

Understanding Juvenile Delinquency in St. Lucia, St. Kitts, and Nevis



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Background and Research Focus

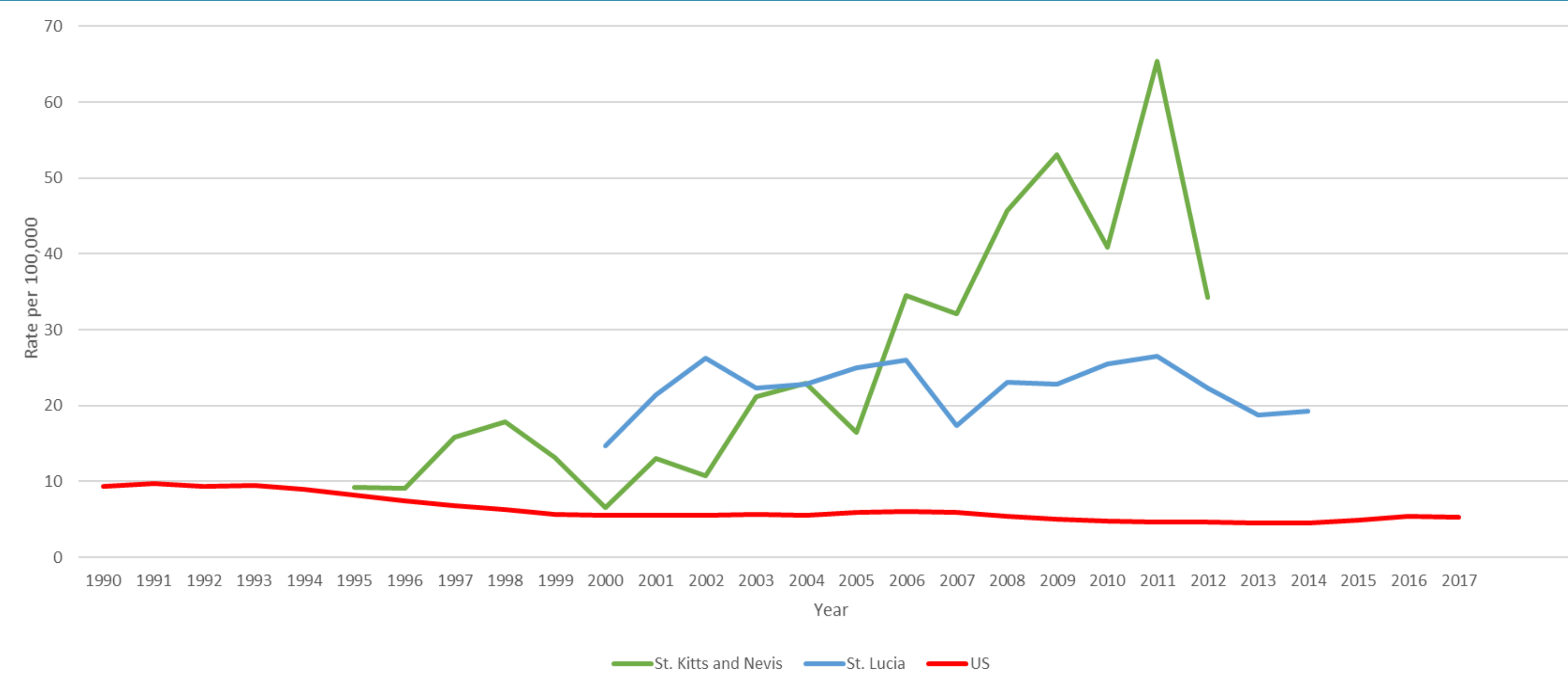
Crime and violence rates within the Caribbean have been rising since the 1980s, with 40% of the population believing that crime is the biggest threat to their country¹. Averaging 30 murders per 100,000 people per year, homicide rates across the Caribbean, are considerably higher than the world average of 5 murders per 100,000 people per year.²

Much juvenile delinquency literature is drawn from samples of North American, Canadian and Western European countries. There are extremely limited data relating to juvenile delinquency in the Caribbean. Without a clear understanding of who is entering the juvenile justice system in St. Kitts and St. Lucia and Nevis, diversion and prevention programs may miss their mark. Therefore, it is important to investigate the drivers of juvenile delinquency within the Caribbean context.

Research Questions

How do juvenile justice stakeholders understand the drivers of delinquency?
Who are the youths in the juvenile justice system in St. Lucia, St. Kitts, and Nevis?
What risk factors are present in their offending trajectories?

Homicide Rates per 100,000



This graph depicts the homicide rates in St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and the United States between 1990 and 2017

Methods

Acquiring knowledge of the north American and European literature of juvenile delinquency, gangs, parents and peer influence, as well as Caribbean homicide and crime rates, and the history of the Caribbean in terms of slavery, colonization, independence and historical leaders proved to be the starting point of this research.

The study was a qualitative analysis of original data. The transcripts of the interviews provided included information about what the juvenile justice professionals believed to be the three greatest drivers of juvenile delinquency.

Location of the Caribbean Islands Researched



More Methods

There were 32 interviews with police, probation officers, magistrates, correctional staff, counselors, and prosecutors. Then, using a grounded theory approach, the transcripts were analyzed using the constant comparison coding method. As such, each transcript was read to identify where the stakeholder talked about causes and influences on crime and delinquency. These chunks were then named. The narrative was coded into themes utilizing a first and second level coding approach. The subsequent analysis strove to encompass the voices of the juvenile justice stakeholders. All parts of the process were synthesized through the use of memo writing.

Key Takeaway

Embracing the complexity of the drivers of delinquency allows researchers to determine culturally sensitive programs to better suit the needs in the respective countries. What may work to target the influence of peer pressure for American juveniles may not work in St. Kitts, even if both programs are targeting peer influences.

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Results and Analysis

St. Lucia:

- **Family**
 - Changing family structure includes female-headed households with very little parental supervision
- **Education**
 - Students are falling through the cracks
- **Different World Now**
 - Media influences individuals
- **Meso/Macro/Neighborhood**
 - Inequity in resources
- **Gangs**
 - Wanting to belong and learning from gangs
- **Peers**
 - Peer pressure to fit in

St. Kitts and Nevis:

- **Parenting**
 - Poor relationships between and with parents
- **Adolescence**
 - Seeking an identity
- **Peers**
 - Wanting to belong leaving adolescents susceptible to negative influences
- **Education**
 - Failing at school; not meeting juvenile's needs
- **Substance Abuse**
 - Using marijuana and selling drugs for survival
- **Changing Times**
 - Breakdown in the community and losing national identity
- **Economic Structure**
 - Lacking opportunities

There is overlap between the two countries on the surface, however, with deeper analysis, one can see that there are nuances between them.

It is key to embrace the nuances between the countries in order to provide a deeper, richer picture of delinquency within St. Lucia, St. Kitts, and Nevis that remains authentic to the voices of the stakeholders.

References

- ¹ Sutton, H., & Baxter, S., (2017). *Understanding and combatting crime in Guyana*. Washington DC: Inter-American Development Bank.
- ² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank (UNODC). (2007). *Crime, violence, and development: trends, costs, and policy options in the Caribbean*. (Report No. 37820). Vienna: UNODC