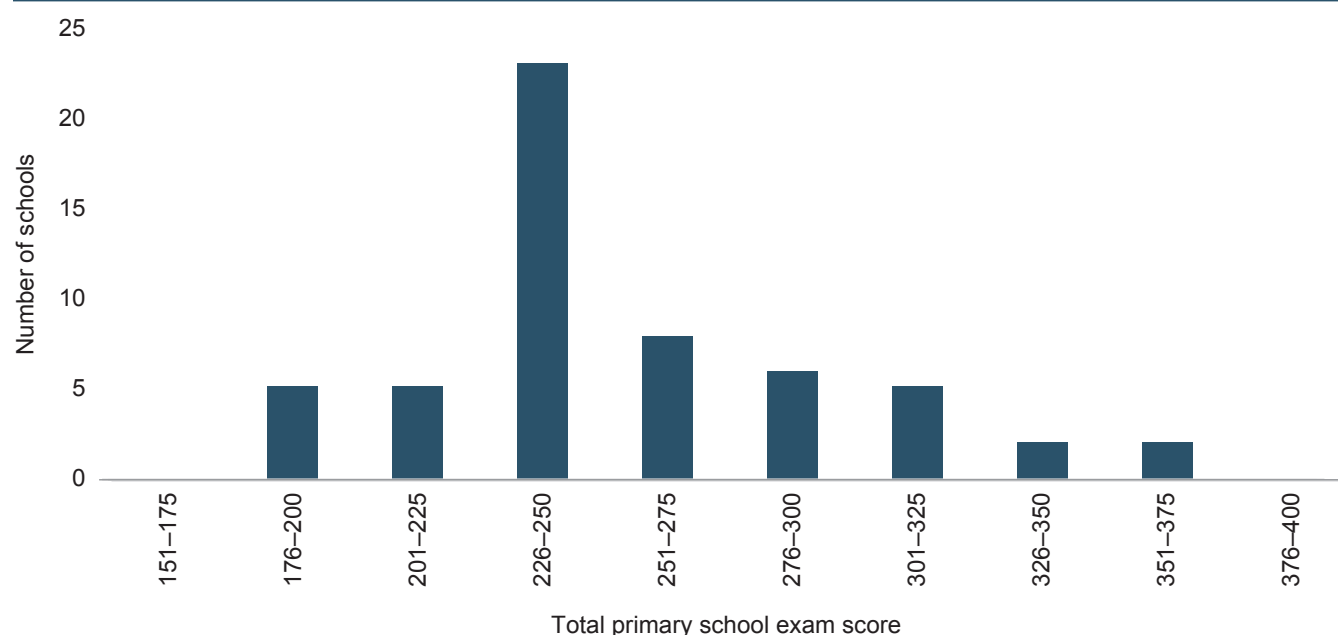
Residents, community leaders, agency personnel, school personnel, and youth were asked how satisfied they were with the current response to gangs. Less than 10 percent of community residents, of community leaders, of agency personnel, and of school personnel expressed satisfaction with the current response to gangs. Community leaders were the most dissatisfied, with 38 percent responding that they were very dissatisfied with the current response.

Community residents expressed the highest percentage of overall dissatisfaction (85 percent) and youth the lowest (59 percent).

### School Performance: Analysis of Data from Belize School District

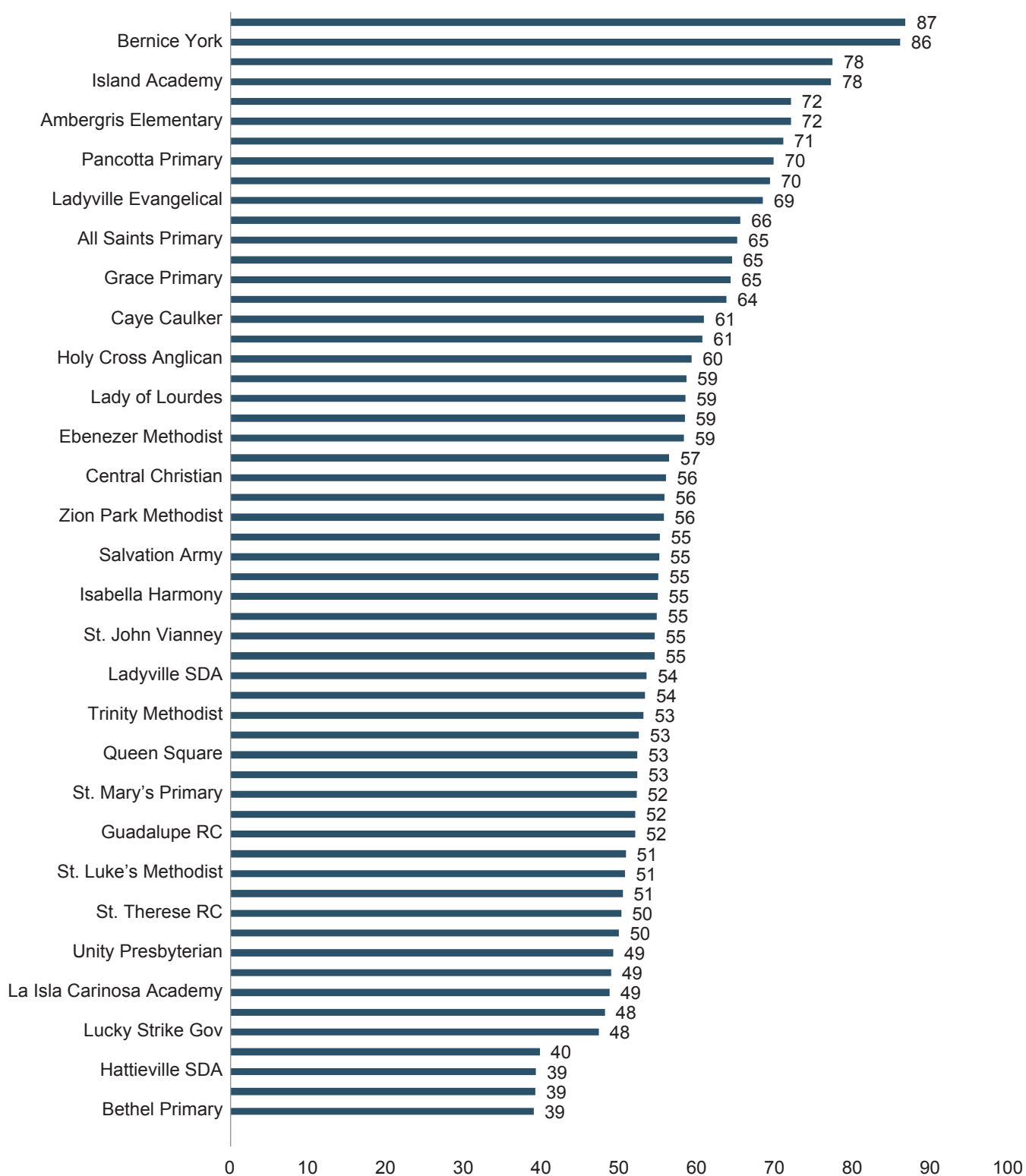
#### Summary Analysis

Low educational attainment, beginning in elementary school, is a significant predictor of students who may

**FIGURE 27. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF 2017 AVERAGE PRIMARY SCHOOL EXAM SCORES IN BELIZE DISTRICT**

Source: Belize Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, and Culture; analysis provided by Mark Antrobus, MHDSTPA.

Note: Primary exams are administered annually to all primary students in four subject areas (English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies). A total of 100 points are possible in each subject area, for a total of 400 points. The average student score for 2017 by school ranged from a low of 156 to a high of 348.

**FIGURE 28. BELIZE DISTRICT PRIMARY SCHOOLS BY PERCENTILE SCORE ON THE PRIMARY SCHOOL EXAM**

Source: Belize Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, and Culture; analysis conducted by Mark Antrobus, MHDSTPA.

develop behavioral problems leading to school suspensions, expulsions, and dropping out.

School performance data for primary schools in Belize District was obtained from the Primary School Exam reports compiled annually by the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, and Culture. A brief summary of school data is provided in this section.

Of the 57 primary schools in Belize District, 78 percent scored between the 50<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Primary School Exam. Nine schools scored below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile and only four schools (7 percent) attained average scores above the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile.

### Demographics: Analysis of Demographic Data for Belize City and Belize District Summary Analysis

Children living in South Side Belize City experience exposure to risk factors in multiple domains of their lives and at a much higher rate than in other parts of Belize District. These risk factors include poverty, substandard housing, family instability and disruption, nutritional deprivation, and harsh physical discipline.

While detailed information about North Side Belize City was unavailable, a study conducted during 2015–2016 by UNICEF provides detailed socioeconomic data about South Side Belize City. For comparison, demographic data is reported for Belize District excluding South Side Belize City and for South Side Belize City.

- Residents of South Side Belize City are poorer than other residents of Belize District. Most South Side residents (59 percent) are in the lowest two wealth quartiles (Statistical Institute of Belize/UNICEF, 2017).
- Over twice as many residents in South Side Belize City (39 percent) reported living in a dwelling with a rudimentary floor compared to residents countrywide (18 percent) or residents of Belize District (21 percent). Residents of South Side Belize City were three times more likely (29 percent) to report that their housing had rudimentary exterior walls than to residents countrywide (10 percent) or residents of Belize District (11 percent) (Statistical Institute of Belize/UNICEF, 2017).
- The infant mortality rate in South Side Belize City was 22 per 100,000 people, significantly higher than the countrywide rate of 12 per 100,000 people (Statistical Institute of Belize/UNICEF, 2017).
- The percentage of low birth weight babies born in South Side Belize City was 5 percent compared with 0.6 percent in Belize District (Statistical Institute of Belize/UNICEF, 2017).
- Children under age 5 from South Side Belize City are 160 percent more likely to be underweight than children from Belize District and 16 percent more likely to be stunted in height.
- Of the children in Belize District, 53 percent lived with two parents compared with 59 percent of children countrywide. In contrast, only 36 percent of children from South Side Belize City lived with both parents (Statistical Institute of Belize/UNICEF, 2017).
- Of the children ages one to 14 who resided in South Side Belize City, 86 percent experienced some form of violent discipline: 78 percent experienced psychological aggression and 67 percent experienced physical punishment. These rates were nearly double the percentage of children and youth in Belize District who experienced psychological aggression (41 percent) and dramatically higher for physical punishment (9 percent). Nearly five times as many children in South Side Belize City experienced severe physical punishment (9 percent) compared to children in Belize District (2 percent). The percentage of children who lived in South Side Belize City who experienced any form of violent physical discipline (86 percent) was significantly higher than children experiencing this nationwide (65 percent) (Statistical Institute of Belize/UNICEF, 2017).





# Resources

Cure Violence Model: [www.cureviolence.org](http://www.cureviolence.org)

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Comprehensive Gang Model: <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/comprehensive-gang-model>

Online overview of the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model: <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/HTML/Online-Overview/> (requires flash)

OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model: Planning for Implementation: <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Comprehensive-Gang-Model/Implementation-Manual>

Street Outreach and the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model: <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/content/documents/street-outreach-comprehensive-gang-model.pdf>

Multidisciplinary Gang Intervention Teams: <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/NYGCbulletin3.pdf>

Aggression Replacement Training: <http://www.aggressionreplacementtraining.com/>

OJJDP Strategic Planning Tool: <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/spt/>

Strengthening Families Program: <https://strengtheningfamiliesprogram.org/>



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