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Developing an Understanding of Juvenile Delinquency in St. Lucia, St. Kitts, and Nevis
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Originally, the topic of my SURF project was dedicated to juvenile delinquency and diversion. Therefore, the research questions were dedicated to both topics. As the transcripts came in, I focused more on just the delinquency portion and had to revise my questions to fit this scope. The main question that emerged became “how do juvenile justice stakeholders understand the drivers of juvenile delinquency?” Parental influences (Henggeler, 1989; Herrera & McCloskey, 2001; Hicks-Pass, 2009; Landon, Waechter, Wolfe, & Orlando, 2017; McLanahan, 1999; Simons, Lin, Gordon, Conger, & Lorenz, 1999; Wells & Rankin, 1991), peer influences (Giordano, 1995; Warr, 1993, Warr, 2008), and individual influences (Fishbane, 2007; Casey, Jones, & Somerville, 2011) on delinquency have been well documented over the years, so they were expected to be influences in the Caribbean as well. This knowledge engendered the development of two additional research questions: “who are the youths in the juvenile justice system in St. Lucia, St. Kitts, and Nevis?” and “what risk factors are present in their offending trajectories?”

A critical interview question for my research was: “what do you think are the top three drivers of crime for young people,” which gave me plenty of content to identify and isolate in the transcripts. Using a grounded theory approach, I then went line-by-line to code the information I had obtained. Using these initial codes, I then created broader categories to “sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize” the data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). This analysis then was utilized to encompass the voices of the juvenile justice stakeholders. All parts of the process were synthesized through the use of memo-writing.

According to juvenile justice stakeholders in St. Lucia, the second-level codes determined that family, education, different world now, meso/macro/neighborhood, gangs, and peers proved to be the main causes of delinquency. Specifically, the changing family structure with more single mothers and absent fathers, an education system that focused too heavily on academics, media influences, inequity of resources, wanting to belong in gangs, and peer pressure were causes for concern within each of those categories, respectfully. For St. Kitts and Nevis, the second level codes were parenting, adolescence, peers, education, substance abuse, changing time, and economic structure. More specifically, poor relationships between parents, seeking an identity, wanting to belong, failing at school, using marijuana and selling drugs for survival, breakdown in the community, and lacking opportunities.

On the surface, the drivers of delinquency appear to be similar between the respective nations. However, upon a deeper analysis, one can determine rich nuances between the groups. For example, both stakeholders within St. Lucia and St. Kitts and Nevis determined that peers influenced delinquency. However, for St. Lucian participants, there was a larger focus on peer pressure, while in St. Kitts and Nevis, there was a focus on young people wanting to belong, thereby leaving adolescents susceptible to negative influences. It is important to both note and embrace these nuances in order to provide a deeper, richer picture of juvenile delinquency. Furthermore, embracing these nuances will lead to culturally competent programs to address the underlying causes within the respective nations.

I plan on continuing this research in the future for my Honor's Thesis, where I will be analyzing juvenile delinquency drivers within Guyana and New York City. I will then be comparing across all of the nations to see if there are any overlaps. I plan on publishing this

research when it is all finished, condensing my Honor's Thesis into a journal article with the help of my advisor.

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