



TURNING THE TIDE

OF CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN TOBAGO

'A Public Health Approach'

Turning the Tide on Crime and Violence in Tobago: A Public Health Approach



Tobago CivilNet

December 2024





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Introduction



Tobago CivilNet is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting a thriving Tobago built on the cornerstones of individual liberty, economic freedom, and accountable government. Within the past few years, the organization has witnessed that Trinidad and Tobago is under threat of destabilization due to the rising rate of crime and violence in the country. Particularly, in Tobago there has been an unprecedented level of murders and other violent crimes in 2023 and 2024 giving rise to much concern and attention. It has become clear to the population that a social change is needed. It has also been noted that crime and violence prevention is everybody's business so the most effective solutions must have collective participation and endorsement. While there have been many discussions on the issue, there has been no one best solution to combat the rise of crime and violence in the country.

Having become aware that crime and violence are public health issues, CARICOM Heads of Government met in April of 2023 to discuss this approach. However, very little has trickled into the public domain from these discussions. Tobago CivilNet with a mandate to drive advocacy and educate the people of the island together with the support of Eastern Credit Union, executed a 4-part educational public discussion series online using the Zoom platform and Tobago CivilNet Facebook page from November 12th, 2024 to December 3rd, 2024 entitled, "Turning the Tide of Crime and Violence in Tobago: A Public Health Approach. This series brought four (4) skilled presenters to engage in enlightening public discussion while proposing solutions to the challenges of crime on the island.

Objectives of Turning the Tide on Crime and Violence in Tobago: A Public Health Approach:

- (1) To give the young people an insight into gangsterism and encourage them to reject that lifestyle.
- (2) To explore the reasons why young black males and females are attracted to gangs and gang culture and what can be done to divert their energies in other directions.
- (3) To assist parents and teachers to understand the major risk factors in the school system that produce personnel for careers in gangsterism and how to avoid or mitigate them.
- (4) To introduce the public health framework for crime and violence prevention and guide key stakeholders into the methodology to integrate it into policy and planning in their sectors.



This outcome statement summarizes the main points raised in the discussions and proposes recommendations that can be adopted by all stakeholders – individuals, businesspersons, the church, community groups, law enforcement, policy makers and the society to reduce the drastic increase in crime and violence in the island of Tobago and to a further extent the country.

Session 1: Tuesday 12th November, 2024

Crime and
Taxation: Is Gang
Violence Worth the
Price? By Quincy
Joseph, Ex-
convicted Federal
Prisoner now
Founder of No
Youth Left Behind



Background of Speaker: Mr. Quincy Joseph, is an ex-convict who gave a backstory of how he unfortunately became imprisoned. The basis for his life of crime stemmed from his lack of skills, societal pressures as well as his misunderstanding of manhood. He recounted that for many youths, crime is based on the pressure and circumstances that one faces. Mr. Quincy has completely turned his life around after spending 12 years in prison in the United States.

Understanding of the Cultural and Social Issue of Crime in Trinidad and Tobago

- Challenges in Society**

Serious crime stems from competition and jealousy including emotional issues which society fails to address. The loss of spirituality and moral values weakens community development and the value of peace and respect for humanity and life.

- Masculinity and Culture**

Many men lack guidance in the principles of true manhood and guidance, with not enough men practicing good values. Women, as nurturers, also unintentionally enable harmful behaviors, leaving young men misled and lacking stability for family life.

- Capitalism and Accountability**

Capitalism creates inequality, leading youths to pursue crime for an expensive lifestyle seen on social media. True change starts with individual accountability for one's actions and choices.

- Misled youth and its impact**

Youths are lacking direction and hope. They become vulnerable to external pressures, leading to crime. Social media also distracts them from self-development, and psychological struggles persist. Consequently, they need ongoing mental health support and support systems at home, in the school, the community, in church, in positive youth groups and community organizations.

Recommendations for Crime Prevention in Trinidad and Tobago:

- Foster educational programmes with realistic goals
- Re-introduce foundational elements such as prayer, and moral guidance from the primary level to the tertiary level.
- Ministries and Divisions of youth and education need to analyse the best method of combating the crime situation within the school populations.
- The moral and spiritual compass that the Tobago society once had has been removed which creates more opportunities of temptation especially amongst youths who are at higher risk. We need to shift the perspective of young men and their role in the community.
- The church must provide physically for the youth while creating close- knit relationships which would ease the challenges when addressing the spiritual aspect of life.
- Good men in society need to be encouraged to mentor and be role models to guide young men while women and men at home collaboratively nurture and discipline children.
- Improve practical support systems and social safety net programmes in at-risk communities in dialogue with the beneficiaries and ensure that beneficiaries get more than talk from these programs.
- Promote a culture of delayed gratification, community spirit and personal responsibility to enforce positive changes especially in crime prone communities.

The poster features a white brick wall background. At the top, there are two logos: 'Tobago CIVILNET' with a circular emblem and 'Eastern Credit Union Co-operative Society Limited' with a globe icon. The main title 'TURNING THE TIDE' is in large, bold, blue 3D letters. Below it, 'OF CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN TOBAGO' is in smaller blue text, and 'A Public Health Approach' is in red cursive. A photo of Quincy Joseph, a Black man with a beard and glasses, is in the center. To his left, text reads: 'Ex-convicted Federal Prisoner now Youth Leader of No Youth Left Behind'. Below that is 'Session 1: November 12, 2024 - 6pm - 8pm'. Under 'Topic:' is 'Crime and Taxation: Is gang violence worth the price?'. To the right of the photo, there are two red octagonal 'STOP' signs with 'CRIME' written on them. At the bottom, it says 'Interviewer: Kasel Campbell', 'Host: Xavier Edwardz', and 'ALL SESSIONS WOULD BE HELD VIA ZOOM 868 732 7630'. Contact information 'TOBAGOCIVILNET@GMAIL.COM' and ' @TOBAGO CIVILNET FOR FURTHER INFORMATION' is at the bottom.

Session 2: Tuesday 19th November, 2024

The Untold Truth about Society's Failure to Develop our Youth by Dr. David Muhammad, Founder of the Black Agenda Project and Kwame Ture Center



Background of the Speaker: Dr. Muhammad holds a PHD in sociology and a double major degree in sociology and education from the University of the West Indies. He is the founder and director of the Black Agenda Project and the Kwame Ture Center which opened in 2018. There he established nine simultaneous groups or ministries to help aid the youths within the community.

Understanding of the Cultural and Social Issue of Crime in Trinidad and Tobago

- **Unequal Distribution of Wealth**

The disparity of wealth between the one percent and other ethnicities versus mainly African population in the lower class contributes significantly to the escalating crime situation. With unequal distribution of wealth across, there are some positive opportunities that the African child has not been exposed to nor had the privilege to experience.

- **Criminal Genetic Capitalism**

Criminogenic Capitalism is a term used to explain the nature of our national economy affairs generating criminal thinking and behaviors. By the fact that basic needs as well as luxury items are over-sensationalized to the poor suggests that a desire is fueled within those who have wants but no means by which to acquire them. Many of the serious crime and violence are attributed to the low-income persons of African heritage who obtain illegal weapons to engage in criminal behaviours. While the young boys of African descent fill the prisons, there is no attempt to prosecute the well-known criminals who bring in the guns and drugs. These persons, mainly of other ethnicities, conduct their criminal enterprises unhindered and are often untouched because they are financiers of political parties.

- **Deviant Amplification Spiral**

Criminal behavior is influenced by mainstream media, which frequently broadcasts crimes like homicides and burglaries. This phenomena of heavy media exposure tends to give rise to a Deviant Amplification Spiral, a sociological term for increased deviance. Politicians use negative crime portrayal as propaganda, leading unemployed youths to join gangs for recognition and a sense of belonging.

- **Post Colonial Sovereignty**

Juvenile delinquency among African males is largely linked to our post-colonial heritage and is fueled by two sets of factors which are both internal and external.

- **Crime is attributed to low-income**

Many African youth are from low income households while white collar crime is conveniently ignored and overlooked.

Internal

- Post colonial ethnocentric curriculum that does not cater to the black child.
- Educational underachievement by itself not passing CSEC or CAPE examinations which were adapted from structures by the colonial masters.
- Negative teacher attitudes such as labelling, stereotyping and branding.

External

- Poverty
- Overcrowding low-income residential areas
- High unemployment rate among marginalized communities



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Dr. David Muhammad

Dr. David Muhammad, Sociologist and Founder and Director of The Black Agenda Project and the Kwame Ture Centre

Session 2: November 19, 2024 - 6pm - 8pm

Topic:

The Untold Truth About Society's Failure to Develop Our Youth



**Host:
Shenell Felix**



ALL SESSIONS WOULD BE HELD VIA ZOOM

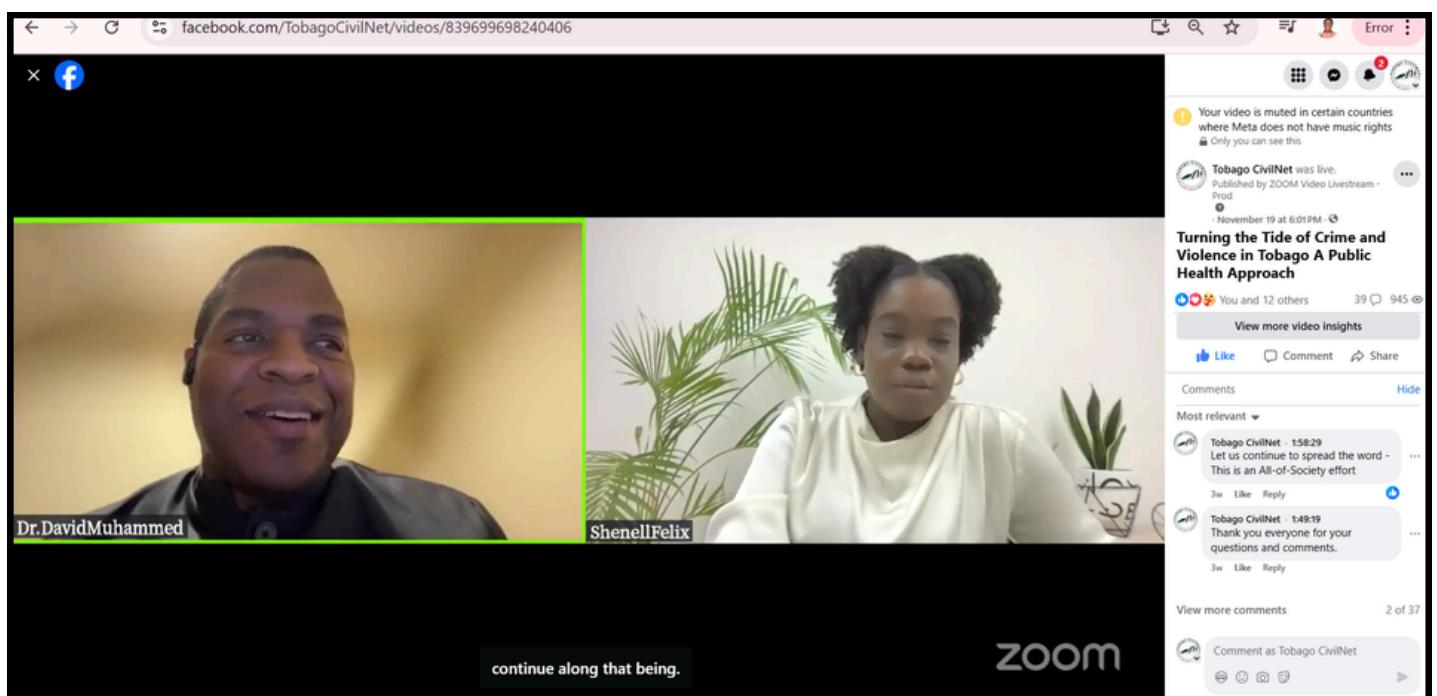
868 732 7630

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Recommendations for Crime Prevention in Tobago:

- Implement a massive government investment and social programmes drive pumping capital into lower income / at-risk communities.
- Engage in a transformation of the educational school system. The new curriculum must be inspiring and relate to aspects of the student's heritage and include those motivational and inspirational elements of knowledge, wisdom and understanding that can empower African children in addition to all races in the country. Instead of continuing to utilize and follow the British education system which has no relevance to the youths in the country.
- Refocus and interface with gangs within the school system and in communities. Society must recognise the crime infiltration tentacles within the school system as well as outside the school system and come up with innovative ways to reduce such elements.
- Private organizations have a significant role to play as well as the state in terms of the community and youth development mentorship strategies. Encouragement of greater social corporate responsibility within communities.
- Advocacy and policy decisions to engage in more Prison Reform can reduce recidivism. Proper living conditions within the prison as well as safeguarding human health and changing its current practices can help prisoners with a smoother transition of reinstatement back into society.
- Promote continuous expansion of the Tertiary Level system. Tertiary level education must encourage cooperative competitiveness, better employment, better communication skills and higher earnings. The expansion of the tertiary level system could open room for more career opportunities and an increase in growth of the economy in terms of GDP.



Session 3: Tuesday 26th November, 2024

Joyful Learning as an Antidote to Failing, Ailing and Misbehaving among the Youth by Camile Swapp, Child and Adolescent Development Psychologist



Background of the Speaker: Camile Swapp is a Child and Adolescent Developmental Psychologist and has been involved in advocacy and the dissemination of information on how to support children, teens and emerging adults. Camile holds a Master of Science (MSc) in Psychology with a concentration in Child and Adolescent Development from Capella University Minnesota. In the past twenty years, her company has successfully hosted several education programmes in Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica. She is a member of TTASCD Trinidad and Tobago Association of Supervision Curriculum Development.

Context to the Challenges of Child Learning and Development:

- Camile's first interest in child developmental psychology stemmed from her observation of her child's behavioural pattern in Sweden, and a greater understanding of how their education system focused on respecting and sharing information on children's developmental needs.
- In Caribbean territories like Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica, the Old British Colonial Education System inherited was not focused on Child and Adolescent Developmental needs, and neuroscientific findings lagged behind.
- Studies on neuropsychology show that children learn predominantly through their feelings. The reality is the human brain takes the longest to mature. The brain for childhood is different from that of adulthood.
- If the education system is interested in the well-being of the learners. Close attention is needed on the research literature of brain development and building human experiences rather than just focusing on testing, and ability sorting for school placement.
- There is a connection between youths' ill health, failure and misbehaviour with rigid education systems which are not developmentally appropriate for children and youth. Additionally, students not feeling connected to their schools, chronic stress, and this negatively impacting self esteem and relationship with their families.

- .Most incarcerated and at-risk youth did not attend an elitist or choice school. They did not feel good in the high schools they attended and met other disenfranchised students and formed troublesome gangs.
- Many students are not illiterate or lazy but rather need the time to develop and grow in an enabling environment conducive for learning. We must respect brain development.

Key recommendations to promote healthy learning and development among youths:

- Equip the educational sector and families with knowledge on child, adolescent and young adult development to make informed input in the public health approach to reduce ill health, school failure and violence among our youth. The role of maturation of brain cells should be respected (parents gain understanding and lobby for institutions to also meet the developmental needs of youngsters).
- The child/ youth should be exposed to parental /caregiver attachment, good diet, blessed, protected from emotional and physical abuse.
- Improvement is needed in student curriculum delivery and learning. Use a curriculum and design lesson plans that suit the appropriate age groups to facilitate learning. Curricula must take into account children's stages of development and the environment in which they operate.
- Create joyful learning environments which promote youth's feeling of connectedness to school, hope about their future and the will to succeed socially, emotionally and academically while enjoying holistic help.
- Dr. Jane Healy notes genes loads the gun, environment pulls the trigger. The adolescent brain is vulnerable and largely impacted by unhealthy environmental influences such as: inappropriate media as in pornography, alcohol use, early use of marijuana, psychoactive drugs, dysfunctional family life and undue school pressures. Therefore, reduce these toxic environments for children.
- Neuro-scientific findings show maturational differences in brain development between boys and girls. Girls' language, fine motor skills for academics (including attention span) and puberty development are approximately two-three years ahead of boys. Boys' spatial skills, and certain aspects of physical development are ahead of girls, hence they don't sit long. That is why many girls excel academically at an earlier age but give boys time and space to grow and they will also be academically strong and perform well at school.
- School entry-age and exit is important so students should not be extremely pressured to enter formal schooling before mandated age. Nor should they demit school too early based on lack of academic achievement.

- As a wholesome alternative to Trinidad and Tobago's ability sorting of students, is the multiplication of religious and top-of-the line schools which Caribbean parents are passionate about and want for their children's learning environment.
- All children and youth should feel they have been placed in a good or excellent school. Desist from ability sorting them so early in their development. Cognitive skills take time to develop.
- As stated by United Nations SDG goal 4 on education, it is "... the right of all children to receive an education without discrimination on any grounds, including low academic achievement." T&T is a signatory on this SDG.
- Collaboration of psychologists, guidance counsellors (human development) and curriculum developers and teachers (scholastic) is important for a well developed and educated society.

The poster features a white brick wall background. At the top, there are two logos: 'Tobago CIVILNET' with the tagline 'Save All For Tobago' and 'Eastern Credit Union Co-operative Society Limited' with the tagline 'LEADING THE WAY'. Below the logos is a large, stylized, 3D blue text 'TURNING THE TIDE'. Underneath this, in blue, is 'OF CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN TOBAGO'. Below that, in red, is the subtitle 'A Public Health Approach'. To the right of the text is a portrait of a smiling woman with dark curly hair, identified as Camile Swapp. Below her portrait is a blue box containing the text: 'Child and Adolescent Developmental Psychologist', 'Session 3: November 26, 2024 - 6pm – 8pm', 'Topic: Joyful Learning as an Antidote to Failing, Ailing and Misbehaving among the Youth'. To the right of the blue box is a portrait of a smiling man with short hair, identified as Xavier Edwards. Below his portrait is a blue box containing the text: 'Host: Xavier Edwards'. At the bottom of the poster is an orange box with the text: 'ALL SESSIONS WOULD BE HELD VIA ZOOM' and the phone number '868 732 7630'. Below the phone number are two contact details: 'TOBAGOCIVILNET@GMAIL.COM' and '@TOBAGO CIVILNET FOR FURTHER INFORMATION'. The poster also features a red 'STOP' sign and a silver 'CRIME' sign.

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Camile Swapp
Child and Adolescent Developmental Psychologist
Session 3: November 26, 2024 - 6pm – 8pm
Topic:
Joyful Learning as an Antidote to Failing, Ailing and Misbehaving among the Youth

Host:
Xavier Edwards

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Session 4: Tuesday 3rd December, 2024

The Public Health Model (PHM)
Approach to Crime and Violence in Tobago by Dr. Ulric Johnson, Community Organizer and Founder of Transformative Counselling, Coaching and Consultations (TLC)



Background of the Speaker: Dr. Ulric Johnson is a community organizer focusing on the impact of “isms” and violence on youth, families, and communities. He specializes in the impact of color, culture, class, character, and context on individual and group behaviors, especially as it relates to the prevention, progression, and treatment of addictive behaviors. He is the founder and director of Transformative Counseling, Coaching and Consultation (TLC), as well as the founder and director of Teens Against Gang Violence, a peer leadership, youth, and family program.

Context of the Public Health Model

The PHM can be defined as a scientific, preventive method focused on community health. It involves the gathering of data, assessing risks, identifying protective factors, and educating the community. This model utilises the Host-Agent-Environment framework: The host (being a person), the agent (being a gun), and the environment (being where you are from, who you associate with, etc.). These must all be addressed in the approach to crime and violence in the country. With this model, emphasis on permanent, consistent and evidence- based change through systematic interventions in Tobago can occur.

While there are four (4) main scopes of violence:

- Self-directed violence e.g. violence done to yourself such as suicidal behavior
- Interpersonal violence e.g. violence or crime done against a person
- Social violence e.g. violence done against an individual’s business or crime done against a political party or hate crimes
- Political violence e.g. mass wars, terrorism, corruption

Within Trinidad and Tobago, we are seeing much interpersonal violence and social violence occurring.

Steps in PHM for Violence Prevention:

- Assessment: Study gang and gun violence to identify root causes.
- Research: Understand what factors lead to violence and how they can be mitigated. These are the risk factors. Determine what are the protective factors that should be in place to deter violence
- Educate: Design and implement strategic interventions with the community or key stakeholders to strengthen the protective factors and mitigate the risk factors .

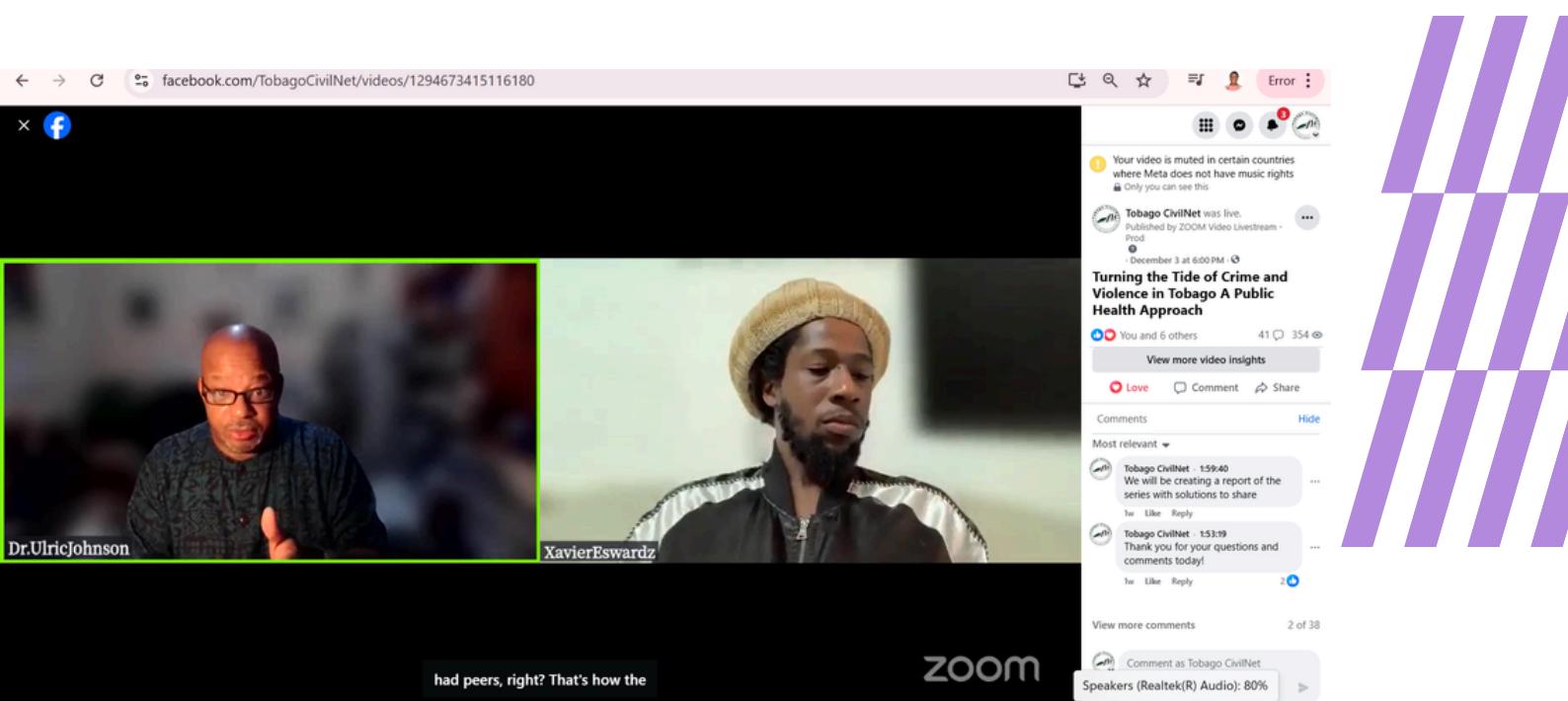


A brief analysis on assessing risk factors for crime and gang violence in Tobago includes some of the following:

- Social -economic factors such as loss of job, temporary jobs, low incomes.
- Poverty and Inequality
- Access to firearms: levels the playing field and sometimes provides more power to the individual holding the gun in conflicts and exacerbates violence.
- Alcohol and illegal substance abuse: lowers inhibitions and increases the likelihood of violent behavior. In Trinidad and Tobago this has become normalised, however, it creates the opportunity for criminal activity.
- Cultural factors such as the Cultural normalization of violence: Domestic abuse is the top cultural violent factor which can lead to criminality.
- Interpersonal aggression further reinforces violent behavior
- The role of mass media inclusive of social media as social media often glorifies violence and influences youth negatively.
- Tobago's cultural and communal based structures have eroded, leading to a rise in violence.
- Mental factors such as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) play a crucial role; more than four ACEs increases the risk of developing criminal behaviour significantly. Undiagnosed trauma and lack of mental health care contribute to the cycle of violence when left untreated.

Recommendations for Crime Prevention in Tobago using the Public Health Approach:

- Encourage community mobilization -communities need to act as soon as violence begins affecting daily living
- Youth-led programs can be utilized to empower young people in guiding their peers away from crime, especially since in Trinidad and Tobago, the youth are the highest number of criminal offenders.
- Cultural Preservation by encouraging collective responsibility in neighborhoods to deter crime
- Advocate for government and NGO funding for youth and community programs that are planned, coordinated and implemented by the community so they feel a part of the processes to make their community a better place.
- Reclaiming traditional cultural values and communal practices in Tobago is crucial.
- Churches, Schools and NGOs should also collaborate on initiatives to promote peace and safety.
- Promote more effective educational youth Programmes that foster self-esteem, teach conflict resolution, and provide constructive outlets for youth.
- Education must be restructured as a pillar of violence prevention, with a focus on equitable and accessible learning for all.
- Improved parenting approaches by practicing L.O.V.E: L-Listen to your children attentively, O- Open up to them, V-Vulnerability with your children builds emotional relationship and E- Empathize with them when negative circumstances occur.
- Learning and understanding children's love languages and building strong emotional bonds with the children.
- Parents should model desired behaviors and prioritize self-love for children to see how to love themselves.



Success Metrics on Engagement and Advocacy of the Education Series



Over the four (4) week period of the educational series -Turning the Tide on Crime and Violence in Tobago, the organization was able to reach approximately 110 persons via the Zoom platform and 2657 reached via Facebook as of 9th December 2024. Additionally, the organization conducted a total of (7) seven television interviews, (1) one radio interview and (1) one print article within local media in Trinidad and Tobago during the period from Friday 8th – 29th of November 2024. The media outreach was also supported by social media posts via LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and letter of invitations via emails to over 100 stakeholders inviting them to be a part of the public discussions. Overall, the 4-part series was an attempt to build awareness of the Public Health Approach to crime and violence in the island of Tobago and further efforts for more in-person activities and information dissemination will continue in subsequent stages of the project.



Participants Feedback



Let's take the opportunity to look at some of the participants comments and feedback from the sessions via social media.



Elitha Dumas
I agree ~~100~~ with you Mr Joseph

4w Like Reply Hide



Irma McMillan
Thank you DR Johnson this is very informative



Sharon Campbell
Amazing presentation!



Howard Moriah
Thank you so much for this evening's webinar.

3w Like Reply Hide



Devika Sammy
I hope that the history curriculum in Trinidad and Tobago can be changed to reflect the history of Tobago as well as black empowerment.

3w Like Reply Hide



Shenell Felix
Kasel Campbell you are doing an excellent job!!! I am impressed !!!

4w Like Reply Hide

2



Camile Swapp
I agree with Quincy adults need to improve systems for our youth

4w Like Reply Hide

2

+15%



Discovering Tobago
Humanity has to go back into the schools.

4w Like Reply Hide



Tricia C Wiltshire
Thanks Mr Joseph for sharing this realistic perspective and raising this level of awareness .

4w Like Reply Hide

2

Conclusion



Violence is a disease! Treating violence requires addressing its root causes (poverty, trauma, cultural norms, etc) while creating protective and enabling environments for a society to grow. Incarcerating all into a penal system does not holistically solve crime and violence for a country. Instead, we must engage in more sustainable efforts that take a whole of society approach.

Changes must be permanent, which requires a shift in the mindset of Tobagonians coupled with increased education and awareness on issues related to crime and violence in the society. Solutions and recommendations must be supported with consistent resource mobilization and funding not only from the government or policy makers but the private sector and the individual citizenry investing in the well-being of the society.

Lastly, a collaborative approach aimed at bringing together families, schools, churches, governments, law enforcement, the judiciary, the private sector and the media is essential for long-term success of crime prevention not only in Tobago, but throughout the country.



+15%

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. If you have any questions or would like to discuss our findings further, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

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